Composition in Cultural Contexts

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Writing Within and Across Modalities and Subjectivities

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Introduction

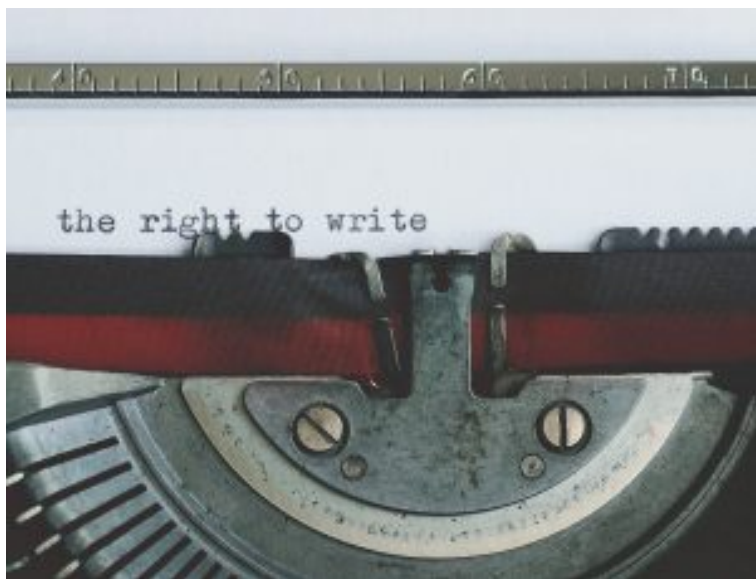

"Close-up View Of An Old Typewriter" by Suzy Hazelwood, Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

In this open education resource (OER) text, we will enter the world of academic writing by exploring how to craft the college essay. We will do this through an interactive discussion of **the six main stages** of the writing *process* and **the six main *elements*** of the essay *format*. While no essay can be fully reduced to a simple series of steps or formulas, we will see that the essay does provide a coherent template, an ancient and powerful structure, through which we can engage the world of ideas and communicate our own perceptions and discoveries in meaningful and academically productive ways. We will also examine how emerging technologies, and multimodal instruction and composition, are changing the

notion of how to teach and **how to do** writing. And, most importantly, how our various subjectivities influence not only the ways we approach any topic, but also how we develop voice, tone, and our relationship to authority, tradition, and the ever changing world of ideas.

Remember this is a **process**. There is an old saying, "writing is rewriting." The goal is not so much to arrive at a perfect piece of writing as it is to engage the spectacular and complex world around us with increasing clarity of thought and vision. And, hopefully, with a sharpened sense of the importance of careful listening, open inquiry, honest evaluation, and organic synthesis as vital steps on any path towards greater understanding.

An essay is an *attempt* to know something about the world with more depth of perspective. When we write an essay, we are opening ourselves up to the full spectrum of human (and nonhuman) knowledge and wisdom, while simultaneously reaching for new connections to the truth and its relevance to our lives. It is a sacred, scientific, and self-empowering task. One that we continue to perfect as long as we are alive and curious.

As mentioned above, this text also explores multimodal composition, culturally-sensitive approaches to writing, and themed course content structures to aid in the co-creation of a diverse, empowered, and engaged writing process that encourages students to both learn more about the world through the *process* of academic inquiry, and share their *own* perspectives and voices more clearly, confidently, and effectively.

- Please watch this **brief video introduction** to the text:

https://cdnapisec.kaltura.com/p/2320281/sp/232028100/embedIframeJs/uiconf_id/40406871/partner_id/2320281?iframeembed=true&playerId=kaltura_player&entry_id=1_8lsbj19v&flashvars[streamerType]=auto

Attribution and OER Revision Statement

This book reimagines the college essay by exploring how the process develops across a number of modalities and subjectivities. It also examines the current best practices of academic writing by exploring how the writing process actually works; with particular attention paid to the various elements of the college essay format. Some of the technical material about the writing process itself was originally published as "The Writing Process" by Andrew Gurevich and is licensed under CC BY 4.0 / A derivative from his original work.

The material is curated and presented to be applicable for subjects/assignments across a number of academic disciplines and areas of cultural value. Emphasis is paid to the importance of multi-modal instruction and composition, as well as how various cultural contexts can impact how students can best learn and develop these skills while still embracing their own voices and identities.

Chapter 1 - What is an Academic Essay? Why Bother?

"Rewrite Edit Text on a Typewriter" by Suzy Hazelwood, Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

The College Essay

The word "essay" originally comes from the French "essai," meaning "an attempt." An *attempt* to do what, exactly? Well, that is the question this texts hopes to answer. It is an attempt to first understand a concept more deeply, and then to explore its larger implications in relation to both writer and reader. The methods for creating a successful college essay are not the same for everyone. Some writers require complete silence with no distractions, while others crave noise and interaction while they work. Some are writing in their own native language, and others in a second, or even third language. Some of us are very political and feel comfortable challenging authority and the status quo, others feel more comfortable trusting authorities and following instructions carefully. Many of us also have little choice concerning how and when we get to write. We fit it in between life and work, marriage and children, and death and taxes. But a few questions remain, and even gain strength in this new and unpredictable world we live in: "Why bother? What practical reasons do we have for making students create these ancient documents to begin with?" The answer is both more complex and simple than we may imagine. The short answer is, because the essay writing *process* in one of the

most effective ways for us to develop our skills in understanding, investigating, and collaborating with others on important topics and ideas. It is also one of the most potent self-education tools we have ever developed. The best way to learn more about a topic is to write an essay about it. So the purpose of the technology of essay writing is to *learn*, more than to *teach*. To explore, more than to explain. To generate and experience communal knowledge, not to bludgeon others with our own isolated ideas of truth. To write a good essay, we must bring our ideas into meaningful dialogue with the thoughts and ideas of others, and in the process, we learn more about both the topic under consideration and our own ways of making sense of the world. Essay writing is most effective when we are not afraid of being wrong *or* of being right. It works best when we see it as a process of discovery. And it works best when we bring our full selves to the exercise.

The Process

While no guide can help you find what exact situations will work best for you, there are aspects of the process that, when basically followed, promote a cleaner, more stable final draft. These six general stages are: ***discovery & investigation***, ***prewriting***, ***drafting***, ***revising***, ***editing***, and ***formatting***.

Discovery & Investigation

The first step in writing a successful college essay requires an active engagement with your sources. Simply reading a source for basic content is not quite enough. The questions should not be simply "What does this say?" or "What happened?" but rather "Why did that happen?" "What does that say about the larger themes and ideas I

am exploring?" and "How does this help advance my thinking into the deeper layers of this topic?"

Make notes of your thoughts, ideas, and reactions as you read. Research is about following the conversation into your sources and allowing your sources to "talk to one another" as you develop your own presence in the conversation. What new questions emerge as your initial questions are answered? How do your sources relate to one another as you dive deeper into a research topic? Have you checked enough into alternative views and perspectives to make sure you are not reaching a biased perspective too quickly?

As you become more informed on the topic, *your voice* will begin to emerge, and even direct the conversation. But now it will be a voice as rooted in authoritative research as it is in your own valid experience and perspective.

Once you have completed an active reading of a primary source, it will often be necessary to obtain secondary sources to back up your thesis. Peer-reviewed journals available online through the college **databases** will be your most commonly used secondary resources. But remember that other search engines, such as **Google Scholar**, can yield strong results too.

Prewriting

Prewriting is the step in which tools such as free writing, brainstorming, outlining, or clustering are used. In prewriting, no idea is too off-topic or too strange to pursue. It is these sometimes outlier ideas that can lead you to a paper topic that you never would have considered otherwise. There will be time to eliminate and consolidate later. For now, cast the net as wide as you can. Let your curiosity guide and motivate you here. Again, you will have time to tailor and sculpt your prewriting ideas to fit the parameters of your given assignment later. For now, just let your mind wander. Be open, curious, and attentive to where your questions lead you.

Though the common perception is that there is nothing that hasn't been written about before, if you allow yourself to think outside the box, you can find a way of looking at an old topic through new eyes. Or a new topic through wise and measured perspectives. Even if it has been covered by another writer, you will be able to bring your unique perspective and relevant experiences to the larger discussion through initially casting a wide research net to pull in potential new ideas and relevant associations.

It is also during prewriting that the writer needs to make a decision about audience. Asking questions like: "Who is going to read my paper?" "What is the purpose of this paper?" and "Why are they going to read my paper?" will help you set your audience. The simple answers to these questions are "My professor" and "Because they assigned it." But these are not the true answers. It could be that your paper needs to be geared towards peers and fellow students, participants in a seminar, colleagues at a conference, or your family and neighbors.

Regardless, consideration of audience is crucial for setting tone, voice, and perspective in a developing essay. The language and tone for each of these possible audiences would be very different. Sometimes slightly, sometimes considerably. Considering this also helps you set your relationship to the topic and to the audience in ways that will make the essay more readable and accessible.

Drafting

Drafting is the beginning of "writing" your paper. It is important to remember that in drafting you should already have a thesis idea to guide your writing. Without a thesis, your writing will be prone to drift, making it harder to structure after the fact. In drafting, the writer should use materials created in the prewriting stage and any notes taken in discovery and investigation to frame and build body paragraphs. You may change your thesis as you go. In the beginning,

it is only advisable to have a general idea of where you are going regarding thesis. The more clarity here, the better. But don't let an unfocused or underdeveloped thesis stop you from getting started. You can always return to it and sharpen it as you go deeper into the essay.

Many writers will tackle their body paragraphs first instead of beginning with an introduction (especially if you are not sure of the exact direction of your paper). Beginning with body paragraphs will allow you to work through your ideas without feeling restricted by a specific thesis, but be prepared to delete or alter paragraphs that don't fit your eventual big idea.

Also be prepared to move body paragraphs around, if necessary, to better fit your pattern of development and thesis. Afterwards, create opening and concluding paragraphs (with an appropriately revised thesis) that reflect the body of your essay.

Revising

There are three different scopes of revision: *global, regional,* and *local*.

Global revision involves looking for issues like cohesion of your main idea(s) and the overall progression of your essay. If your essay has paragraphs that do not flow into each other, but rather change topics abruptly only to return to a previous thought later, your essay has poor cohesion. If your thesis is too generic or is not sufficiently developed and supported in the body of the essay, you need to explore this level of revision. If your topics change too drastically from paragraph to paragraph, it is necessary to consider altering the order of your paragraphs and/or revising your writing by either adding to existing paragraphs or creating new ones that explain your change in topic. An essay with a logical flow and smooth transitions is significantly easier to read and understand. These are the *bones* of the essay.

Regional revision involves reworking or reshaping: changing the *muscles*. This second level of revising means that you're satisfied with what you are saying (or trying to say), but not with how you've said it. Working on "how" tends to mean thinking about readers: thinking about how your thoughts will be read or understood by people other than yourself. Thus feedback from readers is particularly useful for this level of revising. One of the most common kinds of reworking is to improve clarity. Perhaps you realize you need to change the order you present things in; or you need an introduction, conclusion, and some transitions; or you've implied ideas or suggested attitudes that you don't want there. Most common of all, you simply need to leave out parts that may be OK in themselves (or even precious to you) but that don't quite belong now that you've finally figured out what the piece of writing is really saying. These passages clog your piece and will distract or tire readers.

Local revision involves looking for clarity in sentences, ensuring coherence within your body paragraphs, and addressing grammar, syntax, and formatting issues. This should be done after you are comfortable with the larger issues addressed in global revision. This is akin to copyediting the essay and is the *skin* of the essay.

The greatest trick to avoid having to fix too many local issues is to use varied sentence structure and to avoid using the same words repeatedly. Repeating the same sentence structure can make your paper feel mechanical and make an interesting topic feel boring. Also, if you can, have someone else read a draft of your essay to help catch the many small mistakes our eyes can miss when looking at the same essay for too long.

Editing

The final stage in writing a strong college essay requires a review

of what you have written. In this last read of your essay, you should look for any grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors that have slipped through the cracks during the revising stage, or that were introduced in your revisions.

Reading your essay aloud, or asking a friend to read your essay back to you, are good ways to catch errors. Often if you read your own essay, especially out loud, you can catch errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation that can be missed in a silent reading. Though this step seems minor within the process of writing, it is an easy way to prevent the loss of points over simple mistakes.

Formatting, In-text citation, and Works Cited

The formatting required for your paper will change depending on the field of study and academic discipline. Generally, the sciences and business and economics use APA or CSE formatting. English and other humanities will use MLA, and History uses Chicago. The appearance of the first page of the essay, in-text citations, and the Works Cited page will all be affected by these different formats.

Consult your syllabus or ask your professor to learn what format you should use. Guides for MLA are available [later](#) in this guide. Guides for APA, Chicago, CSE and ASA are available [here](#).

The Format

Writing the college essay is a matter of answering a series of questions, of following a sequence of steps towards

"Clear Light Bulb on Black Surface" by Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

creating a coherent written document that explores a topic for

greater insight and understanding. It is a time-tested rhetorical technology meant to focus the writer's inquisitive and curious mind towards an engaging, rational, and academically-sound discussion. Initially, we will also explore the six basic elements of this very specific, yet adaptive, format:

- [Thesis driven](#)
- [Primary pattern of development](#)
- [Coherent, unified paragraphs](#)
- [Strong, clear introductions and conclusions](#)
- [Proper use of relevant, authoritative sources](#)
- [Properly formatted (MLA format)](#)

Please refer back to this book as needed for help with crafting specific elements of your assignments. There are many other websites, nonprofits, and academic institutions who have published readily available materials on the academic writing process. Students and faculty should feel free to explore the options available to them and employ the ones that resonate the most.

[The Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL)](#), for instance, is one of the oldest and most reputable college writing websites available to anyone with an internet connection. Our own **MHCC Tutoring Center** also has a number of great resources available. The point is not to follow one specific "Golden Road" to success in college writing. Rather, we hope to become aware of the purpose and relevant structures of the model and apply them to our own critical and creative thinking processes in ways that make writing assignments more productive, engaging, and fun. This will translate to your reader, improve the substance of your writing, and inevitably elevate your grades along the way.

Here you can find most, if not all, of the technical material you will need to write competent, engaging college-level essays. But the *content* of your writing will be determined by the particular class or assignment, the special areas of interest that make you the

person you are, and the ideas that contribute to the personal, social, vocational, and transformative nature of your education.

(As needed, this ebook will be updated with new materials and relevant links as the author continues to curate the collection.)

Chapter 2 - The Building Metaphor

"Media House" by Mediamodifier, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Building the House

Writing an essay is a lot like building a house. In fact, it really IS building a house. As essay is a metaphor for a *certain kind* of mental construction. The steps are essential and must be engaged thoroughly, methodically, and without rushing through to the end.

Procrastination is a killer. Taking short cuts will diminish the quality of the final product. And the strength of each step is largely dependent on the strength of the ones before it. Also, each choice will contribute to the strength and/or weaknesses of the steps that come after.

An essay, like a house, is an integrated, interdependent set of complementary technologies meant to produce reliable results if

followed properly. There is room for creativity and individual expression, cultural and personal variation, but only after the basic elements of building the structure are secure:

Land Prep (Research & Free Writing)

"Surveying" by Cafeymas, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

The first step in the construction process is getting the land ready. This includes clearing the area, digging trenches and making sure utilities are installed. In essay writing, this is the research process. This is when we brainstorm, free write, and gather research on topics of interest as we lay the groundwork for what comes next: our thesis.

The Footings & Foundation (Thesis)

"Cement Foundation" by ReliableMidget, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Building a good foundation requires a lot more than digging a hole and pouring some concrete into forms. It must be tailored to its site like a custom suit, taking into account soil conditions, water tables, even the quality of the backfill. And it

is the very structure upon which the rest of the house is built. Absolutely nothing that comes next will matter if the foundation isn't solid. Similarly, your thesis is the foundation of your essay. Like the foundation, it needs to be as specific for the particular project as possible; and also like the foundation, it will lay the groundwork for absolutely everything that comes next.

"Construction" by PublicDomainPictures, Pixabay is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

Framing (Pattern of Development)

In the framing step, the "bones" of the home start to come together. Framing includes the floor joists, subfloors, and studs that form the walls and roof trusses. Here is where the very shape of the house begins to take shape. In writing, this is the pattern of development. It is where you decide how your body paragraphs are going to flow one to the next. This larger pattern will determine what spaces are for what functions in the house. In the essay, this is where we decide the larger pattern and shape our writing will take. Thus determining the purpose and function of the various parts.

Plumbing & Electrical (Paragraphs)

"Plumbing Pipe Wrench" by stevepb, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Once the home is framed, subcontractors will start installing the home's major systems, including plumbing pipes, electrical wiring and heating and cooling ducts. These are the systems that move air, water and electricity through the home and make everything flow. In an essay, these are your sentences and paragraphs. If these are not constructed properly, much wasted energy will be spent trying to extract the big ideas from an essay. Conversely, when they are built correctly, ideas can flow freely throughout the various elements of the essay and are delivered to the reader with efficiency and clarity.

"White Ceramic Bathtub Near White Framed Glass Window" by Curtis Adams, Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

Interior & Exterior Finishes (Transitions, Introduction & Conclusion)

In this step, most of the home's interior features will be added. This includes doors, baseboards, casings, window sills, kitchen counters, etc. Driveways, walkways, patios and final grading to direct water away from home will all be completed. Landscaping and exterior decorating happen during this step too. In essay writing, this is where we focus on things like writing strong introductions and conclusions and smooth

transitions. These are the things that make it easier for a reader to enter and move through the space. The first things noticed and thus, often, the most important as far as creating first and last impressions.

"White Wooden Door Near Brown Wooden Parquet Floor" by Curtis Adams, Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

Final Inspection & Walkthrough (Formatting & Editing)

Once construction is complete, a final inspection will be conducted by a local building official. Before you move in, you'll want to do a final walkthrough with your builder to identify a list items that need to be repaired for the job to be considered complete. In essay writing, this is where we do our editing and formatting. Remember there are various levels of editing. Some may require a good deal of reworking of the material and others involve smaller issues like punctuation and syntax errors. Similarly, formatting issues can run the gamut from major to minor as well. Don't skimp on this step. Just like with building house, why bother taking the time to develop all of the other stages correctly just to cut corners on the installation of light sockets and door knobs.? Get another set of eyes on it. That's where the inspectors (writing tutors) come in.

Final Thoughts

Remember that writing is a *process*. We keep saying this, but that is for a very important reason: it's true. When we realize the importance of each of the steps in producing the quality and coherence of the final product, it helps us to not get lost in the seemingly endless details of the process. We are working towards building something meaningful and lasting. A structure that can house our ideas (and the relevant, reliable and authoritative ideas of others) in

"Engineer Designing" by ThisIsEngineering, Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

a well-crafted, engaging, and leak-proof domicile to which all who are curious and willing may enter to explore.

Also, the process is one that we must engage thoroughly over time as we move towards building more solid foundations for our ideas and our thinking. It is AFTER the designs and blueprints have been finalized and your permits have been filed and approved that construction (writing) actually BEGINS on the project. Research, outlining, editing, and revision are as essential to the process as the writing itself. Skipping steps here inevitably will compromise the quality of the final product.

The process matters because you matter. Because we matter. And our ideas deserve the best built delivery systems we can manage. Be patient with yourself but do not shy away from the disciplined side of writing. Success awaits on the other side.

Chapter 3 - Writing Within & Across Subjectivities

"unwrapped" by Erika Cristina, Composition in Cultural Contexts, pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Many instructors and academics will tell you that "objectivity" is the main goal in college essay writing. But many of the same people will also tell you that true objectivity, in the abstract, is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. It is clear that the words we choose, the ideas we present, the ways we structure and organize these ideas, and our understanding of the world at large all help to define and inform the braided thread of our academic observations. These frequently subconscious choices shape our writing and thinking in ways that actually *center* our biases and showcase the *subjective* nature of our approach to essay writing. Only through addressing our subjectivities in relation to the "texts" we are exploring and creating can we provide a *sense* of objectivity. One that exists in an informed and evolving relationship to our subjective experience, not apart from it. Added to this mix is the recurring theme these days in many college composition courses to encourage students to write from the *basis* of their own lived experiences. From the very center of their entangled and living collection of personal subjectivities. We can see that the drive for "objectivity" must be carefully reconsidered if it is to be taken seriously in the modern college essay writing process.

There is also, however, a fear that we can indulge in our subjectivities to the extent that our arguments and research become flawed. If we only ever speak and write about ourselves, how can we grow beyond the potentially limited frames of our

own perspectives? Sometimes writing from the subjective position makes it harder to see the world outside of our own limited frames of reference. But this is not necessarily true. Especially if we are aware and in charge of the process. We must learn how to use our subjectivity and lived experience to *enhance* our ability to engage, understand, and incorporate ideas and experiences unlike our own, not to reject or dismiss them. By harnessing our own position(s) *in relation to* the world we encounter, we can highlight our subjective position, demonstrate an awareness of our own perceptions in the shaping of our text, fill in the necessary spaces with relevant source materials that develop, challenge, or support our subjective frames, and ultimately present a thoughtful essay within which the reader can find an identifiable, engaged position to evaluate. This is because they will understand your perspective in a deeper way. The subjective/objective essay captures your voice, which helps to acknowledge the writer's *presence*. But it also goes beyond your voice to create a conversation between your ideas and those of some relevant, reliable sources. Having this clear indication of the *conversation* that is present in academic writing then allows the writer-as-subject to step back and present the work with as much honesty as can be mustered.

It is vitally important to learn to embrace your own voice as you present yourself in order to create a level of trust with your readers. What is it to write about race, religion, poverty, pandemics, gender, police brutality, immigration, and all of the other topics you are asked to engage in a writing class, from the standpoint of your own subjectivity (or multiple subjectivities)? How does a Trans student approach the topic of gender and sexuality in an essay as opposed to a cis-gendered student? How does a student from an immigrant family discuss immigration reform in a way that is enhanced by their experiences, and not minimized or unduly biased by them? How does a student with a strong background in a particular religious faith tradition approach an assignment they feel is biased against the teachings of their chosen cultural or religious background? What about a student from the Navajo nation, China,

Nigeria, or from another culture that values community, communal identity, and responsibility over the development of individual voice, identity and personality? How does this student respond to the prompts in writing assignments to "develop their own voice and perspective"?

As we can see, writing does not occur in a void. We write about topics *from within* certain *positions*. From the deep well of our lived experiences we bring to any writing assignment or exercise. We are the sum total of the collected experiences that we, and our ancestors, bring to the current moment. But we must also learn not to be trapped or limited by those same positions. So how do we become fully aware of our own subjectivities, our own intersectional web of personal and collective identities, and mobilize all of them to help us write engaging, well-developed, and complex essays and not, instead, trap us within the confining walls of our own limited experiences and perspectives? How can we "be ourselves" in these assignments while also opening ourselves up to new ideas, new possibilities, new perspectives, and new solutions to the problems we collectively face in the world?

Part of what this textbook is designed to achieve is this delicate balance between being *trapped*, or limited, by our own perspectives and ideas, and being able to successfully integrate them into an *open dialogue* with others in ways that elevate and expand the possibilities for growth, knowledge, and wisdom to be gained and shared in intentional, diverse academic contexts.

Learning Environment

"Books on Rack" by Lum3n, Composition in Cultural Contexts is licensed under CC BY 4.0

The learning environment within which students are asked to participate should reflect an atmosphere of safety, mutual respect, and support for the various perspectives and experiences we all bring to the space. This begins with the instructor. Your instructor should be working to provide a safe, welcoming, and expansive learning environment which establishes and honors openness, patience, inquisitiveness, and diversity of thought, opinion, and experience. But this does not stop with the instructor. Students, also, should engage the materials, and each other, in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue. It is not required that you agree with one another, or the instructor, on matters of politics, religion, culture, or any other topic in order for you to do well in the class. But it IS a requirement that we ALL treat each other with the dignity, kindness, and compassionate care that will allow us all to thrive and

grow in the course. We can disagree, but we must do so respectfully. We can agree, but we must do so substantively. Whatever the case, if we cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and fairness from the beginning, the chances of that atmosphere permeating all that we do together in the course are much higher. And the chances of everyone thriving and succeeding in the course grow exponentially as well.

Understanding Assignments

"Woman Reading A Book" by Erika Cristina, Composition in Cultural Contexts, pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

How do we understand assignments that seem to ask us to explore ideas and concepts that live outside of our own comfort zones, life experiences, and chosen belief structures? Often, your instructor will provide writing prompts and examples that are exactly that: examples. Your instructor should be able to provide

alternative examples and options for any student who finds the original assignment or writing prompts to be too problematic, emotional, or otherwise fraught with cultural complexity and personal attachments. Your instructor is likely using the chosen subject to elicit passion and energetic focus from you. Try to understand what the core skills and tasks are that you are being asked to develop. Try *not* to let yourself get too caught up with specific examples. Ask questions when you need to do so, and remember that it is often a good thing, from an academic perspective, to explore ideas outside of our own belief systems, customs, cultural markers, and identity structures.

Often this is where the most learning and transformational growth can occur. But nobody has the right to *force* you to exist outside of your own subjectivity. as a writing student, you should be encouraged to explore the world of ideas outside of your own experiences, but you should never be made to feel that you must do so, or that your own ideas and beliefs are not welcomed into the class or into the college environment (especially if presented in ways that do not infringe on the rights and beliefs of others). If you do not understand an assignment, or aspects of it seem disorienting, intimidating, or disrespectful to you and your own specific web of intersectional identities, please reach out to your instructor, and possibly the tutors, to help you either clarify the assignment's expectations and parameters or to inquire how you can possibly alter the assignment to not be as alienating, intimidating, or disruptive to your own educational experience. Often there is a great deal that can be done to accommodate students in ways that satisfy the core expectations of the assignment while not offending or marginalizing the student further with regard to the subject matter or ideological approach of the teacher, the course content, or any other relevant variable.

Flexibility & Self-Advocacy

"Young man using laptop on floor" by Elijah O'Donnell, Composition in Cultural Contexts, pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

In one sense, a college writing course is supposed to create an environment where we are given incentives to step *outside* of our own subjective experiences and beliefs in an attempt to see the world from the perspectives of others. This is one of the great powers of academic writing: the ability to provide us a solid bridge into the perceptions and reasoning of the other. But also, we are encouraged to find and express our *own* voices, perspectives, and

subjectivities in and through the assignments we encounter in the course. So how do we know when we should do the one and not the other? How do we achieve a balance between expressing ourselves and being open to new ideas, perspectives, and experiences? How do we know when to *set aside* our own biases and beliefs in order to expand and grow as thinkers and writers, and when to *begin* from those same carefully considered and articulated biases and beliefs in order to *dive deeper* into the foundation of our own identities? There is no simple answer to this. Like everything else in the writing classroom, this is a process with no "one size fits all" perspective. But there are a few things to be aware of as we negotiate these seemingly opposite poles of authority and experience in the development of our writing. Becoming aware of our own subjectivities is the starting place. Being curious is another. Staying open to adapting, expanding, or otherwise altering our ideas is the next step. Remembering that we are not our ideas is another essential thing to remember. At the end of the process, you may have totally changed the way you think and feel about a particular topic. Or, after carefully considering both your own beliefs and experiences AND those of others, especially those that differ from your own, you may emerge with greater respect and understanding of the other, but still hold to the same positions you had at the start of the process. Either way, you are still you. Your flexibility and openness are signs of the strength of your character. When we are able to "think about our own thinking," while also engaging and deeply considering the ideas of others, we will be stretched to explore the world in ways we may have not previously anticipated, but we will reemerge from the experience with an expansiveness and openness that will allow us to write about ideas from within, and outside of, a number of different positions and perspectives. When in doubt, ASK!!! We are here to help each other grow.

Cuisine & Music as Metaphors for Essay Writing

If we call something "vegan," that certainly means something specific, but it also allows the chef a great deal of flexibility on what to prepare. If we call something a salad or pasta or seafood, these terms also each mean something specific, something that sets an expectation for the dish. But each term also allows for a

"Cheerful women tasting new menu food in cafe" by etut Subiyanto, Composition in Cultural Contexts, Pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

great deal of creativity, expression, and diversity in preparation and presentation. Cuisine, like so many other aspects of human activity, reveals both the profound differences AND striking similarities in how we develop and experience *culture*.

Cuisine is a characteristic style of cooking practices and traditions, often associated with a specific culture. Cuisines are often named after the geographic areas or regions that they originate from. We often think of "Thai" cuisine or "French" cuisine or "Italian," Southern," or "Mexican" cuisine. A cuisine is primarily influenced by the ingredients that are available locally or through trade. Religious food laws, such as Islamic dietary laws and Jewish dietary laws, can also exercise a strong influence on cuisine. Regional food preparation traditions, customs and ingredients often combine to create dishes unique to a particular region. **Some researchers** have even tried to map the various ingredients used in the world's different cuisines. ***What they all have in common is a core set of ingredients which are intentionally prepared for the purposes of providing nourishment and sustenance. The cuisines of the world vary greatly, but all include some combination of these basic elements: protein, starch, vegetable, spices and some form of cooking or preparation.*** From there, the dishes are only limited by

the imagination of the particular chef or the established and emerging traditions of the culture or cuisine itself.

In classical French cooking, for example, the emphasis is on traditional ingredients and methods or preparation. Dishes are prepared in the "traditional French" way, and this is seen as the *correct* way to cook. They call their sauces "Mother Sauces." These are seen as the foundational elements of all future cuisine. Frequently, in restaurants with this approach, there are no salt and pepper shakers or other condiments on the table. The dish is prepared as it is supposed to be prepared. It has the level of salt that the chef has determined is the right amount. It is not seen as proper for the person eating the dish to alter the recipe or the experience of the food in any way. Other cooking techniques and culinary experiences, however, are much more adaptive and interactive, and see the recipe as a starting point, from which the chef and/or the diners are encouraged to add their own unique elements to the experience. Recipes may vary by family, town, or region. Or even between individuals *within* a family.

Neither of these approaches is the "correct" one. They just reveal different philosophies, different approaches, to the way food is created and experienced. Both involve *process*, both involve *tradition*, both involve *intention* and *skill*, and both involve *experience*. One approach may rank the importance of tradition and form over that of novelty, individuality, and unique expression. One may rank personal expression per that of "How it has always been done." No matter the approach, all cuisine still contains the basic elements mentioned above. A precise definition of cuisine is difficult, as is a precise definition of the "proper" techniques and approaches to creating it, but there remains, nonetheless, a core set of elements and clear intentions that allow for any plate of random ingredients to be properly called "cuisine," no matter the approach or particular cultural spin on it.

"Grayscale Photo of Printer Paper With Printed Music = Life Near Headphones" by Breakingpic, Composition in Cultural Contexts, Pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Similarly, "Music" is one of the most difficult terms to define, partially because *beliefs* about music have changed dramatically over time just in Western culture alone. If we look at music in different parts of the world, we find even more variations and ideas about what music is. Although we may find it hard to imagine, many cultures, such as those found in the countries of Africa or among some indigenous groups, don't have a word for music. Instead, the relationship of music and dance to everyday life is so close that the people have no need to conceptually separate the two. According to the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (2001), some North American Indian languages have no word for "music" as distinct from the word "song." Flute melodies too are labeled as "songs." The Hausa people of Nigeria have an extraordinarily rich vocabulary for discourse about music, but no single word for music. The Basongye of Zaire have a broad conception of what music is, but no corresponding term. To the Basongye, music is a purely and specifically human product. For them, when you are content, you sing, and when you are angry, you make noise (2001). The Kpelle people of Liberia have one word, "sang," to describe a movement that is danced well (Stone, 1998, p. 7). Some cultures favor certain aspects of music. Indian classical music, for example, does not contain harmony, but only the three textures of a melody, rhythm, and a drone. However, Indian musicians more than make up for a lack of harmony with complex melodies and rhythms not possible in the West due to the inclusion of harmony (chord progressions), which require less complex melodies and rhythms.

Indeed, what we may hear as "music" in the West may not be music to others at all. For example, if we hear the *Qur'an* performed,

it may sound like singing and music. We hear all of the "parts" which we think of as music—rhythm, pitch, melody, form, etc. However, the Muslim understanding of that sound is that it is really heightened speech or recitation rather than music, and belongs in a separate category. The philosophical reasoning behind this is complex: in Muslim tradition, the idea of music as entertainment is looked upon as degrading; therefore, the holy *Qur'an* cannot be labeled as music. There are also the social aspects of music to consider. As musicologist Charles Seeger notes, "Music is a system of communication involving structured sounds produced by members of a community that communicate with other members" (1992, p.89). Ethnomusicologist John Blacking declares that "we can go further to say that music is sound that is humanly patterned or organized" (1973), covering all of the bases with a very broad stroke. Some theorists even believe that there can be no universal definition of music because it is so culturally specific.

Furthermore, calling a particular example of music "Heavy Metal," "Country," "Jazz," or "Hip Hop" all have some specific expectations as to the sound and content of the music associated with those terms. But each also leave much room for creative expression and the various personalities, traditions, and artistry of the individual musicians. Indeed, defining what, exactly music *is* proves to be quite difficult, as **some researches** have noted above. ***Although the exact definition of music varies widely, music contains melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, pitch, silence, and form or structure***. What we know about music so far...

- Music is comprised of sound.
- Music is made up of both sounds and silences.
- Music is *intentionally* made art.
- Music is humanly organized sound (Bakan, 2011).

A working definition of music for our purposes might be as follows: music is an intentionally organized art form whose medium is sound and silence, with core elements of pitch (melody and harmony),

rhythm (meter, tempo, and articulation), dynamics, and the qualities of timbre and texture.

Some music purists seem to believe to role of the performer is to reproduce the piece or the form perfectly, as close to the original as possible, as is often the case with the performance of Classical music. This follows the French cooking approach mentioned above. Others value improvisation and innovation within the context of a traditional form, such as the case with much Blues and Jazz performance. Here again, there is no single "correct" approach, as much as there are different approaches that emphasize different values and produce different results. It all depends on intention. The great Jazz artist Miles Davis once said,

"Sometimes you have to play a long time to sound like yourself."

What does he mean by that, exactly? Why should it take a long time in order to "sound like yourself"? A long time doing *what*? Likely, part of what he meant was it took a long time to find the courage to cast off all of the projections, stereotypes, and limiting expectations that others had put upon him, for one reason or another. But he also meant something else. It took him long time to first understand the craft, then master it, and finally make it his own.

"Photo Of Trumpet" by Luana Bento, Composition in Cultural Contexts, Pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Whether one is learning a martial art, a meditation technique or tradition, a cooking style, or a musical composition, they must engage in a prolonged set of exercises to develop a level

of precision, skill, and mastery that all emerge from practice and repetition. Repetition and practice. Reflected experience, measured against previous success and failures and against some established, expected level of skill and performance. They must first *set aside* their own preferences, expectations, and practices to *actually learn* the form, learn the instrument, the style, the technique. Then, *and only then*, are they free to alter, change, and redirect the elements to better serve their own creative expression; their own emergent subjectivities. Both Miles Davis and I, your instructor, "break all of the rules of Jazz" when we pick up a trumpet and blow into it. But when I do it, it sounds like a dying whale. When Miles does it, it sounds like the heavens themselves are opening up and dropping a new blessing into the world. What is the difference? Both of us are ignoring the rules of Jazz and "doing our own thing." But in my case, I have not first developed the skill set, not first learned the traditions, the conventions, the styles, and the form, on the way to my own creative expression. And in his case, he learned *all* of these things, mastered them, and then rearranged them to better serve his own creativity and subjectivity. His own *voice*. There is always this tension between tradition and innovation, between restrictive expectations and freedom of expression. But there is an end game as well. We learn the skill sets in order *make them our ow*n. As Miles Davis also said, "When you're playing your *own* stuff, even the sky ain't the limit." And we learn to "play our own stuff" by *first* learning the terrain. The rules. The nuances of the game. And then we can adjust and innovate to make the forms work for us, and not the other way around.

So, what does all of this have to do with writing the college essay? Quite a lot, actually. In writing, the same is true. Or at least it should be. We find the same tensions between form and freedom, expectation and expression, structure and substance. Calling something an "essay" should conjure a specific set of components and expectations, just as calling a dish "vegan" or a piece of music "Classical" or "Blues" does. However, just as with the examples in music and cuisine, essay writing need not be a template that erases

the creativity, voice, and perspective of the individual author. On the contrary, when used correctly, it can provide a series of steps to help the author strengthen, clarify, and amplify their own perspectives, thoughts, and ideas about the world.

"Never Be Afraid on Typewriter" by Suzy Hazelwood, Communication in Cultural Contexts, Pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Essay writing, like the creation of music or food, emerges from longstanding cultural traditions, rituals, and practices. It emerges from *within* a set of pre-determined expectations but eventually goes *beyond* them. The steps and stages of the essay writing process have been developed over the centuries to connect us to the traditions and methods of communicating academic insights, of transferring knowledge and wisdom, in ways which have been found to be useful, inspiring, transformational, and productive over time. But also, they leave room for the emergence of the new ideas, perceptions, voices, and experiences of those who engage them anew in each generation. We are learning these skill sets so we can understand what they are, where they come from, and how they are valuable for producing certain outcomes within, in our

case, academic contexts. But we are not learning them simply to learn them. Or to get a grade. Or even to do well in college overall. While all of these are good reasons to become stronger academic writers, the strongest may be that when mastered to a certain degree, these rhetorical skills become a vital part of a growing tool kit for clarifying and amplifying your own voice and perspectives, while engaging and embracing those of others. To write well-crafted academic essays is to be able to enter into complex, often difficult conversations with others, with the aim of finding a common ground of mutual understanding, dignity, and respect for the shared pursuits of clarity of thought and generative truth. Don't be afraid to take ahold of the essay form and use it for increasing the precision, and expansiveness of your own voice within and beyond this class, and the rest of your academic career. The ultimate point is to become more aware of the *process* of academic writing and how our own subjectivities can enhance, and not detract, from this process. Like any tool, it doesn't work for every job or occasion. But when used correctly, and for the right job, you can build a lot of great things in the world with it. Learn the rules to master the rules to make them work for you. Do so, and "even the sky ain't the limit."

Let us, then, use this OER textbook, and the steps of the essay writing process, in the same way. They should be *guides* for us to develop a stronger, more engaging, and sharper academic voice. One that is steeped in the traditions of the form, but not restrained by them. One that is rooted in the strengths of the structure, while remaining flexible enough to accommodate the uniqueness of the moment and of the individual author and reader. As you dive deeper into the process, be sure to think about how and when you might be just "going through the motions," and when you are more fully engaged in the attempt to both explore and expand your writing voice in academic contexts and in response to an increasingly connected and complex world.

Reading and Viewing

- Please **read** the following article: **Braiding & Rhetorical Power Players**
- Please **watch** the following video: **Writing Across Boarders** (Parts #2 & #3 can be seen at the end of this first segment.)

🖵 *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:* https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/wr121gurevich/?p=128#oembed-1

Some things to consider after watching the video:

1. How do cultural values and expectations shape the way people think, and thus write, in academic contexts?
2. How can we be flexible and adaptive to different writing styles and ways of thinking while still following the rules and expectations of the academic writing classroom?
3. How do different cultural approaches to writing influence how different students may craft a thesis statement and where they might choose to place it within the essay?
4. Is there a correct or better way to write academic essays, or should we look to integrate multiple perspectives and approaches to the format?
5. How does your own culture, history and background impact the way you approach new ideas? How do you find ways to stand in your truth, articulate your experiences and knowledge, but also stay open to growth, change and transformation that comes from pursuing an education?

Chapter 4 - Multi-Modal Instruction and Composition

Multimodality in the writing classroom refers to the use of different modes, such as written, oral, non-verbal, and visual, to communicate and persuade. Lutkewitte (2014) refers to multimodal composition as composition using multiple modes that work purposely to create meaning.
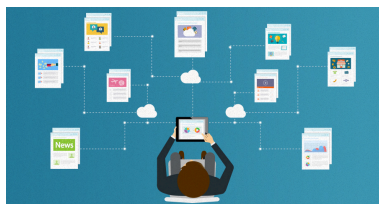
"Applying The Multimodality Theory in eLearning" by Christopher Pappas, Composition and Culture, Docebo is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Students in our class work on assignments that draw on multiple modes that might include words, images, graphics, animation, sounds, or video. They have opportunities to process information through listening, speaking, reading, writing, and visual representation as well as opportunities to showcase knowledge through oral presentations and videos. They analyze and make arguments through text, images, and video; they work on using presentation media effectively; and they participate in class discussions both orally and online.

Through remediation, students transform material that is in one genre or mode to another. They enhance their rhetorical skills and reflect on the process of creating and conveying ideas by preserving the intent of the original material, while adapting it to the requirements of the new form. By exposing students to the different ways and forms in which information and ideas can be communicated, our class builds on the language, visual and oral skills, and multicultural backgrounds of the students and of the various complex rhetorical ideas we are exploring together.

Take a look at this [learning module](#) on crafting strong visual presentations made by the writing department at Boston University.

Now have a look at these two visual presentations created by MHCC students.

The first was presented by a student in a WR 122 class. The assignment was to use what we were learning in the class about critical and creative thinking as a template for analyzing the arguments in the film 12 *Angry Men.*

Click **here** to view 12 *Angry Men* visual presentation.

The second was from a student in an ENG 250 class who was tasked with researching and developing a presentation on a myth or mythological tradition that was meaningful to them, that they wished to know more about, and to share with others:

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Multi-modal instruction and composition offer us the opportunity to engage ideas across multiple formats and bring them together into meaningful, engaging collaborative "conversations" in our assignments. Students are not restricted to the standard five paragraph essay, but instead are free to roam across a variety of formats in search of engaging, relevant, thought-provoking materials with which to support and develop their own ideas and perspectives in the course. This OER textbook is, itself, and example of this multi-tiered approach.

As we continue through the course, pay attention to the various modes of communication used to convey ideas and explore concepts. Often, the medium is an essential part of the message.

Also, think about your own assignments and major essays in the class and see if you would like to use multi-modal composition to compose one or more of your essays. If this kind of "essay" seems appealing to you, talk to your instructor and the tutors about the best ways to create a multimodal essay. In a Blackboard course, using the pretty straightforward **Kaltura Video** editor is likely your best option.

Chapter 5 - The Thesis

"Startup" by StartupStockPhotos, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Your thesis is the engine of your essay. It is the central point around which you gather, analyze, and present the relevant support and philosophical reasoning which constitutes the body of your essay. It is the *center*, the focal point. The thesis answers the question, "What is this essay all about?"

A strong thesis does not just state your topic but your perspective or feeling on the topic as well. And it does so in a single, focused sentence. Two at the most. It clearly tells the reader what the essay is all about and engages them in your big idea(s) and perspective. Thesis statements often reveal the [primary pattern of development](#) of the essay as well, but not always.

Thesis statements are usually found at the end of the introduction. Seasoned authors may play with this structure, but it is often better to learn the form before deviating from it. However, we have spoken in the previous chapter about the various cultural factors that center these kinds of technical assumptions and how some cultural forms and rhetorical approaches prefer to place the thesis towards the end of the essay, after developing a relationship with the reader and, perhaps, leading them through a story and a voyage of discovery. Choosing to arrive at a thesis, instead of beginning from one. If you have ideas to alter the format of the standard essay in order to better align with your own cultural and individual background and perspectives, reach out to your instructor and the tutors and discuss how to most effectively do so. Often, with clear intention and collaboration, you can alter the

"rules" of standard composition and essay writing with great impact and rhetorical effect. But you must do so with clarity of intention and precision of execution. Or at least, that should be the goal.

- Consult this link for the OWL thesis statements discussion.
- Here is another link to assist with argumentative thesis statements.
- Consult these Thesis Writing Exercises for more help in crafting a strong, relevant thesis statement.

BEST: A thesis is strongest when the writer uses both the specific topic, and their educated opinion on it, for writing a detailed and clear main point.

- Watch this video on writing a "Killer" Thesis Statement

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- Watch this video on writing an effective Academic Thesis Statement.

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Chapter 6 - Paragraphs (Organization, Cohesion, & Structure)

Strong essays are built with solid, coherent, and unified paragraphs. They should be digestible units of thought that have similar structure to the essay itself: a topic sentence, a body of support, and a concluding or transitional statement to help the reader move through the essay with clarity. Body paragraphs should also be arranged according to your primary pattern of development and focused on supporting your big idea(s).

"Vintage Book" by Suzy Hazelwood, Pexels is in the Public Domain, CC0

A body paragraph is an expansion of a single thought that is laid out according to a specific, logical structure:

- A strong, clear topic sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph (which will likely be a sub-point helping to explore your thesis).
- Several (two-four) sentences of development and support for your topic sentence: including quotes, summaries, and paraphrases of relevant sources and your substantive responses to the source material.
- A closing sentence of summary and/or a transition into the next paragraph.

BEST: When the writer uses paragraphs to present unified,

coherent, organized, and well-developed thoughts in support of their overall thesis.

- Consult this link on how to construct coherent, engaging, and unified paragraphs.
- Here is another valuable resource for shaping coherent paragraphs: OWL: Paragraphs & Paragraphing.
- And yet another link that addresses paragraph length and consistency.
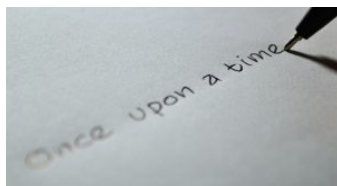- Here is a video on writing strong body paragraphs.

> ▣ *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/ wr121gurevich/?p=26#oembed-1*

- Watch this video on Writing Effective Paragraphs.

> ▣ *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/ wr121gurevich/?p=26#oembed-2*

- Here is another video on writing strong transitions.

> ▦ *One or more interactive elements has been excluded*

- And finally, a companion [link](#) for writing smooth transitions.

Introductions & Conclusions

The beginning and the ending of any communication event, studies show, provide the best opportunities to speak to any audience when their attention is the highest and most focused on what you have to say. Something about our species pays special attention to the way things start

"Once Upon a Time" by Ramdlon, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

and the way they end. We should use this to our advantage as writers.

In communication theory, there is a saying, "Tell them what you are going to tell them (introduction), tell them (body), then tell them what you just told them (conclusion)." While this seems a redundant structure, it is useful to be reminded of the need to build a logical and self-supporting flow into your academic writing.

Clear intent and focus help your reader concentrate on the major ideas you are trying to communicate; and help you stay disciplined and calculated in how you structure the essay to establish, highlight, and support those very ideas.

The introduction should grab your reader's attention, focus it on your general topic, and move towards your specific, engaging

thesis. The conclusion should provide a restatement of your main idea (thesis), provide a sense of finality or closure, and possibly challenge the reader with a "so what?" moment.

- Consult the ["Beginnings & Endings" handout](#).

Both should clearly state the main point of the essay (thesis). Both should grab and focus the reader's attention on the greater topic and larger significance of the thesis. Both should provide a sense of momentum for the reader to move through the essay with clarity, confidence, and full awareness of the main point. Both should inspire as much as they inform.

BEST: When the writer uses both the introduction and the conclusion to grab and focus the reader's attention on the main point of their essay.

- Here is a useful tutorial on writing strong introductory paragraphs.

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- Here is another useful tutorial on writing strong concluding paragraphs.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online

here: https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/
wr121gurevich/?p=26#oembed-5

- Watch this video on writing effective introductions & conclusions using the LAYER Cake Method.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/ wr121gurevich/?p=26#oembed-6

- Here's another video on effective introductions and conclusions.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/ wr121gurevich/?p=26#oembed-7

Chapter 7 - Patterns of Development (Narration/Description)

"Gears" by xresch, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Many college essays follow a primary pattern of development for laying out their ideas and expressing their main thesis. A pattern of development is the way the essay is organized, from one paragraph to the next, in order to present its thesis and the relevant, authoritative support for it, in a coherent and meaningful fashion.

Your readers will be experiencing your essay in time. That is, they will read it starting in paragraph one and then two, then three, four, five, six…etc. This may seem obvious, but you will need to consider how the reader will experience the essay *in time* and *in relation* to your thesis statement.

Thus, we will need to organize the essay into a coherent pattern which allows the reader to easily follow our logic through the reading experience, and be able to fully relate it back to our central theme(s). Some essays use a combination of patterns to communicate their ideas, but usually a *primary pattern* is established to present the overall structure and logical flow of the essay. Common patterns include:

- **Narration & Description (see below)**
- Exemplification

- Comparison/Contrast
- Cause/Effect
- There are several more variations of patterns of development (see below), but these are the most common ones you will use in academic essay writing. You will also likely be asked to combine one or more of these elements into various projects and writing assignments. They are, first and foremost, ways of organizing ideas into a flow that leads the reader through an experience and helps them become better aware of the relationships between the ideas you are presenting. Which should help them to better experience and understand your primary thesis.

BEST: Patterns of development work best when they are used consistently and in conjunction with the structure and theme of the primary thesis statement.

- Follow this link to a more developed discussion on the more popular modes of essay writing.
- Consult this handout on the basic understanding and uses of the primary patterns of development.
- Consult this handout on the patterns of development discussed as the modes of essay writing.
- Here is a useful link that helps to visualize and summarize the primary patterns of rhetorical writing.
- And one more useful link that does more of a deep dive into the modes. With relevant exercises and questions.

Narration & Description

This week, we begin our exploration of *Narration & Description* as patterns of development for academic college essays. We will also

spend some time discussing thesis statements, essay structure, and the invention and arrangement of topics.

Narration tells a story by presenting events in an orderly, logical sequence. Narration can be the dominant pattern in many kinds of writing (as well as in speech). Most histories, biographies, and autobiographies follow a narrative form, as do personal letters, diaries, journals, and bios on personal Web pages or social networking sites such as Facebook. Narration is the dominant pattern in many works of fiction, film, and poetry, and is even an essential part of casual conversation. Narration also underlies folk and fairy tales, radio, television and news programs. In short, anytime you want to tell a story about what happened (from a given perspective), you are using narration.

You use *description* to tell readers about the physical characteristics of a person, place or thing. Description relies on the five senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. A descriptive essay tells what something looks like or what it feels like, sounds like, smells like or tastes like. However, description often goes beyond personal sense impressions: novelists can create imaginary landscapes, historians can paint word pictures of historical figures and scientists can describe physical phenomena they have actually never seen. When you write using description, you use language to create a vivid impression of what something *feels like* for your readers.

We will then apply what we have learned to our first essay, a narration/description about your favorite song, band, or genre of music. Your job in this first essay is to use your writing as a means of inquiry. In other words, your essay will not only teach us about the song, band or musical style you chose, but it will teach us something essential about you and your view of the world. It may even teach you something about yourself that you didn't know before.

Objective, Subjective, Figurative Description

Objective description is primarily factual, omitting any attention to the writer, especially with regards to the writer's feelings. Imagine that a robotic camera is observing the subject; such a camera has absolutely no attachment or reaction to what is being observed.

Subjective description, on the other hand, includes attention to both the subject described and the writer's reactions (internal, personal) to that subject.

Figurative description relies on creating likenesses between objects, often through simile (e.g. like a snowflake...or fragile as a snowflake...) or metaphor. Such likenesses allow the reader to perceive the object more precisely.

An objective sample:

The kitchen table is rectangular, seventy-two inches long and thirty inches wide. Made of a two-inch-thick piece of oak, its top is covered with a waxy oilcloth patterned in dark red and blue squares against a white background. In the right corner, close to the wall, a square blue ceramic tile serves as the protective base for a brown earthenware teapot. A single white placemat has been set to the left of the tile, with a knife and fork on either side of a white dinner plate, around nine inches in diameter. On the plate are two thick pieces of steak.

(Notice how "objective" the narrator in the piece is; his or her eyes scan the scene, but there is no emotional response provoked by the scene).

A subjective sample:

Our lives at home converged around the pleasantly-shaped kitchen table. It was the magnet that drew our family together quite warmly. Cut from the sturdiest oak, the table was tough, smooth, and long enough for my mother, my two sisters, and me to work or play on at the same time. Our favorite light blue ceramic tile, stationed in the right corner, was the table's sole defense against the ravages of everything from a steaming teapot to the latest red-hot gadget from the Sears catalogue. More often than not, however, the heat would spread quickly beyond the small tile and onto the checkered oilcloth, which just as quickly exuded a rank and sour odor. Yet no matter how intensely the four of us competed for elbow room at the table, none dared venture near the lone dinner place arranged securely to the left of the tile. There was no telling when he would get home from work, but, when he did, he expected the food to be ready–steaming hot. He liked to eat right away–steak mostly–two bloody but thick pieces.

   (The narrator scans about the scene, but now, objects take on a sense of "utility" and "meaning"–the narrator explains how certain objects are important, even bordering on the personal and emotional meaning behind each piece.)

A figurative sample:

The kitchen table, a long lost remnant cut from sturdy oak, was sturdy like my father's hands, and as equally calloused by age and tempered by heat. The table had large welts that had grown even darker and more foreboding with age, and mother frequently commented on getting a new table because of these clear signs of progress, but father would have none of it—the table was as dear to him as his own child. After all, this was his grandfather's table,

handcut, the final essence of that old progenitor's largesse on the earth. Dumping this table would be akin to dumping my father's grandaddy. And such an act would be akin to murder itself. This table was like family.

When to Use Each:

- *Narration*: when the writer is telling a story to make a point.
- *Description*: when the writer wants to evoke the senses to create a picture.
- Often, the patterns are used together to give the reader a compelling story with vivid, descriptive details which help to illuminate and strengthen the writer's thesis.

BEST: when the writer uses both together for writing a detailed account of some memorable experience:

- First trip abroad.
- Last-minute victory.
- Picnic in some special place.
- A favorite song or band and how it changed your life.

Audience

How much do I tell my audience?

- Personal Experience (Is your essay primarily focused on the song/band's effect on you personally or on the culture at large?)
  - How much personal detail should you include?

- How much external research and/or "objective" material should you include?
- Add or Delete Material

  - Should your thesis include all of the sub-points you intend to make in the essay or just the main one?
  - Should your thesis include language that highlights your primary pattern of development?
  - Is your thesis too bulky? Too vague? Too specific?

How much do I show my audience?

- Unusual Subject (include a lot of information, especially if technical)

  - How much does your audience already know about your topic?
  - How much background and technical information will you need to provide?

- New images and insight that create a fresh vision of the subject

  - Are you addressing a familiar topic in a new or unexpected way?
  - Can you use vivid language and subjective description to paint a visual or auditory expereince for your reader?
- **Click** on this **handout** for more guidelines for writing the narrative essay.
- **Consult** this **handout** for more guidelines on writing the descriptive essay.
- **Read** these ***Purdue OWL*** articles about writing narrative and descriptive essays.
- **View** this **video** on Writing Narrative/Descriptive Essays (14:00):

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- **View** the **[video](#)** on crafting narrative essays (2:28):

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Chapter 8 - Patterns of Development (Exemplification)

Exemplification

"Gears" by xresch, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Exemplification uses one or more particular cases, or **examples**, to illustrate or explain a general point or an abstract concept. You have probably noticed, when on social media, watching television talk shows or listening to classroom discussions, that the most effective exchanges occur when participants support their points with specific examples. Sweeping generalizations and vague statements are not nearly as effective as specific observations, anecdotes, details and opinions. Many of the most effective essays use examples extensively. Exemplification is used in every kind of writing situation to explain and clarify, to add interest and to persuade.

It is one thing to say:

> "The mayor is corrupt and should not be reelected"

and quite another to illustrate your point by saying:

> "The mayor should not be reelected because he has fired two city workers who refused to contribute to his campaign fund, has put his family and friends on the city payroll and

> has used public employees to make improvements to his home."

The difference? Proper and effective use of *exemplification.*

Here's and example that how the primary concept is made more clear and more concrete by specific examples .

Exemplification

Some people treat animals like humans.

Give human names to their pets.

Dress pets in clothing.

Refer to themselves as "Mommy" or "Daddy".
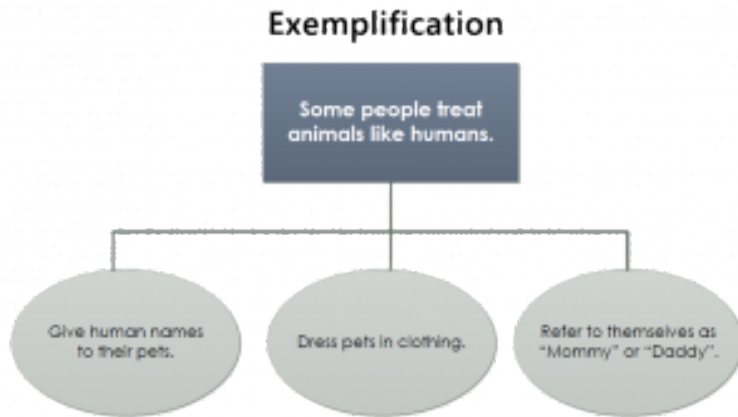
Whether we are evaluating a piece of writing or writing our own essays, exemplification can be a very useful tool in helping us better understand and communicate complicated and abstract concepts. As you have seen from the lecture, videos and reading, there are few ways to more vividly represent an idea in the minds of your readers than the proper and effective use of exemplification.

- **Read** this overview of **Exemplification** writing by Bucks County CC: **Exemplification**
- **View** this embedded video (11 Min): Exemplification Writing

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from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/wr121gurevich/?p=32#oembed-1

Using Exemplification

Writers use exemplification extensively in every kind of writing situation to explain and clarify, to add interest and to persuade. Anytime a writer uses examples to help support or claify a point, they are using exemplification. Sometimes examples are used to help the writer develop another kind of essay (definition, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc.) and other times exemplification becomes the primary pattern of development for the essay itself (as with the Brett Staples essay you are reading this week).

- **Download** this **Exemplification Worksheet**. (You may use this to assist you in structuring, placing and commenting on relevant examples in your essays in ways that fully suport your overall thesis.)

Exemplification vs. Illustration

You might wonder how exemplification is different from illustration. To begin, exemplification focuses on giving examples while illustration is the broader process of making ideas clearer by using examples, diagrams or pictures. In this type of essay, examples act as supporting material to explain or clarify the generalization.

The 3 Rs of Exemplification Writing

The examples we select to illustrate a point do not need to be the only examples of the concept we are trying to define but they must be **relevant**, **reliable** and **representative** of that concept.

- **Relevant**: The examples we use must be clearly connected to the concepts we are trying to illustrate or explain. It does us no good to use irrelevant examples if we are attempting to clarify and explain an idea. Relevant examples are those which speak as directly and completely as possible to the concept they are trying to clarify or develop.
- **Reliable**: The examples we use to illustrate or clarify a point must be verifyable, reliable and well-supported with the appropriate academic, journalistic and/or statistical data. Often stories, memes and anecdotes are passed around (especially on social media) as examples of some idea or concept when the example didn't actually happen or isn't reported in a way that is accurate or reliable. In such cases, the connection between the example and that which it is being used to illustrate becomes weakened and the overall meaning of the connection is obscured.
- **Representative**: We must strive to make sure that our examples are not unique, isolated experiences but actually represent the larger statistical portion of the concept or idea we are trying to explore. For instance, in an essay about police brutality, it is not enough to point to one or two examples of police using inappropriate force to make the case that the problem is epidemic and rooted in the function of community policing itself. The examples must be contextualized and supported with relevant data and analysis to show how these specific examples are actually symptoms of a larger problem within police departments around the country. In another instance, a few examples of record-breaking temperatures will

not, on their own, make the case for human-caused climate change but can be added to a larger research base that includes the relevant data and statistical information which gives the proper context to these figures.

Chapter 9 - Patterns of Development (Cause/Effect)

Cause/Effect

Cause and effect essays examine causes, describe effects or do both. Cause / Effect, like narration, links situations and events together in time, with causes preceding

"Gears" by xresch, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

effects. But causality involves more than sequence: cause / effect analysis explains why something happened—or is happening—and predicts what probably will happen.

- **Read** this information on the steps to [Writing a Cause/Effect Essay](#)
- **View** the [embedded video](#) (9 min) :

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Sometimes several different causes can be responsible for one effect:

Causes   **Effect**

Tablets and phones
help with research

Students
are allowed to
use tablets
and phones
in class

Tablets and phones
give students
access to
course materials
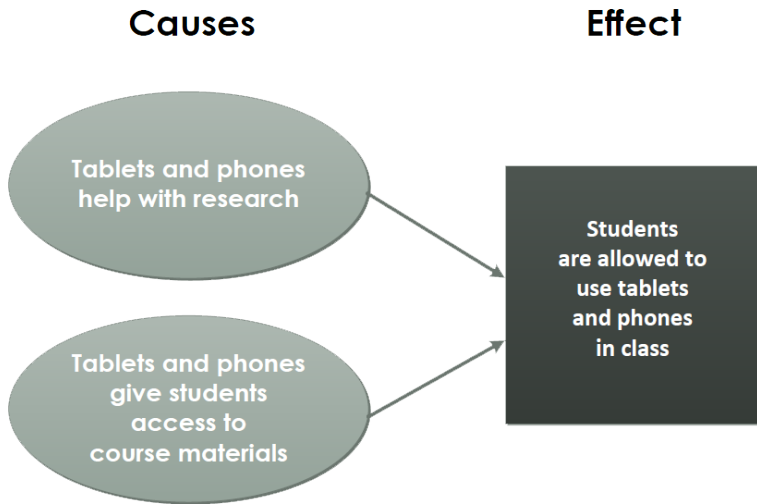
Other times, once cause can have several effects:
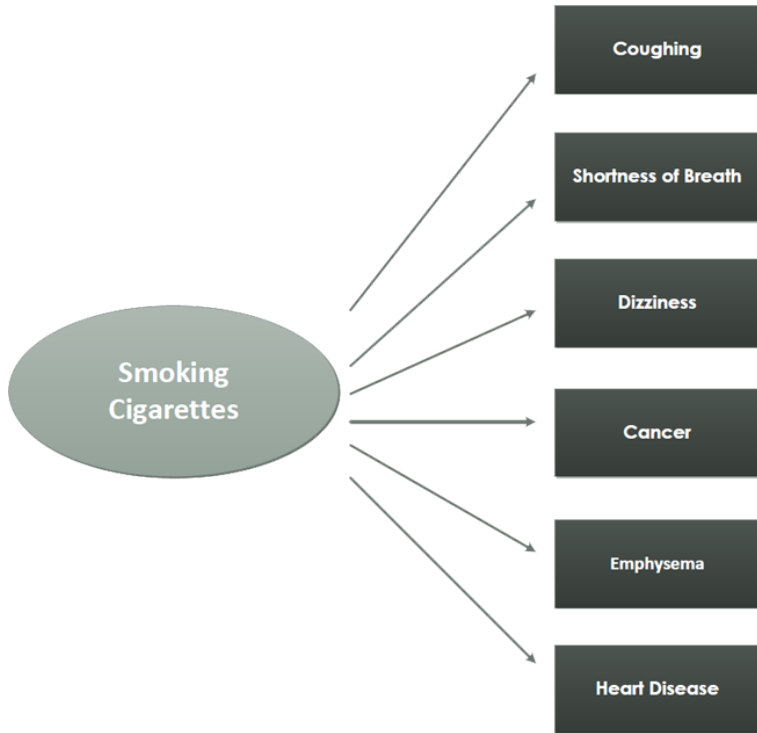
Understanding Main & Contributory Causes

Even when you have identified several causes of a particular effect, one—the main cause —is always (or usually) more important than the others —the contributory (or secondary) causes. Understanding the distinction between the **main** (most important) and the **contributory** (less important) causes is vital for planning a cause / effect essay (and for analyzing one as well) because once you

identify the main cause, you can emphasize it in your essay (probably in your thesis statement and pattern of development) and downplay the other causes. How, then, can you tell which cause is the most important? Sometimes the main cause is obvious, but often it is not. **Examine the diagram below.**
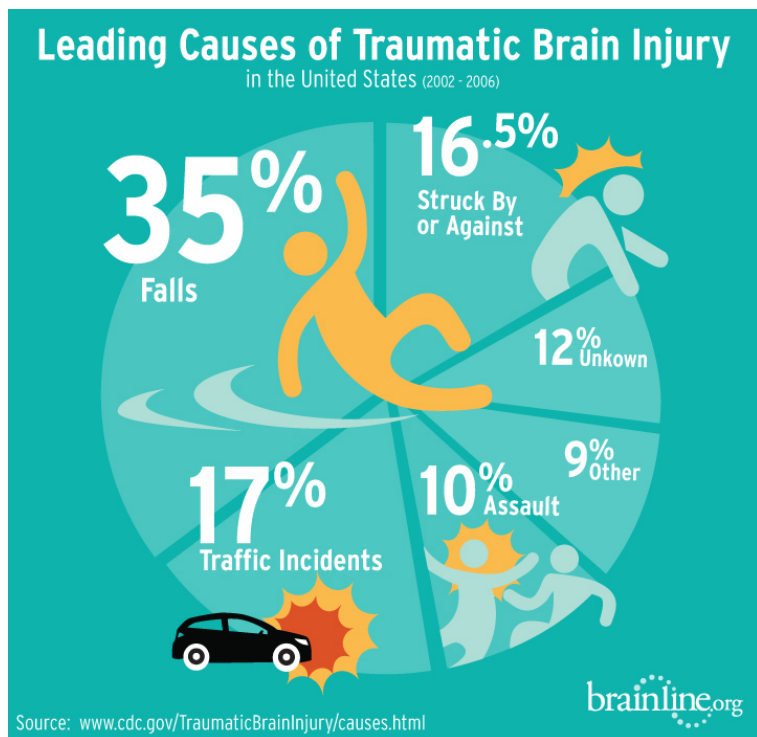
Because the main cause is not always the most obvious one, you should be sure to consider the significance of each cause very carefully as you plan your essay – and continue to evaluate the importance of each cause as you write and revise your essays (and as you analyze the causal relationships in the other essays you read).

Understanding Immediate & Remote Causes

Another important distinction is the difference between an immediate cause and a remote cause. An immediate cause closely precedes an effect and is therefore relatively easy to recognize. A remote cause is less obvious, perhaps because it involves something in the past or far away. Assuming that the most obvious cause is always the most important can be dangerous as well as shortsighted.
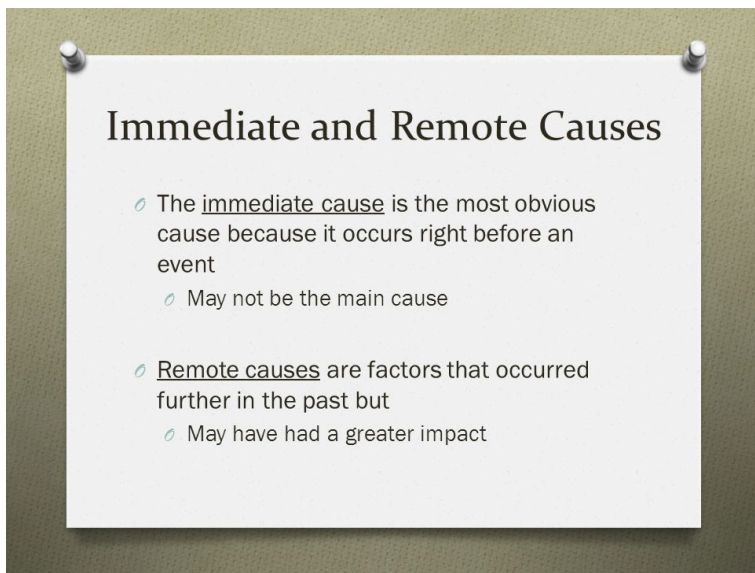
Understanding Causal Chains

Sometimes an effect can also be a cause. This is true in a **causal chain**, where **A** causes **B**, which causes **C**, which causes **D**.

In **causal chains**, the result of one action is the cause of another. Leaving out any link in the chain, or failing to put any link in its

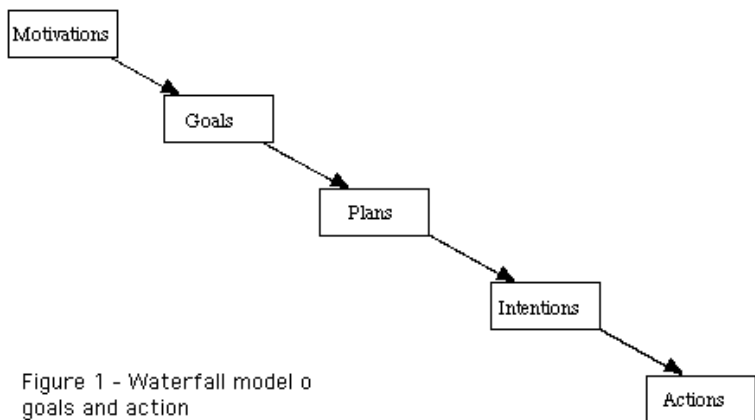proper order, can destroy the logic and continuity of the entire chain.

Figure 1 - Waterfall model o goals and action

A causal chain

"Why is Jason in the hospital?"
Because he has a bad infection in his leg.
But why does he have an infection?
He has a cut on his leg and it got infected.
But why does he have a cut on his leg?
He was playing in a junk yard next to his apartment building and fell on some sharp, jagged steel there.
But why was he playing in a junk yard?
His neighbourhood is run down. Kids play there and there is no one to supervise them.
But why does he live in that neighbourhood?
His parents can't afford a nicer place to live.
But why can't his parents afford a nicer place to live?
His dad is unemployed and his mom is sick.
But why is his dad unemployed?
Because he doesn't have much education and he can't find a job.
But why ...?

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/index-eng.php

Avoiding Post Hoc Reasoning

When exploring causal relationships in your own writing or in someone else's, you should not assume that just because event A **precedes** event B, that event A must have **caused** event B. This illogical assumption, called **post hoc reasoning**, equates a chronological sequence with causality. When you fall into this trap—assuming, for instance, that you failed an exam because a black cat crossed your path the day before—you are mistaking coincidence (and chronology) for causality. Proving causation is a slow, methodical and academic process that requires a great amount of research, analysis and reflection on the nature of the causal relationships you are attempting to explore.

# Chapter 10 - Patterns of Development (Comparison/Contrast)

"Gears" by xresch, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Comparison/Contrast

Throughout our lives, we are bombarded with information from newspapers, television, radio, the Internet and personal experience. Somehow, we must make sense of the jumbled facts and figures that surround us. Whether we are trying to select a political candidate or party, a health care plan, a major in college, a new car or a new series to watch on Netflix, one way we have of understanding information like this is to put it side by side with other data and then compare and contrast the options.

We apply **comparison/contrast** every day to matters that directly affect us. When we make personal decisions, we consider alternatives, asking ourselves whether one option seems better than another. In the same way, **comparative analysis** helps us consider the similarities and differences between two (or more) things as a way to systematically evaluate them in relation to one another. Usually with the aim of determining which is the better option.
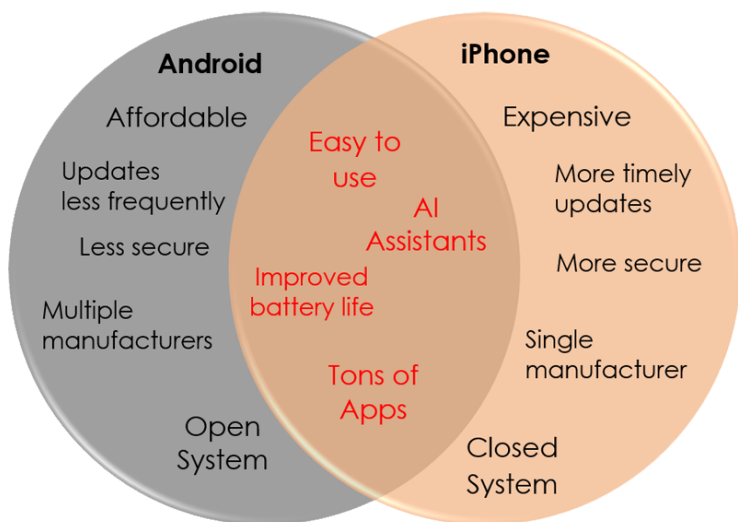
The Venn diagram above is a great example of how comparison/ contrast can be used effectively to communicate a complicated idea (the differences and similarities of iPhones and Android phones) rather quickly and efficiently. The overlap contains the characteristics the two smartphones share and the corners reveal their differences. From this diagram, the student could write a paper (with relevant sources) that evaluates these two devices according to the stated attributes and makes a final decision on which smartphone is better suited for their own needs.

- **Read** this information describing [How to Write Comparison/ Contrast](#)
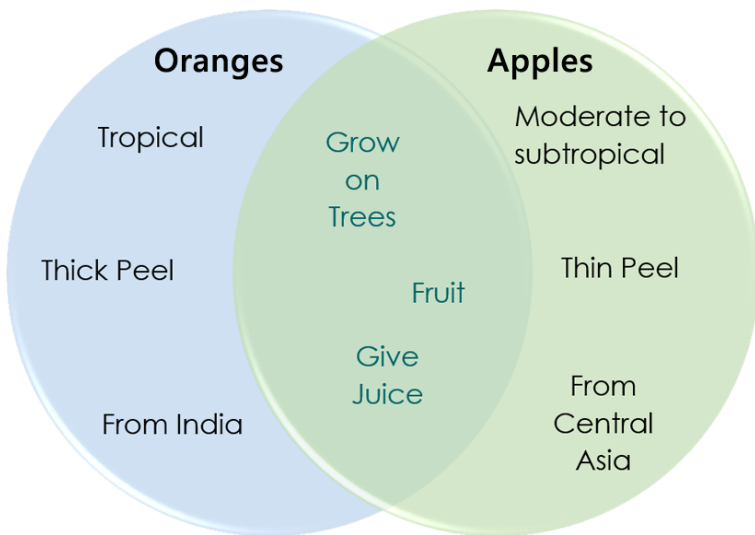- **View** the embedded video (4 min):[How to Write a Comparison/ Contrast Essay](#)
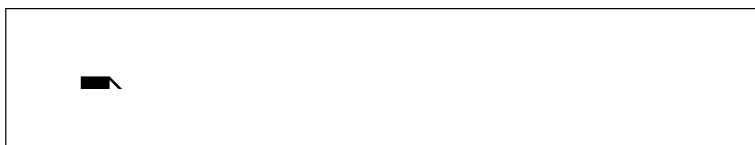
Establishing a Basis for Comparison

Before you can compare and/or contrast two things, you must be sure a **basis for comparison** exists—that the two things have enough in common to justify a comparison. For example, although apples and oranges are very different, they share several significant elements: they are both fruit, grown on trees and give juice. Without

these shared elements, there would be no basis for analysis and nothing of importance to discuss.

Once a **basis for comparison** is established, a **comparative analysis** should lead you beyond the obvious. When two subjects are very similar, the contrasts may be more interesting to write about. And when two subjects are not very much alike, you may find the similarities are more worth considering. Please review the chapter on comparison/contrast for more on how this pattern of development can be used in college essay writing.

Planning to use Comparison/Contrast to make a point in your final essay?

Structuring a Comparison/Contrast Essay

Like every other type of essay in this class, a **comparison/contrast** essay has an introduction, several body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Within the body of your paper, however, you can use either of two basic comparison/contrast strategies **subject by subject** or **point by point**.
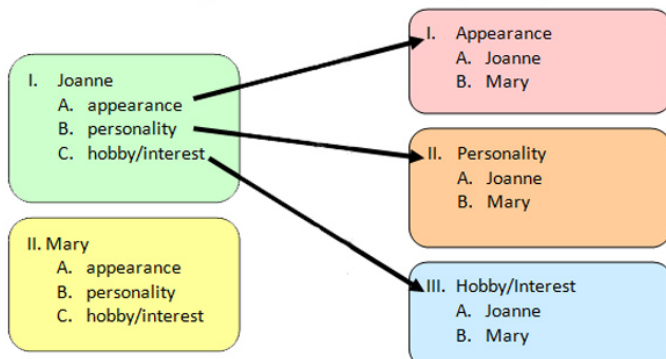
As you might expect, each organizational strategy has advantages and disadvantages. In general, you should use **subject-by-subject**comparison when your purpose is to emphasize overall similarities or differences, and you should use **point-by-point** comparison when your purpose is to emphasize individual points of similarity or difference. Consult your textbook for more information on how and when to use these various patterns in your comparison/contrast writing.

Comparison and contrast can be simple as illustrated by the Venn diagram of apples and oranges. But take a look at this one from Reddit examining the age old battle between PC and Mac. The contrasts of two computer operating systems brings up a labyrinth of issues involving global economics, cultural alignments and worldviews.
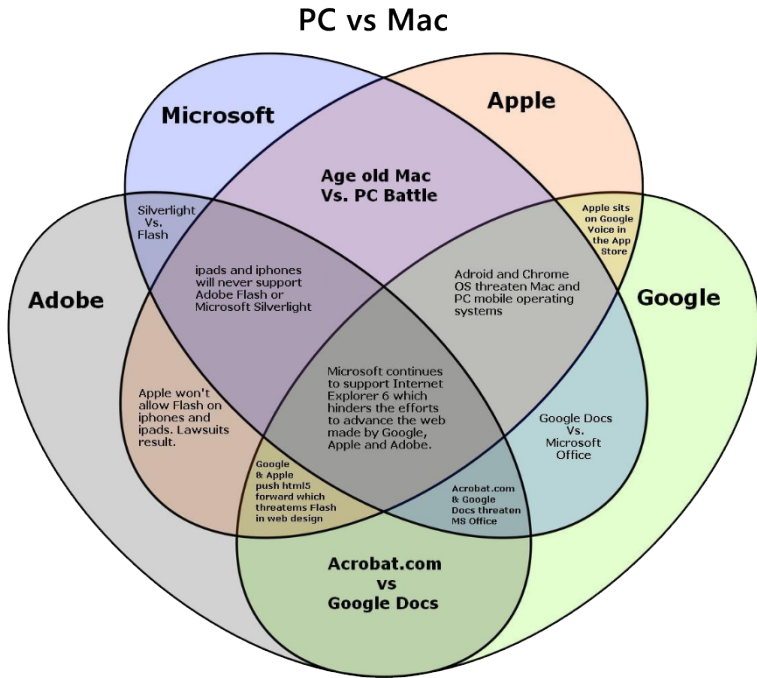
Chapter 11 - Re-vision (Writing is Rewriting & The 3 "Levels" of Revision)

"Person Writing on Pink Sticky Notes" by Bruno Buen, Composition in Cultural Contexts, Pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Revision

(by Allie Donahue with help from *Being a Writer* by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff)

As you probably know, few writers spin out the polished prose that appears in their finished works the first time they sit down at the computer. Almost everything we read has been through the *process* of revision. If you want your writing to be clear, persuasive

and enjoyable to read, revision should always be a part of your writing process. Revision isn't easy; it takes time and critical thought, but it is key in producing good writing. Often, we will need to take several passes at a piece of writing before we arrive at something coherent enough to even be called a "first draft." Do not let this deter or frustrate you. Better to understand and accept that this is a natural part of the writing process and give yourself enough time to do it properly. Also, it is important to realize that we should not get too attached to versions of our writing too early in the process, as they are likely to change drastically, or even be removed entirely, before the process is "finished."

- Check out this **short video** on revising the college essay. (2:42)

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Revision Is Not Editing

In their book *Being a Writer*, Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff differentiate between revision and editing:

"Many students equate revision with correcting mechanics or copyediting. Experienced writers never confuse the two. For them, revision means *entering into a conversation with their previous thoughts*. They match what they have already written against what they now wish to say and create out of the two a new piece that suits their present purpose." (124)

Editing—checking for errors in spelling and mechanics—is an

important step in writing anything, but it should never be the only action the writer takes after completing a draft.

Revision Is Never Done

No piece of writing is ever perfect; it can always be improved in some way. At some point, though, a writer must decide to call a draft finished. Elbow and Belanoff contend that the never-ending nature of revision makes the process hard to define. They conclude, "Probably the best definition is that revising is whatever you do to improve a piece of writing in terms of getting close to what you want to say" (124).

Bones, Muscles and Skin

Elbow and Belanoff identify three levels of revision. The metaphor of bones, muscles, and skin can help clarify the task at each level. These roughly correspond to the three levels we discussed earlier in the chapter of *global*, *regional* and *local* revision.

    Level 1: Reseeing or rethining: changing what a piece says, or its "**bones**."

    Level 2: Reworking or reshaping: changing how a piece says it, or changing its "**muscles**."

    Level 3: (Editing) Copyediting or proofreading for mechanics and usage: checking for deviations from standard conventions, or changing the writing's "**skin**." (124).

Bones

When revising the "bones" of a piece, you change *what* your writing says. Maybe you don't agree with what you wrote anymore. Maybe you didn't grasp the full implication of your argument. Maybe you found new information that shifts the whole piece towards a new focus. It's very common for writers to abandon—or radically redirect—a rough draft.

Some suggestions:

- Share your draft with someone else. (Hey! A MHCC tutor is someone else.)
- Read your draft, go make a cup of tea, and then sit down and allow a few minutes of free writing. Simply write about your subject. Maybe new thoughts will arise in light of your first draft.
- Choose the most interesting sentences of your draft. Freewrite about why they are the most interesting.

Muscles

When revising the "muscles" of a piece, you change *how* your writing says what it says. Is your writing clear? Will your readers understand its nuances?

Some suggestions:

- In the margins, write the purpose each paragraph. Then ask yourself: does this paragraph achieve what I intend it to achieve?
- Keep an eye out for abstractions. COWS director Lydia McDermott breaks abstractions into four categories:

*Level 4: **abstraction***—intangible ideas (e.g. love, hope, truth, success)

*Level 3: **noun classes**—*broad groups with little specification (e.g. woman, dogs, Americans)

*Level 2: **noun categories**—*more definite subgroups (e.g. working mothers, African-Americans, astronauts)

*Level 1: **specific, identifiable nouns**—*a unique instance (e.g. My mother, Donald Trump, tulip bulb, bull)

Wherever possible, abstractions should be replaced with specific language. Jean Paul Sartre defined evil as "*man's ability to make abstract that which is concrete.*"

- Check to make sure sentences follow the "**Known-New Contract.**" Professor McDermott explains the contract like this:

"**The Known-New Contract**" exists between writer and reader, where the writer has a responsibility to the reader to lead her step by step toward new information by reviewing information that has already been introduced. When we drop in new information without tying it to something we've already established in our writing, it is jarring for the reader. The "**Known-New Contract**" applies from sentence to sentence as well as from paragraph to paragraph."

A simple example of "**Known-New Contract**" at the sentence level: The dog ate cheese. The cheese had gone bad; it was a terrible green. The first sentence makes the cheese known. The second sentence introduces new information about the state of the cheese. Therefore, these two sentences follow the "Known-New Contract."

Skin

When revising the "skin" of a piece, you clean up mistakes in spelling, mechanics, and style conventions. This is the final step before turning in a draft. This is similar to the level of **local revision** discussed in an earlier chapter.

- Keep a style manual nearby. Double check that your citations are correct and you follow the conventions of whatever style you are using. Style errors look sloppy and can distract your reader from the content of your writing.
- Don't trust your spell check. It won't catch errors in capitulation, abbreviations, italics usage, etc.

And then, at some point, you call it quits, and turn in what you have. Your draft isn't perfect, but your revision work will certainly show.

- For more on the revision process, click **here**.
- One more good **video** about the importance of the revision process. (5:57)

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Chapter 12 - Using Sources & MLA Format

The discovery, analysis, and integration of relevant source material into a research project is referred to as a "research methodology." This can be a daunting, frustrating, and sometimes scary process. But is is essential if we are to fully engage in the essay writing process as a way to expand and fortify our own thinking and writing.
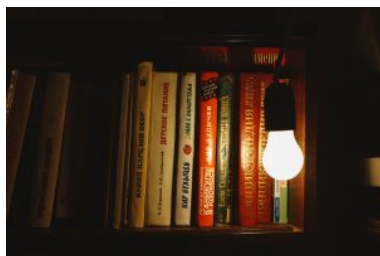
"White Led Light" by Artem Follow, Composition in Cultural Contexts, Pexels is licensed under CC BY 4.0

It takes a lot of discipline and courage to boldly go into the world of a given topic to check our ideas against those of authoritative, relevant, and reliable source material. It can also expose us to the reality that most topics are far more complicated than they originally appear.

This is an essential component of college writing. It is important to get our thoughts and ideas down on paper in clear and understandable ways. But it is equally important to verify, challenge, and expand those ideas by comparing/contrasting them with the most reliable information we can find on our chosen topic.

We do not research just to verify what we already believe about a topic, but to *challenge* our previously held ideas and, hopefully, move beyond the echo chamber of our own thoughts into a meaningful, substantive dialogue with others who also have relevant experience and expertise on the topic. Sometimes very different from our own. Sometimes not.

Doing this will help us to generate a depth of knowledge that goes

beyond the superficial and into the real mechanics of knowing. The result will be an essay that is engaging, grounded, and integrative.

The "essay" format itself is intended to get the writer to explore a topic by beginning with a question or idea and then going out into the larger world of the topic and finding relevant, authoritative sources to help develop, test, and explore that idea.

Authoritative sources do more than just back up the ideas we already have. They challenge us to dive deeper into the topic we are exploring to address their full complexity and broad application. And perhaps, even change our minds entirely.

- Watch this video on [Searching the Databases.](#)

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- Consult the [Library Databases](#) and our [Writing Library Guide](#) for help in finding and using relevant, authoritative sources.
- Follow this [link](#) for helpful tips on finding, using, and properly citing sources.

BEST: When the writer uses relevant, authoritative sources to enhance a dialogue with the audience and themselves around the significant issues the essay addresses. Most effective when they are blended carefully and properly into an honest and focused exploration of the topic that is lead by the writer but open to where the relevant source material can take the discussion.

A strong essay will include enough relevant, authoritative, and reliable sources to help develop and explore the topic and thesis.

The exact level of what constitutes "enough" will largely depend on the weight and scope of the thesis and the particulars of a given topic or assignment.

Try to include a variety of sources from various academic, professional and popular institutions to provide a wide array of perspectives on the topic and thesis under discussion. But, a good essay doesn't JUST report what the source material says. A strong essay will also effectively *blend* sources into a focused, academic conversation by integrating them into the larger topic, allowing them to "talk to one another," and commenting on them in ways that stay true to their original intent but also include your thoughtful responses. Ultimately, the writer is directing the course of the discussion. But the sources should be, in turn, leading the writer.

- Consult the "Evaluating Sources" handout.
- Watch this video on Evaluating Sources.

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- Consult this handout on how to effectively blend sources into your essay.

MLA Format

"Paper notes" by Mediamodifier, Pixabay is in the Public Domain, CC0

Essays in Humanities classes are formatted according to Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines. Formatting can be a frustrating and time-consuming process. But there are many tools and tricks to help you through the weeds.

Stay calm and focused and learn how to use the tools that will assist you in proper MLA formatting. If something doesn't make sense, ask for help. Do this at the end of the process, during your "local editing" phase. MLA involves three primary components when getting your essay into proper format:

1. Formatting of the first page of your essay.
2. Proper use of "in-text" citations (citing sources you use in the body of the text of your essay).
3. Properly formatted "Works Cited" or "Works Consulted" page.

BEST: When an essay is properly crafted and formatted, the reader is able to clearly and easily follow the ideas and trace outside information to its original sources.

- Consult the MLA Style Guides on the MHCC Library Website.
- Consult this handout on how to put your essay in MLA format.
- Consult this template on how to construct your first essay.
- Watch the following video on how to use MLA Format (8th Edition).

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- Watch the following video on how to use [MLA Format for MAC (8th Edition).](#)

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:* *https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/ wr121gurevich/?p=28#oembed-4*

- Watch the following video on how to [create the MLA Works Cited Page (8th Edition).](#)

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:* *https://mhcc.pressbooks.pub/ wr121gurevich/?p=28#oembed-5*

- Have a look at this [SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAY](#) for tips on the whole process!

On the [MLA Style Guides](#) site there is a section called "*Citation Builders*" which will help put sources into proper format for you. Note also that in most newer versions of *Microsoft Word* there is an

MLA template you can select to automatically put your document into MLA format.

Sources taken from the [MHCC Library Databases](#) will already be listed at the bottom of the article in MLA format. Simply copy and paste the citation from the database entry to your Works Cited page (making sure the entry is: in proper alphabetical position, bold type, double-spaced, and in proper "hanging" format").

Lastly, although most essays in Writing and Humanities classes will be formatted according to the Modern Language Association (**MLA**) guidelines, many other classes will use alternative formats such as APA, Chicago and ASA documentation styles. Use this [link](#) to assist in the construction of these alternative formats.

As always, when in doubt…reach out!

Credits