

The Writing Process

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Table of Contents

The Writing Process	3
Overview	3
Pre-writing	16
Drafting	20
Revising	27
Polishing.....	34

The Writing Process

Once you select a topic and complete enough research to commit yourself—at least tentatively—to your stance toward that topic, you are ready to begin writing. Or are you?

Stop for a moment to consider the writing process we recommend.

- **Prewriting:** Analyzing your audience, determining your purpose in writing, limiting the scope of what you will cover, and generating potential content.
- **Drafting:** Making a case and structuring your evidence for that case.
- **Revising:** Putting yourself in the place of the reader, rethinking your approach, and making changes that will improve your case.
- **Polishing:** Editing and proofreading to eliminate errors and improve the coherence and readability of your presentation.

The recursive, rather than linear, nature of the writing process helps writers produce stronger, more focused work because it highlights connections and allows for movement between research and the phases of writing. Writing doesn't have to be a one way path.



Don't let writing a paper seem an overwhelming task. We have a few ideas that can help you [beat writer's block](#) and become [hooked on writing](#). For example, how about forming a [writer's group](#)? Having a hard time [getting or staying motivated](#)? You can preview an overview of the essential elements of an effective course paper, or for more in-depth information about the process of writing, visit the rest of this handbook.

View the following modules for information on specific writing topics and the writing process:

[Beating Writer's Block](#)

[Maintaining Motivation](#)

[Writing a Course Paper](#)

Overview

The work of a scholar includes reading, writing, and thinking — but not necessarily in that order. Like the writing process, scholarly work is recursive rather than linear.

Critical readers are working readers. They evaluate sources, ask probing questions, and approach reading with a strategy. By demanding the best from their sources, they become better researchers and writers.

Critical thinkers ask questions, examine assumptions, and don't accept ideas at face value. By questioning their own assumptions and ideas as well as those of others, they come to deeper understandings and learn new perspectives.

Scholarly writing is a result of critical reading and critical thinking, and scholarly writing generates critical readers and critical thinkers.

Overview / Scholarly Writing

The term "scholarly writing" is somewhat misleading because writing as a scholar varies by disciplinary community and rhetorical situation. However, a few observations can be made about scholarly writing in general:

- Scholars write with evidence, and particular types of evidence are more acceptable in particular communities and situations.
- Scholarly writing tends to have a more transparent organizational structure and to be more explicit than other types of writing.
- Scholarly writing tends to be formal.
- Scholarly communities have conventions, which are more comparable to etiquette than law.
- Scholars use reading and writing to think.

Scholarly writing is the product of thought and analysis, and the act of writing can often uncover unanticipated insights and analysis that make a writer's work unique and valuable. This section compares and contrasts scholarly writing at the undergraduate and graduate levels, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities that graduate-level writing presents.

Purposes

Undergraduate Writing

Undergraduates approach many of their courses as new scholarly readers, writers, and thinkers. Their challenge is to read critically; discover some of the major theories, concepts, and scholarship of various disciplines; analyze what they read and hear in class; and produce evidence of their mastery of facts, theories, methods, and academic genres.

Instructors ask them to write for many reasons. For example, undergraduates might be asked to:

- Tie theory to practice, e.g., produce software documentation as part of a technical writing class.

- Learn about and use genres unique to a discipline, e.g., prepare a business plan for a new small business after learning the elements of business plans.
- Select a sub-topic and analyze it in depth, e.g., write an analytical paper about a particular formula for state funding of local school districts.
- Learn and apply research and library skills, e.g., prepare an annotated bibliography on the work of a particular psychologist.
- Learn by writing, e.g., keep an analytical journal throughout a group project for a course in project management.
- Learn and use new tools, e.g., develop, distribute, collect data, and analyze the results of a questionnaire.
- Develop an ethical sense, e.g., analyze a case study about an ethical dilemma faced by an accountant in a major corporation.

In summary, undergraduate students write to learn. Instructors use written assignments as tools that students use to increase their learning.

Graduate Writing

Graduate-level writers write for all the reasons mentioned above, and they have an added challenge. At the point of writing their dissertations, they are expected to do one or more of the following:

- Create new knowledge or make unique discoveries.
- Develop a new theorem.
- Develop a new theory or conceptual framework to explain a major phenomenon.
- Work from an existing theory or framework to shed new light on a phenomenon.
- Create a new research tool for use by other scholars or use an existing tool in a unique way.
- Disprove a longstanding or widely believed idea, classification, or theory.
- Explain a phenomenon that was considered inexplicable.
- Synthesize existing knowledge or scholarship in a new way.
- Discover new diagnoses, treatments, cures, or preventatives.

The purpose of graduate-level scholarship is ultimately to discover and communicate new truths that others in the field, or even beyond the field, will consider important.

Method and Style

Each writing experience is a new experience, so one set of writing directives will never fit all. Audiences and purposes change, and each discipline has certain expectations of how someone from its ranks should write.

Each discipline has writing conventions—rules about documenting sources, structuring a particular kind of paper, analyzing different kinds of data, or presenting verbal and visual information, to name a few.

A writer's choice of research methodology will affect writing style. For example, if a study is primarily quantitative, a writer will inevitably be concerned with levels of significance, restatement of the hypothesis, data analysis, and limitations of the method. Examining major academic journals from a particular field can help show how others have used the language of statistics and analysis. If a paper relies on qualitative data, other scholars can provide models in their completed dissertations and respected academic journals.

Undergraduate writers should know how to research and find sources to support their papers. Graduate writers should also know the important books, documents, and journals that other experts consult. More specifically, they must know the work of the major respected experts in their field, and they should be able to select and read their works critically. Academic journals, especially those that are peer-reviewed, have publication guidelines. Graduate writers should be familiar with those guidelines. Advanced graduate writers should be able to write and submit an article to one of those journals and follow its publication guidelines.

Moreover, graduate writers should be able to reproduce the conventions scholarly writers follow, such as the following:

- All dissertations and many assigned papers follow guidelines or outlines provided by instructors, institutions, or publishers. These guidelines vary somewhat from university to university and journal to journal, but they all include most of the same elements. For example, scholarly writing typically opens with an abstract of the article or dissertation that follows.
- Dissertation proposals mirror dissertation content, so suggested formats and outlines for proposals provide a method for organizing content. Each college at Capella has prepared such outlines for its students, so rely on these resources.
- Different disciplines use different systems for attributing intellectual property. Capella learners rely on the APA guidelines for citing sources.

Scholarly Voice

Scholarly writers often puzzle about how to present themselves. May they write in the first person using *I*? May they use contractions? What should they do to sound scholarly? The answers to all these questions are, "It depends."

Writers, by the words they choose and the sentences they construct, project a personality when they write. Scholarly writers depend not only on the substance of their argument, but also an aura of authority they bring to their readers. As result, some writers try, as the stylist John Lanham once remarked, "...to sound like the grownups."

No effective scholarly writer should try to sound like someone else. Such affectation usually results in a writing style that sounds pompous, pedantic, and boring. Rather, effective writers work hard to express rather than impress. They focus on making a clear case with well-edited, concise sentences written in the active voice. They read their work out loud to hear those passages they would never say.

Readers of scholarly texts do have expectations about the voice style of a scholarly article or book. For example, scholarly articles and books, unless written for a mass market, are generally more formal in tone. They maintain a consistent level of formality throughout.

Most often, scholarly writers prefer a third person rather than a first or second person approach.

Example:

1st person approach: I concluded that...

2nd person approach: You can conclude...

3rd person approach: The data show that...

Note that the first example sounds like a statement of unsubstantiated opinion. The second example might feel too direct and coercive to the reader. The third example directs attention away from the author and a statement that sounds like unsupported opinion; rather, it sounds like the author is presenting a fact that the data substantiate. Thus, the voice in the third example sounds more scholarly because writing in a scholarly manner requires evidence, and the writer is providing it.

Some audiences are more receptive to occasional use of sentences written in the first or second person. A check with publication guidelines or faculty will provide guidance about the level of formality required.

The same advice applies to writers who question the use of contractions. Contractions are less formal and thus considered less scholarly. However, some readers or reviewers might not object.

Conclusion

Undergraduate writers write to learn. Graduate writers must produce new truths, and they must use more sophisticated and thorough methods and tools for arriving at them. All writers should familiarize themselves with the conventions of structure and format, argument, and voice expected by other scholars.

Overview / Critical Thinking and Writing

Many people think that being a critical thinker is being a negative thinker. Rather, critical thinking is a positive activity. Critical thinkers work to discover truth, create new knowledge, find alternative solutions to problems, and challenge beliefs that might be false or illogical. Critical thinkers are not naysayers; they are intellectual pioneers and risk takers. Critical thinking displayed in writing is an active and never ending requirement for excellent scholarship.

Critical Thinking: Definition and Purposes

Experts in the area of critical thinking define it as *informal logic* to distinguish it from formal logic used in philosophy and mathematics. Others have defined it as intellectual processes and strategies used to find meaning, solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts.

Critical thinking forces writers to take risks. It asks them to go beyond their worldview and social conditioning so that they can become more aware of the diversity of beliefs, behaviors, and social structures in the world. Critical writers never think they have all the answers. Rather they are questioners, always trying to determine if a statement or claim is authentic, accurate, and valuable.

Consider these examples. Before the discovery of bacteria and viruses, people ascribed the causes of illness to everything from curses and angry gods to vapors. Church officials declared that the sun moved in the sky and any contradictory theory was heresy. Many of Columbus' contemporaries thought that he was a fool. Why do we now understand disease, astronomy, and geography differently? Because critical thinkers challenged strongly held beliefs and doctrines, asked hard questions, and dared to put forth new hypotheses about the world. They then acted to fight disease in new ways, evaluate new theories in astronomy and physics, and take risky voyages to unknown places.

Writers who think critically **are** adventuresome travelers: they propose new ideas in the prewriting and drafting phases of the writing process, and then evaluate those ideas without reservation in the revision phase. Critical writing takes writers and readers to unfamiliar places that might feel uncomfortable, surprising, revelatory, or even threatening.

The Place of Creativity

Critical thinking and writing are acts of creation. Just as poets and novelists show us the world in new ways, so do truly critical writers. Separating critical writing and creativity is a mistake, because truly critical writing communicates fresh, original insights or provides new perspectives. Critical thinking and writing require imagination.

Non-critical writers reuse someone else's ideas or take the ideas of others at face value rather than add value. Writers tempted to write a paper that merely rehashes what others have said about a topic are not thinking critically. Writers who do not examine the unspoken beliefs of their sources are not thinking critically. Papers that do not provide analysis and evaluation of the work of others are not written critically or creatively.

The Social Aspects of Critical Thinking and Writing

Critical thinking and writing are social as well as intellectual activities. We react to ideas as social creatures shaped by years of interaction with other people and by our shared beliefs. People who thought the earth was flat had lots of company, and doubters reinforced their mutual skepticism about Columbus' voyage.

Furthermore, critical writing for readers requires social as well as intellectual interaction with those readers. Writers must often convince skeptical readers in a persuasive written conversation. Readers, influenced by their education, the beliefs of their peers, or tradition, aren't always open to new approaches to old problems. A recent public radio reporter interviewed scientists who couldn't find funding for their projects because the hypotheses they wanted to test contradicted common wisdom about the causes of certain diseases and the use of existing drugs in novel applications. The medical establishment seemed to have made up its mind on certain topics and therefore rewarded other scientists who wanted to test hypotheses that seemed more familiar and comfortable. The grant reviewers were not thinking critically about the grant proposals they received from these scientists, and the grant writers couldn't break through the barriers of the medical community. Who knows what medical breakthroughs we might be missing as a result.

Emotional and Moral Appeals

Remember that other writers often appeal to emotions or morality when they are making their cases. They might use fear, patriotism, flattery, or loyalty to bring readers around to their points of view. Therefore, when you write critically about arguments presented by others, you should note when they are using emotional appeals that might not be grounded on fact or evidence. And, you should use hard evidence as well as emotional appeals in your writing so that you can be logical and persuasive.

Critical Thinking and Critical Writing: The Connections

It stands to reason: fuzzy thinking results in fuzzy logic and fuzzy writing. Critical thinking comes into play in three phrases of writing: prewriting, drafting, and revising. In fact, the act of writing is one way to discover what we are thinking and argue with ourselves before we commit to a main idea and support for a paper.

[Brainstorming activities](#) are critical thinking exercises as well—flip sides of the thinking/writing coin. [Clustering](#), idea trees, [freewriting](#), [mapping](#), and questioning all describe strategies that force writers to expand their thinking, make connections, and ask hard questions.

Try these additional strategies to insure that your thinking and writing are sufficiently critical.

- After you have written a sentence that captures your main idea and prepared a tentative outline, spend some time freewriting arguments against the case you intend to make. You might need to rethink your argument.
- Pretend you are a hostile reader and ask every uncomfortable question you can think of about the argument you have outlined.
- Circle and draw lines between statements or assumptions you make and the evidence you use to back them up. Evaluate the evidence you circled.
 - Is it real evidence for the point you are making?
 - Is it accurate?
 - Is it valuable? What makes it valuable?
- If your paper focuses on a solution to a problem, use this line of critical thinking:
 - Identify the problem. Give it a name.
 - Define the problem. Describe the hard evidence that a problem exists and how it affects other people or things.
 - Describe as many possible solutions as you can imagine.
 - Select and defend the solution(s) you think best.
 - Look at your solution(s) with skepticism. Will it really solve the problem? Have you demonstrated beyond most doubt that it will? Have you uncovered all the best solutions?
 - Imagine alternative futures should you try to implement your solution. What might be unintended consequences of your proposed solution?
- As you look at what you have written, ask, "What do I know for certain and what is likely but not certain?" You may discover that what you originally thought was a certainty might be in doubt.

- Try dialectical thinking. Contradict what you just wrote. Then resolve the contradiction. For example, look again at two contradictory statements:

Statement: If you work hard in America, you will prosper.

Counter statement: Some hardworking people cannot make enough to stay out of poverty.

Resolution of the contradiction: Hard working people should be able to escape poverty, but this seems not to be the case for some.

A Model Process for Questioning Beliefs

Take any hot button issue of the day—abortion, taxes, immigration, or environmental protection—to name a few. Then try out this exercise.

1. Make a statement about one of these issues that you strongly believe.

Example: I believe in lowering taxes because I work hard for my money, and I don't think it is fair that the government should take so much of it from me and give it to others who haven't worked as hard as I have.

2. List the attitudes and beliefs that led to this statement.

Example:

- Many people in this country don't have my work ethic.
- If you work hard in America, you will prosper.
- Poverty is a sign that individuals aren't taking responsibility and working hard enough.
- If you don't work hard, then poverty is your own problem, not the government's.
- Other people take advantage of the government's generosity.
- The government is inefficient.
- The government allows individuals to take money they don't deserve.
- This isn't fair for the rest of us.
- People should be responsible for their own economic welfare and not rely on the government.
- Government subsidies perpetuate people's dependence.

3. Consider how someone might prove the truth of all these beliefs. What statistics, studies, or other kinds of evidence or reasoning could support those statements?
4. State beliefs that contradict the previous ones. This part of the exercise forces an evaluation of beliefs.

Example:

- Most people would work hard for their living if they could find adequately paying jobs.
 - Some hardworking people cannot make enough to stay out of poverty.
 - Some people try very hard to survive economically, but because of disability, inadequate education, negative role models, inability to fund education, or a reliable car cannot find jobs that will sustain them.
 - Most people don't like to take government money.
 - Most people prefer to be financially independent.
 - Government programs like Social Security run well.
 - Government programs like Social Security reward workers.
 - It is in our best interests to support our collective welfare.
 - We have a moral obligation to safeguard our collective welfare.
5. In light of what resulted from the previous steps, identify those beliefs that require modification or more adequate support.

Now try this exercise on your own, following the steps above.

If you are honest and write down a strong personal belief in the first step, you might feel unsettled as you complete the exercise. Dissecting one's beliefs and arguing against them can be a disconcerting process. However difficult that process might seem, its value lies in the new perspectives we see, the new connections we make, and the new knowledge we gain as a result of thinking critically.

Conclusion

Peter Elbow, an expert on academic writing, urges writers to play what he calls the doubting game. He urges writers to doubt what they read—and what they write. Nothing should go unexamined. The result will be critical and creative academic writing.

Overview / Critical Reading of Primary and Secondary Sources

Sources can be more or less useful depending on how they advance the goals of different readers. Critical readers might do preliminary reading about a topic for background or mine the bibliographies and footnotes in secondary sources to find other helpful resources.

However, they should then move on to reading with purpose--asking questions they want to answer, listing information they need, and keeping track of other sources cited in their reading. They should imagine how their sources might lead them to new arguments and viewpoints, help them write definitions, provide examples or data, or bolster arguments. Or, they can read and then discard a source because it doesn't relate to the readers' research goals. Think of sources as evidence in a trial; they strengthen a case.

Scholars must critically read primary and/or secondary sources when making an original case in writing, reviewing what others have said about a topic, or comparing and contrasting points of view. *Secondary*

sources are books, articles, and online resources that interpret facts presented by authors who create original information. That original information is considered a *primary source*. Finding information from primary and secondary sources in print or online does not necessarily insure that the facts are true, the author is qualified, or the presentation is unbiased.

Critical Reading Skills

Critical readers can:

- Understand and evaluate the progression of an argument. They can find and articulate the main idea of a piece of writing. They can then find the supporting arguments and evidence for those arguments. They are equally adept at pointing out where an argument isn't clear or adequately supported.
- Determine when a statement is merely the opinion of the writer versus when it is an argument supported by evidence.
- Analyze and interpret quantitative data. Numbers and statistics can tell the truth, distort the truth, or outright lie. Critical readers understand the uses and misuses of numbers and statistics and can make judgments about their reliability and validity. Also, they look for instances where the methods used to gather statistics or carry out a study might be suspect.
- Analyze and interpret qualitative data. The results of interviews, focus groups, certain kinds of questionnaires, case studies, and observations constitute qualitative data. A critical reader will judge whether the data has been fairly and completely gathered and analyzed.
- Detect errors of fact. Writers commit errors of fact, either accidentally or deliberately. Critical readers should check facts, and not take a writer's word that certain facts are true and complete.
- Detect methodological problems. The way a researcher designs a study might influence the outcome. For example, a researcher might depend solely on statistics, but interviews might have yielded richer and perhaps different results.
- Find instances of faulty logic. Writers might claim that A caused B, but in reality, any number of other factors could have influenced B. Or, a writer might make a generalization based on incomplete information or make incorrect connections between two phenomena. How a writer reached a conclusion and the logic of the argument requires a careful and thoughtful critique.
- Detect faulty sources.

Evaluating Sources

The quality and credibility of sources underpin all well-written course papers and dissertations. Scholarly readers constantly ask probing questions as they read a secondary source.

Who is the author?

Critical readers determine if authors are qualified. Other than checking on degrees or experience, how can they make this judgment? Consider these criteria:

- The author's name is synonymous with a particular area of expertise.
- The author is mentioned in the text, footnotes, or bibliographies of other experts writing on the topic.
- The author's work has been reviewed by reputable experts in journals, the press, letters to the editor of scholarly publications, blogs, and chats sponsored by respected individuals.
- Other experts in the field, such as your instructor, judge the author to be a credible source.
- Reputable websites link to this individual's website.
- The author is a speaker at major professional meetings.

What are the main ideas?

Not all books, articles, or websites are well written or sufficiently edited. If an argument seems difficult to follow, the fault might be that of the writer, not the reader.

Readers should start with abstracts, executive summaries, tables of contents, prefaces, introductions, and conclusions to determine the main ideas presented by authors. Then they can read and analyze the text to determine the following:

- **The logic of the argument.** What are the main steps in the author's presentation? Could one counter them with an alternative selection of facts or analysis? Sometimes authors claim that a certain effect was caused by a certain action. Could other actions have resulted in the same effect?
- **Evidence, examples, case studies, and visuals.** Authors should back up assertions because, without support, they are merely unsubstantiated opinion. Further, a critical reader will determine if the author has supplied enough credible support to make a convincing case.
- **Research methodology.** Critical readers determine if the research methods used were appropriate, adequate, and sufficiently documented. The wrong research tools can yield faulty or incomplete data.
- **Quantitative data.** Would a statistician approve of the statistical methods and analysis of the results? Sample size, statistical tools used—even the visuals used to display the data—should be analyzed and critiqued. Can the process and outcomes be duplicated by independent researchers?
- **Qualitative data.** Researchers use many tools like interviews, case studies, and ethnographic research to gather data, but sometimes their choice of tool isn't appropriate, or they don't adequately document their results.

When was the document published?

The currency of a document may or may not influence the value of a source. For example, the writing of a classical economist, psychologist, or educational theorist might be a year old or a century old and still be valid and interesting. In contrast, because information technology changes so rapidly, information published last year might be considered ancient. Critical readers will always note the publication date of a source before making judgments about its worth for a particular project.

Where was the document published?

Experts in most fields can list from memory the chief journals, classic books, reliable websites, and professional organizations that publish documents of interest to scholars. University presses, especially those affiliated with respected research institutions, specialize in scholarly publications. Professional organizations often sponsor their own academic journals and websites. They also award prizes for the best books and articles in their fields. Respected publishers use experts to screen potential manuscripts carefully before they invest in publishing them, and they often hire fact checkers and even lawyers to review content.

Scholarly journals are often [juried or peer reviewed](#)— that is, panels of experts review all the articles submitted to a publication and select the best and most reliable. These panels might also check facts, offer editorial comments, or communicate the results of their critical reading of a manuscript to an author who then writes a revised draft. Therefore, critical readers will note if a publication is peer reviewed as one way to determine the quality of the publication.

The same can be said of indexes. Each discipline relies on standard reference tools that scholars trust. Reviewing what indexes academic libraries subscribe to will point critical readers in the direction of quality sources.

Special Considerations for the Web

Online sources can be helpful, provided readers are especially wary when reading them. The reason for this caution is obvious: anyone, for whatever reason, can post words on the Web. Therefore, critical readers should pay particular attention to the following features of web-based information.

- The owner or author of the website. Go to www.whois.sc to discover who really owns the site you are looking at. Might that owner or author be biased or have a hidden agenda?
- A review of the author's other publications online and in print. You can get a sense of the interests and track record of the author.
- The nature of advertising on the site and what it might tell you about the purpose of that site. If a site is selling a product, it is biased.
- The point of view or bias in the writing. All writing has some kind of bias. However, reputable sites don't pretend to be something they are not — a radical site with a conventional, middle of the road title, for example — and they offer documented facts and analysis.
- Linkages from other sites to the one under scrutiny. If other reputable sites link to this site, it too is probably reputable.

- The inclusion of contact information. If you can't contact the author or publisher, you should ask why.
- The inclusion of a bibliography and referral to literature from the field. These sources will indicate that the author has done the homework.
- The absence of grammatical and spelling errors.
- The currency of the information. When was it last updated?
- Information that is accurate and verifiable in more than one other source. Just because something is printed does not make it true.

Critical Reading Strategies

Scan before reading. That is the best advice for readers who want to be efficient as well as critical when they read. Before jumping into a line-by-line reading of a document you should do the following:

- **Look at the executive summary or abstract.** Executive summaries introduce a document, provide an overview, and convince readers that the content is valid. Abstracts can function like a prose table of contents (descriptive abstracts) or act as a summary capsule of the document (informative abstracts).
- **Look at the introduction and preface.** They typically introduce the purpose and themes of the document. On occasion, they provide a summary of the contents, describe the structure, or set the scene with important background information.
- **Browse the table of contents.** Tables of contents spell out the steps of an argument. Complete tables of contents can read like outlines of the document.
- **Read the introduction and conclusion.** They will usually reveal the main themes and ideas.
- **Check the footnotes and endnotes.** They can reveal much about the quality and thoroughness of the author and offer additional sources for readers.
- **Engage in a silent dialogue with the author.** Ask questions like these:
 - How do you know X is true? Where are the facts to back up that assertion?
 - Are you sure X is the result of Y?
 - Did you use the most current sources?
 - To what extent have other scholars agreed or disagreed with that statement?
 - Does the data on that chart really mean what you just said it did?
 - Was your sample size large enough?

- How could you come to that conclusion after having interviewed such a small or specific sample of individuals?
- Did someone pay you to say that?

If the text doesn't answer your questions, that source may not be as valuable as it appears at first glance.

Pre-writing

Pretend that you have time and finances to visit a country you've never visited and know little about. Although you could hop a plane and figure out what to do when you get there, you would probably do some Google searches, browse guidebooks, buy a map, make a few reservations for lodging, and chat with others who have made the trip. If you were thorough, you would sketch a complete itinerary, book all your hotels, and read extensively about your destination. Then, as a last step, you would pack your clothing and gear after consulting your packing list.

Writing is like taking a trip. Planning and preparation will usually result in a smoother voyage and give you confidence and energy to complete the trip.

We'd like to introduce you to a process that should make your writing journey successful.

Pre-Writing / Understanding the Assignment

Don't write a word until you are certain you understand the assignment. Contact your instructor or dissertation advisor if you have questions about any of these items:

- **Purpose.** The reason for the assignment (what you are supposed to accomplish or demonstrate at the end)
- **Preparation.** Actions you should take before you begin (what you are supposed to read, whom you are supposed to consult)
- **Components.** The required elements of the assignment (models or outlines that you should follow or topics you should address)
- **Evaluation.** The criteria that your instructor or committee members will use to determine if you have met their expectations (what the readers will be looking for)
- **Pitfalls.** Common mistakes that others have made while completing the same or similar writing projects (what your instructor and other students have learned from similar experiences)

Pre-writing / Thinking and Planning

Once you have clarified your task, think, and read **around** your topic to appreciate the many approaches you could take or the topics you could address. Don't jump to any quick conclusions about your topic or the case you plan to make and support. Following the travel metaphor a bit further—get the lay of the land before charging off. Read and think critically before writing [course papers](#) or dissertations.

While doing this initial reading and researching, keep track of all your sources including all the bibliographic information that you'll need when you apply APA reference and citation guidelines to your paper. If you aren't

familiar with APA style, review a copy of the [APA Guidelines](#) or visit the [APA Style and Formatting Module](#). Consider these some of the guidebooks for your journey.

Although you will be reading about a process that seems to have a succession of orderly steps, preparing to write, drafting your paper, and editing are not tidy processes. They are iterative, that is, they influence each other and constantly recur. For example, you generate ideas that will provide the basis of your argument. You also determine a purpose or thesis statement and continue on your search for information that can support the steps of that argument. However, as you gather more information, you may then discover that your original purpose or thesis statement requires revision. Or, once you begin editing, you may discover that you need more information or content to bolster your argument. And around it goes.

We have prepared a model that captures all the interactivity of the writing stages. When you see how complex the process can be, you understand why you can't separate the acts of thinking and writing.



To move forward, you need to make order from this apparent chaos. What follows are some tips for taming the beginning of this process and making progress on your project. You will need to generate ideas and collect potential content, focus until you have a statement of purpose or thesis, and prepare an outline to support or explain your key idea or argument.

Before you write. Think. Jot down ideas using one or more of the techniques described below. Then think some more. Never try writing a first draft without first using the pre-writing strategies described in this chapter.

Pre-writing / Determining Your Purpose

Stephen Wilbers in his book, *Writing for Business: Helpful, Easy-to-Apply Advice for Everyone Who Writes on the Job*, suggests a simple formula for focusing. Before you begin to write a paper, a chapter, or even a section of a paper, complete these statements:

I am writing because...

My main points are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

We suggest adding a third sentence:

Therefore, I conclude that...

Keep those three statements before you. You can change them as you go, but always review all three together as your writing project evolves. These statements are your commitment to yourself and your audience about what you are trying to accomplish.

Remember that ultimately you will have to develop a [thesis statement](#), a point of view that is arguable and that goes beyond a mere statement of the topic you are addressing. Draft a tentative thesis statement in the pre-writing stage, but remain open to changing it as you prepare and outline and complete the first draft. You can find more about writing a thesis statement in the chapter, "Drafting."

Pre-writing / Analyzing your Audience

Remember that your instructor, your committee, and your peers and colleagues could be readers of your work—your audience. Direct your writing to them. Imagine you are making your case face-to-face. How do you persuade them that your point of view is logical, well supported, and worth writing about? The answer: complete an [audience analysis](#).

To meet their expectations you must remember why academic audiences read your work and what they need to do afterwards. Consider these facts about your audience.

- They want you to demonstrate that you can articulate and support an argument.
- They require proof that you understand the genres and conventions of academic writing.
- They also need proof that you can move beyond what you have learned in class and synthesize or apply those lessons.
- They look for evidence that you know how to find and use primary and secondary sources and use them as support.
- If you are a graduate student, they want evidence that you can create new tools, new knowledge, new theories, or new models. Graduate writing differs from undergraduate writing in this respect.

Your audience wants you to prove that you can think and write in an academic setting at a level that is appropriate for someone earning the degree for which you are striving.

Pre-writing / Generating Content: Prewriting Strategies

Consider this writer. She sits down to write, taps out a sentence or two on her keyboard, stops, rewrites the sentence, stops again, deletes, and on and on. She is exhibiting the symptoms of the Write and Rip Disease—trying to organize her thoughts, say something meaningful, and edit—simultaneously. No wonder writing stresses her and takes forever.

That writer compares to a driver who jumps into a car and tries to drive with one foot on the accelerator and the other on the brake. Then he wonders why he is making so little progress.

Other [strategies](#) have proven to be much more efficient. Writers can rely on one or a combination of the following strategies to sort out ideas and potential content.

- **Brainstorming.** Make a long list of ideas or content you could potentially use in your paper. Write in phrases and resist the urge to make any corrections or changes. You can also use Post-it notes to record single ideas. Later, you can sort the Post-its into categories or groups of related ideas. You can then add other Post-its to these groupings. This grouping of ideas is also known as [clustering](#).
- **Idea Trees.** This method appeals to visual thinkers. Start with an idea. Draw a line and add the related idea. As one idea leads to another, record the connections with simple lines. Before long, you will begin to see how various groupings of ideas relate, and eventually you should be able to use the groupings to devise a thesis statement and create an outline.
- **Freewriting.** Set a timer to ten minutes and start writing without stopping to correct or change what you type. If you draw a blank, type "I can't think of anything to say" until a relevant idea comes to mind. Don't consider this your rough draft; instead, consider it a way to generate and connect ideas. You're your freewrites for gems of ideas, and use them to start writing again. Continue your ten-minute sprints until you have enough content to draft a purpose statement and begin an outline.
- **Questions.** Close your eyes until you conjure up the face(s) of your audience. Then, put yourself into their place. Ask all the questions they might have about your argument. Here are some examples:
 - What is your point?
 - Do you know that for a fact? Prove it.
 - Who in the field agrees with you?
 - Who in the field disagrees with you?
 - Who does this affect and how?
 - Have others done similar research or replicated yours?
 - What theoretical approach are you applying here? Why?
 - Why is this a new idea, model, theory, or tool?
 - What does this viewpoint add to a general understanding of your topic?
- **Paragraph outlines.** Write down the first sentence of every paragraph you think you might write. Then you can add the evidence for each statement in the drafting phrase.
- **Mapping.** A map begins with an initial idea and builds an argument, step by step. In many ways it resembles outlining because it describes the function of each step of a paper. Here is an example:
 1. My initial idea is...
 2. The problem that I want to address is...
 3. The extent of the problem is...
 4. Evidence for this problem includes...

5. My solution for the problem is...
6. Opposition to my solution might be...
7. But I can refute that opposition by...
8. These are my conclusions...

Pre-writing / Outlines

Outlines evolve from the processes of audience analysis, focusing, and content generation, and they should support your main idea or thesis statement. They can be formal outlines with Roman numerals and letters, or they can be more visual representations of your lines of thought. The point is to create a plan before writing the first draft, not during the process.

Drafting

Prewriting is like getting ready for a trip, gathering information, and making preliminary decisions about your general direction. Drafting is the actual journey. Sometimes you follow the itinerary you mapped out in the prewriting phase. However, the process of writing can occasionally tempt you off the beaten track as you stumble onto side roads you didn't know existed. Then you have to decide if you will stay with your original plan, take an unexpected side trip, or revise the entire itinerary.

What is a draft?

Once you have completed prewriting and decided upon a preliminary main idea and outline, you should write a first draft of your [course paper](#) or assignment. In the drafting phase, you fulfill the promise you make in the introduction where you state the main idea. You dive in and present your arguments and evidence in full, remembering that the first draft is rarely the last.

The key in this stage of the writing process is to avoid editing and proofreading until you have your ideas down. Stopping and starting and making small changes as you go will interrupt your thinking. Understanding the distinction between [drafting and revising](#) will also save time. Get as much down as you can and then go back, both to rethink what you've written and to proofread. The legendary baseball player, Yogi Berra, exclaimed, "I can't think and bat at the same time," when his coaches urged him to think as he was batting during a serious slump. So too, you shouldn't be trying to edit when you are getting your first draft down. Dealing with one task, writing a draft, is enough simultaneous activity.

This section will guide you through this first attempt to commit your thoughts to paper—the drafting phase.

Drafting / Main Ideas

Instructors assign different kinds of papers. They might want students to take a position on a topic and defend it. They might request a recommendation report where learners gather data and offer conclusions and recommendations for action. Others ask for reviews of what scholars have said about a topic and sometimes require students to identify and explain themes or disputes.

Therefore, be clear about what the instructor is asking you to do. Then work towards a single sentence or short paragraph that will summarize what you intend to say in your paper—defend a position or assertion, find and evaluate evidence and make recommendations, point out a recurring theme, or dispute the scholarly literature.

By articulating your main idea in the beginning of your paper, you highlight the topics you will discuss, the key terms and concepts that you will use, and the purpose for the evidence or research findings you will reveal in the course of your paper. You are sharing a brief roadmap of your journey.

Before writing, evaluate your preliminary [main idea](#). Remember that it should meet these criteria:

1. A main idea is a statement, complete sentence or short paragraph, that sets the stage for the rest of the paper. It articulates a major argument, or describes and limits the boundaries of the territory the paper will cover.

Example: Many small companies cannot afford a full-blown telecommunications system that reduces the need for face-to-face meetings while providing real time communication. Skype, Ebay's latest major acquisition, addresses this problem by allowing users to communicate on a free, web-based telephone system that provides teleconferencing for up to four users.

This author, in a brief paragraph, described a problem and solution and announced the benefits of the solution. The route of this paper is clear and readers can predict all the major paragraphs or sections.

- Small companies cannot pay the significant license fees charged for sophisticated telecommunications systems.
- They face a conflict between the need to communicate easily with staff and customers, and the need to contain costs.
- Skype is owned by a company that we assume will be around for a long time.
- Skype's technology depends on the web, a free technology.
- The software it uses is also free.
- Skype provides small teleconferences without charge, thus offering a cost-effective alternative to more complex proprietary systems.

2. A main idea does not merely announce a topic, it also describes the author's position on the topic.

Example: It does not say, "I am writing about tax incentives for businesses that use sophisticated telecommunications systems." Rather, it says, "State tax incentives for the purchase of state-of-the-art technology keep businesses competitive in the urban market place."

3. An audience familiar with your topic could take a contrasting point of view.

Example: Economists in four recent studies have concluded that tax incentives to help keep businesses

competitive in urban areas usually cost a state more than the tax revenues they could collect by offering tax incentives to rural businesses.

4. Complete and convincing evidence backs up the main idea.

Example: In the main idea found in #3 above, the author would systematically summarize and analyze each of the four studies conducted by economists.

5. Everything in the outline supports the main idea.

Example: In the Skype paper discussed above, the author might be tempted to provide much detail about expensive systems that corporations license. Although some specific information about these costs should appear as background, the author should resist providing too much interesting but irrelevant detail about their costs. The paper should focus on the benefits of Skype and the solution to the problem of expensive teleconferencing.

On occasion, as you are writing, you may realize that what you thought was your main idea is causing you problems. The act of writing often results in such an insight. For example, you may realize that you don't have sufficient evidence to support your main idea. Or, you may discover that your line of reasoning isn't as logical as it seemed when you were preparing your outline.

If you have such a realization, rewrite your purpose statement and review your outline in light of your new emphasis. In the long run, the act of thinking and writing—and having to shift direction as a result—might be a necessary stage in the development of your main idea.

Drafting / Your Audience

Remember that you are [writing for an academic audience](#) but don't view that audience as a faceless entity. Rather, try to anticipate your readers' attitudes toward your thesis, their reason for reading your paper, and interests and values that might color their reading. Remember that they will expect that you can write in a [scholarly voice](#).

Drafting / Introductions

Writing paragraphs for the body of your essay can be difficult enough, but introductions present special challenges. In an introduction you must gain your reader's attention, identify the subject of your essay, and present the basic substance of your argument for the essay. Writers are always struggling with introductions, asking themselves questions about how specific or general they should be in defining their subject, whether they have adopted the correct tone to draw their reader in, what kinds of questions they are trying to answer in the body of the paper, and how those should be presented in the introduction. Many writers leave writing the introduction until the very end of the writing process, when they are most sure about what they have written and can be clearest about laying it out for their reader. Below are several guides to writing introductions that will help you think about the shape and content of this all-important part of your essay.

Set the stage with the first paragraph or two. A well-written opening will accomplish these tasks:

- Introduce the purpose of the paper
- Give the audience a sense of how the paper will unfold
- Provide context to show why the main idea is significant
- Establish a relationship with the audience by establishing credibility and scholarly voice

Drafting / Using Sources

Sources are primary and secondary. Secondary sources are books, articles, and online resources that interpret facts presented by authors who create original information. That original information is considered a primary source. The advice in [Strategies for Writing from Secondary Sources](#) will provide a detailed explanation of the many ways you can use both kinds of sources in your paper. If you use outside sources, you need to use them strategically and honestly.

Make your case **in your own words** and then use your sources. After presenting a quote or other borrowed material, analyze it. Avoid making your paper a verbal quilt where you sew together others' ideas. Instead, make your point and then use your sources to provide evidence, definition, or further explanation. Even when you are doing a literature review of what others have said about a topic, summarize the major themes, and then describe the individual sources and what they say about a topic. And remember to read your sources critically so that your use of secondary sources is strategic, i.e., persuasive.

You have three choices when you use outside sources as evidence.

- Quote the borrowed text word for word, or copy the visual exactly as it was published.
- Summarize the information by presenting a shortened version of the original **in your own words**.
- Paraphrase the information by presenting it in detail, but rewrite the information so that it is completely **in your own words**.

Quotations, summaries, and paraphrases are always cited as sources in the text and in bibliographies. You don't need to cite a source if you are merely repeating information that is common knowledge for those who have familiarity with your subject.

Avoid [plagiarism](#) by erring on the side of caution. Quoting even three or four words directly from a source and not attributing their origin constitutes plagiarism.

Many writers inadvertently commit plagiarism because they don't know how and when to cite sources or how to incorporate the intellectual property of others into their work. When they use the work of others but don't extract exact quotes from the text, they don't know the difference between [paraphrasing and summarizing](#), or

why they should do one or the other. Review the [APA Guidelines](#) and the [Academic Honesty](#) module to secure the tools you'll need.

Drafting / Using Visuals

Drafting might also include the creation of visuals: charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, or photographs. Visuals strengthen your main idea. They can

- Summarize data that would take many pages of regular text to express, e.g., a graph showing the adjusted GNP over an entire century.
- Make a more dramatic case, e.g., a compelling photograph with a poignant caption beneath.
- Show relationships between two sets of data, e.g., a bar graph comparing the earnings of two companies over time.
- Emphasize a point, e.g., bar graph showing a monthly drop in charitable contributions to small agencies after Hurricane Katrina.
- Show how something works, e.g., a diagram of a new telecommunications system.
- Present a table so the rows and columns create a cross-referencing system, e.g., the loss of pounds, inches, and cholesterol resulting from three different weight-loss diets.
- Lay out a project, e.g., a Gantt chart that shows a schedule for a project.

Remember these principles about the use of visuals:

1. If they were created by someone else, always attribute their authorship.
2. Title as well as number all visuals to prevent misinterpretation of the data or the message the visual is intended to convey.
3. Refer to the visuals in your main text.
4. If possible, keep visuals close to that text.
5. Understand that any visual should be making a case.
6. Have someone else review your visuals to determine if they are clear.
7. Use appropriate metrics for your charts, graphs, and tables.
8. Maintain a balance between text and visuals, i.e., don't rely on one at the expense of the other.

Drafting | Paragraphs

Think of the first sentence of each paragraph as a mini-main idea or topic sentence. What should then follow is evidence for topic sentences: examples, definitions, statistics, quotes, visuals, and further explanation. Next comes analysis where the writer discusses the meaning of the evidence. Finally, a transitional device can lead

the reader to the next paragraph. One strategy, called the [MEAL plan](#), helps insure that each paragraph deals completely with the main idea or topic sentence of that paragraph.

If you use paragraphs strategically, your audience should be able to read your introduction, the first sentence of each paragraph, and your conclusion, and have an overall sense of the points you are making.

Review long paragraphs. They might be presenting more than one idea, and your audience might have difficulty sorting out what your main premise might be.

Remember that an occasional short paragraph can provide emphasis or move your audience from one topic to the next. What follows are additional ideas for connecting sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers.

Drafting / Coherence and Transitions

Have you ever heard someone say that a certain writer's work "flows?" Some prose seems to move seamlessly from one idea to another because the writer eases readers through the presentation. Ideas seem to cohere or stick together because readers never have to slow down when a new, potentially confusing term is interjected into the text. And a skillful writer will never force readers to jump from one idea to the next without first showing how Idea A relates to Idea B.

What can you do to make your writing cohere and flow? Here are a few suggestions.

1. **Repeat and refer.** If a word or concept is important, reuse it or refer to it. In the past, English teachers warned students never to use the same word twice in the same paragraph or paper. Consequently, they reached for the nearest thesaurus to find as many synonyms as they could. That writing practice can result in an affective and garbled message. Here is why repetition and referral work:
 - Repetition of and referral to key words and phrases signals to the reader that renamed concepts are important.
 - Writers use repetition for emphasis.
 - Consistency of word choice prevents confusion. Readers don't have to keep asking, "Is that writer addressing the same topic?"
 - Repetition appeals to the ear and makes prose seem to flow.
 - Repetition weaves the elements of different paragraphs together. Try drawing lines between repeated words in succeeding paragraphs. You can see how the repetition becomes like a strand of fiber, strengthening the fabric of your prose.

You can see how the use of repetition and referral works to create a coherent presentation. Circle all repeated words in a text and draw a line from one circle to the next. The course of the lines through the text provides a flow or path through the text.

2. **Announce what you are going to discuss and then discuss it.** Here is an example of repetition at work. Each sentence is the first sentence of a new paragraph.

Experts consider *culture, economics, and history* of a nation when determining if it can accept some form of democracy...

Many *cultures* value the will and welfare of the group—the family, the tribe, the village—over individual will and prosperity...

The *economics* of a country, especially its distribution of wealth, offers clues about the willingness of elites to sacrifice power for the sake of instituting a democracy...

Finally, a nation with some history of democracy might be more likely to embrace some form of it again...

Drawing circles around repeated words and then connecting the circles produces an image that looks like a spider's web on the page. All the strands are connected to each other so they cohere or stick together.

3. **Use words that indicate the stages of your argument.**

Series of words like *first, second, and third* signal the direction of your logic. So do words like *initially, then, finally, or beginning, middle, end*. They are like heralds in medieval days who trumpeted to announce the approach of someone important or the start of an important event.

4. **Use words that tie ideas together.**

Some of these words can tie one sentence to another sentence, or one paragraph to the next. Think of them as bridges that lead readers from one idea to the next. Words like *therefore, however, in addition to, moreover, or consequently*, explain the relationship between two sentences, two paragraphs, or two ideas, and help keep your reader on the right path.

Drafting / Conclusions

After returning from an exciting vacation, we often go through the photos we took and the brochures and souvenirs we collected to keep the trip alive for a long time. We want to imprint the sights and sounds in our memory and maintain the good feeling we experienced. We might even be tempted to contemplate a return visit or new journey.

Some people think of conclusions as closures. However, a good conclusion does more than end a paper. It should resemble those moments at the end of a trip where we review where we just traveled and think about the meaning of the trip. It may also point to subsequent intellectual journeys.

So what should a conclusion accomplish? It should summarize the main arguments in the paper. It can also:

- Present a solution to a problem
- Describe consequences
- Call for a particular action
- Relate the main idea of the paper to other important subjects

- Suggest further work on the topic that should be accomplished by other scholars

Conclusions should never rehash, word for word, the main idea in the introduction. Rather, a good conclusion should be a confident and more detailed review of the trip the reader just took.

Also, conclusions don't introduce new, major ideas at the end. If a conclusion seems different from the main idea found in the introduction, decide which best captures your intent and the ultimate point that your evidence supports. Then rewrite the other to accurately reflect your true main idea.

And remember that sometimes your conclusion might work better in your introduction because after writing the draft, you have a better idea about the message you want to communicate. So don't be afraid to work on your introduction and your conclusion at the same time.

Drafting / Getting Started

Now that you have read about drafting, it's time write. Avoiding procrastination and writing the first words of a major paper are difficult for many writers, but you can [beat writer's block](#) and maintain motivation. Some of the strategies in the prewriting section also work in the drafting phase. For example, try [freewriting](#). Force yourself to write uninterrupted for ten minutes. Don't stop for a second. You'll find that putting words down will break the ice and give you momentum to continue. This resource should motivate you to charge on.

Revising

Bravo! You have completed your first draft. Now you are ready to revise.

In the chapters on prewriting and drafting, you learned that these activities are similar to planning a trip and then following through on your plan. Revision is like the recapping and analysis of a trip after your travels have ended. If you could go back, what might you have changed along the way? How could you have made the trip better? Unlike taking vacations, writing does allow you to go back, retrace, or redo your path.

So what exactly is revision? Finding typos? Cleaning up punctuation problems? Completing omissions in your citations? Actually, revision involves much more. As its Latin roots reveal, revision means looking again at your entire work. Of course, you want an error-free paper, but revision means much more than proofreading. See "[Revising, Editing, & Proofreading](#)" a helpful table that contrasts the tasks of these three final phases of the writing process—why, when, where, and how to approach each. For a more in-depth look at revising, editing, and proofreading, visit our [Revising for Results](#) module.

Revision means looking at a paper like an outside critic and finding opportunities for cutting, adding to, reordering, or rewording a draft. It requires writers to reconsider the big picture of their drafts.

Be prepared when you revise to cut whole sections of what you have written. Conversely, once you look again at your paper, you might want to add new sections. Perhaps you decide to reorder previously written ones. In other words, revision means rethinking everything and staying open to making significant changes, if necessary.

As you revise, you should consider your audience, the structure of your presentation, content, logic, coherence, voice, style, tone, and the security of your files.

Before you panic or despair, consider the advice below that will guide you systematically through the revision process. Think of revision as an intellectual post mortem examination where you probe for the answer to the

question, "Will this writing project meet the needs of my immediate readers and the larger intellectual community?"

Revising / The Bottom Line: Consider Readers First

Why are you writing? What is your purpose? Who are you writing to? How are you going to present information to them? These are the first questions you should ask yourself when you sit down to revise. Put yourself in the place of your readers, your [academic audience](#). Your job is to meet their expectations and needs. All readers will be interested in the following:

- The breadth, depth, and appropriateness of your research
- The sufficiency of your argument and proof
- Your mastery of the kinds of and approaches to writing accepted in your field or profession
- The clarity of your presentation
- The conciseness of your presentation
- Your voice as a writer and professional in your field

Once you consider your audience, you should find the rest of the revision process easier.

Revising / Structure: Make a Point and Back It Up

Would readers be able to fill in these blanks after completing your paper?

- The purpose of this chapter/section/subsection is...(complete in one sentence).
- The author's main points are
 1. Point 1
 2. Point 2
 3. Point 3
 4. Point 4
 5. And so on...
- Evidence/definitions/further explanation for each point above are
 1. Point 1
 - a.
 - b.

- c.
2. Point 2
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 3. And so on...

In many ways, reconsidering a piece of writing in this fashion is like outlining from a text, only you happen to have already written the text.

A related technique is [reverse outlining](#): outlining a draft after it is written. The act of identifying key ideas and subordinate support or evidence might reveal unsupported claims or instances where details seem unrelated to major points being made (nice-to-know versus need-to-know information). If you think of revision as performing a post mortem on your work, then you can systematically take it apart to see what in the body works well and what is broken, unconnected, or dysfunctional.

Paragraphs count. Reverse outlining allows you to review each paragraph as a single unit. The topic sentence should convey the main idea, and the [paragraph should develop one and only one main idea at a time](#). Put your readers first. Could they scan for the topic sentence of each paragraph and get a big-picture look at your presentation? Reverse outlining will reveal problems with paragraphs if you need a reliable tool to discover revision opportunities.

Effective writers enhance their papers by providing headings and subheadings that guide readers from idea to idea and give them a sense of the structure—the skeleton of the paper.

Finally, remember that the introduction should introduce your main idea or purpose for writing and provide background; the body should develop the main idea; and the conclusion should wrap up your argument and expand it slightly.

Revising / Content: Determine Quality and Quantity

Take one more look at your major points and evidence. Is it accurate? Do you have too much or not enough? Have you provided—just to name a few of the possibilities for content—background, definitions, descriptions, examples, comparisons, quantitative and/or qualitative information, summaries, paraphrases, quotes, and your own analysis? Now is the time to prune unnecessary content and fill in any gaps. Often writers succumb to the temptation to include information that was difficult to find or interesting, although it does not support the main idea or its supporting assertions. Ask what is "need-to-know" versus "nice-to-know" information from the point of view of your reader. Sacrificing interesting content requires discipline and refusal to make writing a scrapbook of interesting information that is only tangentially related to your main ideas. Of course, this is also the time to fill in any gaps, making sure that each of your major points has enough muscle to support it. Double check that no argument or assertion goes unsupported or is supported with inadequate or incorrect information. The [reverse outline](#) is a great tool in this situation.

Revising / Logic: Order the Presentation Strategically

Look again at your main arguments. Can you prove that A caused B? That your Evidence A actually bolsters Argument A? Are you building an argument step-by-step or will the reader have to hunt-and-peck for information? Will your reader buy your conclusions based on the argument you have developed? The same tools used for revising for structure and paragraphing will also help with revising for logic and flow: the [reverse outline](#) and the [MEAL plan](#).

In addition, academic journals can provide models for academic papers. You can see how their contributors adhere to a set of conventions about organization and content. You can also get a sense of the writers' voices, use of primary and secondary sources, and conventional outlines and headings. Academic journals also provide publication guidelines for potential contributors—information that you might find helpful.

Also, some generic principles apply when you [write any course paper](#). Check your work against these guidelines.

At the same time, try to find someone unfamiliar with your paper and ask for feedback about how you lined up the steps of your argument. Have your reader tell you what the writing has communicated, paying particular attention to your introduction and conclusion so that they reflect the body of the paper. Also, ask if the basic argument is believable, clearly articulated, and well defended.

Revising / Coherence: Make It Flow

Headings and sub-headings provide readers an overview they can scan to understand the flow of your ideas. However, you can use other more subtle methods that will make your argument seem to flow.

First, use the same words for the same key concepts throughout the paper. Synonyms force your reader to slow down. Also, when you use the same word or phrase consistently throughout a document, you signal your reader that the word or phrase is important. Use repetition as a strategy, not as something to be avoided, remembering to walk that fine line between use and over-use. Therefore, check that you have used consistent terminology throughout—without sounding like a broken record.

Second, if you haven't already, announce the steps or topics that you will address as you make a commitment to your audience about what you intend to cover. Then follow through on that commitment.

Example:

Experts consider culture, economics, and history of a nation when determining if it can accept some form of democracy...

Many cultures value the will and welfare of the group—the family, the tribe, the village—over individual will and prosperity...

The economics of a country, especially its distribution of wealth, offers clues about the willingness of elites to sacrifice power for the sake of instituting a democracy...

Finally, a nation with some history of democracy might be more likely to embrace some form of it again...

And finally, use connector words (e.g., *therefore*, *however*, *first*, *second*, *third*, *finally*, *in addition*, *moreover*, *similarly*, *in contrast*, *in conclusion* etc.) to tie sentences, paragraphs, or sections together. These words

promote the transitions of ideas as well as words because they show some kind of relationship between sentences, paragraphs, and sections.

Example:

Those are the reasons Dr. X gives for the change.

However, his reluctance to maintain the old model should alert careful readers to examine his reasons for change.

Revising / Voice: Sound Like an Expert

Many writers worry about sounding professional when they write. As a result, they often write in a style that is wordy and overly formal, jargon-laden, or complex. Rather than worrying about writing to **impress**, they should work to **express**.

Example of someone writing to impress:

Providing economic subsidies for impecunious students will ameliorate their unfortunate circumstances and render them increasingly capable of supplementing their deteriorating incomes.

Example of someone writing to express:

Financial aid will help struggling students replace lost earnings while they are studying instead of working.

In the first example, the writer chose words and structured sentences that sounded pompous and unnecessarily florid without communicating a concrete assertion. In the second example, the writer made a concrete statement that contained real information.

A remedy for these problems is reading work out loud. If you couldn't imagine saying what you just wrote, consider that passage an opportunity for revision. The point remains that writers who work to communicate with a real audience will sound professional; they don't need to assume a voice that feels artificial.

However, certain audiences use language in ways that are unique to a discipline or profession. You can develop your [scholarly voice](#) by tuning in to this unique expression and making it yours. The tone of your work should match that of authors considered leaders in your field, and it should be consistent, i.e., not jump between casual and formal. In fact, a tone that is either too casual or too formal will be considered inappropriate by some readers. And your writing should achieve the appropriate level of technicality; it cannot be full of jargon unfamiliar to the audience or, conversely, lack important language that has special meaning for experts in the field.

One method some writers use to sound scholarly is to turn verbs into nouns by adding -ion, -ence, -ance or -ment. They write in a [passive voice](#) using a noun style known as nominalization.

Example:

Strong verb style Noun style

utilize or use	utilization
accept	acceptance
achieve	achievement

However, overuse of the noun style deprives prose of the energy that strong verbs supply. Therefore, to infuse life into scholarly prose and sound scholarly, use more active, strong verbs and edit out words written in a noun style. Note the difference in voice in these two sentences and how the strong verb in Sentence 1 produces a more energetic and concise sentence than Sentence 2, which uses a noun style. Note also that use of a noun style encourages the use of passive voice. An occasional use of the passive voice is acceptable, but nominalization will automatically lead writers to rely too heavily on the passive voice.

Sentence 1:

Economists **use** the revised version of the GNP to make comparisons.

Sentence 2:

Utilization of the GNP by economists is the major way they make comparisons.

Finally, scholarly writing does not rely as heavily on first person communication as other writing. Look at these sentences that convey the same information.

1. You can see that the data support my contention that new policies are in order.
2. The data support the need for new policies.

First person: I, me, we, us

Second person: You (for one or more)

Third person: He, him, she, her, it, they, them, or any noun

As the second sentence above demonstrates, the third person approach to presenting information in academic is the most common. Third person writing sounds less personal and more universal. For more information about drafting sentences, selecting words, and presenting yourself in an appropriate tone and scholarly voice, review these supplementary materials:

[Voice, Style and Tone](#)

[Writing for an Academic Audience](#)

Revising / Conciseness: Say It Crisply

Skilled writers will vary the length of their sentences and avoid series of sentences too long or too short. They know how to make sentences more lively by avoiding overuse of the passive voice, watching for strings of prepositions, and eliminating redundant words and phrases. In short, the challenge is to say what you mean without complicating your presentation with verbal clutter.

1. **Passive Voice.** The red flag for passive voice is the use of the verb "to be" in any of its conjugations. This is the reason your grammar school teachers made you circle all of the is's and the was's and the were's and get rid of them. Your grammar checker will find many instances of passive voice and give you an alternate solution. You can then decide which version of the sentence you prefer, remembering that passive voice is grammatically correct, but it tends to weigh prose down.

Passive: The report was written by Joe.

Active: Joe wrote the report.

Both sentences say the same thing. However, the emphasis changes. In the active sentence, the emphasis is on Joe. In the passive sentence, the emphasis is on the report. Therefore, you should decide where you want your emphasis to be.

The passive voice sometimes hides the person responsible for an action, and in some circumstances this is exactly what you want.

Passive: It was decided that you are fired.

Active: The board of directors decided to fire you.

In the first sentence, a reader can't tell who owns the decision, a typical problem with the passive construction. In addition, passive sentences tend to be longer than sentences in the active voice.

Strong verbs sound more energetic, and continued use of strong verbs contributes to an energetic, straightforward style.

2. **Strings of prepositions.** Sometimes writers' minds run faster than their typing fingers. They add meaning by piling on prepositional phrases and some infinitives as well. Often these phrases are so formulaic that you could complete them without hearing the entire phrases, e.g., on the occasion of should become the simple preposition, on.

Example:

As of this date, they won't be in a position to address the problem on the basis of the evidence owing to the fact that they are not in possession of the actual certificate.

Edited example:

They cannot address the problem because they do not have adequate evidence: the certificate.

3. **Redundant words and phrases.** Look at these phrases. You should be able to prune them down to size by selecting a single word. Try to find and eliminate as many of these redundancies as you can in your writing.

Example:

advance planning = planning

ask the question = ask

consensus of opinion = consensus

For further discussion about matters of style in sentences, consult "[Voice, Style and Tone](#)" and "[Style: Sentence Simplicity](#)."

Revising / Backups: Save Your Revisions

Save each revised version of your paper as a separate file. You may need to refer to previous work that you abandoned.

And whatever you do, create backups of your work and store them in a different physical space than your computer or original storage media like CD's or flash drives. Natural disasters, fires, or even brief electrical spurts can wipe out weeks and months of work. Writers can inadvertently delete rather than save new work. Back-up copies of your writing on your computer and on media removed from your computer might save your academic life!

Revising / Conclusion: Revise More Than Once

Depending on your task, you should complete more than one revision. However, once you are confident that your argument, format, language, and voice are appropriate for your readers, you are ready for the final stage: proofreading and editing.

A final warning for writers who are also perfectionists: Don't revise and revise and revise. Go through your material several times, but then be willing to consider your revisions adequate and move on to the final proofreading and editing phase.

Joan Bolker in her book, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*, summed up revision nicely: "Revision is a way to think further about your subject, to say something in the clearest possible way, and to undo mistakes, all in the service of first-rate writing."

Polishing

The final stage in the writing process—Polishing—consists of editing and proofreading. For this stage, your goal is not to make major revisions but simply to smooth off the edges of your work for its final presentation—much like a sculptor applying finishing touches to artwork before casting. The artist doesn't remold the clay at this point but gently sculpts and shapes, making only slight alterations to his or her masterpiece to achieve final form. Like the artist, then, your job in this final stage of writing is to use your sculpting tools, editing and proofreading, to ready your paper for presentation.

Editing

Although writers often use the term editing loosely, editing at the polishing stage is more specifically defined: fine-tune the language. At this stage, writers review and assess text by examining diction, tone, style, rhythm and flow. Intermingled, these elements work together and not only express a writer's voice, but are also influenced by a writer's intended audience.

- Diction has to do with the level of clearness and conciseness reflected in an author's choice, usage and arrangement of words. Further, word choice and the way in which a writer elects to put words, thus, sentences together determines his or her tone, rhythm and style.
- Tone exposes attitude or mood, as expressed through the author's preferred choice, usage and combinations of words as well as the writer's preferences of sentence types, lengths and structures used.
- Style represents a writer's distinctive and unique form of expression. Like tone, it also reveals the writer's attitude and mood, but more so, it allows the reader to discover aspects of the author's

personality or take on things. Writers often intentionally change their style, depending on the format or type of message being delivered and depending upon the intended audience.

- Rhythm further reveals a writer's tone and style just like a song uniquely expresses feelings or emotions of a songwriter. Words and sentences move, too, and their patterns deliver much of a writer's message.
- Flow means that your words and sentences evolve and proceed smoothly, logically, consistently and continuously over time, much like a stream gently running down the side of a quietly sloping mountain.

Proofreading

The final phase of the writing process, proofreading means to make the final check and fix mechanical or technical flaws, such as spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes.

- Spelling mistakes are often hard to catch, especially with writers' modern-day dependence on spell check features available in most word processing software programs. When the spell check feature automatically replaces misspelled words with correctly spelled words, they may not always be the words originally intended by the writer. Spell check features are quick and convenient, but writers should review the spell check suggestions before accepting them.
- Grammar pertains to the rules of syntax and inflection that define a language. Grammar is a description of language use, which is always in flux because people use language to communicate. What was "correct" fifty years ago, might not be "correct" today, which might not be "correct" fifty years from now—hence the confusion surrounding the "correctness" of grammar.
- Punctuation includes symbols or characters, such as commas and question marks, used to break up sentences and their parts to provide clear meaning. Punctuation tells a reader how to read a sentence—when to start, stop, or just slow down; when to whisper or yell; when to emphasize or subordinate—the way the writer wants it read.

Polishing / How to Edit

First, read your paper silently, checking for general readability: if you stumble over words in the same section every time, so will your readers. Second, try reading it aloud. Hearing yourself read your written words out loud is different from reading silently, thus, it allows you to better identify areas that might need work. Look at the coherence, conciseness, and language flow in your paper. Look at the words. Watch for colloquial language, slang or jargon. Check for needless repetition and padding. Review your paper further with the following editing [checklist](#) items in mind:

Word Choice

- [Delete repetitive or unnecessary words and phrases.](#) Ever notice how some people tend to talk a lot without ever really saying anything? After listening to a person talk like this, you might feel exhausted, frustrated or confused—or all three. The same thing can happen with wordy writing. It's important for writers to try to learn how to *get to the point* without losing important descriptive wording and/or sacrificing tone, style and rhythm. The best way to do this is to eliminate unneeded words or phrases. When reviewing each sentence, ask yourself, "What is the main point or the goal of this sentence?" If

you find information there that doesn't pertain or is merely saying what's already been said in the sentence, simply get rid of it. You will find your stripped down sentences are easier to read and understand and will help the overall flow of your paper. Take a look at these examples:

Eliminate meaningless words like "actually," "certainly," "kind of," "basically," "indeed," "assuredly," "particular," "generally," and "fundamentally." In most cases, they add nothing to the sentence.

Example:

Indeed, improving employee productivity actually depends more on leadership than on any kind of technology.

Edited:

Improving employee productivity depends more on leadership than on technology.

Delete repetitive words. Some might think that phrases like "first and foremost," "full and complete," "each and every," or "true and accurate" provide a level of specificity or emphasis that "first," "full," "each," or "true" alone do not provide. That's just not true (or, that's just not accurate, but it's not both).

Example:

To develop an effective strategy, an organization must first and foremost articulate its vision.

Edited:

To develop an effective strategy, an organization must first articulate its vision.

- *Make sure you've used strong and descriptive words, especially verbs.* For instance, many academic writers have the habit of using the verb, "get" (or one of its forms) in their sentences. Depending on sentence context, of course, stronger and/or more descriptive verbs will replace "get."

Example:

The company got a large return on its investment.

Edited:

The company earned a large return on its investment.

There's a balance between wordiness and not using enough description to convey ideas and meaning. Readers can become lost in too many words, especially bland one, or they can become confused with too few words. Writers use strong and meaningful words to accurately describe events and allow readers to understand—or live vicariously—the experiences. For instance, accurately describing a scientific study is crucial for the credibility and success of a research paper. The reader must understand the study and its implications for your work.

- *Inspect for discriminatory or sexist wording and avoid other negative connotative words.* According to the International Development Research Center, although racial/social stereotypes are often recognizable and avoidable, less apparent and often not easily avoidable is gender bias.

Your baby should always be fed when he is hungry.

Because of the nature of language, gender bias is still prevalent, especially in light of the fact that the use of "he/she" or "he or she" or s/he" and related gender-neutral reference words did not occur in writing less than twenty years ago."

Sometimes, the neutral pronoun, "one" was/is used by writers, but a writer and his readers can easily be lost in a sea of oneness:

One has to ask oneself what is the true meaning of one's life.

While "one" can sound formal and stiff, and the use of "he/she" and the likes can be too tedious, there is another answer: go plural.

You must feed your babies when they are hungry.
People have to ask themselves what is the true meaning of their lives.

However, other biased and stereotypical words are more difficult to detect, and going plural doesn't seem to address the bias. With a bit of thought, research, practice, and a little intuition, acceptable alternatives can be found:

Examples:
businessman → change to → entrepreneur or business executive
fireman → change to → firefighter
mankind → change to → humans/humanity/people/human beings

- *Colloquial Language*

All of us use informal diction or slang in everyday speech. In writing, however, it is wise to avoid using common expressions that should be reserved for casual conversation.

Examples:
Sam worked his tail off to get a promotion.
Sam worked very hard to get a promotion.

Judi parties every weekend.
Judi goes out with friends every weekend.

Brett will sometimes diss his friends.
Brett will sometimes insult his friends.

There are times, however, when the context of the message or the subject being discussed called for the use of slang or colloquial expressions. For instance:

Example:

Youth counselors find it most difficult to convince their clients to walk away from someone who makes a point of continually insulting them, a practice known as "dissing."

In this case, the use of "dissing" is informative. Readers of the paper/article will not only be informed of the term, but its definition as well. Please note that when using a slang or colloquial word or expression, it is appropriate to place quotation marks around it.

Sentences

- *Test for limited use of [passive voice](#).* Passive voice is grammatically correct, and sometimes it's necessary for describing an event or situation accurately. However, academic writers should avoid it because it tends to weaken a paper through ambiguity, taking the emphasis off the subject and/or the action. Therefore, sentences may not convey their intended meaning as well as they should.

Example:

Mistakes were made; solutions were sought.

Edited:

The cashier misapplied the money; the auditor corrected the mistake.

The goal of academic writing is to convey meaning accurately. Sentences should be concise, clear and direct without confusing readers.

- *Check for consistent use of [verb tense](#).* So that readers aren't lost, it's important for a writer to remain in the same tense throughout his or her paper. Granted, sometimes writers have to temporarily roll back time to tell a related or supporting story, so it's appropriate to change the tense for this. However, it should be apparent to your reader when and why you switch tenses.

Example:

Yesterday, I ate apples; today, I eat bananas; tomorrow, I will eat grapes.

Transition words and phrases can let readers know when there's a tense switch by announcing a time/period and/or place/setting change.

- *Verify the use of strong and varied transitions.* As with place and time, transition words and phrases are used to create stronger connections between ideas in writing. Transition words have many purposes, such as introducing something new or changing the direction of thought. See the lists of partial categories below:

Addition

furthermore, further, also, moreover, first, even more, next,...

For example

for instance, to illustrate, specifically,...

Comparison

similarly, likewise, in similar fashion,...

Contrast

yet, after all, however, nonetheless, on the other hand,...

- *Confirm that sentence beginnings are different and ensure sentence variety—length, structure and rhythm.* Basically, it starts to look and sound quite choppy when all of a writer's sentences begin exactly the same way. Unless, of course, it's a strategic move, and the writer intends to start each thought or phrase the same way to convey a particular meaning.

Example:

I woke up early that morning. I put on my sweater because it was cold. I found my shoes and put them on. I unzipped my tent. I saw a huge bear!

Edited:

I woke up early that morning. Because it was cold, I put on my sweater and my shoes. As soon as I unzipped my tent, I saw a huge bear!

Changing the way your sentences begin immediately affects length, structure and rhythm of sentences. However, it's important to pay attention to sentence variety beyond this. Even though a writer might frequently start sentences differently, he or she can still end up with an abundance of choppy or short sentences, overly long sentences or combinations of sentences, or awkward or cumbersome sentences. As is true during all phases of the writing process, it's important to think about your audience and focus on your writing intentions or purpose for that audience, and this should be reflected in your sentence variety accordingly. For instance, when writing a children's book, a writer might use shorter and simpler sentences. When writing academic papers, writers have to create sentences geared toward academia, and specifically toward a certain area of study or field, which might require them to write more complex sentences.

- *Sentence Coordination*

Remember the acronym FANBOYS for the seven coordinating words that take a comma beforehand when used to join two sentences together.

for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so → F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.

Example:

He is busy, so I will not bother him.

If you are not using one of the seven FANBOYS to join two sentences together but are using words such as the ones listed below to join sentences, you don't need a comma beforehand. (An exception occurs when the sentence is extremely long, and it's not practical or appropriate to shorten it. In this case, a comma breaks up the length.)

after, although, as, as if, as long as, as though, because, before, even if, even though, if, if only, now that, once, rather than, since

Example:

I will withdraw money from my savings account because I am going on vacation.

However, if you *begin* a sentence with one of these words in order to join it with another sentence, a dependency is formed between the two sentences, and a comma must be used in between them.

Example:

Because I am going on vacation, I will withdraw money from my savings account.

APA Guidelines

- Are quotations integrated into the text properly/smoothly? If you use someone else's direct words in your own sentence, it's important to make sure, first, that the sentence makes sense grammatically and that it's integrated correctly according to [APA Style and Formatting Guidelines](#).

Example:

The judge on the case was angered by the man's "arrogant attitude and rude behavior" so would not budge (Casey, 2006, p. 16).

- Have you documented all quotations/paraphrases appropriately? During editing, make sure you haven't left an author's name out or some other important information out of your in text parenthetical citations. Also, make sure you have correlated your in text citations properly with your reference list and that no information is missing there.
- Overall, does your text follow standards for style and formatting?

Polishing / How to Proofread

Proofreading is the last phase of the writing process, the final check prior to submission. Why? Because if you proofread too early, you could waste your time fixing typos in a paragraph that you ultimately decide to delete completely. This doesn't mean that if you see a mistake when you're revising that you can't fix it. It just means don't waste your time *looking* for mistakes until you get to the proofreading phase.

The key to proofreading is to make the text seem strange. You wrote the text, you've read it a thousand times, and you know what it says. You are so familiar with it that while reading, your brain fills in the gaps and corrects the mistakes in your writing. Making the text seem strange will make those typos, double words, and punctuation problems jump out, begging to be noticed.

One way to solve the text familiarity problem is to ask someone else to read your paper. If that's not possible, you can read it out loud to yourself. Hearing it with your ears is not the same as hearing it inside your head, though you could still run into the familiarity problems and read it correctly out loud, leaving the mistakes on the page.

One of the best ways to make the text strange is to read the paper backwards - yes, backwards - sentence by sentence. And it's even better if you read it backwards out loud. You're not reading for meaning this time, and reading backwards allows you to see the text anew with all its warts.

A Few Grammar and [Punctuation](#) Tips

Commas

- Use a comma before FANBOYS, the seven coordinating words that take a comma beforehand when used to join two sentences together.

for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so → F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.

Example:

He is busy, so I will not bother him.

- Use a comma to set off most introductory words and phrases.

Examples:

To achieve the promotion she desired, Sarah found it necessary to complete her doctoral degree.

Afterwards, James found his keys under the table.

On the other hand, she didn't begin driving until last year.

- Use a comma to set off elements that do not restrict the meaning of the word or words to which they apply. Restrictive elements are never set apart by punctuation. For example, in the sentence "Employees who work hard are rewarded with significant raises." The element "who work hard" restricts the meaning of "employees."

Example:

The three year old, with a mischievous look in his eye, had to be watched at all times. (In this case, the phrase "with a mischievous look in his eye" is descriptive of the three year old.)

- Use commas to set off parenthetical expressions-explanatory, supplementary, or transitional words or phrases.

Example:

The play was one of Neil Simon's best, according to the New York critics.

- Use commas between words, phrases, or clauses forming a series.

Example:

This job involves answering the phone, filing, and typing. Note: the comma between the second item and the word *and* is optional, so check the conventions of your field or publisher and be consistent with your usage.)

Semicolons

- Use a semicolon to separate two independent, closely related clauses NOT joined by one of the FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, yet, or, so).

Example:

The psychologist used qualitative analysis; the economist used quantitative analysis.

Words such as "therefore" and "however" (not one of the FANBOYS) can be used to emphasize any connection.

Example:

The psychologist used qualitative analysis; however, the economist used quantitative analysis.

- Use a semicolon to separate items in lists when those items are themselves divided by commas, or are very long.

Example:

For the holiday, we gave toys, clothes, and savings bonds to our children; toys and savings bonds to our nieces and nephews; and clothes to each other.

Dashes & Ellipses

- Dashes are used for emphasis, to show informality, or to highlight a sharp turn in thought or abruptness. They can be used to replace other types of punctuation--for linking, separating and enclosing.

Example:

The kitchen was hot--steaming hot!

Example:

Only one person--the winner--will receive the grand prize.

Only one person, the winner, will receive the grand prize.

Only one person (the winner) will receive the grand prize.

All are correct. However, punctuation choice affects meaning.

- Ellipses are used to signify a pause in speech . . . or a lead into silence. Also they are used to indicate when words are deliberately left out, especially when separate parts of direct quotes are used.

Example:

Lincoln said, "Fourscore and seven years ago . . . shall not perish from this earth."

A Few Words about Grammar and Spelling Checker Software

The single most important thing to remember about grammar and spelling checker software is that they offer suggestions, not truths. The software does not *understand* — it *matches*. You still have to make the decision whether to hit the "change" or "ignore" button because you know your intended meaning; the software does not. If you choose to use grammar and spelling checkers, then you need to understand how they work and how their suggestions will change your text, so you can make the right decision for your paper.

Grammar checkers match what they are programmed to match, and their suggestions aren't always right. For instance, the grammar checker ignored the following sentence fragment:

While the sun shone.

However, it offered an erroneous suggestion for the following sentence...

When reviewing each sentence, ask yourself, "What is the main point?"

Changing it to...

When reviewing each sentence, as you, "What is the main point?"

When the spelling checker suggests a replacement word, or automatically replaces misspelled words with correctly spelled words, some words may not always be the ones originally intended by the writer.

For instance, a writer might accidentally type the word, "monjei," when actually meaning to type the word, "money." With a quick click of the "change" button, the word "monkey" ends up in the paper, describing the company's financial situation.

In addition, the spelling checker does not identify words spelled correctly, but used incorrectly. If you type "red," intending to type "read," the spelling checker will think it's just fine and will pass right over it.

Use grammar and spelling checkers — just understand how they work and be the one to make the best decision for your intended meaning.

Final Proofreading Check

- Check final formatting specifics, including page numbers, headings, spacing, and appendices.
- Verify that your citations and reference list follow [APA Guidelines and Requirements](#).
- Note: Learners in the School of Psychology must use the APA guidelines and requirements for formatting documents as well as for citations and references.