CHAPTER 2: READING & WRITING FOR COLLEGE

Communication Essentials for College by Jen Booth, Emily Cramer & Amanda Quibell

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2.1 - READING FOR COLLEGE

Learning Objectives

- Understand the expectations for reading and writing assignments in post-secondary courses
- Understand and apply general strategies to complete college-level reading assignments efficiently and effectively

In college, academic expectations change from what you may have experienced in high school. The quantity of work you are expected to do is increased. When instructors expect you to read pages upon pages or study hours and hours for one particular course, managing your workload can be challenging. This chapter includes strategies for studying efficiently and managing your time.

The quality of the work you do also changes. It is not enough to understand course material and summarize it on an exam. You will also be expected to seriously engage with new ideas by reflecting on them, analyzing them, critiquing them, making connections, drawing conclusions, or finding new ways of thinking about a given subject. Educationally, you are moving into deeper waters. A good introductory writing course will help you swim.

High School versus Post-Secondary Assignments

High School vs. Post secondary Assignments (Text version)
Determine whether each statement reflects high school or post-secondary environments.

1. Reading assignments are moderately long. Teachers may set aside some class time for reading and reviewing the material in depth.
2. Reviewing for exams is primarily your responsibility.
3. Your grade is determined by your performance on a wide variety of assessments, including minor and major assignments. Not all assessments are writing based.
4. Writing assignments include personal writing and creative writing in addition to expository writing.
5. Depending on the course, you may be asked to master new forms of writing and follow standards within a particular professional field.
6. Teachers often go out of their way to identify and try to help students who are performing poorly on exams, missing classes, not turning in assignments, or just struggling with the course. Often teachers will give students many "second chances."

Check your answers [1]

Setting Goals

To do well , it is important to stay focused on how your day-to-day actions determine your long-term success. You may not have defined all of your career goals yet, but you likely have some overarching goals for what you want out of your studies to expand your career options, to increase your earning power, or just to learn something new. In time, you will define your long-term goals more explicitly. Doing solid, steady work, day by day and week by week, will help you meet those goals.

Reflecting on Goals

With your group, discuss the following issues and questions

- Introduce yourself: Who are you? Why are you taking the course? Where are you living now?
- How do you feel about writing in general? (You will not be judged on this.)
- Identify one long-term goal you would like to have achieved by the time you complete your diploma or degree. For instance, you might want a particular job in your field.
- Identify one semester goal that will help you fulfill the long-term goal you just set.
- Review the activity: **High School versus Post-Secondary Assignments** and answer the following questions:
- In what ways do you think post-secondary education will be rewarding for you as a learner?
- What aspects of post-secondary education do you expect to find most challenging?
- What changes do you think you might have to make in your life to ensure your success in a post-secondary learning environment?

Reading Strategies

Your courses will sharpen both your reading and your writing skills. Most of your writing assignments—from brief response papers to in-depth research projects—will depend on your understanding of course reading assignments or related readings you do on your own. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to write effectively about a text that you have not understood. Even when you do understand the reading, it can be hard to write about it if you do not feel personally engaged with the ideas discussed.

This section discusses strategies you can use to get the most out of your reading assignments. These strategies fall into three broad categories:

- Planning strategies to help you manage your reading assignments
- Comprehension strategies to help you understand the material
- Active reading strategies to take your understanding to a higher and deeper level

Planning Your Reading

Have you ever stayed up all night cramming just before an exam? Or found yourself skimming a detailed memo from your boss five minutes before a crucial meeting? The first step in handling your reading successfully is planning. This involves both managing your time and setting a clear purpose for your reading.

Managing Your Reading Time

For now, focus on setting aside enough time for reading and breaking your assignments into manageable chunks. For example, if you are assigned a 70-page chapter to read for next week's class, try not to wait until the night before to get started. Give yourself at least a few days and tackle one section at a time.

Your method for breaking up the assignment will depend on the type of reading. If the text is very dense and packed with unfamiliar terms and concepts, you may need to read no more than 5 or 10 pages in one sitting so that you can truly understand and process the information. With more user-friendly texts, you will be able to handle longer sections—20 to 40 pages, for instance. And if you have a highly engaging reading assignment, such as a novel you cannot put down, you may be able to read lengthy passages in one sitting.

As the semester progresses, you will develop a better sense of how much time you need to allow for the reading assignments in different subjects. It also makes sense to preview each assignment well in advance to assess its difficulty level and to determine how much reading time to set aside.

Tip

Instructors at the post-secondary level often set aside reserve readings for a particular course. These consist of articles, book chapters, or other texts that are not part of the primary course textbook. Copies of reserve readings are available through the college library, in print, or more often, online. When you are assigned a reserve reading, download it ahead of time (and let your instructor know if you have trouble accessing it). Skim through it to get a rough idea of how much time you will need to read the assignment in full.

Setting a Purpose

The other key component of planning is setting a purpose. Knowing what you want to get out of a reading assignment helps you determine how to approach it and how much time to spend on it. It also helps you stay focused during those occasional moments when it is late, you are tired, and when relaxing in front of the television sounds far more appealing than curling up with a stack of journal articles.

Sometimes your purpose is simple. You might just need to understand the reading material well enough to discuss it intelligently in class the next day. However, your purpose will often go beyond that. For instance, you might also read to compare two texts, to formulate a personal response to a text, or to gather ideas for future research.

Here are some questions to ask to help determine your purpose:

How did my instructor frame the assignment? Often instructors will tell you what they expect you to get out of the reading. For example:

- Read Chapter 2 and come to class prepared to discuss current theories related to conducting risk assessments.
- Read these two articles and compare Smith's and Jones's perspectives on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982).
- Read Chapter 5 and think about how you could apply these guidelines to the first stages of onsite patient assessment.

How deeply do I need to understand the reading? If you are majoring in emergency management and you are assigned to read Chapter 1, "Introduction to Emergency Management," it is safe to assume the chapter presents fundamental concepts that you will be expected to master. However, for some reading assignments, you may be expected to form a general understanding but not necessarily master the content. Again, pay attention to how your instructor presents the assignment.

How does this assignment relate to other course readings or to concepts discussed in class? Your instructor may make some of these connections explicitly, but if not, try to draw connections on your own. (Needless to say, it helps to take detailed notes both when in class and when you read.)

How might I use this text again in the future? If you are assigned to read about a topic that has always interested you, your reading assignment might help you develop ideas for a future research paper. Some reading assignments provide valuable tips or summaries worth bookmarking for future reference. Think about what you can take from the reading that will stay with you.

Improving Your Comprehension

You have blocked out time for your reading assignments and set a purpose for reading. Now comes the challenge: making sure you actually understand all the information you are expected to process. Some of your reading assignments will be fairly straightforward. Others, however, will be longer or more complex, so you will need a plan for how to handle them.

For any expository writing—that is, nonfiction, informational writing—your first comprehension goal is to identify the main points and relate any details to those main points. Because post-secondary-level texts can be challenging, you will also need to monitor your reading comprehension. That is, you will need to stop periodically and assess how well you understand what you are reading. Finally, you can improve comprehension by taking time to determine which strategies work best for you and putting those strategies into practice.

Identifying the Main Points

In your courses, you will be reading a wide variety of materials, including the following:

- Textbooks. These usually include summaries, glossaries, comprehension questions, and other study aids.
- Nonfiction trade books. These are less likely to include the study features found in textbooks.
- Popular magazines, newspapers, or web articles. These are usually written for a general audience.
- Scholarly books and journal articles. These are written for an audience of specialists in a given field.

Regardless of what type of expository text you are assigned to read, your primary comprehension goal is to identify the main point: the most important idea that the writer wants to communicate and often states early on. Finding the main point gives you a framework to organize the details presented in the reading and relate the reading to concepts you have learned in class or through other reading assignments. After identifying the main point, you will find the supporting points, details, facts, and explanations that develop and clarify the main point.

Some texts make that task relatively easy. Textbooks, for instance, include the aforementioned features as well as headings and subheadings intended to make it

easier for students to identify core concepts. Graphic features such as sidebars, diagrams, and charts help students understand complex information and distinguish between essential and inessential points. When you are assigned to read from a textbook, be sure to use available comprehension aids to help you identify the main points.

Trade books and popular articles may not be written specifically for an educational purpose; nevertheless, they also include features that can help you identify the main ideas.

Trade books. Many trade books include an introduction that presents the writer's main ideas and purpose for writing. Reading chapter titles (and any subtitles within the chapter) will help you get a broad sense of what is covered. It also helps to read the beginning and ending paragraphs of a chapter closely. These paragraphs often sum up the main ideas presented.

Popular articles. Reading the headings and introductory paragraphs carefully is crucial. In magazine articles, these features (along with the closing paragraphs) present the main concepts. Hard news articles in newspapers present the gist of the news story in the lead paragraph, while subsequent paragraphs present increasingly general details.

At the far end of the reading difficulty scale are scholarly books and journal articles. Because these texts are aimed at a specialized, highly educated audience, the authors presume their readers are already familiar with the topic. The language and writing style is sophisticated and sometimes dense.

When you read scholarly books and journal articles, try to apply the same strategies discussed earlier for other types of text. The introduction usually presents the writer's thesis—the idea or hypothesis the writer is trying to prove. Headings and subheadings can help you understand how the writer has organized support for the thesis. Additionally, academic journal articles often include a summary at the beginning, called an abstract, and electronic databases include summaries of articles too.

Monitoring Your Comprehension

Finding the main idea and paying attention to text features as you read helps you figure out what you should know. Just as important, however, is being able to figure out what you do not know and developing a strategy to deal with it.

Textbooks often include comprehension questions in the margins or at the end of a section or chapter. As you read, stop occasionally to answer these questions on paper or

in your head. Use them to identify sections you may need to reread, read more carefully, or ask your instructor about later.

Even when a text does not have built-in comprehension features, you can actively monitor your own comprehension. Try these strategies, adapting them as needed to suit different kinds of texts:

Summarize. At the end of each section, pause to summarize the main points in a few sentences. If you have trouble doing so, revisit that section.

Ask and answer questions. When you begin reading a section, try to identify two to three questions you should be able to answer after you finish it. Write down your questions and use them to test yourself on the reading. If you cannot answer a question, try to determine why. Is the answer buried in that section of reading but just not coming across to you? Or do you expect to find the answer in another part of the reading?

Do not read in a vacuum. Look for opportunities to discuss the reading with your classmates. Many instructors set up online discussion forums or blogs specifically for that purpose. Participating in these discussions can help you determine whether your understanding of the main points is the same as your peers'.

These discussions can also serve as a reality check. If everyone in the class struggled with the reading, it may be exceptionally challenging. If it was easy for everyone but you, you may need to see your instructor for help.

Active Reading Exercise

Choose any text that that you have been assigned to read for one of your courses. In your notes, complete the following tasks:

- Summarize the main points of the text in two to three sentences.
- Write down two to three questions about the text that you can bring up during class discussion.

Tip

Students are often reluctant to seek help. They feel like doing so marks them as slow, weak, or demanding. The truth is, every learner occasionally struggles. If you are sincerely trying to keep up with the course reading but feel like you are in over your head, seek help. Speak up in class, schedule a meeting with your instructor, or visit your campus learning centre for assistance.

Deal with the problem as early in the semester as you can. Instructors respect students who are proactive about their own learning. Most instructors will work hard to help students who make the effort to help themselves.

Taking It to the Next Level: Active Reading

Now that you have acquainted (or reacquainted) yourself with useful planning and comprehension strategies, your reading assignments may feel more manageable. You know what you need to do to get your reading done and make sure you grasp the main points. However, the most successful students in are not only competent readers but active, engaged readers.

There are two common strategies for active reading:

- Applying the four reading strategies
- SQ3R

Both will help you look at a text in depth and help prepare you for when you have to study to use the information on an exam. You should try them both and decide which works better for you.

Four Reading Stages

Everyone reads and retains (or not) information in different ways. However, applying the following four stages for reading whenever you pick up material will not only help you understand what you are reading, but will also increase the changes of your actually remembering what you have read. While it may seem that this strategy of four reading stages takes a lot of time, it will become more natural for you as you continue applying it. Also, using these four stages will actually save you time because you will already have

retained a lot, if not all, of the content, so when it is time to study for your exam, you will find that you already know the material.

Effective academic reading and study seeks not only to gain an understanding of the facts, opinions, and beliefs presented in a text, but also of the biases, assumptions, and perspectives underlying the discussion. The aim is to analyze, interpret, and evaluate the text, and then to draw logical inferences and conclusions.

The four reading stages you will need to sharpen in order to get through your material are:

1. Survey reading
2. Close reading
3. Inquiry reading
4. Critical reading

These four strategies all stress "reading as thinking." You will need to read actively to comprehend and remember what you are reading, for both your own and your instructor's purposes. In order to do that, you need to think about the relevance of ideas to one another and about their usefulness to you personally, professionally, and academically.

Again, this differs from our usual daily reading activities, where interest often determines what we choose to read rather than utility. What happens when we are really not interested in what we are reading or seeing? Our eyes move down the page and our minds are elsewhere. We may read anywhere from one paragraph to several pages and suddenly realize we do not have the foggiest idea what we have just read. Clearly focusing our reading purpose on surveying, reading closely, being inquisitive, and reading critically, means we are reading for specific results: we read faster, know what we want, and read to get it.

1. Survey reading

Surveying quickly (2 to 10 minutes if it is a long chapter) allows you to see the overall picture or gist of what the text is sharing with you. Some of the benefits of surveying are listed below:

- It increases reading rate and attention because you have a road map: a mental picture of the beginning, middle, and end of this journey.
- In helps you create a mental map, allowing you to organize your travel by

highlighting key topics and getting impressions of relevance, which in turn helps in the business or remembering.
- It aids in budgeting study time because you know the length and difficulty of the material. Usually you read study material to find out what is there in order to go back later and learn it. With surveying you accomplish the same in one-tenth the time.
- It **improves concentration** because you know what is ahead and how what you are reading fits into the total picture.

Technique for survey reading

For a text or chapter, look at introductions, summaries, chapter headings, bold print, and graphics to piece together the main theme and its development.

Practical uses

Magazines, journals, books, chapters, sections of dense material, anything that allows for an overview.

2. Close reading

Close reading allows you to concentrate and make decisions now about what is relevant and what is not. Its main purpose is to help ensure that you understand what you are reading and to help you store information in a logical and organized way, so when you need to recall the information, it is easier for you to do so. It is a necessary and critical strategy for academic reading for the following reasons:

- You read as if you were going to be tested on it immediately upon completion. You read to remember at least 75 to 80 percent of the information.
- You clearly identify main concepts, key details, and their relationships with one another. Close reading allows you to summarize effectively what you read.
- Your ability to answer essay questions improves because the concepts are more organized and understood rather than merely memorized.
- You become more confident because your understanding improves which, in turn, increases your enjoyment.

Technique for close reading

Survey for overall structure; read, annotating main theme, key points, and essential detail; summarize the important ideas and their development.

Practical uses

Any reading that requires 80 percent comprehension and retention of main points and supporting detail.

3. Inquiry reading

Inquiry reading tends to be what we do with material we are naturally interested in. We usually do not notice we are doing this because we enjoy learning and thinking about it. *Discovery reading* is another term that describes this type of reading. Some of its benefits to the study process include:

Increased focus: By asking interpretative questions, determining relevance, and searching for your answers, you are involved and less likely to be bored or distracted.

Retention: Memory of the material is improved because of increased involvement.

Stimulation of creativity: This involvement will raise new questions for you and inspire further research.

Matching instructor expectations: Instructors are usually seeking deeper understanding as well as basic memory of concepts.

Technique for inquiry reading

Increase the volume and depth in questions while reading informational, interpretative, analytical, synthesizing, and evaluating kinds of questions.

Practical uses

Any material that requires both thorough comprehension and needs or inspires examination

4. Critical reading

Critical reading is necessary in order to determine the salience (or key points) of the concepts presented, their relevance, and the accuracy of arguments. When you read

critically, you become even more deeply involved with the material, which will allow you to make better judgments about what is the more important information.

People often read reactively to material—especially debate, controversy, and politics. When readers react, they bring a wealth of personal experience and opinion to the concept to which they are reacting. But critical reading requires thinking—as you would expect—critically about the material. Critical thinking relies on reason, evidence, and open mindedness and recognizes the biases, assumptions, and motives of both the writer and the reader.

Learning to read critically offers these advantages:

- By substantiating arguments and interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating those supporting the concept moves mere reaction into critical reading and deepens your understanding.
- By analyzing relationships between the material read and other readings or experience, you can make connections.
- By making connections, you will increase your concentration and confidence in being able to discuss and evaluate what you read.

Technique for critical reading

Understand and analyze the material in terms of writer's purpose and results, relevance to readers, and value to the field at large.

Practical uses

Any material that requires evaluation.

Your memory of facts and concepts will be enhanced by surveying and close reading. Interpretation, relevance, application, and evaluation of presented facts and concepts require deeper questioning and involvement. Inquiry and critical reading are more applicable at these stages.

Using the SQ3R Strategy

The SQ3R is a step-by-step process to follow before, during, and after reading. You could use SQ3R for a variety of reading purposes:

- Getting main concepts only

- Flushing out key details
- Organizing concepts
- Writing a coherent summary of significant points and their development

You may already use some variation of SQ3R. The process works like this:

- Survey the text in advance.
- Form questions before you start reading.
- Read the text.
- Recite and/or record important points during and after reading.
- Review and reflect on the text after you read.

Each of these elements is discussed below.

Survey (or Skim)

Before you read, first survey or preview the text. As noted earlier, reading introductory paragraphs and headings can help you begin to figure out the author's main point and identify what important topics will be covered. However, surveying does not stop there. Flip through the text and look for any pictures, charts or graphs, the table of contents, index, and glossary. Scan the preface and introduction to each chapter Skim a few paragraphs. Preview any boldfaced or italicized vocabulary terms. This will help you form a first impression of the material and determine the appropriateness of the material.

The final stage of surveying occurs once you have identified which chapters are relevant. Quickly look at any headings as well as the introduction and conclusion to the chapter to confirm the relevance of the information.

Sometimes, this survey step alone may be enough because you may need only a general familiarization with the material. This is also when you will discover whether or not you want to look at the book more deeply.

Question

If you keep the question of why you are reading the material in mind, it will help you focus because you will be actively engaged in the information you are consuming. Also, if there are any visual aids, you will want to examine what they are showing as they probably represent important ideas.

Next, start brainstorming questions about the text. What do you expect to learn from the reading? You may find that some questions come to mind immediately based on your initial survey or based on previous readings and class discussions. If not, try using headings and subheadings in the text to formulate questions. For instance, if one heading in your textbook is **Conditional Sentence** and another is **Conditional Release**, you might ask yourself these questions:

What are the major differences between these two concepts?

Where does each appear in the sentencing process?

Although some of your questions may be simple factual questions, try to come up with a few that are more open ended. Asking in-depth questions will help you stay more engaged as you read. Once you have your questions in mind, you can move to the next step of actively reading to see if you can come up with an answer.

Read

The next step is simple: read. As you read, notice whether your first impressions of the text were correct. Are the author's main points and overall approach about the same as what you predicted—or does the text contain a few surprises? Also, look for answers to your earlier questions and begin forming new ones. Continue to revise your impressions and questions as you read.

Recite

While you are reading, pause occasionally to recite or record important points. It is best to do this at the end of each section or when there is an obvious shift in the writer's train of thought. Put the book aside for a moment and recite aloud the main points of the section or any important answers you found there. You might also record ideas by jotting down a few brief notes in addition to, or instead of, reciting aloud. Either way, the physical act of articulating information makes you more likely to remember it.

After you have finished reading, set the book aside and briefly answer your initial question by making notes or highlighting/underlining. Try to use your own words as much as possible, but if you find an important quote, you can identify it as well. If there are any diagrams, makes notes from memory on what information they are giving. Then look back at the diagrams to make sure you were accurate.

Repeat this questioning, reading, and reciting process for the rest of the chapter. As you work your way through, occasionally pause and really think about what you have

read; it is easy to work through a section or chapter and realize that you have not actually absorbed any of the material.

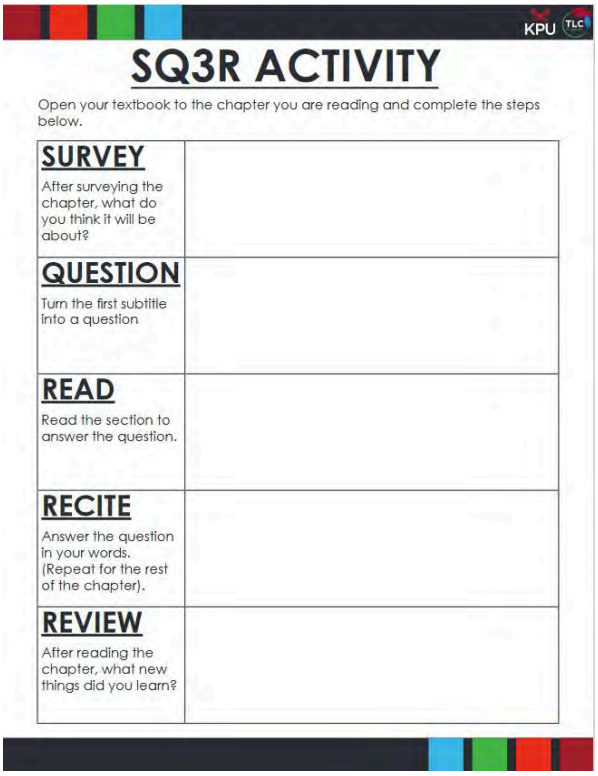
Review and reflect

Once you have looked at the whole chapter, try to put each section into the context of the bigger picture. Ask yourself if you have really answered each question you set out with and if you have been accurate in your answers. To make sure that you really remember the information, review your notes again after about one week and then again three or four weeks later. Also, if the textbook includes review questions or your instructor has provided a study guide, use these tools to guide your review. You will want to record information in a more detailed format than you used during reading, such as in an outline or a list.

As you review the material, reflect on what you learned. Did anything surprise you, upset you, or make you think? Did you find yourself strongly agreeing or disagreeing with any points in the text? What topics would you like to explore further? Jot down your reflections in your notes. (Instructors sometimes require students to write brief response papers or maintain a reading journal. Use these assignments to help you reflect on what you read.)

Printable Handout – SQ3R

This template will guide you as you make your notes



KPU TLC

SQ3R ACTIVITY

Open your textbook to the chapter you are reading and complete the steps below.

SURVEY After surveying the chapter, what do you think it will be about?	
QUESTION Turn the first subtitle into a question	
READ Read the section to answer the question.	
RECITE Answer the question in your words. (Repeat for the rest of the chapter).	
REVIEW After reading the chapter, what new things did you learn?	

View or download the SQ3R handout [PDF format] (https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/1984/2022/02/COMMESS-SQ3RDownload.pdf)

Tip

As you go through your future readings, practise this method considering these points:

From memory, jot down the key ideas discussed in the section you just read. If you need it, use a separate piece of paper. Look back through the text and check your memory with what you jotted down. How did you do?

Choose one section from the chapter and write a summary from memory of what you learned from that section.

Now review that section. Identity what corresponds and what you omitted. How are you doing? When you read that section, did you consciously intend to remember it?

Although this process may seem time-consuming, you will find that it will actually save time. Because you have a question in mind while reading, you have more of a purpose while looking for the important information. The notes you take will also be more organized and concise because you are focused, and this will save you time when it comes to writing essays. Also, since you have reviewed throughout the process, you will not need to spend as much time reviewing for exams because it is already stored in your memory.

Watch SQ3R Reading Method on YouTube (3 mins) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dhcSP_Myjg)

Reading Activity – SQ3R

Choose another text that that you have been assigned to read for a class. Use the SQ3R process to complete the reading. (Keep in mind that you may need to spread the reading over more than one session, especially if the text is long.)

Be sure to complete all the steps involved. Then, reflect on how helpful you found this process. On a scale of 1 to 10, how useful did you find it? How does it compare with other study techniques you have used?

Using Other Active Reading Strategies

The SQ3R process encompasses a number of valuable active reading strategies: previewing a text, making predictions, asking and answering questions, and summarizing. You can use the following additional strategies to further deepen your understanding of what you read.

- Connect what you read to what you already know. Look for ways the reading

supports, extends, or challenges concepts you have learned elsewhere.
- Relate the reading to your own life. What statements, people, or situations relate to your personal experiences?
- Visualize. For both fiction and nonfiction texts, try to picture what is described. Visualizing is especially helpful when you are reading a narrative text, such as a novel or a historical account, or when you read expository text that describes a process, such as how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- Pay attention to graphics as well as text. Photographs, diagrams, flow charts, tables, and other graphics can help make abstract ideas more concrete and understandable.
- Understand the text in context. Understanding context means thinking about who wrote the text, when and where it was written, the author's purpose for writing it, and what assumptions or agendas influenced the author's ideas. For instance, two writers might both address the subject of health care reform, but if one article is an opinion piece and one is a news story, the context is different.
- Plan to talk or write about what you read. Jot down a few questions or comments in your notebook so you can bring them up in class. (This also gives you a source of topic ideas for papers and presentations later in the semester.) Discuss the reading on a class discussion board or blog about it.

Attribution & References

- Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from " Chapter 1. Introduction to Academic Writing (https://opentextbc.ca/writingforsuccess/chapter/introduction-to-academic-writing/)" In *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Harkoff & [author removed], licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
- Printable handout – SQ3R is included from "Read with a purpose: The SQ3R Strategy (https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/studystrategizesucceed/chapter/read-with-a-purpose-the-sq3r-strategy/)" In *University 101: Study, Strategize and Succeed* by Kwantlen Polytechnic University licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Notes

1. 1. High school, 2. Post secondary, 3. High school, 4. High school, 5. Post secondary, 6. High

school

2.2 - NOTE-TAKING

Learning Objectives

- Understand and apply strategies for taking notes efficiently.
- Determine the specific study and note-taking strategies that work best for you individually.

You've got the PowerPoint slides for your lecture, and the information in your textbook. Do you need to take notes as well?

Despite the vast amount of information available in electronic formats, taking notes is an important learning strategy. In addition, the way that you take notes matters, and not all note-taking strategies lead to equal results. By considering your note-taking strategies carefully, you will be able to create a set of notes that will help retain the most important concepts from lectures and tests, and that will assist you in your exam preparation.

Two Purposes for Taking Notes

People take notes for two main reasons:

1. To keep a record of the information they heard. This is also called the *external storage* function of note-taking.
2. To facilitate learning material they are currently studying.

The availability of information on the internet may reduce the importance of the *external storage* function of note-taking. When the information is available online, it may seem logical to stop taking notes. However, by neglecting to take notes, you lose the benefits of note-taking as a learning tool.

How Note-Taking Supports Learning

Taking notes during class supports your learning in several important ways:

1. Taking notes helps you to focus your attention and avoid distractions.
2. As you take notes in class, you will be engaging your mind in identifying and organizing the main ideas. Rather than passively listening, you will be doing the work of active learning while in class, making the most of your time.
3. Creating good notes means that you will have a record for later review. Reviewing a set of condensed and well-organized notes is more efficient than re-reading longer texts and articles.

Source: "Take Notes from Lectures – That You'll Actually Use (https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/studystrategizesucceed/chapter/take-notes-from-lectures-that-youll-actually-use/)" in *University 101: Study, Strategize and Succeed* by Kwantlen Polytechnic University licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Everybody takes notes, or at least everybody claims to. But if you take a close look, many who are claiming to take notes on their laptops are actually surfing the Web, and paper notebooks are filled with doodles interrupted by a couple of random words with an asterisk next to them reminding you that "This is important!" In college and university, these approaches will not work. Your instructors expect *you* to make connections between class lectures and reading assignments; they expect *you* to create an opinion about the material presented; they expect *you* to make connections between the material and life beyond school. Your notes are your road maps for these thoughts. Do you take good notes? Actively listening and note-taking are key strategies to ensure your student success.

Effective note-taking is important because it

- supports your listening efforts.
- allows you to test your understanding of the material.
- helps you remember the material better when you write key ideas down.
- gives you a sense of what the instructor thinks is important.
- creates your "ultimate study guide."

There are various forms of taking notes, and which one you choose depends on both your personal style and the instructor's approach to the material. Each can be used in a notebook, index cards, or in a digital form on your laptop. No specific type is good for all

students and all situations, so we recommend that you develop your own style, but you should also be ready to modify it to fit the needs of a specific class or instructor. To be effective, all of these methods require you to listen actively and to think; merely jotting down words the instructor is saying will be of little use to you.

Table 1 – Note-taking methods

Method	Description	When to Use
Lists	A sequential listing of ideas as they are presented. Lists may be short phrases or complete paragraphs describing ideas in more detail.	This method is what most students use as a fallback if they haven't learned other methods. This method typically requires a lot of writing, and you may find that you are not keeping up with the professor. It is not easy for students to prioritize ideas in this method.
Outlines	The outline method places most important ideas along the left margin, which are numbered with roman numerals. Supporting ideas to these main concepts are indented and are noted with capital letters. Under each of these ideas, further detail can be added, designated with an Arabic number, a lowercase letter, and so forth.	A good method to use when material presented by the instructor is well organized. Easy to use when taking notes on your computer.
Concept Maps	When designing a concept map, place a central idea in the centre of the page and then add lines and new circles in the page for new ideas. Use arrows and lines to connect the various ideas.	Great method to show relationships among ideas. Also good if the instructor tends to hop from one idea to another and back.
Cornell Method	The Cornell method uses a two-column approach. The left column takes up no more than a third of the page and is often referred to as the "cue" or "recall" column. The right column (about two-thirds of the page) is used for taking notes using any of the methods described above or a combination of them. After class or completing the reading, review your notes and write the key ideas and concepts or questions in the left column. You may also include a summary box at the bottom of the page, in which to write a summary of the class or reading in your own words.	The Cornell method can include any of the methods above and provides a useful format for calling out key concepts, prioritizing ideas, and organizing review work. Most universities recommend using some form of the Cornell method.

The List Method

Example: The List Method of Note-taking

Learning Cycle

September 3

Prof. Jones

The learning cycle is an approach to gathering and retaining info that can help students be successful in Col. The cycle consists of 4 steps which should all be app'd. They are preparing, which sets the foundation for learning, absorbing, which exposes us to new knowledge, capturing, which sets the information into our knowledge base and finally reviewing and applying which lets us set the know. into our memory and use it.

Preparing for learning can involve mental preparation, physical prep, and oper. prep. Mental prep includes setting learning goals for self based on what we know the class w/ cover (see syllabus)/ Also it is **very important** to do any assignments for the class to be able to learn w/ confidence and....

Physical Prep means having enough rest and eating well. Its hard to study when you are hungry and you won't listen well in class if you doze off.

Operation Prep means bringing all supplies to class, or having them at hand when studying... this includes pens, paper, computer, textbook, etc. Also means setting to school on time and getting a good seat (near the front).

Absorbing new knowledge is a combination of listening and reading. These are two of the most important learning skills you can have.

The list method is usually not the best choice because it is focused exclusively on capturing as much of what the instructor says as possible, not on processing the information. Most students who have not learned effective study skills use this method,

because it's easy to think that this is what note-taking is all about. Even if you are skilled in some form of shorthand, you should probably also learn one of the other methods described here, because they are all better at helping you process and remember the material. You may want to take notes in class using the list method, but transcribe your notes to an outline or concept map method after class as a part of your review process. It is always important to review your notes as soon as possible after class and write a summary of the class in your own words.

The Outline Method

Example: The Outline Method of Note-taking

Learning Cycle

September 3

Prof Jones

Learning is a cycle made up of 4 steps:

I. Preparing: Setting the foundation for learning.
II. Absorbing: (Data input) Exposure to new knowledge.
III. Capturing: Taking ownership of the knowledge.
IV. Review & Apply: Putting new knowledge to work.

I. Preparing

    A. Mental Prep.

        1. Do assignments – New knowledge is built on prior knowledge.

            a. assignments from prior classes.
            b. Readings! (May not have been assigned in class – see Syllabus!)

        2. Review Syllabus

        a. Know what instructor expects to cover
        b. Know what assignments you need to do
        c. Set your own objective

B. Physical Prep

    1. Get right about of rest. Don't zzz in class.
    2. Eat right. Hard to focus when you are hungry.
    3. Arrive on time.

C. Practical Prep (Organizational Prep):

    1. Bring right supplies – (Notebooks, Texts, Pens, etc.)
    2. Arrive on time

        a. Get organized and ready to listen
        b. Don't interrupt the focus of others
        c. Get a good seat

    3. Sit in the front of the class.

The advantage of the outline method is that it allows you to prioritize the material. Key ideas are written to the left of the page, subordinate ideas are then indented, and details of the subordinate ideas can be indented further. To further organize your ideas, you can use the typical outlining numbering scheme (starting with roman numerals for key ideas, moving to capital letters on the first subordinate level, Arabic numbers for the next level, and lowercase letters following.) At first you may have trouble identifying when the instructor moves from one idea to another. This takes practice and experience with each instructor, so don't give up! In the early stages you should use your syllabus to determine what key ideas the instructor plans to present. Your reading assignments before class can also give you guidance in identifying the key ideas.

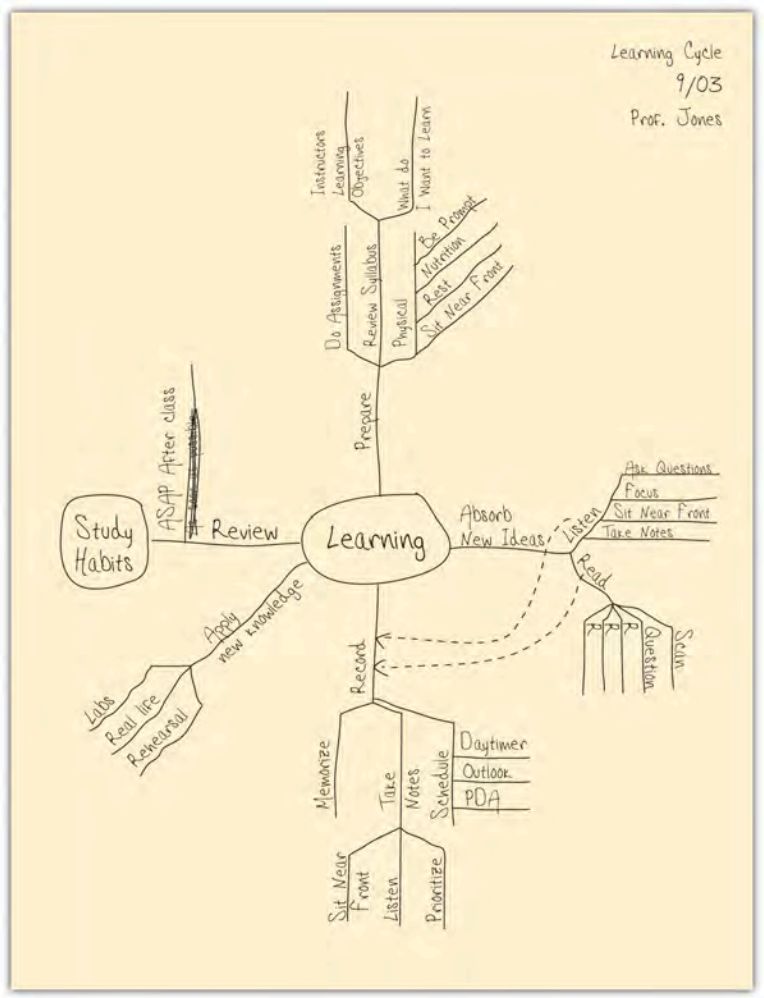
If you're using your laptop computer for taking notes, a basic word processing application (like Microsoft Word or Works) is very effective. Format your document by selecting the outline format from the format bullets menu. Use the increase or decrease indent buttons to navigate the level of importance you want to give each item. The software will take care of the numbering for you!

After class be sure to review your notes and then summarize the class in one or two

short paragraphs using your own words. This summary will significantly affect your recall and will help you prepare for the next class.

The Concept Map Method

Example: The Concept Map Method of Note-taking



Click on the image to see the full size.

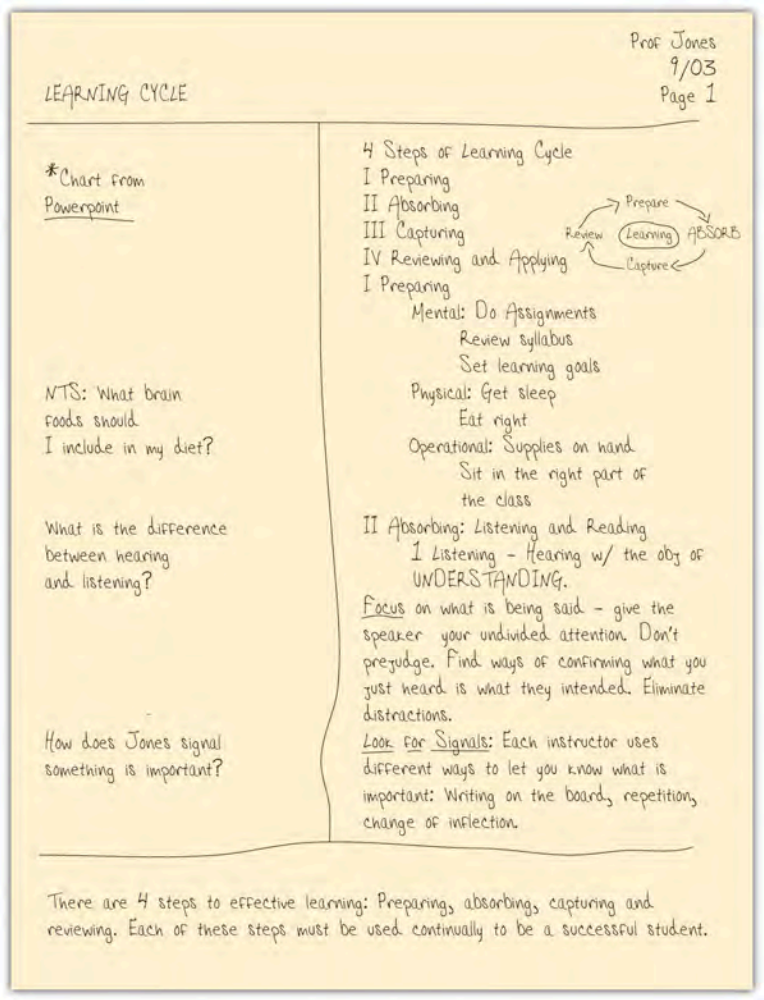
This is a very graphic method of note-taking that is especially good at capturing the relationships among ideas. Concept maps harness your visual sense to understand complex material “at a glance.” They also give you the flexibility to move from one idea to another and back easily (so they are helpful if your instructor moves freely through the material).

To develop a concept map, start by using your syllabus to rank the ideas you will listen to by level of detail (from high-level or abstract ideas to detailed facts). Select an overriding idea (high level or abstract) from the instructor’s lecture and place it in a circle in the middle of the page. Then create branches off that circle to record the more detailed information, creating additional limbs as you need them. Arrange the branches with others that interrelate closely. When a new high-level idea is presented, create a new circle with its own branches. Link together circles or concepts that are related. Use arrows and symbols to capture the relationship between the ideas. For example, an arrow may be used to illustrate cause or effect, a double-pointed arrow to illustrate dependence, or a dotted arrow to illustrate impact or effect.

As with all note-taking methods, you should summarize the chart in one or two paragraphs of your own words after class.

The Cornell Method

Example: The Cornell Method of Note-taking



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9/03
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LEARNING CYCLE

*Chart from Powerpoint

NTS: What brain foods should I include in my diet?

What is the difference between hearing and listening?

How does Jones signal something is important?

4 Steps of Learning Cycle
I Preparing
II Absorbing
III Capturing
IV Reviewing and Applying

I Preparing
Mental: Do Assignments
Review syllabus
Set learning goals
Physical: Get sleep
Eat right
Operational: Supplies on hand
Sit in the right part of the class

II Absorbing: Listening and Reading
1 Listening - Hearing w/ the obj of UNDERSTANDING.
Focus on what is being said - give the speaker your undivided attention. Don't prejudge. Find ways of confirming what you just heard is what they intended. Eliminate distractions.
Look for Signals: Each instructor uses different ways to let you know what is important: Writing on the board, repetition, change of inflection.

There are 4 steps to effective learning: Preparing, absorbing, capturing and reviewing. Each of these steps must be used continually to be a successful student.

Click on the image to see the full size.

The Cornell method was developed in the 1950s by Professor Walter Pauk at Cornell University [1]. It is recommended by many universities because of its usefulness and

flexibility. This method is simple to use for capturing notes, is helpful for defining priorities, and is a very helpful study tool.

The Cornell method follows a very specific format that consists of four boxes: a header, two columns, and a footer.

The header is a small box across the top of the page. In it you write identification information like the course name and the date of the class. Underneath the header are two columns: a narrow one on the left (no more than one-third of the page) and a wide one on the right. The wide column, called the "notes" column, takes up most of the page and is used to capture your notes using any of the methods outlined earlier. The left column, known as the "cue" or "recall" column, is used to jot down main ideas, keywords, questions, clarifications, and other notes. It should be used both during the class and when reviewing your notes after class. Finally, use the box in the footer to write a summary of the class in your own words. This will help you make sense of your notes in the future and is a valuable tool to aid with recall and studying.

Using Index Cards for the Cornell Method

Some students like to use index cards to take notes. They actually lend themselves quite well to the Cornell method. Use the "back" or lined side of the card to write your notes in class. Use one card per key concept. The "front" unlined side of the card replaces the left hand "cue" column. Use it after class to write keywords, comments, or questions. When you study, the cards become flash cards with questions on one side and answers on the other. Write a summary of the class on a separate card and place it on the top of the deck as an introduction to what was covered in the class.

> "I used to tape my lecture classes so I could fill in my sketchy notes afterwards. Now that I'm using the Cornell system, my notes are complete and organized in much less time. And my regular five-minute reviews make learning almost painless. No more taping and listening twice."
>
> — A student at Southern Methodist University

You will have noticed that all methods end with the same step: reviewing your notes as soon as possible after class. Any review of your notes is helpful (reading them, copying them into your computer, or even recasting them using another note-taking method).

But THINK! Make your review of notes a thoughtful activity, not a mindless process. When you review your notes, think about questions you still have and determine how you will get the answers. (From the next class? Studying with a friend? Looking up material in your text or on the net?) Examine how the material applies to the course; make connections with notes from other class sessions, with material in your text, and with concepts covered in class discussions. Finally, it's fun to think about how the material in your notes applies to real life. Consider this both at the very strategic level (as in "What does this material mean to me in relation to what I want to do with my life?") as well as at a very mundane level (as in, "Is there anything cool here I can work into a conversation with my friends?").

Instructor Handouts

Some instructors hand out or post their notes or their PowerPoint slides from their lectures. These handouts should *never* be considered a substitute for taking notes in class. They are a very useful complement and will help you confirm the accuracy of your notes, but they do not involve you in the process of learning as well as your own notes do. After class, review your notes with highlighter in hand and mark keywords and ideas in your notes. This will help you write a summary of the class in your own words.

General Tips on Note-Taking

Regardless of what note-taking method you choose, there are some note-taking habits you should get into for all circumstances and all courses:

1. **Be prepared.** Make sure you have the tools you need to do the job. If you are using a notebook, be sure you have it with you and that you have enough paper. Also be sure to have your pen (as well as a spare) and perhaps a pen with different-coloured ink to use for emphasis. If you are taking notes on your laptop, make sure the battery is charged! Select the application that lends itself best to your style of note-taking. Microsoft Word works very well for outline notes, but you might find taking notes in Excel to work best if you are working within the Cornell method. (It's easier to align your thoughts in the cue or recall column to your notes in the right column. Just be sure you keep one idea per row!)
2. **Write on only one side of the paper.** This will allow you to integrate your reading notes with your class notes.

3. **Label, number, and date all notes at the top of each page.** This will help you keep organized.
4. **When using a laptop, position it such that you can see the instructor and white board right over your screen.** This will keep the instructor in your field of vision even if you have to glance at your screen or keyboard from time to time. Make sure your focus remains with the instructor and not on your laptop. A word of caution about laptops for note-taking: use them if you are very adept at keyboarding, but remember that not all note-taking methods work well on laptops because they do not easily allow you to draw diagrams and use special notations (scientific and math formulas, for example).
5. **Don't try to capture everything that is said.** Listen for the big ideas and write them down. Make sure you can recognize the instructor's emphasis cues and write down all ideas and keywords the instructor emphasizes. Listen for clues like "the four causes were…" or "to sum up…."
6. **Copy anything the instructor writes on the board.** It's likely to be important.
7. **Leave space between ideas.** This allows you to add additional notes later (e.g. notes on the answer to a question you or one of your classmates asked).
8. **Use signals and abbreviations.** The ones you use are up to you, but be consistent so you will know exactly what you mean by "att." when you review your notes. You may find it useful to keep a key to your abbreviations in all your notebooks.
9. **Use some method for identifying your own thoughts and questions to keep them separate from what the instructor or textbook author is saying.** Some students use different colour ink; others box or underline their own thoughts. Do whatever works for you.
10. **Create a symbol to use when you fall behind** or get lost in your note-taking. Jot down the symbol, leave some space, and focus on what the instructor is covering now. Later you can ask a classmate or the professor to help you fill in what you missed, or you can find it in your textbook.
11. **Review your notes as soon after class as possible (the same day is best).** *This is the secret to making your notes work!* Use the recall column to call out the key ideas and organize facts. Fill in any gaps in your notes and clean up or redraw hastily drawn diagrams.
12. **Write a summary of the main ideas of the class in your own words.** This process is a great aid to recall. Be sure to include any conclusions from the lecture or discussion.
13. **Use notes when preparing for a test or doing an assignment.** Your notes usually have a summary of the most important points and are useful for making sure you incorporate important concepts in your assignments and for focusing on the main

concepts when studying for tests and exams.

This video provides some great tips for note-taking as well.

Watch How to Take Great Notes on YouTube (5 mins) (https://youtu.be/UAhRf3U50lM)

Exercise: Journal Entry

Choose one of your classes where you normally take notes. Make a conscious effort to use the Cornell method with either the outline or concept map method for taking your notes. Follow as many steps listed previously as possible. Now compare these notes with those you took in the previous class. Are your new notes more useful? What did you like about taking notes this way? What are some of the things you need to work on improving? (Remember this will get much easier with more practice.) Write your thoughts down.

What If You Miss Class?

Clearly the best way to learn class material is to be at the class and to take your own notes. In university, regular attendance is expected. But life happens. On occasion, you may have to miss a class or lecture. When this happens, here are some strategies you can use to make up for it:

- Check with the instructor to see if there is another section of the class you can attend. Never ask the instructor "Did I miss anything important?" (Think about what that's saying and you'll see it's rather insulting.)
- If the instructor posts his or her lectures as a podcast, listen to the lecture online and take notes. If the instructor uses PowerPoint slides, request a copy (or download them if posted) and review them carefully, jotting down your own notes and questions. Review your notes with a classmate who did attend.
- You may want to borrow class notes from a classmate. If you do, don't just copy them and insert them in your notebook. They will not be very helpful. When you borrow notes from a classmate, you should photocopy them and then review them carefully and mark your copy with your own notes and questions. Use your textbook

to try to fill in the gaps. Finally, schedule a study session with the person who gave you the notes to review the material and confirm your understanding.

- If none of these options is available for you, use the course syllabus to determine what was covered in the class, then write a short paper (two pages or so) on the material using the class readings and reliable online sources. See your instructor during office hours to review your key findings and to answer any questions you still may have.

Group Notes: A Collaborative Approach

Groups within a class can take notes together using file-sharing software on the Cloud such as Google Docs. The individuals in the group can add to the document in real time as different individuals are adding themselves. This creates a collaborative document that all can use, download, (or adapt). This won't work for all situations but can be very useful especially in a fast-moving classroom.

Keeping Your Notes

Class is over, and you have a beautiful set of notes in your spiral notebook or saved in your laptop. You have written the summary of the class in your own words. Now what?

Start by organizing your notes. We recommend you use a three-ring binder for each of your subjects. Print your notes if you used a computer. If you used note cards, insert them in plastic photo holders for binders. Group all notes from a class or unit together in a section; this includes class notes, reading notes, and instructor handouts. You might also want to copy the instructor's syllabus for the unit on the first page of the section.

Next, spend some time linking the information across the various notes. Use the recall column in your notes to link to related information in other notes (e.g. "See class notes date/page").

If you have had a quiz or test on the unit, add it to your binder, too, but be sure to write out the correct answer for any item you missed. Link those corrections to your notes, too.

Use this opportunity to write "notes on your notes." Review your summary to see if it still is valid in light of your notes on the reading and any handouts you may have added to your notes package.

You don't need to become a pack rat with your notes. It is fairly safe to toss them after the end of a course except in the following cases:

1. If the course you took is a prerequisite for another course, or when the course is part of a standard progression of courses that build upon each other (this is very common in math and science courses), you should keep them as a reference and review for the follow-up course.
2. If the course may pertain to your future major, keep your notes. You may not realize it now that they may have future value when you study similar topics or even the same topics in more depth.
3. If you are very interested in the course subject and would like to get into the material through a more advanced course, independent study, or even research, keep your notes as a prep tool for further work.

Exercise: Note-taking

1. Name two advantages of the Cornell system over the list method of note-taking.
2. Describe the benefits of—and potential problems with—taking class notes on a laptop.
3. List at least three ways to make up for missing notes because you miss a class.

Key Takeaways

- Good note-taking is a key strategy for academic success.
- Choose among effective note-taking styles for what works best for you and modify it to meet the needs of a specific class or instructor.

- List notes are generally less effective and not prioritized.
- Outlines work well for taking notes on a laptop when the instructor is well organized.
- Concept map notes are good for showing the relationships among ideas.
- The Cornell method is effective for calling out key concepts and organizing notes for review.
- Instructor handouts and PowerPoint presentations help with—but do not replace the need for—personal note-taking.
- If you miss a class, explore your options for replacing your missing notes.
- Keep your notes organized in a way that makes it easy to study for tests and other uses in the future.

Attribution & References

Notes

1. Pauk, W. & Owens, R.J.Q. (2013). *How to Study in College*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

2.3 - WRITING FOR COLLEGE

Learning Objectives

- Identify common types of college writing assignments.
- Recognize the purpose of each type of writing assignment.

Common Writing Assignments

College writing assignments serve a different purpose than the typical writing assignments you completed in high school. In high school, teachers generally focus on teaching you to write in a variety of modes and formats, including personal writing, expository writing, research papers, creative writing, and writing short answers and essays for exams. Over time, these assignments help you build a foundation of writing skills.

In college, many instructors will expect you to already have that foundation.

Your college communications courses will focus on writing for its own sake, helping you make the transition to college-level writing assignments. However, in most other college courses, writing assignments serve a different purpose. In those courses, you may use writing as one tool among many for learning how to think about a particular academic discipline.

Additionally, certain assignments teach you how to meet the expectations for professional writing in a given field. Depending on the class, you might be asked to write a lab report, a case study, a literary analysis, a business plan, or an account of a personal interview. You will need to learn and follow the standard conventions for those types of written products.

Finally, personal and creative writing assignments are less common in college than in

high school. College courses emphasize expository writing, writing that explains or informs. Usually expository writing assignments will incorporate outside research, too. Some classes will also require persuasive writing assignments in which you state and support your position on an issue. College instructors will hold you to a higher standard when it comes to supporting your ideas with reasons and evidence.

The following activity describes some of the most common types of college writing assignments. It includes minor, less formal assignments as well as major ones. Which specific assignments you encounter will depend on the courses you take and the learning objectives developed by your instructors.

Common Types of Post Secondary Assignments

Common Types of Post Secondary Assignments (Text version)

Match the assignment types listed below to the numbered descriptions.

Assignment types: Literature review, Personal response paper, Problem solution paper, Critique, Research paper, Research journal, Position paper, Laboratory report, Summary, Case study

Descriptions

1. Expresses and explains your response to a reading assignment, a provocative quote, or a specific issue; may be very brief (sometimes a page or less) or more in depth (eg: Writing about videos on ineffective management for a business course).
2. Restates the main points of a longer passage objectively and in your own words (eg: a one-page precis of a research article).
3. States and defends your position on an issue (often a controversial issue) (eg: an essay agreeing with or disagreeing with capital punishment).
4. Presents a problem, explains its causes, and proposes and explains a solution (eg: a plan for a crisis communication strategy).
5. States a thesis about a particular literary work and develops the thesis with evidence from the work and, sometimes, from additional sources (eg: an essay that explains the purpose of a poem).
6. Sums up available research findings on a particular topic (eg: an examination of all the studies about violent media).

7. Investigates a particular person, group, or event in depth for the purpose of drawing a larger conclusion from the analysis (eg: a report on the successful treatment of a cat with kidney disease).
8. Presents a laboratory experiment, including the hypothesis, methods of data collection, results, and conclusions (eg: the results of a study on nutrition in rats)
9. Records a student's ideas and findings during the course of a long-term research project (eg: a reflection of the process of research, maintained over time).
10. Presents a thesis and supports it with original research and/or other researchers' findings on the topic; can take several different formats depending on the subject area (eg: a deeply researched examination on the success of seat belt laws).

Check your Answers: [1]

Writing at Work

Part of managing your education is communicating well with others at your college. For instance, you might need to e-mail your instructor to request an office appointment or explain why you will need to miss a class. You might need to contact administrators with questions about your tuition or financial aid. Later, you might ask instructors to write recommendations on your behalf.

Treat these documents as professional communications. Address the recipient politely; state your question, problem, or request clearly; and use a formal, respectful tone. Doing so helps you make a positive impression and get a quicker response.

Attribution & References

Notes

1. 1. Personal response paper, 2. Summary, 3. Position paper, 4. Problem solution paper, 5. Critique, 6. Literature Review, 7. Case study, 8. Lab report, 9. Research journal 10. Research paper

2.4 - PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, TONE, AND CONTENT

Learning Objectives

- Identify the four common academic purposes.
- Identify audience, tone, and content.
- Apply purpose, audience, tone, and content to a specific assignment.

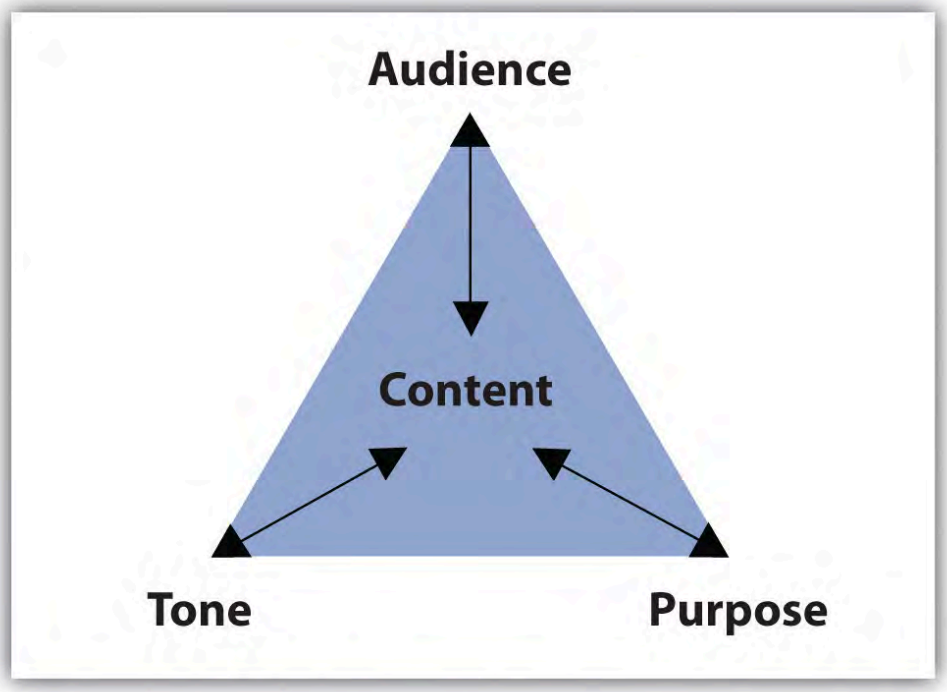
Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. One technique that effective writers use is to begin a fresh paragraph for each new idea they introduce.

Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks. One paragraph focuses on only one main idea and presents coherent sentences to support that one point. Because all the sentences in one paragraph support the same point, a paragraph may stand on its own. To create longer assignments and to discuss more than one point, writers group together paragraphs.

Three elements shape the content of each paragraph:

1. **Purpose**. The reason the writer composes the paragraph.
2. **Tone**. The attitude the writer conveys about the paragraph's subject.
3. **Audience**. The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.

Figure 1 – Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content Triangle



Content is at the center of the triangle, audience at the top corner, tone on the left corner and purpose on the right corner. Arrows point from audience, tone and purpose to content in the center, and back.

The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what the paragraph covers and how it will support one main point. This section covers how purpose, audience, and tone affect reading and writing paragraphs.

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose for a piece of writing identifies the reason you write a particular document. Basically, the purpose of a piece of writing answers the question "Why?" For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theatre. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform him or her of your schedule and rules.

In academic settings, the reasons for writing fulfill four main purposes: to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate. You will encounter these four purposes not only as you read for your classes but also as you read for work or pleasure. Because reading and writing work together, your writing skills will improve as you read. Identifying these purposes by reading paragraphs will prepare you to write individual paragraphs and to build longer assignments.

Summary Paragraphs

A summary shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials. You probably summarize events, books, and movies daily. Think about the last blockbuster movie you saw or the last novel you read. Chances are, at some point in a casual conversation with a friend, coworker, or classmate, you compressed all the action in a two-hour film or in a two-hundred-page book into a brief description of the major plot movements. While in conversation, you probably described the major highlights, or the main points in just a few sentences, using your own vocabulary and manner of speaking.

Similarly, a summary paragraph condenses a long piece of writing into a smaller paragraph by extracting only the vital information. Summaries need not contain all the specific facts and figures in the original document; they provide only an overview of the essential information.

A good summary accomplishes the following:

- It identifies or names the piece and its author(s) and states the main purpose of the text.
- It captures the text's main points.
- It does *not* include the reader's opinions, feelings, beliefs, counterarguments, etc.
- It is short. The idea of a summary is to "boil down" or condense a text to just a few sentences.

Consider the example of this journal report and the summary of it that follows:

Example: Journal report – "Underage Alcohol Use"

According to the Monitoring the Future Study, almost two-thirds of 10th-grade students reported having tried alcohol at least once in their lifetime, and two-fifths reported having been drunk at least once (Johnston et al. 2006*a*). Among 12th-grade students, these rates had risen to over three-quarters who reported having tried alcohol at least once and nearly three-fifths who reported having been drunk at

least once. In terms of current alcohol use, 33.2 percent of the Nation's 10th graders and 47.0 percent of 12th graders reported having used alcohol at least once in the past 30 days; 17.6 percent and 30.2 percent, respectively, reported having been drunk in the past 30 days; 21.0 percent and 28.1 percent, respectively, reported having had five or more drinks in a row in the past 2 weeks (sometimes called binge drinking); and 1.3 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively, reported daily alcohol use (Johnston et al. 2006*a*).

Alcohol consumption continues to escalate after high school. In fact, 18-to 24-year-olds have the highest levels of alcohol consumption and alcohol dependence of any age-group. In the first 2 years after high school, lifetime prevalence of alcohol use (based on 2005 follow-up surveys from the Monitoring the Future Study) was 81.8 percent, 30-day use prevalence was 59 percent, and binge-drinking prevalence was 36.3 percent (Johnston et al. 2006*b*). Of note, college students on average drink more than their noncollege peers, even though they drank less during high school than those who did not go on to college (Johnston et al. 2006*a*,*b*; Schulenberg and Maggs 2002). For example, in 2005, the rate of binge drinking for college students (1 to 4 years beyond high school) was 40.1 percent, whereas the rate for their noncollege age mates was 35.1 percent.

Alcohol use and problem drinking in late adolescence vary by sociodemographic characteristics. For example, the prevalence of alcohol use is higher for boys than for girls, higher for White and Hispanic adolescents than for African-American adolescents, and higher for those living in the north and north central United States than for those living in the South and West. Some of these relationships change with early adulthood, however. For example, although alcohol use in high school tends to be higher in areas with lower population density (i.e., rural areas) than in more densely populated areas, this relationship reverses during early adulthood (Johnston et al., 2006 *a*,*b*). Lower economic status (i.e., lower educational level of parents) is associated with more alcohol use during the early high school years; by the end of high school, and during the transition to adulthood, this relationship changes, and youth from higher socioeconomic backgrounds consume greater amounts of alcohol.

Source: The article "Underage alcohol use: summary of developmental processes and mechanisms: ages 16-20 (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3860496/)" by Brown et al. (2009), is in the Public Domain (U.S.A.), reused here for educational purposes. Full citation in references section.

A summary of the report should present all the main points and supporting details in brief. Read the following summary of the report written by a student:

Sample summary of report

Brown et al. (2009) inform us that by tenth grade, nearly two-thirds of students have tried alcohol at least once, and by twelfth grade this figure increases to over three-quarters of students. After high school, alcohol consumption increases further, and college-aged students have the highest levels of alcohol consumption and dependence of any age group. Alcohol use varies according to factors such as gender, race, geographic location, and socioeconomic status.

Some of these trends may reverse in early adulthood. For example, adolescents of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to consume alcohol during high school years, whereas youth from higher socioeconomic status are more likely to consume alcohol in the years after high school.

Notice how the summary retains the key points made by the writers of the original report but omits most of the statistical data. Summaries need not contain all the specific facts and figures in the original document; they provide only an overview of the essential information.

Watch How to write a summary – Best guide! on YouTube (mins) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEwmts9MqGs)

Analysis Paragraphs

An analysis separates complex materials in their different parts and studies how the parts relate to one another. The analysis of simple table salt, for example, would require a deconstruction of its parts—the elements sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl). Analysis is not limited to the sciences, of course. An analysis paragraph in academic writing fulfills the same purpose; it takes apart a primary source (an essay, a book, an article, etc.) point by point. It communicates the main points of the document by examining individual points and identifying how the points relate to one another.

Take a look at a student's analysis of the journal report.

Student analysis of the journal report

At the beginning of their report, Brown et al. (2009) use specific data regarding the use of alcohol by high school and college-aged students, which is supported by several studies. Later in the report, they consider how various socioeconomic factors influence problem drinking in adolescence. The latter part of the report is far less specific and does not provide statistics or examples.

The lack of specific information in the second part of the report raises several important questions. Why are teenagers in rural high schools more likely to drink than teenagers in urban areas? Where do they obtain alcohol? How do parental attitudes influence this trend? A follow-up study could compare several high schools in rural and urban areas to consider these issues and potentially find ways to reduce teenage alcohol consumption.

Notice how the analysis does not simply repeat information from the original report, but considers how the points within the report relate to one another. By doing this, the student uncovers a discrepancy between the points that are backed up by statistics and those that require additional information. Analyzing a document involves a close examination of each of the individual parts and how they work together.

Synthesis Paragraphs

A synthesis combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Consider the electronic musical instrument aptly named the synthesizer. It looks like a simple keyboard but displays a dashboard of switches, buttons, and levers. With the flip of a few switches, a musician may combine the distinct sounds of a piano, a flute, or a guitar—or any other combination of instruments—to create a new sound. The purpose of the synthesizer is to blend together the notes from individual instruments to form new, unique notes.

The purpose of an academic synthesis is to blend individual documents into a new document. An academic synthesis paragraph considers the main points from one or more pieces of writing and links the main points together to create a new point, one not replicated in either document.

Take a look at a student's synthesis of several sources about underage drinking.

Student synthesis of several sources

In their 2009 report, Brown et al. consider the rates of alcohol consumption among high school and college-aged students and various sociodemographic factors that affect these rates. However, this report is limited to assessing the rates of underage drinking, rather than considering methods of decreasing these rates. Several other studies, as well as original research among college students, provide insight into how these rates may be reduced.

One study, by Spoth et al. (2009) considers the impact of various types of interventions as a method for reducing alcohol consumption among minors. They conclude that although family-focused interventions for adolescents aged ten to fifteen have shown promise, there is a serious lack of interventions available for college-aged students who do not attend college. These students are among the highest risk level for alcohol abuse, a fact supported by Brown et al. (2009).

I did my own research and interviewed eight college students, four men and four women. I asked them when they first tried alcohol and what factors encouraged them to drink. All four men had tried alcohol by the age of thirteen. Three of the women had also tried alcohol by thirteen and the fourth had tried alcohol by fifteen. All eight students said that peer pressure, boredom, and the thrill of trying something illegal were motivating factors. These results support the research of Brown et al. (2009). However, they also raise an interesting point. If boredom is a motivating factor for underage drinking, maybe additional after school programs or other community measures could be introduced to dissuade teenagers from underage drinking. Based on my sources, further research is needed to show true preventative measures for teenage alcohol consumption.

Notice how the synthesis paragraphs consider each source and use information from each to create a new thesis. A good synthesis does not repeat information; the writer uses a variety of sources to create a new idea.

Evaluation Paragraphs

An evaluation judges the value of something and determines its worth. Evaluations in everyday experiences are often not only dictated by set standards but also influenced by opinion and prior knowledge. For example, at work, a supervisor may complete an employee evaluation by judging his subordinate's performance based on the company's

goals. If the company focuses on improving communication, the supervisor will rate the employee's customer service according to a standard scale. However, the evaluation still depends on the supervisor's opinion and prior experience with the employee. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine how well the employee performs at his or her job.

An academic evaluation communicates your opinion, and its justifications, about a document or a topic of discussion. Evaluations are influenced by your reading of the document, your prior knowledge, and your prior experience with the topic or issue. Because an evaluation incorporates your point of view and reasons for your point of view, it typically requires more critical thinking and a combination of summary, analysis, and synthesis skills. Thus evaluation paragraphs often follow summary, analysis, and synthesis paragraphs. Read a student's evaluation paragraph.

Student evaluation paragraph

> Throughout their report, Brown et al. (2009) provide valuable statistics that highlight the frequency of alcohol use among highschool and college students. They use several reputable sources to support their points. However, the report focuses solely on the frequency of alcohol use and how it varies according to certain sociodemographic factors. Other sources, such as the Spoth et al. (2009) study and the survey I conducted among college students, examine the reasons for alcohol use among young people and offer suggestions as to how to reduce the rates. Nonetheless, I think that Brown et al. (2009) offer a useful set of statistics from which to base further research into alcohol use among high school and college students.

Notice how the paragraph incorporates the student's personal judgment within the evaluation. Evaluating a document requires prior knowledge that is often based on additional research.

Tip

When reviewing directions for assignments, look for the verbs summarize, analyze, synthesize, or

evaluate. Instructors often use these words to clearly indicate the assignment's purpose. These words will cue you on how to complete the assignment because you will know its exact purpose.

Summarize, synthesize, analyze, or evaluate?

Summarize, synthesize, analyze or evaluate? (Text version)

Identify which paragraph is the best example of each paragraph purpose (summarize, synthesize, analyze, evaluate).

1. During the opening scene, we learn that the character Laura is adopted and that she has spent the past three years desperately trying to track down her real parents. Having exhausted all the usual options—adoption agencies, online searches, family trees, and so on—she is on the verge of giving up when she meets a stranger on a bus. The chance encounter leads to a complicated chain of events that ultimately result in Laura getting her lifelong wish. But is it really what she wants? Throughout the rest of the film, Laura discovers that sometimes the past is best left where it belongs.
2. The scene in which Campbell and his fellow prisoners assist the guards in shutting down the riot immediately strikes the viewer as unrealistic. Based on the recent reports on prison riots in both Detroit and California, it seems highly unlikely that a posse of hardened criminals would intentionally help their captors at the risk of inciting future revenge from other inmates. Instead, both news reports and psychological studies indicate that prisoners who do not actively participate in a riot will go back to their cells and avoid conflict altogether. Examples of this lack of attention to detail occur throughout the film, making it almost unbearable to watch.
3. To create the feeling of being gripped in a vise, the director, May Lee, uses a variety of elements to gradually increase the tension. The creepy, haunting melody that subtly enhances the earlier scenes becomes ever more insistent, rising to a disturbing crescendo toward the end of the movie. The desperation of the actors, combined with the claustrophobic atmosphere and tight camera angles create a realistic firestorm, from which there is little hope of escape. Walking out of the theatre at the end feels like staggering out of a Roman dungeon.

4. This film could easily have been cut down to less than two hours. By the final scene, I noticed that most of my fellow moviegoers were snoozing in their seats and were barely paying attention to what was happening on screen. Although the director sticks diligently to the book, he tries too hard to cram in all the action, which is just too ambitious for such a detail-oriented story. If you want my advice, read the book and give the movie a miss.

Check your Answers: [1]

Writing at Work

Thinking about the purpose of writing a report in the workplace can help focus and structure the document. A summary should provide colleagues with a factual overview of your findings without going into too much specific detail. In contrast, an evaluation should include your personal opinion, along with supporting evidence, research, or examples to back it up. Listen for words such as *summarize*, *analyze*, *synthesize*, or *evaluate* when your boss asks you to complete a report to help determine a purpose for writing.

Identifying the Audience

Imagine you must give a presentation to a group of executives in an office. Weeks before the big day, you spend time creating and rehearsing the presentation. You must make important, careful decisions not only about the content but also about your delivery. Will the presentation require technology to project figures and charts? Should the presentation define important words, or will the executives already know the terms? Should you wear your suit and dress shirt? The answers to these questions will help you develop an appropriate relationship with your audience, making them more receptive to your message.

Now imagine you must explain the same business concepts from your presentation to

a group of high school students. Those important questions you previously answered may now require different answers. The figures and charts may be too sophisticated, and the terms will certainly require definitions. You may even reconsider your outfit and sport a more casual look. Because the audience has shifted, your presentation and delivery will shift as well to create a new relationship with the new audience.

In these two situations, the audience—the individuals who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of presentation.

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions.

For example, you update your status on a social networking site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humour in mind. Even at work, you send e-mails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message.

In other words, being aware of "invisible" readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day. Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the author send to her parents? Which one would she send to her best friend?

Examples

Example A

Last Saturday, I volunteered at a local hospital. The visit was fun and rewarding. I even learned how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Unfortunately, I think caught a cold from one of the patients. This week, I will rest in bed and drink plenty of clear fluids. I hope I am well by next Saturday to volunteer again.

Example B

> OMG! You won't believe this! My advisor forced me to do my community service hours at this hospital all weekend! We learned CPR but we did it on dummies, not even real peeps. And some kid sneezed on me and got me sick! I was so bored and sniffling all weekend; I hope I don't have to go back next week. I def do NOT want to miss the basketball tournament!

Most likely, you matched each paragraph to its intended audience with little hesitation. Because each paragraph reveals the author's relationship with her intended readers, you can identify the audience fairly quickly. When writing your own paragraphs, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject. Imagining your readers during each stage of the writing process will help you make decisions about your writing.

Tip

While giving a speech, you may articulate an inspiring or critical message, but if you left your hair a mess and laced up mismatched shoes, your audience would not take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words.

Similarly, grammar and sentence structure serve as the appearance of a piece of writing. Polishing your work using correct grammar will impress your readers and allow them to focus on what you have to say.

Because focusing on audience will enhance your writing, your process, and your finished product, you must consider the specific traits of your audience members. Use your imagination to anticipate the readers' demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations.

- **Demographics.** These measure important data about a group of people, such as their age range, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, or their gender. Certain topics and assignments will require these kinds of considerations about your audience.

- **Education.** Education considers the audience's level of schooling. If audience members have earned a doctorate degree, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. Or, if audience members are still in college, you could write in a more relaxed style.
- **Prior knowledge.** This refers to what the audience already knows about your topic. You may decide whether to define terms and explain concepts based on your audience's prior knowledge. Although you cannot peer inside the brains of your readers to discover their knowledge, you can make reasonable assumptions. For instance, a nursing major would presumably know more about health-related topics than a business major would.
- **Expectations.** These indicate what readers will look for while reading your assignment. Readers may expect consistencies in the assignment's appearance, such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and legible font. Readers may also have content-based expectations given the assignment's purpose and organization. In an essay titled "The Economics of Enlightenment: The Effects of Rising Tuition," for example, audience members may expect to read about the economic repercussions of college tuition costs.

Remember that decisions about style depend on audience, purpose, and content. Identifying your audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how you write, but purpose and content play an equally important role. The next subsection covers how to select an appropriate tone to match the audience and purpose.

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood.

Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit through writing a range of attitudes, from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers intimate their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose.

Consider the Writer's tone

Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

Consider the Writer's Tone (Text version)
Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation? There is more than one right answer.

Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we do not act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example. Today, tigers occupy just 7 percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelt and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from 100,000 in 1920 to just a few thousand (Smith, 2013). Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

Is the writer's tone: impassioned? well informed? bored? funny? relaxed? urgent?

Check your Answer: [2]

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content.

Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will

be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. Consider that audience of third graders. You would choose simple content that the audience will easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone. The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

Identify your Audience

Match the content in the box to the appropriate audience and purpose. On your own sheet of paper, write the correct letter next to the number.

1. Whereas economist Holmes contends that the financial crisis is far from over, the presidential advisor Jones points out that it is vital to catch the first wave of opportunity to increase market share. We can use elements of both experts' visions. Let me explain how.
2. In 2000, foreign money flowed into the United States, contributing to easy credit conditions. People bought larger houses than they could afford, eventually defaulting on their loans as interest rates rose.
3. The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, known by most of us as the humungous government bailout, caused mixed reactions. Although supported by many political leaders, the statute provoked outrage among grassroots groups. In their opinion, the government was actually rewarding banks for their appalling behavior.

a. Audience: An instructor

   Purpose: To analyze the reasons behind the 2007 financial crisis

   Content:

b. Audience: Classmates

   Purpose: To summarize the effects of the $700 billion government bailout

   Content:

c. Audience: An employer

   Purpose: To synthesize two articles on preparing businesses for economic recovery

   Content:

Key Takeaways

- Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks of information.
- The content of each paragraph and document is shaped by purpose, audience, and tone.
- The four common academic purposes are to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate.
- Identifying the audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how and what you write.
- Devices such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language communicate tone and create a relationship between the writer and his or her audience.
- Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations. All content must be appropriate and interesting for the audience, purpose and tone.

Attributions & References

References in examples & summaries

- Brown, S. A., McGue, M., Maggs, J., Schulenberg, J., Hingson, R., Swartzwelder, S., Martin, C., Chung, T., Tapert, S. F., Sher, K., Winters, K. C., Lowman, C., & Murphy, S. (2009). Underage alcohol use: summary of developmental processes and mechanisms: ages 16-20. *Alcohol research & health : the journal of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 32*(1), 41–52.
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interventions addressing underage drinking: State of the evidence and steps toward public health impact. *Alcohol Research & Health, 32*(1), 53–66.

Notes

1. 1. Summarize, 2. Analyze, 3. Synthesize, 4. Evaluate
2. The writers tone may be considered: urgent, well informed, impassioned

2.5 - EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR WRITING A PARAGRAPH

Learning Objectives

- Identify characteristics of a good topic sentence.
- Identify the three parts of a developed paragraph.
- Apply knowledge of topic sentences and parts of a developed paragraph in an assignment.

Now that you have identified common purposes for writing and learned how to select appropriate content for a particular audience, you can think about the structure of a paragraph in greater detail. Composing an effective paragraph requires a method similar to building a house. You may have the finest content, or materials, but if you do not arrange them in the correct order, then the final product will not hold together very well.

A strong paragraph contains three distinct components:

1. Topic sentence . The topic sentence is the main idea of the paragraph.
2. Body . The body is composed of the supporting sentences that develop the main point.
3. Conclusion . The conclusion is the final sentence that summarizes the main point.

The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay (see Chapter 4.1 for more information about thesis statements) and guides the

reader by signposting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.

This section covers the major components of a paragraph and examines how to develop an effective topic sentence.

Developing a Topic Sentence

Pick up any newspaper or magazine and read the first sentence of an article. Are you fairly confident that you know what the rest of the article is about? If so, you have likely read the topic sentence.

An effective topic sentence combines a main idea with the writer's personal attitude or opinion. It serves to orient the reader and provides an indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph. Read the following example.

> Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many provinces.

This topic sentence declares a favourable position for standardizing math and English education. After reading this sentence, a reader might reasonably expect the writer to provide supporting details and facts as to why standardizing math and English education might improve student learning in many provinces. If the purpose of the essay is actually to evaluate education in only one particular province, or to discuss math or English education specifically, then the topic sentence is misleading.

Tip

When writing a draft of an essay, allow a friend or colleague to read the opening line of your first paragraph. Ask your reader to predict what your paper will be about. If they are unable to guess your topic accurately, you should consider revising your topic sentence so that it clearly defines your purpose in writing.

Main Idea versus Controlling Idea

Topic sentences contain both a main idea (the subject, or topic that the writer is discussing) and a controlling idea (the writer's specific stance on that subject). Just as a thesis statement includes an idea that controls a document's focus (as you will read about in Chapter 3 "The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?"), a topic sentence must also contain a controlling idea to direct the paragraph. Different writers may use the same main idea but can steer their paragraph in a number of different directions according to their stance on the subject. Read the following examples.

- Marijuana is a destructive influence on teens and causes long-term brain damage.
- The antinausea properties in marijuana are a lifeline for many cancer patients.
- Legalized marijuana creates a higher demand for Class A and Class B drugs.

Although the main idea—marijuana—is the same in all three topic sentences, the controlling idea differs depending on the writer's viewpoint.

Identifying main & controlling ideas

Identifying Main & Controlling Ideas (Text version)
Identify the **main idea** in the following topic sentences.

1. Raising the legal driving age to 21 would decrease road traffic accidents.
2. Exercising three times a week is the only way to maintain good physical health
3. Dog owners should be prohibited from taking their pets on public beaches.

Identify the **controlling idea** in the following topic sentence.

4. Sexism and racism are still rampant in today's workplace.
5. Owning a business is the only way to achieve financial success.

Check your Answers: [1]

Characteristics of a Good Topic Sentence

Five characteristics define a good topic sentence:

1. A good topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.

   Weak example. People rarely give firefighters the credit they deserve for such a physically and emotionally demanding job. (The paragraph is about a specific incident that involved firefighters; therefore, this topic sentence is too general.)

   Stronger example. During the October riots, Unit 3B went beyond the call of duty. (This topic sentence is more specific and indicates that the paragraph will contain information about a particular incident involving Unit 3B.)
2. A good topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea or opinion.

   Weak example. In this paper, I am going to discuss the rising suicide rate among young professionals. (This topic sentence provides a main idea, but it does not present a controlling idea, or thesis.)

   Stronger example. The rising suicide rate among young professionals is a cause for immediate concern. (This topic sentence presents the writer's opinion on the subject of rising suicide rates among young professionals.)
3. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.

Weak example. In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or nonacademic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but both are buried beneath the confusing sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary. These obstacles make it difficult for the reader to follow.)

Stronger example. Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline. (This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow.)

4. A good topic sentence does not include supporting details.

Weak example. Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year. (This topic sentence includes a supporting detail that should be included later in the paragraph to back up the main point.)

Stronger example. Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for many reasons. (This topic sentence omits the additional supporting detail so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph.)

5. A good topic sentence engages the reader by using interesting vocabulary.

Weak example. The military deserves better equipment. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but the language is bland and unexciting.)

Stronger example. The appalling lack of resources provided to the military is outrageous and requires our immediate attention. (This topic sentence reiterates the same idea and controlling thesis, but adjectives such as *appalling* and *immediate* better engage the reader. These words also indicate the writer's tone.)

Watch How to Write a Topic Sentence on YouTube (2 mins) (https://youtu.be/2R-9T9TgGnE)

Test Yourself

Read each of the examples below, and decide whether it is a strong or weak topic sentence based on the criteria listed above. Then click on the sentence to find out if you are on the right track.

The growth of e-sports will benefit parks and recreation departments by increasing the use of services by hard to reach audiences.

Weak! This topic sentence has both a topic (the growth of e-sports) and a controlling idea (it will benefit parks and recreation departments), but it also includes unnecessary supporting detail. The *way* e-sports will be a benefit should be explained in the paragraph's body. It does not need to be stated in the topic sentence itself.

Contrary to common fears, automation creates new jobs, many of which are far more glamorous than their predecessors.

Strong! This topic sentence contains a topic (automation), a controlling idea (it creates new jobs), and it uses interesting and engaging vocabulary that makes the reader want to know more.

A key factor of McDonald's' success has been the company's worldwide creation of employment opportunity.

Strong! This topic sentence leaves no doubt what the paragraph will discuss. It will explain how McDonald's has been successful (topic) in part because of the creation of employment opportunity (controlling idea). Not a lot of room for confusion here!

Periodontal disease effects the gums and tissues surrounding the teeth, and people who use tobacco may present with bleeding and gum pain after eating, brushing and flossing.

Weak! This topic sentence is not very easy to follow. It has a topic (periodontal disease) and a controlling idea (the disease affects tobacco users), but the idea is not clearly stated nor connected to the topic. It could be clarified by saying, "Periodontal disease is prevalent in tobacco users."

This paragraph will discuss the history of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Weak! This sentence has a topic (the history of the Commission) but not a controlling idea. What

point is the paragraph going to make? Using a phrase like "This paragraph will..." or "In this essay, I will..." means that a point has not been established. Improve the sentence by saying something like, "Establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was an important first step in healing the trauma created by the residential school system."

Activity Source: "Is the topic sentence WEAK or STRONG?" by Emily Cramer is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

Effective Topic Sentences

Effective Topic Sentences (Text version)

Choose the most effective topic sentence from the following sentence pairs.

1. a. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the Liberals need to listen to public opinion. OR
   b. This paper will discuss the likelihood of the Liberals winning the next election.
2. a. Union workers are crippling the economy because companies are unable to remain competitive as a result of added financial pressure. OR
   b. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the Liberals need to listen to public opinion.
3. a. Authors are losing money as a result of technological advances. OR
   b. The introduction of new technology will devastate the literary world.
4. a. This essay will consider whether talent is required in the rap music industry. OR
   b. Rap music is produced by untalented individuals with oversized egos.

Check your Answers: [2]

Activity source: "Self Practice 3.10" by Brenna Clarke Gray (H5P Adaptation) *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Harkoff & [author removed], licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Practice: Creating Topic Sentences

Using the tips on developing effective topic sentences in this section, create a topic sentence on each of the following subjects. Remember to include a controlling idea as well as a main idea. Write your responses on your own sheet of paper.

1. An endangered species
2. The cost of fuel
3. The legal drinking age
4. A controversial film or novel

Writing at Work

When creating a workplace document, use the "top-down" approach—keep the topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph so that readers immediately understand the gist of the message. This method saves busy colleagues precious time and effort trying to figure out the main points and relevant details.

Headings are another helpful tool. In a text-heavy document, break up each paragraph with individual headings. These serve as useful navigation aids, enabling colleagues to skim through the document and locate paragraphs that are relevant to them.

Developing Paragraphs That Use Topic Sentences, Supporting Ideas, and Transitions Effectively

Learning how to develop a good topic sentence is the first step toward writing a solid paragraph. Once you have composed your topic sentence, you have a guideline for the rest of the paragraph. To complete the paragraph, a writer must support the topic sentence with additional information and summarize the main point with a concluding sentence.

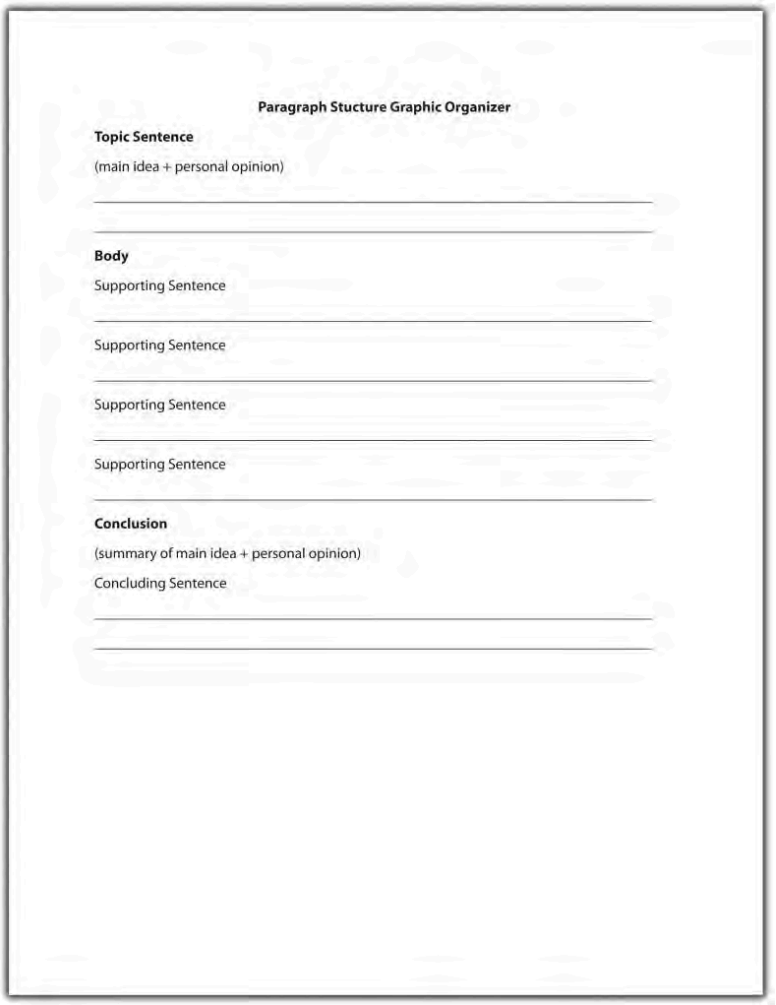
This section identifies the three major structural parts of a paragraph and covers how to develop a paragraph using transitional words and phrases.

Imagine the parts as a burger: topic sentence is the top bun, supporting details are the burger toppings (lettuce, tomato, meat), colourful vocabulary are the condiments (mustard, ketchup, relish), and concluding sentence is the bottom bun. Photo (https://www.flickr.com/photos/vblibrary/6123923301/in/gallery-78108369@N07-72157632019968814/) by Enokson is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Identifying Parts of a Paragraph

An effective paragraph contains three main parts: a topic sentence, the body, and the concluding sentence. A topic sentence is often the first sentence of a paragraph. This chapter has already discussed its purpose—to express a main idea combined with the writer's attitude about the subject. The body of the paragraph usually follows, containing supporting details. Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It reminds the reader of the main point by restating it in different words.

Figure 2.2 Paragraph Structure Graphic Organizer



Paragraph Stucture Graphic Organizer

Topic Sentence

(main idea + personal opinion)

_____

_____

Body

Supporting Sentence

_____

Supporting Sentence

_____

Supporting Sentence

_____

Supporting Sentence

_____

Conclusion

(summary of main idea + personal opinion)

Concluding Sentence

_____

_____

Download/Access a text version of this worksheet [Word file] (https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/1984/2022/02/COMMESS-2.5-ParagraphStructureOrganizer.docx)

Read the following paragraph. The topic sentence (the first one in the paragraph) is underlined for you.

> After reading the new TV guide this week I had just one thought—why are we still being bombarded with reality shows? This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of viewer favorites, we are to be cursed with yet another mindless creation. *Prisoner* follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for the purposes of this fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums

associated with reality television. I dread to think what producers will come up with next season, but if any of them are reading this blog—stop it! We've had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!

It tells the reader that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer's distaste for these shows through the use of the word *bombarded*.

Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about a specific reality television show. The final sentence is the concluding sentence. It reiterates the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows by using different words from the topic sentence.

Paragraphs that begin with the topic sentence move from the general to the specific. They open with a general statement about a subject (reality shows) and then discuss specific examples (the reality show *Prisoner*). Most academic essays contain the topic sentence at the beginning of the first paragraph.

Now take a look at the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

Last year, a cat traveled 130 kilometers to reach its family, who had moved to another province and left their pet behind. Even though it had never been to their new home, the cat was able to track down its former owners. A dog in my neighborhood can predict when its master is about to have a seizure. It makes sure that he does not hurt himself during an epileptic fit. Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.

The last sentence of this paragraph, "Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.", is the topic sentence. It draws on specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures) and then makes a general statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (animals' senses are better than humans'). In this case, the supporting sentences are placed before the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is the same as the topic sentence.

This technique is frequently used in *persuasive* writing. The writer produces detailed examples as evidence to back up his or her point, preparing the reader to accept the concluding topic sentence as the truth.

Sometimes, the topic sentence appears in the middle of a paragraph. Read the following example.

> For many years, I suffered from severe anxiety every time I took an exam. Hours before the exam, my heart would begin pounding, my legs would shake, and sometimes I would become physically unable to move. **Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety—breathing exercises.** It seems so simple, but by doing just a few breathing exercises a couple of hours before an exam, I gradually got my anxiety under control. The exercises help slow my heart rate and make me feel less anxious. Better yet, they require no pills, no equipment, and very little time. It's amazing how just breathing correctly has helped me learn to manage my anxiety symptoms.

In this paragraph, the sentence in bold, "Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety – breathing exercises.", is the topic sentence. It expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to his main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how he used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The last sentence is the concluding sentence and restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing. If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through the paragraph carefully to make sure that it contains only one major topic. To read more about topic sentences and where they appear in paragraphs, see Chapter 3 "The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?".

Identifying Topic, Supporting & Concluding Sentences

Identifying Topic, Supporting & Concluding Sentences (Text version)

Read the following passage:

The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a minuscule amount of water. Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats into moisture. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

1. **Identify the topic sentence:**
    a. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating.
    b. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.
2. **Identify one example of a supporting sentence:**
    a. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.
    b. The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt.
    c. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool.
3. **Identify the concluding sentences:**
    a. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a minuscule amount of water.
    b. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Check your Answers:[3]

Supporting Sentences

If you think of a paragraph as a hamburger, the supporting sentences are the meat

inside the bun. They make up the body of the paragraph by explaining, proving, or enhancing the controlling idea in the topic sentence. Most paragraphs contain three to six supporting sentences depending on the audience and purpose for writing. A supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

- **Reason Sentence:** The refusal of the baby boom generation to retire is contributing to the current lack of available jobs.
- **Fact**

  Sentence: Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.
- **Statistic**

  Sentence: Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in the United States.
- **Quotation Sentence:** "We will not allow this situation to continue," stated Senator Johns.
- **Example Sentence:** Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.

The type of supporting sentence you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. Read the following example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. **(Topic sentence)**

First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. **(Supporting sentence 1: statistic)**

Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. **(Supporting sentence 2: fact)**

Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. **(Supporting sentence 3: reason)**

Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. **(Supporting sentence 4: example)**

"It's the cheapest car I've ever had," she said. "The running costs are far lower than previous gas powered vehicles I've owned." **(Supporting sentence 5: quotation)**

Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future. **(Concluding sentence)**

To find information for your supporting sentences, you might consider using one of the following sources:

- Reference book
- Website
- Biography/autobiography
- Map
- Dictionary
- Newspaper/magazine
- Interview
- Previous experience
- Personal research

To read more about sources and research, see "Introduction to Research Writing".

Tip

When searching for information on the Internet, remember that some websites are more reliable than others. Websites ending in .gov or .edu are generally more reliable than websites ending in .com or .org. Wikis and blogs are not reliable sources of information because they are subject to inaccuracies.

Concluding Sentences

An effective concluding sentence draws together all the ideas you have raised in your paragraph. It reminds readers of the main point—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Using the hamburger example, the top bun (the topic sentence) and the bottom bun (the concluding sentence) are very similar. They frame

the "meat" or body of the paragraph. Compare the topic sentence and concluding sentence from the previous example:

Topic sentence: There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Concluding sentence: Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Notice the use of the synonyms *advantages* and *benefits*. The concluding sentence reiterates the idea that owning a hybrid is advantageous without using the exact same words. It also summarizes two examples of the advantages covered in the supporting sentences: low running costs and environmental benefits.

You should avoid introducing any new ideas into your concluding sentence. A conclusion is intended to provide the reader with a sense of completion. Introducing a subject that is not covered in the paragraph will confuse the reader and weaken your writing.

A concluding sentence may do any of the following:

- Restate the main idea.

  Example: Childhood obesity is a growing problem in Canada.
- Summarize the key points in the paragraph.

  Example: A lack of healthy choices, poor parenting, and an addiction to video games are among the many factors contributing to childhood obesity.
- Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.

  Example: These statistics indicate that unless we take action, childhood obesity rates will continue to rise.
- Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.

  Example: Based on this research, more than 60 percent of children in Canada will be morbidly obese by the year 2030 unless we take evasive action.
- Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.

Example: Childhood obesity is an entirely preventable tragedy.

Check Your Understanding

Check Your Understanding (Text version)

1. The concluding sentence is a good place to introduce a new idea, because readers find that engaging. True or False?
2. Fill in the missing words to complete the metaphor.
   If a paragraph is a hamburger, the topic sentence is the (a) _____ bun and the concluding sentence is the (b) _____ bun. This makes the body of the paragraph the (c) _____ (unless you prefer a veggie burger).
3. Match the type of concluding sentence (A) to the best example (B)

   A. Type of sentence:

      a. Restate the main idea.
      b. Summarize the key points in the paragraph
      c. Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.
      d. Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.
      e. Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.

   B. Examples:

      1. These examples from recent research show how criminalizing drugs has not protected communities or served individual drug users.
      2. The war on drugs has not resulted in a reduction in suffering.
      3. Given all we know about outcome of failed drug policy, the next step is to consider decriminalization.
      4. The war on drugs has damaged society because it has resulted in a more dangerous drug supply and a criminalized population.
      5. The traumas and violence inflicted by the war on drugs could have been prevented.

1.

Check your Answers: [4]

Activity source: "Self Practice 3.13" by Brenna Clarke Gray (H5P Adaptation) *Writing for Success – 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Harkoff & [author removed], licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Transitions

A strong paragraph moves seamlessly from the topic sentence into the supporting sentences and on to the concluding sentence. To help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another, writers use transitional words and phrases. A transition is a connecting word that describes a relationship between ideas. Take another look at the earlier example:

> There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the litre than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. "It's the cheapest car I've ever had," she said. "The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I've owned." Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Each of the underlined words (first, second and because) is a transition word. Words such as *first* and *second* are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer's ideas by showing that he or she has another point to make in support of the topic sentence. Other transition words that show order include *third*, *also*, and *furthermore*.

The transition word *because* is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they do not require gas). Other transition words of consequence include *as a result*, *so that*, *since*, or *for this reason*.

To include a summarizing transition in her concluding sentence, the writer could rewrite the final sentence as follows:

> In conclusion, given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

The following lists provide some useful transition words to connect supporting sentences and concluding sentences. See "The Writing Process: How do I begin" for a more comprehensive look at transitional words and phrases.

Examples of transition words

For Supporting Sentences:

- above all, but, for instance, in particular, moreover, subsequently, also, conversely, furthermore, later on, nevertheless, therefore, aside from, correspondingly, however, likewise, on one hand, to begin with, at the same time, for example, in addition, meanwhile, on the contrary...

For Concluding sentences:

- after all, all things considered, in brief, in summary, on the whole, to sum up, all in all, finally, in conclusion, on balance, thus...

Practice What You've Learned About Paragraphs

Practice What You've Learned About Paragraphs (Text version)

For this exercise, you will draft a paragraph after spending some time reflecting on the criteria for good paragraphs that you learned about in this chapter. You can choose any topic you like for your paragraph — maybe there's something you're thinking about for this or another class that would benefit from some time to do some writing about — but if you need help with a prompt, consider writing about one of the issues in this chapter or answer one of these questions:

- Can online friendships be as meaningful as offline ones?
- Is college or university always the right decision for people leaving high school?
- What can people do to manage their stress levels?

You don't need to do research to approach this exercise (though you are welcome to, if you wish!). Instead, your own personal experience will be sufficient here.

Remember:

- The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay and guides the reader by signposting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.
- Most paragraphs contain three to six supporting sentences depending on the audience and purpose for writing.
- An effective concluding sentence draws together all the ideas you have raised in your paragraph. It reminds readers of the main point—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Using the hamburger example, the top bun (the topic sentence) and the bottom bun (the concluding sentence) are very similar. They frame the "meat" or body of the paragraph.

Key paragraph details

Here you will reflect on what makes a good paragraph before you take a run at it yourself. Remember, a good paragraph has the following criteria:

- A topic sentence (that makes a claim/states an opinion!).
- A concluding sentence.
- Appropriate supporting details.
- Use of transitional words/phrases.

In the exercise below, click on the "criteria" button and make notes for yourself about how you can address the key criteria for paragraphs. Try make four points: one for each key element your paragraph needs to have.

Paragraph composition

Based on the criteria you outlined on the previous page, draft a paragraph.

Review Criteria and Details

Rate how well you've achieved each of the criteria, and reflect on how you can strengthen the thesis statement.

- Doesn't meet criteria.
- Meets criteria partially.
- Strongly meets criteria.

Save your file and consider sharing with a classmate for feedback.

Writing at Work

Transitional words and phrases are useful tools to incorporate into workplace documents. They guide the reader through the document, clarifying relationships between sentences and paragraphs so that the reader understands why they have been written in that particular order.

For example, when writing an instructional memo, it may be helpful to consider the following transitional words and phrases: *before you begin*, *first*, *next*, *then*, *finally*, *after you have completed*.

Using these transitions as a template to write your memo will provide readers with clear, logical instructions about a particular process and the order in which steps are supposed to be completed

Key Takeaways

- A good paragraph contains three distinct components: a topic sentence, body, and concluding sentence.
- The topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph combined with the writer's attitude or opinion about the topic.
- Good topic sentences contain both a main idea and a controlling idea, are clear and easy to follow, use engaging vocabulary, and provide an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.
- Topic sentences may be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph. In most academic essays, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a paragraph.
- Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence by offering facts, reasons, statistics, quotations, or examples.
- Concluding sentences summarize the key points in a paragraph and reiterate the main idea without repeating it word for word.
- Transitional words and phrases help organize ideas in a paragraph and show how these ideas relate to one another.

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from " 6.2 Effective means for writing a paragraph (https://open.lib.umn.edu/writingforsuccess/chapter/6-2-effective-means-for-writing-a-paragraph/)" In *Writing for Success* (https://open.lib.umn.edu/

writingforsuccess/)by University of Minnesota licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0. / Adaptations include updates for accessibility and images for visual appeal.

Notes

1.
1. Legal driving age
2. Exercising
3. Dog owners
4. Still rampant in today's workplaces
5. Financial success
6. 1. a, 2. a, 3. a, 4. b
7. 1. a, 2.c, 3. b
8. 1. False 2. a. top, b. bottom, c. meat/patty, 3. 1 (d), 2. (a), 3. (c), 4. (b), 5. (e).

2.6 - WRITING PARAGRAPHS: EXERCISES

End of Chapter Exercises

1. Select one of the following topics or choose a topic of your choice:

    a. The Alberta oil sands
    b. Drinking water access in First Nations reserves
    c. Introducing a four-day work week
    d. Bringing pets to work
    e. Charging airline passengers to use the in-flight bathroomCreate a topic sentence based on the topic you chose, remembering to include both a main idea and a controlling idea. Next, write an alternative topic sentence using the same main idea but a different controlling idea. Explain how each fully developed paragraph might differ in tone and content.

2. At some point during your career, you may be asked to write a report or complete a presentation. Imagine that you have been asked to report on the issue of health and safety in the workplace. Using the information under "Audience" in Chapter 2.4, complete an analysis of your intended audience—your fellow office workers. Consider how demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will influence your report and explain how you will tailor it to your audience accordingly.
3. Group activity. Working in a group of four or five, assign each group member the task of collecting one document each. These documents might include magazine or newspaper articles, workplace documents, academic essays, chapters from a reference book, film or book reviews, or any other type of writing. As a group, read through each document and discuss the author's purpose for writing. Use the information you have learned in this chapter to decide whether the main purpose is to summarize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Write a brief report on the purpose of each document, using supporting evidence from the text.

4. Group activity. Working in a small group, select a workplace document or academic essay that has a clear thesis. Examine each paragraph and identify the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. Then, choose one particular paragraph and discuss the following questions:

    a. Is the topic sentence clearly identifiable or is it implied?
    b. Do all the supporting sentences relate to the topic sentence?
    c. Does the writer use effective transitions to link his or her ideas?
    d. Does the concluding sentence accurately summarize the main point of the paragraph?

    As a group, identify the weakest areas of the paragraph and rewrite them. Focus on the relationship among the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. Use transitions to illustrate the connection between each sentence in the paragraph.

5. Peer activity. Using the information you have learned in this chapter, write a paragraph about a current event. Underline the topic sentence in your paragraph. Now, rewrite the paragraph, placing the topic sentence in a different part of the paragraph. Read the two paragraphs aloud to a peer and have him or her identify the topic sentence. Discuss which paragraph is more effective and why.

Attributions & References