

# Building Blocks of Academic Writing



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Carellin Brooks

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BCCAMPUS  
VICTORIA, B.C.



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# Chapter 1: Research

## Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between sources that suit your purpose and those that don't.
- Determine if an electronic source is trustworthy.
- Format a simple MLA or APA style bibliographic entry.
- Explain the importance of citation as an academic practice.

How do you gather background material on your topic? How can you tell a useful source from one that might lead you astray or provide inaccurate information, especially on the internet, where anyone can publish anything? And once you've located a trustworthy source, how do you credit it in your own bibliographical list of sources? Is citation even a big deal anymore, anyhow?



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## 1.1 Finding Sources

With today's easy access to the internet and its limitless resources, finding appropriate sources seems like the easiest part of your work as a writer. Simply think up a topic, plug it into a search engine like Google, and search up the results. Pick the first likely-looking source and your job is done. Right?

In fact, it's not so simple. The internet is a little bit like the Wild West: there are very few rules. If you pick up a book and open it to a particular chapter, the book publisher almost certainly assigned it an editor, whose job it is to go over the author's work and make sure it is accurate and well written before publication. This is not so on the internet, so the source you choose may be poorly written, irrelevant to your writing, or simply wrong. And since you yourself have to do the work of an editor in figuring out if your source is appropriate, it's worth taking some time to make sure you choose a source that will be useful and helpful to you in your writing. After all, having to choose an entirely different source and rewrite your assignment from scratch takes a lot more time than vetting your source in the first place. And by that point, your deadline is probably getting a lot closer—not the most enjoyable writing situation!

**Hence, as a general rule, allow for about as much time for researching as you do for writing.**

There are some tools that can help you, such as the [CRAAP test](#). Developed by California State University librarians under the leadership of Sarah Blakeslee, this test evaluates the Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose of your electronic source.

If you don't want to do all that work yourself, try a print source, or a trusted name in print that also publishes a website, like a newspaper such as *The Globe and Mail* or *The New York Times*, or a magazine like *The Walrus* or *The Economist*. Be aware, however, that even respected magazines, newspapers, and books have particular aspects that may make them more or less suitable for your work. *The Walrus* is a Canadian magazine that includes fiction, commentary, and feature articles. It would not be a good source for a science paper, for example. For that, you would need to find a magazine focused on scientific topics, like, well, *Science*.

Finally, make sure you can reference your source. In academic writing, you are expected to list the source in two places: briefly in your writing and more fully in a bibliography afterward. If you can't find the information on where and when the source was published, including names, dates, and page numbers, you may not be able to provide a complete entry for your bibliography. You'd think the internet would make finding such information easier, but in fact, many sources are published on the web with incomplete information about where they came from, and it can be difficult to track that information down when you need it most.

### Review Questions

1. Find an appropriate source for a paragraph about the events that influenced the Prime Minister's residential schools apology. Explain why the source will be helpful using the CRAAP test.
2. Find an inappropriate source for a paragraph about drug legalization in Canada. List at least three reasons why the source is a poor choice for your topic.



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## 1.2 Citation Styles

Your instructor typically assigns a citation style for your classroom. This is the format that you will use to cite your sources, both in the body of your writing and at the end of your assignment in the bibliography.

The two main citation styles are Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA). MLA is often used in humanities and English, and APA is often used in, well, psychology and other sciences.

There are oodles of additional citation styles out there. If you have studied in a different country or are going into a specific field such as law, you will probably need to learn an additional citation style (or more!).

Why all the fuss? Two reasons. Number one, citation is crucial in academic writing. That's because all academic work—like the scientific finding that smoking causes cancer, for example—relies on a foundation of knowledge. Nobody sets out to do work that has never been done on topics that have never before been studied. Rather, each bit of knowledge builds on the knowledge that came before. This is why Google Scholar has as its slogan “Stand on the shoulders of giants.” The giants are all the scholars who have done the work that you consult for yours.

Secondly, citation helps others locate your sources. If instructors want to check a source, the citation should give them all of the information they need to do so. You'll notice that the citation in the body of your writing—sometimes called an in-text citation—is pretty sparse. That's because providing only the author's last name and page number (in MLA style) or last name and date (in APA) gives the reader all the information needed to go to the bibliography, where you're going to provide a full entry.

The table below explains the format of an in-text citation.

**Table 1.1 Sample in-text citations**

Citation Style	Sample In-Text Citation
APA	In the previous paragraph, Brooks (2019) provides a rationale for citing fully by pointing out how listing your source can help someone else find it.
MLA	The writer explains how “citation helps others” find the same work if needed (Brooks 9).

Students often wonder why it is necessary to get a citation exactly right, down to questions of punctuation, capitalization, and which lines to indent. The truth? It probably isn't. However, what is important is training yourself in the ability to apply a model to your own sources and getting good enough that you can copy it exactly. Your instructors have probably seen thousands of pages of student citations: after a while, it is extremely easy for them to pick out the mistakes.

The table below gives a sample structure for APA and MLA entries.

**Table 1.2 Sample entries for a chapter in an edited book**

Citation Style	Sample Entry
APA	LastName, First Initial(s). (Date). Title of chapter. In Editor's Name & OtherEditor's Name (Eds.), <i>Title of book</i> (xx–xx). Location: Publisher.
MLA	LastName, FirstName. "Title of Chapter." <i>Title of Book</i> , edited by Editor's Name(s), Publisher, Year, pp. xx–xx.

### Review Questions

1. For the first source you found, above, write two bibliographies: one in APA style and one in MLA style. (Hint: Don't forget your heading and the formatting of the page, including spacing and the hanging indent.)
2. Trade your bibliographies with a classmate. See if each of you can find any errors in the other person's entries by comparing it with a formatting and style guide like [Purdue OWL](#).
3. Explain to a classmate why citing your sources is so crucial in academic writing.

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## Chapter 2: Prewriting

### Learning Objectives

- Understand the purpose of prewriting.
- Identify your own writing practices as linear or associative.
- Practise the three suggested prewriting options—outline, mind map, and freewriting—in different writing situations.

Many of us write haphazardly, using strategies we may have evolved as beginning learners. There is something incredibly frustrating in sitting and looking at a blank page, waiting for inspiration to strike. Wondering what to write about and how to start are normal parts of the writing process, and they happen to everyone—even people who make their living as writers. How can you get past the blank page? Prewriting can help. The following strategies—outlines, mind maps, and freewriting—may or may not work for you. Even if they don't, however, they can help spark ideas for what will—and free you from the dreaded blank page.



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## 2.1 Outlines

Some writers swear by outlines; others loathe them. When assigned an outline in school, I would simply write the assignment, then extract the outline afterward. To this day, I'm an associative rather than a linear writer, whether I'm crafting an assignment description or revising a poem. If this also describes you, try the two techniques later in this chapter: [Chapter 2.2: Mind Maps](#) and [Chapter 2.3: Freewriting](#).

If you find outlines helpful, or if you don't know yet, you can try using one for your next assignment.

First, set aside a line for each of the things you already know you might need, like an introduction and a conclusion. If your instructor has told you to include a bibliography, add that, too.

Now think about what you'll be putting in the body of your assignment. Decide on the number of paragraphs you'll need and number each one. Then jot a quick note describing what each paragraph will be about.

Finally, leave room for three points for each paragraph and describe what each point will say. Each point should help explain the overall topic of the paragraph.

Don't be afraid to stray from your outline if needed. Writing is a discovery process, and change is part of that process. If your outline doesn't conform to your finished project, good! You learned something along the way.

### Review Questions

1. With a classmate, decide whether your writing process so far has been more linear (knowing exactly what you're going to write before you start, writing in a straight line from A to Z) or associative (starting without much of a plan and figuring it out as you go along). Which style do you prefer? Why?
2. Write an outline for an assignment on the topic of future challenges in immigration to Canada.



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## 2.2 Mind Maps

People who like to think visually and who have a harder time establishing order over their writing process tend to enjoy mind maps. A mind map can be used not only for an assignment, but:

- to capture a conversation around a group presentation.
- to take lecture notes.
- to help you with your ideas for a creative project, like a poem or a story.

You'll use mind maps again in [Chapter 6: Creative Writing](#).

To create a mind map, take a blank sheet of paper. Write your central idea in the middle and draw a circle around it. Then begin adding other circles to the paper around the main idea, each one with a different sub-idea, example, or thought in it. Don't worry about consciously deciding on the relative size of the circles or where they should go in relation to the central idea, but if this happens easily, let it. Draw lines to indicate the relationships between the central idea, sub-ideas, examples, and thoughts. By the end, your mind map should look sort of like a giant, blobby Starship *Enterprise* from *Star Trek*.

### Review Questions

1. Write a mind map on a topic of your choice. Suggested topics are the importance of exposure to nature for city dwellers; the importance of individual versus government or corporate steps to combat climate change; or the importance of learning relationship and communication skills as part of the high school curriculum.
2. In groups, choose a different topic from the one you considered in question 1 and talk about it together. Create a mind map of the conversation.





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## 2.3 Freewriting

Freewriting is a form of brainstorming. Whether you have been given a topic by your instructor to write on, and your mind is blank, or you have been told to pick your own topic, and your mind is also blank, you can use this technique.

Freewriting involves writing for a certain amount of time—say, ten minutes—without taking your pen off the page. This means that you write down anything that comes to mind, even if that is “This is a really stupid exercise. I don’t know why I’m doing it. Wow, am I bored.”

The goal is to continue writing for the specified time. There is only one rule: do not stop writing, even for a minute, during the specified time period. Your job is not to think about what you are writing, but to write. Afterwards, you’ll have a chance to go over what you wrote and pick out your favourite parts.

### Review Questions

Try freewriting on a topic of your choice, or on one of the topics you didn’t choose for a previous question. After ten minutes, read over the freewriting you completed and underline any words, phrases, or sentences that stick out to you. Is there a way you could turn what you wrote into the start of an assignment, a question you want to answer, or a take on the topic that you are interested in exploring further?



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## Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure



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## 3.1 Descriptive Paragraphs

### Learning Objectives

- Understand and utilize the descriptive language associated with the five senses.
- Conceptualize the difference between showing the reader and telling the reader.
- Identify the different types of descriptive paragraphs: person, place, object, and event.
- Describe a person, a place, an object, or an event adequately and concisely.
- Master the organizational schemes associated with descriptive paragraphs.
- Indicate in writing the significance of a person, place, object, and event.

A descriptive paragraph provides a vibrant experience for the reader through vivid language and descriptions of something. Unlike narrative paragraphs, which must include personal thoughts, feelings, and growth, descriptive paragraphs do not need to be personal in nature. Instead, descriptive paragraphs must focus on vividly and objectively describing something to the reader. In order to provide this vivid detail, the writer must use language that appeals to the reader's five senses: sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. To appeal to these senses, the writer must use descriptive language, usually in the form of adjectives, that describes the sensations felt by the senses. For instance, examine the differences between the descriptions below:

**Sentence 1:** The tree was tall and green.

**Sentence 2:** The soft and damp pink flowers of the dogwood tree smelled sweet in the cool spring air as the wind whistled through its yellow-green leaves.

How do these descriptions compare? If these two sentences both describe the same tree, which sentence provides a better picture for the reader? Why?

While the first description does provide some detail (that the tree is both “tall” and “green”), it does not help the reader picture the tree. Saying that the tree is “tall” and “green” does not help separate the tree being described from any other tree. The second sentence, however, provides the reader with descriptive information that makes the tree unique. Unlike the writer of the first sentence, who only vaguely describes how the tree looked, the writer of the second sentence appeals to at least four of the reader's five senses. This writer describes how the tree feels (soft and damp), how the tree smells (sweet), how the tree sounds (it whistles), and how the tree looks (pink and yellow-green). Through these descriptions, the reader can see, hear, feel, and smell the tree while reading the sentence. However, in some instances, not all of the senses will be applicable for the description. In this case, most descriptions of trees would not include a sense of how the tree tasted, especially when so many trees are inedible or poisonous!

**Table 3.1 Words associated with each of the five senses**

See	Hear	Smell	Taste	Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• colours (green, blue, red)</li> <li>• contrast (light vs. dark)</li> <li>• depth (near vs. far)</li> <li>• texture (rough, pebbly, smooth)</li> <li>• shape (round, square, triangular)</li> <li>• dimensions (height, width, length)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loud</li> <li>• grating</li> <li>• metallic</li> <li>• atonal</li> <li>• melodic</li> <li>• euphonious</li> <li>• discordant</li> <li>• screeching</li> <li>• gravelly</li> <li>• harmonious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sweet</li> <li>• pungent</li> <li>• acrid</li> <li>• delicious</li> <li>• disgusting</li> <li>• appetizing</li> <li>• fresh</li> <li>• stale</li> <li>• fruity</li> <li>• tantalizing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• delicious</li> <li>• sour</li> <li>• sweet</li> <li>• savoury</li> <li>• salty</li> <li>• spoiled</li> <li>• bitter</li> <li>• earthy</li> <li>• spicy</li> <li>• bland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• soft</li> <li>• creamy</li> <li>• rubbery</li> <li>• firm</li> <li>• cool/hot</li> <li>• unctuous</li> <li>• porous/ smooth</li> <li>• knobby</li> <li>• sticky</li> <li>• dry/ moist</li> </ul>

Providing good details in a descriptive paragraph also rests on the idea that a writer must *show* and not *tell* the reader. While good details in a paragraph are important, the most essential part of a descriptive paragraph is the reason for writing the paragraph. Since descriptive paragraphs should explain to the reader the importance of what is being described, in addition to helping the reader picture it, the author must show the reader how and why something is significant rather than simply telling the reader. A good writer helps the reader picture what they are describing; however, a better writer shows the reader the purpose or reason for describing something. Consider the differences between the sentences below:

**Example 1:** Ever since grade school, I have always been nervous during tests.

**Example 2:** Staring blankly at my exam, I tapped my pencil rapidly on the side of my desk and desperately tried to focus. Mustering up some courage, I wrote an answer to the second question. Just as quickly, I erased the answer frantically, not wanting to leave a trace of it on the blank white paper. As the teacher announced that time was almost up, I remembered the taunt of my evil grade-school teacher: “You’ll never pass this test. Just give up already.” The memory of her words paralyzed my mind. Even more panic-stricken than before, I stared wildly at my blank test, trying to remember what the teacher had said in class last week or what I had read in the textbook.

While the first example does not explain how the narrator is nervous, it also fails to show why this nervousness is important. Ultimately, the first example tells and does not show the reader how the narrator is nervous or why this reaction is important. Meanwhile, the second example not only shows how the narrator expresses this nervousness (tapping the pencil on the desk, erasing answers, etc.), it begins to show why this is significant by relating it to earlier experiences in the narrator’s life. Through

this connection, the writer is beginning to develop the description and the importance of the test-taking nervousness. The second example describes the experiences from grade school that led to this current bout of test-taking anxiety.

By showing and not telling the reader and by using descriptive language that appeals to the five senses, descriptive paragraphs provide the reader with a detailed account and the significance of something. Thus, this something being described is the most important aspect of the descriptive paragraph. Generally, descriptive paragraphs describe one of four somethings: a person, a place, an object, or an event.

## Person

Like any other descriptive paragraph, the most important aspect of a person paragraph is the reason for writing it. Have you ever read a book or article for school wondering what the point is? Perhaps even feeling disinterested because of what you felt was a lack of point or reason for reading or even writing the book, poem, article, etc.? Essentially, the same can be true for your own paragraphs if you do not write with a purpose. In choosing the person you want to write about, you have a reason for the choice you have made. It is your job as the writer to show the reader your point. Why have you chosen this person instead of another? What makes them interesting? You must draw your readers into your paragraph just as every other author draws their readers into their work, even if your only audience is your instructor. Remember, instructors do not like reading pointless writing any more than you do!

Thus, whenever writing a descriptive paragraph about a person, you must ask yourself: Why did I choose this person? What makes this person special? Is it a memory? Which of this person's characteristics has inspired me to write about them? In answering these questions, you not only find the reason or purpose for writing your paragraph, but you also inadvertently discover how to format your paragraph as well. Generally, paragraphs can be formatted in a number of different ways. The formatting of a paragraph rests almost entirely on what you are trying to do or say within your writing. For instance, let us consider the answer to some of the questions provided above.

Imagine that you have decided to write your descriptive paragraph about your aunt because you spent your summers with her when you were younger. Let's say that, during one of your visits, she taught you how to swim in the lake behind her house, and this is one of the fondest memories from your childhood. In this case, your descriptive paragraph would be a chronological account of this experience. You would organize your paragraph around the experience by having an introductory and concluding sentence that indicate the topic and purpose of your paragraph while detailing the event in the body of the paragraph. For instance, in a descriptive paragraph about your aunt, the introductory and concluding sentence would indicate that this memory was the highlight of your childhood while the body sentences would describe the event in chronological order. Since this is a descriptive paragraph about a person and not an event, you must be sure to centre your discussion of the event on the person involved; the person who made the event special.

However, you could also write a descriptive paragraph about your aunt that details some of your favourite characteristics about her. Perhaps you want your paragraph to describe a few reasons why your aunt is your favourite relative. In this paragraph, you would focus on the several characteristics that show why your aunt is so important to you. To do so, you may choose to explain briefly an event

that supports one characteristic. For instance, if you want to show that your aunt is spontaneous and that this is one of your favourite things about her, you may choose to describe a day when she woke you up early to go on an unplanned, spur-of-the-moment trip to the beach. Through describing this event in one of your body sentences, you help support your claim that your aunt is spontaneous.

**Table 3.2 Examples of different ways to organize information about a person**

<b>Focus of the paragraph</b>	<b>What will the paragraph talk about?</b>	<b>How to organize the paragraph</b>
An event	The summer your aunt taught you to swim is one of your fondest childhood memories.	You would organize your paragraph around this event and how it has made your aunt more important to you.
Personal characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. spontaneous</li> <li>2. fun-loving</li> <li>3. easygoing</li> </ol>	You would organize your paragraph around the main reasons why your aunt is your favourite relative with each of these characteristics serving as a sentence.

## Place

Much like a person descriptive paragraph, the most important aspect of a descriptive paragraph about a place is your reason for writing it. Consider all of the places you have been to in your life—not only the places you have visited on vacation, but also those that you visit in everyday life. Every day, or at least during the school week, how many different places do you go? After leaving home, do you stop to get breakfast or coffee along the way, or do you stop and pick up a friend? Do you spend the majority of your day at school? If so, do you leave campus to get lunch? How about after later in the day? Do you go straight home? Go to the gym? Pick your kids up from school? Considering all the places you visit in one day, which would you pick to write about and why? These are the most important questions to answer when writing your place descriptive paragraph, and answering them will help you decide the organization of your paragraph.

The organization of a descriptive paragraph about a place is much like that of a descriptive paragraph about a person. Thus, there are two main organizational schemes that you can choose from when composing a descriptive paragraph about a place: one that focuses on certain characteristics of the place, or one that focuses on a specific event (or set of events) related to the place. For instance, for the first type of organization, you would focus on the reasons—or characteristics—why you like or dislike a place. For the second type, you would focus on the events that explain why this place is important to you. For example, if you were writing a descriptive paragraph about Barkerville, Table 3.3 describes the two ways in which you could organize your paragraph.



**Table 3.3 Examples of different ways to organize information about a place**

Focus of the paragraph	What will the paragraph talk about?	How to organize the paragraph
An event	A high school trip you took with your grade 11 history class to learn about the history of the gold rush in British Columbia.	You would organize your paragraph around this event and how it sparked your interest in museums.
Characteristics of a place	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Actors</li> <li>2. Story telling</li> <li>3. Historic buildings</li> </ol>	You would organize your paragraph around the main reasons why you enjoyed Barkerville with each of these characteristics serving as a body sentence.

While it may not matter which type or organization you choose, you must always make the place the focus of your paper. Thus, be sure the events or characteristics you describe in the paragraph do not outshine the importance of the place they are describing. For instance, following the example above, when talking about listening to the actors at Barkerville, do not focus too much on tours you have experienced at other museums. While comparing use of actors to give tours at Barkerville does stress how much better they are, do not let tours at other museums distract from your discussion of Barkerville. Additionally, remember to stress why the place being described is important to you regardless of the organizational scheme you choose.

## Object

By now, you may have noticed a pattern when it comes to organizing a descriptive paragraph. As you remember, you organize a descriptive paragraph about a person or place based either upon the characteristics of the subject or an event associated with it, and an object descriptive paragraph is no exception to this pattern. When writing a descriptive paragraph about an object, you must first decide why you have chosen this specific object to write about. In answering this question, you will know how to organize your paragraph. If you decide that an object is important to you because of the characteristics the object possesses, then you would organize the body of your paragraph around these characteristics or reasons. However, if an object is important to you because it was part of a significant event in your life, then you would produce body sentences that explain the event in chronological order.

For instance, imagine you wanted to write a descriptive paragraph about a tree at a local park. Consider the two ways of organizing this paragraph described in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Examples of different ways to organize information about an object**

<b>Focus of the paragraph</b>	<b>What will the paragraph talk about?</b>	<b>How to organize the paragraph</b>
An event	You shared your first kiss with your current partner under this tree.	You would organize your paragraph around this event and how it has made this tree more important to you.
Characteristics of an object	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. good for climbing</li> <li>2. has a tire swing</li> <li>3. displays the change in seasons</li> </ol>	You would organize your paragraph around the main reasons why this is your favourite tree with each of these characteristics serving as a body sentence.

Although the organizational scheme you choose rests solely on the content you intend to include, the object must be the focus of the paragraph. Make sure the characteristics of an object or the retelling of an event do not overshadow the impact of the object being described. For example, when describing the event of your first kiss, you would need to make sure that you did not spend too much of your paragraph focusing on your partner. Additionally, when writing about an event connected to the object, be sure to connect the event to the significance of the object so that the event itself does not outshine the object being described. In focusing on not only the organization of the paragraph but also the significance of the object, the object descriptive paragraph that you compose will stress both the description and importance of the object being described.

## Event

Although the three previous types of descriptive paragraphs follow the same two organizational schemes, event descriptive paragraphs differ slightly. While other descriptive paragraphs either describe the person, place, or object in question or detail an event connected to it, event descriptive paragraphs chronologically describe an event from the past or from the future. Thus, descriptive paragraphs that focus on an event can either detail a memory that is significant or your hopes about an upcoming event. For instance, your event descriptive paragraph about a past event would describe a memory that is in some way important to you, be it positively or negatively. However, your event descriptive paragraph about a future event would describe something to occur in the future that you hope for or that you dread.

While the other descriptive paragraphs also employ organizational schemes that outline events connected to the subject, a descriptive paragraph about an event must focus on the event itself. For example, one could write a descriptive paragraph detailing the event of their high school graduation that could be based on a person, place, object, or event. If they wanted to stress a person through this event, they could write a paragraph that details how their graduation was important because it was the first time they saw their grandparents in ten years. If they wanted to stress a place, they could write a paragraph that details how important the park where the graduation took place is to them. If they wanted to stress an object through the event, they could write a paragraph that describes how important their high school diploma is to them. However, if they wanted to stress the importance of the graduation, or the event itself, they could write a paragraph that describes how all the things listed

above—their grandparents, the park, and their diploma—all make the event significant. The different approaches they could take to a paragraph about the graduation are detailed in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5 The significance of each paragraph type**

<b>Paragraph Type</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>Significance of Paragraph</b>	Their grandparents are important to them because they came to the graduation.	The central park in their hometown is important to them because they graduated there.	Their diploma is important to them because it symbolizes their graduation.	Their graduation itself is important because it was the first time they saw their grandparents in ten years, at the central park in their hometown, and when they received their diploma.

Hence, while in the other descriptive paragraphs, you must never let the event overshadow the significance of the person, place, or object being described, in an event descriptive paragraph, you should focus on how the people, place, and objects surrounding the event make it important. In this way, an event descriptive paragraph is a lot like the person, place, and object paragraphs. Thus, think of the objects, people, and place of an event as the characteristics that make the event important to you whenever you are constructing an event descriptive paragraph.

#### Review Questions

##### **Person**

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about a person in your family following one of the organizational schemes listed.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about an important person in history using the event organization. Instead of indicating how the person is important to you, indicate how the person is important or significant within history.

##### **Place**

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about your hometown. Describe the town and indicate why it is important either to you or to society as a whole.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about one of the original Coast Salish settlements at the time of first contact with European explorers. Describe the location and environment, paying close attention to how the structure of the settlement was a response to the coastal environment.

##### **Object**

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about a gift you received on your birthday. Remember you can arrange your paragraph according to the characteristics of the object or by detailing the event at which you received it.

2. Write a descriptive paragraph about the provincial flower, the dogwood. Be sure to indicate why the flower is important to the province.

**Event**

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about a commemorative event that you attended or that you plan to attend in the future (wedding, memorial, graduation, etc.). Remember to include the people, location, or objects that make the event significant.
2. Write a descriptive paragraph about the next or last federal election, focusing on why this election is significant in Canada.

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## 3.2 Narrative Paragraphs

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the differences in form between descriptive and narrative paragraphs.
- Know the major differences between autobiographical and biographical narratives.
- Recognize the structure of autobiographical and biographical narratives.
- Identify the importance of personal growth in a narrative paragraph.
- Stress the importance of personal growth within your own narrative paragraph.

Unlike descriptive paragraphs—which strive to explain why a person, place, object, or event is important—a narrative paragraph demonstrates the development of a person through the chronological retelling of an important event. In addition, a narrative paragraph should indicate how a person has changed or learned from this experience. The experience should unfold much like the plot of a novel or short story, beginning with the individual facing a problem and ending in the resolution of the problem and subsequent growth of the individual. Thus, the action of the problem should unfold as the telling of the event unfolds, much like the action of a short story builds as the plot progresses.

However, just as in descriptive paragraphs, you must describe the event that is progressing, effectively drawing your readers into the development of the individual. Think of how invested—or perhaps uninvested—you become in the stories you read. Why do you connect with certain characters and not with others? Often, you connect with characters you feel you can relate to in some way or with events that you can imagine experiencing. Thus, it is essential to clearly and concisely indicate the action of the event being described. Your readers must be able to imagine being at and participating in the event. However, you must keep in mind that you can provide too much information to the reader. Make sure all the details you provide are relevant to the narration. For instance, when narrating an event, you do not need to include details that do not add to the feeling of an event. Otherwise, the readers will feel unconnected to and uninterested in the development of the individual.

While describing the event is crucial to the reader’s understanding and interest, the subject’s feelings, thoughts, desires, or insights are integral to creating the sense of personal growth. Without these components, the reader will be unable to track the person’s development and change. Essentially, in order for the reader to see that the individual has transformed, you must present the inner thoughts, desires, and feelings of the person before and after the alleged transformation. This way, the reader can compare the thoughts and feelings from before the change with those after and ultimately evaluate the personal growth of the individual on their own.

Since the personal growth in the narrative is the most essential component, choosing the individual and

experiences is an important decision. As a writer hoping to engage the reader, you must carefully consider both the events and the individual that you choose. Not only must you choose an event that points toward eventual personal growth, but you must also choose an individual who is compelling. Generally, a narrative paragraph can either be autobiographical or biographical in nature. That is, the narrative can be written by you and about you, or the narrative can be written by you and about someone else. Moreover, in choosing to write about yourself or about someone else, you decide the organization of your paragraph.

## Autobiographical Narrative

An autobiographical narrative is one of the most personal types of paragraphs. Not only are you writing a paragraph that expresses your own views and thoughts, but autobiographical narratives are based upon your own life experiences.

Thus, it follows that the organization of the paragraph will also be more personal in nature. Unlike a narrative paragraph based on another individual, an autobiographical narrative will always contain your personal thoughts, desires, and motivations. While it is hard to know the motives of other individuals when writing a biographical narrative (unless you know the individual well), you always have access to the motivations for your own personal development. Hence, when you organize your autobiographical narrative, you must organize your paragraph around the event that promotes your personal growth and the feeling you experienced before, during, and after this event.

There are several ways to incorporate your thoughts, feelings, and motivations into the organization of your paragraph. First, you can consider integrating your description of certain events with your motives and thoughts for the events. This way, you present the event and your motivations both in chronological order and simultaneously. This means that you are describing the event and your feelings as they occurred, or at the same time. Second, you can consider blocking your description of your event and your feelings, providing a set of sentences describing the event followed by a set of sentences describing your motivations. You could also reverse this blocking format to first provide your motivations and then the description of the event.

**Table 3.6 Examples of both paragraph types**

<b>Integrated description and motivations</b>	<b>Blocked descriptive and motivations</b>
<p>Today, I stepped into a new stage of my life by moving into my own apartment. I am so excited, because I have always lived with roommates, and this will be my first time living alone. I was able to find a great used couch on Facebook Marketplace that I have set up in the living room. My friends think living by myself will be lonely, but I am really enjoying setting up my place exactly how I want it. After we got everything moved in, I spent the afternoon rearranging furniture, putting dishes away, and hanging pictures.</p>	<p>Today, I moved into my new apartment. We got up at 6 a.m. to load up the truck up with all of my stuff and drop it off at my new place. That took most of the morning. I was also able to find a used couch on Facebook Marketplace, which we picked up and brought over. I spent the afternoon rearranging furniture, putting dishes away, and hanging pictures.</p> <p>It was a very exciting day. I have always lived with roommates, so this will be my first time living alone. My friends think living by myself will be lonely, but now I can set up my place exactly how I want it. It feels like I am entering a new stage.</p>

How do these two examples compare? Although they both narrate the same event, is one more effective than the other? Generally, the first organizational scheme (when you integrate description and motivations together) is the most seamless. By incorporating the two together, you provide the reader with a more complete picture of the event—as if the reader is experiencing the event as it unfolds in your narration. However, sometimes this formatting does not work, specifically with complicated events. If you feel that the event you are narrating is too difficult to explain or clarify, then you should consider separating your description and thoughts. However, you do need to be aware of how this affects the story you are telling. Do you want the importance of the event to be at the end? In doing so, you make the event seem more suspenseful, and you can make the reader more compelled to finish your narrative. Nevertheless, organizing your paper in this way places more of a burden on you as a writer because you must clearly connect the separate ideas in the paragraph.

Regardless of the organizational scheme you choose, you must properly describe your personal growth. In order to do so, you must organize your paragraph around one significant event. If your paragraph centres around one main event that helped shape your personal growth, the majority of the body should describe the one event while the introductory and concluding sentences should include your thoughts and feelings from before and after the event to help clarify how the occurrence helped shape you.

## **Biographical Narrative**

Unlike the much more personal autobiographical narrative, a biographical narrative tends to be more formal and less personal. While you can easily include how you felt or what you thought during events in your own life, it is harder to indicate how others thought or felt during action in their own lives. Sometimes, if you are writing a biographical narrative about a close friend or relative, or if you have interviewed the individual you are writing about, you can include specific insights and motivations. If you do have access to the person's thoughts and feelings, you can easily organize your biographical narrative as you would an autobiographical one. However, usually, you will have to infer how a person felt or what they thought from their actions in certain events.

If you must write a biographical narrative about someone you do not know or someone you cannot interview, you must suggest the person's motivations through analyzing actions. For instance, if someone apologizes for past behaviour, then you can infer that they feel regret about the incident. You could then analyze the events following this apology to see if the individual's apology was genuine. In other words, you could see if the individual's behaviour changed after the apology or if the individual changed their actions in significant ways. In order to vocalize the analysis in your paragraph, you must suggest to your reader that the individual started acting and behaving differently in response to a past experience. For example, you would need to stipulate that the good behaviour following the apology means that the individual regrets past actions. On the other hand, if an individual's actions after an apology do not change (if the person continues to make the same mistake, for instance), you can infer that the person does not regret or feel sorry for past actions.

### Review Questions

1. What is the purpose of a narrative paragraph?
2. How does a narrative paragraph differ from a descriptive paragraph?
3. What are the two ways you can organize an autobiographical narrative?
4. How do you show the feelings and thoughts of other individuals when writing a biographical narrative?
5. Write an autobiographical narrative about your experience as a writer. Be sure to stress how you have grown as a writer by including both descriptions of past situations and your feelings and thoughts about these situations.



### 3.3 Expository Paragraphs

#### Learning Objectives

- Provide evidence that supports a thesis, including relevant information on varying perspectives.
- Articulate concepts and information correctly and concisely.
- Decide the significance and merit of different facts, concepts and data.
- Organize an expository paragraph.

The main aim of an expository paragraph is to provide an effective explanation of a topic. While a descriptive paragraph strives to describe a subject and a narrative paragraph seeks to show personal growth, an expository paragraph tries to explain a topic or situation. Thus, expository paragraphs are written as if the writer is explaining or clarifying a topic to the reader. Since an expository paragraph is trying to clarify a topic, it is important that its sentences provide the categories or reasons that support the clarification of the topic. Moreover, these categories and reasons also provide the framework for the organization of the paragraph.

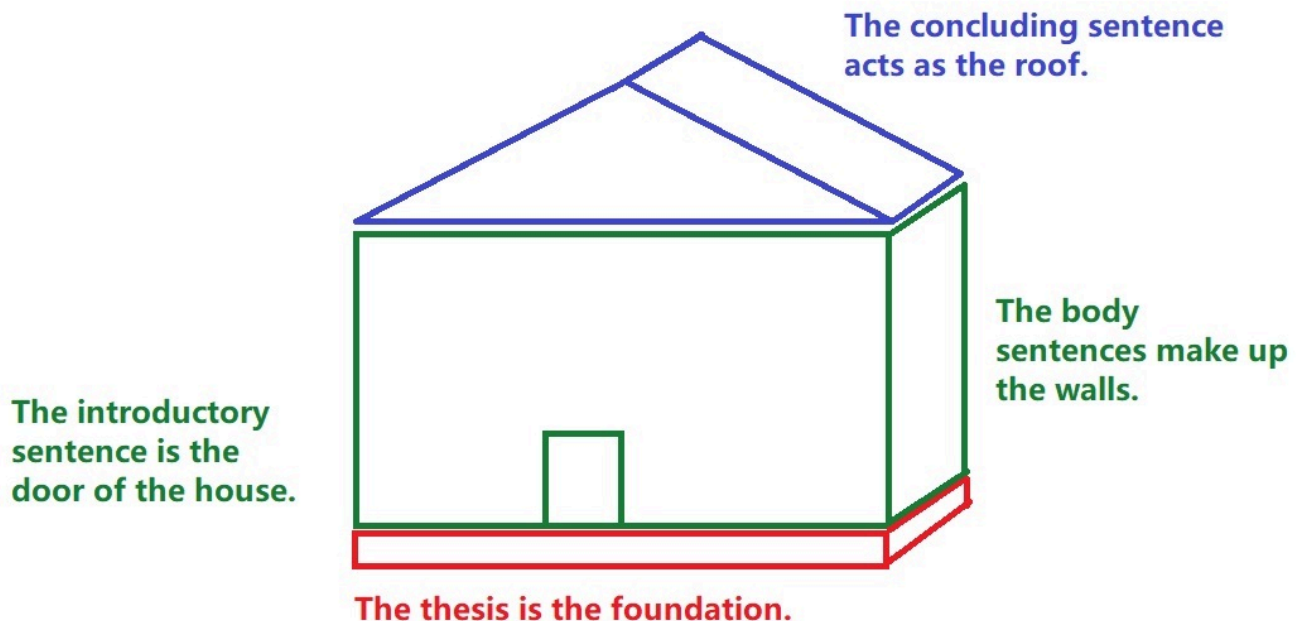


Figure 3.1 Components of the expository paragraph as the parts of a house.

Much like the categories are essential to clarifying the topic, organization is the key to any well-developed paragraph. When composing your paragraph, think of its organization as a house, with each

major part of a house representing a component of a paragraph. Just as the foundation provides support on which a house can be built, a thesis represents the foundation upon which to build a paragraph. The introductory sentence then functions as both the door and the framework for an expository paragraph. Like a house door, the introductory sentence must allow the reader to enter the paragraph. Additionally, just as walls are built upon the framework of a house, the body sentences of a paragraph are organized around the framework or the organizational scheme that is presented in the introductory sentence. The body sentences, much like the walls of a house, must be firm, strong and complete. Finally, a paragraph must include a concluding sentence that tops off the paragraph, much like a roof completes a house. As the roof cements the structure of the house and helps hold the walls in place, the concluding sentence must sum up the point of your body sentences and complete the paragraph.

Although the overall organization of an expository paragraph is important, you must also understand the organization of each component (the introductory, body, and concluding sentences) of your paragraph. The sections below identify the essential parts of each component of your paragraph, explaining the necessary information for each type of sentence.

While the guidelines listed below may feel constrictive, they are merely meant to guide you as a writer. Ultimately, the guidelines should help you write more effectively. The more familiar you become with how to organize a paragraph, the more energy you can focus on your ideas and your writing. As a result, your writing will improve as your ability to organize your ideas improves. Plus, focusing your energy on your argument and ideas rather than the organization makes your job as a writer more exciting and fun.

## Introductory Sentences

A strong introductory sentence is crucial to the development of an effective expository paragraph. Unlike a persuasive paragraph, which takes a stand or forms an opinion about a subject, an expository paragraph is used when the writer wishes to explain or clarify a topic to the reader. In order to properly explain a topic, an expository paragraph breaks it into parts, explains each component in relation to the whole, and uses each component to justify the explanation of the topic. Thus, when writing an introductory sentence, it is crucial to include the explanation or clarification of the topic and the categories or components used to produce this explanation.

### **Introductory sentences**

- Introduce the issue.
- Present the topic and its explanation or clarification.
- Provide the categories used to explain the topic.
- Provide the thesis statement.

Since the success of the paragraph rests on the introductory sentence, it is important to understand its

essential components. Usually, when expository paragraphs fail to provide a clear explanation, it is not because the writer lacks explanations or clarifications, but rather because the explanations are not properly organized and identified in the introductory sentence. One of the most important jobs of an introductory sentence is that it introduces the topic or issue. Most explanations cannot be clarified without at least some background information. Thus, it is essential to provide a foundation for your topic before you begin explaining. For instance, if you wanted to explain what happened at the first Olympic Games, your introductory sentence would first need to briefly mention how the first games happened. In doing so, you ensure that your audience is as informed about your topic as you are, and thus, you make it easier for your audience to understand your explanation.

Below, the main jobs of the introductory sentence are described and explained in detail.

## **The purposes of introductory sentences**

### **Introductory sentences introduce the topic and suggest why it is important.**

**Example:** An analysis of the essay exam results of the new English class shows that the new class format promotes close reading and better essay organization.

This sentence tells the reader both that the topic of the paper will be the benefits of the new English class and that the significance of these benefits is the improvement of close reading and essay organization.

### **Introductory sentences outline the structure of the paragraph and highlight the main ideas.**

**Example:** Considering the results of the high school exit exam, it is apparent that the school curriculum is not properly addressing basic math skills, such as fractions, percentages and long division.

This sentence indicates the main ideas (fractions, percentages and long division) of the paragraph and indicates the order in which they will be presented in the body sentences.

### **Introductory sentences state the thesis.**

**Example:** University and college work experience programs will require all students to take a résumé and cover letter writing workshop in order to better prepare them for employment.

This thesis statement indicates the explanation of the paragraph.

In addition to introducing the topic of your paragraph, your introductory sentence also needs to introduce each of the points you will cover in your body sentences. By providing your audience with an idea of the points you will make in your paragraph, your introductory sentence serves as a guide map, not only for your audience, but also for you. Including your main points in your introductory sentence not only allows your audience to understand where your paragraph is headed, but also helps you as a writer remember how you want to organize your paragraph. This is especially helpful if you are not writing your paragraph in one sitting, as it allows you to leave and return to your paragraph without forgetting all of the important points you wanted to make.

**Table 3.7 Dos and don'ts of introductions**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture the interest of your reader.</li> <li>• Introduce the issue to the reader.</li> <li>• State the problem simply.</li> <li>• Write in an intelligible, concise manner.</li> <li>• Refute any counterpoints.</li> <li>• State the thesis, preferably in one arguable statement.</li> <li>• Provide each of the arguments that will be presented in each of the body sentences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apologize: Do not suggest that you are unfamiliar with the topic. (<b>Example:</b> <i>I cannot be certain, but ...</i>)</li> <li>• Use sweeping generalizations. (<b>Example:</b> <i>All men like football ...</i>)</li> <li>• Use a dictionary definition. (<b>Example:</b> <i>According to the dictionary, a humble person is ...</i>)</li> <li>• Announce your intentions: Do not directly state what you will be writing about. (<b>Example:</b> <i>In this paper, I will ...</i>)</li> </ul>

Most importantly, when writing an introductory sentence, it is essential to remember that you must capture the interest of your reader. Thus, it is your job as the writer to make the introduction entertaining or intriguing. In order to do so, consider using a quotation, a surprising or interesting fact, an anecdote, or a humorous story. While the quotation, story, or fact you include must be relevant to your paragraph, placing one of these at the beginning of your introduction helps you not only capture the attention of the reader, but also introduce your topic and argument, making your introduction interesting to your audience and useful for your argument and paragraph.

## Body Sentences

In an expository paragraph, the body sentences are where the writer has the opportunity to explain or clarify their viewpoint. By the concluding sentence, the writer should adequately clarify the topic for the reader. Regardless of a strong thesis statement that properly indicates the major subtopics of the paragraph, paragraphs with weak body sentences fail to properly explain the topic and indicate why it is important. Body sentences of an expository paragraph are weak when no examples are used to help illuminate the topic being discussed or when they are poorly organized. Occasionally, body sentences are also weak because the quotes used complicate rather than simplify the explanation. Thus, it is essential to use appropriate support and to adequately explain your support within your body sentences.

In order to create a body sentence that is properly supported and explained, it is important to understand the components that make up a strong body sentence. The bullet points below indicate the essential components of a well-written, well-argued body sentence.

### Body sentences

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Support the argument with useful and informative quotes from sources such as books, journal articles, expert opinions, etc.
- Briefly explain each quote and indicate its significance.
- Ensure that the information provided is relevant to the thesis statement.
- Transition into the next body sentence.

Just as your introduction must introduce the topic of your paragraph, the first body sentence must introduce the main subpoint for that sentence. For instance, if you were writing a body sentence for a paragraph explaining the factors that led to Canadian conscription in World War II, one body sentence could discuss the impact of Canada's relationship with Britain on the decision to conscript Canadian men. To do so, you would begin by explaining why Canada felt obliged to come to Britain's aid. Your audience now knows what the paragraph is explaining, and you can also keep track of your ideas.

Following the topic sentence, you must provide some sort of fact that supports your claim. In the example of the World War II paragraph, maybe you would provide a quote from a historian. After your quote or fact, you must always explain what the quote or fact is saying, stressing what you believe is most important about your fact. It is important to remember that your audience may read a quote and decide it is indicating something entirely different than what you think it is explaining. Or, maybe some of your readers think another aspect of your quote is important. If you do not explain the quote and indicate what portion of it is relevant to your clarification, then your reader may become confused or may be unconvinced by your explanation. Consider the possible interpretations for the statement below.

**Example:** While Canada's involvement in World War II did not lead to as many young men dying as in Britain, a generation was still deeply affected.

Interestingly, this statement seems to be saying two things at once: that Canada's young men were not killed in the same numbers as those of other Allied countries, and that the number of deaths nonetheless marked a generation. On the one hand, the historian seems to say that the two outcomes are not directly linked. On the other hand, the historian also indicates that the two outcomes are linked in that the deaths caused Canada to be impacted by the war. Because of the tension in this quotation, if you used it for your World War II paragraph, you would need to explain that the significant portion of the quote is the assertion that links the outcomes.

In addition to explaining what this quote is saying, you would also need to indicate why this is important to your explanation. When trying to indicate the significance of a fact, it is essential to try to answer the "so what." Imagine you have just finished explaining your quote to someone and they have asked you "so what?" The person does not understand why you have explained this quote, not because you have not explained the quote well, but because you have not told them why they need to know

what the quote means. This—the answer to the “so what”—is the significance of your paragraph and is essentially your clarification within the body sentences.

## Concluding Sentences

The concluding sentence of an expository paragraph is an author’s last chance to create a good impression. Hence, it is important to restate the thesis statement at the beginning of the sentence in order to remind the reader of your topic and explanation. Since it is at the end of the paragraph, the concluding sentence also should add a sense of closure and finality to the clarification of the paragraph. It is important to re-emphasize the main idea without being repetitive or introducing an entirely new idea or subtopic. While your concluding sentence can suggest further research or investigation, do not make this question the focus of the sentence. Thus, you should briefly and concisely reiterate the strongest clarifications of the paragraph, reminding the reader of the validity of your thesis or explanation and bringing closure to your paragraph.

### Example

The following is an example of a paragraph that describes why graduating from college is harder than graduating from high school. The paragraph has been broken up to describe the purpose of each sentence (or group of sentences).

**Table 3.8 An example paragraph**

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Example</b>
Topic sentence	There are several reasons why graduating from college is harder than graduating from high school; however, the most important reason is the lack of support.
Introduce and explain one major point that supports your topic sentence. Be sure to provide adequate information to both explain the point and connect the point to your topic.	While in high school, the school and the teachers monitor and enforce a student's attendance, yet in college, a student's attendance is not monitored and they can decide whether or not to attend class. As a result, many students may choose to go to the beach or to the mall rather than school.
Introduce and explain the second major point that supports your topic sentence. Be sure to provide adequate information to both explain the point and connect the point to your topic.	Though a college student's grades may suffer from missing a scheduled class meeting, high school students are given detention or other forms of punishment. To many college students, this lack of consequences seems freeing, yet it actually reflects a lack of support. Without the college or professors supporting a student's attendance, the student must make these decisions on their own.
Introduce and explain the third major point that supports your topic sentence. Be sure to provide adequate information to both explain the point and connect the point to your topic.	This situation can also be exacerbated by a lack of nearby family and friends. A large number of college students move away from home to attend college, whereas most high school students still live with their parents. Due to this, college students may not have the same support system as high school students.
A body paragraph can contain as many points as needed to explain and support the topic sentence.	What is more, some college students may be the only individual from their high school to attend a university. Thus, in addition to leaving their family, a student may find themselves friendless.
Concluding/transition sentence	Despite the hazardous effects that this lack of support may produce, there are also several other factors that affect a college student's ability to succeed

**Concluding sentences**

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Briefly summarize the main points of the paragraph.
- Provide a strong and effective close for the paragraph.

**Table 3.9 Dos and don'ts of conclusions**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress the importance of the thesis.</li> <li>• Include a brief summary of the main idea.</li> <li>• Be concise.</li> <li>• Provide a sense of closure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rework your introduction or thesis statement.</li> <li>• Use overused phrases. (<b>Example:</b> <i>In summary ...</i> or <i>In conclusion ...</i>)</li> <li>• Announce what you have written in the body of the paragraph. (<b>Example:</b> <i>In this paragraph, I have emphasized the importance of ...</i>)</li> <li>• Apologize. (<b>Example:</b> <i>Although I do not have all the answers ...</i>)</li> <li>• Make absolute claims. (<b>Example:</b> <i>This proves that the government should ...</i>)</li> </ul>

You may feel that the concluding sentence is redundant or unnecessary. However, do not forget that this is your last chance to explain the significance of your argument to your audience. Just as your body sentences strive to present the significance of each fact or quote you use, your concluding sentence should sum up the significance of your argument. Thus, you should consider making a bold statement in your concluding sentence by evoking a vivid image, suggesting results or consequences related to your argument, or ending with a warning. Through using these strategies, you not only make your concluding sentence more exciting, but you also make your paragraph and your argument more important.

#### Review Questions

1. What are three of the main purposes of an introductory sentence?
2. What should you never do in an introductory sentence?
3. How should you refute counterpoints?
4. What is the formula for a well-argued body sentence?
5. What should you include in a concluding sentence? What should you never include in a concluding sentence?



## Points to Consider

- a. Write an expository paragraph about your favourite movie or book, paying special attention to why a certain book or movie is your favourite. Be sure to briefly but adequately summarize the movie or book in order to provide a concise and comprehensible explanation. Additionally, be sure to use concrete details and examples to explain why you enjoy the book or movie you are writing about. Simply summarizing the plot will not explain to the reader why the book or movie is entertaining to you.
- b. Write an expository paragraph about a historical event, indicating at least three factors that contributed to its development. For instance, you could discuss how factors such as residential schools led to the reconciliation movement. A factor could be an event, an individual, or a movement that is historically significant. In order to properly show how certain factors caused or contributed to a specific event, you must clarify both the factors and the event itself.



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## 3.4 Persuasive Paragraphs

### Learning Objectives

- Organize arguments in a logical and persuasive order.
- Provide appropriate support in the form of quotations, statistics, expert opinions, and commonly accepted facts
- Clarify the meaning and significance of the main arguments.
- Identify and refute relevant counterpoints.

The main aim of a persuasive paragraph is to make an effective argument. Thus, persuasive paragraphs are written as if the writer is attempting to convince their audience to adopt a new belief or behaviour. While expository paragraphs strive to explain or clarify a topic, persuasive paragraphs take a stand on an issue. However, simply having an argument or viewpoint about a topic is not enough. In persuasive paragraphs, writers must also support their claims. Typically, persuasive paragraphs support their arguments through the use of appropriate evidence, such as quotations, examples, expert opinions, or other facts. Nevertheless, simply having a viewpoint and supporting evidence is still not enough to write a strong persuasive paragraph. In addition to these two things, a writer must also have strong organization.

Organization is the key to any well-developed paragraph. When composing your paragraph, think of its organization as a set of blocks balanced between two triangles (see Figure 3.2). Each block represents the main arguments of your paragraph, while the two triangles stand for your introductory and concluding sentences, respectively. Just as the top triangle comes to a point before leading into the blocks, your introductory sentence should make your thesis before your paragraph jumps to the supporting sentences. These supporting sentences, as the blocks suggest, should be full of information and logically solid. Just as the stability and balance of the shapes rests on the solidity of the blocks, the stability of the argument of the paragraph rests on the success of the body sentences. Much like the introductory sentence that precedes it, your concluding sentence should restate your thesis statement and the main argument of your paragraph, allowing your paragraph to end on a firm base.

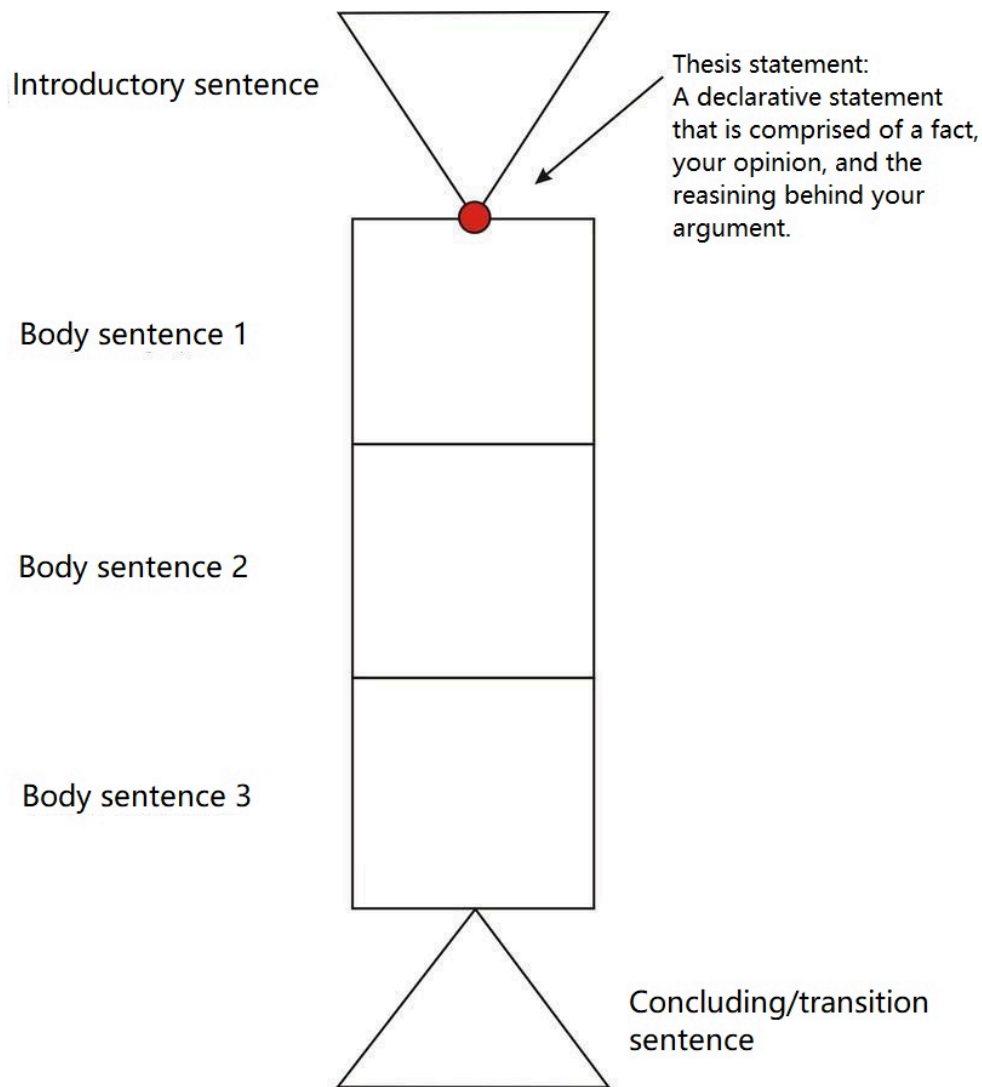


Figure 3.2 A representation of the organization of a persuasive paragraph.

The sections below identify the major components of each part of a persuasive paragraph. Keep in mind that these guidelines are not meant to hinder your voice as a writer, but rather to strengthen your effectiveness as a writer. Though you may sometimes feel constricted by this organizational framework, it is essential to compose a paragraph that contains all of these parts in order to make a strong argument. Plus, once you get acquainted with how to organize a persuasive paragraph, you will be able to use your creative juices in the actual writing of the paragraph. Rather than focusing on where to put an idea, you can focus on how to express or explain, which makes your job as a writer easier and more exciting.

## Introductory Sentences

A strong introductory sentence is crucial to the development of an effective persuasive paragraph. Without an introductory sentence that properly introduces both the topic *and* the writer's argument, persuasive paragraphs fail to convince the reader of the validity of the argument. Since the introductory

sentence contains the thesis statement, or the core argument and purpose of the paragraph, introductory sentences are essential to the overall success of the paragraph.

### **Introductory sentences**

- Introduce the issue.
- Preview the argument that will appear in the body.
- Provide each of the arguments that will later appear in each body sentence.
- Refute any counterpoints to the argument.
- Provide the thesis statement.

Since the success of the paragraph rests on the introductory sentence, it is important to understand its essential components. Usually, when persuasive paragraphs fail to make a clear argument, it is not because the writer's ideas or opinions are wrong, but rather because the argument is not properly explained in the introduction. One of the most important jobs of an introductory sentence is to introduce the topic or issue. Most arguments cannot be made without at least some background information. Thus, it is essential to provide a foundation for your topic before you begin explaining your argument. For instance, if you wanted to argue that the animation in the movie *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is innovative, your introductory sentence would first need to provide background information about movie animation. By doing so, you ensure that your audience is as informed about your topic as you are, and thus, you make it easier for your audience to understand your argument.

Below, the main jobs of the introductory sentence are described and explained in detail.

## **The purposes of introductory sentences**

### **Introductory sentences introduce the topic and suggest why it is important.**

**Example:** An analysis of the Vancouver Island University Writing Centre survey answers reveals that a significant portion of tutees improved their writing skills, and this has correlated to an improvement on their essay scores.

This sentence tells the reader both that the topic of the paragraph will be the benefits of the Writing Centre and that the significance of these benefits is the improvement of essay scores.

### **Introductory sentences outline the structure of the paragraph and highlight the main ideas.**

**Example:** Considering the dropout rate of high-schoolers in Canada, it is apparent that schools are not addressing the social conditions that lead students to fail.

This sentence provides the main ideas of the paragraph and indicates the order in which they will be presented in the body sentences.

**Introductory sentences state the thesis.**

**Example:** Kwantlen Polytechnic University should require all students to enrol in Creative Writing courses in order to better prepare them for employment.

This thesis statement indicates the argument of the paragraph.

In addition to introducing the topic of your paragraph, your introductory sentence also needs to introduce each of the arguments you will cover in your body sentences. By providing your audience with an idea of the points or arguments you will make later in your paragraph, your introductory sentence serves as a road map not only for your audience but also for you. Including your main subpoints in your introduction not only allows your audience to understand where your paragraph is headed, but also helps you as a writer remember how you want to organize your paragraph. This is especially helpful if you are not writing your paragraph in one sitting, as it allows you to leave and return to your paragraph without forgetting all of the important points you wanted to make.

Another common—though often forgotten—component of an introductory sentence is the refutation of counterarguments. In order for your argument to appear strong, and in order for your audience to know that you considered the arguments against your claim, it is essential to refute or disprove counterarguments (arguments against your thesis) in your introductory sentence. The most common error writers make when dealing with counterarguments is to not refute them. Sometimes, a writer forgets to show how the counterarguments are wrong and how their argument is correct. To avoid this error, consider using the sentence constructions in the list below that help refute counterarguments. By using words such as “while,” “although,” “yet,” or “however” in compound sentences, you can be sure that you are properly refuting any counterarguments to your argument while supporting your own claims.

In the examples listed below, *X* is the counterargument and *Y* is the writer’s argument:

- While most people believe *X*, *Y* is true.
- Although people argue *X*, *Y* is correct.
- This expert claims *X*, yet this expert in the same field argues *Y*.
- This book says *X*; however, this book indicates that *Y* is true.

There are also some important dos and don’ts when it comes to writing introductory sentences. It is crucial when writing your persuasive paragraph to avoid apologizing or using sweeping generalizations, since both undermine your argument. If you continue to apologize in your paragraph, you make your argument seem weak, and thus your audience is unconvinced. Likewise, if you base your argument on a generalization or stereotype—something which your audience will likely disagree with—your entire argument will lose credit or validity. Also, it is important not to rely too heavily on dictionary definitions, especially in your thesis. A thesis must be composed of a fact and a viewpoint. Thus, if you base your argument on a definition, which is an irrefutable fact, your thesis is no longer a point of view but a truth.

**Table 3.10 Dos and don'ts of introductions**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capture the interest of your reader.</li> <li>• Introduce the issue to the reader.</li> <li>• State the problem simply.</li> <li>• Write in an intelligible, concise manner.</li> <li>• Refute any counterpoints.</li> <li>• State the thesis, preferably in one arguable statement.</li> <li>• Provide each of the arguments that will be presented in each of the body sentences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apologize: Do not suggest that you are unfamiliar with the topic. (<b>Example:</b> <i>I cannot be certain, but ...</i>)</li> <li>• Use sweeping generalizations. (<b>Example:</b> <i>All men like football ...</i>)</li> <li>• Use a dictionary definition. (<b>Example:</b> <i>According to the dictionary, a humble person is ...</i>)</li> <li>• Announce your intentions: Do not directly state what you will be writing about. (<b>Example:</b> <i>In this paper, I will ...</i>)</li> </ul>

Most importantly, when writing an introductory sentence, it is essential to remember that you must capture the interest of your reader. Thus, it is your job as the writer to make the introduction entertaining or intriguing. In order to do so, consider using a hook, or a quotation, a surprising or interesting fact, an anecdote, or a humorous story. While the quotation, story, or fact you include must be relevant to your paragraph, placing one of these at the beginning of your introduction helps you not only capture the attention of the reader, but also introduce your topic and argument, making your introduction interesting to your audience and useful for your argument and paragraph. However, after using a hook, you must transition from the quote, fact, or story that is used into the main topic of your paragraph. Often, writers include interesting hooks that they do not connect to their topic or argument. In these instances, the hook detracts from rather than supports the introductory sentence.

## Body Sentences

In a persuasive paragraph, the body sentences are where the writer has the opportunity to argue their viewpoint. By the concluding sentence, the writer should convince the reader to agree with the argument of the paragraph. Regardless of a strong thesis, paragraphs with weak body sentences fail to explain why the argument of the paragraph is both true and important. Body sentences of a persuasive paragraph are weak when no quotes or facts are used to support the thesis or when those used are not adequately explained. Occasionally, body sentences are also weak because the quotes used detract from rather than support the paragraph. Thus, it is essential to use appropriate support and to adequately explain your support within your body sentences.

In order to create a body sentence that is properly supported and explained, it is important to understand the components that make up a strong body sentence. The bullet points below indicate the essential components of a well-written, well-argued body sentence.

**Body sentences**

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Support the argument with useful and informative quotes from sources such as books, journal articles, expert opinions, etc.
- Explain each quote and indicate its significance.
- Ensure that the information provided is relevant to the thesis statement.
- End with a transition which leads into the next body sentence.

Just as your introduction must introduce the topic of your paragraph, the first body sentence must introduce the argument. For instance, if you were writing a body sentence for a paragraph arguing the animation in the movie *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is innovative, one body sentence may begin, “*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* has produced the most surprising animation of any movie so far this decade.” Following this sentence, you would go on to support this one statement by indicating how the movie does this. When you place this statement as the opening of your sentence, not only does your audience know what you are going to argue, but you can also keep track of your ideas.

Your sentences must provide some sort of fact that supports your claim. In the example of the *Spider-Verse* paragraph, maybe you would provide a quote from a movie critic or a prominent animator. After your quote or fact, you must always explain what the quote or fact is saying, stressing what you believe is most important about your fact. It is important to remember that your audience may read a quote and decide it is arguing something entirely different than what you think it is arguing. Or, maybe some of your readers think another aspect of your quote is important. If you do not explain the quote and indicate what portion of it is relevant to your argument, then your reader may become confused or may be unconvinced of your point. Consider the possible interpretations for the statement below.

**Example:** While I did not like the storyline of the movie, I enjoyed the surprising animation in the film. Without the surprising animation, the storyline would have been boring and the characters would have been unoriginal.

Interestingly, this statement seems to be saying two things at once: that the movie is bad and that the movie is good. On the one hand, the person seems to say that the storyline and characters of the movie were both bad. On the other hand, the person also says that the animation more than makes up for the bad storyline and unoriginal characters. Because of this tension in the quotation, if you used this quote in your *Spider-Verse* paragraph, you would need to explain that the animation in the movie is so good that it makes a boring movie exciting.

In addition to explaining what this quote is saying, you would also need to indicate why this is important to your argument. When trying to indicate the significance of a fact, it is essential to try to answer the “so what.” Imagine you have just finished explaining your quote to someone, and they have asked you “so what?” The person does not understand why you have explained this quote, not because you have not explained the quote well, but because you have not told them why they need to know



what the quote means. This—the answer to the “so what”—is the significance of your paragraph and is essentially your argument within the body sentences. However, it is important to remember that, generally, a body sentence will contain more than one quotation or piece of support. Thus, you must repeat the quotation-explanation-significance formula several times within your body sentences to argue the one subpoint indicated in your topic sentence.

## Concluding Sentences

The concluding sentence of a persuasive paragraph is an author’s last chance to create a good impression. Hence, it is important to restate the thesis statement at the beginning of the sentence in order to remind the reader of your argument. Since it is at the end of the paragraph, the concluding sentence should also add a sense of closure and finality to the argument of the paragraph. It is important to re-emphasize the main idea without being repetitive or introducing an entirely new idea or subtopic. While you can end your concluding sentence by suggesting a topic for further research or investigation, do not make this question the focus of the sentence. Thus, you should briefly and concisely reiterate the strongest arguments of the paragraph, reminding the reader of the validity of the thesis and bringing closure to your paragraph.

### Concluding sentences

- Begin by reflecting the argument of the thesis statement.
- Briefly summarize the main points of the paragraph.
- Provide a strong and effective close for the paragraph.

### Example

The following is an example of a persuasive paragraph that argues for the importance of paragraph organization. The paragraph has been broken up to describe the purpose of each sentence (or group of sentences).

**Table 3.11 An example persuasive paragraph**

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Example</b>
Topic sentence	The strength of a body paragraph lies in its organization.
Quote/Support #1	According to <i>The Bedford Handbook</i> , “the body of the essay develops support for [the] thesis, so it’s important to have at least a tentative thesis before [one starts] writing” (Hacker 38).
Explanation (1 to 2 sentences)	As this quote suggests, it is hard for a writer to support his or her thesis in a body paragraph before the thesis has even been developed. Thus, it is crucial to decide upon a thesis before starting to compose the body, or support, of an essay.
Significance (1 to 3 sentences)	Writing an essay in this order will ensure that the body paragraph argues the point which the writer is trying to make.
Quote/Support #2	What’s more, it is always important to “sketch a preliminary outline” and “draft the body of [the] essay by writing a paragraph about each supporting point listed in the planning stage” (Hacker 38).
Explanation (1 to 2 sentences)	In creating both an outline and a draft, the writer will begin creating his or her body paragraphs before the final draft is even begun.
Significance (1 to 3 sentences)	Moreover, this process will ensure that the writer never forgets any of his or her key points since they have already been written down. Hence, the writer can leave and revisit his or her work without fear of forgetting or losing any of the key arguments of the paper.
Concluding/Transition sentence	Although organization is essential to the effectiveness of a body paragraph, there are other factors which contribute to its overall strength.

**Table 3.12 Dos and don'ts of conclusions**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress the importance of the thesis.</li> <li>• Include a brief summary of the main idea.</li> <li>• Be concise.</li> <li>• Provide a sense of closure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rework your introduction or thesis statement.</li> <li>• Use overused phrases. (<b>Example:</b> <i>In summary ... or In conclusion ...</i>)</li> <li>• Announce what you have written in the body of the paragraph. (<b>Example:</b> <i>In this paragraph, I have emphasized the importance of ...</i>)</li> <li>• Apologize. (<b>Example:</b> <i>Although I do not have all the answers ...</i>)</li> <li>• Make absolute claims. (<b>Example:</b> <i>This proves that the government should ...</i>)</li> </ul>

You may feel that the concluding sentence is redundant or unnecessary; however, do not forget that this is your last chance to explain the significance of your argument to your audience. Just as your body sentences strive to present the significance of each fact or quote you use, your concluding sentence should sum up the significance of your argument. Thus, you should consider making a bold statement in your concluding sentence by evoking a vivid image, suggesting results or consequences related to your argument, or ending with a warning. Through using these strategies, you not only make your concluding sentence more exciting, but you also make your paragraph, and your argument, more important.

#### Review Questions

1. What are three of the main purposes of an introductory sentence?
2. What should you never do in an introductory sentence?
3. How should you refute counterpoints?
4. What is the formula for a well-argued body sentence?
5. What should you include in a concluding sentence? What should you never include in a concluding sentence?

#### Points to Consider

- a. Write a persuasive paragraph arguing for or against a community service requirement that high school students must fulfill in order to graduate. If you are arguing for the requirement, be sure to

specify what the requirement entails (i.e., how many hours or where it needs to be completed) in addition to supporting the use of the requirement. If you are arguing against the requirement, be sure to address counterpoints in addition to supporting your claims fully.

- b. Write a persuasive paragraph about the impact of one type of media—such as social media, video games, television, movies, or magazines—on high school aged (15–18) and junior high school aged (12–14) children. Should parents regulate both age groups' access to these forms of media? Or should only one group be monitored? If so, which? Do social media, video games, television, magazines, etc., affect one group more than the other? Use specific examples to support your ideas.

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## Chapter 4: Summary

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the main idea and relevant details in summarizing another’s writing.
- Indicate your own point of view while fairly representing your source’s ideas.
- Accurately summarize while selecting details relevant to your argument.
- Write an interesting first sentence of your summary.
- Make a strong counterargument and refute it.

Summary often seems like a low-level skill, hardly worth practising. After all, we’ve been doing it our whole lives. “That book looks interesting. What’s it about?” Simply answering such a question, however casually, requires us to accurately summarize the plot, characters, and narrative in a sentence or two so our questioner gets a sense of the book’s flavour.

Summary, however, is also the underpinning of academic writing. That’s because, before you can engage with the work of others—the knowledge that came before—you have to represent it to your reader, who likely hasn’t done the research you have and is thus relying on you to bring them up to speed.



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## 4.1 Accurate Summary

You learned about argument in [Chapter 3.4: Persuasive Paragraphs](#). Think of summary as laying the groundwork for your own persuasive writing.

There is no one way to summarize. Some people use diagrams or outlines, which is perfectly fine. If you're stuck, however, you can go over each paragraph and jot down a few notes representing the ideas in it. You can then write those notes up, going over them to select the ones most relevant to your eventual aim. For example, if you want to claim that the Prime Minister's residential schools apology was too little, too late, you may wish to focus your summary details on the timeline leading up to the apology. You can then use those details as evidence for your eventual argument.

Your summary must be completely accurate, however. Representing the work of another inaccurately ("according to X, the Prime Minister didn't really think the apology was important") is a serious matter in academic writing. It's considered as bad as not citing the work of others. Thus, in summary:

**Make sure you are just as careful to represent the source accurately as you are to express your own point of view accurately.**

### Review Questions

1. Read and summarize the source you found for question 1 in [Chapter 1.1: Finding Sources](#). What is your source's main idea? What are some details that will help the reader understand the main idea?
2. Exchange summaries with a classmate. See if the two of you can guess each other's views on the Prime Minister's residential schools apology. How do you know?





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## 4.2 Representing Counterarguments

When summarizing a source, you may disagree with the argument. That’s fine. It’s also fine if you agree, although you may have to work harder to add something to the previous work in your own essay, as you’ll see in [Chapter 5: The Essay](#). Finally, because you are aiming for a nuanced argument, you may in fact agree with some parts of the argument, and disagree with others. That’s also fine.

Your own reaction is important, because it provides the spur to your writing. Ideally, it also makes the writing interesting to your reader. Remember, it is your job to “hook” the reader by providing some combination of interesting details, information, ideas, and a point of view in your summary. Ideally, you do this in the first sentence, as described in [Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure](#). But “hooking” the reader can also be done throughout your summary.

One way to make your summary interesting is to compare and contrast your point of view with the viewpoint found in your source. If the source disagrees with your argument, it is called a counterargument.

Don’t be afraid of conflict in your writing. Simply make sure that you do two things when you disagree with your source. As noted above, relate the source’s counterargument with as much persuasive power as you can. Secondly, be sure to refute the counterargument.

As described in [Chapter 3.4: Persuasive Paragraphs](#), the better you refute, or disprove, a counterargument, the stronger your own argument becomes. Seeing you handle a counterargument (“Some say the Prime Minister’s apology came at the perfect time. However, it is important to note that ...”) dispels any doubts the reader may have (“But what about ...”) and persuades them to go along with your point of view.

### Review Questions

1. Look at the first sentence of the summary you wrote for question 1 in [Chapter 4.1: Accurate Summary](#). If you can find a hook, underline it. If there is no hook in the first sentence, go back to the source and see if you can find one: an interesting fact or example, your view, or a counterargument you plan to refute. Exchange your first sentence with a classmate. Do your first sentences “hook” each other as readers? Why or why not?
2. If you disagree with the source you found for question 1 in [Chapter 1.1: Finding Sources](#), state that counterargument as strongly as you can. Then refute it. If you agree, make up a counterargument (“Some say the Prime Minister’s apology came at the perfect time”). Then refute it. (Hint: You may wish to use the suggested X and Y format in Chapter 3.4 Persuasive Paragraphs.)



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## Chapter 5: The Essay

### Learning Objectives

- Combine your knowledge of paragraphs and summary in a longer format.
- Write the parts of an essay: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.
- Practise writing either a descriptive, narrative, expository, or persuasive essay.
- Practise five ways to hook the reader with your first sentence.
- Back up your claim with relevant evidence.
- Differentiate evidence from experience and evidence from a source.
- Signal your point of view in your first sentence so it is clear to the reader.

Now that you have practised writing different types of paragraphs—including descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive—as well as learning how to summarize, you’re ready to put your skills to work in a longer piece of writing: the essay.

Essays require you to use many of the skills you learned, such as argument, exposition, summary, “hooking” the reader, and so forth, in a more extended format. Ideally, they capture the reader’s attention and keep it throughout by expressing what you want to say in a lively and forthright manner, as well as including evidence for your claim. You also explain the relevance of your evidence and clearly indicate where it comes from.



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## 5.1 The Introduction

Essay introductions are longer versions of the introductory sentences you practised in [Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure](#). Remember how, in [Chapter 3.3: Expository Paragraphs](#), an expository paragraph was described as being like a house? The introductory sentence functioned as the door, inviting readers into the paragraph as well as indicating its general framework.

The introduction to your essay functions in much the same way. Your introduction is organized just like the introductory sentences you practised writing in Chapter 3. Your introductory paragraph does the same four things:

- Introduces the issue and gives a preview of your claim.
- Presents the topic and its explanation or clarification.
- Provides the categories used to explain the topic.
- Provides the thesis statement.

Organizing your introduction is important because it primes the reader to understand your topic more clearly and to learn any background information they might need to follow your explanation. You can think of the introductory paragraph of your essay as the door to and framework of a house, but you can also think of it as a road map for both your reader and yourself, indicating where the essay will go.

Part of that road map involves introducing your point of view. In the introduction, you'll only briefly indicate your point of view, but it will signal to your reader the direction you're going. See [Chapter 5.5: Your Point of View](#) for more on this.

The introduction to your essay also introduces your tone and style. These topics are covered in [Chapter 11: Tone and Style](#). For now, you simply need to know that your introduction establishes an academic (as opposed to informal) tone. Your introduction's style—the way you structure your sentences, the order in which you present information to the reader—also establishes the reader's trust in you.

**Basically, your tone and style convey that you are a trustworthy academic writer—worth reading, in other words.**

You have one final job to do in your introduction: you need to capture your reader's interest. You can think of this as “hooking” your reader. Stimulating your reader's curiosity will make it more likely your essay will be read to the end.

**Table 5.1 Examples of gripping introductions**

Topic	Type of Hook	Example
Residential schools apology	Quote	“This should never have happened to Canadians,” proclaimed John Doe, in ...
Odd phobias	Interesting fact	Did you know that one in ten adults suffers from a fear of opening envelopes?
How to find a good job	Anecdote	When my friend applied for a tech internship, she was startled when the interviewer wanted to know how <i>she</i> would reorganize the company.
Essay-writing story	Humorous	“Nobody is interested in what you think,” my father told me when I asked him whether I should use “I” in my writing, as my instructor had suggested.

### Review Questions

1. Write an introduction to an essay that will do one of the following:
  - a. Describe a meaningful object that you had when you were younger.
  - b. Narrate the life of someone and the lessons you learned from that person.
  - c. Explain why a certain type of art or a certain sport is your favourite.
  - d. Persuade the reader that the current approach to preventing vaping among youth is wrong.
2. Exchange introductions with a classmate. See if you can find each other’s “hook” in the introductory paragraph. Can you help each other sharpen the hook?

### Points to Consider

- a. How would your first sentence change if you used a different hook? Practice the five different types of hook, making up the quote, fact, etc., as needed.

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## 5.2 The Body

The body of the essay is a longer version of the body sentences you practised in [Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure](#). Just like in those shorter, more concise sentences, you'll need to use the body paragraphs to prove your argument.

You'll need to continue doing the same things you did in the introduction: maintain an academic (as opposed to informal) tone; follow the principles of style outlined in [Chapter 11: Tone and Style](#); continue to indicate your point of view; and introduce and cite your evidence.

Just as you did while practising in Chapter 3, you'll follow the format for a successful body sentence in each sentence of your body paragraph. In review, writing a body paragraph has four steps:

- Begin with a topic sentence that reflects your argument (sometimes called a thesis statement or claim).
- Cite your supporting evidence: quotations, findings, your experience, expert views, etc. (Hint: for more about how to include evidence and how to write about and cite it, see [Chapter 1.2: Citation Styles](#) and [Chapter 5.4: Handling Evidence](#).)
- Briefly explain each piece of evidence and indicate why it is important to your argument.
- Transition into the next body paragraph.

### Review Questions

1. Write a body paragraph that follows from the introduction you wrote for [Chapter 5.1: The Introduction](#). Use the format suggested above. (Hint: For an example of a body paragraph with all of its parts labelled, see Figure 3.2 in [Chapter 3.3: Expository Paragraphs](#).)
2. In a group, read each other's body paragraphs. Can you identify the topic sentence, support or point, explanation, significance, and transition sentence to the next body paragraph? If not, can you help each other revise? (Hint: For a suggested format to help each other revise, please see [Chapter 7.2: Peer Review](#).)





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## 5.3 The Conclusion

The conclusion of an essay is a longer version of the concluding sentences you practised in [Chapter 3: Paragraph Structure](#).

In a conclusion, you tie it all together for the reader, reminding them of your argument and supporting evidence and why it's important. Here's where you can be at your boldest as a writer.

In conclusions, academic writers tend not to tell people what to do. Although in an informal argument with friends or family, you may be used to laying down the law ("Everybody needs to pay attention to this!"), in academic writing, laying out recommendations for individuals is considered beyond your scope. You can, however, recommend changes to policy or further research. Janet Giltrow, in *Academic Writing*, describes this kind of recommendation as a **moral statement**.

The table below gives some examples of different ways you can boldly describe the future that might ensue if your argument is ignored. Note that these statements don't stick strictly to their own type: the vivid image, for example, can also be seen as a warning of results or consequences should the writer's call go unheeded.

**Table 5.2 Examples of bold conclusions**

Type of Statement	Example
Vivid image	The spectre of millions of abandoned bicycles, their tires rotted away and wheel rims glinting in the sun, is one that could come true unless we continue to invest in the infrastructure that allows cyclists to take to the road safely.
Results or consequences	The Prime Minister's apology was, as many have noted, just the first step. Only if the federal government incorporates reconciliation into all of its dealings with Indigenous people can it hope to move beyond the wrongs that its predecessors perpetrated.
Warning	Hockey Canada would no doubt prefer to avoid an expensive, lengthy, and public lawsuit, but that is exactly what will happen if the men's and women's games are not equalized.

### Review Questions

1. You have already written the introductory and body paragraphs—now, write a concluding paragraph for your essay.
2. In a group, read each other's concluding paragraphs. Do they make a bold statement by evoking a vivid image or explaining the significance of your topic? If you wrote a persuasive essay, did you

suggest results or consequences related to your argument, or end with a warning? Is your conclusion exciting and important? If not, how can you revise? (Hint: For a suggested format to help each other revise, please see [Chapter 7.2 Peer Review](#).)

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## 5.4 Handling Evidence

You learned briefly about evidence in [Chapter 3.4 Persuasive Paragraphs](#), which described how you can, and should, use a quote or fact to support your claim.

Your evidence usually comes from one of two places: a source such as the one you found in [Chapter 1.1 Finding Sources](#), or your own personal experience.

In either case, the reader must clearly understand where the evidence comes from.

**Table 5.3 Describing evidence from sources versus experience**

Topic	Evidence from Source	Evidence from Experience
Residential schools apology	According to Jones, the Assembly of First Nations has been asking the government for compensation for decades.	As a proud member of the Squamish Nation, I and most of my friends found the Prime Minister’s apology completely irrelevant.
Effects of technology in classrooms	A study conducted in 2018 found that cellphone use in classrooms distracted not only users, but those around them.	Almost everybody I know uses a smartphone multiple times a day.

### Review Questions

1. Pick a topic of your own, or use one of the above. Decide on a claim (technology is helpful in the classroom, for example). Now invent two pieces of evidence, one from a source and one from experience, that do *not* support your claim.

### Points to Consider

- a. Try going back to the essay that you wrote for this chapter—you should now have the introduction, body, and conclusion. Underline each piece of evidence you provided, and identify it in the margin. Make sure each piece of evidence is strongly tied to either a source or identified as from your experience, as in the examples above.



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## 5.5 Your Point of View

In [Chapter 4: Summary](#), you practised clearly explaining your point of view. Your point of view may have agreed with that of your source. Or you may have disagreed. Or you may have had a mixed reaction: agreeing with some of your source’s point of view, while disagreeing with other parts. All of these responses are valid.

Ideally, the reader gets a hint of your point of view in the introductory paragraph, or even the first sentence. For example, to go back to our topic of the Prime Minister’s residential schools apology, you might begin:

In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a long overdue apology to all those injured by the residential school system in Canada.

The words “long overdue” give the reader the idea that you disagree with the timing of the apology and that your essay may argue that the apology should have come much earlier.

**Table 5.4 Ways to indicate your point of view**

Type of Essay	Point of View Marker
Descriptive	Many people looking at it would see just an old shoe, but in fact, that loafer marked the beginning of my life as an independent person.
Narrative	When I went to visit, Baba often wondered out loud why a young person would want to spend time with an “old woman”—her words, not mine.
Expository	Pretty much everyone in Canada has watched men’s hockey at some point, but despite the sport’s exposure in the 2010 Olympics, millions of Canadians have still never seen a women’s hockey game.
Persuasive	Bike lanes in cities have come in for sharp criticism by—no surprise—drivers.

### Review Questions

1. See how you can change the reader’s impression of your point of view simply by changing a word. What would the reader think, for example, if in the first introductory sentence above, instead of “long overdue,” you wrote “unnecessary”? How about “damaging”?
2. Look at Table 5.4 above. What is the writer’s point of view in each example? Can you predict what each essay will eventually say?
3. Go back to the outline you wrote in [Chapter 2.1 Outlines](#). Write three first sentences of an essay on the topic of future challenges in immigration in Canada.

- a. In the first sentence, agree with a particular point of view.
- b. In the second version, disagree with the same point of view.
- c. In the third version, mix your response. Agree with some parts, but disagree with other parts of the point of view.

#### Points to Consider

- a. Take out the introduction you wrote for [Chapter 5.1 The Introduction](#). No matter what kind of essay introduction you chose, does it clearly indicate your point of view?
- b. See if you can change a single word (as you did in question 1 above) or phrase to indicate an entirely different point of view. If you chose to write an introduction to a biographical essay, for example, and your introduction mentioned how much you had learned from the person, you could revise it to say that you have in fact learned only one thing from this person.

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# Chapter 6: Creative Writing

## Learning Objectives

- Use existing paragraph and essay writing skills to create vivid images in creative writing.
- Write a short story that includes characters, a plot, conflict, and climax.
- Write acrostic, found, and list poems using prompts.
- Write a blog post or journal entry describing a significant moment in your life.
- Revise your blog post using another as a model.

Writing creatively is something that many of us do regularly, but other students have very little experience with. That's okay. With creative writing, especially if you're a beginner, your first goal will simply be to put something—anything—down on paper. Of course, just like with every other kind of writing, you'll have to revise that initial effort, often drastically. And even though we tend to think of creative writing as a special case, we often don't have the luxury of waiting for inspiration to strike if we're assigned a piece of creative writing with a deadline.





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## 6.1 The Short Story

Short stories, like essays, have beginnings, middles, and endings. Sometimes, they play with that structure—starting in the middle, for example, and then using a **flashback** to the past to explain the beginning of the story to the reader—but let’s begin with their simplest form, especially if writing stories is new to you.

Stories have a **protagonist**, also called the **main character**. This person typically wants something. It could be anything: love, a decent night’s rest, to have one last chance to gaze on a particular postage stamp. It’s your job as the writer to make sense of the main character’s desire. Why does she want to look at that particular postage stamp so much? What does it mean to her? The reason behind this desire will help the reader to identify with the main character and to become invested in her story. This is crucial. If we don’t care why she wants to see the stamp, we’re hardly going to stick around to read the rest of the story.

Stories also typically have an **antagonist**. Many antagonists are human—the mother who forbids the main character to jet off to see the postage stamp, for example. But an antagonist can also be a force: the main character’s lack of money to buy that plane ticket, incipient blindness that will prevent her from seeing the stamp when she gets to it, or debilitating anxiety that means she has practically no prospect of making the journey. Even the repressive regime of the character’s country, the one that prevents her from travelling to see the stamp, could be an antagonistic force.

**Table 6.1 Dos and don’ts of short stories**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show, don’t tell, readers what to think.</li><li>• Use vivid, descriptive language employing the five senses.</li><li>• Include a conflict.</li><li>• Incorporate specific, surprising details.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell readers what to think about a given topic. (<b>Example:</b> <i>Gurleen’s father was a terrible man ...</i>)</li><li>• Use clichés. (<b>Example:</b> <i>Van doesn’t have a care in the world ...</i>)</li><li>• Rely on description to carry the story. (<b>Example:</b> <i>It is a beautiful, sunny day. Jonas lives in a house with large windows ...</i>)</li><li>• Include clashing imagery (also known as mixed metaphors). (<b>Example:</b> <i>Coco was ready to seize the hilt of this information gushing forth in a fountain ...</i>)</li></ul>

## Review Questions

1. Use an object in the classroom—someone’s hat or coat, a particular book or piece of furniture—to write a short story. Where does the object come into the story? What is its significance? Who are the characters? What is the conflict?
2. Try mind mapping a story. Start with one element: a setting, a situation, a conflict, or a character, for example. Then use the mind map technique described in [Chapter 2.2 Mind Maps](#) to draw different aspects of the story that you might write about. (Hint: For ways to make your writing come alive, review [Chapter 3.1 Descriptive Paragraphs](#), which gives you lists of words relating to the five senses and explains how to show, not tell, readers about your subject.)

## Points to Consider

- a. See how your story would change if you changed a non-plot element. For example, what if, instead of the story being narrated in the main character’s voice, or first person (“I opened the door”), you changed it to third person (“She opened the door”)? How about if you moved all of the action from past tense (“I opened the door”) to present tense (“I open the door”)? How about if you changed the setting or time period, from, say, a commune in Israel to Soviet Russia, or from the current era to the past?
- b. Trade stories with a classmate. Use the peer review process described in [Chapter 7.2 Peer Review](#) to give each other feedback. Revise your story based on the feedback you received. Do substantial revisions first. As a last step, proofread.

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## 6.2 The Poem

You may have encountered poetry in a variety of forms. Although free verse, where the line breaks do not follow any particular pattern, is the most common in contemporary poetry, there are many additional types of poem. One is the **sonnet**, a rhyming pattern of four-line stanzas with a two-line couplet to finish. Typically, sonnets are written in **iambic pentameter**: stressed and unstressed syllables following each other in a pattern. From Japan, we have the seventeen-syllable, three-line **haiku**, often employed to describe a moment in nature. Experimental Canadian poets have even written entire books out of “found” material (other texts that have been adapted by the poet), or, in the case of Christian Bök’s *Eunoia*, a book divided into chapters in which only one of the vowels is used.

The **villanelle** is an old poetry form that is popular with contemporary poets. Originating in France, the poem has five stanzas of three lines each, finishing with a four-line stanza. The first and third lines of the first stanza are repeated in each following stanza and used to make up the last two lines of the final stanza.

Beginning poets typically wait for inspiration to begin writing. Poetry is seen as something that describes a special moment, and how can one write about a special moment in an everyday mood?

Although this is one way of looking at poetry, it isn’t always helpful when you’re in the classroom and you’ve been asked to write. You probably don’t feel very inspired!

Thinking about different forms your poem could take, different subjects you could write about that are important to you, or simply freewriting a poem and seeing where it goes can be helpful in getting you started. For instructions on freewriting, review [Chapter 2.3 Freewriting](#).

**If you want to write more poetry, simply writing as much of it as you can, in whatever circumstances, is useful practice—as it is with every form of writing.**

**Table 6.2 Dos and don’ts of poetry**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use vivid, descriptive language.</li><li>• Surprise the reader.</li><li>• Show, don’t tell.</li><li>• Connect a series of images in words to build up the mood you want.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use well-worn phrases. (<b>Example:</b> <i>The sun will rise / Like a fiery red ball in the sky</i>)</li><li>• Rely on exposition or explanation (telling rather than showing). (<b>Example:</b> <i>I am feeling / Extremely tired</i>)</li><li>• Write prose broken into lines and call it poetry. (<b>Example:</b> <i>I have a lot / of work to do / My sister calls / and wants to know / will I go out with her tonight?</i>)</li></ul>

## Review Questions

1. Try an acrostic poem. Select a word meaningful to you. Your name is a classic, but there are many other words you could use, including ones describing values or other things you find important. Write the word in capital letters down the left-hand side of your piece of paper, one letter per line. Use each letter to start a line of poetry related to your word.
2. Try making a found poem from a text (or texts) you find. Nisga’a poet Jordan Abel, for example, searched old Western novels for mentions of the word “Injun,” which became the basis for his third book of the same name. Don’t forget that your found text could be a set of instructions, an official letter—anything with words.
3. Write a poem explaining “Where I’m From.” Each line begins “I’m from” and contains a detail or phrase. (Hint: For ways to make your writing come alive, review [Chapter 3.1 Descriptive Paragraphs](#), which gives you lists of words relating to the five senses and explains how to show, not tell, readers about your subject.)

## Points to Consider

- a. You don’t need to stop with one poem. Your poem can be a jumping-off point for other poems or for other forms of creative writing, such as a short story or piece of creative nonfiction. For ideas of what to write next after “Where I’m From,” for example, see [George Ella Lyon’s web page on “Where I’m From”](#).
- b. Try rewriting one of your poems in a different format. Can you turn your acrostic poem into a haiku? Are there two phrases in your found poem you can use in a villanelle?
- c. Find a poem you really like. Study it, and then write a poem of your own. (Hint: To credit your source, write “inspired by,” the poem’s title, and the poet’s name at the top, just under your poem’s title.)
- d. Trade poems with a classmate. Use the peer review process described in [Chapter 7.2 Peer Review](#) to give each other feedback. Revise your poem based on the feedback you received. Do substantial revisions first. As a last step, proofread.

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## 6.3 Creative Nonfiction

There is lots of creative writing that, unlike a short story, contains factual elements. I may write about “Carellin Brooks,” who has had the same past experiences as me and lives the same kind of life today. However, “Carellin Brooks” is a construct. I am writing about her, so she is a character, even though she shares my name and life.

In creative nonfiction, the lines between reality and what you make up can get quite blurry. That is because, however much we set out to write the exact truth, it still needs shaping into a narrative if anyone is going to be interested in reading it.

You will already know this if you have ever listened to people speaking and written down exactly what they say. Unlike in stories, plays, or other forms of writing, people’s speech is littered with phrases like “um,” “you know,” and “well, ah.” Sentences trail off halfway instead of finishing: “Well, then, I guess we’ll just, um, yeah. That makes sense.” It actually does make sense, in the context of the conversation, but if we accurately recorded such dialogue, either we, or the characters we wrote about, would sound like idiots.

In creative nonfiction, you’re also usually setting out to make a point. Your blog post about the latest great book you read is not going to spend time describing what you had for breakfast (unless it’s a cookbook). Instead, you’ll select and order your details to build toward the point you’re making. You could describe all the books you’ve read lately that haven’t been great, for example, and all the things you did to avoid reading them because you were bored, exaggerating for comic effect, perhaps, to emphasize that you couldn’t put this particular book down for even a minute.

**Table 6.3 Dos and don’ts of creative nonfiction**

<b>Things to always do</b>	<b>Things to never do</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk about your specific point of view.</li><li>• Include relevant examples from your own experience.</li><li>• Describe experiences using the five senses.</li><li>• Order your experiences to reinforce the sense of story and make your point stronger.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assume that everyone else feels as you do about a given topic. (<b>Example:</b> <i>We all know that the day you get your driver’s licence is the greatest day of your life ...</i>)</li><li>• Skimp on details. (<b>Example:</b> <i>The house will be exactly the way I want it. I’ll step inside ...</i>)</li><li>• Assume your reader already knows who you are and what you’re like (even if it’s your instructor!). (<b>Example:</b> <i>That’s just like me ...</i>)</li></ul>

### Review Questions

1. Write a blog post or journal entry describing a particular day that is significant to you. Try to choose something of personal significance, rather than a national holiday or general celebration, like graduation. (Hint: For ways to make your writing come alive, review [Chapter 3.1 Descriptive Paragraphs](#), which gives you lists of words relating to the five senses and explains how to show, not tell, readers about your subject.)

### Points to Consider

- a. Trade your writing with a classmate. Use the peer review process described in [Chapter 7.2 Peer Review](#) to give each other feedback. Revise your writing based on the feedback you received. Do substantial revisions first. As a last step, proofread.
- b. Find a blog you like, and see if you can figure out how the writer creates comic effect or stokes your interest. After identifying some of the blogger's strategies, can you use them when you revise your own blog post or journal entry?

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# Chapter 7: Revising Your Work

## Learning Objectives

- Make substantial changes to your own work at either the paragraph or idea level.
- Practise reviewing a peer’s work as a responsive reader.
- Listen to and record a peer’s review comments and use them to revise your work.
- Proofread your work as a last step in the revision process.

Writing down feedback from a classmate or instructor, editing, and proofreading your work all require different skills. To make it easier and help you get the most out of revising, this chapter suggests separating these tasks into three separate steps of the revision process. You may not end up peer reviewing every assignment, but it is helpful to at least make major revisions as a first step and—as a final stage before handing in your work—correct your grammar, punctuation, spelling, word choice, and sentence structure.





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## 7.1 Making Major Changes

Often, beginning writers find the writing process itself difficult enough. After struggling to get a paragraph, poem, or persuasive essay onto paper, you may wonder why on earth you should take the time and trouble to revise the substance of what you wrote. Why run the risk of mixing it up, garbling what you're trying to say, and creating a completely nonsensical piece of writing?

Major changes to your work require you to think differently about what you wrote. Here are some ways in which making major changes can help your work.

Getting used to reordering your ideas can help you to understand which order has the most impact after you've tried out different options. For example, a topic like how you ended up back in school after dropping out could be written chronologically, in the same order it happened: when you dropped out, what you did afterward, and the steps you took to get back into school. Or it could be reordered, starting with the moment you realized you had to go back to school: "I'm sorry," my boss said, handing back my application for promotion. "We only promote graduates." Then you could fill in the backstory: why you dropped out in the first place, what you did afterward, and the steps you took once you realized you had to return to school. Opening your essay with a dramatic moment where you are confronted with the consequences of your lack of credentials could make the reader more interested than if you wrote a simple chronology.

If you are a beginning writer, however, you may want to write step by step first, to make sure you don't miss anything. Reordering your ideas can help you take these steps and put them into a more dramatic sequence. Once you have them all written down, you can also decide which to keep as part of the revision process. Maybe your reader doesn't need to know, for example, that for a few years, you had an unrelated sales job and that you left it for reasons that have nothing to do with your returning to school.

Reordering paragraphs can also help strengthen your entire argument and help the reader to understand the points you are making and (hopefully) come to the same conclusion as you. In a persuasive essay, for example, you will always have several points in support of your claim. Should your points go from most to least important, or vice versa? Is one point a subcategory of another? Should it go afterward to make the link obvious, or before to lead into the bigger point?

### Review Questions

1. Try reordering the ideas in a recent essay you wrote. What do you think is the most effective order of your ideas? Why?
2. Try reordering the paragraphs in a recent essay you wrote. What do you think is the most effective order of your paragraphs? Why?

3. Share your revision and your original with a classmate. See if your classmate can tell which is the first effort and which is your revision. Which is your classmate's favourite? Why?

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## 7.2 Peer Review

The easiest way for others to read and review your work, as well as for you to do so yourself, is in print form. When revising, print the draft as you will the final version: single-sided and double-spaced, with regular size margins. This allows your reader, whether a classmate or your instructor, plenty of room to mark areas that might require revision. If you yourself would like to make marks as your reviewer speaks, provide yourself with a second printout identical to the first. You will get more and clearer feedback, however, if you simply write your reviewer's comments on lined notebook paper.

Take down all of your reviewer's comments. Stifle the almost universal urge to explain or justify your work: "Oh, no, that's not right. See, what I meant by that was ..." You will not be able to accompany your final draft to your instructor's office and comment while she reads it.

### **Remember, your writing needs to speak for itself.**

It is more valuable for you to learn from your reviewer what sentences or ideas caused confusion (so that you can fix them) than it is for him to understand what you actually meant. This is because, since you have read much more on the topic than you wrote, your brain naturally "fills in the blanks" where you left out vital information. You have no way of knowing where you need to add details, reword your work, or otherwise revise by reading over your work yourself. Your peer reviewer, however, probably hasn't researched the subject. He is a blank slate and thus the perfect person to point out any gaps in your writing.

If your reviewer makes a judgment without evidence ("It seems like this is really unclear"), wait until the end, when your instructor may give you a chance to respond to comments. Then ask him for the evidence that led to his judgment ("What parts of it seem unclear to you? How come?"). You need specifics to revise accurately.

Now it's your turn to read your peer's work. Read it over slowly, pausing at the end of each sentence, if not before. Offer a comment based on your experience as a reader. If you see no issues with the sentence, say so, and perhaps offer a summary (this lets him know he is on the right track). "The Kamchatka Peninsula was closed to visitors until 1990.' Okay, well, I guess you're writing about how people from outside couldn't see this place for a long time. I'm curious why." Give your peer time to jot down your comments, then move on to the next sentence.

### **Remember, your job is not to edit or judge your peer's work.**

He's the writer, so he gets to decide what to do with your feedback. There are often multiple ways to solve any writing problem. Pointing out that your classmate has split an infinitive only helps if he doesn't end up changing the sentence or taking it out altogether. Plus, he may not have the grammatical background to understand what you've said. "The people of Kamchatka have worked to tirelessly safeguard their heritage.' Hm. The word 'tirelessly' seems like it could come before 'to'" is a helpful comment anyone could understand.

Take as much time as you can to review your peer's work. It should take you at least twenty minutes to get through a double-spaced page of printed text.

Once you have your reader's comments, it's time for you to edit your work. Take the feedback home and refer to it as you revise your work. You don't need to address every comment, but be clear on the ones you ignore ("He said he didn't get this sentence, but I actually think, because I revised the previous one to add more information, it should probably be clear now"). Your instructor may ask you to report on your editing decisions or hand in your notes, so it's best to have an idea of why you made the editing choices you did.

#### Review Questions

1. Exchange copies of each other's conclusions from [Chapter 5.3 The Conclusion](#). Take turns being the reader and the writer. When you are the reader, read each sentence of the conclusion out loud, pausing at the end of the sentence to give your writer a comment. When you are the writer, simply write down everything your reader says without saying a word.
2. Use your reviewer's comments to revise your conclusion. When you have finished writing, add a short report (two-thirds of a page) explaining what comments you did and didn't address and why.

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## 7.3 Drafting

Some writers swear by writing another draft of a creative work like a poem or short story without looking at the previous one. The idea is that you will remember the most important parts of your previous draft, but your new work will dispense with any unnecessary words or details that may have slowed down your initial draft.

Others draft meticulously, making outlines and referring to the original. Still others don't rewrite at all: they simply incorporate changes into the existing document, an easy thing to do with a computer. Even in this process, however, it can be helpful to see a printout and make your changes on paper before incorporating them into your electronic version. Trying to change an electronic version of your work on a screen is the least effective form of revision and should be avoided.

You'll probably use a mix of forms, unless you hit on one that works for you across all your writing.

### Review Questions

1. Read over a poem you wrote. Now, without looking at it again or even trying to remember what you wrote, rewrite the poem. When you have finished, compare the two. Which do you like better? Why?
2. Write a second draft of an essay using an outline. First, outline your existing essay, if you haven't already. Second, decide what and where you'll change, and incorporate those changes into the outline. Thirdly, rewrite your essay. Does it make a difference if you rewrite by hand versus using your computer? Why or why not?
3. Take your printed work to a space with few distractions (like a library or an unfamiliar café). Read it through, making changes in the margins. Go home and transfer the changes to the electronic version. (Hint: Make sure to print your changes clearly so that you can understand them when it comes time to add them to your electronic document. You may want to use the editing marks found in [Purdue's Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) or elsewhere.)



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## 7.4 Proofreading

Proofreading often challenges us to be a detective of our own mistakes. Once, I submitted an entire manuscript of hundreds of pages to an academic press. When I got back the editor’s changes, which included proofreading, I was embarrassed to see that every time I had used the word “surprise,” I had spelt it as “suprise.” If I’d noted my tendency to misspell that word, I would have looked for it myself.

How can we become mistake detectives? After all, the reason we make mistakes is probably because we don’t notice them in the first place. Again, our classmates and instructor can be a helpful resource here. Look at your instructor’s comments on the last assignment you handed in. Are there any patterns in what they wrote? Is there a type of mistake you make over and over?

Another way to become a detective of your mistakes is to figure out common mistakes for your peer group. Many students, for example, learn in English, but it is not their first language. English uses articles—“the,” “a”—differently from many other languages, and so many additional language learners either forget to put articles where they are needed (“He walked into house”) or write them where they are not (“I want to have the hope”). Seeing this pattern in your peers’ work can give you a clue to look out for similar mistakes in your own work.

### Review Questions

1. Review feedback on a recent assignment, either from a peer or from your instructor. What are some mistake patterns you can find?
2. Start a proofreading log. For each mistake, write the error, and then write a correction. Describe the correct usage (“Articles are used when something is specific, but not for general ideas”) and add a tip for yourself that will help you catch the error in future (“Read the sentence out loud to see if the article sounds like it belongs”).

### Points to Consider

- a. A grammar handbook or reference can be a helpful tool for your assignments. Your instructor may be able to recommend one.
- b. Many schools and even some libraries offer writing centres where you can have a peer or instructor look over your work, in addition to any peer review offered in your class. While writing centres will not correct your work for you, they will work with you to reduce errors. If you can arrange your schedule to finish your assignments a week before the due date, you will have

enough time to visit the writing centre and fix any problems you find with their help.



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## Chapter 8: Responding to Other Views

### Learning Objectives

- Write a review that incorporates background information to enhance your reader or viewer's understanding of a work.
- Critique a work by offering evidence so that readers can judge for themselves.

The review is a specific form of literary criticism that takes (usually) a work of art—a book, a movie, a dance, a play, a game, or an album—and delivers a judgment. Professional reviews are written by critics employed by newspapers or magazines, or critics writing online. More recently, ordinary folks have begun reviewing restaurants, instructors, medical doctors, and businesses online. It seems everyone's a critic.



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## 8.1 The Review

Professional reviewing usually requires a high degree of familiarity with the medium of your chosen subject. If you are reviewing a particular video game, for example, it is helpful to whoever sees or reads your review if you know the previous versions of the game, when the game was first created, perhaps some information about why certain decisions were made, and who worked on the game. It is also helpful if you know about other, similar games and can rank this one based on your familiarity with this type of game. Someone might be looking to buy a first-person shooter game and wondering if the one she saw advertised is as good as it appears in the ad, or if it's merely being hyped as the next big thing in order to sell it.

Reviews also typically demand a high level of familiarity with the wider world of your work of art, whether it's gaming, dance, or music. You'll need to know approximately how many games are out there (hundreds? Thousands? Millions?) and what technical specifications do or don't make certain things possible, as well as when they arrived on the scene. How old is motion capture, and what did it change in the gaming world?

Usually, a work is helmed or wholly created by a single person or entity, whether it's a game developer, a famous choreographer, or a known movie director. You'll want to know about the developer's previous track record. Is this the first such game the company has created, or the latest in a long line of them? Were other games popular and successful? What type of game is this company known to produce, and how does the new game fit in? Depending on the scope of your review, you may also want to be familiar with the social world around your chosen piece of art. In gaming, for example, you may find it relevant to reference "Gamergate," or the harassment of women gamers.

Typically, we only find out this much about a subject if it really interests us. So when you write a review, pick a work and medium you really like. You might have to play the game a number of times, see the movie twice, read what others have to say about the book or the author—in other words, really immerse yourself in the work.

Finally, reviewing requires a balance of praise and criticism. Reviews can praise creators for what they did ("This work succeeds in ..."), what they tried to do ("Although ultimately unsuccessful, so-and-so made a notable attempt to ...") and what they did not do ("So-and-so resists the almost universal urge to sentimentalize the dying"). You are trying both to understand the work of art in light of the creator's intentions, and to judge whether it is worth an audience's time and attention.

Thus, just as with praise, your criticism can bring to light drawbacks ("I can't help feeling the piece would have been better if ..."), missing elements ("The addition of a tuba would have really ...") or unnecessary ones ("So-and-so's lighting scheme, although dramatic, overshadowed ..."). While you're judging the work, the reader or viewer is judging you. How sound is your judgment? Should the reader rely on your view when deciding whether to devote money and attention to the work? Just as with other forms of writing, the review requires you to demonstrate that you are a trustworthy guide and that the reader is justified in relying on you.

**Table 8.1 Dos and don'ts of reviewing**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mention the history of your chosen genre.</li> <li>• Bring in relevant facts about the creator's past work.</li> <li>• Include plenty of evidence for any judgment you make.</li> <li>• Consider several different aspects of a work when rendering judgment.</li> <li>• Praise and critique not just for what the work does, but for what it tries to and what it does not do.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a judgment without supporting evidence. (<b>Example:</b> <i>This is the director's best work ever. You need to see it to believe how good it is.</i>)</li> <li>• Ignore the creator's previous work. (<b>Example:</b> <i>This is the director's fifth movie, and in this one ...</i>)</li> <li>• Judge work in light of political standards that did not exist at the time. (<b>Example:</b> <i>This minstrel movie from 1929 is horribly racist and uses many outdated and offensive terms for black people.</i>)</li> <li>• Use clichéd language. (<b>Example:</b> <i>This book was a thriller—I literally could not put it down!</i>)</li> </ul>

### Review Questions

1. Write a review of your favourite work of art. Make sure your review includes information about the art form more generally, a larger look at the entity responsible for the work, and evidence for your judgment.
2. Write a political review. Review a work of art in light of a recent controversy (the lack of representation of people of colour in the movie industry, for example). Briefly describe the history of the controversy, explain how it is relevant to the work you are reviewing, and judge how the work measures up in light of the controversy.
3. Write a review of a work that praises a) what the work did, b) what the work tried to do, and c) what the work did not do. In your review, offer three pieces of criticism of the same pattern: a) what the work did, b) what the work tried to do, and c) what the work did not do.

### Points to Consider

- a. Bring a review by your favourite reviewer to class. Analyze the elements that make the reviewer trustworthy. Is it the tone? The included details about the work, history, or creator's other work? Do you learn more about the art form when you read the review? Does trustworthiness arise from a combination of these things?

- b. See if you can write a review on a different subject that includes some of the same elements used by your favourite reviewer.



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# Chapter 9: Oral Presentations

## Learning Objectives

- Incorporate best practices for presenting from slides.
- Learn citation standards for slides.
- Search for and use images that are not copyright protected in your presentation.
- Practise your presentation outside the classroom so you know how long it takes and can pace yourself.
- Incorporate classroom engagement techniques into your presentation discussion.

Giving a presentation is a great way to practise speaking in front of others, presenting material from another source, summarizing, and engaging your classmates. Presentations are typically assigned either to individuals or groups. Depending on the class, presentations can last anywhere from five minutes to an hour.





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## 9.1 Organizing Your Presentation

You will have either an assigned topic or one you choose yourself. Topics can vary from your favourite hobbies to academic articles on assigned topics. If you are asked to find your own article or site about your topic, make sure to check with your instructor ahead of time to make sure the source is academically appropriate. If your instructor asks you to present on a poem, for example, they probably are thinking that it should be one that has been traditionally published, by a recognized poet, rather than a poem written by a high-schooler with no previous experience. Maybe not, though, so your best bet is to ask.

Consider using props, as they will make your presentation stand out. Wear panda pyjamas to present on pandas, and give out slices of bamboo for your classmates to try. Declaim a poem, or if the poet comes from a different time, try carrying a prop from or dressing in the style of that era. Capturing the interest of your audience is easier if you give them something novel to look at.

Although many students default to slides because of their professional look, they are entirely optional unless your instructor assigns them. You can easily make a compelling presentation by speaking, writing relevant points on the board, giving your classmates a handout, and leading a discussion. A piece of paper has the bonus of being much more technically reliable than a projection on a screen.

If you are using slides, make sure to have the right number for the time you are allowed—not too many, so that you have to race through, or too few, so that you have to spend a long time dragging out the information on each slide. Make a printout of the slides so you have a guide and can present, even if they fail to project or are otherwise unavailable.

One of the advantages of slides is that you can incorporate visuals. Make sure the ones you use are not copyright protected and that you have the right to use them. Search Google Images, select “Tools,” and then select “Labelled for Reuse” in the “Usage rights” drop-down menu. Other sites that can be searched for images holding a Creative Commons licence include [Flickr](#), [Wikimedia](#), and [CC Search](#).

The last page of your slides is your reference page. Use the reference format assigned in your classroom (e.g., MLA or APA). Reference any videos or images used as well as any print source.

The key to any good presentation, after preparation of materials and research on your topic, is practice. Experienced speakers can sound spontaneous and unrehearsed, but this is an illusion. The more times you go over your presentation in advance, the easier it will become on the day. Aim to read the entire presentation out loud, with visuals or props, at least three times. If you can persuade someone to listen to you, great. If not, even an empty room is better than not practising. It does not matter, by the way, if the person listening pays attention. An inattentive listener can even stimulate you to make your presentation more exciting in a bid to capture her attention!

Time your practices so you can see how long your presentation will take. Classroom schedules can be tight, and if you go over, your instructor may have to stop you in the middle. If you run out of material

before your minimum time requirement, you'll be standing at the front of the room with nothing to say. Knowing how long your material takes to present alleviates both of these problems.

#### Review Questions

1. Write a ten-minute freewrite on a topic of your choice. Highlight or select those aspects of your freewrite that you could incorporate into a presentation.
2. Find (or create) five images for a deck of slides on your presentation topic.
3. Practise your presentation and time it. How could you make the presentation half as long? Twice as long?

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## 9.2 During the Presentation

Arrive early to class (or come to the classroom earlier in the day, if you have another class directly before your presentation). Do a dry run of your presentation. Cue up any slides you may be using so that you can immediately access them at the beginning of your presentation, rather than trying to load or display them once class has already begun. This often wastes valuable minutes of class time for your classmates and is easy to avoid with a little advance planning. Ask a tech-savvy classmate to help you before or to advance the slides during your presentation.

Practise standing in front of the empty desks, choosing where you will stand so as not to block any visuals you plan to show the class. If you are using slides, put the deck into projector mode and advance the slides. Make sure they project properly—classroom systems vary and can be finicky. Click on any links to videos or other material you may have embedded in your slides to make sure they work. If not, you can manually cue up the material and switch between slides and your browser to show it to the class.

If you are running a video, check that the sound is turned up and that you can hear the soundtrack. If you need any outside technical assistance, call for it now. Many schools have an IT department that can send someone to troubleshoot any issues with classroom machines and help to set up. If your school does not, a classmate with IT experience might be willing to help.

During the presentation, face the room and look at your classmates when possible. Speak loudly and slowly enough that they can hear you and understand what you are saying. If you are using slides, refer to your printout rather than turning to the projector or looking at the computer screen. Although many students refer to their phones when giving presentations, looking at your notes this way gives the impression that you are uninterested in and unengaged with your audience. Keep your arms at your sides, not folded or crossed in front of you, to project an open rather than closed attitude. Although you are the one speaking, you are engaged in a dialogue with your classmates in which they are expected to listen, understand, and respond to your material.

**Table 9.1 Dos and don'ts of oral presentations**

Things to always do	Things to never do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand facing your audience.</li> <li>• Speak clearly and slowly.</li> <li>• Ask questions.</li> <li>• Answer questions.</li> <li>• Incorporate activities.</li> <li>• Make use of props.</li> <li>• Multiply learning (visual, movement, slides, handouts, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumble, face the screen, wall, or computer, look at your phone.</li> <li>• Read slides word for word.</li> <li>• Incorporate typos into your slides.</li> <li>• Quote others word for word in your slides without attribution or quotation marks.</li> <li>• Rely on the audience or your instructor to determine your presentation's structure. <b>(Example:</b> “<i>So what do you guys think? What should we do next?</i>”)</li> <li>• Use inadvertently sexist language. <b>(Example:</b> “<i>So, guys ...</i>” [in a class with women in it])</li> </ul>

### Review Questions

1. Create a presentation on a topic of your choice. Practise the presentation in your classroom, if possible.
2. Have a friend video you giving a short presentation. Check the video for practices you may not have noticed—hand movement, for example, that distracts rather than engages your audience.

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## 9.3 Leading Class Discussions

Your instructor may have directed you to assign one or more discussion questions in advance or on the day of the presentation, or you may simply wish to gather feedback from your classmates or further discuss your topic. In any case, there are numerous techniques for stimulating class discussion, especially in a reluctant room where many students will not volunteer to speak.

Avoid relying on the few volunteers in every classroom who are ready to speak to any topic. Your goal should be to get everyone in the room talking, not just the frequent contributors. Encourage frequent speakers to monitor their input by asking, “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet?” You can also write names of those who have already spoken on the board, if you know them. Finally, your instructor can remind students that they and you both earn marks for participation.

**Table 9.2 Discussion stimulation techniques**

<b>Name of Technique</b>	<b>How to Do It</b>
Tag, you're it	Bring a soft object such as a plush ball with you to class, or crumple up a piece of paper to use as a ball. Display your question, give students a moment to reply, then lob the ball to the first speaker. The first speaker picks the next by throwing the ball, and so on, until everyone in the room has spoken.
Think/pair/share	Display the question, then ask students to write their answers. Ask them to share their answers with the person next to them. Then ask the pairs to report on their answers to the entire class.
Reflective writing	Like think/pair/share, this allows students to write on the question before they share their answers with the class. For sensitive topics, students can write the answer and hand it in anonymously, and you can read them out.
Snowball	If you are trying to get students to ask you questions and encounter reluctance, ask them to write down their questions on a piece of paper, crumple the paper, and toss it into the middle of the room. Pick up the papers and answer the questions.
Group reporter	Have the students discuss the question in groups. Ask the person with the least experience speaking in class to report on the group discussion to the rest of the class.
Everyone answers	Each person in class is called on in turn until everyone has spoken. Students can also be called alphabetically. To encourage conversation rather than unconnected monologues, prompt students not just to state their own point but to respond to previous points. Ask the next speaker, "What about you, Brandon? What do you think of what Talia said?"
Seed	Pick a couple of people you know in class to start the conversation. Tell them ahead of time that you will call on them and prepare them to ask further questions of other students along the lines you are interested in pursuing.

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# Chapter 10: Business Documents

## Learning Objectives

- Recognize the style in which business documents are written.
- Understand the purpose of a résumé and cover letter and how to write them
- Understand how to use email appropriately.
- Understand the limitations of online communication.
- Understand the potential consequences of your online communications for your reputation and employability
- Make a fair complaint about a friend or family member in an email or post.





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## 10.1 Business Documents

You've practised different types of academic writing so far, but what if you want to send a letter to your member of Parliament or write an amazing cover letter for a job application? As you've probably guessed, the academic essay form doesn't always work in these situations. Business and professional writing should be clear, concise, and direct.

So, you might be asking, what differentiates business writing from academic writing? First, there's style. Business documents are written in a formal style, meaning that you should avoid using contractions and colloquialisms (slang and informal writing). And second, there's form. Most business documents have specific forms that you should follow. These forms apply to everything from headings to what you should include in each paragraph. There are many kinds of business documents (letters, résumés, and memos, to name just a few), and each of these document types has a standardized form you should follow.

In this chapter, we'll go over the style and forms you should use for standard business letters, cover letters, and résumés. In the next chapter, we'll discuss how you can present yourself professionally online.

### Business Letters

#### When do I write a business letter?

It is appropriate to send a business letter any time you want to conduct a formal correspondence. Business letters are often sent to companies, politicians, and institutions. For instance, if you wanted to write a letter to your local member of the legislative assembly about funding for your school, you would voice your concerns in a business letter. When you ask a company for a refund for a faulty product, a business letter is likely to get your money back. And when you want to inquire about a job opening, a business letter may help you get a favourable response.

#### How do I write a business letter?

The main thing to remember about a business letter is that you should follow a specific format. Business letters always include the date, the sender's address, the recipient's address, a salutation, a body, and a closing line.

The most common way to format a business letter is called **block formatting**. In block formatting, everything should be left-aligned. The letter should be single-spaced, with double spacing between each paragraph. Do not indent the beginning of each paragraph. Choose a font with good readability, such as size 12 Times New Roman or Arial.

### **Date**

The first line of your letter should be the date the letter was finished. Use the date format acceptable in the recipient's country. For instance, if you are writing to someone in Canada or the United States, you would format the date as January 1, 2020. However, if you are writing to someone in Europe, you would write 1 January 2020. Do not abbreviate the month for any date format. Place a blank line after the date.

### **Sender's address**

The next section of your letter should be the sender's address. Since you are writing the letter, this will be your address. Write your name on the first line of the address. Write your street address on the second line, and your city, province, and postal code on the third line. Leave a blank line after your address. You can also place the sender's address after the signature and printed name on the last line of your letter; however, this is stylistic and entirely up to you.

### **Recipient's address**

Next, you need to include the recipient's address, also called the inside address, in your letter. No matter what format you are using, this address will always be left-aligned. The first line of the inside address should be the recipient's name. If you cannot find out their name, you can leave this line out.

When writing a business letter, always address the recipient by their title. For instance, you would write "Premier Horgan" instead of "Mr. Horgan" or "John Horgan." If you do not know a woman's marital status, you can address her as "Ms." If a person has several titles, try to find out which one they prefer being addressed by. If you can't get this information, use the highest-ranking title they have. For instance, if someone has a PhD and is also a professor, you can address them as either "Dr. Roxane Gay" or "Roxane Gay, PhD."

If you are writing to someone in a company (for instance, if you were writing to inquire about potential internship opportunities), include the company name on the next line. If you are writing to an individual not associated with a corporation, such as a politician, you do not have to include the company name. The next line should be the recipient's street address. The line after that should be the city, province, and postal code. If you are writing to someone outside of the country, include the recipient's country on the following line in capital letters. Leave a blank line after the recipient's address.

### **Salutation**

The next line of your letter should be the salutation. The salutation will say "Dear" followed by the same name you used in the recipient's address. If you addressed your letter to "Roxane Gay, PhD," you can write "Dear Dr. Gay" in your salutation. If you do not know the name of the recipient, you can use the salutation "To Whom It May Concern." You can also use this salutation if you do not know the recipient's gender. Use a colon (:) after your salutation and leave one blank line after it.

## Body

The first paragraph of a business letter lets the recipient know what the letter is about. You should begin your letter with a polite opening line explaining who you are and why you are writing. Next, state the purpose of your letter, but keep it concise—you will explain all the details in the rest of your letter. Place a blank line between each body paragraph.

The following paragraphs will explain all the relevant details of your letter to the recipient. In this section of the body, explain why the purpose of your letter is important, and provide facts to support your case. However, be sure to keep your language concise. Also, divide your paragraphs logically. If your letter has two main points, you should use two body paragraphs to provide details and your reasoning.

The last body paragraph acts much like the conclusion of a paper. You should restate your purpose and include a brief word on why it is important. You should conclude a business letter by thanking the reader for their time. Place a blank line between your last body paragraph and your closing.

## Closing

The closing of your letter should be brief. “Sincerely” is generally accepted as a formal closing, but if you are writing a slightly informal business letter, you can end with “Thank you.” Only capitalize the first word of the closing and follow it with a comma (.). Leave two lines blank and type your name. When you print the letter, place your signature in between the closing and your typed name.

## Enclosures

Finally, if you want to include any items with your letter, list them after the word “Enclosures” one line below your typed name. An enclosure can be anything from a résumé to a writing sample. Keep in mind that if you want to include a sample of work you’ve done for a company, you should make sure you have the right to share that work with others.

## Sample business letter

January 18, 1926

Sherlock Holmes  
221B Baker Street, London

Nero Wolfe  
506 West 35th Street  
New York, New York 10001  
UNITED STATES

Dear Mr. Wolfe:

My name is Sherlock Holmes, and I am a private investigator operating out of London. I have read about your work, and I would like your advice on a matter of criminal affairs. At the moment, I am working on a very difficult kidnapping case in which the perpetrator has demanded a ransom. I would like your opinion on how to catch the criminal, retrieve the victim, and save the family a hefty fee.

So far, I have gathered a number of clues. The victim was last seen on London's east side at 10 a.m. on Saturday the 8th of January. She is of the feline persuasion and has often been known to leave the house in the mornings to hunt mice. She is said to have a sleek brown coat, sapphire eyes, and white markings on each of her paws. On Monday the 10th of January, a typewritten ransom note was delivered to the family's house. It demanded a sum of 1,000 Canadian dollars. The family has until the end of the month to deliver the money.

Using this evidence, I have reached the conclusion that a native of Britain must have perpetrated the crime. The emphasis on Canadian dollars is clearly a distraction, but not a good one. Clearly, our criminal is lacking in experience. I suspected a certain Mr. Moriarty for a time, but it does not follow his pattern of behaviour to go after a cat. I am sending copies of several notable London newspapers for you to peruse—perhaps you will catch something I have missed.

Your assistance in this matter would be most helpful. It is of great importance to the victim's family that justice be served, and I believe your professional judgment will be quite helpful in my solving of this case. Thank you very much for your time regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

Sherlock Holmes

Enclosed: *The London Times, The Telegraph, The London Evening Standard.*

## Cover Letters and Résumés

### Cover letters

A cover letter is the introduction to your résumé. The purpose of your cover letter is simple: it should entice your prospective employer to read your résumé. A cover letter should be a short three- or four-paragraph document. Each paragraph has a specific purpose.

#### Paragraph 1

Explain to your reader how you heard about the job or internship for which you are applying and why you wish to work there.

#### Paragraphs 2–3

In these paragraphs, you should explain who you are and why you are a good candidate for this job. Describe the skills and abilities you will bring to the job. You should point out accomplishments from your résumé that indicate your strengths. For example, if you babysit regularly for a neighbour, you might point out that you are punctual, responsible, and organized, which is why your neighbours trust you to take care of their children.

You should highlight something from your résumé. Because a résumé is written in short phrases, you may wish to expand upon an experience or award listed on your résumé in your cover letter. For example, you could write:

I have excellent time management skills. As you will note on my résumé, I have done after-school tutoring for three years, while also playing in the Charles Hays Secondary School Marching Band. As a band member, I am required to practice with the band six hours a week. I practise playing the trombone on my own four to five hours a week. I tutor four hours a week. I have maintained a straight A's since my first year of high school.

#### Closing paragraph

What do you expect to happen next? Do you want the company representative to contact you? Will you contact them? In the closing paragraph, you spell out your expectations, and thank your reader for their time and consideration.

Although your cover letter is short, it is not an easy document to write. Consider it a 15-second advertisement for you. You want your letter to capture your reader's attention and get them excited about reading your résumé.

**Tip:** Your letter must be error-free. After you have finished it, spell check it, and then read it very carefully to be sure that you have no errors. When you feel you have a perfect document, share it with your instructor, counsellor, family, or someone else who will read it carefully and provide helpful

feedback.

### Parts of a cover letter

- Your return address (Type out your complete return address.)
- Date (Write out the name of the month, followed by the day and the year.)
- Inside address (This should include the name of the person to whom you are writing, their title, the name of the organization or institution, and the address of the organization.)
- Greeting (Use your addressee's title and last name only, not their first name.)
- Body of your letter (Typed, using a business font such as Times New Roman, size 11–12 font, single-spaced, with a double space between paragraphs.)
- Closing
- Your signature
- Your name, typed out

**Sample cover letter**

123 South Arlington Avenue  
Anytown, British Columbia V1A 1A1

October 8, 2019

Susan Jones, Admissions Officer  
Lapkin School for the Arts  
444 South Marion Avenue  
Lapkinsville, Ontario M5M 1A1

Dear Ms. Jones:

Enclosed are my résumé, transcripts, and portfolio for application to the Lapkin School for the Arts Summer Internship Program. I learned of this program through my art teacher at Arlington High School. I wish to participate in this internship program because, as an intern at Lapkin, I would be exposed to some of the most prestigious programs in the country. As an aspiring artist, I would be proud to be a part of this internship.

I will be graduating from Arlington High School in June 2022. As you will note on my enclosed résumé, I have maintained an outstanding GPA, participated in art shows, and volunteered ten hours each week after school. I have received numerous awards for my art. Notably, I was named Best New Artist in the British Columbia Innovative Arts Show; I received a first and third place award for my watercolour and acrylic still life paintings at the province-wide High School Art Show; and I received an Honourable Mention in the National Art Exhibit for ninth graders.

I have taught art classes at Anytown Elementary School since 2008. When the provincial budget cut all elementary art classes, my art teacher at Arlington High organized Arlington Art Outreach, a program in which high school art students go to local elementary schools to teach art. After one semester of tutoring, I was selected to become a tutor mentor and trainer. In this capacity, I develop original lesson plans, solicit donations to provide art supplies, and provide teaching tips to tutors. I believe these activities demonstrate my passion and leadership ability and make me an excellent candidate for your internship program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to further discussing my qualifications for this internship with you. I can be reached at (555) 222-5555, or you can email me at [m.duong@gmail.com](mailto:m.duong@gmail.com). I will call you in two weeks to check on the status of my application.

Sincerely,

*Melissa Duong*

Melissa Duong

Tip: If you say that you will be calling to check on the status of your application, be sure to follow up with a phone call. Mark your calendar so you don't forget.

## Résumés

A résumé is a concise summary of your personal strengths and accomplishments. There are many reasons why you may need to write a résumé. You may be applying for a job, to a college, or for a scholarship or grant to help pay for your education. Regardless of the organization for which you are writing your résumé, there are rules that you should follow to create a document that effectively and accurately represents you.

In most cases, a résumé should be one page and should be clearly formatted so your reader can easily spot your personal information and your qualifications.

Parts of a résumé include:

- Contact information
- Education
- Experience
- Additional information (if necessary)

### Contact information

The first thing your reader should see on your résumé is your name and contact information. Your name should be at the top, with nothing else written on the same line. Under your name should be your address, phone number, and email. Be sure you have an appropriate email address (e.g., “2cute4u” or “1337ninja” are amusing to you as a high school student; however, such a frivolous email address may seem inappropriate to a prospective employer or college admissions officer. Your first and last name, or first initial and last name, followed by your email service provider is a good choice: melissa.duong@gmail.com or m.duong@gmail.com).

### Education

List the name and location of the high school you currently attend and your graduation date. If you have good grades (a 3.0 grade point average [GPA] or above), include your GPA under your education.

### Experience

The term “experience” does not mean the same thing as “employment.” “Experience” refers to the accomplishments that make you a good candidate. As a high school student, you may feel you don't



have much experience. However, there are things you can list that will indicate your skills and positive characteristics to your reader.

Have you played on a sports team? Have you tutored at an elementary school? Did you participate in a fundraiser? Did you help organize a school event? Do you volunteer for a non-profit organization? These accomplishments indicate that you have leadership skills, work well with others, and are interested in things other than yourself. All of these characteristics would be appealing to a prospective employer.

Next to each item you list, include the date(s) you were involved with that activity.

Tip: If you cannot think of anything to list under “Experience,” check with an instructor, friend, or family member who knows you well. You can brainstorm with them to think of things you have accomplished. After talking with someone, if you truly have nothing to list under “Experience,” now is the time for you to get out there and do something!

### Additional information

You want your résumé to fill one page. After you have completed the four sections listed above, if you still have space, here are some other items you may wish to include:

- Awards, honours, scholarships
- Affiliations (clubs, professional or student organizations, sports teams, philanthropic organizations). What was your position in this organization? If you were an officer or team leader, indicate your title and the dates you held that position.
- Special accomplishments (projects, publications, certifications)
- Special skills (other language(s), photography, computer expertise, etc.)
- Hobbies

Next to each activity or accomplishment, list the date(s) of any awards received or when you were affiliated with the organization.

Tip: If you volunteer for an organization, instead of saying “Volunteer,” use a job title that describes for your reader what you did for the group. Following the job title, use specific terms so that your reader will be able to understand exactly what your responsibilities include. Because you use the term “Experience” rather than “Employment,” you can list volunteer work as experience.

## Sample résumé A

### **Melissa Duong**

123 South Arlington Avenue  
Anytown, British Columbia, V1A 1A1  
(555) 222-5555  
m.duong@gmail.com

### **Education**

Arlington High School  
Graduation date: June 2022, Anytown, British Columbia  
GPA: 3.75

### **Experience**

Arlington Art Outreach, January 2018–present  
Anytown Elementary School

Art Tutor: Teach art to elementary school students grades 3–6 in an after-school program six hours a week; classes range in size from 8–15 students. Develop lesson plans; critique student work in a positive, nurturing manner; mentor students.

Tutor Trainer: Train high school tutors in developing art lessons, art evaluation techniques, and classroom management; schedule tutors in three elementary school programs.

Community Outreach: Solicit donations to support AAO; educate the public about the importance of art.

Anytown YMCA, June 2017–present  
Anytown, British Columbia

Computer Co-Pilot: This program matches a high school volunteer with a senior citizen to teach them how to use computers more effectively.

### **Awards**

Best New Artist in the British Columbia Innovative Arts Show, October 2018

Provincial High School Art Show, January 2019

First Place Watercolour; Third Place Acrylic Still Life, National Art Exhibit, April 2017

Honourable Mention for Watercolour, Ninth Grader

References provided upon request.

## Sample résumé B

### **Navjot Sekon**

701 Front Street  
Nelson, British Columbia, V9Z 9Z9  
navjot.sekon@gmail.com

### **Education**

Rogers High School, Nelson, British Columbia

Graduation date: June 2023

### **Experience**

City High School Baseball Team  
September 2019–present

- Play various positions, including catcher, outfield, and second base
- Work with teammates on improving skills such as catching, throwing, and batting
- Support coach by staying after on practice days to clean and put away equipment
- Participate in annual team fundraiser for team travel and uniforms

Kootenay Little League  
May 2014–October 2018

- Played on several Little League teams; my team went to playoffs each year
- Played various positions, such as pitcher, catcher, and outfield
- Helped my father coach my younger brother’s team; worked with individual players on special skills

Rogers High School Baseball Team Annual Fundraiser Advertising Team Leader  
October 2019

- Solicited donations from sponsors to advertise in the program for our annual fundraiser
- Took photographs of team members to use in the program
- Help plan and create the layout for the 27-page program

### **Interests**

Sports, skateboarding, photography

References available upon request.

## Review Questions

### Business Letters

1. Draft an outline for the body of a formal business letter. Include the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph and relevant facts and details to support your purpose in the following paragraphs. Make sure your closing paragraph restates your purpose and reinforces why it is important.
2. Compose a formal business letter to a local politician advocating a change to your school or community. For instance, you could write to your MLA to voice concerns about your school's library funding. You could also write to your mayor to propose a community cleanup project. Write about a cause that you are interested in!

### Cover Letters and Résumés

#### Cover letters

1. Write a letter applying to be an after-school tutor or coach for a local elementary school. When writing your letter, be sure to consider: What qualities would such a job require? Explain in your letter why you would be a good choice for this position.

#### Résumés

1. Think about a job you would like to do this summer. What sort of skills will you need to be able to do this job? What makes you think you would be good at this job? Make a list of the skills you think would be appropriate for this job and indicate why you think you would be good at this job. Then organize a résumé that indicates your qualifications.

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## 10.2 Making a Positive Impression Online

Today, online communication has become the primary means of communication between many people. You are probably familiar with a variety of online communications, such as text messaging, instant messaging, and emailing. This section will focus on email. Email has become a very important means of communication between friends, members of clubs, student or volunteer groups, and teachers and students.

You may have been sending emails or other online messages for years. You may be thinking, “I know how to send email. Why do I need tips about how to communicate online?”

There are several reasons. First, when you are communicating face to face with someone, you can make clear when you are joking or teasing by your tone of voice or facial expression. It is hard to communicate such emotions or attitudes online without using emoticons, which may not be appropriate for some emails. Secondly, you must always consider your audience when you send an email. How much information does your intended reader need to understand your intended message? Finally, have you thought about who else might see this email and what impression it may have on them?

### Professional vs. Private Email

Is there such a thing as private email? While you may consider an email message to a close friend to be “private,” in reality, there is no such thing as a “private” email. The moment you hit “send,” that email goes out to potentially millions of readers. You may just be sending it to your friend, but there is no way of knowing what your friend may do with that message. They may post it online or forward it to someone without asking your permission.

### Professional email for students

You may be thinking, “I am a student. I’m not a professional. Why do I need to know about writing a professional email?” While you may not be in the job market or have a job right now, there are times when you need to write more formally. These should be considered professional emails.

When you send an email, you have a purpose in mind. When you send a professional email, you want your reader to pay attention to what you wrote. If your reader is impressed by your well-written email, they will be more likely to give careful consideration to your message. Here are some tips to help you write effective emails.

#### 1. Your email address: Make a good first impression.

If you were to call your instructor on the phone, would you begin talking without greeting them or identifying yourself? You probably would not, especially if you wanted to make a good impression. Your email address and subject line are your greeting when you send an email.

The first thing your readers will see is your email address. While it may be fun to have a cute or funky email address, when you are communicating with instructors or prospective employers, a funky email address may make the wrong impression. What do you think of the following email addresses?

- Itchymonkey
- Sweetnfoxy
- Porkyone
- Runswithscissors
- Damitsara
- Slurpypig

While they are entertaining, they may be provoking thoughts that make the wrong impression. Look at your email address. What does it say about you?

Use your name in your email address, either your first and last name or your first initial and last name.

**2. Subject line: Let your reader know what you are writing about.**

The subject line of your email should be clear and meaningful. You should assume your email may be one of hundreds that your reader receives each day. If you want them to open and read your email, it is a good idea to indicate what you are writing about in the subject line.

The person you are emailing may be a very busy person. They may decide whether or not to open your email based on the subject line.

A common problem with subject lines is that they are typically too vague. Here are some subject lines you should avoid:

- Hi
- Question
- \_\_\_\_\_ [blank]
- My paper

Good subject lines indicate exactly what the content of the email will be. This makes it easier for your reader to prioritize and respond to your email. The more exact your subject line is, the easier it will be for your reader to fulfill your request (thus, making it more likely that they will at all). Here are some examples of specific subject lines:

- Article on the Police School Monument: please forward to class to read for my presentation Thursday
- UVic Pride meeting this Friday (4 p.m.)—ROOM CHANGE: Now in Room 321
- Question about Exam 2 multiple choice section—is film 5 included?

### 3. Greeting: Begin your email in a friendly and courteous manner.

It is always appropriate to start your email with “Dear ...” and then list the person’s title and last name (e.g., Dear Mr. Johnson; Dear Dr. Williams).

### 4. The content of your email: A well-written email will be well received by your reader.

When you compose your email, use standard spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. This indicates to your reader that you respect them. You want your message to be well received by your reader. If the language is too casual, or if there are spelling or grammar errors, then you will make the wrong impression on your reader.

Refer to the grammar and writing tips throughout this book to be sure that your email is correctly written.

Sentences should be short and well-written. Proofread for clarity. Be sure to follow the grammar rules in [Appendix A: Grammar Review](#) to make the best impression on your reader.

Paragraphs in your email should also be short and to the point. Reading a screen is different from reading a paper; you want to make your email easy to follow. Short paragraphs with blank lines in between make for easy reading.

The tone of your email should be polite and courteous. Be friendly and respectful, but don’t be too familiar with your reader. Avoid trying to make jokes or using sarcasm. A joke or sarcastic comment is likely to be misconstrued by your reader because it is difficult to convey “tone” in writing, especially in a brief email. It is better to be too formal than to be too casual. Remember, you will not get a chance to redo the first impression you make online.

Below are some tips to help you make a good impression online:

- Avoid the temptation to use “text spelling” such as “ttyl” (talk to you later) “gr8” (great) or “R U going 2 the mtg?” Your reader may not understand your abbreviations; in addition, your reader may feel that you are too lazy to write the words out or that you don’t know how to spell.
- Do not type your message in all capital letters. That is interpreted in the online world as screaming, which is most likely not the meaning you intend. THERE IS NOTHING WORSE THAN AN EMAIL SCREAMING A MESSAGE IN ALL CAPS!!!! It may indicate to your reader that you are too lazy to take the time to use standard capitalization, or it may also imply to your reader that you don’t know how to use standard capitalization. In either case, it is not sending the message you intend to send.
- The content of your email should deal with one topic. If you have multiple topics you need to cover, put them into separate emails.

The following email is an example of an email which covers too many topics. Look at the following email. How many topics do you see?

Dear Mrs. Radway,

I am writing to you because I am going to be in San Francisco next week for our midterm exam. I am hoping that you will let me take the test before I leave so that I won't be behind the class when I return after winter break.

I also need to talk to you about my research paper on the abolition of slavery. I found several very good resources that will be useful in my paper; however, one of them is an online source and it gives no author or date of publication for my reference page. Is it okay for me to just list the source with as much information as I can find on the website?

I wanted to find out if we can use the multipurpose room for the Archaeology Club's winter party. We wanted to have the party on Friday, January 18 from 5:30–8:00 PM.

Thank you,

Janna Treefern

**5. Closing: End your email in a positive, courteous manner.**

Sign your email with your first and last name, and if the email is to your teacher, include the course title. Do not assume your reader will know who you are.

**6. Finishing touches: Proofread your email before you send it.**

Proofreading is a four-step process. First, you want to read your message to be sure that you included all the pertinent information and that you composed a clear and easy-to-read email. Then you should spell check it using the spelling and grammar check option on your computer. Next, proofread again to be sure all the words are used correctly. For example, if you used “there” instead of “their,” some spell check programs won't catch that error. That is your responsibility. Finally, once you have assured yourself that you have a grammatically correct, well-written email, check the recipient's address to be sure your email is going to the intended recipient.

In summary: Compose your email, proofread it to be sure it conveys your message appropriately, then type in the recipient's address.

Some questions or issues should be handled in person. If you need to type 200 words or more to explain or present your point of view to your reader, you should consider picking up the telephone or speaking to them in person. This is particularly true if you have a serious problem, such as challenging a grade or having to change your work schedule.

**7. Plan ahead: Check with your instructor about submitting assignments via email.**

Some instructors allow assignments to be submitted as attachments. Never assume that your instructor is willing to accept an assignment via email, especially if you are sending it after it was due in class. Always check before you send it.



## Review: Professional email checklist

- Your email address: Is it appropriate?
- Subject line: Is the content of your message obvious?
- Content: Is the purpose of your message understandable?
- Tone: Will your reader have a good impression of you based on what you wrote?
- Closing: Are you sure your reader will know who you are?
- Proofread: Have you double-checked your spelling and grammar?

The next example email was written by a student to his teacher. The student is asking a question about the following assignment:

Write a paper about a correctional issue. A key component of your research for this paper will be two interviews with professionals in the corrections field about this issue. Your interview write-ups are due Friday, November 11. The graded write-ups will be returned to you Monday, November 14. Your final paper must incorporate the information from your interviews and five other scholarly sources. Final paper is due Friday, November 18.

Here is the email:

From: stinkymonkey@gmail.com

Sent: Sunday, November 13, 2019

To: Dave Hu

Subject: hi

hey hey

sorry mr h to bug you again but hey.

ok check it out. for my topic...how about "using juvenile offenders to clean the streets

one guy he kind of hung out with the wrong crowd...end up breaking in someones house and stab one...he got 5 yrs. the other guy is um...actually known him all my life...he lost his mother and he hung with the wrong crown and he got himself in the system. And with that ill find 5 additional sources to go with it.

what do you think? yeah. If you can get back at me asap.

Chris

If you were the teacher, what impression would you have of Chris? How would you reply to this email? Do you see anything about this email that the teacher might find objectionable?

## Personal email for students

You may already be very familiar with the process of email and may use it regularly to keep in touch with your friends. However, there are some points you should keep in mind when you send an email, regardless of how friendly and familiar you are with the recipient. Because email is easy to distribute to others, you should think carefully about what you put in an email before you send it.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you go online:

1. Know your audience!
2. Consider the impact of your message on your reader. You may find something very funny, but it may not have that same impact on your reader.
3. Be discreet. Emails can easily become public. Your email can be forwarded, copied, shared, or sent to someone you did not intend to see it when you wrote it. Before you hit “send,” think about who could possibly see this email. Are you complaining about a teacher, a classmate, or your boss? What would the subject of your email think if they were to see the email that you are about to send? Would you say this to their face?
4. Don’t forward an email without obtaining permission from the person who wrote it. Below is an example of a situation in which an email was forwarded without the author’s knowledge:

Sam had a former girlfriend who was essentially stalking him. She would wait for him in the garage when he came out of class, she would wait for him in the hall after class, she would show up at his workplace, she would wait for him at the door of his apartment building at night. When he told her that he did not want to see her and that they were no longer a couple, she would threaten to call the police and say he was stalking her. She did actually call the police several times. She was making his life miserable.

He emailed a teacher for advice on how to get her to leave him alone. The teacher offered to forward Sam’s email to an attorney for his advice. Sam agreed. When the attorney responded, the teacher forwarded it to Sam, without informing the attorney that she was going to forward his email. The attorney was very upset that his email had been forwarded, because he had referred to the young woman in question as a “whacko” and “dangerous.” He did not consider his comments to be professional and did not want them made public.

5. When you type a word in all capitals, it is considered SHOUTING at your reader. Avoid shouting online.
6. As with your professional emails, some things are better communicated in person than in an email. If you need to type 200 words or more to explain your situation or point of view to your reader, you should consider picking up the telephone or speaking to them in person.

Below is an example of how information exchanged online can be forwarded to someone other than the intended audience.

A high school student was extremely disappointed when the vice principal of the school cancelled the upcoming dance. She sent out an email to her friends describing the vice principal as a “douchebag.” Someone forwarded her email to the vice principal. The student was suspended for two weeks and was not allowed to attend any school dances for the rest of the year.

## Social Media

Social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) are fun and a good way to keep in touch with many friends. However, remember that everything you send or post goes into the public domain and can be retrieved, even if you delete it later. Even if something seems funny and harmless now, it could be the reason you get denied admission to the college of your choice or denied a job in the next year or two. Before you hit “send,” think about a future employer seeing what you are about to send. Would you be proud to have that individual see the comment or photo you are posting or sending?

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Below is an example of the repercussions posting photographs online can have.

A college student interning at a state law enforcement agency posted the following on her Facebook page under her photo:

I am an agent with [she named the agency]. It is a rockin’ job! I am currently working undercover on [she named three cases which were currently under investigation by the agency]. When I am not busting bad guys, I love to get falling-down drunk. My favourite bars are [she named two local bars].

When her internship supervisor with that agency saw her Facebook page, she was furious. What this person had posted online compromised three long-term undercover investigations. Not only had her posting compromised those investigations, but she said she was an agent, which of course she wasn’t. She also had the poor judgment to list the bars she frequented. The result of this posting? The intern received a failing grade for her internship. Not only that, but she has effectively precluded herself from ever getting a job in law enforcement. No law enforcement agency would consider hiring someone with such poor judgment.

The above examples demonstrate how poor judgment can lead to severe consequences. In the cases of both the intern and the high school student, the person who sent out the electronic communication suffered as a result of their poor judgment.

### Review Questions

1. Write an email to your aunt complaining about a decision your father has made. Assume that your aunt will forward the email to your father to read.
2. Compose an email to your instructor asking a question about the essay she just assigned.
3. Write a post expressing your disappointment at your friend’s choosing not to attend an activity with you. First, write the post inappropriately. Then rewrite the same post with appropriate content.



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## Chapter 11: Tone and Style



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## 11.1 Tone and Style

Tone and style, while often confused, are both important in academic writing. Style also involves word choice, coherence, conciseness, and correctness. This chapter contains sections about each of these elements of style.

### Definition of Tone and Style

**Tone** refers to the type of language a writer uses to address their audience. When writing an email to a friend, for example, you may choose to use an informal or colloquial tone, whereas an essay for an English class requires an academic tone. Compare the two examples below:

**Example 1:** The city should just start paying for our rides to school so we can use the bus money for other stuff. If this happens, people will actually start caring about how to get there.

**Example 2:** If the city gave students free access to public transportation, riding to school for free would not only save students money, but it would also promote the use of public transportation.

While both sentences above convey the same idea, Example 1 illustrates an informal tone or **register**, while Example 2 displays an academic tone. Therefore, if you were writing a persuasive essay arguing for public transportation, Example 2 would be appropriate. Example 1 should be used when an informal tone is usual, such as in an email, a message to a friend, or a dialogue between two friends in a story.

**Style**, on the other hand, involves more than just formality and informality. It concerns how clearly we write. Some beginning academic writers think that having wordy and complicated sentences equals having a good writing style, but that can make it difficult for readers to grasp the idea of a text. Essays should be well-written and free of errors, but first they should be clear and logical.

Here are a few useful guidelines to help develop your writing style:

- Avoid using abstract and complex terms, since they tend to confuse rather than impress readers.
- Accept that your writing will always seem clearer to yourself than to others; therefore, do not hesitate to get another reader's opinion.
- Keep your audience in mind while writing.
- Know the expectations of an academic English writing style.
- Understand how readers decode the information they read.

## Review Questions: Definition of Tone and Style

1. Think about three kinds of writing you do every day. What tones do they represent?
2. List three expectations for academic English writing style.

For questions 3–5, determine whether the tone and style of the sentences below are appropriate or inappropriate for a persuasive essay you are writing for your English composition class. Discuss your answers with a partner.

3. The overall quality of the food served to students at school needs to improve. Even though school districts require students to spend hours in science classes learning about nutrition and balanced meals, administrators seem to ignore that the best way to teach is by example. The food most schools serve students is neither nutritious nor tasty. There is a great distance between what students learn they should eat and what they really get at school.
4. The food served at school sucks. I don't eat that stuff, and I never will. Schools should walk their talk and serve us grub that is edible, not that junk that can kill you. When we get pizza, the cheese does not even look like cheese. It looks like some weird alien substance ...
5. Most students and school staff seem to agree that the food served to students in school cafeterias is not good enough. Why still serve it, then? Well, the reality is that it is not that easy to change things in a school district. This fact illustrates the contradiction between what students learn in classes about health and nutrition and what they actually eat.

## Word Choice

Most writers' problems with word choice come from trying to use words they do not know. At times, you may feel the pressure to use vocabulary that is "fancy" or "smart." However, using words whose meanings you are not sure of may change your ideas radically. Misspelling a word may also confuse readers. Before using a word you are not sure about, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I sure this is the right word to express my idea?
- To the best of my knowledge, did I spell it correctly?
- Is the word appropriate for this text and my audience?
- If I am not sure about the word I am trying to use, is there another word I can replace it with?

At times, you may also be concerned about reducing the number of mistakes in your writing to obtain a good grade. In such cases, it is best to look up the words you do not know. If you are not allowed to look them up, take a safer approach and replace them with another word you know.

In order to avoid problems with the words you choose, read often. Books, magazines, newspapers, and blogs are among the many useful reading resources that will expose you to new words and help you expand your vocabulary.



The following sections will help you make more informed decisions about choosing words for your work.

### Denotation and connotation

Words may carry a **denotative** (literal) meaning or a **connotative** (figurative, implied) meaning. For example, when writing a description of the place you live in, you may call it a “home,” a “house,” or a “residence.” These three words **denote** or indicate the same place. However, their connotative meaning is different. “Home” refers to a warmer place than “house.” “Residence” probably carries very little feeling compared to the other two words.

Connotative meanings of words may be positive, negative, or sometimes neutral, depending on what you are writing and who you are writing for. For example, informal words that may carry a neutral or positive connotation in a letter to a friend may have a negative connotation in an argumentative essay. In this lesson and subsequent practice exercises, assume your audience expects an academic tone.

Consider both denotative and connotative meanings of a word before using it. Some words have a negative connotation and may not be appropriate for your work.

The table below contains words with both positive and negative connotations when used in a persuasive essay. Read and compare them.

**Table 11.1 Words with positive and negative connotations**

Positive Connotation	Possible Negative Connotation
Boy, men, people	Dude (also used informally)
Natural	Plain
Child	Kid
Inexpensive, thrifty	Cheap
Teenager	Dirtbag
Girl, woman, people	Chick

Review Questions: Word Choice

Assuming your readers expect an academic tone, replace the words in bold with other words carrying more positive connotations.

1. **The peeps at my school** voted against having makeup classes on Saturday. (Replace “The peeps at my school”)

2. When I asked my **li'l bro** if he was **hooked on** video games, he **went**, "Of course I'm not!" (Replace "li'l bro," "hooked on," and "he went.")
3. She **goes up to this guy and goes, like, "Who are you?"** But when they **got chatting**, she **chilled right out**. (Replace "goes up to this guy and goes, like, 'Who are you?,' "got chatting," and "chilled right out.")

## Misspelling

Misspelling words can also cause you problems, especially if you write a word that looks similar to the one you want but has a different meaning. The best way to avoid misspellings is to become familiar with the words you often use.

You should also double-check the words suggested by the spell check application on your word processor. Although these programs catch common misspellings, they sometimes make wrong suggestions or simply miss misspelled words.

A few hints to help you avoid spelling errors:

- Make flash cards with the words you frequently use in your essays but have problems spelling. Seeing them often will help you memorize them.
- Keep a vocabulary list at the end of your notebook containing both new words and words you have a hard time spelling.

Consider this list of commonly misspelled words:

- |                  |                 |                |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| • acknowledge    | • fourth        | • opportunity  |
| • accidentally   | • fulfill       | • parallel     |
| • awkward        | • guarantee     | • perseverance |
| • acknowledgment | • harass        | • proceed      |
| • argument       | • independence  | • receipt      |
| • basically      | • indispensable | • regardless   |
| • commitment     | • insufficient  | • religious    |
| • consensus      | • interrupt     | • separate     |
| • convenient     | • judgment      | • specifically |
| • definitely     | • length        | • sufficient   |
| • descend        | • liaison       | • temperament  |
| • desperate      | • license       | • truly        |
| • dependent      | • maintenance   | • unanimous    |
| • embarrass      | • negotiable    | • usually      |
| • existence      | • occasion      | • vengeance    |
| • forfeit        | • occurrence    | • withhold     |

## Review Questions: Misspelling

Choose the word with the correct spelling. The words in this practice section may not be in the [list provided in the Misspelling section](#), and you may have to use a dictionary to learn their correct spelling.

1. Lack of water and fire extinguishers in the room **aggravated/agravated** the fire.
2. Their **analysis/analisis** of the problem was accurate.
3. My parents say that my curfew is not **negociable/negotiable**.
4. The history teacher was irritated when she talked about the **omission/omision** of an important fact in the students' exam responses.
5. Lawmakers **recomended/recommended** the bill be changed before the final vote.

## Gender Bias

Writers need to make sure they address readers in a respectful and unbiased manner. One way to do this is by carefully choosing your nouns and pronouns. For example, when you address people in general, readers will interpret the exclusive use of “he,” “him,” and “his” or “she,” “her,” and “hers” as biased. The suggestions below will help you avoid **gender bias** in your essays:

1. Rephrase the sentence.
  - A teacher must consider the background of his students (biased).
  - A teacher must consider the students' backgrounds (unbiased).
2. Use plural nouns or pronouns, or use gender-neutral nouns, such as “person,” “individual,” “child,” etc.
  - A student knows he must do his homework (biased).
  - Students know they have to do their homework (unbiased).
  - Teachers must consider the backgrounds of their students (unbiased).
3. If the noun you are using is a profession that carries gender (e.g., “steward,” and “stewardess”), use the gender-neutral variation (e.g., “flight attendant”).
  - All salesmen were required to attend the meeting (biased).
  - All salespeople were required to attend the meeting (unbiased).
4. Replace the pronoun “he” with “one,” “you,” “we,” or use “he or she” (but do not overuse them).

- When a student finished his exam early, he could leave the room (biased).
  - When a student finished her or his exam early, she or he could leave the room (unbiased).
5. Alternatively, use the singular “they” to avoid specifying a gender or to reflect a non-binary person’s preferences for how you refer to them (but be aware that, while “they” to denote an individual without indicating gender is now pretty much accepted in spoken English, it is technically grammatically incorrect and your teacher may or may not accept it).
- Ali likes basketball. They started playing basketball when they were eight years old.
  - When a team member finishes a break, they should proceed directly to the sales floor.

When avoiding gender bias, use the strategies that best fit your personal style, but try not to overuse any one strategy.

#### Review Questions: Gender Bias

Rewrite the sentences below and eliminate their gender bias. Refer to the strategies given in this section.

1. Each doctor will explain her own procedures.
2. When you call the technician, tell him the computer broke yesterday.
3. According to the guidelines, a writer needs to publish her manuscript in order to be eligible for the grant.
4. If I ever meet a congressman, I will tell him how upset I am with politics at the national level.
5. When a doctor wants to order gloves, she must speak to the office staff.

## Sentence Order

The elements in an English sentence have a standard or canonical position. Writers should understand this order of elements because choosing to adhere to it or break it will draw readers’ attention to different elements of a sentence. The **canonical order** of elements in an English sentence is demonstrated in Table 11.2.

**Table 11.2 The canonical order of elements in an English sentence**

Subject	Verb	Other elements (indirect and direct objects, adverbials, etc.)
The instructor	offered	the students a solution to the problem during class.

Generally, the subject is the doer or the main character, and the verb expresses the action, state, or description. Other elements may include people or things affected by the action, adverbials (references to time, place, manner, etc), and so on.

While it is true that English writing favours elements in the canonical order, this does not mean you should only write in this order. It means that this sequence should only be broken when there is a clear reason for doing so (adding emphasis, placing old information first, etc.). The canonical order is a principle and not an absolute rule of writing.

The following lessons will help you determine how to shift the order of sentence elements to write cohesive sentences and add emphasis when needed.

### Review Questions: Sentence Order

Rewrite the sentences below and redistribute sentence elements according to the canonical order. (Hint: You should start new sentences with the underlined elements.)

1. Finally, in a very apologetic tone, the director spoke to us.
2. After running for two hours and exercising for another two at the gym last night, Rachel collapsed.
3. With words of encouragement after a long and difficult year, the teacher addressed the students.

### Characters and Actions

1. The following table contains pairs of nouns and verbs. Complete it with the missing elements:

**Table 11.3 Nouns and their corresponding verbs**

Noun	Verb
decision	decide
	express
analysis	
	describe
explanation	explain
conclusion	

2. Diagnose the sentences below and identify their characters and actions. Then rewrite them and replace the underlined nouns with the corresponding verbs from the above table:
  - a. The mayor's analysis of the issue did not convince journalists. (Noun = analysis)
  - b. Bob's explanation of why he was late frustrated his wife. (Noun = explanation)

- c. The documentary’s description of the accident shocked viewers. (Noun = description)
- d. The conclusion the scientists reached was that the problem had no solution. (Noun = conclusion)

## Characters and Actions

When your writing highlights important sentence elements, such as **characters** and **actions**, your sentences become clear to your readers and naturally draw their attention. Characters are sentence elements that trigger actions or events. They can be concrete (a person, animal, or thing) or abstract (an issue, a concept). Characters are usually nouns or pronouns. Actions describe what characters do or what events they trigger. Actions are expressed by verbs. These concepts are illustrated in the examples below:

**Example 1:** Jack’s refusal to leave the worksite resulted in his boss’s decision to call security.

**Example 2:** Because Jack refused to leave the worksite, his boss decided to call security.

Consider the following differences between the sentences in Example 1 and Example 2:

- a. The characters of Example 1, Jack and his boss, are part of the subject, but they do not receive the main focus in the sentence. The foci lie in the words “refusal” and “decision.”
- b. The characters of Example 2, Jack and his boss, receive focus in the subject of each respective clause, and their actions are expressed by the verbs “refused” and “decided,” instead of in the nouns “refusal” and “decision.” Example 2 characters are aligned with their actions.

Notice that Example 1 draws readers’ attention to the abstract nouns “refusal” and “decision.” Even though it is possible to use abstract nouns as characters when you write about abstract issues, this example shows that it can be a bad decision when you use them in lieu of clear characters and their actions.

The alignment between characters and their actions makes sentences like Example 2 more powerful. It is easy to turn type-1 sentences into type-2 ones. All you need is to play a simple game of verbs and nouns, as shown in Table 11.3 in review question 1 for this section.

## Old-before-new

The old-before-new principle guides how writers should sequence information in a sentence. According to this principle, they should use the *information readers already know* to introduce *information they do not know yet*. This principle helps direct readers from familiar or old information to new information. Analyze this first set of examples:

**Example 1:** The science teacher spoke about environmental challenges yesterday, and she mentioned five big environmental problems countries will face in the upcoming decade. Carbon-dioxide concentration levels in the atmosphere are increasing rapidly [new information], and this was the first problem she described [old information].

**Example 2:** The science teacher spoke about environmental challenges yesterday, and she mentioned five big environmental problems countries will face in the upcoming decade. She first talked about [old information] the increasing concentration levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere [new information].

The sentence in Example 2 gradually guides the writer from old to new information. Since information is logically displayed in the sentence, readers are not only able to understand it better, but they will also remember it more easily.

Here are some additional examples:

**Example 3:** Yesterday, lawmakers finally approved a bill that introduces new rules and regulations to financial markets in Canada. The increase of the government's regulatory powers [new information] was by far the most controversial of the new measures [old information].

**Example 4:** Yesterday, lawmakers finally approved a bill that introduces new rules and regulations to financial markets in Canada. The most controversial measure by far [old information] was the increase of the government's regulatory powers [new information].

#### Review Questions: Old-before-new

Rewrite the sentences below and apply the old-before-new principle to make them more cohesive.

1. The syllabus the instructor gave students yesterday did not include dates for turning in papers or for taking exams. Although all assignments were described in detail, as well as the content for each test, the syllabus did not include when they were due.
2. In her email, the principal emphasized that new attendance rules would be in place. She also told us that teachers have found it difficult to maintain lines at the cafeteria during recess, after saying the school would start notifying parents immediately every time a teacher declared a student absent.

## Short-to-long

The short-to-long principle applies to how writers coordinate elements in a sentence. It suggests you list coordinated elements from short to long, as the sentences below illustrate:

**Example 1:** Participants in the study noticed no differences between the first slide scientists projected on the white wall [long element] and the real painting [short element].

**Example 2:** Participants in the study noticed no differences between the real painting [short element] and the first slide scientists projected on the white wall [long element].

The short-to-long principle helps you write sentences that are fluid and easy to read.

### Review Questions: Short-to-long

Select the sentences below that illustrate a good use of the short-to-long principle.

1. A group of five students resolved the test without any assistance, quickly and accurately.
2. A group of five students resolved the test quickly, accurately, and without any assistance.
3. The upset instructor decided to punish all the students. She did not distinguish between the students who had completed the assignment late and the ones who had not turned in the assignment.
4. The upset instructor decided to punish all the students. He did not distinguish between the students who had not turned in the assignment and the ones who had completed the assignment late.
5. Parents have not been attending the evening meetings because some work late and others cannot come to school three nights in a row.
6. Parents have not been attending the evening meetings because some cannot come to school three nights in a row and others work late.

## Coherence

In English composition, coherence or cohesion describes how harmoniously different parts of a text connect to one another. Writers show coherence when they make sense of their ideas as a whole. They need to be cohesive on two different levels: the paragraph level and the text level.

### Paragraph-level coherence

To achieve paragraph-level coherence, define your **topic** clearly. The topic is what you write about in a paragraph. You may have learned that the introduction of every paragraph should contain a **topic sentence**. If you are able to make the sentence topic about the subject, it will be easier for readers to grasp it. Whenever topic and subject align in a sentence, readers will understand what it is about more easily; as a result, your sentence will be more coherent. Compare examples 1 and 2 below:

**Example 1:** The ability to learn from mistakes is not exclusively human, and it has been found by scientists in many other animal species. This ability has been detected, for example, in dogs, cats, and other domesticated species.

**Topic:** the ability to learn from mistakes is not only human

**Characters:** dogs, cats, and other domesticated animals



Although the sentence in Example 1 is understandable, its topic and its characters are not aligned. When they are aligned, notice how much more readable the sentence becomes:

**Example 2:** Dogs, cats, and other domesticated animals can learn from mistakes, as we humans do [topic and characters]. The discovery of this behaviour in animals has led scientists to conclude it is not exclusively human.

Writers sometimes take a while to get to the topic of their sentences or paragraphs by inserting information that could easily come afterward, or even not appear at all. Consider Example 3:

**Example 3:** It is important to note that, after years of discrimination and unheard appeals for justice, politicians finally recognized minority groups needed to have their basic rights written as law.

The introductory clause “it is important to note that” is unnecessary. The writer would not have included the main information if it were not important. Also, the time adverbial “after years of discrimination and unheard appeals for justice” could be placed after the main clause, if it is not needed beforehand as a transition or for emphasis. In the following example, we assume it is not needed as such.

**Example 4:** Politicians finally recognized minority groups needed to have their basic rights written as law after years of discrimination and unheard appeals for justice.

In Example 4, both topic and character come first, and the supporting or secondary information comes after. This strategy creates a more readable and coherent sentence.

## Text-level coherence

Coherence also depends on how writers organize their ideas. To keep ideas organized, the thesis statement should function as a map highlighting the **organizational pattern** of the essay. However, this pattern will affect elements beyond the thesis statement, such as the introduction and body paragraphs. For this reason, you should choose the pattern that works best for your essay as a whole. Take a look at some of the different organizational patterns you may use and what they are good for:

1. **Chronological order:** explaining a step-by-step process, narrating a story, narrating an incident or anecdote from earlier to later
2. **Cause and effect:** explaining a historical event, explaining a scientific finding or process
3. **Coordinate:** explaining the several reasons for a fact or state of affairs

After you have decided on the best organizational pattern for your essay, and your thesis statement is ready, you should ask the following questions:

1. Does my thesis statement provide the reader with a map of the essay? That is, upon reading my thesis statement, does the reader understand what I am writing about and what my main points are?
2. In each paragraph, do the examples, facts, or illustrations I use relate to and support the topic?

3. Does the topic of each paragraph detail one of the points or reasons I included in my thesis statement?

### Review Questions: Coherence

#### Paragraph-level coherence

Rewrite the following paragraph in order to make it coherent. Some sentences require further correction.

1. I believe that technology can help people more in their lives. Nowadays, automation has become very popular in many areas, including agriculture. Vietnam is still an agricultural country, but it is not helped much by high technology, especially the poor farmers. I hope that, in the future, the farmers will enjoy the benefits of automation for a suitable price. The farmers can use a remote control to run a machine that can help them a lot in farming.

(Hint: First, identify the topic of the paragraph and then make it a topic sentence. Then find the characters. After that, decide which information should come after.)

#### Text-level coherence

The paragraphs below illustrate the organization pattern of the essays from which they were extracted. Read them and determine which of the three patterns—chronological, cause and effect, and coordinate—they exemplify. After you identify the pattern, write a new paragraph using the same pattern.

1. **Paragraph 1:** In the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a group of apes were gathered when something unusual happened: A black monolith emerged from the ground. Some of the apes were shocked, and they did not know how to react, while others decided to investigate the strange object. From this incident, the apes learned to throw and to hit with objects. They used this new skill to fight other animals and get food. This was the beginning of humankind.
2. **Paragraph 2:** The “American dream” means many different things to many different people. For some, it means religious freedom or the freedom to worship in any way they like without feeling threatened. For others, it is becoming your own boss, a pursuit that just isn’t possible in many countries. For a third group, it is knowing that their hard work will allow their children and grandchildren to have a much better life than they had.
3. **Paragraph 3:** Many problems could result from climate change. One of the most serious is the rise of sea levels, which could result in the flooding of low-lying coastal areas in countries such as Egypt and the Netherlands. Another negative effect of climate change is its effect on weather patterns. The changing weather has caused a surge in hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters in many areas of the world. A final issue associated with climate change is how it affects biodiversity. Fish populations, for example, could be impacted by changes in water temperature, while some insects that carry disease might become more common throughout the world.

## Voice

The **voice** of a verb determines which elements in the sentence will or will not be in focus. In English, the two types of verb voices are **active** and **passive**.

When we use active voice:

- the *source of the action* (agent) appears as the subject
- the *receiver of the action* (goal) appears as the object

**Example:** The government [agent] has extended benefits [goal] for the unemployed.

When we use passive voice:

- the *receiver of the action* (goal) becomes the subject
- the *source of the action* (agent) may or may not appear

**Example:** Benefits [goal] for the unemployed have been extended (by the government) [agent].

Passive voice is very useful to describe actions whose agents are obvious, not known, or not important. However, in an argumentative essay, passive voice may place your characters at the end of sentences, and this may not be a strong argumentative strategy. In this case, active voice should be used, especially when actions derive from visible characters.

Passive and active voices coexist because each has a distinct function. They allow writers to describe the same phenomenon from two different viewpoints. Writers need to understand the uses of each in order to make informed decisions about when to use either active or passive voice.

Here are a few hints to help you determine which voice may be appropriate in a sentence or description:

1. If your readers must know who is responsible for the action, choose active voice.

**Example:** The CIA should disclose torture documents to the public.

2. If you do not know who did the action, or this information is either obvious or not important, use passive voice.

**Example:** Very expensive jewellery should not be kept at home.

3. Your choice can also be determined by flow in your text.

**Example:** Students must choose if they want makeup classes either right after school or in the evening. The popular football game schedule and not the academic one [new information] may influence their choice more strongly [old information].

The underlined sentence above is in active voice, and it contains the new piece of information before the old one. In this case, passive voice is a better choice. It will place old information first and increase sentence flow, as the following example shows.

**Example:** Students must choose if they want makeup classes either right after school or in the evening. Their choice may be more strongly influenced by the popular football game schedule than by the academic one.

## Review Questions: Voice

The verbs in the sentences below are in passive voice. Rewrite the sentences and change the verbs to active voice. Make any other changes as needed.

1. New skills are learned by students when they are given opportunities by their teachers to take risks.
2. In Brown's article, it is argued that the secret prisons project was carried out by the Secret Service to allow high-risk criminals to be questioned without respect to international law.
3. According to the local newspaper, it is believed that the discussion is polarized by citizens' beliefs about how much the government should intervene in the economy.

## Nominalization

In this chapter's section on [sentence order](#), we learned how to turn nouns into verbs as a strategy to place characters in focus and increase their agency. What we did was an exercise of **de-nominalizing**: we were turning nouns into actions. A **nominalization** is just the opposite, and it occurs when we turn a verb or an adjective into a noun.

**Example 1:** Bob's intention was to speak to Kate.

**Example 2:** Our presentation was about a new plan.

**Example 3:** We did a survey of 30 people for our study.

**Example 4:** Jack got the job because of his proficiency in English.

Using nominalization in the wrong context may remove the attention and focus you need for your characters and verbs. Sentences containing too many nominalizations can also end up being too wordy. In order to correct a nominalization, turn a noun back into a verb as per the example above.

**Example 1:** Bob intended to speak to Kate.

## Review Questions: Nominalization

1. Rewrite examples 2–4 in this section, correcting their nominalizations.

## Points to Consider

**1. Definition of tone and style.**

- a. Write two sample paragraphs on any of the suggested topics below. One paragraph should display an appropriate tone for a persuasive essay. The other paragraph should display an informal or colloquial tone.
- b. In pairs, exchange paragraphs with a partner. Read your partner's paragraphs and identify which one was written in an academic tone and which was not.
- c. Suggested topics:
  - Schools should replace books with laptops.
  - Discuss your academic background and achievements.
  - My recipe for stress management.

**2. Word choice.**

- a. When you are not sure about the meaning of a word you want to use, how can you figure out whether or not to use it?
- b. What is the difference between denotative and connotative meanings?

**3. Gender bias.**

- a. Name and provide examples of three different strategies to avoid gender bias.

**4. Characters and actions.**

- a. When sentences emphasize clear characters and actions, what difference does it make to readers?
- b. How can you tell if the characters and actions in your sentences have been properly emphasized?

**5. Old-before-new.**

- a. How does the old-before-new principle help readers?
- b. How does this principle help connect ideas and sentences to one another?

**6. Coherence.**

- a. Explain paragraph-level coherence.
- b. Describe two organizational patterns you can use to plan and write a paragraph.

**7. Voice.**

- a. When is it appropriate to use passive voice?
- b. When is it not appropriate to use passive voice?



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## Appendix A: Grammar Review

Navigate through this grammar review using the table of contents:

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<a href="#">A.4 The Phrase</a>
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<a href="#">A.13 Intransitive Verbs</a>
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### A.1 Basic Parts of Speech

The eight parts of speech (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections) are the basic words that make up phrases, clauses, and sentences. Nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs make up over 95% of all words in the English language.

#### Nouns

We traditionally define a noun as any word that represents a person, place, or thing. However, nouns often do not function on their own; they work with attendant **determiners** and **adjectives** to form **noun phrases**. We can also distinguish further between abstract nouns and **proper nouns**, those that represent a specific person, historical event, or other name. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

Mary jogged.

Mary is a proper noun that functions as the subject of the sentence.

That tall woman jogged.

“Woman” is a noun, but the word also has the determiner “that” and the adjective “tall” preceding it. All three words working together make up the noun phrase that functions as the subject of the sentence.

## Pronouns

A pronoun replaces a noun or proper noun, indirectly referring to a person, place, or thing. Typically, a pronoun is used when the reader already knows the proper noun to which it refers, either from a previous sentence or because of information given within the same sentence.

She went straight to the source.

For such a beautiful country, it has very few visitors.

## Adjectives

Adjectives modify or describe nouns. Many adjectives have characteristic suffixes, such as *-ous* (“delicious”), *-ish* (“waspy”), *-ful* (“beautiful”), and *-ary* (“wary”). You can modify adjectives using **qualifiers** (“very,” “extremely”) and comparative words (“more,” “most,” “less,” “least”). Just as with nouns, adjectives and attendant modifiers form **adjective phrases**.

I need to find an affordable car.

The adjective “affordable” is modifying the noun “car.”

Ms. Chu needs to find a more reliable car.

Here the adjective “reliable” is preceded by the comparative word “more.” Both of these words make up the adjective phrase modifying the noun “car.”

## Verbs

Verbs are defined as action words, but may also introduce states or descriptions. They are often marked by **auxiliaries** (“will,” “shall”). A verb and its attendant auxiliaries make up a **verb phrase**. All verbs require a **subject**, which in most cases consists of who or what is conducting the action. Often in sentences that command or suggest something to a listener, the subject “you” will be omitted. Many verbs require an **object** (who or what is receiving the action).

Robert dropped the ball during the final seconds of the game.

The verb of this sentence is “dropped.” The subject of the verb is the noun “Robert” and the object is the noun “ball.”

Go to my office and fetch my keys.

The subject of these verbs is the implied “you,” which is omitted in commands or requests.

I could finish my essay by eight o’clock tonight.

The verb “finish” is attended by the auxiliary “could.” Both words make up the verb phrase.



Here is a list of auxiliaries that can attend a verb. “Must” and “ought to” have no past form. Auxiliaries are defined as part of the verb, not as a separate adverb.

**Table A.1 Auxiliary verbs**

Present	Past
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will</li> <li>• shall</li> <li>• can</li> <li>• may</li> <li>• must</li> <li>• ought to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• would</li> <li>• should</li> <li>• could</li> <li>• might</li> </ul>

## Adverbs

Adverbs act as modifiers of verbs, describing their time, place, reason, or manner. Like adjectives, adverbs can be qualified (“very,” “quite”). Many (but not all) adverbs end with *-ly* (“slowly,” “apparently,” “strangely”).

Pierre quickly ran through the main points of his argument.

The adverb “quickly” is modifying the verb “ran.”

She threw down the gauntlet quite suddenly.

The adverb “suddenly” is being qualified by the word “quite.” This **adverb phrase** modifies the verb “threw.”

## Conjunctions

A conjunction joins two clauses, or helps coordinate words within a single sentence. Conjunctions include words like “and,” “if,” and “but.”

You told me to meet you here, but then you left.

**Coordinating conjunctions** show that the connected words, phrases, or clauses in the sentence are equally important.

The students were always told to mind their p’s and q’s.

We can either sweep the floor or start making breakfast.

A coordinating conjunction can link a sentence to the previous one if placed at the beginning of the second sentence.

I've always felt people set too much store by appearances. And it turns out I was right.

A **subordinating conjunction** joins an independent and a dependent clause. Any phrase beginning with a subordinating conjunction is judged dependent. (For a list of subordinating conjunctions, see [section A.3.](#))

When the worst of the storm had passed, we ventured outside.

## Prepositions

A preposition is used to indicate a relationship between another word and a noun or pronoun. Common prepositions include “for,” “in,” “with,” “of,” “through,” and so forth.

We've been looking for you for hours.

In this case, I'm willing to give it a chance.

## Interjections

An interjection is a part of speech that interrupts a sentence. It is typically used in very informal situations or to represent everyday speech, rather than formal or academic language.

You're eating that? Eww.

Wow! Are you really going to walk across the bridge?

## A.2 Form Versus Function

In [section A.1](#), we defined the different parts of speech by their form; we looked at the basic meaning of words while ignoring how they might be working within a sentence. However, in order to understand how the parts of speech work grammatically in sentences, we must use a functional terminology.

Remember, **form** refers to the part of speech of a word as it is defined, while **function** refers to how the word works in a sentence. The form of a word is static, whereas its function might change from sentence to sentence.

Eating an apple a day can keep the doctor away, or so they say.

In this sentence, the word “eating,” which is formally defined as a verb, functions nominally (as if it were a noun) because it is the subject of the sentence.

Is this the picture of Jose's mother?

By making “Jose” (formally a proper noun) possessive, we are using it as a modifier to describe whose mother we are talking about. Therefore, it is functioning adjectivally.

Her truck, a red Chevy, was parked around the back of the house.

Here we are using the noun phrase “red Chevy” adjectivally to describe the noun “truck.”

### Review Questions

Identify the nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs in each sentence. Remember that any part of speech can come in the form of a phrase as well, so make sure to mark the entire phrase.

1. Should I take that plastic bottle out of the fridge?
2. Mr. Gonzalez quickly reprimanded the student for using his cellphone in class.
3. Interestingly, there was a strange inscription on the bottom of the clay pot.
4. During the weekends, she volunteers at the local homeless shelter.
5. The balcony collapsed because of a poorly manufactured steel I-beam.

## A.3 The Clause

A clause is any group of words that contains both a subject and a verb. The subject can be a simple noun, a group of words known as a phrase (see [section A.4](#)), or another clause. Clauses can be split into two categories: independent and dependent clauses.

### Independent clause

The independent clause can always stand on its own as a complete sentence; it does not rely on other clauses or phrases for its meaning. A sentence may contain more than one independent clause, but each independent clause can always be made a separate complete sentence.

Hand me that socket wrench.

Here, a single independent clause is used as a complete sentence. The verb in this clause is “hand.” The subject is the implied **pronoun** “you,” which is usually omitted in orders or requests.

Tell my sister that I miss her; tell my brother that it gets much easier.

Here, two related independent clauses are joined together with a semicolon to form a **compound sentence**, which is defined as any sentence that has more than one independent clause.

She is going to be a schoolteacher because she believes education is the most fundamental pillar of the republic.

This sentence is made up of an independent clause and a subordinate (dependent) clause. A sentence with one independent clause and one or more dependent clause is called a **complex sentence**.

This peach is way beyond ripe, and I refuse to pay for it.

This sentence consists of two independent clauses joined by a **coordinating conjunction**.

## Dependent clause

Like the independent clause, the dependent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. However, the dependent clause relies (or depends) on an independent clause to complete its meaning.

If you chase two rabbits, you will lose them both.

The first clause is dependent because it begins with “if,” which is classified as a **subordinating conjunction**. All clauses that begin with subordinating conjunctions are considered dependent. Notice that the dependent clause still contains both a subject and a verb.

Janis spent her vacation in Goa, which is on the west coast of the Indian subcontinent.

Here, the dependent clause is being used like one big adjective to modify or describe “Goa.” The dependent clause begins with the **relative pronoun** “which,” which stands in for “Goa” as the subject of the clause.

Here is a list of common subordinating conjunctions:

- |              |                 |              |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| • after      | • as if         | • before     |
| • if         | • lest          | • because    |
| • until      | • where         | • although   |
| • as long as | • while         | • though     |
| • now that   | • till          | • when       |
| • since      | • as            | • as much as |
| • how        | • in order that | • wherever   |
| • unless     | • whenever      | • so that    |

Remember that any clause beginning with one of these words is considered dependent and cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence.

### Review Questions

Identify the clause(s) in each example sentence. Mark each clause as either an independent clause (IC) or dependent clause (DC).

1. There are a thousand little restaurants tucked into the corners, basements, and alleyways of Manhattan, and many of them are worth discovering.

2. My uncle was not dull: he was uncommonly clever.
3. If you speak the truth, have a foot in the stirrup.
4. Take your shoes off before you walk on my new carpet.
5. Is Jason really moving to Portland to look for a job after he graduates?

## A.4 The Phrase

A phrase is defined as any word or group of words (excluding clauses) that functions as a unit within a sentence. In other words, a phrase can be any group of words that is missing either a subject or a verb. There are many different types of phrases. Here, we will outline those most commonly seen in English sentences.

### Prepositional phrase

Any phrase (with a handful of exceptions) that begins with a preposition is considered a **prepositional phrase**.

There are dozens of different prepositions. The following is a list of common prepositions:

- |              |              |             |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| • aboard     | • toward     | • past      |
| • through    | • onto       | • from      |
| • near       | • down       | • beneath   |
| • but        | • at         | • across    |
| • amid       | • within     | • to        |
| • until      | • since      | • on        |
| • over       | • like       | • despite   |
| • for        | • beyond     | • as        |
| • below      | • along      | • with      |
| • above      | • underneath | • regarding |
| • till       | • outside    | • into      |
| • off        | • except     | • between   |
| • concerning | • before     | • against   |
| • around     | • about      | • under     |
| • upon       | • throughout | • out       |
| • per        | • of         | • during    |
| • in         | • by         | • atop      |
| • beside     | • among      | • without   |
| • after      | • up         |             |

Here is an example of a sentence that uses prepositional phrases:

After swimming in the ocean, Marco jumped in the pool.

There are three prepositional phrases in this sentence. The second, “in the ocean,” is contained within the first. Remember that a preposition will always be modifying either a noun or a verb. All three, in this case, are adverbial: “after swimming” is describing when Marco jumped, while “in the pool” is describing where.

Our company now imports semiconductors from the Republic of China.

Here is an example of two prepositional phrases acting adjectivally. “From” is telling us the origin of the semiconductors (though, in this case, it could also be functioning adverbially—that is, describing the verb “imports”), while “of” tells us which republic we’re talking about.

## Participial phrase

A participle is defined as any verb that ends with *-ing* or *-ed* (with regular verbs) and functions as either an adjective or adverb. The participle may also have an object (something receiving the action of the verb) after it, causing it to become a **participial phrase**.

Skipping along the forested path, the dwarfs whistled in a merry chorus.

Here the participial phrase is modifying the subject “dwarfs.” Notice that you can move the participial phrase to different parts of the sentence. It could go either after the subject or at the end of the sentence.

The kids went bounding down the stairs.

The participial phrase is acting adverbially in this sentence. In other words, the participle is modifying the verb “went.”

Participles can also be used in conjunction with auxiliary verbs to make compound verbs.

He had enjoyed art for many years before he went to school to study graphic design.

They were washing the dishes when they heard a thump upstairs.

## Gerund phrase

The gerund is defined as any *-ing* verb that functions as a noun. In other words, you can place a gerund phrase in any place in the sentence where a noun could normally function. When the gerund verb has an attendant object or modifiers, we describe it as a **gerund phrase**.

For thirty years, Marcel has started every morning by swimming around the bay.

This gerund phrase is functioning as the object of the preposition “by.”

Snooping around Facebook is the new way to vet potential employees.

The gerund phrase here is functioning as the subject of the sentence.

## Infinitive phrase

The infinitive is defined as the base (present tense) form of a verb preceded by the word “to.” An **infinitive phrase** can function nominally, adverbially, or adjectivally.

To talk about poll numbers at this stage of the election is simply counterproductive.

The infinitive phrase is functioning as a noun by being the subject of the sentence. Notice that there are two prepositional phrases following the infinitive verb: “about poll numbers” and “at this stage of the election.” Because these phrases are both modifying the infinitive verb, we consider them to be part of the infinitive phrase.

To ensure a full refund, you must also bring your receipt.

The infinitive phrase is functioning as an adverb modifying the main verb “bring.” Notice that, when the infinitive is positioned at the beginning of the sentence and is acting as an adverb (not as the subject), we place a comma after it.

A fistfight is no way to resolve an argument.

The infinitive phrase is functioning as an adjective modifying the noun “way.”

### Review Questions

Underline and identify the participial, prepositional, gerund, or infinitive phrase(s) in each sentence.

1. On Thursday, I drove up north to move a couch for a friend.
2. If your shoes have a lot of surface area, hiking through a snow drift gets a lot easier.
3. Already exhausted by the second quarter, we were no match for the division champions.
4. That award, offered once a year to only one teacher in the entire state, is quite an honour to win.
5. Hoping against all hope that the balding tires would hold and the rusting fuel pump would continue to work, I loaded up all of my possessions that would fit, discarded the rest in a dumpster behind a truck stop, and set out to cross the country.

## A.5 Commas

Use commas with coordinating conjunctions that join two independent clauses. There are seven coordinating conjunctions: “for,” “and,” “nor,” “but,” “or,” “yet,” and “so.” Using the acronym FANBOYS will help you remember them.

You should only connect two independent clauses per sentence, as any more than that can quickly make a sentence unwieldy.

Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.

The coordinating conjunction “and” is connecting two independent clauses. Notice that, in the first clause, the subject is a missing but implied “you.” We still consider clauses with an implied “you” (what we term **imperative** statements) to be independent.

I looked all over the house, but I couldn’t find my keys.

The coordinating conjunction “but” is connecting two independent clauses. Since the subject “I” is restated in the second clause, we consider it a separate subject.

Ms. Brenner went to the local police station and disputed her speeding ticket with the officer at the front desk.

Notice that the coordinating conjunction “and” is connecting two verbs (“went” and “disputed”) instead of two independent clauses. Do not use commas when connecting two verbs, adjectives, or nouns unless you want to place special emphasis on the second item.

---

Use the comma to separate three or more elements in a series. Although you are not absolutely required to place a comma before the last item in a series, it seems to be a general academic convention to include one. Whether you decide to use it or not, make sure to keep it consistent throughout your writing.

During her trip to Europe, Erica visited Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Holland.

---

Use a comma after a dependent clause when it comes before an independent clause. Use a comma to introduce a dependent clause that comes after an independent clause only if the subordinating conjunction implies contrast (i.e., “though,” “whereas”).

If you speak the truth, have a foot in the stirrup.

The subordinating conjunction “if” marks the dependent clause as coming before the independent clause. Place a comma between the ending of the dependent clause and the beginning of the independent clause.

He cancelled his magazine subscription because he thought the editors no longer addressed important issues.

The subordinating conjunction “because” does not imply a contrast between the independent clause and the dependent clause. Therefore, we do not use a comma before “because.”

Allen is scrambling to finish all of his projects, whereas Amy planned ahead and had everything finished by last Thursday.

The subordinating conjunction “whereas” implies a contrast between the independent clause and the dependent clause.

---

Many sentences begin with a prepositional, gerund, or infinitive phrase that introduces or explains the sentence. Place a comma between the end of the introductory phrase and the beginning of the subject.



If the introductory phrase is less than four words long, you often do not need to use a comma, although it is never wrong to use one to be safe.

To get a good grade, you must complete all of your assignments.

The sentence is introduced with an infinitive phrase, and the comma is placed before the subject “you.”

Justifying a fault doubles it.

Notice that the gerund phrase is not working as an introductory phrase, but as the subject itself. If a phrase is filling the role of sentence subject, then we do not place a comma after it.

### Review Questions

For each example sentence, insert missing commas or omit incorrectly placed commas.

1. I finally found my keys and I got to work just in time.
2. Mrs. Contreras threw out her old coffee table, and cleaned the carpet.
3. Taking the elevator to the roof we hoped we could see the skyline, and the bay.
4. Though Susan wasn't feeling well she went to the store anyway and bought ice cream pizza, and candy.
5. I let my neighbour borrow my phone, because she said hers was tapped by the police.

## A.6 Semicolons

Use semicolons to connect two independent clauses when the second clause restates the first or when the two clauses are closely related.

Road construction in Seattle has hindered travel around town; streets have become covered with bulldozers, trucks, and cones.

The second independent clause is describing the same situation as the first, but in a different manner.

It rained heavily during the afternoon; however, we still managed to have a picnic.

The second independent clause is linked to the first with a semicolon and a **conjunctive adverb**. Whenever you use a conjunctive adverb, either after a semicolon or at the beginning of a sentence, place a comma after it.

Here is a list of common conjunctive adverbs:

- besides
- thereafter
- moreover
- meanwhile
- hence
- therefore

- |                |               |               |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| • however      | • similarly   | • in fact     |
| • nevertheless | • undoubtedly | • likewise    |
| • thus         | • indeed      | • that is     |
| • incidentally | • still       | • as a result |

Be wary of confusing conjunctive adverbs with subordinating conjunctions, for they have distinctly different uses. See section A.3 for a [list of subordinating conjunctions](#).

Use a semicolon to separate elements in a sequence when those elements already have commas or other punctuation within them, known as internal punctuation. Doing so clarifies for the reader how the internal punctuation is functioning.

Recent sites of the Summer Olympic Games include Beijing, China; Athens, Greece; Sydney, Australia; and Atlanta, Georgia.

The semicolons separate the larger elements, while the commas separate the city and country within each element.

### Review Questions

For each sentence, insert missing semicolons or omit incorrectly placed semicolons.

1. They gave the fire marshal a kickback to look the other way consequently, the building went up in flames the very next year.
2. The earthquake on March 22nd was nearly a 6.0 on the Richter scale, however there was no loss of life.
3. Ingrid received a huge bonus last Christmas; because she single-handedly sealed the Union Plastics deal.
4. The old industrial centres of America—Detroit, Michigan, Cincinnati, Ohio, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—are attempting to find new ways to thrive in a tech-heavy economy.
5. I came in second place, my father hid his disappointment.

## A.7 Colons

Use the colon after an independent clause when it is followed by a list, quotation, or other idea directly related to the independent clause.

Julie went to the store for some groceries: milk, bread, coffee, and cheese.

The colon is announcing a list of items that describes the noun “groceries” in more detail.

The crier said those dreaded words: “The King is dead! Long live the king!”

The colon is announcing a quote that specifies which “words” were said.

You can also use the colon to join two independent clauses when you wish to emphasize the second clause. The colon in this case announces that the second independent clause will complete the idea set up in the first.

Road construction in Yorknapatawpha County hindered travel along many routes: parts of Highway 56 and Vienda Drive are closed during construction.

The colon here announces that the first clause about “road construction” will be completed using the more specific detail from the second clause.

### Review Questions

For each sentence, insert missing colons or omit incorrectly placed colons.

1. An ammonia molecule consists of four atoms, one nitrogen and three hydrogen.
2. George was turned away at the unemployment office they knew he still had a job.
3. Some say there are traces of mercury in the town water supply: however, tests conducted by the EPA showed negative results.
4. I know the perfect job for her; a politician.
5. That street vendor sells everything you could possibly want; churros, hot dogs, and popsicles, for starters.

## A.8 Hyphens

Use the hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single modifier before a noun. We use hyphens to clarify how multiple modifiers function before a noun.

You might not know it upon first seeing her, but she is a well-known author.

That novelty shop on the boardwalk sells chocolate-covered peanuts.

Last night, Ms. Munoz attended a high-school prom-night fundraiser.

If each word works *separately* to modify a noun, they are not hyphenated. We also do not use a hyphen when the compound modifiers come *after* a noun.

The old manor house was covered with creeping green wisteria.

In this case, “creeping” is not modifying “green”; both words work as separate modifiers to describe “wisteria.”

You might not know it upon first seeing her, but the author is well known.

That novelty shop on the boardwalk sells peanuts that are chocolate covered.

### Review Questions

For each sentence, insert missing hyphens or omit unnecessary hyphens.

1. I have nothing to wear for my job interview but a paint splattered tie.
2. Those ragged-old clothes I got from the attic were moth-ridden.
3. Shelia’s cat brought home a mouse that was scared-stiff but otherwise unharmed.
4. The recycling bin was filled with empty-plastic water bottles.
5. Walter said I could use his, even though it was dog-eared and had missing pages.

## A.9 Apostrophes

We use apostrophes to indicate a **possessive** noun. Follow these rules to create possessive nouns with apostrophes.

1. Add [’s] to the singular form of the word (even if it ends in –s).
  - the owner’s insurance, the waitress’s coat
2. Add [’s] to plural forms that do not end in –s.
  - the children’s game, the people’s opinion
3. Add [’] to the end of plural nouns that end in –s.
  - the three friends’ cars, the workers’ benefits
4. Add [’s] to the end of compound words.
  - my brother-in-law’s money
5. Add [’s] to the last noun to show joint possession of an object.
  - Tom and Monica’s house

Apostrophes are also used in contractions. We define a contraction as a word in which one or more letters have been omitted. The apostrophe shows this omission. Here is a list of examples:

- don't = do not
- I'm = I am
- he'll = he will
- you're = you are
- won't = will not
- could've = could have

### Review Questions

For each sentence, insert missing apostrophes or omit unnecessary apostrophes.

1. Jack's and Jill's hill is nothing more than a mound of dirt on the southwest corner of Farmer Johns land.
2. One's labour is proportional to ones' wealth.
3. George shouldn't say that he'll be in the library when he obviously wont.
4. Ill be back.
5. Who'll referee those kid's soccer game if not for you're brother.

## A.10 Dashes and Parentheses

Use longer em dashes (—) to set off or emphasize the content enclosed within them or the content that follows a dash. Em dashes are distinct from en dashes (–), which have a similar function to hyphens (-) but are used only in specific cases. Em dashes place more emphasis on the enclosed content than either parentheses or commas. We also use em dashes to set off an **appositive** phrase that already includes commas.

An appositive is a word or phrase that adds explanatory or clarifying information to the noun that precedes it.

The USS Constitution became known as “Old Ironsides” during the War of 1812—during which the cannonballs fired from the British HMS Guerriere merely bounced off the sides of the Constitution.

In this case, the phrase that comes after the dash is more important than the independent clause that comes before.

To some of you, my proposals may seem radical—even revolutionary.

Here, the dash works in conjunction with “even” to emphasize the adjective “revolutionary.”

The cousins—Tina, Todd, and Sam—arrived at the party together.

Here, the dash is not being used for emphasis, but to stand in the place of additional commas that might confuse the reader.

Whereas dashes are used to emphasize content, parentheses are used to downplay content. They place less emphasis on the enclosed content than commas. Use parentheses to set off nonessential material—such as dates, clarifying information, or sources—from a sentence.

Muhammad Ali (1942–present), arguably the greatest boxer of all time, claimed he would “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.”

Denis Johnson’s new novel (which is bound in a luminous red hardback cover) is a worthy addition to the crime fiction genre.

Notice that information enclosed in parentheses has little relevance to the primary idea or meaning of a sentence.

### Review Questions

For each sentence, decide whether to replace the comma(s) with an em dash or parentheses.

1. My brother’s favourite dog, a Jack Russell terrier, loves to play fetch.
2. I have always been described as a little bit odd, even downright strange.
3. “Waterfalls,” perhaps the greatest song of all time, has recently been reissued.
4. How would we be able to tell which of the three cheeses, Camembert, Roquefort, or cheddar, was best?

## A.11 “To Be” Verbs

When a form of “to be” (“am,” “is,” “are,” “was,” “were”) serves as the main verb of a sentence, an adverbial of time or place, an adjectival, or a noun phrase will follow it. (For definitions and examples of the adverb, adjective, and noun phrase, see [section A.1](#).) The following are the three sentence patterns that occur with the “to be” verb:

1. (subject) + (“to be” verb) + (adverbial of time or place)

**Table A.2 Sentences with adverbials of time or place**

Subject	“To Be” Verb	Adverbial of Time or Place
The children	were	upstairs.
The meeting	is	tomorrow.
The nutmeg	is	on the shelf.

Prepositional phrases often take the form of adverbials, as seen in the third example. For a definition and examples of prepositional phrases, see [section A.4](#).

2. (subject) + (“to be” verb) + (subject complement [adjective])

**Table A.3 Sentences with adjective subject complements**

Subject	“To Be” Verb	Subject Complement [adj.]
The children	were	excited.
The meeting	is	boring.
Jacob	is	in a bad mood.

Sometimes a prepositional phrase, in the form of an idiomatic expression, will fill the role of subject complement, as seen in the third example.

3. (subject) + (“to be” verb) + (subject complement [noun phrase])

**Table A.4 Sentences with noun subject complements**

Subject	“To Be” Verb	Subject Complement [n.]
The children	were	angels.
The meeting	will be	a success.

### Review Questions

Identify the subject and “to be” verb of each sentence, as well as the adverbial, subject complement [adj.], or subject complement [noun phrase].

1. My neighbour is uncommonly thrifty.
2. The Oldsmobile was on its last legs.
3. Celia is the CEO of a large multinational corporation.
4. The last performance of *Death of a Salesman* was on Friday.

5. The plumber will be here soon.

## A.12 Linking Verbs

We define linking verbs as all verbs that are completed by a subject complement, which is an adjectival or a noun phrase that describes or identifies the subject. Subject complements describe or redefine the subject. Common linking verbs include “seem,” “look,” “smell,” “sound,” and “become.” The formula for a sentence with a linking verb is:

(subject) + (linking verb) + (subject complement [NP or adj.])

**Table A.5 Sentences with linking verbs and subject complements**

Subject	Linking Verb	Subject Complement [NP or adj.]
The children	became	restless.
The soup	smells	delicious.
Marcel	looks	like a businessman.

Noun phrases that act as subject complements are often preceded by the preposition “like,” as seen in the third example in Table A.5.

Note that “to be” is also a linking verb, but it has been given its own section in this appendix to highlight how important it is (see [section A.11](#)).

### Review Questions

Identify the subject, linking verb, and subject complement (noun phrase or adjective) of each sentence.

1. The taxi driver seemed like a nice man.
2. The inside of the bakery smells delicious.
3. On that day, Francis became a criminal.
4. It sounds like a good idea!
5. Ms. Yeziarsky became a schoolteacher.



## A.13 Intransitive Verbs

An intransitive verb has no complement (noun phrase or adjectival). Though an intransitive verb requires nothing more than a subject, it is often accompanied by adverbial information. In fact, a handful of intransitive verbs, such as “reside,” “sneak,” and “glance,” require an adverbial of place in order to be complete.

1. (subject) + (intransitive verb)

**Table A.6 Sentences with intransitive verbs**

Subject	Intransitive Verb
The children	wept.
My dog	sleeps.

2. (subject) + (intransitive verb) + (optional adverbial)

**Table A.7 Sentences with intransitive verbs and adverbials**

Subject	Intransitive Verb	Optional Adverbial
The children	played	on the jungle gym.
The meeting	concluded	without a hitch.
My dog	snores	loudly.

### Review Questions

Identify the subject, intransitive verb, and optional adverbial (if present) of each sentence.

1. We went to the bowling alley on Friday.
2. Mr. Billingsworth laughed at the antics of the class clown.
3. The ambassadors from Albania arrived.
4. Rosa walked to the park.
5. The party of boy scouts rested.

## A.14 Transitive Verbs

All transitive verbs have a subject and take one or more complements. Furthermore, all transitive verbs have one complement in common: the **direct object**, which receives the action of the verb.

1. (subject) + (transitive verb) + (direct object [NP])

**Table A.8 Sentences with transitive verbs and direct objects**

Subject	Transitive Verb	Direct Object [NP]
The children	kicked	the ball.
My dog	chews	the furniture.
The professor	answered	the question.

2. The second transitive-verb pattern includes a second complement, the **indirect object**. We traditionally define the indirect object as the recipient of the direct object. (subject) + (transitive verb) + (direct object [NP]) + (indirect object [NP])

**Table A.9 Sentences with transitive verbs and direct and indirect objects**

Subject	Transitive Verb	Indirect Object [NP]	Direct Object [NP]
The students	bought	their teacher	a present.
My dog	brought	me	the tennis ball.
The professor	called	himself	a genius.

3. Transitive verbs take **object complements**. Similar to subject complements in “to be” verbs and linking verbs, object complements describe or redefine their object. Object complements take the form of noun phrases (NP) and adjectives. (subject) + (transitive verb) + (direct object [NP]) + (object complement [NP])

**Table A.10 Sentences with transitive verbs, direct objects, and noun object complements**

Subject	Transitive Verb	Direct Object [NP]	Object Complement [NP]
The child	named	her cat	Charlie.
I	make	my living	the hard way.

4. (subject) + (transitive verb) + (direct object [NP]) + (object complement [adj.])

**Table A.11 Sentences with transitive verbs, direct objects, and adjective object complements**

Subject	Transitive Verb	Direct Object [NP]	Object Complement [adj.]
The children	painted	the fence	white.
The teacher	made	the test	easy.

### Review Questions

Identify the subject, transitive verb, and direct object of the sentence. If applicable, identify the indirect object or object complement as well.

1. Mrs. Nakamura considers her hometown beautiful.
2. Before setting out on the road trip, I put air in my tires.
3. Joyce gave her father a gift card for Christmas.
4. He hadn't broken his promise.
5. The voters elected Mr. Thompson mayor.

## A.15 Subject-Verb Agreement

Sometimes, a long phrase or clause will separate a subject from a verb. Consider the following error in subject-verb agreement:

The play with such true witticisms and parables come highly recommended.

The author has misconstrued the subject as “witticisms and parables” and has thus used the plural form of the verb. You must always identify the actual subject of the sentence—in this case, the noun “play.” One way to identify the subject of a sentence is to find the word or phrase that comes before the verb and does not modify anything else. Prepositional phrases can never act as the subject of the sentence, so you can separate them with brackets to find the subject:

The play [with such true witticisms and parables] comes highly recommended.

Subjects can be phrases as well. Consider these two examples:

To attend a party without pants is quite foolish.

Running a marathon is his idea of a vacation!

In the above sentences, the underlined phrases function as subjects. Subject phrases always take singular verbs.

There are also several rules related to the conjunctions “and,” “or,” and “nor.” Generally speaking, if the subject is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected with an “and,” then the verb is plural:

Her watch and wallet **were** stolen from the locker at the train station.

When two or more singular nouns are connected by “or” or “nor,” use the singular form of the verb:

A socket wrench or power drill **is** a good tool to have in a situation like this.

If one of the nouns connected with “or” or “nor” is plural, use the plural form of the verb if the plural noun is closer. However, if the singular noun is closer to the verb, use the singular form of the verb:

A power drill or socket wrenches **are** good tools to have in a situation like this.

Socket wrenches or a power drill **is** a good tool to have in a situation like this.

There are a few exceptions to the rule of subject-verb agreement. Some nouns such as “civics,” “politics,” “mathematics,” “measles,” “mumps,” and “news” take the singular form of the verb:

The news **is** dire.

Politics **is** becoming more optimistic these days.

### Review Questions

Select the correct form of the verb in each sentence.

1. There **is/are** fewer criminals on the street since the law was passed.
2. That may be, but there **is/are** no evidence that it’s making us any safer.
3. Mathematics **is/are** the fundamental language of physics.
4. Jerry, who runs around all weekend trying to find great deals at big-box stores, sometimes **lose/loses** sight of what’s really important.
5. Civics **is/are** taught in every high school in America.
6. The protesters holding that hand-painted sign **seem/seems** really motivated.
7. Throwing politicians to the media sharks **does/do** them some good.
8. Neither the sword nor the pen **is/are** most mighty in this situation.
9. Charity or alms **helps/help** those suffering most from the recession.
10. Potassium and water **is/are** a dangerous combination!

## A.16 Commas and Semicolons

Avoid using commas to connect **independent clauses**. Consider the following comma splices:

I finally found my keys, I got to work just in time.

It rained heavily during the afternoon, however we still managed to have a picnic.

Use a period, semicolon, or coordinating conjunction to connect independent clauses:

I finally found my keys, and I got to work just in time.

It rained heavily during the afternoon; however, we still managed to have a picnic.

In most cases, we only use semicolons to connect two independent clauses. Avoid using semicolons to separate words or phrases from the independent clause.

The roof of that car was covered in AstroTurf; a strange sight!

Quentin's father gave him a golden pocket watch; which was a priceless family heirloom.

Use dashes to emphasize or set off a phrase, or use a comma to set off a phrase if you do not want to convey as much emphasis.

The roof of that car was covered in AstroTurf—a strange sight!

Quentin's father gave him a golden pocket watch, which was a priceless family heirloom.

### Review Questions

Each sentence has either a comma splice or a sentence fragment. Correct comma splices by replacing the comma with a period, semicolon, or coordinating conjunction. Correct sentence fragments by either omitting the semicolon completely or replacing the semicolon with a comma or dash.

1. I gave my mother a box of chocolates for her birthday, she was pleased.
2. Susan was sitting off in the corner; without a care in the world.
3. When they were kids they made homemade lemonade, they sold it for two bucks a pop.
4. Without support from the president; the bill failed to make it through Congress.
5. Construction continued unabated for more than two months, I wasn't getting much sleep.

## A.17 Voice

In English grammar, we make a distinction between **active voice** and **passive voice**. In sentences written with active voice, the subject is doing the action.

The student wrote the paper.

Rainwater flooded the basement.

Jose argued that his house was no place for a dance party.

In sentences written with passive voice, the subject is acted upon. Consider the same examples written in passive voice:

The paper was written by the student.

The basement was flooded by rainwater.

That his house was no place for a dance party was argued by Jose.

Compare the third example in both instances: They both have the same fundamental meaning, but the sentence written in passive voice is vague and awkwardly worded, while the same sentence in active voice is clearer and more succinct.

Use the following steps to determine if a sentence is written in passive voice. We'll use the same example sentence.

1. The subject is not conducting the action, but is being acted upon.
  - That his house was no place for a dance party was argued by Jose.
2. A form of "to be" ("am," "is," "are," "was," "were") appears with a past participle (verb form ending in *-ed* or *-en*).
  - That his house was no place for a dance party was argued by Jose.
3. The **preposition** "by [noun phrase]" either appears in the sentence or can be added.
  - That his house was no place for a dance party was argued by Jose.

See [section A.4](#) for a definition and examples of prepositions and prepositional phrases.

Eliminate passive voice by making the subject the doer of the action. You can convert a sentence to active voice by exchanging the object of the preposition and the subject of the passive sentence.

**Passive voice:** That his house was no place for a dance party was argued by Jose.

Invert the subject and object, and the sentence changes to active voice.

**Active voice:** Jose argued that his house was no place for a dance party.

However, sometimes passive voice is preferable when the object being acted upon is more important or when the doer of action is unknown.

The rainfall total was measured using standard practices.

My car was broken into last night.

### Review Questions

Convert the following sentences from passive voice to active voice. If necessary, invent a subject for the active construction.

1. Mistakes were made by top-level officials.
2. The electricity was turned off by the power company.
3. The vase was broken.
4. The scientists' assertions could not have been believed.
5. When was the law implemented?





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## About the Author

Carellin Brooks has written four previous books: *Every Inch a Woman*, *Wreck Beach*, *Fresh Hell*, and *One Hundred Days of Rain*. She is a contract instructor at the University of British Columbia, Kwantlen Polytechnic University where she teaches pre-university English courses in Academic and Career Preparation, and Fairleigh Dickinson University Vancouver. She has taught since 2003.



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## Adaptation Statement

*Building Blocks of Academic Writing* by Carellin Brooks is under a [CC BY-NC 4.0 Licence](#), except where otherwise noted.

This book is a major adaptation of *Commonsense Composition* by Crystle Bruno, Jen Jebens, Fabio Coelho, Jen Hagemann, and Peter Gambrill, and edited by Jan Jose State University (© 2019 CK-12 Foundation), which is under a [CC BY-NC 3.0 Licence](#). The original book can be accessed here: [Commonsense Composition – original](#).

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This adaptation includes the following changes, which are © 2020 by Carellin Brooks and are licensed under a CC BY-NC 4.0 Licence:

- Chapters 1 to 4 were combined into one chapter (Chapter 3). This chapter was then edited to address various styles of paragraphs, rather than essays.
- Kept the following chapters:
  - Chapter 7 (Now Chapter 11: Tone and Style)
  - Chapter 8 (Now Chapter 10: Business Documents)
  - Chapter 9-13 (Now Appendix A: Grammar Review)
- Deleted the following chapters:
  - Chapter 5: Writing about Literature: The Basics
  - Chapter 6: Writing about Literature: Analyzing Prose
- Changed examples to reflect the Canadian context and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
- Replaced American spelling with Canadian spelling.
- Changed examples and wording to be appropriate for adult learners.
- Added an editing marks legend to the Appendix.
- The following chapters are new creations:
  - Chapter 1: Research

- Chapter 2: Prewriting
- Chapter 4: Summary
- Chapter 5: The Essay
- Chapter 6: Creative Writing
- Chapter 7: Revising Your Work
- Chapter 8: Responding to Other Views – The Review
- Chapter 9: Oral Presentations

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## Versioning History

This page provides a record of edits and changes made to this book since its initial publication in the [B.C. Open Textbook Collection](#). Whenever edits or updates are made in the text, we provide a record and description of those changes here. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.01. If the edits involve substantial updates, the version number increases to the next full number.

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Version	Date	Change	Details
1.00	June 16, 2020	Added to the B.C. Open Textbook Collection.	