

Notebook for

Successful College Writing

McWhorter, Kathleen T.

PART 1 Academic Quick Start

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CHAPTER 4

Responding Critically to Text and Images

WRITING QUICK START

The photograph on the opposite page shows examples of popular newsstand journalism. Suppose you are taking a sociology class and are studying popular culture. Your instructor asks you to examine publications such as these, read and evaluate a few articles, and be prepared to discuss in class what they reveal about Americans' needs and values.

Write a list of questions about the articles whose titles are shown in the photograph. Include questions that would help you evaluate the articles' purpose and identify to whom they appeal. Then study the photographs on the front covers. Write a few sentences explaining why they may have been included and what they accomplish.

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As you analyzed the titles of the articles featured on the covers, you had to think and react critically; you had to question and evaluate. This process is known as *critical thinking*.

In this chapter you will learn strategies for both thinking critically and reading critically. You will learn to interpret visuals, including photographs and graphics. This chapter also includes a Guide to Responding to Text that offers strategies to help you organize your ideas about what you have read.

SCENES FROM COLLEGE AND THE WORKPLACE

- In an *art history* class, your instructor assigns a critical review of a museum exhibit that your class recently visited. She asks you to read the review and write an essay agreeing or disagreeing with the critic's viewpoint and expressing your own views.
- For a zoology course, your instructor distributes an excerpt from the book *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals* that displays several photographs of elephants interacting and asks you to write a paper summarizing, analyzing, and evaluating evidence presented about animal emotions.
- You are working as an *inspector* for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Part of your job is to read, interpret, and evaluate corporate plans to comply with OSHA safety standards.

Strategies for Critical Thinking and Reading

In elementary and high school, students memorize facts to develop a basic foundation of knowledge in reading, writing, science, and mathematics. In college, you will learn and memorize new information, but you are also expected to analyze what you learn, develop your own opinions, and conduct your own research. In other words, your college instructors expect you to *think critically*—to interpret and evaluate what you hear and read—and not simply accept something as “the truth” because an instructor says it or you read it somewhere. (Thinking critically also means not rejecting something just because it contradicts what you currently believe or previously learned.) In this context, the term *critically* does not mean “negatively.” Rather, it means “thoughtfully and analytically”—that is, thinking deeply about the information you encounter.

In your college courses and your daily life, it is important to think critically about written and visual materials that you encounter. Whether you are looking at a textbook chapter, an essay or article, or an online reference source, you will need to analyze and evaluate the ideas presented. *Critical reading*, then, is a form of critical thinking that you use to analyze written text and visuals.

Developing your critical-thinking and -reading skills will enable you to distinguish good information from incomplete, inaccurate information. You will become a savvy consumer who can compare options and avoid scams, frauds, and misleading advertis-

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ing. You will become an informed citizen who can evaluate issues, examine politicians' campaign platforms and promises, and analyze people's political and economic motives. In the workplace, you will become a valued employee who can evaluate and solve problems, recognize trends, and analyze causes and effects. In college, you will become a careful reader who can evaluate research sources to determine if they are reliable or unreliable. In particular, you will be able to conduct Internet research more effectively by identifying accurate and trustworthy sites. Critical reading will also enable you to recognize relationships between ideas and disciplines. For example, understanding basic human psychology will help you in other courses, such as economics, because critical thinking about consumer spending patterns will help you recognize psychological concepts that help to explain them. The strategies in the remainder of this section will help you become a critical thinker who is ready to handle the demands of your daily life, your college classes, and your job.

Evaluate Information Sources

We live in a world of sensory overload. We are surrounded by news, opinions, advertisements, and other kinds of information everywhere we look (or listen). Developing your critical-thinking skills will help you to evaluate this avalanche of information. Begin by thinking about your various information sources—how factually accurate they try to be, whether they are written by people with experience in the field, whether they have been reviewed by editors or experts in the field, and whether they show bias toward a particular view of a situation and, therefore, might misrepresent it.

Newspapers

Newspapers vary in how skilled their reporters are in obtaining accurate and complete information and in how rigorously they check facts before publishing a news story. As the word *news* suggests, they tend to focus on what is new—unexpected events and recent trends—and to give less attention to more familiar and predictable patterns that may be equally important or even more so. Most newspapers have an editorial page or opinion section in which the paper's editors and contributors offer their views on current issues and other topics. These pieces are likely to reflect the writers' personal views on controversial questions, political or otherwise, so be aware of this as you read. Also keep in mind that some newspapers tend to be liberal in their views, while others are conservative. These tendencies often show up not just on the editorial page but also in the way news stories are presented, such as where a story appears or what kind of language is used to describe an issue.

Television News

TV news broadcasts also require close scrutiny. Because networks are interested in attracting and keeping viewers, they sometimes focus on events that their staff members think will achieve this goal rather than on developments that are more important. News programs may focus on stories that have high visual appeal at the expense of those with less compelling images. Finally, some networks have a particular political bias or slant, and their news coverage is aimed at furthering this agenda. For the same reasons, radio news deserves scrutiny.

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Magazines

Literally thousands of magazines are published every year. Some are devoted to specific interests, such as home schooling, organic food, or Latin American politics. Others report, analyze, and comment on national, state, or local news; still others focus on particular issues, such as finance, art, or literature. Although such magazines can be excellent sources of information, their content, like that of newspapers and television, is influenced by the perspectives and biases of their editors and writers. Magazines also vary in their fact-checking and in the skill of their journalists. Magazines that focus on gossip and celebrities are viewed as less reliable than news magazines.

The Internet

For many people, the Internet is the first place they turn for news and research because it is free and easy to access. However, anyone can create a Web site and post on it anything he or she wants, regardless of its accuracy. Be particularly cautious when using blogs (online diaries), which contain personal opinions that are not reviewed by editors. For more information on evaluating Internet sources, read Chapter 21 (pp. 585–87).

Scholarly Journals

Scholarly journals report research and developments in a particular academic or professional field. Examples include the *Journal of Psychology* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. They tend to be highly trustworthy sources because they are peer-reviewed. That is, the journals' editors accept only articles that have been evaluated and approved by other authorities in the field. In scientific fields, journal articles must be based on research that follows strict standardized procedures and must make connections to related research on the topic. Articles in scholarly journals can use specialized vocabulary, so you need to read them slowly and carefully. Fortunately, most articles begin or end with an *abstract*, a one- or two-paragraph summary of the findings of the research study.

Exercise 4.1

On your own or as part of a class discussion, evaluate the reliability of each of the information sources in the list below. Do some research if necessary to learn more about them. How seriously should you take each source? Which exist solely for entertainment? Which are likely to be highly biased? Which would be acceptable as references in an academic research paper? Rate the reliability of each on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being completely unreliable and 5 being very trustworthy.

1. an opinion column in the *Washington Post* (newspaper)
2. a feature story in the *National Enquirer* (newspaper/magazine)
3. an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (newspaper)
4. *Meet the Press* (a TV news program)
5. www.thesmokinggun.com
6. www.census.gov (Web site of the U.S. Census Bureau)
7. www.tnz.com
8. *The Journal of Economic Research*

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9. Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

10. a feature article in *InStyle Magazine* (a women's fashion magazine)

Understand the Nuances of Words

Words are powerful, and their power can be used in many ways. On the positive side, words can inspire, comfort, educate, and calm. At the other end of the spectrum, words can inflame, annoy, and deceive. Professional writers understand that word choices influence readers and listeners, and they choose words that will help them achieve their objective. To think critically, consider the following aspects of word choice.

Denotation

A **denotation** is the literal meaning of a word. For example, the denotation of the word *obese* is "very fat."

Connotation

A **connotation** is the set of additional meanings or associations that a word has taken on. Often, a word's connotation has a much stronger effect on readers or listeners than its denotation does. A politician who weighs much more than the average or recommended amount for his height might be described as "pleasingly plump" (which carries an almost pleasant connotation), as "quite a bit overweight" (which is an objective-sounding, statistical statement of fact), or as "morbidly obese" or "grossly fat" (which gives readers a negative impression of the politician). Always pay attention to the connotations that words carry and consider why the writer made his or her particular word choices.

Exercise 4.2

For each of the following words, think of one word with a similar denotation but a positive connotation and then another word with a similar denotation but a negative connotation.

- Group (of people): positive connotation, audience; negative connotation, mob
- 1. choosy
- 2. cheap
- 3. girl
- 4. bold
- 5. walk

Euphemism

A **euphemism** is a word or phrase that is used to avoid a word that is unpleasant, embarrassing, or otherwise objectionable. For example, a company may say that it is *downsizing* its workforce when it fires people. That same company may say it is *moving into international sourcing* when it eliminates jobs in the United States and sends them overseas. Euphemisms seek to sugar-coat an unpleasant reality, and as a critical

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thinker you should always be alert for them, particularly when reading about politics and business.

Exercise 4.3

1. The media often report about people from other countries who come to the United States without permission from the U.S. government or who stay here after their permission to visit has expired. Two terms are used to refer to these people—*illegal aliens* and *undocumented immigrants*. Discuss which term seems to have a more negative connotation and which seems more neutral. Why does each term carry the connotations it does? Is the more neutral term a euphemism? Why, or why not?
2. Brainstorm a list of euphemisms currently in use in the media.

Distinguish Fact from Opinion

College textbooks present factual information that has been checked and rechecked over many years (often, over hundreds or even thousands of years) and is therefore highly reliable. In addition, when textbook authors write about topics that are matters of opinion and controversy (rather than topics that most scholars in the field agree on), they usually identify the different schools of thought. Many other reading materials—newspapers, magazines, advertisements, Web sites, and so forth—present a mixture of fact and opinion without distinguishing between the two. For example, an advertisement may state that an American-made car offers the best warranty coverage of all American cars, then describe the features of the warranty, but make no attempt to compare the warranty to another car's warranty. (For a more detailed discussion of fact and opinion, refer to Chapter 21, pp. 588–89.)

Facts

Facts are objective statements of information that can be verified—that is, their truth can be established with evidence. The following are facts:

- Most people who use marijuana do not go on to use more dangerous drugs.
- Texting while driving has caused many accidents.

How do you know a fact when you see it? Facts can be checked in trustworthy sources such as online dictionaries and Web reference sources like *refdesk.com*. (Note that for the purposes of academic writing, Wikipedia is *not* considered a trustworthy reference source for checking facts.)

Opinions

Opinions are subjective—that is, they differ by individual. They express attitudes, feelings, or beliefs that cannot be definitely established as either true or false, at least at the present time. Often, they put forth a particular position or agenda. Even scholarly journals put forth some ideas that are the authors' opinions based on their own research and that of earlier researchers. Only time and further research will tell if these opinions become facts. The following are opinions:

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- It is likely that marijuana use will be legalized in all fifty states by 2020.
- People who text while driving should be fined and have their driver's licenses revoked.
- To prevent permanent hearing loss in musicians and audience members, performers should be required to meet decibel noise exposure limits.

Exercise 4.4

For two of the following topics, write one statement of fact and one statement of opinion:

1. voter turnout rates in presidential elections
2. cell-phone use in classrooms
3. alternative energy solutions
4. the Super Bowl

Evaluate Whether Information Is Reliable

You may have heard the term *spin doctor*. This phrase describes a public relations specialist who puts a positive spin on bad news. Reading and thinking critically require you to understand when information is presented fairly and when it is spun for some purpose—to influence public opinion, to sell something, to win votes, and so forth.

In general, the most reliable information is based on solid *evidence*. Just as police look for evidence to discover who committed a crime, you must look for evidence that supports any assertion made by a writer. If the writer offers little or no evidence, you should question the assertion. The following types of evidence are often considered relevant and valid.

Personal Experience or Examples

Personal experience can be powerful evidence. For example, no one understands cancer like a person who has suffered with the disease and survived. Different people can experience the same event very differently, however, so be careful about generalizing from the experiences of any single person. Furthermore, even though several people may report similar experiences, their reports may not be sufficient evidence to make a sweeping generalization.

Statistical Data

Statistics are often collected and made public by academic researchers or professional research organizations, and these statistics tend to be reliable because the people reporting them try to be as objective and accurate as possible. However, be wary of people who use data in ways that try to hide the truth rather than clarify it. For example, a soda company may claim that “90% of the people in a taste test preferred our cola to our competitor’s cola.” This statement may be true, but what if the taste test were conducted at the company’s headquarters? Would that create a different result than a taste test run in a neutral location, such as a mall? In thinking critically about how reliable a statistical survey is, also consider factors such as how many people were surveyed, how they were selected, when the survey was done, and how the questions were worded.

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Eyewitness Reports

Eyewitness reports are often considered powerful evidence, but studies suggest that eyewitness testimony in criminal cases is often inaccurate. Also, different people can interpret the same situation in different ways. Suppose that a building bursts into flames and a man is seen running out of the building. One person may think, "What a lucky man! He escaped from the burning building." Another person may think, "That man started the fire to burn this building down and collect the insurance money."

Experimental Evidence

The results of scientific experiments and studies are usually considered highly reliable because they are based on the *scientific method*, which is a set of procedures that researchers follow to investigate their theories. The conclusions that can be drawn from the results of a single study may be fairly narrow, though. Moreover, experiments are not always designed or conducted as carefully as they should be. Even when they are, uncontrollable factors can influence the results. For example, scientific research studies on the safety of a drug can be contradictory. In addition, although most scientists try to be objective and neutral, you need to consider who is conducting the research and whether the researchers have an interest in its outcomes (such as an economic motive or a political agenda) that might influence how they design and conduct it. In rare cases, researchers have even falsified results and misrepresented the data to produce the outcomes they wanted.

Exercise 4.5

Consider each of the following statements and the context in which it is made. List what sorts of information are missing that would help you weigh the evidence and evaluate the claim being made. What further types of evidence would you need to accept or reject the claim?

1. On the label of a bag of cookies: "CONTAINS 45% LESS FAT and 0 grams of TRANS FAT!"
2. In a printed campaign flyer for mayoral candidate Mary Johnson: "My opponent, Joe Smith, has been accused of serious conflicts of interest in the awarding of city contracts during his term as mayor."
3. In large print on the cover of a novel you see at the supermarket checkout: "This novel is a . . . wild and exciting . . . ride through the rough-and-tumble days of the Gold Rush . . . full of . . . adventure and excitement. . . . Memorable!"—*The New York Times*."

Analyze the Author's Tone

Have you ever noticed that people can use the same words to mean different things in different situations? The tone of the words in each situation can convey a very different meaning. Consider a police officer who pulls you over for speeding, approaches the car, and says to you, "Could you please step out of the car?" A police officer would say these words very differently than an employee at a car wash who says the same words so that he can vacuum the interior of your vehicle.

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Tone refers to how a writer sounds to readers, and it is influenced by how the writer feels about the readers and his or her topic. Recognizing an author's tone will help you interpret and evaluate the message and its effect on you.

Tone is revealed primarily through word choice and stylistic features such as sentence patterns and length. A writer can communicate surprise, disapproval, disgust, admiration, gratitude, or amusement, for example. Table 4.1 lists some words commonly used to describe tone.

Many writers and speakers feel passionately about their beliefs, and sometimes they have a personal charisma or physical attractiveness that makes people more open to hearing their message. Be sure not to get carried away by a writer or speaker's tone or commitment. As a critical thinker, your job is to analyze words, facts, and tone to determine how they affect you and whether you are being told the complete story. It is even more important to watch for subtle tones that may be hidden within a message. For example, a writer may use an apparently sympathetic tone in describing a political candidate's recent questionable financial deals: "Poor Mayor Jones must not have realized that taking money for political favors is illegal." This writer is using a mocking or sarcastic tone as a way of criticizing the candidate.

Exercise 4.6

Read each of the following statements, and describe its tone. Refer to Table 4.1 to locate terms that describe the tone. Which words in the statement are clues to the tone?

1. When you are backpacking, you can reduce the risk of back injury by adjusting your pack so that most of its weight is on your hip belt rather than your shoulder straps.
2. Do you eat canned tuna? Then you are at least partially responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent dolphins, who are mercilessly slaughtered by fishermen in their quest for tuna.

TABLE 4.1 Words Commonly Used to Describe Tone

angry	disapproving	informative	persuasive
apathetic	earnest	instructive	pessimistic
arrogant	flippant	ironic	playful
assertive	forgiving	irreverent	reverent
bitter	formal	joyful	righteous
caustic	frustrated	loving	sarcastic
cheerful	hateful	malicious	satiric
compassionate	humorous	mocking	serious
condemning	impassioned	nostalgic	sympathetic
condescending	incredulous	objective	vindictive
cynical	indignant	optimistic	worried
detached			

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3. The penalty for creating and launching a computer virus should include a personal apology to every person who was affected by the virus, and each apology should be typed—without errors!—on a manual typewriter.
4. Piles of solid waste threaten to ruin our environment, pointing to the urgent need for better disposal methods and strategies for lowering the rate of waste generation.
5. All poets seek to convey emotion and the complete range of human feeling, but the only poet who fully accomplished this goal was William Shakespeare.

Exercise 4.7

Consider the following situation: A developer has received permission to bulldoze an entire city block filled with burned-out tenement buildings and abandoned factories. In their place, the developer is going to build a community of three hundred upscale condominiums for people who work in the city and want to live close to their jobs.

Write three different sentences (or paragraphs) that react to this news. Make the tone of your first sentence outraged. Make the tone of your second sentence joyful. Make the tone of your third sentence nostalgic.

Look for Purposeful Omissions

Writers and speakers sometimes mislead by omission—that is, by what they do not say. They may leave out essential background or context, include only details that favor their own position, or ignore contradictory evidence. They may also use the passive voice (to avoid taking or assigning responsibility for an action) or use vague nouns and pronouns (to avoid specifying exactly what or whom they are referring to).

Consider an article written by a woman who has home-schooled her children. As an advocate of home schooling, she is likely to emphasize her children's educational progress and her own sense of personal fulfillment achieved by teaching her children. However, she may not address arguments made by opponents of home schooling—that home-schooled children sometimes feel lonely or isolated from their peers, for example. She also may refer to home schooling as “better” for children without specifying exactly what it is better than (her local public school, public schools in general, any kind of school) or in what way it is better.

The same writer may also describe a research study that concludes that home-schooled children excel academically. Other studies, however, have found that home-schooled children do not differ in academic achievement from traditionally educated students. If the writer does not mention these findings, she has chosen to ignore contradictory evidence, reporting only evidence that she wants the reader to know. In any case, the writer needs to identify the study she cites rather than simply say something like, “A research study on home schooling concluded that . . .” or “It has been found that . . .”

Regardless of what you are reading, ask yourself the following questions to be sure you are getting full and complete information:

- Is any important information omitted? What, if anything, am I not being told?
- Is any evidence that contradicts the writer's or speaker's position not being reported?
- Has the writer or speaker selectively reported details to further his or her cause?

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- On the basis of my own experiences, how do I evaluate this material? Is there another side to this argument or aspect to this topic that I should consider?

To answer these questions, you may need to do some additional reading or research. That is what the college experience is all about—learning from as many sources as possible, taking in many points of view, and using your critical-thinking skills to formulate your own opinions.

Exercise 4.8

Read the following scenarios, which you are likely to encounter in your everyday life. In each situation, what information is being withheld from you? In other words, what other information do you need to evaluate the situation?

1. You see a TV ad for a fast-food restaurant that shows a huge hamburger topped with pickles, onions, and tomatoes. The announcer says, "For a limited time, get your favorite burger for only 99 cents!"
2. You open your mailbox and find a letter from a credit-card company. The letter invites you to open a charge card with no annual fee and offers you instant credit if you return the attached card in a postage-paid envelope.
3. You get an offer from a DVD club that appears to be a good deal. As part of your introductory package, you can buy five DVDs for only ninety-nine cents, plus shipping and handling.

Exercise 4.9

The reading "Combat High" appeared in Chapter 3 (p. 62). Use the Guide to Responding to Text in this chapter (p. 86) to answer the questions below.

1. Using the information you find in the introduction to the reading and in the reading itself, evaluate Sebastian Junger's qualifications to write about combat experiences. Is he a trustworthy and reliable source?
2. Describe the author's tone. What effect does the tone have on you as a reader? How effective do you find it?
3. Identify at least five words with positive or negative connotations.
4. Does the author use euphemisms? If so, give several examples.
5. What information may have been omitted?
6. Is the author fair or biased? Justify your answer.

Interpreting Visuals

Many articles, essays, books, and other materials you will read in college rely on visual images to express important parts of their meaning. Visual messages appear everywhere in your daily life as well—on television, on the Internet, in print magazines and newspapers, and on signs, flyers, and billboards. In the workplace, visuals are used

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to present information, sell products, report trends, show corporate organization, and demonstrate processes.

Visuals include photographs, cartoons, advertisements, illustrations, drawings, PowerPoint slides, and graphics (charts, diagrams, maps, graphs, tables, and flowcharts). These powerful tools can help you share information, convey impressions, provoke thought, raise questions, and trigger emotions. In your writing in college and in the workplace, you will probably find opportunities to use visuals for all these purposes. As an active and critical reader, you should study the visuals you encounter as carefully as you read, analyze, and evaluate written text.

On page 79, for example, is a public service advertisement from the World Wildlife Fund. What do you notice first? Your eye probably goes to the tiger in a lush jungle setting in the small framed snapshot, and you recognize this as a common kind of nature photograph demonstrating the magnificence and beauty of jungle animals. Then you realize that the photograph is surrounded by a larger one showing a natural habitat destroyed by deforestation. When you then consider the captions, you realize the purpose of the ad—to warn against the human destruction of natural habitats and the animals that live there. This ad makes a dramatic and compelling statement that nature is worth protecting and is at risk of being destroyed.

The visuals make the ad much more noticeable and engaging than one with only written text that simply states the problem and explains why jungle habitats are in danger. The twin images with their corresponding text deliver a strong and effective message.

Following are some suggestions for analyzing photographs and some common kinds of graphics.

Interpreting Photographs

A photograph can appear by itself, but it is usually accompanied by a caption or text that discusses or refers to the photograph. Use the following suggestions when analyzing photographs and any words that accompany them. Refer to the following photograph as you read these guidelines.

1. **Preview the photograph.** Look at it quickly. Your goal is to form a first impression—to notice its general subject. What did you notice first, and how did that affect you?

Look at the photograph in Figure 4.1 (p. 80). What was your first reaction? You probably noticed the young man first and then noticed that he was sitting on a soccer ball.

2. **Study the photo as a whole, and then examine its parts.** Identify the focal point of the photograph. Then look closely at the details, examining both the foreground and the background. Details can provide important clues. If you are a verbal learner, it may be helpful to translate the photo into words; you will be able to remember it more easily, and its purpose may become more obvious.

As you look at Figure 4.1, you first see the young man sitting on the ball in the foreground. In the background you notice the graffiti on the wall behind him. An important detail in this photograph is that the young man is holding a book and is reading.

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3. **Read the caption, if there is one.** The caption, appearing above, beside, or below the photograph, usually gives background about it and may offer clues about what the author (or his or her editor) wants to emphasize.

The caption in Figure 4.1 indicates that the person who chose the photo wanted to emphasize the book and the act of reading.

4. **Read the accompanying text, if any.** Although a photograph should be analyzed and evaluated on its own merit, look for connections between the photo and any written text that accompanies it (whether or not the text refers to the photo). Ask yourself how the photo relates to the ideas presented in the text and what, if anything, it adds to these ideas.

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FIGURE 4.1 Reading Happens Anytime, Anywhere

Figure 4.1 appeared in a college textbook about secondary education in a chapter on building literacy skills. What connection does this photograph have to that topic? The photograph depicts the central literacy skill—reading—and presents it as a universal skill that is useful in unusual contexts.

5. **Determine the purpose and message of the image.** Why was it created and used? Photos can be powerful, and they are often chosen to elicit a strong reaction. As with print text, the purpose may be to inform, to amuse, to shock, to persuade, or some combination of these or other motives. Analyze your response to the photo; it can help you discover why someone chose to include it. Ask yourself what point the person might be trying to make.

In Figure 4.1 the photo puts the intellectual act of reading in a surprising physical context—a soccer-ball seat and the background of a wall filled with distracting graffiti. The author seems to be making a point about the act of reading, suggesting that it can take place in unexpected, even uncomfortable circumstances. The larger message seems to be that reading can be an important and pleasurable task, regardless of when and where it occurs.

6. **Think critically about the photograph.** Consider whether it is representative or typical of the situation or subject. Also consider the emotional effect of the photograph. How does it make you feel? What emotions do you think it might produce in others? Would you feel as strongly about the topic without the photo? How

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effective is it in achieving its purpose? What other kind of illustration might the writer or editor have used?

Figure 4.1 shows someone reading in an unusual place and posture. Because people read in a wide variety of situations and contexts, the photograph seems intended to make the college students using the textbook appreciate the universal nature of reading. At the same time, it also suggests an idea related to building literacy skills in secondary education—the challenges that many high school students face in finding time and space in which to read. Finally, because it is slightly amusing, it engages the attention of the textbook users in a way that a photo of someone reading in a more ordinary setting, such as indoors in a chair, might not.

Exercise 4.10

Study the photograph below, using the guidelines listed on pages 78–79. Then answer the following questions:

1. Describe your first impression of the photo.
2. Summarize what is happening in the photo.
3. What does the caption contribute to your understanding of the photo?
4. This photograph appeared in a sociology textbook titled *Deviance and Conformity* in a section titled “Norms and a Range of Tolerance.” Why did the author include the photo in a chapter that discusses *deviance* (behaving in ways different from the usual or traditionally acceptable ones) and in a section of the chapter that focuses on *norms* (standards of behavior)?
5. What other kinds of photos or images might the writer have used to make the same point?



A nontraditional marriage ceremony

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Exercise 4.11

Examine one of the photographs that accompanies the reading "Combat High" in Chapter 3 (pp. 62–65), and write a paragraph explaining what it contributes to the reading.

Exercise 4.12

Discuss what types of photographs might be useful to include in each of the following writing tasks:

1. An essay opposing the whaling industry
2. An essay describing problems faced by cyberbullying victims
3. A research paper on teen slang
4. An argumentative essay opposing casino gambling
5. A report about unhealthy fast-food menu items

Interpreting Graphics

Graphics are commonly used to organize and condense information, making lengthy or complicated data easier to understand. Writers use a wide range of types of graphics; the purpose of each of the common types is summarized on the next page (p. 83).

Use the following suggestions when reading and interpreting graphics. Refer to the multiple bar graphs shown in Figure 4.2 as you apply suggestions 2 to 7 below.

1. **Read any reference to the graphic in the main text.** Many authors refer to the graphics they include, providing a context for the graphic, offering a reason it was included, or giving a summary of what it is intended to show. When you locate the reference in the text, finish reading it before you examine the graphic. Even if the text does not mention the graphic, look for connections between the two. To understand complicated graphics, you may need to go back and forth several times between the text and the graphic.

This graphic appeared in a report published by *CQ Researcher*, a print and online periodical that publishes a weekly in-depth report on a current social or political issue. The text of this report, "Caring for Veterans: Does the VA Adequately Serve Wounded Vets?" does not directly mention the graphic, although it discusses many of the issues addressed in the graph.

2. **Read the title and the caption, if there is one.** The title identifies the subject of the graphic, and the caption provides important information about what it shows. In some cases, the caption will specify the key point for the graphic.

The title of Figure 4.2 identifies the subject—brain injuries of veterans—and states the main point that these injuries are costly to the Veterans Administration. The caption provides background and suggests that the graphic is considering both brain damage and post-traumatic stress disorder to be forms of brain injury.

3. **Examine how the graphic is organized.** Read the column headings, labels, or other text used to indicate the organizational method. Find out what variables are involved.

In Figure 4.2, the top graph displays number of casualties by their type and by the war in which they were suffered. How is the bottom graph organized?

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4. **Look at the legend, if there is one.** The legend is the guide to the colors, symbols, terms, and other important information in the graphic. In maps, the legend usually contains a scale explaining how measurements should be read. (For example, a map may be scaled so that one inch on the map represents one mile.)

In Figure 4.2, the legend for the top graph explains the color scheme used to distinguish the two wars that the graph represents.

5. **Analyze the graphic's purpose.** Based on what you see, determine the key purpose. Is it to show change over time, to represent a process or a structure, or to compare statistics from different countries?

The purpose of Figure 4.2 is clear. It displays the number of casualties and emphasizes the large numbers of brain injuries and psychological traumas suffered by veterans.

Type of Graphic	Purpose	Example																		
Pie (circle) chart 	To show the relationships among parts of a whole; to show how given parts of a unit are divided or classified	A chart showing the proportions of different racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. population																		
Bar graphs 	To make comparisons between quantities or amounts	A graph comparing the percentage of the U.S. population living in cities for each decade from 1770 to 2010																		
Line graphs 	To show changes in a variable over time or to compare relationships between two or more variables	A graph comparing spending on advertising from 2009 to 2011 in different media, such as TV networks, the Internet, and print newspapers and magazines																		
Tables <table border="1" data-bbox="292 1060 446 1165"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age</th> <th>Men</th> <th>Women</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>20-24</td> <td>1000</td> <td>1000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25-29</td> <td>2000</td> <td>1500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>30-34</td> <td>2500</td> <td>2000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>35-39</td> <td>3000</td> <td>2500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>40-44</td> <td>3500</td> <td>3000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age	Men	Women	20-24	1000	1000	25-29	2000	1500	30-34	2500	2000	35-39	3000	2500	40-44	3500	3000	To organize and condense data; to compare and classify information	A table showing how many calories men and women need daily for various age groups with either an active or a sedentary lifestyle
Age	Men	Women																		
20-24	1000	1000																		
25-29	2000	1500																		
30-34	2500	2000																		
35-39	3000	2500																		
40-44	3500	3000																		
Diagrams and flowcharts 	To explain processes or procedures or show how things work	A diagram showing the process by which the U.S. Constitution can be amended																		

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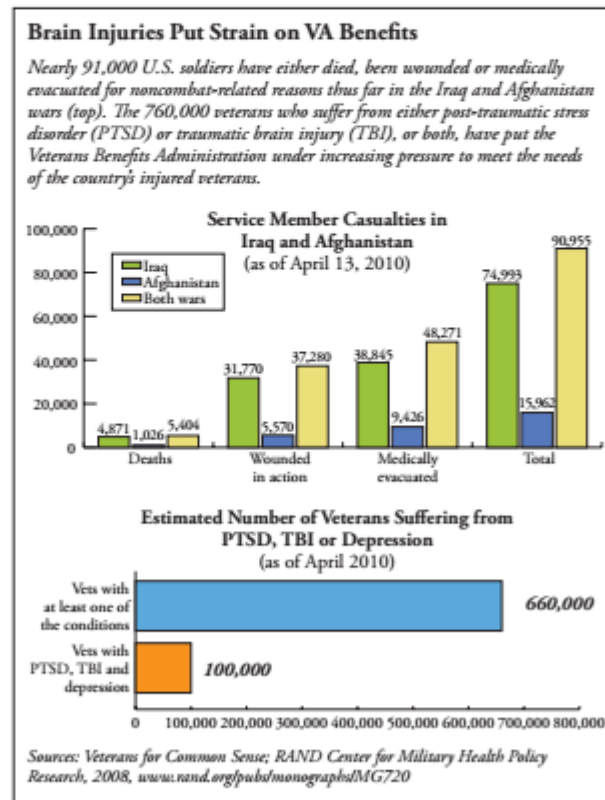
6. **Study the data to try to identify trends or patterns.** Also note unexpected changes (such as sudden increases or decreases in amounts), surprising statistics, or unexplained variations.

In Figure 4.2, note that there is a consistently higher number of casualties in Iraq than in Afghanistan.

7. **Make a brief summary note about any trends or patterns you find.** Writing will crystallize the idea in your mind, and your note will be useful for review.

A summary note of Figure 4.2 might read, "The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced a large number of casualties among soldiers, including those who have been killed (dead and wounded, and those evacuated for reasons besides

FIGURE 4.2



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battlefield injuries). Large numbers of veterans also suffer from one or more of the following conditions—PTSD, TBI, or depression.”

8. **Think critically about the graphic.** Consider questions like these: Are the data from a reputable source? Is the information current and accurate? How objective is the graphic? Are the data presented fairly? Is the meaning of the data clear, or is anything vague or confusing? Are the scale or units of measurement misleading in any way? Could the information be presented differently to show a different trend or outcome?

In Figure 4.2, the data are from two different sources. The first source listed, Veterans for Common Sense, is a nonprofit organization that was formed, according to a statement on its Web site, “to raise the unique and powerful voices of veterans so that our military, veterans, freedom, and national security are protected and enhanced, for ourselves and for future generations.” The second source is a part of the RAND Center, a well-known nonprofit institution dedicated to research and analysis to improve policy and decision making. Its Web site says that its “core values” are quality and objectivity. The second source seems more reliable than the first because it is less likely to be biased in favor of a certain policy agenda. It is unclear, however, which sources were used for each graphic.

Notice, too, that the first graph presents actual numbers, and the second offers estimates. The accuracy of the first graph can be questioned since the figures given for each category of casualty (deaths, wounded in action, and medically evacuated) for Iraq and Afghanistan do not quite add up to the figures given as the total casualties for each war. In the second graph, the labels to the left of the two bars are confusing in relation to each other and to the caption that introduces the two graphs. Apparently the bottom label means “Vets with all three conditions,” so that the 100,000 figure in that bar would be included in the 660,000 figure in the first bar. But the caption gives a total of 760,000 for veterans with either PTSD, TBI, or both—with no mention of depression. The significance of the information in the graphic would be clearer if the caption and labels were clearer about the role that depression plays.

Exercise 4.13

Study the table on the following page using the guidelines presented above, and answer the following questions:

1. How is the table organized?
2. What is the purpose of the table?
3. What trends and patterns are evident for bachelor's degrees? For master's degrees? For both degrees? What differences in trends and patterns are there between the two degrees?
4. Write a brief summary note.
5. Do you consider the source of the data to be reliable?
6. Note that the table reports data in ten-year intervals from 1968 to 1988 and then in five-, four-, and seven-year intervals. Consider possible reasons for this variation. Does an increased frequency of reporting make the increases seem less dramatic?

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TABLE Academic Degrees Conferred by Sex

Year	Bachelor's Degree					Master's Degree				
	Total	Men	%	Women	%	Total	Men	%	Women	%
1968	632,289	357,682	57	274,607	43	176,749	113,552	64	63,197	36
1978	921,204	487,347	53	433,857	47	311,620	161,212	52	150,408	48
1988	994,829	477,203	48	517,626	52	299,317	145,163	48	154,154	52
1998	1,172,000	523,000	45	649,000	55	406,000	183,000	45	223,000	55
2003	1,312,503	537,079	41	775,424	59	512,645	211,381	41	301,264	59
2007	1,524,092	649,264	43	874,828	57	604,607	238,216	39	366,391	61
2014*	1,582,000	633,000	40	949,000	60	693,000	275,000	40	418,000	60

*Projected

Source: Unpublished tabulations, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. 2003 and 2014 (projected) data, Tables 27 & 28, "Projections of Education Statistics to 2014," National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education; 2007 update. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2009). Condition of Education 2009.

Exercise 4.14

For each of the following, discuss what type of graphic might be used to advance the writer's purpose and help the reader grasp the material more easily:

1. To show the religious affiliations of Americans in 2011
2. To show percentages of registered voters who participated in each presidential election from 1988 to 2008 for five age groups, four racial or ethnic groups, four levels of education, five categories of marital status, and eight categories of income
3. To compare percentages of African Americans, whites, Latinos, and Asian Americans who divorced in each decade from 1970 to 2010
4. To show the process by which a legal immigrant can become a citizen
5. To show where divorce in the United States occurs at an average rate, at a below-average rate, and at an above-average rate

A GUIDE TO RESPONDING TO TEXT

Active reading is the first step in understanding a text, but equally important is responding. Once you respond to material, you understand it better.

When an instructor assigns a reading, some form of response is always expected. You might be expected to participate in a class discussion, summarize the information as part of an essay exam, or research the topic further and report your findings. One type of response that instructors assign is a **response paper**, which requires you to read an essay, analyze it, and write about some aspect of it. For some assignments, your instructor may suggest a particular direction for the paper. At other times, you decide how to respond to the essay.

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Before beginning any response paper, make sure you understand the assignment. If you are uncertain of what your instructor expects, be sure to ask. You may also want to check with other students to find out how they are approaching the assignment. If your instructor does not mention length requirements, ask how long the paper should be.

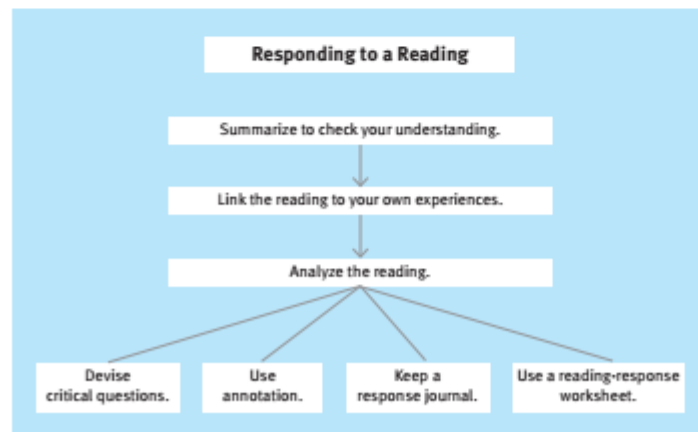
In a response paper, you may include a brief summary as part of your introduction (see the next section); but you should concentrate on interpreting and evaluating what you have read. Do not attempt to discuss all of your reactions, however. Instead, choose one key idea, one question the essay raises, or one issue it explores.

For example, suppose your instructor asks you to read an article titled "Advertising: A Form of Institutional Lying" that tries to show that advertisements deceive consumers by presenting half-truths, distortions, and misinformation. Your instructor asks you to write a two-page paper about the essay but gives you no other directions. In writing this response paper, you might take one of the following approaches:

- Discuss how you were once deceived by an advertisement, as a means of confirming the author's main points.
- Evaluate the evidence and examples the author provides to support his claim; determine whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient.
- Discuss the causes or effects of deception in advertising that the author overlooks (you might need to consult other sources to take this approach).
- Evaluate the assumptions the author makes about advertising or consumers.

For an assignment like this one or for any response paper, how do you decide on an issue to write about? How do you come up with ideas about a reading? This guide will help you. It presents a step-by-step process for discovering ideas for response papers, as shown in Figure 4.3. Notice that it begins with summary writing to check and clarify

FIGURE 4.3 Active Response to a Reading



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your understanding, moves to connecting the ideas to your own experiences, and then offers numerous strategies for analyzing the reading. Each of these steps is discussed below within the context of a reading assignment.

Summarize to Check Your Understanding

A **summary** is a brief statement of major points, and summarizing is something that we all practice every day. When a friend asks, “What was the movie about?” we reply with a summary of the plot. A summary presents only the main ideas, not details. Your summary of a movie would not include specific scenes or dialogue, for example. When summarizing print text, a summary is less than one-fifth of the original.

Summarizing is an excellent way to check whether you have understood what you have read. If you have difficulty writing a summary, you probably do not understand what is important in the reading. Summarizing is an excellent way to improve your retention of the material and makes it easier for you to keep track of a writer’s important ideas. Summaries can be reviewed easily and quickly in preparation for a class discussion or exam.

Many students keep a journal in which they write summaries of essays as well as other responses to what they read. Journal writing is a good way to generate and record ideas about an essay, and your journal entries can serve as useful sources of ideas for writing papers.

To write an effective and useful summary, use the following seven guidelines:

1. **Read the entire essay before attempting to write anything.**
2. **Highlight or annotate as you read.** These markings will help you pick out what is important to include in your summary.
3. **Write your summary as you reread the essay.**
4. **Write an opening sentence that states in your own words the author’s thesis—the most important idea the entire essay explains.**
5. **Include the author’s most important supporting ideas.** Use either highlighted topic sentences or marginal summary notes as a guide for knowing what to in-

For more on journal writing, see Chapter 2, p. 32.

CONVERTING MARGINAL NOTES TO SUMMARY SENTENCES

Marginal Note	Summary Sentence
(para. 2) politeness and rudeness together	People make conscious efforts to be polite but also are unconsciously thoughtless and rude.
(para. 4) political correctness in excess	Political correctness has gone overboard.
(para. 12) being out of touch with real survival causes rudeness	Civilization has evolved to the point where we no longer have to focus on the basics of survival, which causes us to act selfishly while pretending to be civil.
(para. 14) people have stopped paying attention	Unintentional distraction and self-absorption are the causes of much rudeness.

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clude. Marginal summary notes briefly state the content of each paragraph. If you write notes similar to those on pages 54–55, you can easily convert them into sentences for your summary. Following is a list of the marginal notes written for the essay “American Jerk,” which appeared in Chapter 3 (p. 54). Also shown are sentences that have been generated from the notes, which then become part of the sample summary paragraph below.

6. **Present the ideas in the order in which they appear in the original source.** Be sure to use transitions (connecting words) as you move from one supporting idea to another.
7. **Reread your summary to determine if it contains sufficient information.** Would your summary be understandable and meaningful to someone who has not read the essay? If not, revise it to include additional information.

Here is a sample summary for the essay “American Jerk.” It was written by a student using the preceding seven steps.

Although people believe they are acting politely, rudeness and incivility are on the rise. We overdo political correctness, yet we behave rudely to everyone around us. Media, entertainment, and cell-phone usage illustrate improper behavior and support our rudeness. The author believes that because our civilization has evolved to the point that we are no longer concerned with basic survival, we can act selfishly while pretending to be civil. The author also contends that people are simply distracted and self-absorbed but not intentionally rude. The bottom line is that people must choose their own behavior and decide how they will act.

The writer expresses Schwartz's thesis in her own words.

The order of ideas parallels the order in Schwartz's essay.

The writer continues to use her own words—not those of Schwartz.

Exercise 4.15

Write a summary of the section “Avoiding Misconceptions” in Chapter 3 (pp. 47–48).

Link the Reading to Your Own Experiences

One way to start ideas flowing for a response paper is to think about how the reading relates to your own experiences. This builds a bridge between you and the author and between your ideas and the author's.

- **Begin by looking for useful information in the essay that you could apply or relate to other real-life situations.** Think of familiar situations or examples that illustrate the subject. For example, for “American Jerk,” which considers incivility in society in general, you might write a journal entry about incivility among college students.
- **Try to think beyond the reading itself.** Recall other material you have read and events you have experienced that are related to the reading. In thinking about “American Jerk,” for example, you might recall an article about cell-phone use for texting.

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- **Use the key-word response method for generating ideas.** Choose one or more key words that describe your initial response, such as *angered, amused, surprised, confused, annoyed, curious, or shocked*. For example, fill in the following blank with key words describing your response to “American Jerk.”

“After reading the essay, I felt _____.”

The key-word response you just wrote will serve as a point of departure for further thinking. Start by explaining your response; then write down ideas as they come to you, trying to approach the reading from many different perspectives. Here is the result of one student’s key-word response to “American Jerk.”

After reading “American Jerk,” I felt annoyed and insulted. I agree that the world has changed because of cell phones, but I don’t think that these changes have made people ruder. Each generation creates its own rules and values, and the cell-phone generation is doing that. If media and entertainment were horrible and insulting, then people wouldn’t watch them. Humans are evolving, and our expectations have to evolve with technology. Some people do act like they are polite when they actually do rude things all the time. Behavior comes from people. People have to change it.

For more on freewriting, see Chapter 5, pp. 110–11.

Possible Topic #1: how generations create their own values

Possible Topic #2: how behavior changes with changes in technology

Exercise 4.16

Review the three preceding techniques for linking a reading to your own experiences. Choose one of those techniques, and use it on the topic of rudeness in public life.

Analyze the Reading

Analyzing, like summarizing, is a skill we use every day. After you see a movie, you ask a friend, “So what did you think of it?” Your friend may praise the plot, criticize the photography, or comment on the believability of the characters. When you analyze a reading, then, you comment on any aspect of the essay—such as the author’s fairness or accuracy, his or her method of presentation, the quality of the supporting evidence provided, or the intended audience. To discover ideas for analysis, you could devise critical questions, use annotation, keep a response journal, and use a reading-response worksheet.

Devise Critical Questions

Asking critical questions and then answering them is a useful method for analysis and for discovering ideas for a response paper. Here are three sample questions and the answers that one student wrote in response to them after reading the essay “American Jerk.”

Can we turn the tide and find a way to return to a polite society?

Possible topic: how to teach politeness and effective methods

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I think that adults emphasize politeness less than in the past. Parents and teachers hardly try to instill it in children. People no longer have to learn etiquette. To improve manners would require us to rethink how we raise and educate children.

Is technology causing people to be less civil, or is it just an excuse?

Technology has changed the way that people communicate with each other. Technology makes it easier to have less personal contact with others, but it does not encourage rudeness. It's possible to use technology and still be civil to other people.

Possible topic: the effect of technology on human behavior

Why are people more distracted and thoughtless now than they used to be?

People have probably always been distracted and thoughtless, but today so many things clamor for our attention that it is easier than ever to be distracted. We are focused less on the people around us and more on the electronics we use throughout the day.

Possible topic: the effect of distractions on the ways that people interact with each other

Essay in Progress 1

Write a list of critical questions about the reading "American Jerk" on page 50 or another essay assigned by your instructor. Use *why*, *how*, and *what* questions to generate ideas about the reading.

Use Annotation

In the Guide to Active Reading in Chapter 3 (p. 48), you learned to annotate as you read. Annotation can also be used to analyze and respond to a reading when you read it for the second time and are preparing to write about it. As you read an essay for the second time, record additional reactions that occur to you. Some students prefer to use a different color of ink to record their second set of annotations. Refer to the sample student annotation shown on p. 56.

Essay in Progress 2

Reread "American Jerk" or the other assigned essay, this time adding annotations that record your reactions to and questions about the essay as you read.

Keep a Response Journal

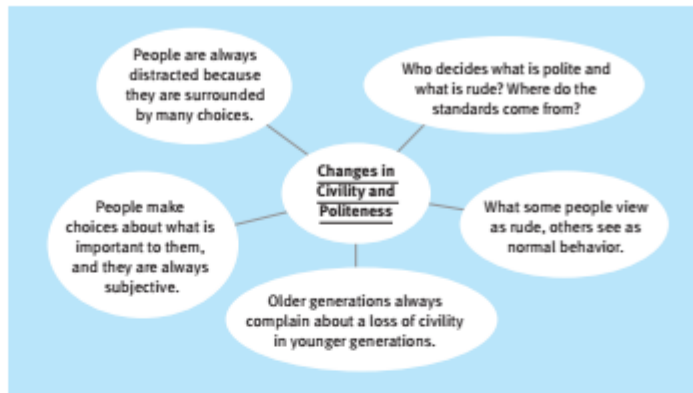
A response journal is a section of your writing journal (see Chapter 2, p. 32) in which you record your reactions to and questions about readings. Experiment with these two ways to organize a response journal until you discover the one that works best for you.

The Open-Page Format

On a blank page, write, outline, draw, or create a diagram to express your reactions to an essay. Because the open-page format encourages you to let your ideas flow freely, it may work well for creative and spatial learners. Figure 4.4 shows one student's open-page response journal entry for "American Jerk." This entry suggests several possible topics to write about—identifying generational differences in defining civility, determining standards for civility, and recognizing subjectivity in evaluating behavior.

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FIGURE 4.4 Sample Open-Page Journal Format



The Two-Column Format

Divide several pages of your journal into two vertical columns. If you journal on a computer, you can insert a table with two columns. Label the left side “Quotations” and the right side “Responses.” Under “Quotations,” jot down five to ten quotations from the text. Choose remarks that seem important—that state an opinion, summarize a viewpoint, and so forth. In the right column, next to each quotation, write your response to the quotation. You might explain it, disagree with or question it, relate it to other information in the reading or in another reading, or tie it to your own experiences. The two-column format forces you to think actively about an essay while you question what you have read and draw connections. Because it provides more structure than the open-page format, students who tend to be pragmatic or concrete learners may find it effective.

Figure 4.5 follows the two-column format. In this entry, the writer has uncovered several possible topics—types or degrees of rudeness, the meaning of “socioeconomically disadvantaged,” and self-centered behavior.

You may find it useful to paraphrase the quotation before writing your response. Paraphrasing forces you to think about the meaning of the quotation, and ideas for writing may come to mind as a result. To use paraphrasing, add a “Paraphrases” column to your journal between the “Quotations” column and the “Responses” column.

For more on paraphrasing, see Chapter 21, pp. 671–12.

Essay in Progress 3

For “American Jerk” or another essay, write a response in your journal using the open-page format or the two-column format.

Use a Reading-Response Worksheet

An easy way to record all of your ideas about a reading in one place is to use a reading-response worksheet. The worksheet guides your response while directing your thinking. A blank worksheet is shown in Figure 4.6 on page 94. Notice that it includes space for

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FIGURE 4.5 Sample Two-Column Journal Format

Quotations	Responses
"A moment when a roomful of even relatively evolved people will react with discomfort to an off-color joke about people of color—and when those same people have no compunction whatsoever about loudly ignoring one another as they blather into their cell phones."	This statement implies that racial jokes and talking on your cell phone are somehow on the same level of rudeness.
"No one is 'poor,' but many are 'socioeconomically disadvantaged.'"	There is a distinction between "poor" and "socioeconomically disadvantaged," and it's an important one. The first term has to do with money, but the second one also has to do with culture and opportunities.
"The second is that sunlight contains tiny spores that lodge in the cerebellum, making the infected believe they are the center of the universe."	This is a joke, but the author is saying that everyone sees themselves as important; this is a bad thing; and schools, churches, and parents teach this message to children to build self-esteem.

recording your first impressions, a summary, connections to your own experiences, ideas for analysis, and additional sources.

Using Your Learning Style

If you are a *verbal* or *social* learner, you probably find reading a comfortable and convenient way to obtain information. If you are a *spatial* learner, though, you may prefer graphic images (like those in videos and films) to printed text. Regardless of your learning style, most of your assignments will be in print form. Therefore, you need to use your learning style in a way that enhances your reading and writing. The following guidelines for active reading and response are tailored to the various learning styles:

Learning Style Options

- If you are a *spatial* learner, create mental pictures of people and places. For example, while reading the essay "American Jerk," on p. 54, you might create a mental image of a person behaving rudely. In addition, use graphic organizers and diagrams to organize the ideas in an essay. As you annotate, use symbols to connect the ideas within and between paragraphs (for example, see the symbols listed for the reading-response journal on p. 34).
- If you are a *social* learner, discuss a reading assignment with a classmate both before and after reading. Preview the essay together, sharing ideas about the topic. After reading the essay, discuss your reactions to it. In both instances, use the Guide to Active Reading in Chapter 3 (p. 48) and the Guide to Responding to Text in this chapter (p. 86) to get started.
- If you are an *abstract* learner, a *creative* learner, or both, you may overlook details and instead focus on the "big ideas" and overall message of a reading. Be sure to highlight important points and to concentrate on facts and supporting details.

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FIGURE 4.6 Sample Reading-Response Worksheet

READING-RESPONSE WORKSHEET

TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: _____

SUMMARY: _____

CONNECTIONS TO YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES: _____

ANALYSIS (issue, aspect, feature, problem)

1. _____

2. _____

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OR VISUALS (if needed)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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- If you are a *concrete* learner, a *pragmatic* learner, or both, you may like to focus on details instead of seeing how ideas fit together and contribute to an author's overall message. Use graphic organizers to help you create a larger picture. Try to make the essay as "real" as possible; visualize events occurring or the author writing. You might visualize yourself interviewing the author, alone or with a panel of classmates.
- If you are an *emotional* learner, you may focus on your feelings about people or events in the essay and overlook the way an author uses them to convey an overall message. Keep this question in mind: How does the author use these people or events to get his or her message across?
- If you are a *rational* learner, you may see how logical or clear the presentation of ideas is and overlook more subtle shades of meaning. Be sure to annotate, which will draw out your personal reactions to a piece of writing.

Essay in Progress 4

Discuss "American Jerk" with a classmate. Make notes as you discuss. If you chose another essay, pair up with a classmate who also chose that essay, or ask your classmate to read the essay you have chosen.

Essay in Progress 5

Write a two- to four-page paper in response to "American Jerk" or the essay you have chosen. Use the following steps to shape the ideas you generated in Essays in Progress 1 to 4:

1. Reread the writing you did in response to the reading. Look for ideas that seem worthwhile and important enough to become the basis of your essay.
2. Look for related ideas. Try to find ideas that fit together to produce a viewpoint or position toward the reading.
3. Do not attempt to cover all your ideas. Your essay should not analyze every aspect of the essay. Instead, you should focus on one feature or aspect.
4. Write a sentence that states your central point. This sentence will become your thesis statement. It should state what your essay will assert or explain.
5. Collect ideas and evidence from the reading to support your thesis. Your thesis should be backed up by specifics in the reading.
6. Organize your ideas into essay form. Your paper should have a title, introduction, body, and conclusion.
7. Revise your essay. Be sure that you have explained your ideas clearly and have provided support from the reading for each one.
8. Proofread for accuracy and correctness. Use the Suggestions for Proofreading in Chapter 10 (pp. 221–22).

For more on thesis statements, see Chapter 6. For more on organizing your ideas, see Chapter 7. To help you revise your essay, see Chapter 9. For more on editing and proofreading, see Chapter 10.

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How to Approach the Student Essays in This Book

Use the following suggestions when reading student essays:

- **Read an essay several times.** During your first reading, concentrate on the writer's message. Then read the essay again as many times as necessary to analyze its writing features. For example, first notice how the writer supported the thesis statement, and then look at the language used to create a particular impression.
- **Read with a pen or marker in hand.** As you discover writing techniques that are emphasized in the chapter, mark or annotate them.
- **Focus on characteristics.** Each chapter in Part 3 presents the characteristics of a particular method of organization. Consider how the student essay demonstrates some or all of that method's characteristics.
- **Focus on techniques.** Each chapter in Part 3 offers specific techniques and suggestions for writing a particular type of essay. Review these techniques and observe how the writer applied them.
- **Focus on what is new and different.** Ask yourself the following questions as you read: What is the writer doing that you haven't seen before? What catches your attention? What works particularly well? What techniques might be fun to try? What techniques would be challenging to try? For example, if a writer begins his or her essay with a striking statistic, consider whether you could use a striking statistic to begin your essay.
- **Use student essays to train your critical eye.** Although student essays are reasonably good models, they are not perfect. Look for ways the essays can be improved. Once you can see ways to improve someone else's essay, you will be better equipped to analyze and improve your own writing.
- **Use graphic organizers to grasp the essay's structure.** In Part 3, a graphic organizer is presented for each method of organization. Compare the essay to the graphic organizer, noticing how the essay contains each element.

Students Write

Karen Vaccaro wrote the following essay in response to "American Jerk." As you read, notice how Vaccaro analyzes Schwartz's points about civility and the lack of it in our society.

READING

Introduction: Identifies the article Vaccaro is responding to

In her thesis statement Vaccaro states how her ideas differ from those of Schwartz.

Vaccaro agrees with Schwartz.

"American Jerk"? How Rude! (but True)

In his article "American Jerk," Todd Schwartz claims that Americans today are both the most 1
and the least civil we have ever been. Although the painful truth in these observations is a bit hard
to take, Schwartz eases the reality by providing a great deal of humorous relief. **Schwartz's claim**
is an apt one, and most of his observations about our current culture are accurate, but some of his
observations and accusations are broad generalizations that don't always hold true.

"We have never been more concerned about the feelings of minority groups, the disabled, 2
and the disadvantaged," Schwartz writes in paragraph 3, and he is right. We have become a
culture obsessed with being PC (politically correct). I often carefully choose and often second-
guess the words I use to describe anyone of a different race or physical or mental ability, for

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fear of offending anyone. And yet many people I encounter seem hardly concerned about offending me. Schwartz is right that “we have never been less concerned about the feelings of anyone with whom we share the road, the Internet, or the movie theater” (para. 3). Cyclists seem to have taken over city streets and even shout insults at me when I am walking in a crosswalk (and they are breaking the law by ignoring a red light). Despite many methods used to discourage theatergoers from using their cell phones, cell phones ring during films, concerts, and plays. In fact, last week I was at a live theater performance, and in the middle of an important scene, a cell phone rang in the audience—twice.

Vaccaro offers examples of lack of concern.

In another example of how (overly) civil we’ve become, Schwartz writes, “Schools won’t let teachers use red pens to correct papers because . . . self-esteem might be bruised” (para. 4). This reminded me of the teaching internship I did while studying abroad in China one semester. I taught an English writing course to Chinese high school students. One day I was marking up the students’ papers with a red pen (as I thought teachers were supposed to do). Another American teacher said, “I thought teachers weren’t supposed to mark students’ papers with red pens anymore.” I asked if red was offensive to Chinese students. “No,” she answered. “Some of my teachers back home in America said it’s because red is a harsh color that really stands out from the black and white.” “Well, yes, I thought that was the point,” I said. “But it can make some students feel bad,” she responded. “That’s the silliest thing I’ve ever heard,” I said as I went back to marking my students’ papers with the red pen. Have we become so “civil” that we’re afraid to teach students? Don’t young men and women come to class expecting to learn something, knowing that at some point they will need to be corrected to see their mistakes so that they can truly learn?

Vaccaro connects Schwartz’s ideas to her own experience and affirms his ideas.

Then there are the less civil aspects of our culture, as Schwartz so accurately points out. We Americans have become obsessed with reality television shows that often take advantage of the misfortune and embarrassment of others. In addition, “giant assault vehicles” (para. 7) dwarf other cars on the road, guzzle gas, often take up more than one parking space, and seem unnecessary on city streets in a time of environmental awareness and concern. Furthermore, we are so interested in our technological gadgets that we ignore real human-to-human interactions. “We’re all talking to someone all the time,” Schwartz writes, “but it’s ever more rarely to the people we are actually with” (para. 8). I have noticed that my boyfriend often whips out his new iPhone. Even when we’re walking and talking, catching up after days of not seeing one another, he’s playing a new game, downloading a new app, or chatting with his friends. I myself can be guilty of this rude behavior. Sometimes I am spending time with one friend but will be texting another friend. I know it’s rude, but I do it anyway (usually because the friend I’m with is doing the same thing and therefore it seems okay). We no longer realize how rude it is to divide our attention between two sources instead of giving our friend or loved one our full, undivided attention.

Vaccaro identifies another of Schwartz’s points that she agrees with and admits that she is guilty of it as well.

Where I must disagree with Schwartz, though, is his sweeping, unfounded statement that we are now living in “what must certainly be the rudest era in history” (para. 5). Really? Are we ruder

Vaccaro moves to points with which she disagrees.

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than people who enslaved others and denied them any and all rights, including the right to be treated like human beings and not animals? Are people who refuse to “shut their inane traps” (para. 7) ruder than people in the time of segregation? It might be easy to convince ourselves that the present must be the rudest time in our history, since it is freshest in our minds, and we know it very well. But if Schwartz took time to flesh out his observations and accusations with concrete examples, he might rethink such a generalization.

Conclusion: Vaccaro points out the value of Schwartz's article.

Even if it doesn't fix the problems it calls attention to, Schwartz's entertaining and witty article forces us to stop and think about how contemporary American culture straddles the line between civility and rudeness. Many of his examples illustrate the hypocrisy of our behaviors and ways of thinking. Ultimately, Schwartz is correct in his claim that “we have arrived at simultaneously the most and least civil moment in U.S. history” (para. 2). I doubt, though, that Neanderthals—with their barbaric weapons and primitive hunting instincts—“were probably nicer to each other than we are” (para. 6).

Analyzing the Writer's Technique

1. Express Vaccaro's thesis (central point) in your own words.
2. What kinds of information does Vaccaro include to support her thesis?
3. Where would additional examples help Vaccaro support her thesis?

Reacting to the Reading

1. Vaccaro admits to texting one friend while visiting with another. Are you also guilty of acts of incivility? If so, describe one.
2. What steps or actions could be taken to build Americans' awareness of their lack of civility?
3. Do you agree or disagree that our culture is obsessed with political correctness? Give examples to support your answer.
4. Write a journal entry describing an act of incivility that you have observed or experienced that particularly disturbed or annoyed you.