This week's assigned readings are the following articles. You can find and read them on the web (links provided). I recommend reading them in the order listed. The quiz is based on these articles.

1) Purdue Online Writing Lab: Developing Strong Thesis Statements
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/establishing_arguments/index.html

2) Douglas College writing: The essay
https://www.douglascollege.ca/~/media/3F83BB7A6AE041FF8A4464BB87A911F4.ashx?la=en

3) Douglas College writing: Making an outline from the top down
https://www.douglascollege.ca/-/media/F6560411057D4E5BAFD2D5261AC1980A.ashx?la=en

4) University of Chicago Writing Program: Argument: A key feature of college writing
https://writing-program.uchicago.edu/undergrads/wic1highschool

5) Harvard Writing Center: A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper
https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf

6) Purdue Online Writing Lab: Logic in Argumentative Writing
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/index.html
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/using_logic.html
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/fallacies.html
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/logic_in_writing.html
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/does_logic_always_work.html
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/improprieties.html

7) UCLA graduate writing center: The writing process
https://www.scribd.com/document/366129743/writing-process

Other optional articles:

8) New York Times: The Sentence as a Miniature Narrative
http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/19/the-sentence-as-a-miniature-narrative/

9) New York Times: Where do sentences come from
http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/13/where-do-sentences-come-from/#more-132632

10) New York Times: Other men's flowers
http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/08/other-mens-flowers/#more-133785

11) Thou shalt not commit logical fallacies
http://yourlogicalfallacyis.com

Welcome to the Purdue OWL

Contributors: Stacy Weida, Karl Stolley.

Summary:

These OWL resources will help you develop and refine the arguments in your writing.

Developing Strong Thesis Statements

The thesis statement or main claim must be debatable

An argumentative or persuasive piece of writing must begin with a debatable thesis or claim. In other words, the thesis must be something that people could reasonably have differing opinions on. If your thesis is something that is generally agreed upon or accepted as fact then there is no reason to try to persuade people.

Example of a non-debatable thesis statement:

Pollution is bad for the environment.

This thesis statement is not debatable. First, the word pollution means that something is bad or negative in some way. Further, all studies agree that pollution is a problem, they simply disagree on the impact it will have or the scope of the problem. No one could reasonably argue that pollution is good.

Example of a debatable thesis statement:

At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on limiting pollution.

This is an example of a debatable thesis because reasonable people could disagree with it. Some people might think that this is how we should spend the nation's money. Others might feel that we should be spending more money on education. Still others could argue that corporations, not the government, should be paying to limit pollution.

Another example of a debatable thesis statement:

America's anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars.

In this example there is also room for disagreement between rational individuals. Some citizens might think focusing on recycling programs rather than private automobiles is the most effective strategy.

The thesis needs to be narrow

Although the scope of your paper might seem overwhelming at the start, generally the narrower the thesis the more effective your argument will be. Your thesis or claim must be supported by evidence. The broader your claim is, the more evidence you will need to convince readers that your position is right.

Example of a thesis that is too broad:

Drug use is detrimental to society.

There are several reasons this statement is too broad to argue. First, what is included in the category "drugs"? Is the author talking about illegal drug use, recreational drug use (which might include alcohol and cigarettes), or all uses of medication in general? Second, in what ways are drugs detrimental? Is drug use causing deaths (and is the author equating deaths from overdoses and deaths from drug related violence)? Is drug use changing the moral climate or causing the economy to decline? Finally, what does the author mean by "society"? Is the author referring only to America or to the global population? Does the author make any distinction between the effects on children and adults? There are just too many questions that the claim leaves open. The author could not cover all of the topics listed above, yet the generality of the claim leaves all of these possibilities open to debate.

Example of a narrow or focused thesis:

Illegal drug use is detrimental because it encourages gang violence.

In this example the topic of drugs has been narrowed down to illegal drugs and the detriment has been narrowed down to gang violence. This is a much more manageable topic.

We could narrow each debatable thesis from the previous examples in the following way:

Narrowed debatable thesis 1:

At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on helping upgrade business to clean technologies, researching renewable energy sources, and planting more trees in order to control or eliminate pollution.

This thesis narrows the scope of the argument by specifying not just the amount of money used but also how the money could actually help to control pollution.

Narrowed debatable thesis 2:

America's anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars because it would allow most citizens to contribute to national efforts and care about the outcome.

This thesis narrows the scope of the argument by specifying not just what the focus of a national anti-pollution campaign should be but also why this is the appropriate focus.

Qualifiers such as "typically," "generally," "usually," or "on average" also help to limit the scope of your claim by allowing for the almost inevitable exception to the rule.

Types of Claims

Claims typically fall into one of four categories. Thinking about how you want to approach your topic, in other words what type of claim you want to make, is one way to focus your thesis on one particular aspect of you broader topic.

Claims of fact or definition: These claims argue about what the definition of something is or whether something is a settled fact. Example:

What some people refer to as global warming is actually nothing more than normal, long-term cycles of climate change.

Claims of cause and effect: These claims argue that one person, thing, or event caused another thing or event to occur. Example:

The popularity of SUV's in America has caused pollution to increase.

Claims about value: These are claims made about what something is worth, whether we value it or not, how we would rate or categorize something. Example:

Global warming is the most pressing challenge facing the world today.

Claims about solutions or policies: These are claims that argue for or against a certain solution or policy approach to a problem. Example:

Instead of drilling for oil in Alaska we should be focusing on ways to reduce oil consumption, such as researching renewable energy sources.

Which type of claim is right for your argument? Which type of thesis or claim you use for your argument will depend on your position and knowledge on the topic, your audience, and the context of your paper. You might want to think about where you imagine your audience to be on this topic and pinpoint where you think the biggest difference in viewpoints might be. Even if you start with one type of claim you probably will be using several within the paper. Regardless of the type of claim you choose to utilize it is key to identify the controversy or debate you are addressing and to define your position early on in the paper!

Contributors: Stacy Weida, Karl Stolley.
Summary:

These OWL resources will help you develop and refine the arguments in your writing.

Using Research and Evidence

What type of evidence should I use?

There are two types of evidence:

First hand research is research you have conducted yourself such as interviews, experiments, surveys, or personal experience and anecdotes.

Second hand research is research you are getting from various texts that has been supplied and compiled by others such as books, periodicals, and websites.

Regardless of what type of sources you use, they must be credible. In other words, your sources must be reliable, accurate, and trustworthy.

How do I know if a source is credible?

You can ask the following questions to determine if a source is credible:

Who is the author? Credible sources are written by authors respected their fields of study. Responsible, credible authors will cite their sources so that you can check the accuracy of and support for what they've written. (This is also a good way to find more sources for your own research.)

How recent is the source? The choice to seek recent sources depends on your topic. While sources on the American Civil War may be decades old and still contain accurate information, sources on information technologies, or other areas that are experiencing rapid changes, need to be much more current.

What is the author's purpose? When deciding which sources to use, you should take the purpose or point of view of the author into consideration. Is the author presenting a neutral, objective view of a topic? Or is the author advocating one specific view of a topic? Who is funding the research or writing of this source? A source written from a particular point of view **may** be credible; however, you need to be careful that your sources don't limit your coverage of a topic to one side of a debate.

What type of sources does your audience value? If you are writing for a professional or academic audience, they may value peer-reviewed journals as the most credible sources of information. If you are writing for a group of residents in your hometown, they might be more comfortable with mainstream sources, such as *Time* or *Newsweek*. A younger audience may be more accepting of information found on the Internet than an older audience might be.

Be especially careful when evaluating Internet sources! Never use Web sites where an author cannot be determined, unless the site is associated with a reputable institution such as a respected university, a credible media outlet, government program or department, or well-known non-governmental organizations. Beware of using sites like Wikipedia, which are collaboratively developed by users. Because anyone can add or change content, the validity of information on such sites may not meet the standards for academic research.

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Summary:

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Organizing Your Argument

How can I effectively present my argument?

Use an organizational structure that arranges the argument in a way that will make sense to the reader. The Toulmin Method of logic is a common and easy to use formula for organizing an argument.

The basic format for the Toulmin Method is as follows:

Claim: The overall thesis the writer will argue for.

Data: Evidence gathered to support the claim.

Warrant (also referred to as a bridge): Explanation of why or how the data supports the claim, the underlying assumption that connects your data to your claim.

Backing (also referred to as the foundation): Additional logic or reasoning that may be necessary to support the warrant.

Counterclaim: A claim that negates or disagrees with the thesis/claim.

Rebuttal: Evidence that negates or disagrees with the counterclaim.

Including a well thought out warrant or bridge is essential to writing a good argumentative essay or paper. If you present data to your audience without explaining how it supports your thesis they may not make a connection between the two or they may draw different conclusions.

Don't avoid the opposing side of an argument. Instead, include the opposing side as a counterclaim. Find out what the other side is saying and respond to it within your own argument. This is important so that the audience is not swayed by weak, but unrefuted, arguments. Including counterclaims allows you to find common ground with more of your readers. It also makes you look more credible because you appear to be knowledgeable about the entirety of the debate rather than just being biased or uniformed. You may want to include several counterclaims to show that you have thoroughly researched the topic.

Example:

Claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Data1: Driving a private car is a typical citizen's most air polluting activity.

Warrant 1: Because cars are the largest source of private, as opposed to industry produced, air pollution switching to hybrid cars should have an impact on fighting pollution.

Data 2: Each vehicle produced is going to stay on the road for roughly 12 to 15 years.

Warrant 2: Cars generally have a long lifespan, meaning that a decision to switch to a hybrid car will make a long-term impact on pollution levels.

Data 3: Hybrid cars combine a gasoline engine with a battery-powered electric motor.

Warrant 3: This combination of technologies means that less pollution is produced. According to ineedtoknow.org "the hybrid engine of the Prius, made by Toyota, produces 90

percent fewer harmful emissions than a comparable gasoline engine."

Counterclaim: Instead of focusing on cars, which still encourages a culture of driving even if it cuts down on pollution, the nation should focus on building and encouraging use of mass transit systems.

Rebuttal: While mass transit is an environmentally sound idea that should be encouraged, it is not feasible in many rural and suburban areas, or for people who must commute to work; thus hybrid cars are a better solution for much of the nation's population.

Contributors: Stacy Weida, Karl Stolley.
Summary:

These OWL resources will help you develop and refine the arguments in your writing.

Using Rhetorical Strategies for Persuasion

There are three types of rhetorical appeals, or persuasive strategies, used in arguments to support claims and respond to opposing arguments. A good argument will generally use a combination of all three appeals to make its case.

Logos

Logos or the appeal to reason relies on logic or reason. Logos often depends on the use of inductive or deductive reasoning.

Inductive reasoning takes a specific representative case or facts and then draws generalizations or conclusions from them. Inductive reasoning must be based on a sufficient amount of reliable evidence. In other words, the facts you draw on must fairly represent the larger situation or population. Example:

Fair trade agreements have raised the quality of life for coffee producers, so fair trade agreements could be used to help other farmers as well.

In this example the specific case of fair trade agreements with coffee producers is being used as the starting point for the claim. Because these agreements have worked the author concludes that it could work for other farmers as well.

Deductive reasoning begins with a generalization and then applies it to a specific case. The generalization you start with must have been based on a sufficient amount of reliable evidence.Example:

Genetically modified seeds have caused poverty, hunger, and a decline in bio-diversity everywhere they have been introduced, so there is no reason the same thing will not occur when genetically modified corn seeds are introduced in Mexico.

In this example the author starts with a large claim, that genetically modified seeds have been problematic everywhere, and from this draws the more localized or specific conclusion that

Mexico will be affected in the same way.

Avoid Logical Fallacies

These are some common errors in reasoning that will undermine the logic of your argument. Also, watch out for these slips in other people's arguments.

Slippery slope: This is a conclusion based on the premise that if A happens, then eventually through a series of small steps, through B, C,..., X, Y, Z will happen, too, basically equating A and Z. So, if we don't want Z to occur A must not be allowed to occur either. Example:

If we ban Hummers because they are bad for the environment eventually the government will ban all cars, so we should not ban Hummers.

In this example the author is equating banning Hummers with banning all cars, which is not the same thing.

Hasty Generalization: This is a conclusion based on insufficient or biased evidence. In other words, you are rushing to a conclusion before you have all the relevant facts. Example:

Even though it's only the first day, I can tell this is going to be a boring course.

In this example the author is basing their evaluation of the entire course on only one class, and on the first day which is notoriously boring and full of housekeeping tasks for most courses. To make a fair and reasonable evaluation the author must attend several classes, and possibly even examine the textbook, talk to the professor, or talk to others who have previously finished the course in order to have sufficient evidence to base a conclusion on.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc: This is a conclusion that assumes that if 'A' occurred after 'B' then 'B' must have caused 'A.' Example:

I drank bottled water and now I am sick, so the water must have made me sick.

In this example the author assumes that if one event chronologically follows another the first event must have caused the second. But the illness could have been caused by the burrito the night before, a flu bug that had been working on the body for days, or a chemical spill across campus. There is no reason, without more evidence, to assume the water caused the person to be sick.

Genetic Fallacy: A conclusion is based on an argument that the origins of a person, idea, institute, or theory determine its character, nature, or worth. Example:

The Volkswagen Beetle is an evil car because it was originally designed by Hitler's army.

In this example the author is equating the character of a car with the character of the people who built the car.

Begging the Claim: The conclusion that the writer should prove is validated within the claim. Example:

Filthy and polluting coal should be banned.

Arguing that coal pollutes the earth and thus should be banned would be logical. But the very conclusion that should be proved, that coal causes enough pollution to warrant banning its use, is already assumed in the claim by referring to it as "filthy and polluting."

Circular Argument: This restates the argument rather than actually proving it. Example:

George Bush is a good communicator because he speaks effectively.

In this example the conclusion that Bush is a "good communicator" and the evidence used to prove it "he speaks effectively" are basically the same idea. Specific evidence such as using everyday language, breaking down complex problems, or illustrating his points with humorous stories would be needed to prove either half of the sentence.

Either/or: This is a conclusion that oversimplifies the argument by reducing it to only two sides or choices. Example:

We can either stop using cars or destroy the earth.

In this example where two choices are presented as the only options, yet the author ignores a range of choices in between such as developing cleaner technology, car sharing systems for necessities and emergencies, or better community planning to discourage daily driving.

Ad hominem: This is an attack on the character of a person rather than their opinions or arguments. Example:

Green Peace's strategies aren't effective because they are all dirty, lazy hippies.

In this example the author doesn't even name particular strategies Green Peace has suggested, much less evaluate those strategies on their merits. Instead, the author attacks the characters of the individuals in the group.

Ad populum: This is an emotional appeal that speaks to positive (such as patriotism, religion, democracy) or negative (such as terrorism or fascism) concepts rather than the real issue at hand. Example:

If you were a true American you would support the rights of people to choose whatever vehicle they want.

In this example the author equates being a "true American," a concept that people want to be associated with, particularly in a time of war, with allowing people to buy any vehicle they want even though there is no inherent connection between the two.

Red Herring: This is a diversionary tactic that avoids the key issues, often by avoiding opposing arguments rather than addressing them. Example:

The level of mercury in seafood may be unsafe, but what will fishers do to support their families.

In this example the author switches the discussion away from the safety of the food and talks

instead about an economic issue, the livelihood of those catching fish. While one issue may effect the other, it does not mean we should ignore possible safety issues because of possible economic consequences to a few individuals.

Ethos

Ethos or the ethical appeal is based on the character, credibility, or reliability of the writer. There are many ways to establish good character and credibility as an author:

- Use only credible, reliable sources to build your argument and cite those sources properly.
- Respect the reader by stating the opposing position accurately.
- Establish common ground with your audience. Most of the time, this can be done by acknowledging values and beliefs shared by those on both sides of the argument.
- If appropriate for the assignment, disclose why you are interested in this topic or what personal experiences you have had with the topic.
- Organize your argument in a logical, easy to follow manner. You can use the Toulmin method of logic or a simple pattern such as chronological order, most general to most detailed example, earliest to most recent example, etc.
- Proofread the argument. Too many careless grammar mistakes cast doubt on your character as a writer.

Pathos

Pathos, or emotional appeal, appeals to an audience's needs, values, and emotional sensibilities.

Argument emphasizes reason, but used properly there is often a place for emotion as well. Emotional appeals can use sources such as interviews and individual stories to paint a more legitimate and moving picture of reality or illuminate the truth. For example, telling the story of a single child who has been abused may make for a more persuasive argument than simply the number of children abused each year because it would give a human face to the numbers.

Only use an emotional appeal if it truly supports the claim you are making, not as a way to distract from the real issues of debate. An argument should never use emotion to misrepresent the topic or frighten people.

DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Learning Centre

THE ESSAY

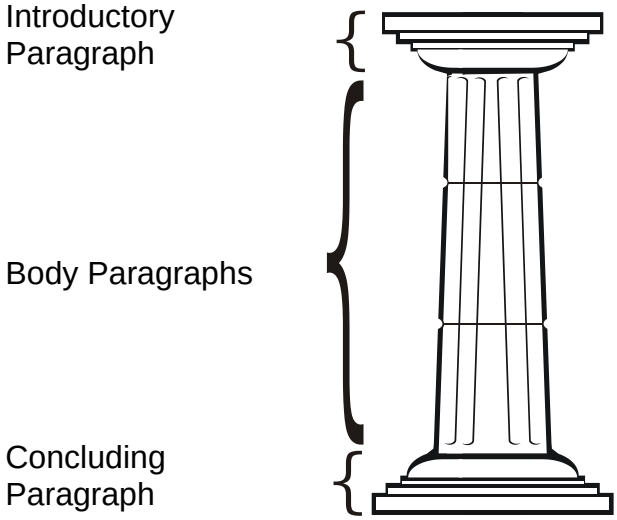
Instructors use the term “essay” to refer to a wide range of written work. Usually, however, by essay they mean a piece of writing that has a number of paragraphs and has one main focus or idea.

This handout discusses, in brief, a basic essay format. If you are unsure what sort of essay your instructor is looking for, you should ask your instructor for clarification. If you need more explanation of the different parts of the essay or the essay writing process, you should consult a Learning Centre tutor.

Typically, the 3 main parts of an essay are:

- The Introductory Paragraph
- The Body Paragraphs
- The Concluding Paragraph

A good way to think about an essay is to picture a column like this:



In the following pages, each of these parts is discussed and an example is provided from an essay by Anna, a Learning Centre tutor.

It is important to recognize that Anna’s essay only provides an example of how one student has applied essay-writing principles to write about a specific topic. It is not the only way to develop an essay. Anna’s essay is a research paper, and she has used APA style documentation to show her readers where she got her information.

The Introductory Paragraph

The introduction's role is to:

- To motivate your reader to read further
- To provide a context for your essay, and
- To clarify the purpose and scope of your essay.

The introductory paragraph should be fairly brief, typically no more than about 6 sentences in a short essay.

The Thesis: The most important part of the introduction is the thesis statement. It generally comes at the end of the introductory paragraph. The thesis statement typically expresses a point of view (or argument) about a topic. The purpose of the essay is to prove the truth of the thesis statement. Here are two examples of thesis statements:

- *In "The Necklace," de Maupassant shows that personal tragedy can lead to strength of character.*
- *Although the raid at Dieppe was unsuccessful, it was necessary to boost the morale of the citizens of Allied countries.*

Notice how each of these examples introduces a topic and then focuses on a particular aspect of that topic.

In some types of essays, a thesis statement expressing a point of view is not needed. In those essays, the thesis statement simply clarifies what the essay is about. For more information on effective thesis statements, see Learning Centre handout WR4.20: The Thesis Statement.

Developing the Introduction: Once you have written a thesis statement, you can develop your introduction in a number of ways. One way to develop your introduction is to start with a statement relating to one key concept in your thesis. This statement should be interesting enough to encourage your reader to read on. Then in subsequent sentences, narrow your focus to something more specific and closer to your thesis statement. The introduction ends with the thesis statement, the most specific sentence in the introduction.

The following introduction is from Anna's essay titled *A Residential School Legacy*.

From the late 1800s to the 1980s, more than 100,000 First Nations children in Canada attended residential schools (Llewellyn, 2008, p. 258).[1] To attend these schools, children were taken away from their families and communities. At the schools, the children suffered from emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse (Steckley & Cummins, 2001, p. 191). The worst abuses were often used as punishment for speaking their indigenous languages (Petten, 2007, p. 22). The imposition of residential schools on First Nations children has led to significant loss of indigenous languages, and this language loss has led to further cultural losses for traditional First Nations cultures in Canada.

[1] APA style only requires page numbers for direct quotations, but it encourages the use of page numbers even with paraphrased material.

The final sentence of this introduction is the thesis statement. So, the reader knows that the rest of the essay will show how residential schools led to loss of native languages and cultures.

Anna begins the introduction with one general concept from the thesis statement – "residential schools." She later adds the concept of "language loss" and then in the thesis statement ties the two together and adds the concept of "cultural loss."

Anna's use of statistics in the first sentence shows that the issue of residential schools is not a minor one. The length of time, the number of children, and the seriousness of the abuse all encourage the reader to take an interest in learning more about this issue. This information also provides a context for the essay – residential schools.

The Body Paragraphs

The body of an essay is made up of a number of sections. In a short essay, a section is the same as a paragraph. In a longer essay, each section may be broken up into a number of paragraphs. The number of body paragraphs depends on what the writer has to say and the length of the essay required.

Each body paragraph has the following components:

A topic sentence: The specific point to be developed in a paragraph is stated in its topic sentence, usually at the beginning of the paragraph. Typically key words or concepts from the thesis statement should be reflected in the topic sentences. This helps the flow of the essay by clearly connecting each section back to the main point of the essay as stated in the thesis in the introduction.

Support (Evidence and Explanation): After the topic sentence, you need to provide support for the point you are making. Often this will involve a number of supporting points. Each supporting point needs 2 parts: 1) evidence, and 2) explanation. The evidence might include facts, statistics, quotes, anecdotes, logical arguments, examples, elaboration, description or definition. The second part of giving support – explanation – is crucial because the reader needs to be told how the evidence supports the point that the writer is making. The purpose of the evidence and explanation is to prove the truth of the topic sentence.

Unity: Each body paragraph needs to be unified. This means that each sentence in the paragraph must clearly relate to the topic sentence of that paragraph.

Coherence: Each body paragraph needs to be coherent. This means that each sentence is logically connected to the sentence before it. This smooth flow of ideas can be created through the use of transitions, repetition of key words and ideas, and presentation of ideas in a logical order.

Here is Anna's first body paragraph from her essay about residential schools:

> *One far-reaching result of the residential school system is the loss of indigenous languages in Canada. A major cause of this loss was the removal of children from their families and language communities. Petten (2007) reported that, having been removed from their families at an early age, children lost the opportunity to continue to develop their mother tongues (p. 22). At the schools, only English or French were used. Furthermore, children were punished and abused for using their indigenous languages. Survivors of residential schools have reported that priests and nuns punching, slapping, verbally abusing (Knockwood, 1992, p. 99), and sticking pins in the tongues (Steckley & Cummins, 2001, p. 193) of very young children for speaking their mother tongues. In the face of this abuse, many children quickly lost the ability to speak their indigenous languages. A long-term result of residential schools is a significant reduction in the numbers of speakers of indigenous languages. According to the 2001 Canada Census, only 24% of people who identified themselves as aboriginal said they could communicate in an aboriginal language (as cited in Norris, 2007, p. 20). In addition, over the past 100 years, at least ten indigenous languages have become extinct (Norris, 2007, p. 20). Although residential schools were not the sole cause of this loss of language, they played a significant role in the decline.*

The Topic Sentence: In this paragraph, Anna's topic sentence is *"One far-reaching result of the residential school system is the loss of indigenous languages in Canada."* This sentence reflects key ideas from the thesis statement – residential schools and language loss.

Support (Evidence and Explanation): Anna has two supporting points for the idea that residential schools contributed to the loss of indigenous languages. First, she shows that residential schools impacted children's first language development. She cites a source stating this general point and also provides examples of punishments for children speaking their first languages at the schools. After providing this evidence, she relates the evidence back to her topic sentence. Anna's second supporting point is the overall reduction in speakers of indigenous languages. She cites statistics about how few aboriginal people speak their indigenous languages and how many languages have become extinct. She then goes on to explain that residential schools were only one factor in the decline of indigenous languages.

Unity: Every sentence in this paragraph adds to our understanding of the language loss resulting from residential schools. This makes the paragraph a unified one.

Coherence: Anna creates coherence in a number of ways. First, she uses repetition so the reader is always clear what she is talking about. There are no uses of vague "it" kinds of pronouns. Notice the repetition of these ideas: *indigenous languages, loss, communication.* In some cases she uses words that mean the same (notice "*indigenous languages," "mother tongues," "aboriginal language")* so as not to be boring, but the ideas are repeated, which improves the paragraph's coherence. Second, she follows a logical order – cause to effect. First she talks about the causes of the children's language loss and then the effect of this loss on indigenous languages in general.

She also makes use of a few transition words that help the reader to follow the logic of her ideas. Examples of transitions (or connectors) in this paragraph include "*furthermore," "in addition," "a result of*." Notice how each supporting point is clearly indicated by "*A major cause"* and "A long-term result." This helps the reader realize that new ideas are being introduced.

An essay has more than one body paragraph, each with these characteristics. You will see Anna's other body paragraphs later in this handout.

The Concluding Paragraph

The concluding paragraph includes:

- A brief summary of the main points of the essay and/or a restatement of the thesis statement
- A final comment on the topic. This might be a discussion of the implications of the truth of your thesis (answering the question, *so what?)* or some discussion providing food for thought for your reader concerning the thesis or a related topic.

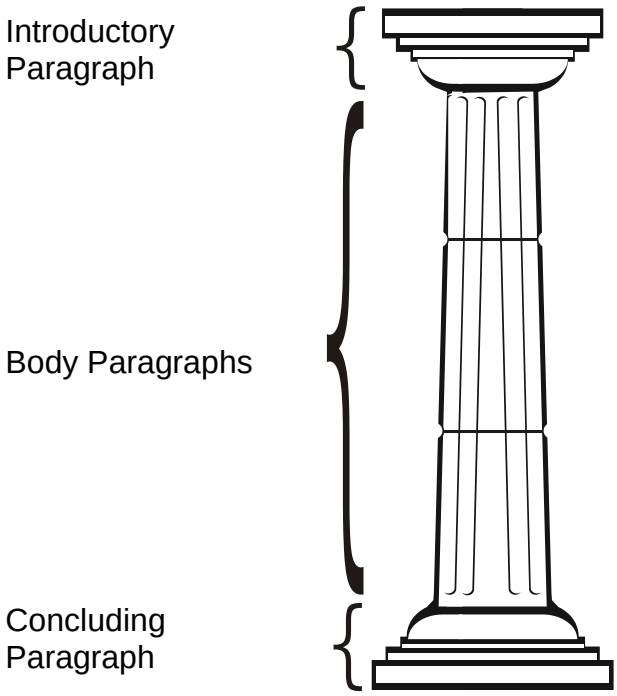
Here is Anna's concluding paragraph from her essay on residential schools:

> *In short, interpersonal relationships and traditional belief systems were both sacrificed when residential schools contributed to the decline of First Nations children's indigenous language abilities. The effects of these losses continue to this day despite attempts to reverse the damage. On June 11, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper offered an official apology on behalf of the Canadian government to survivors of residential schools for the treatment they had received there (Fitzpatrick & Nguyen, 2008, p. 1). Following this apology, Beverly Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, noted that aboriginal people need more than an apology; they need a government commitment to dealing with the negative impacts of the schools in areas such as "language, culture, . . . tradition, and spirituality" (Native women's leader, 2008, p. 2). The effects of the residential schools on First Nations' language and culture will never be undone; all Canadians can do now is support efforts by aboriginal people to preserve and revitalize those linguistic and cultural traditions that have not been lost.*

In her first sentence in the conclusion, Anna signals the reader that this is the conclusion by using the transition "In short." She then summarizes her main supporting points and restates her thesis in one sentence. This is not an exact repetition of the thesis, but it says the same idea using somewhat different words and providing a bit more detail. She then discusses the Canadian government apology to residential school survivors and a response from the aboriginal community. Because the paper was about language loss and its effect on traditional native culture, information about the apology would not fit in the body paragraphs, but since Anna has already restated her thesis, she is now free to move away from the thesis and write about a related issue – what we can do about the problem.

A Visual Overview of the Essay

One way to think of an essay is to think of a pillar on an old Greek or Roman temple. Picturing this image can help you remember some key issues about essay structure.



At the top, there is a wide part that narrows to the width of the pillar. This top part is like the introduction. It is broader than the content of the rest of the essay, but it narrows to a focussed thesis at the end of the introduction.

The body of the essay is represented by the column itself. The body stays within the confines of the focus of the thesis. The body of the essay is made up of building blocks which hold up the thesis. Each block is heavy and strong. The strength of a body paragraph comes from the strength of the evidence and explanation provided.

At the bottom, there is another part that widens out from the column to make a pedestal on the floor. In the same way, the conclusion begins with the narrower focus of the body paragraphs and thesis and then widens out to include other ideas. Notice how this pedestal is a mirror-image of the top of the pillar. Similarly, a conclusion is like a mirror-image of an introduction.

A Sample Essay

Below is Anna's complete essay on residential schools. Read the essay and identify the following parts:

1. The introduction
2. The body Paragraphs
3. The conclusion
4. The thesis statement
5. The 3 topic sentences
6. The supporting points for each topic sentence
7. The evidence for each supporting point
8. The restated thesis in the conclusion
9. The summary of points in the conclusion

Discuss the parts with your tutor.

A Residential School Legacy[2]

From the late 1800s to the 1980s, more than 100,000 First Nations children in Canada attended residential schools (Llewellyn, 2008, p. 258). To attend these schools, children were taken away from their families and communities. At the schools, the children suffered from emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse (Steckley & Cummins, 2001, p. 191). The worst abuses were often used as punishment for speaking their indigenous languages (Petten, 2007, p. 22). The imposition of residential schools on First Nations children has led to significant loss of indigenous languages, and this language loss has led to further cultural losses for traditional First Nations cultures in Canada.

One far-reaching result of the residential school system is the loss of indigenous languages in Canada. A major cause of this loss was the removal of children from their families and language communities. Petten (2007) reported that, having been removed from their families at an early age, children lost the opportunity to continue to develop their mother tongues (p. 22). At the schools, only English or French were used. Furthermore, children were punished and abused for using their indigenous languages. Survivors of residential schools have reported that priests and nuns punching, slapping, verbally abusing (Knockwood, 1992, p. 99), and sticking pins in the tongues (Steckley & Cummins, 2001, p. 193) of very young children for speaking their mother tongues. In the face of this abuse, many children quickly lost the ability to speak their indigenous languages. A long-term result of residential schools is a significant reduction in the numbers of speakers of indigenous languages. According to the 2001 Canada Census, only 24% of people who identified themselves as aboriginal said they could communicate in an aboriginal language (as cited in Norris, 2007, p. 20). In addition, over the past 100 years, at least ten indigenous languages have become extinct (Norris, 2007, p. 20). Although residential schools were not the sole cause of this loss of language, they played a significant role in the decline.

[2] APA style requires double-spacing of both the paper and the reference list. Both are single-spaced in this handout simply to save paper. Papers and reference lists you hand in must be double-spaced.

This loss of indigenous languages caused by residential schools affected traditional family and community relationships. First, children's loss of their ability to speak their mother tongue affected their relationships within the family. As residential school survivor and researcher Isabelle Knockwood observed, it "drove a wedge between family members," even between siblings at the same school (1992, p. 100). For example, a residential school survivor, Freda Simon, told of arriving at a residential school speaking only her mother tongue to find that her sister, who had been taken to the school two years earlier, could no longer speak their language (as cited in Knockwood, 1992, p. 100). This example shows that even at the schools, family members were separated due to language loss. When children went back to their communities, they were unable to communicate with parents and elders. They felt "suspended in limbo" (Knockwood, 1992, p. 158). As a result, the early survivors of residential schools were unable to develop bonds with older members of their communities and were unable to learn the traditional ways of their people through "songs, games, stories and ceremonies" (Blair, Rice, Wood & Janvier, 2002, p. 89). A strong traditional value in First Nations cultures was respect for elders (Couture, 1996), but with no ability for young and old to communicate, meaningful relationships between the generations became impossible.

Besides damaging family and community relationships, the loss of indigenous languages also distanced many First Nations people from their traditional belief systems. One common belief among First Nations traditional cultures is that "all of life is spiritual: everything that exists, animals, plants, people, rocks, the sun and stars have elements of sacredness" (Rajotte, 1998, p. 21). This suggests that aboriginal peoples' connection to nature is crucial to their spirituality. Aboriginal spirituality is passed on orally by elders through myths and rituals. Without knowledge of their traditional languages, young people could not learn about the spiritual beliefs of their people. This spirituality was all encompassing, affecting not only their thoughts about the spirit world but also their knowledge of places, plants and animals and traditional skills such as fishing, trapping, and tanning (Blair et al., 2002, p. 96). As Steckley and Cummins have pointed out, without access to the elders' knowledge of nature, young people lost access to the beliefs and practices their people had developed over thousands of years (2001, p. 17). Therefore, the loss of language led to the loss of traditional spiritual beliefs and connection to nature.

In short, interpersonal relationships and traditional belief systems were both sacrificed when residential schools contributed to the decline of First Nations children's indigenous language abilities. The effects of these losses continue to this day despite attempts to reverse the damage. On June 11, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper offered an official apology on behalf of the Canadian government to survivors of residential schools for the treatment they had received there (Fitzpatrick & Nguyen, 2008, p. 1). Following this apology, Beverly Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, noted that aboriginal people need more than an apology; they need a government commitment to dealing with the negative impacts of the schools in areas such as "language, culture, . . . tradition, and spirituality" (Native women's leader, 2008, p. 2). The effects of the residential schools on First Nations' language and culture will never be undone; all Canadians can do now is support efforts by aboriginal people to preserve and revitalize those linguistic and cultural traditions that have not been lost.

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Conclusion

This handout outlines the basic format of an academic essay. The Learning Centre has many other handouts relating to writing academic papers. To continue to learn more about essays, you may want to ask a tutor to show you our other Writing handouts. Also, your instructor may have different requirements, so be sure to read assignment instructions carefully and ask your instructor if you need more clarification.

DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Learning Centre

Making an Outline from the Top Down

So you have to write an essay? Where do you start? Developing an outline is one of the best places to start. Doing an outline before you write your paper helps you make sure that your essay is organized and that the content is okay. An outline also saves time. If you write without an outline, you often end up changing direction as you write. Then you have a lot of revising to do to get back on track. However, if you think through an outline before you start, you generally have a stronger paper which needs less revision and so takes less time to write.

This handout shows you how to make a simple essay outline from the top down. "From the top down" means that you start with a topic for your essay and then build in the supporting ideas below it. This handout uses very simple content to show you a process you can use in developing ideas for your own essays.

1) THESIS: The very first step in writing your essay is to create a thesis statement.
(For more information on thesis development, see handout WR4.20, *The Thesis: Four Requirements*)

Here's a simple example of how you might do this:

General Subject: Pets
Question you'd like to answer: What animal makes a good pet?
Thesis: Cats are excellent pets.

Once you have your thesis statement, think of a number of **reasons** why (how, what, etc.) this is true. **(Back it up!)**

1. They are independent
2. They are loving
3. They can reduce stress

Now let's put it all together; your complete thesis statement is:

Cats make excellent pets because they are independent, loving, and relaxing.

2) OUTLINE:

THESIS: Cats make excellent pets because they are independent, loving, and relaxing.

(Your thesis statement will become the last sentence of your introduction paragraph and will be restated in the first sentence of your conclusion.)

THE BODY:

(Use each of your reasons as the topic sentence for a separate body paragraph.)

PARA 1) Cats require little care because they are independent pets.
(Now ask yourself how this point relates to your thesis: Why does being independent make cats excellent pets?)

a) can go away for the weekend and the cat is fine by itself
(Back it up with specific details!)
- just have to leave food and water for it
(Why/how else does being independent make cats excellent pets?)

b) don't have to take it for a walk
- get their exercise by hunting birds

c) don't need a bath
(Back it up. Can you be more specific? Ask yourself who, why, when, where, what, or how.)
- lick themselves clean

PARA 2) Cats are loving.
(How does being loving make cats excellent pets?)

a) keep you company
(Back it up.)
A cat may curl up on your stomach while you are watching TV.
(Use sources to back up your own thoughts.)
- "The companionship between a cat and its owner is a grand thing." (Brown, James "I'm not Alone" 1979, p. 23)

b) Makes the owner feel special
- old age homes introduce pets to give the patients a companion to love, who will always love them back.

PARA 3) Cats can reduce stress.

(How does this relate to your thesis statement? How/why/when does <u>reducing stress</u> make cats <u>excellent pets</u>.)

a) The purring is soothing
   - Like listening to your favorite CD

b) Owner doesn't have to worry about the pet
   - cat is happy being alone

(Use sources to back up your own thoughts)

- "While monitoring the stress levels in 50 cats, Dr. Wong found no significant difference when the cats were left by themselves for the weekend"
  (Hanna, 2002, p. 47)

   - only have to make sure they have food and water and a clean litter box

c) "Cats have been found to reduce stress in both children and adults " (National Pet Magazine, 1999, p.18)

When writing your outline, remember to:

- **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

It is much easier to check that your essay is organized properly if all points are short. You can always combine points and change your wording later as you write your essay. Write out full sentences only for the thesis and topic sentences. For the rest, just make notes. Don't worry about grammar or spelling at the outlining stage.

- **STAY ON TRACK**

Outlines allow you to easily see if all your points are organized and relevant. To do this, check that each point in your outline clearly supports your thesis statement.

- **BACK IT UP**

When you make your outline, you need to consider whether you have included enough specific evidence to support your ideas. This evidence can include specific facts, quotes from experts, statistics and logical reasoning. Always ask yourself why, how, what, when, where, and who. The more specific your evidence is, the better your essay is.

For more help with essay structure, see Learning Centre handout WR4.30, *The Essay*.

University of Chicago Writing Program

Writing in College, by Joseph M. Williams and Lawrence McEnerney

1. Some crucial differences between high school and college writing

From high school to college

Some students make very smooth transitions from writing in high school to writing in college, and we heartily wish all of you an easy passage. But other students are puzzled and frustrated by their experiences in writing for college classes. Only months earlier your writing was winning praise; now your instructors are dissatisfied, saying that the writing isn't quite "there" yet, saying that the writing is "lacking something." You haven't changed--your writing is still mechanically sound, your descriptions are accurate, you're saying smart things. But they're still not happy. Some of the criticism is easy to understand: it's easy to predict that standards at college are going to be higher than in high school. But it is not just a matter of higher standards: Often, what your instructors are asking of you is not just something *better*, but something *different*. If that's the case, then you won't succeed merely by being more intelligent or more skillful at doing what you did in high school. Instead, you'll need to direct your skills and your intelligence to a new task.

We should note here that a college is a big place and that you'll be asked to use writing to fulfill different tasks. You'll find occasions where you'll succeed by summarizing a reading accurately and showing that you understand it. There may be times when you're invited to use writing to react to a reading, speculate about it. Far more often--like every other week--you will be asked to *analyze* the reading, to make a worthwhile *claim* about it that is not obvious (*state a thesis* means almost the same thing), to support your claim with good reasons, all in four or five pages that are organized to present an *argument* . (If you did that in high school, write your teachers a letter of gratitude.)

Argument: a key feature of college writing

Now by "argument" we do not mean a dispute over a loud stereo. In college, an argument is something less contentious and more systematic: It is a set of statements coherently arranged to offer three things that experienced readers expect in essays that they judge to be thoughtful:

- They expect to see a *claim* that would encourage them to say, "That's interesting. I'd like to know more."

- They expect to see *evidence, reasons* for your claim, evidence that would encourage them to agree with your claim, or at least to think it plausible.

• They expect to see that you've thought about *limits* and *objections* to your claim. Almost by definition, an interesting claim is one that can be reasonably challenged. Readers look for answers to questions like "But what about . . . ?" and "Have you considered . . . ?"

This kind of argument is less like disagreeable wrangling, more like an amiable and lively conversation with someone whom you respect and who respects you; someone who is interested in what you have to say, but will not agree with your claims just because you state them; someone who wants to hear your reasons for believing your claims and also wants to hear answers to their questions.

At this point, some students ask why they should be required to *convince* anyone of anything. "After all," they say, "we are all entitled to our opinions, so all we should have to do is express them clearly. Here's my opinion. Take it or leave it." This point of view both misunderstands the nature of argument and ignores its greatest value.

It is true that we are all entitled to our opinions and that we have no duty to defend them. But universities hold as their highest value not just the pursuit of new knowledge and better understanding, but the sharing of that knowledge. We write not only to state what we have think but also to show why others might agree with it and why it matters. We also know that whatever it is we think, it is never the entire truth. Our conclusions are partial, incomplete, and always subject to challenge. So we write in a way that allows others to test our reasoning: we present our best thinking as a series of claims, reasons, and responses to imagined challenges, so that readers can see not only what we think, but whether they ought to agree.

And that's all an argument is--not wrangling, but a serious and focused conversation among people who are intensely interested in getting to the bottom of things *cooperatively*.

Those values are also an integral part of your education in college. For four years, you are asked to read, do research, gather data, analyze it, think about it, and then communicate it to readers in a form in which enables them to asses it and use it. You are asked to do this not because we expect you all to become professional scholars, but because in just about any profession you pursue, you will do research, think about what you find, make decisions about complex matters, and then explain those decisions--usually in writing--to others who have a stake in your decisions being sound ones. In an Age of Information, what most professionals do is research, think, and make arguments. (And part of the value of doing your own thinking and writing is that it makes you much better at evaluating the thinking and writing of others.)

In the next few pages, we're going to walk you through a process of creating an argument in a Humanities or Social Science paper. Note that we're describing "a" process and not "the" process. We're not describing the way that everyone does go about writing an argument. We're certainly not describing the way everyone must go about writing an argument. Further, we can't cover everything, and some of your teachers will expect something other than what we describe here. There are even some differences between how you write papers in Humanities and in the Social Sciences. But within all these limits, we can lay some groundwork for writing college papers.

We begin with the assignment that gets you started; then we discuss some ways to plan your paper so that you don't waste too much time on false starts. We conclude with some strategies for drafting and revising, especially revising, because the most productive work on a paper begins after you have gotten your ideas out of the warm and cozy incubator of your own mind and into the cold light of day.

Interpreting assignments: a guide to professors' expectations

Not all of your instructors will be equally clear about what they expect of your paper. Some will tell you in detail what to read, how to think about it, and how to organize your paper, but others will ask a general question just to see what you can do with it. Some instructors will expect you to stay close to the assignment, penalizing you if you depart from it; others will encourage you to strike out on your own. Some few instructors may want you to demonstrate only that you have read and understood a reading, but most will want you to use your understanding of the reading as a jumping-off point for an analysis and an argument.

So your first step in writing an assigned paper occurs well before you begin writing: You must know what your instructor expects. Start by assuming that, unless you see the words "Summarize or paraphrase what X says about . . . ," your instructor is unlikely to want just a summary. Beyond this point, however, you have to become a kind of anthropologist, reading the culture of your particular class to understand what is said, what is not, and what is intended.

Start by looking carefully at the words of the assignment. If it is phrased in any of these ways, one crucial part of your task has been done for you:

- "Agree or disagree: 'Freud misunderstood the feminine mind when he wrote . . . .'"
- "Was Lear justified in castigating Cordelia when she refused to . . . ?"
- "Discuss whether Socrates adequately answered the charge that he corrupted the youth of Athens."

For questions like these, you start (but it's only a start) by considering two opposing claims: Freud understood the feminine mind or did not , Lear was or was not justified, Socrates did or did not answer the charges against him. For reasons we will discuss below, you will *not* want the claim of your paper to be merely yes or no, he did or he didn't. But an assignment like this can make it easier to get started because you can immediately begin to find and assess data from your readings. You can look at passages from the reading and consider how they would support one of the claims. (Remember: this is only a start. You do not want to end up with a claim that says nothing more than "Freud did (or did not) understand the feminine mind." "Lear was (or was not) justified in castigating Cordelia " "Socrates did (or did not) adequately answer the charge.")

More likely, however, your assignments will be less specific. They won't suggest opposite claims. Instead, they'll give you a reasonably specific sense of subject matter and a reasonably specific sense of your task:

"illustrate," "explain," "analyze," "evaluate," "compare and contrast,"

"Discuss the role that the honor plays in *The Odyssey.* "

"Show how Molière exploits comic patterns in a scene from *Tartuffe*."

None of these assignments implies a main point or claim that you can directly import into your paper. You can't just claim that "honor does play a role in *The Odyssey*" or that "MoliËre does exploit comic patterns in *Tartuffe*." After all, if the instructor has asked you to discuss *how* MoliËre used comic patterns, she presumably already believes that he *did* use them. You get no credit for asserting the existence of something we already know exists.

Instead, these assignments ask you to spend four or five pages explaining the results of an analysis. Words such as "show how" and "explain" and "illustrate" do *not* ask you to summarize a reading. They ask you to show how the reading is put together, how it works. If you asked someone to show you how your computer worked, you wouldn't be satisfied if they simply summarized: "This is the keyboard, this is the monitor, this is the printer." You already know the summary--now you want to know how the thing does what it does. These assignments are similar. They ask you to identify parts of things--parts of an argument, parts of a narrative, parts of a poem; then show how those parts fit together (or work against one another) to create some larger effect.

But in the course of so doing, you can't just grind out four or five pages of discussion, explanation, or analysis. It may seem strange, but even when you're asked to "show how" or "illustrate," you're still being asked to make an argument. You must shape and focus that discussion or analysis so that it supports a ***claim*** that you discovered and formulated and that all of your discussion and explanation develops and supports. We'll talk more about claims -- also known as points -- in later sections.

A third kind of assignment is simultaneously least restrictive and most intimidating. These assignments leave it up to you to decide not only what you will claim but what you will write about and even what kind of analysis you will do: "Analyze the role of a character in *The Odyssey*." That is the kind of assignment that causes many students anxiety because they must motivate their research almost entirely on their own. To meet this kind of assignment, the best advice we can give is to read with your mind open to things that puzzle you, that make you wish you understood something better.

Now that advice may seem almost counterproductive; you may even think that being puzzled or not understanding something testifies to your intellectual failure. Yet almost everything we do in a university starts with someone being puzzled about something, someone with a vague--or specific--dissatisfaction caused by not knowing something that seems important or by wanting to understand something better. The best place to begin thinking about any assignment is with what *you* don't understand but wish you did.

If after all this analysis of the assignment you are still uncertain about what is expected of you, ask your instructor. If your class has a Writing Intern, ask that

person. If for some reason you can't ask either, locate the Academic Tutor in your residence hall and ask that person. **Do this as soon as possible**. You're not likely to succeed on an assignment if you don't have a clear sense of what will count as success. You don't want to spend time doing something different than what you're being asked to do.

Another key feature of college writing: what's your point?

However different your assignments may seem, most will share one characteristic: in each, you will almost certainly be asked to make a point. Now when we talk about the "point" of your paper, you should understand what we do and do *not* mean. If asked what the point of their paper is, most students answer with something like, "Well, I wanted to write about the way Falstaff plays the role of Prince Hal's father." But that kind of sentence names only your *topic* and an *intention* to write *about* it.

When most of your instructors ask what the point of your paper is, they have in mind something different. By "point" or "claim" (the words are virtually synonymous with *thesis*), they will more often mean the most important *sentence* that you wrote in your essay, a sentence that appears on the page, in black in white; words that you can point to, underline, send on a postcard; a sentence that sums up the most important thing you want to say as a result of your reading, thinking, research, and writing. In that sense, you might state the point of your paper as "Well, I want to show/prove/claim/argue/demonstrate (any of those words will serve to introduce the point) that

> "Though Falstaff seems to play the role of Hal's father, he is, in fact, acting more like a younger brother who . . . ."

If you include in your paper what appears after *I want to prove that*, then that's the point of your paper, its main claim that the rest of your paper supports.

But what's a *good* point?

A question just as important as what a point is, though, is what counts as a good one. We will answer that question here, even though it gets us ahead of ourselves in describing the process of writing a paper. Many beginning writers think that writing an essay means thinking up a point or thesis and then finding evidence to support it. But few of us work that way. Most of us begin our research with a question, with a puzzle, something that we don't understand but want to, and maybe a vague sense of what an answer might look like. We hope that out of our early research to resolve that puzzle there emerges a solution to the puzzle, an idea that seems promising, but one that only more research can test. But even if more research supports that developing idea, we aren't ready to say that *that* idea is our claim or point. Instead, we start writing to see whether we can build an argument to support it, suspecting, hoping that in the act of writing we will refine that idea, maybe even change it substantially.

That's why we say we are getting ahead of ourselves in this account of writing a paper, because as paradoxical as it may sound, you are unlikely to know *exactly*

what point you will make until *after* you have written the paper in which you made it. So for us to talk about the *quality* of a point now is to get ahead of ourselves, because we haven't even touched on how you might think about drafting your paper, much less revising it. But because everything you do at the beginning aims at finding a good point, it is useful to have a clear idea about what it is you are trying to find, what makes for a good point.

A good point or claim typically has several key characteristics: it says something significant about what you have read, something that helps you and your readers understand it better; it says something that is not obvious, something that your reader didn't already know; it is at least mildly contestable, something that no one would agree with just by reading it; it asserts something that you can plausibly support in five pages, not something that would require a book.

Measured by those criteria, these are *not* good points or claims:

- "*1 Henry IV* by William Shakespeare is a play that raises questions about the nature of kingship and responsibility." Sounds impressive, but who would contest it? Everyone who has read the play already knows that it raises such questions.

- "*Native Son* is one of the most important stories about race relations ever written." Again, your readers probably already agree with this, and if so, why would they read an essay that supported it? Further, are you ready to provide an argument that this point is true? What evidence could you provide to make this argument? Are you prepared to compare the effect of *Native Son* with the effects of other books about race relations?

- "Socrates' argument in *The Apology* is very interesting." Right. So?

- "In this paper I discuss Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean-Corinthian debate in Book I." First, what significant thing does this point tell us about the book? Second, who would contest this (who would argue that you are not going to discuss Thucydides' account?).

None of these is a particularly significant or contestable point, and so none of them qualifies as a good one.

What does qualify as a good claim? These might:

- The three most prominent women in *Heart of Darkness* play key roles in a complex system of parallels: literally as gatekeepers of Africa, representatively as gatekeepers of darkness, and metaphorically as gatekeepers of brutality.

- While Freud argues that followers obey because each has a part of themselves invested in the leader, Blau claims that followers obey in order to avoid punishment. Both neglect the effects of external power.

You should recognize, however, that you will only rarely be able state good points like these *before* you write your first draft. Much more often, you *discover* good points at the end of the process of drafting. Writing is a way of thinking through a

problem, of discovering what you want to say. So do not feel that you should begin to write only when you have a fully articulated point in mind. Instead, write to discover and to refine it.

One note on the language of point sentences. If you're like us, you will want your readers to think that your points are terrifically interesting and significant. What almost never accomplishes this is to say: "My point is terrifically interesting and significant." Many writers try to generate a sense of importance for what they write by simply adding some synonym of the word "important:" "An important question to consider . . ." "It is essential to examine . . . " "A crucial concern is whether. . ." This isn't going to work. What convinces readers that a point is important is not the word "important," but the words that tell us the substance of the point. If, during your first draft, you find yourself using words like "important," you should make a note to yourself to come back during your revisions to replace "important" with more substantive language. Then don't forget to do it. It's really important.

Now: in order to prove that important point -- or to go through a process that will help you develop one -- you'll need a strategy for gathering evidence and writing a first draft. We offer advice on these matters in the next section: "**Preparing to write and drafting the paper**."

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WRITING CENTER BRIEF GUIDE SERIES

A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper

The Challenges of Philosophical Writing

The aim of the assignments in your philosophy classes is to get you doing philosophy. But what is philosophy, and how is it to be done? The answer is complicated. Philosophers are often motivated by one or more of what we might call the "Big Questions," such as: How should we live? Is there free will? How do we know anything? or, What is truth? While philosophers do not agree among themselves on either the range of proper philosophical questions or the proper methods of answering them, they do agree that merely expressing one's personal opinions on controversial topics like these is not doing philosophy. Rather, philosophers insist on the method of first attaining clarity about the exact question being asked, and then providing answers supported by clear, logically structured arguments.

An ideal philosophical argument should lead the reader in undeniable logical steps from obviously true premises to an unobvious conclusion. A *negative* argument is an *objection* that tries to show that a claim, theory, or argument is mistaken; if it does so successfully, we say that it *refutes* it. A *positive* argument tries to support a claim or theory, for example, the view that there is genuine free will, or the view that we should never eat animals. Positive philosophical arguments about the Big Questions that are ideal are extremely hard to construct, and philosophers interested in formulating or criticizing such arguments usually end up discussing other questions that may at first seem pedantic or contrived. These questions motivate philosophers because they seem, after investigation, to be logically related to the Big Questions and to shed light on them. So, for example, while trying to answer Big Questions like those above, philosophers might find themselves discussing questions like (respectively): When would it be morally permissible to push someone into the path of a speeding trolley? What is a cause? Do I know that I have hands? Is there an external world? While arguing about these questions may appear silly or pointless, the satisfactions of philosophy are often derived from, first, discovering and explicating how they are logically connected to the Big Questions, and second, constructing and defending philosophical arguments to answer them in turn. Good philosophy proceeds with modest, careful and clear steps.

Structuring a Philosophy Paper

Philosophy assignments generally ask you to consider some thesis or argument, often a thesis or argument that has been presented by another philosopher (a *thesis* is a claim that may be true or false). Given this thesis or argument, you may be asked to do one or more of the following: explain it, offer an argument in support of it, offer an objection to it, defend against an objection to it, evaluate the arguments for and against it, discuss what consequences it might have, determine whether some other thesis or argument commits one to it (i.e., if I accepted the other thesis or argument, would I be rationally required to accept this one *because* I accept the other one?), or determine whether some other view can be held consistently with it. No matter which of these tasks you are asked to complete, your paper should normally meet the following structural requirements:

- **Begin by formulating your precise thesis.** State your thesis clearly and concisely in your introduction so that your reader understands what your paper sets out to achieve. Get to the point quickly and without digression. Don't try to introduce your argument within a grand historical narrative, for example. Your thesis does not have to be the same as any thesis mentioned in the assignment, although in some cases it may be.

GOOD WRITING EXAMPLE

Jen was an excellent philosophy writer who received the following assignment:

Evaluate Smith's argument for the claim that people lack free will.

Jen decided before she began writing her paper that Smith's argument ultimately fails because it trades on an ambiguity. Accordingly, she began her paper with the following sentence:

In this paper, I will refute Smith's argument against the existence of free will by showing that it trades on an ambiguity.

Jen's thesis, then, was that Smith's argument is invalid because it trades on an ambiguity – and she stated it clearly right at the beginning of her paper. Note that Jen need not say anything at all about the truth or falsity of the thesis that people lack free will; even if Smith's argument for it is invalid, it might still be true that people lack free will.

- **Define technical or ambiguous terms used in your thesis or your argument.** You will need to define for your reader any special or unclear terms that appear in your thesis, or in the discussion at hand. Write so that you could be clearly understood by a student who has taken some classes in philosophy but not this particular class. (Think of this imaginary reader whenever you need to decide how much you need to say to set up a discussion, or to judge the overall clarity of your work.)
- **If necessary, motivate your thesis (i.e. explain to your reader why they should care about it).** You'll need to do this, especially in longer assignments, when it isn't clear why a reader would care about the truth of the claim you are arguing for.
- **Explain briefly how you will argue in favor of your thesis.** In the example above, Jen's thesis itself is stated in such a way as to indicate how the argument for it will proceed. Jen might reasonably have chosen to enlarge a little on this explanation, for example by indicating in her introduction which term in Smith's argument is ambiguous, or by indicating why she thinks others may have overlooked the ambiguity.

Take care to clearly indicate when you are speaking in your own voice, and when you are explicating someone else's argument or point of view but not yourself advocating it.

- **If necessary, explain the argument you will be critiquing.** If your assignment asks you to critique someone else's argument (as in the example above), you will need to explain that argument before presenting your critique of it. Sometimes, the entire task of an assignment will be simply to explain an argument originated by somebody else, rather than to provide an argument for your own thesis. While you will not always be expected to provide your own completely original arguments or theories in philosophy papers, you must always practice philosophy. This means that you should explain the argument in your own words and according to your own understanding of the steps involved in it. You will need to be very clear on the precise *logical structure* of an author's argument (N.B. this may not be clearly represented by the order in which the argument is written down in the readings). Don't try to impress your reader with your wide knowledge by summarizing everything in a particular article, or everything you have learned about the topic: stick to explaining only the details that are essential to the author's argument for the particular thesis and to your own argument for your thesis. Also take care to clearly indicate when you are speaking in your own voice, and when you are explicating someone else's argument or point of view but not yourself advocating it.

POOR WRITING EXAMPLE

In answer to the previously mentioned assignment, George wrote a paper arguing that there was free will, on the grounds that George was himself aware of making all kinds of free choices every day. His conclusion was that Smith's argument (which he had not explained, and mentioned only at the end of the paper) must be false, since there is free will.

George's professor asked him to rewrite, telling him that he had failed to engage with Smith's argument in the first draft. Here is an excerpt from George's less-than-successful rewrite…

… Smith says on p.9, "The truth of causal determinism having been established by this argument from elimination, we shall move on to prove incompatibilism." Smith then says that the source of an agent's actions is some event that occurred before he was even born. If an event occurred before someone was born, it cannot be a product of his choices. Therefore incompatibilism is true. On p.10, Smith addresses the objection that…

George does not properly explain and analyze the logic of Smith's argument (a philosophy paper), but rather reports what Smith says and the way in which it appears in the text (a book report). In the first sentence George quotes Smith directly where there is no need to do so, and he provides no explanation of Smith's sentence or the technical terms in it that shows that George actually understands it. In his second sentence, George just follows Smith's text while paraphrasing it. In his third, George may be attempting to: (i) simply paraphrase Smith, or (ii) paraphrase and endorse Smith's claim, or (iii) make his own personal point – but to the reader it is left ambiguous what George thinks Smith's view is and what George's own view is.

If you use a claim that your reader might find doubtful, then you must try to give the reader convincing reasons for accepting it.

- **Make an argument to support your thesis.** This is the main focus of your paper. To make the strongest possible argument, do not skip any steps, and try not to rest your argument on any premises that your reader might not be willing to accept. If you use a claim that your reader might find doubtful, then you must try to give the reader convincing reasons for accepting it. It will almost always be more effective to use a single argument and make it as compelling as you can than to use more than one argument supported less comprehensively, so avoid taking a "shotgun" approach by using multiple weaker arguments. In presenting your argument, be straightforward in your language, and say precisely what you mean. At times you will need to use examples or otherwise elaborate, yet you must still be as concise as possible – unnecessary words or information will distract and confuse your reader.
- **In order to strengthen your argument, anticipate and answer objections to it.** In most philosophy assignments, this will be an essential part of your paper; it helps support your main argument and makes it more compelling. When you present an objection, you must always present a reason or reasons for thinking it true; the simple negation of a thesis is not an objection to it.

GOOD WRITING EXAMPLE:

After offering her argument, Jen summarized her conclusion and introduced an objection as follows:

As I have shown clearly in my reconstruction of Smith's argument, the word "free" as it appears in Smith's first premise (meaning uncaused) must be interpreted differently from the word "free" as it appears in Smith's third premise (meaning unforced) – otherwise at least one of those premises would be highly implausible. But in that case, Smith's argument is logically invalid.

It might be objected that I have interpreted Smith's argument unfavorably. I can think of only one other reasonable interpretation of Smith's argument. It uses the same first two premises but has a different third premise…

Jen might reply to the objection she has imagined by showing that Smith's argument would suffer some other defect if it were reconstructed in the way the objection suggests, such as resting on a logical fallacy or an implausible premise.

You should always raise and reply to the strongest objections you can think of rather than making up unconvincing objections that you find it easier to reply to. If you cannot think of a decisive reply to an objection, you should admit this, and then give your reader some reason to think the objection might not succeed anyway. If you cannot offer such a reason, you might have to go back and revise the thesis that you want to argue for. In some cases, the correct response to an objection, if you cannot answer it, will be to start your paper over and argue for a point of view opposite to that which you started with. If this happens to you, congratulations on making a philosophical discovery!

Sometimes, an assignment will contain instructions to think of one or more objections to your thesis and defend against them. Generally, except for the very shortest assignments, of three double-spaced pages or less, you should take such a requirement to be implicit even if it isn't mentioned outright. Also except in these very brief papers:

- **Briefly conclude by explaining what you think your argument has established.**

In presenting your argument, be straightforward in your language, and say precisely what you mean. At times you will need to use examples or otherwise elaborate, yet you must still be as concise as possible – unnecessary words or information will distract and confuse your reader.

Don't try to write a philosophy paper from scratch, from beginning to end: you must leave plenty of time to plan things out first. Think about the assigned topic for a while, and figure out a possible thesis and a rough argument for it in your head. If you're finding this hard, start writing rough sketches of relevant ideas. You'll throw a lot of this material away later, but the act of writing can help you to think things through. When you're ready, begin to develop a master *outline* on paper. Your outline should show your thesis and your argument in abbreviated form but with maximal logical clarity; try to use one line for each logical step of your argument. Make sure it includes potential objections and replies, using just a couple of lines for each.

You'll almost certainly find, as you produce your outline, that you need to revise pieces of your argument or even your entire answer. Keep writing sketches of pieces of your paper throughout the outlining process if it helps. Continue revising the outline until the argument in it is completely clear and satisfactory to you. (Try explaining your argument to someone else; if you can't explain it, your outline needs more work!) At this point, write a first complete draft of your paper from your outline, focusing on clarity of the overall structure of your argument.

Once you have a first draft in hand, continue to revise it, with both the argument's structure and your particular word choices in mind. Save your drafts as you go along, so that you can go back if you change your mind. Read your paper out loud or have a friend read it to work out which parts of your argument might confuse or fail to persuade the reader and need more work. Be open to changing your mind and your arguments at all stages of the process, and keep your outline up to date as you do. Your final draft should offer the clearest expression you can manage of your final, properly outlined argument.

Evidence

From your philosophy instructor, a request for evidence for a claim is generally a request for an argument, or for a better argument. While philosophers may from time to time make use of scientific generalizations or results, they generally avoid the messy and specialized business of collecting and arguing about empirical data, and confine their investigations to their armchairs. This is a broad generalization; sometimes empirical evidence from psychology, physics or other fields of inquiry can be put to good use in philosophical arguments. But if you do use such evidence from elsewhere, never just assume that it solves your philosophical question: be careful to explain exactly why it is relevant and exactly what we can conclude from it, and do make sure that you accurately report what the scientists have to tell us.

Philosophers still find a lot to argue about even when they put empirical questions aside. For one thing, the question of what sort of empirical evidence would be needed to decide the answer to a question might itself be a non-empirical question that philosophers discuss. For another, philosophers spend a lot of time discussing how different claims (which may be empirical) relate logically to each other. For example, a common philosophical project is to show how two or more views cannot be held consistently with each other, or to show that although two views are consistent with one another, they together entail an implausible third claim. If successful, this type of argument, known as a *reductio ad absurdum* or *reductio* for short, shows that we have reason to reject at least one of its premises.

EXAMPLE OF A REDUCTIO

- **Premise 1:** People sometimes ought morally to do what they are not in fact going to do.
- **Premise 2:** If a person morally ought to do something, then they could do what they ought to do (Principle that "Ought implies can").
- **Premise 3:** If a person is in fact going to do one thing, then it is not the case that they could do something else (Determinism).
- **Conclusion (from 2 and 3):** People never ought morally to do what they are not in fact going to do

Here, the conclusion contradicts the first premise. If the argument is logically valid, it shows that the three premises of the argument cannot all be true. A further argument would be needed to show which of the three premises ought to be rejected.

Philosophical arguments are not always in the form of a *reductio*; we often need to start from some basic premises that our ultimate conclusions will depend on. Unless they are scientific results as mentioned above, they should generally be claims that any reasonable reader can be expected to agree with, and they might be drawn from common experience, or from our stronger intuitions. So, for example, one might begin an argument with the intuition that murder is wrong if anything at all is wrong, or with the common experience that things look smaller when they are further away. When you introduce a set of basic premises, you should be careful to avoid the fallacy of *begging the question* – which is to say, using any premises that one would reasonably doubt if not for one's prior acceptance of the conclusion the argument attempts to establish. (This is the correct logical use of the phrase "begs the question", by the way. Avoid using the phrase "begs the question" to mean raises the question, at least in philosophy papers.)

EXAMPLE OF A QUESTION-BEGGING ARGUMENT

- **Premise (1)**: I have religious experiences.
- **Premise (2):** If anyone has religious experiences, then God exists.
- **Conclusion:** God exists.

Note that in this argument, the term "religious experiences" is ambiguous between two readings. On one reading, it means genuine experiences of something supernatural. On this reading, premise (2) is plausible, but premise (1) is question-begging, since one would have to assume that God exists to think that one has had a religious experience. On a second reading, "religious experiences" means experiences *as if of* something supernatural. But on this reading, premise (2) is implausible. Finally, the argument is not logically valid (it *equivocates*) if the term "religious experiences" means a different thing in each of the two premises. If the writer of this argument had defined his terms more carefully, its weakness would be clear. Ambiguous terms in philosophical arguments are a common problem, and can mask other weaknesses.

Since a lot of the things philosophers talk about are very abstract, it may be difficult to bring our common experiences and intuitions to bear on them. This is one place where examples may be a useful source of evidence. Examples can also help clarify the intended meaning of terms. Philosophers make great use of *hypothetical examples* in particular, and you should feel free to use them yourself.

A GOOD USE OF EXAMPLES

Jen is arguing for the thesis that it is permissible for me to perform some actions that have foreknown side effects which it wouldn't be permissible to aim at directly. She uses examples successfully both to elucidate the notion of a "foreknown side-effect," and to help bring our intuitions to bear on her thesis:

A foreknown side-effect of an action is an event or state of affairs that one does not aim at when one acts, but that one knows will (likely) result from one's action. For example, I decide to drive to class in order to save time. I know that my driving will leave the parking space in front of my house empty. The empty parking space is a foreknown side-effect of my action: I don't aim at it, because my aim is only to get myself to school faster.

…

To help prove my point about the difference in permissibility between aims and foreknown side-effects, I will use the following hypothetical example: Bill the bomber pilot has decided to bomb an important munitions factory. Bill knows that the factory is next to a hospital, and that about 1,000 civilian casualties are likely. But bombing the factory will bring an early defeat to the enemy by cutting their arms flow. This will demoralize them and help end the war. Bill's action, I contend, may be permissible. Now I'll just alter the case slightly: Bob the bomber pilot has decided to bomb a munitions factory. Bob knows that the factory is next to a hospital, and that about 1,000 civilian casualties are likely. In fact, bombing the factory is the best way to bring about such a high number of casualties, and this is why Bob has decided to bomb there. Bringing about this many civilian casualties will help weaken the enemy's resolve and thereby bring an early end to the war. (It will also have a side-effect of cutting their arms flow). I contend that Bob's action is clearly impermissible.

Examples like these might bring clear moral intuitions, and if Jen can construct an example in which she can convince us that it is indeed clear that something would be permitted as a foreknown side-effect but not as an aim, she will have a good argument for her thesis.

There are a couple of types of "evidence" that you should not use in philosophy papers: Do not argue that a claim is true, or is likely to be true, just because someone of great authority believed it. Authorities can be wrong, and philosophers want to see the arguments for a view. And do not argue from what the dictionary says about something. If the dictionary defines truth as "correspondence with reality", you cannot use this as an argument that truth is correspondence with reality because either you are treating the dictionary as an authority, or you are citing it as a reporter of common usage. But philosophers don't want to know what most people think or assume about what truth is, they want to know what is actually the case! (N.B.: you may also be misled when you consult the dictionary because some words have technical, philosophical meanings within the subject that differ from their ordinary usage.)

Sources

You may freely use the arguments of other philosophers in your papers as long as you credit them appropriately, and also do your own philosophical thinking. Again, if you need to explain someone else's argument, you must do so in your own words and according to your own clear understanding of the logical steps involved in it. It is also extremely important that when you explain the arguments of other philosophers, you interpret them *charitably*. This does not mean that you are barred from criticizing them, but rather that you must interpret each author as holding the strongest possible argument consistent with what they have written. If a philosopher's argument seems obviously wrong, then you probably do not understand it properly. Even if a philosopher's argument seems right, you must take great care to avoid confusing their argument with any other argument that sounds similar to it.

You can help yourself to avoid these difficulties by training yourself to read philosophy articles extremely slowly and carefully in order to understand the precise steps of the author's argument. It is not unusual to have to read a philosophy article several times in order to grasp its details. Philosophy is difficult by nature: to avoid making things even harder, make sure that the argument in *your* paper is absolutely as clear and easy to understand as possible!

If you are asked to offer an argument or an objection and the assignment does not require that it be your own, then you may generally use one that you have learned in class or from the readings, with proper credit. In this case, you should not only put the argument in your own words and in the logical form that seems clearest to you, but also see whether there is any way in which you can improve on the argument you have heard. Perhaps you can offer reason to modify it, or offer extra considerations in defense of it that help explain why you yourself find it plausible. Look for ways to show that you are doing your own philosophical reasoning.

Conventions

Certain conventions are helpful and generally expected in philosophical writing:

- **Avoid direct quotes.** If you need to quote, quote sparingly, and follow your quotes by explaining what the author means in your own words. (There are times when brief direct quotes can be helpful, for example when you want to present and interpret a potential ambiguity in the text of an author's argument.) When you paraphrase, you must do philosophical work in doing so: explain any ambiguous terms or technical terms in the source, and remember that your task is not to explain the author's sentences in the text but his or her argument: aim to show that you've understood it and aren't merely repeating it in different words.
- **Use first person personal pronouns and possessive pronouns freely; signpost.** Phrases such as "I will use the term 'realist' to mean…" are useful in clarifying your use of concepts and terminology. Phrases such as, "I will argue that…", "I will now show that…", "I will give three examples…", "My second objection is…" or "My argument has shown that…" are an extremely useful aid to communicating the structure of your arguments and your paper overall. Use "sign-posting" phrases like these frequently in your papers in order to give your reader a clear sense of *where your argument is going* at all times (note that such sign-posting phrases are not always formulated first-personally, e.g. "Smith offers three main objections … Smith's first objection is … but it might be replied that … Smith's second objection is ….").

Use "sign-posting" phrases frequently to give your reader a clear sense of where your argument is going

- **Say exactly what you mean, and no more than you need to say.** Use simple prose and short, simple sentences. If you can complete your argument in fewer pages than the assignment allows, look for premises or steps that might need further support, or anticipate and answer additional objections. Add examples where they may help to clarify the meaning of a concept or a claim or to persuade a doubtful reader of something. A philosophy paper should establish a modest point as clearly, carefully, and concisely as possible.
- **Be careful with specialized language.** Certain terms and phrases are reserved in philosophy for special, narrow meanings that are peculiar to the subject. These include *deduction, begs the question, valid, invalid, sound*, and *unsound* (used to describe arguments), and *vague* (used to describe terms or concepts). Understand how these words are used in philosophy before you use any of them in your writing.

FOR FURTHER READING

- For a longer guide on this topic, see: A Guide to Philosophical Writing by Elijah Chudnoff. **http://isites.harvard.edu/k24101**
- Jim Pryor's web page at: **http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching** has some other introductory resources you will find useful, including his "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy" (because you need to learn to read in philosophy before you can write!) and some notes on "Philosophical Terms and Methods."

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Welcome to the Purdue OWL

Contributors: Ryan Weber, Allen Brizee.
Summary:

This resource covers using logic within writing-- logical vocabulary, logical fallacies, and other types of logos-based reasoning.

Logic in Argumentative Writing

This handout is designed to help writers develop and use logical arguments in writing. Through an introduction in some of the basic terms and operations of logic, the handout helps writers analyze the arguments of others and generate their own arguments. However, it is important to remember that logic is only one aspect of a successful argument. Non-logical arguments, statements that cannot be logically proven or disproved, are important in argumentative writing, such as appeals to emotions or values. Illogical arguments, on the other hand, are false and must be avoided.

Logic is a formal system of analysis that helps writers invent, demonstrate, and prove arguments. It works by testing propositions against one another to determine their accuracy. People often think they are using logic when they avoid emotion or make arguments based on their common sense, such as "Everyone should look out for their own self interests" or "People have the right to be free." However, unemotional or common sense statements are not always equivalent to logical statements. To be logical, a proposition must be tested within a logical sequence.

The most famous logical sequence, called the syllogism, was developed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. His most famous syllogism is:

Premise 1: All men are mortal.
Premise 2: Socrates is a man.
Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

In this sequence, premise 2 is tested against premise 1 to reach the logical conclusion. Within this system, if both premises are considered valid, there is no other logical conclusion than determining that Socrates is a mortal.

This guide provides some vocabulary and strategies for determining logical conclusions.

Contributors: Ryan Weber, Allen Brizee.

Summary:

This resource covers using logic within writing-- logical vocabulary, logical fallacies, and other types of logos-based reasoning.

Using Logic

Logical Vocabulary

Before using logic to reach conclusions, it is helpful to know some important vocabulary related to logic.

Premise: Proposition used as evidence in an argument.
Conclusion: Logical result of the relationship between the premises. Conclusions serve as the thesis of the argument.
Argument: The assertion of a conclusion based on logical premises.
Syllogism: The simplest sequence of logical premises and conclusions, devised by Aristotle.
Enthymeme: A shortened syllogism which omits the first premise, allowing the audience to fill it in. For example, "Socrates is mortal because he is a human" is an enthymeme which leaves out the premise "All humans are mortal."
Induction: A process through which the premises provide some basis for the conclusion.
Deduction: A process through which the premises provide conclusive proof for the conclusion.

Reaching Logical Conclusions

Reaching logical conclusions depends on the proper analysis of premises. The goal of a syllogism is to arrange premises so that only one true conclusion is possible.

Example A:
Consider the following premises:

Premise 1: Non-renewable resources do not exist in infinite supply.
Premise 2: Coal is a non-renewable resource.

From these two premises, only one logical conclusion is available:

Conclusion: Coal does not exist in infinite supply.

Example B:
Often logic requires several premises to reach a conclusion.

Premise 1: All monkeys are primates.
Premise 2: All primates are mammals.
Premise 3: All mammals are vertebrate animals. **Conclusions:** Monkeys are vertebrate animals.

Example C:

Logic allows specific conclusions to be drawn from general premises. Consider the following premises:

Premise 1: All squares are rectangles.
Premise 2: Figure 1 is a square.
Conclusion: Figure 1 is also a rectangle.

Example D:
Notice that logic requires decisive statements in order to work. Therefore, this syllogism is false:

Premise 1: Some quadrilaterals are squares.
Premise 2: Figure 1 is a quadrilateral.
Conclusion: Figure 1 is a square.

This syllogism is false because not enough information is provided to allow a verifiable conclusion. Figure 1 could just as likely be a rectangle, which is also a quadrilateral.

Example E:
Logic can also mislead when it is based on premises that an audience does not accept. For instance:

Premise 1: People with red hair are not good at checkers.
Premise 2: Bill has red hair.
Conclusion: Bill is not good at checkers.

Within the syllogism, the conclusion is logically valid. However, it is only true if an audience accepts Premise 1, which is very unlikely. This is an example of how logical statements can appear accurate while being completely false.

Example F:
Logical conclusions also depend on which factors are recognized and ignored by the premises. Therefore, different premises could lead to very different conclusions about the same subject. For instance, these two syllogisms about the platypus reveal the limits of logic for handling ambiguous cases:

Premise 1: All birds lay eggs.
Premise 2: Platypuses lay eggs.
Conclusion: Platypuses are birds.

Premise 1: All mammals have fur.
Premise 2: Platypuses have fur.
Conclusion: Platypuses are mammals.

Though logic is a very powerful argumentative tool and is far preferable to a disorganized argument, logic does have limitations. It must also be effectively developed from a syllogism into a written piece.

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Logical Fallacies

Fallacies are common errors in reasoning that will undermine the logic of your argument. Fallacies can be either illegitimate arguments or irrelevant points, and are often identified because they lack evidence that supports their claim. Avoid these common fallacies in your own arguments and watch for them in the arguments of others.

Slippery Slope: This is a conclusion based on the premise that if A happens, then eventually through a series of small steps, through B, C,..., X, Y, Z will happen, too, basically equating A and Z. So, if we don't want Z to occur, A must not be allowed to occur either. Example:

If we ban Hummers because they are bad for the environment eventually the government will ban all cars, so we should not ban Hummers.

In this example, the author is equating banning Hummers with banning all cars, which is not the same thing.

Hasty Generalization: This is a conclusion based on insufficient or biased evidence. In other words, you are rushing to a conclusion before you have all the relevant facts. Example:

Even though it's only the first day, I can tell this is going to be a boring course.

In this example, the author is basing his evaluation of the entire course on only the first day, which is notoriously boring and full of housekeeping tasks for most courses. To make a fair and reasonable evaluation the author must attend not one but several classes, and possibly even examine the textbook, talk to the professor, or talk to others who have previously finished the course in order to have sufficient evidence to base a conclusion on.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc: This is a conclusion that assumes that if 'A' occurred after 'B' then 'B' must have caused 'A.' Example:

I drank bottled water and now I am sick, so the water must have made me sick.

In this example, the author assumes that if one event chronologically follows another the first event must have caused the second. But the illness could have been caused by the burrito the night before, a flu bug that had been working on the body for days, or a chemical spill across campus. There is no reason, without more evidence, to assume the water caused the person to be sick.

Genetic Fallacy: A conclusion is based on an argument that the origins of a person, idea, institute, or theory determine its character, nature, or worth. Example:

The Volkswagen Beetle is an evil car because it was originally designed by Hitler's army.

In this example the author is equating the character of a car with the character of the people who built the car. However, the two are not inherently related.

Begging the Claim: The conclusion that the writer should prove is validated within the claim. Example:

Filthy and polluting coal should be banned.

Arguing that coal pollutes the earth and thus should be banned would be logical. But the very conclusion that should be proved, that coal causes enough pollution to warrant banning its use, is already assumed in the claim by referring to it as "filthy and polluting."

Circular Argument: This restates the argument rather than actually proving it. Example:

George Bush is a good communicator because he speaks effectively.

In this example, the conclusion that Bush is a "good communicator" and the evidence used to prove it "he speaks effectively" are basically the same idea. Specific evidence such as using everyday language, breaking down complex problems, or illustrating his points with humorous stories would be needed to prove either half of the sentence.

Either/or: This is a conclusion that oversimplifies the argument by reducing it to only two sides or choices. Example:

We can either stop using cars or destroy the earth.

In this example, the two choices are presented as the only options, yet the author ignores a range of choices in between such as developing cleaner technology, car sharing systems for necessities and emergencies, or better community planning to discourage daily driving.

Ad hominem: This is an attack on the character of a person rather than her/his opinions or arguments. Example:

Green Peace's strategies aren't effective because they are all dirty, lazy hippies.

In this example, the author doesn't even name particular strategies Green Peace has suggested, much less evaluate those strategies on their merits. Instead, the author attacks the characters of the individuals in the group.

Ad populum: This is an emotional appeal that speaks to positive (such as patriotism, religion, democracy) or negative (such as terrorism or fascism) concepts rather than the real issue at hand. Example:

If you were a true American you would support the rights of people to choose whatever vehicle they want.

In this example, the author equates being a "true American," a concept that people want to be associated with, particularly in a time of war, with allowing people to buy any vehicle they want even though there is no inherent connection between the two.

Red Herring: This is a diversionary tactic that avoids the key issues, often by avoiding opposing arguments rather than addressing them. Example:

The level of mercury in seafood may be unsafe, but what will fishers do to support their

families?

In this example, the author switches the discussion away from the safety of the food and talks instead about an economic issue, the livelihood of those catching fish. While one issue may affect the other it does not mean we should ignore possible safety issues because of possible economic consequences to a few individuals.

Straw Man: This move oversimplifies an opponent's viewpoint and then attacks that hollow argument.

People who don't support the proposed state minimum wage increase hate the poor.

In this example, the author attributes the worst possible motive to an opponent's position. In reality, however, the opposition probably has more complex and sympathetic arguments to support their point. By not addressing those arguments, the author is not treating the opposition with respect or refuting their position.

Moral Equivalence: This fallacy compares minor misdeeds with major atrocities.

That parking attendant who gave me a ticket is as bad as Hitler.

In this example, the author is comparing the relatively harmless actions of a person doing their job with the horrific actions of Hitler. This comparison is unfair and inaccurate.

Contributors: Ryan Weber, Allen Brizee.
Summary:

This resource covers using logic within writing-- logical vocabulary, logical fallacies, and other types of logos-based reasoning.

Using Logic in Writing

Understanding how to create logical syllogisms does not automatically mean that writers understand how to use logic to build an argument. Crafting a logical sequence into a written argument can be a very difficult task. Don't assume that an audience will easily follow the logic that seems clear to you. When converting logical syllogisms into written arguments, remember to:

- lay out each premise clearly
- provide evidence for each premise
- draw a clear connection to the conclusion

Say a writer was crafting an editorial to argue against using taxpayer dollars for the construction of a new stadium in the town of Mill Creek. The author's logic may look like this:

Premise 1: Projects funded by taxpayer dollars should benefit a majority of the public.
Premise 2: The proposed stadium construction benefits very few members of the public.
Conclusion: Therefore, the stadium construction should not be funded by taxpayer dollars.

This is a logical conclusion, but without elaboration it may not persuade the writer's opposition, or even people on the fence. Therefore, the writer will want to expand her argument like this:

Historically, Mill Creek has only funded public projects that benefit the population as a whole. Recent initiatives to build a light rail system and a new courthouse were approved because of their importance to the city. Last election, Mayor West reaffirmed this commitment in his inauguration speech by promising "I am determined to return public funds to the public." This is a sound commitment and a worthy pledge.

However, the new initiative to construct a stadium for the local baseball team, the Bears, does not follow this commitment. While baseball is an enjoyable pastime, it does not receive enough public support to justify spending $210 million in public funds for an improved stadium. Attendance in the past five years has been declining, and last year only an average of 400 people attended each home game, meaning that less than 1% of the population attends the stadium. The Bears have a dismal record at 0-43 which generates little public interest in the team.

The population of Mill Creek is plagued by many problems that affect the majority of the public, including its decrepit high school and decaying water filtration system. Based on declining attendance and interest, a new Bears stadium is not one of those needs, so the project should not be publicly funded. Funding this project would violate the mayor's commitment to use public money for the public.

Notice that the piece uses each paragraph to focus on one premise of the syllogism (this is not a hard and fast rule, especially since complex arguments require far more than three premises and paragraphs to develop). Concrete evidence for both premises is provided. The conclusion is specifically stated as following from those premises.

Consider this example, where a writer wants to argue that the state minimum wage should be increased. The writer does not follow the guidelines above when making his argument.

It is obvious to anyone thinking logically that minimum wage should be increased. The current minimum wage is an insult and is unfair to the people who receive it. The fact that the last proposed minimum wage increase was denied is proof that the government of this state is crooked and corrupt. The only way for them to prove otherwise is to raise minimum wage immediately.

The paragraph does not build a logical argument for several reasons. First, it assumes that anyone thinking logically will already agree with the author, which is clearly untrue. If that were the case, the minimum wage increase would have already occurred. Secondly, the argument does not follow a logical structure. There is no development of premises which lead to a conclusion. Thirdly, the author provides no evidence for the claims made.

In order to develop a logical argument, the author first needs to determine the logic behind his own argument. It is likely that the writer did not consider this before writing, which demonstrates that arguments which could be logical are not automatically logical. They must be made logical by careful arrangement.

The writer could choose several different logical approaches to defend this point, such as a syllogism like this:

Premise 1: Minimum wage should match the cost of living in society.
Premise 2: The current minimum wage does not match the cost of living in society.
Conclusion: Therefore, minimum wage should be increased.

Once the syllogism has been determined, the author needs to elaborate each step in writing that provides evidence for the premises:

The purpose of minimum wage is to ensure that workers can provide basic amenities to themselves and their families. A report in the Journal of Economic Studies indicated that workers cannot live above the poverty line when minimum wage is not proportionate with the cost of living. It is beneficial to society and individuals for a minimum wage to match living costs.

Unfortunately, our state's minimum wage no longer reflects an increasing cost of living. When the minimum wage was last set at $5.85, the yearly salary of $12,168 guaranteed by this wage was already below the poverty line. Years later, after inflation has consistently raised the cost of living, workers earning minimum wage must struggle to support a family, often taking 2 or 3 jobs just to make ends meet. 35% of our state's poor population is made up of people with full time minimum wage jobs.

In order to remedy this problem and support the workers of this state, minimum wage must be increased. A modest increase could help alleviate the burden placed on the many residents who work too hard for too little just to make ends meet.

This piece explicitly states each logical premise in order, allowing them to build to their conclusion. Evidence is provided for each premise, and the conclusion is closely related to the premises and evidence. Notice, however, that even though this argument is logical, it is not irrefutable. An opponent with a different perspective and logical premises could challenge this argument. See the next section for more information on this issue.

Contributors: Ryan Weber, Allen Brizee.
Summary:

This resource covers using logic within writing-- logical vocabulary, logical fallacies, and other types of logos-based reasoning.

Does Logic Always Work?

Logic is a very effective tool for persuading an audience about the accuracy of an argument. However, people are not always persuaded by logic. Sometimes audiences are not persuaded because they have used values or emotions instead of logic to reach conclusions. But just as often, audiences have reached a different logical conclusion by using different premises. Therefore, arguments must often spend as much time convincing audiences of the legitimacy of the premises as the legitimacy of the conclusions.

For instance, assume a writer was using the following logic to convince an audience to adopt a smaller government:

Premise 1: The government that governs least, governs best.
Premise 2: The government I am proposing does very little governing.
Conclusion: Therefore, the government I am proposing is best.

Some members of the audience may be persuaded by this logic. However, other members of the audience may follow this logic instead:

Premise 1: The government that governs best, governs most.
Premise 2: The government proposed by the speaker does very little governing.
Conclusion: Therefore, the government proposed by the speaker is bad.

Because they adhere to a different logical sequence, these members of the audience will not be persuaded to change their minds logically until they are persuaded to different values through other means besides logic. See the OWL resource **here** for more examples of how to integrate argument and rhetorical strategies into your writing.

Contributors: Ryan Weber, Allen Brizee.
Summary:

This resource covers using logic within writing-- logical vocabulary, logical fallacies, and other types of logos-based reasoning.

Improprieties

A functional impropriety is the use of a word as the wrong part of speech. The wrong meaning for a word can also be an impropriety. For example, in this sentence, the impropriety is "trying":

When writing papers, we trying to start early and revise often.

Correct version:

When writing papers, we try to start early and revise often.

Here is another example:

This tale works as initiative story about a young girl who grows into a more mature adolescent.

Correct version:

This tale works as an initiation story about a young girl who grows into a more mature adolescent.

To help you practice avoiding improprieties, complete the exercise below.

Mark improprieties in the following phrases and correct them. If you find none, write C for "correct" next to the phrase.

Example: (occupation) hazards — occupational

1. reforming institution policies
2. percent aging students by grades
3. dead trees as inhabitants for birds
4. an initiate story about a young girl
5. a recurrence theme in literature
6. a wood chisel
7. a wood baseball bat
8. a frivolity conversation on the weather
9. a utopia hideaway of alpine villas
10. a utilize room complete with workbench
11. the unstable chemical compounds
12. the unschooled labor force
13. the vandals who rapined Rome
14. an erupting volcano crevassing the hills
15. criticism writing which is often abstract
16. abstracted beyond understanding
17. classified as an absorbent
18. a handwriting letter
19. banjoed their way to the top ten
20. a meander stream
21. hoboing across the country
22. holidayed the time away
23. the redirective coming from the officer
24. grain-fed slaughter cattle
25. ivy tendoned to the walls

"Writing is difficult" —anon.

The Writing PROCESS

1. Identify purpose, audience, topic
2. Generate ideas
3. Gather information
4. Organize ideasformulate thesis
5. Write your initial draft
6. Revise
    - 6a. Revise
    - 6b. Revise
    - 6c. Revise

[Repeat steps 2-6 as necessary, in any order desired, until you attain a satisfying result.]

7. Edit and proofread

Step 1: Identify purpose, audience, topic

Purpose: to explain, entertain, express, persuade, inform, describe, analyze, recommend, summarize, instruct, hypothesize, . . .

Audience: Consider age, gender, interests, values, education.

How much does your audience *know* about your topic? How *interested* will they be? What kind of *vocabulary* should you use? What terms must you define? How much *background info* must you give? Will your audience be *sympathetic or adversarial* to your argument?

Topic: Consider your own knowledge about, interest in, feelings for, and thoughts on a topic as you decide whether / how to write about it.

Consider paper length—Make sure your topic is *sufficiently narrow* to allow you to develop a paper fully within the assigned page limit.

Generating ideas (Prewriting)

Freewriting:

Set a time limit and write *without pausing at all.*

Don't worry about grammar, spelling, organization, etc.

Harvest promising ideas from your freewriting and develop and/or narrow them with more freewriting, or other prewriting techniques.

Brainstorming:

Proceed as when freewriting, but using phrases rather than sentences.

Try it individually or with a group.

Clustering:

Create a *visual* arrangement of ideas and logical connections.

Use it to narrow topics, locate ideas that need development, and identify the logical and hierarchical relationships among ideas.

Keeping a journal Answering questions

Formulating your thesis statement

broad area of interest	college admissions
topic	affirmative action in college admissions
question to answer	What problems can be caused by affirmative action in college admissions?

thesis statement Affirmative action in college admissions can cause divisions and resentments within the student body and so destroy the very unity it attempts to create.

Your thesis statement should

Narrow your topic to a single main idea;

Assert a position;

Express your opinion and attitude about the topic;

Stimulate curiosity in your readers;

Fit your purpose.

Place your thesis at the beginning of your paper (deductive development) or, as a climax, at the end of your paper (inductive development).

Organizing ideas—OUTLINING

The difference between a well organized paper and a holy mess generally lies in the outline.

An outline does NOT have to be sophisticated; it only needs to show levels of ideas and the order in which you will write about them.

BEFORE writing: 1. List all the points you want to make.
2. Group them according to relationships.
3. Decide which ideas are major and minor / main topics and subtopics.
4. Decide the order in which you want to cover the topics.
5. Indicate logical connections/transitions between them.

DURING writing: outline what you have written so far when you are stuck, or to make sure you are staying on topic.

Writing your first DRAFT—some helpful and unorthodox tips

Don't begin at the beginning: start with the section/point that seems easiest to you, work to the end, then write your intro.

Write quickly. Get your ideas down as quickly as possible, without worrying too much about grammar, perfect word choice, spelling, etc.

Write strongly. Capture your initial passion and excitement about the ideas, or else you'll lose them. You can tone down your writing later.

Save all drafts and notes. Save both hard and electronic copies, betting on the worst (it happens). Save multiple versions of your drafts, as you may decide to revisit ideas you've already deleted.

When you take breaks—finish a section or try to exhaust your current thoughts; if not, make notes about what you want to say next.

Write where you are free from distractions. You'll get more done in two intense hours of work than in six hours of interruptions by friends, phone, TV, email, etc. Don't waste your time.

Set deadlines, plan breaks, break up your work hours. Setting aside a whole day to write a paper usually results in getting little done—the idea of spending an entire day writing a paper is just too awful.

Plan shorter work periods with rewards at the ends of them. (Start early.)
When all else, fails, take a shower—or do whatever makes your
brain juices flow. Run. Sing. Sniff a rotten apple.

Stages of REVISION

I. BIG STUFF: Thesis statement (clarity, location, effectiveness), logical fallacies, assignment parameters

II. Overall organization
- A. Unity
  - --Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
  - --Does each sentence relate to that topic sentence?
  - --Does each topic sentence relate to the thesis statement?
- B. Development
  - --Is each topic sentence sufficiently developed?
  - --Does the essay provide enough evidence and supporting detail for the thesis statement? too much?
- C. Coherence
  - --Does each paragraph lead logically into the next? Are there any gaps in logic within or between paragraphs?

III. Introduction, conclusion, and title

IV. Style—sentence variety, word choice, conciseness, action, parallelism, etc. Is the essay lively, engaging, and original?

Stages of EDITING

I. Sentence faults (comma splices, fused sentences, fragments)

II. Pronoun use (vague PNs, PN shifts, PN agreement)

III. Punctuation (especially apostrophes and commas)

IV. Subject-verb agreement; other grammatical problems

PROOFREADING

Check for format (spacing, font, margins, page numbers, etc.), spelling, typographical errors, homonym mistakes, etc.

Tips to help you catch your errors:

1. Read your paper aloud.
2. Use a ruler to help you focus on one line at a time.
3. Read the paper backwards, sentence by sentence.

**4. PUT YOUR PAPER AWAY FOR A WHILE before you proofread it.

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Opinionator

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The Sentence as a Miniature Narrative

By CONSTANCE HALE

I like to imagine a sentence as a boat. Each sentence, after all, has a distinct shape, and it comes with something that makes it move forward or stay still - whether a sail, a motor or a pair of oars. There are as many kinds of sentences as there are seaworthy vessels: canoes and sloops, barges and battleships, Mississippi riverboats and dinghies all-too-prone to leaks. And then there are the impostors, flotsam and jetsam - a log heading downstream, say, or a coconut bobbing in the waves without a particular destination.

My analogy seems simple, but it's not always easy to craft a sentence that makes heads turn with its sleekness and grace. And yet the art of sentences is not really a mystery.

Over the course of several articles, I will give you the tools to become a sentence connoisseur as well as a sentence artisan. Each of my lessons will give you the insight to appreciate fine sentences and the vocabulary to talk about them.

*

At some point in our lives, early on, maybe in grade school, teachers give us a pat definition for a sentence - "It begins with a capital letter, ends with a period and expresses a complete thought." We eventually learn that that period might be replaced by another strong stop, like a question mark or an exclamation point.

But that definition misses the essence of sentencehood. We are taught about the sentence from the outside in, about the punctuation first, rather than the essential components. The outline of our boat, the meaning of our every utterance, is given form by nouns and verbs. Nouns give us sentence subjects - our boat hulls. Verbs give us predicates - the forward momentum, the twists and turns, the abrupt stops.

For a sentence to be a sentence we need a What (the subject) and a So What (the predicate). The subject is the person, place, thing or idea we want to express something about; the predicate expresses the action, condition or effect of that subject. Think of the predicate as a *predicament* - the situation the subject is in.

I like to think of the whole sentence as a mini-narrative. It features a protagonist (the subject) and some sort of drama (the predicate): *The searchlight sweeps. Harvey keeps on keeping on.* The drama makes us pay attention.

Let's look at some opening lines of great novels to see how the sentence drama plays out. Notice the subject, in bold, in each of the following sentences. It might be a simple noun or pronoun, a

noun modified by an adjective or two or something even more complicated:

"**They** shoot the white girl first." - *Toni Morrison, "Paradise"*

"**Stately, plump Buck Mulligan** came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed." - *James Joyce, "Ulysses"*

"**The Miss Lonelyhearts of the New York Post-Dispatch (Are-you-in-trouble? - Do-you-need-advice? - Write-to-Miss-Lonelyhearts-and-she-will-help-you)** sat at his desk and stared at a piece of white cardboard." - *Nathanael West, "Miss Lonelyhearts"*

Switching to the predicate, remember that it is everything that is *not* the subject. In addition to the verb, it can contain direct objects, indirect objects, adverbs and various kinds of phrases. More important, the predicate names the predicament of the subject.

"Elmer Gantry **was drunk**." - *Sinclair Lewis, "Elmer Gantry"*

"Every summer Lin Kong **returned to Goose Village to divorce his wife, Shuyu**." - *Ha Jin, "Waiting"*

There are variations, of course. Sometimes the subject is implied rather than stated, especially when the writer uses the imperative mood:

"**Call me Ishmael.**" - *Herman Melville, "Moby Dick"*

And sometimes there is more than one subject-predicate pairing within a sentence:

"We **started dying before the snow**, and like the snow, we **continued to fall**." - *Louise Erdrich, "Tracks"*

One way to get the hang of such mini-narratives is to gently imitate great one-liners. Try taking each one of the sentences above and plugging in your own subjects and predicates, just to sense the way that nouns and verbs form little stories.

Another way to experiment with subjects and predicates is to write your epitaph - either seriously or in jest. The editors of *SmithMagazine* challenged their readers to put their lives into six words and have published the best results. Here are some examples of Six-Word Memoirs that do the subject-predicate tango:

"Told to Marry Rich, married Richard." *(JMorris)*

"My parents should've kept their receipt." *(SarahBeth)*

When a sentence lacks one of its two essential parts, it is called a *sentence fragment*. Like the flotsam I mentioned earlier, fragments are adrift, without clear direction or purpose.

Playing with sentence fragments can be fun - the best copywriters use them for memorable advertising slogans (Alka-Seltzer's "Plop plop, fizz fizz"). But there are plenty of competing Madison Avenue slogans to convince you that a full sentence registers equally well - from Esso's "Put a tiger in your tank" to The Heublein Company's "Pardon me, would you have any Grey Poupon?" While sentence fragments can be witty, they are still shards of thoughts, better suited

to hawking antacids than to penning the Great American Novel or earnestly attempting to put inchoate thoughts into indelible words.

If sentence fragments are like flotsam, a profusion of subjects is like jetsam. Too many subjects thrown in can cause a passage to become muddy. We are especially prone to losing control of our subjects when we speak. Take these off-the-cuff remarks by President George Bush at a 1988 Milwaukee campaign stop around Halloween:

> "We had last night, last night we had a couple of our grandchildren with us in Kansas City - 6-year-old twins, one of them went as a package of Juicy Fruit, arms sticking out of the pack, the other was Dracula. A big rally there. And Dracula's wig fell off in the middle of my speech and I got to thinking, watching those kids, and I said if I could look back and I had been president for four years: What would you like to do? Those young kids here. And I'd love to be able to say that working with our allies, working with the Soviets, I'd found a way to ban chemical and biological weapons from the face of the earth."

As the subjects in those sentences keep shifting - from *we* to *twins*, *one of them*, *the other*, *we* (implied), *wig*, *I*, *I*, *I*, *you*, *kids*, *I*, and *I* - his message keeps shifting, too. Mr. Bush's speechwriter, Peggy Noonan, has written that the president was "allergic to I." He seemed to feel uncomfortable calling attention to himself, so he performed what Noonan called "I-ectomies" in his speeches.

Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. may not share Mr. Bush's aversion to *I*, but a sentence from his 2008 vice-presidential debate shows how he, too, could lose track of his subjects:

> "If you need any more proof positive of how bad the economic theories have been, this excessive deregulation, the failure to oversee what was going on, letting Wall Street run wild, I don't think you needed any more evidence than what you see now."

Biden not only shifts from *you* to *I* and back to *you* again, he throws three sentence fragments into the middle of his sentence, each featuring a different subject.

Syntax gets a lot more complicated than subjects and predicates, but understanding the relationship between the hull and the sail, the What and the So What, is the first step in mastering the dynamics of a sentence. In future weeks we'll delve into more ways you can play with subjects and predicates, but first, in the next few lessons I will write, we'll explore the raw materials of sentence-building: nouns, adjectives and verbs.

*

Just as there is no one perfect boat, there is no one perfect sentence structure. Mark Twain wrote sentences that were as humble, sturdy and American as a canoe; William Faulkner wrote sentences as gaudy as a Mississippi riverboat. But no matter the atmospherics, the best sentences bolt a clear subject to a dramatic predicate, making a mini-narrative. Tell us your favorite sentences from literature in the comments section below, and identify the subject and the predicate. We'll publish some of the best ones in Draft later this week.

Constance Hale, a journalist based in San Francisco, is the author of "Sin and Syntax" and the forthcoming "Vex, Hex, Smash, Smooch." She covers writing and the writing life at sinandsyntax.com.

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Opinionator

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Where Do Sentences Come From?

By VERLYN KLINKENBORG

Sift the debris of a young writer's education, and you find dreadful things - strictures, prohibitions, dos, don'ts, an unnatural and nearly neurotic obsession with style, argument and transition. Yet in that debris you find no traces of a fundamental question: where do sentences come from? This is a philosophical question, as valuable in the asking as in the answering. But it's a practical question, too. Think about it long enough, and you begin to realize that many, if not most, of the things we believe about writing are false.

Whenever you find an unasked question you've also found an assumption. Here's another example: what is writing for? The answers seem obvious - communication, persuasion, expression. But the real answer in most classrooms is this: writing is for making assigned writing. Throughout their education, students everywhere are asked repeatedly to write papers that are inherently insincere exercises in rearranging things they've read or been told - papers in which their only stake is a grade. There's no occasion to ask something as basic as "Where do sentences come from?"

Certain kinds of writers do try to answer this question. They talk about "process" as if it explained something important. But what "process" usually describes is the circumstances - time, place, tools - in which certain writers believe that sentences come from wherever they come from. That gets us nowhere. It's like asking where water comes from and pointing to a David Hockney pool as an answer.

So let's demystify the origin of sentences. Think of it this way. You almost surely have a voice inside your head. At present, it's an untrained voice. It natters along quite happily, constructing delayed ripostes and hypothetical conversations. Why not give it something useful to do? Memorize some poetry or prose, nothing too arcane. A rhythmic kind of writing works best, something that sounds almost spoken. Then play those passages over and over again in your memory. You now have in your head something that is identifiably "language," not merely thoughts that somehow seem unlinguistic.

Now try turning a thought into a sentence. This is harder than it seems because first you have to find a thought. They may seem scarce because nothing in your education has suggested that your thoughts are worth paying attention to. Again and again I see in students, no matter how sophisticated they are, a fear of the dark, cavernous place called the mind. They turn to it as though it were a mailbox. They take a quick peek, find it empty and walk away.

So experiment a little. Make a sentence of your own in your head. Don't write it down. Any kind of sentence will do, but keep it short. Rearrange it. Reword it. Then throw it out. Make another.

Rearrange. Reword. Discard. You can do this anywhere, at any time. Do it again and again, without inscribing anything. Experiment with rhythm. Let the sentences come and go. Evaluate them, play with them, but don't cling to them. If you find a sentence you really like, let it go and look for the next one. The more you do this, the easier it will be to remember the sentences you want to keep. Better yet, you'll know that you can replace any sentence you lose with one that's just as good.

There's a good reason for doing this all in your head. You're learning to be comfortable in that dark, cavernous place. It's not so frightening. There's language there, and you're learning to play with it on your own without the need to snatch at words and phrases for an assignment. And here's another good reason. A sentence you don't write down is a sentence you feel free to change. Inscribe it, and you're chained to it for life. That, at least, is how many writers act. A written sentence possesses a crippling inertia.

What should these mental sentences be about? Anything you happen to notice. Anything you happen to think. Anything you want to say. You could make a sentence merely because a word keeps popping into your mind. But learn to play with every sentence you make in your head, shuffling words, searching for accuracy, listening for rhythm. Your memory will surprise you. Because you're writing nothing down, it may seem as though you're not writing at all. But you're building confidence, an assurance that when you're in the place where sentences come from - deep in the intermingling of thought and words - you're in a place where good things usually happen.

Before you learn to write well, to trust yourself as a writer, you will have to learn to be patient in the presence of your own thoughts. You'll learn that making sentences in your head will elicit thoughts you didn't know you could have. Thinking patiently will yield far better sentences than you thought you could make.

I'm repeatedly asked how I write, what my "process" is. My answer is simple: I think patiently, trying out sentences in my head. That is the root of it. What happens on paper or at the keyboard is only distantly connected. The virtue of working this way is that circumstances - time, place, tools - make no difference whatsoever. All I need is my head. All I need is the moments I have.

There's no magic here. Practice these things, and you'll stop fearing what happens when it's time to make sentences worth inscribing. You'll no longer feel as though a sentence is a glandular secretion from some cranial inkwell that's always on the verge of drying up. You won't be able to say precisely where sentences come from - there is no where there - but you'll know how to wait patiently as they emerge and untangle themselves. You'll discover the most important thing your education left out: how to trust and value your own thinking. And you'll also discover one of things writing is for: pleasure.

Verlyn Klinkenborg is a member of The New York Times Editorial Board and the author, most recently, of "Several Short Sentences About Writing."

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Other Men's Flowers

By SAM LEITH

Rhetoric, simply put, is the study of how language works to persuade. So any writer seeking to make a case, or hold a reader's attention - which is more or less any writer not in the service of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea - has something to learn from it.

If the classical orators have modern counterparts in the realm of the written word, pre-eminent among those counterparts are the authors of opinion pieces. Here is persuasion overt, persuasion front and center. The techniques that served Cicero will just as effectively serve modern writers of opinion.

Open a book of rhetorical terms, and you will meet a lot of gnarly looking Greek and Latin words. *Apodioxis* and *epizeuxis* sound like diseases you wouldn't especially want to catch. But, pilgrim, be not afraid. The figures - all the different twists of language that rhetoric describes - are sometimes called the flowers of rhetoric. Think of these words as the botanical names for those flowers, and remember what Shakespeare said about roses and their names.

Using classical techniques is not, in itself, a different approach to writing: it's simply a way of thinking more consciously about what you're doing. Terms such as *antithesis*, which is the technique of setting two terms in opposition, are ways of labeling what any prose stylist does by habit and instinct. Like the bourgeois gentleman of the playwright Molière - amazed to discover in middle age that he'd been speaking prose all his life - you've been using the figures since long before you could name them.

If you're accustomed to thinking of rhetoric as dealing only with fancy language, think again. Rhetoric is present in the plain style as much as in the high. One of the best-known figures, *erotema*, the "rhetorical question," is in regular use: "What am I, - chopped liver?" Everyday language seethes with metaphor and figuration. The trick, in a formal context, is to use it effectively.

It does help to keep in mind that, as Aristotle wrote, you have three forms of power over the reader: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. That is, roughly: selling yourself, swaying the emotions and advancing your argument. Any sentence you write should be pulling one or more of those levers; the best will do all three. Even apparent decoration works to a purpose - if a phrase is beautiful, funny or memorable, it is doing work on its audience.

First, consider the three R's - repetition, repetition and repetition. Richard A. Lanham's authoritative "A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms" lists no fewer than 36 figures of repetition covering everything from the repetition of sounds to the repetition of larger ideas and

arguments. So it's not a paradox to say that your repetition can be various. Repeat, but do not be repetitive.

An argument can be given gathering force by *anaphora*, for instance, where a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences: "Big Tobacco will want to tell you X... Big Tobacco will want to tell you Y... Big Tobacco will want to tell you Z. But there's something you can tell Big Tobacco..." Its conclusion can be given a sense of roundness and inevitability with *epistrophe* - where the repetition comes at the end rather than the beginning of a sentence. But repetition applies at a subtler level, too. The memorable or resonant phrase, for instance, is often alliterative or assonant: "I like Ike."

A light touch is best: a thunderous 15-sentence run of *anaphora* might not be appropriate for an article on traffic measures in suburban New Jersey. *Sprezzatura*, or naturalness, is the quality to cultivate.

If a piece of writing feels like a unit, it lends its argument an impression, however spurious, of coherence. The more each clause or sentence relates to those around it, whether in parallel or counterpoint, intellectually or musically, the more it will feel like an organic whole. Syntax can do much of the work of sense.

The *tricolon*, putting phrases into groups of three, is perennially effective. Once you start to notice these - be they in newspaper articles, politicians' speeches or TV advertisements (that's an example right there) - the little monkeys are everywhere. Lists, in general, work well. Try *enumeratio*: setting out your points one by one, to give the impression of clarity and command.

Music matters, too. The effects of the *tricolon*, as of any number of other figures, are in some ways metrical. Think of how clusters of stressed syllables can sound resolute and determined. "Yes we can!" is three strong syllables. Persuasion operates as much through the ear as through the faculties of reason.

Prose does not scan like poetry. But it shares its effects. One of the most memorable lines in American history, for instance, is the clause in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident." That, among other things, is an example of iambic pentameter.

Rhetoric, whether on the page or in the spoken word, is about patterns and echoes and resonances. Recently, Mitt Romney declared: "It's time for a president who cares more about America's workers than he does about America's union bosses." That's, arguably, a false opposition. But my point isn't about politics so much as about the way a ringing antithesis can sound.

The template is: "It's time for a president who cares more about [supposedly good thing] than he does about [supposedly opposite bad thing]." The sentence is an *ethos* appeal - "I stand for [good thing]" - disguised as a piece of argument. Note how it is inflated for musical reasons by the extra syllables "he does about" and the repetition of "America's"; and how "It's time" lends a sense at once of urgency and of history's being on the speaker's side.

Whether history is on Mr. Romney's side has yet to be established. But it's clear that during his perambulations in the garden of rhetoric, he has been picking the flowers. So has his opponent.

And so have the countless pundits whose commentary will swell blogs and op-ed pages over the coming months. Ask not what you can do for *chiasmus*, then: ask what *chiasmus* can do for you.

Sam Leith is a writer and critic whose latest book is "Words Like Loaded Pistols: Rhetoric From Aristotle to Obama."

strawman

Misrepresenting someone's argument to make it easier to attack.

By exaggerating, misrepresenting, or just completely fabricating someone's argument, it's much easier to present your own position as being reasonable or valid, but this kind of dishonesty serves to undermine rational debate.

After Will said that we should put more money into health and education, Warren responded by saying that he was surprised that Will hates our country so much that he wants to leave it defenceless by cutting military spending.

false cause

Presuming that a real or perceived relationship between things means that one is the cause of the other.

Many people confuse correlation (things happening together or in sequence) for causation (that one thing actually causes the other to happen). Sometimes correlation is coincidental, or it may be attributable to a common cause.

Pointing to a fancy chart, Roger shows how temperatures have been rising over the past few centuries, whilst at the same time the numbers of pirates have been decreasing; thus pirates cool the world and global warming is a hoax.

slippery slope

Asserting that if we allow A to happen, then Z will consequently happen too, therefore A should not happen.

The problem with this reasoning is that it avoids engaging with the issue at hand, and instead shifts attention to baseless extreme hypotheticals. The merits of the original argument are then tainted by unsubstantiated conjecture.

Colin Closet asserts that if we allow same-sex couples to marry, then the next thing we know we'll be allowing people to marry their parents, their cars and even monkeys.

ad hominem

Attacking your opponent's character or personal traits instead of engaging with their argument.

Ad hominem attacks can take the form of overtly attacking somebody, or more subtly casting doubt on their character. The result of an ad hom attack can be to undermine someone without actually having to engage with their argument.

After Sally presents an eloquent and compelling case for a more equitable taxation system, Sam asks the audience whether we should believe anything from a woman who isn't married, was once arrested, and smells a bit weird.

special pleading

Moving the goalposts or making up exceptions when a claim is shown to be false.

Humans are funny creatures and have a foolish aversion to being wrong. Rather than appreciate the benefits of being able to change one's mind through better understanding, many will invent ways to cling to old beliefs.

Edward Johns claimed to be psychic, but when his 'abilities' were tested under proper scientific conditions, they magically disappeared. Edward explained this saying that one had to have faith in his abilities for them to work.

loaded question

Asking a question that has an assumption built into it so that it can't be answered without appearing guilty.

Loaded question fallacies are particularly effective at derailing rational debates because of their inflammatory nature - the recipient of the loaded question is compelled to defend themselves and may appear flustered or on the back foot.

Grace and Helen were both romantically interested in Brad. One day, with Brad sitting within earshot, Grace asked in an inquisitive tone whether Helen was having any problems with a drug habit.

appeal to emotion

Manipulating an emotional response in place of a valid or compelling argument.

Appeals to emotion include appeals to fear, envy, hatred, pity, pride, and more. Though a valid argument may sometimes have an emotional aspect, one must be careful that emotion doesn't replace sensible logic.

Luke didn't want to eat his sheep's brains with chopped liver and brussels sprouts, but his father told him to think about the poor, starving children in a third world country who weren't fortunate enough to have any food at all.

the fallacy fallacy

Presuming that because a claim has been poorly argued, or a fallacy has been made, that it is necessarily wrong.

There are few things more frustrating than watching someone poorly argue a position one holds. Much of the time a debate is won not because the victor is right, but because s/he is better at debating than their opponent.

Recognising that Amanda had committed a fallacy in arguing that we should eat healthy food because it was popular, Alyse resolved to eat bacon double cheeseburgers every day.

tu quoque

Avoiding having to engage with criticism by turning it back on the accuser - answering criticism with criticism.

Literally translating as 'you too' this fallacy is commonly employed as an effective red herring because it takes the heat off the accused having to defend themselves and shifts the focus back onto the accuser themselves.

The blue candidate accused the red candidate of committing the tu quoque fallacy. The red candidate responded by accusing the blue candidate of the same, after which ensued an hour of back and forth criticism with not much progress.

personal incredulity

Saying that because one finds something difficult to understand that it's therefore not true.

Complex subjects like biological evolution through natural selection require some amount of understanding of how they work before one is able to properly grasp them; this fallacy is usually used in place of that understanding.

Kirk drew a picture of a fish and a human and with effusive disdain asked Richard if he really thought we were stupid enough to believe that a fish somehow turned into a human through just, like, random things happening over time.

burden of proof

Saying that the burden of proof lies not with the person making the claim, but with someone else to disprove.

The burden of proof lies with someone who is making a claim, and is not upon anyone else to disprove. The inability, or disinclination, to disprove a claim does not make it valid (however we must always go by the best available evidence).

Bertrand declares that a teapot is, at this very moment, in orbit around the Sun between the Earth and Mars, and that because no one can prove him wrong his claim is therefore a valid one.

ambiguity

Using double meanings or ambiguities of language to mislead or misrepresent the truth.

Politicians are often guilty of using ambiguity to mislead and will later point to how they were technically not outright lying if they come under scrutiny. It's a particularly tricky and premeditated fallacy to commit.

When the judge asked the defendant why he hadn't paid his parking fines, he said that he shouldn't have to pay them because the sign said 'Fine for parking here' and so he naturally presumed that it would be fine to park there.

the gambler's fallacy

Believing that 'runs' occur to statistically independent phenomena such as roulette wheel spins.

This commonly believed fallacy can be fairly said to have created an entire city in the desert of Nevada USA. Though the overall odds of a 'big run' happening may be low, each spin of the wheel is itself entirely independent from the last.

Red had come up six times in a row on the roulette wheel, so Greg knew that it was close to certain that black would be next up. Suffering an economic form of natural selection with this thinking, he soon lost all of his savings.

bandwagon

Appealing to popularity or the fact that many people do something as an attempted form of validation.

The flaw in this argument is that the popularity of an idea has absolutely no bearing on its validity. If it did, then the Earth would have made itself flat for most of history to accommodate people's popular belief.

Shamus pointed a drunken finger at Sean and asked him to explain how so many people could believe in leprechauns if they're only a silly old superstition. Sean, however, had had a few too many Guinness himself and fell off his chair.

appeal to authority

Using the opinion or position of an authority figure, or institution of authority, in place of an actual argument.

Much of the time experts have better information and understanding than others, but holding a position of authority doesn't necessarily mean that someone is right. After all, the highest medical authorities used to think that bleeding people was a good general cure for sickness.

Not able to defend his position that evolution 'isn't true' Bob says that he knows a scientist who also questions evolution (and presumably isn't a primate).

composition /division

Assuming that what's true about one part of something has to be applied to all, or other, parts of it.

Often when something is true for the part it does also apply to the whole, but because this isn't always the case it can't be presumed to be true. We must show evidence for why a consistency will exist.

Daniel was a precocious child and had a liking for logic. He reasoned that atoms are invisible, and that he was made of atoms and therefore invisible too. Unfortunately, despite his thinky skills, he lost the game of hide and go seek.

no true scotsman

Making what could be called an appeal to purity as a way to dismiss relevant criticisms or flaws of an argument.

In this form of faulty reasoning one's belief is rendered unfalsifiable because no matter how compelling the evidence is, one simply shifts the goalposts so that it wouldn't apply to a supposedly 'true' example.

Angus declares that Scotsmen do not put sugar on their porridge, to which Lachlan points out that he is a Scotsman and puts sugar on his porridge. Furious, like a true Scot, Angus yells that no **true** Scotsman sugars his porridge.

genetic

Judging something good or bad on the basis of where it comes from, or from whom it comes.

To appeal to prejudices surrounding something's origin is another red herring fallacy. This fallacy has the same function as an ad hominem, but applies instead to perceptions surrounding something's source or context.

Accused on the 6 o'clock news of corruption and taking bribes, the senator said that we should all be very wary of the things we hear in the media, because we all know how very unreliable the media can be.

black-or-white

Where two alternative states are presented as the only possibilities, when in fact more possibilities exist.

Also known as the false dilemma, this insidious tactic has the appearance of forming a logical argument, but under closer scrutiny it becomes evident that there are more possibilities than the either/or choice that is presented.

Whilst rallying support for his plan to fundamentally undermine citizens' rights, the Supreme Leader told the people they were either on his side, or on the side of the enemy.

begging the question

A circular argument in which the conclusion is included in the premise.

This logically incoherent argument often arises in situations where people have an assumption that is very ingrained, and therefore taken in their minds as a given. Circular reasoning is bad mostly because it's not very good.

The word of Zorbo the Great is flawless and perfect. We know this because it says so in The Great and Infallible Book of Zorbo's Best and Most Truest Things that are Definitely True and Should Not Ever Be Questioned.

appeal to nature

Making the argument that because something is 'natural' it is therefore valid, justified, inevitable, or ideal.

Just because something is natural doesn't mean it's good. For instance murder is natural, but most of us agree that we don't think it's a very good thing to be doing, nor does its 'naturalness' constitute any kind of justification for it.

The medicine man rolled into town on his bandwagon offering various natural remedies, such as very special plain water. He said that it was only natural that people should be wary of 'artificial' medicines such as antibiotics.

anecdotal

Using personal experience or an isolated example instead of a valid argument, especially to dismiss statistics.

It's often much easier for people to believe someone's testimony as opposed to understanding variation across a continuum. Quantitative scientific measures are almost always more accurate than individual perceptions and experiences.

Jason said that that was all cool and everything, but his grandfather smoked, like, 30 cigarettes a day and lived until 97 - so don't believe everything you read about meta analyses of sound studies showing proven causal relationships.

the texas sharpshooter

Cherry-picking data clusters to suit an argument, or finding a pattern to fit a presumption.

This 'false cause' fallacy is coined after a marksman shooting at barns and then painting bullseye targets around the spot where the most bullet holes appear. Clusters naturally appear by chance, and don't necessarily indicate causation.

The makers of Sugarette Candy Drinks point to research showing that of the five countries where Sugarette drinks sell the most units, three of them are in the top ten healthiest countries on Earth, therefore Sugarette drinks are healthy.

middle ground

Saying that a compromise, or middle point, between two extremes is the truth.

Much of the time the truth does indeed lie between two extreme points, but this can bias our thinking: sometimes a thing is simply untrue and a compromise of it is also untrue. Half way between truth and a lie, is still a lie.

Holly said that vaccinations caused autism in children, but her scientifically well-read friend Caleb said that this claim had been debunked and proven false. Their friend Alice offered a compromise that vaccinations cause some autism.

thou shalt not commit logical fallacies

A logical fallacy is often what has happened when someone is wrong about something. It's a flaw in reasoning. Strong arguments are void of logical fallacies, whilst arguments that are weak tend to use logical fallacies to appear stronger than they are. They're like tricks or illusions of thought, and they're often very sneakily used by politicians, the media, and others to fool people. Don't be fooled! This poster has been designed to help you identify and call out dodgy logic wherever it may raise its ugly, incoherent head. If you see someone committing a logical fallacy online, link them to the relevant fallacy to school them in thinky awesomeness and win the intellectual affections of those who happen across your comment by appearing clever and interesting e.g. yourlogicalfallacyis.com/strawman