

Notebook for

Successful College Writing

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PART 1 Academic Quick Start

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CHAPTER 2

Writing in College

WRITING QUICK START

The photographs on the opposite page show several situations in which college students use writing. Brainstorm a list of other situations in which you use writing, such as on-the-job writing and personal writing. What did your list reveal about the importance of writing?

Most, if not all, college classes require some form of writing—exams, essays, journals, reports, and so forth. Strong writing skills are essential to college success, so the time and effort you spend in improving your writing skills are certainly worthwhile.

The main purpose of this chapter—and of this entire book—is to help you succeed in your writing class as well as in other classes that involve writing. In this chapter, you will learn what is expected of you as a college writer. You will learn about the importance of improving your writing skills and discover useful strategies for doing well in your writing class. This chapter will also help you learn and write more effectively by analyzing your learning style.

Academic Writing: What to Expect

In college you will probably do more writing than you did at previous educational levels. You will be expected to write in your writing class and in most other classes as well. Instructors consider writing a means of learning—not just a means of testing and evaluating what students have already learned. The following section explains what you can expect about writing in college.

Expect Your Writing to Move from More Personal to Less Personal

Much of your writing up to now may have been about yourself and your experiences. In college you can expect to write less about yourself and more about ideas. You will still often be asked to share your personal perspective when expressing ideas. For example, in a communications class you might write a film review. In other cases you will be writing to inform—to present information about a subject in an objective, nonpersonal way. For example, in a sociology class you might write an essay explaining what the 1.5 generation is. Or you may be writing to persuade—to convince your readers to think or act a certain way. For example, you might write an essay for your criminal justice class arguing that the penalties for drunk driving should be increased or a proposal to convince college officials that more security is needed on campus. In doing so, you might draw on your personal knowledge or experience, but you would need to depend mostly on objective evidence to persuade your readers. In general, therefore, you will find that in college much less writing is done in the first person (*I, me*) and much more is done in the third person (*it, they, he, she*). When given a writing assignment, make sure it is clear how much of your personal experience and personal opinion, if any, is appropriate for the assignment.

Expect Your Writing to Take Different Forms

In college you will write much more than essays and exam answers. Depending on your field of study, you may also be required to write in a variety of specialized *genres*, such as logs, case reports, abstracts, patient observation charts, and diagnostic evaluations. Each genre has its own set of conventions and expectations. A lab report is a good example. It has a specific purpose (to report the results of a laboratory experiment), follows a specific format (Introduction, Materials and Methods, Observation), has an expected style of writing (brief, factual, and concise), and uses technical and specialized language (names of instruments, names of chemicals, names of procedures).

As you encounter new genres, it is helpful to read samples written in that form. Be sure to ask questions so you understand exactly what your instructor expects.

Expect to Use the Language of the Discipline

Each academic discipline has its own language—words and phrases that are used only or primarily in that discipline. The words *photosynthesis* and *homeostasis*, for example, are used primarily in biology-related fields, and the words *allegory*, *symbolism*, and *mythology* are used in literary fields. When you write in a particular discipline, you are expected to use the language of that discipline. In doing so, the first step is to learn the language. See Chapter 3 for suggestions on learning vocabulary. When you write a paper, concentrate first on expressing your ideas, but as you revise, check to be sure you have used the appropriate language of the discipline.

Expect to Use Standard American English

Although nonstandard English (slang, incorrect grammar, misspellings) may be appropriate in some settings (such as informal conversation or text messages and emails to friends), you are expected to use standard, correct American English for academic writing. As you revise and proofread your writing, concentrate on correctness. Refer to a grammar handbook or consult an online writing resource that offers help with particular problems. You can also refer to Chapter 10 of this book (for help with sentence-level problems) and—unless you are using the Brief Edition—the handbook at the back of the book.

Expect to Use and Document Scholarly Sources

Although you have probably written research papers in high school, more college writing assignments will require you to use library or Internet sources to acquire needed information or to support your own ideas. Depending on the assignment, you will need to summarize, paraphrase (express in your own words), and quote the sources you use.

In college, writers are often required to use scholarly sources rather than popular sources such as newsstand magazines and personal Web sites. Scholarly sources are those written by experts in the field and published by professional organizations in the field. In many cases popular sources may not be appropriate because they may not offer expert, trustworthy opinion. In other cases they may not be sufficient: They may not offer enough detail or provide enough background information, for example. Chapters 21 and 22 of this book offer help in locating and using scholarly sources. Be sure to consult your reference librarian if you need additional help.

It is important in college writing to give credit to all sources that you use in your writing. This includes language that you quote and information that you borrow and express in your own words. Chapter 23 of this book will show you how to correctly document the sources you use.

Expect to Write and Research Online

Many college writing assignments involve online skills. Most instructors expect you to write your assignments, essays, and research papers on a computer. (If you are new to using a computer for writing, your college writing lab or computer lab may offer resources and advice to help you get started.) Some instructors may ask you to work online with a classmate on a piece of writing. You may also be asked to write about

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articles and essays that you find online, and some research paper or class discussion topics may require online research.

Expect to Collaborate with Classmates

More often than in high school, college instructors expect student writers to collaborate, or work together, on a piece of writing. Collaboration is a form of learning about a subject as well as a means of improving your writing by learning from others. In an environmental studies class, for example, you may be asked to work with classmates on a report on a local air-quality problem. Because collaboration on writing projects is expected in a wide variety of career fields, many instructors consciously build collaborative activities into their courses. To learn to collaborate successfully, refer to Chapter 9, p. 188.

Why Strive to Improve Your Writing Skills?

Most college students ask themselves the following two questions:

- How can I improve my grades?
- How can I improve my chances of getting a good job?

The answer to both questions is the same: Improve your writing, reading, and thinking skills. The following sections explain how these skills, especially writing, are essential to your success in college and on the job.

Writing Skills Help You Succeed in College and Career

College courses such as psychology, biology, and political science demand that you read articles, essays, reports, and textbooks and then react to and write about what you have read. In many courses, you demonstrate what you have learned by writing exams, reports, and papers.

Writing is important on the job, as well. In most jobs, workers need to communicate effectively with supervisors, coworkers, patients, clients, and customers. You can expect to write plenty of letters, email messages, memos, and reports. A study performed by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute found that employers consistently want the “total package” in recent college graduates. Employers want job candidates who have not only the technical knowledge to work but also strong oral and written communication skills.*

Because your writing course offers both immediate and long-range benefits, it is one of the most important college courses you will ever take. You will learn how to express your ideas clearly, structure convincing arguments, prepare research papers, and write essay exams. Your writing course will also help you improve your reading and thinking skills. As you read, respond to, and write about the readings, you will learn how to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate ideas.

* Betsy Stevens, “What Communication Skills Do Employers Want? Silicon Valley Recruiters Respond,” *Journal of Employment Counseling* 42 (March 2005): 2–9.

Writing Helps You Learn and Remember Things

Taking notes, outlining, summarizing, or annotating focuses your attention on the course material and gets you thinking about the subject matter as you connect and define ideas. In addition, writing facilitates learning by engaging two senses at once. Whereas you take in information visually by reading or aurally by listening, writing engages your sense of touch as you put your pen to paper or your fingers on a keyboard. In general, the more senses you use in a learning task, the more easily learning occurs and the more you remember about the task later on. You can often remember something more easily if you write it down.

Writing Helps You Think More Clearly

Writing forces you to think through a task. Getting your ideas down on paper or on a computer screen helps you evaluate them. Writing, then, is a means of sorting ideas, exploring relationships, weighing alternatives, and clarifying values.

Writing Helps You Solve Problems

When you solve problems, you identify possible actions that may change undesirable situations (your car won't start) to desirable ones (your car starts). Writing makes problem solving easier by helping you define the problem. By describing the problem in writing, you can often see new aspects of it.

One student, for example, had a father-in-law who seemed hostile and uncooperative. The student described her problem in a letter to a friend: "He looks at me as if I'm going to take his son to the end of the earth and never bring him back." When she reread this statement, the student realized that her father-in-law might resent her because he was afraid of losing contact with his son. She began to think of ways to reassure her father-in-law and strengthen their relationship. Writing about the problem helped the student define it and discover ways to solve it. Similarly, writing can help you think through confusing situations and make difficult decisions.

Developing Strategies for Writing

Establishing a study area, planning your time, and using academic services such as the writing center are all strategies that will help you succeed in your courses. Other strategies will also make a big difference in your writing—starting with a positive attitude, keeping a journal, and planning to get the most out of conferences with your writing instructor.

Start with a Positive Attitude

You have the potential and ability to be a successful writer. To approach your writing course positively and to get the most out of it, use the following suggestions:

1. **Think of writing as a process.** Writing is not a single act of getting words down on paper. Instead, it is a series of steps—planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing and proofreading. In addition, most writers go back and forth among these steps. Chapters 5 to 10 cover these steps of the writing process.

2. **Be patient.** Writing is a skill that improves gradually. Don't expect to see dramatic differences in your writing immediately. As you draft and revise your essays, your writing will improve in small ways that build on one another.
3. **Expect writing to take time, often more time than you planned.** Realize, too, that on some days writing will be easier than on other days.
4. **Focus on learning.** When you are given a writing assignment, ask, "What can I learn from this?" As you learn more about your own writing process, write down your observations (see the section on journal writing on p. 32).
5. **Use the support and guidance available to you.** Your instructor, your classmates, and this book can all help you become a better writer. In Parts 3 and 4 of the text, Guided Writing Assignments will lead you, step by step, through each chapter assignment. You will find tips, advice, and alternative ways of approaching the assignment.
6. **Look for ideas in the readings.** The essays in this book have been chosen to spark your interest and to touch on current issues. Think of every assigned reading as an opportunity to learn about a topic that you might not otherwise have the time to read or think about. Chapter 3 provides instructions on active reading, and Chapter 4 provides strategies for reading critically and responding to text and visuals. Together, they will help you get the most out of your reading assignments.
7. **Attend all classes.** Writing is a skill, not a set of facts you can read about in a book; it is best learned through interactions with your instructor and classmates.

FIGURE 2.1 Excerpted Sample Syllabus for a College Writing Course

I. General Information		
<i>Course Title:</i> English Composition I	<i>Course Number:</i> ENG 161	
<i>Prerequisite:</i> English 070 or placement test	<i>Semester:</i> Fall	
<i>Instructor:</i> John Gillam	<i>Phone:</i> (724) 555-7890	
<i>Email:</i> gillam@indiana.edu	<i>Office Hours</i>	
A good way to contact your instructor	& <i>Location:</i> MWF 3–5	Important:
	English Department offices in Ryan Hall	Be sure to use them.
II. Text		
McWhorter, Kathleen T. <i>Successful College Writing</i> , 5th Edition. New York: Bedford, 2012.		
III. General Course Objectives		
	1. The student will learn to organize his or her thoughts into a meaningful written work.	Planning and organizing are expected.
Grammar is important.	2. The student will easily recognize grammar mistakes.	
	3. The student will be familiar with different types of writing.	
	4. The student will be able to use several different writing styles.	
What you will be graded on	IV. Specific Course Objectives	
	1. The student will write papers using the following strategies: description, illustration, process analysis, comparison and contrast, classification and division, and cause and effect.	Learn these strategies.
Correctness counts: Allow time for proofreading.	2. The student will edit and proofread for errors in grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling.	

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Read assignments carefully. 3. The student will be tested on reading comprehension.
 Learn about documentation. 4. The student will write a research paper using appropriate documentation.
 5. The student will critically analyze readings that use specific writing strategies.
 6. The student will use the Internet as a tool for research.

V. Classroom Procedures

Attendance is essential. Absences: The student is responsible for attendance. Attendance affects performance, and all students are expected to take part in class discussions and peer-review editing sessions. Each student is expected to be present and is responsible for class notes and assignments. If absent, the student is responsible for arranging an appointment with the instructor to discuss the notes and assignments missed.

Format for papers: Papers must be typed double-spaced using a 12-point font. Be sure to keep a copy of each assignment for yourself. Keep a copy of assignments.

VI. Disability Statement

If you need to have special arrangements made due to a physical or learning disability, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. (Disclosure of the type of disability is not required.) Don't hesitate to ask for needed services.

VII. Grading

All papers must be turned in on the due date. Late papers will be lowered one letter grade. No papers will be accepted after the last day of class. If you do not understand the grade assigned to a paper, see me immediately. You are encouraged to save all papers in a folder to enable you to keep track of progress and compute your own grade. Meeting deadlines is essential.
 The instructor encourages questions.

VIII. Tentative Schedule

Week of Sept. 5:	Course Introduction Ch. 1 (Succeeding in College) Ch. 2 (Writing in College)	} Read these chapters the first week. Your instructor may not remind you of reading assignments, so check the syllabus weekly.
Week of Sept. 12:	Writing Assessments Ch. 3 (Reading in College) Ch. 4 (Responding Critically to Text and Images) Ch. 5 (Prewriting)	
Week of Sept. 19:	Ch. 7 (Drafting an Essay) Ch. 11 (Narration) Draft of Essay #1 due	} Assignment due dates
Week of Sept. 26:	Ch. 13 (Illustration) Draft of Essay #2 due	

Use Your Course Syllabus

The syllabus is the most important document you will receive in your first week of class. Some instructors place the syllabus on the course's Web site as well. A syllabus usually describes how the course operates. It includes information on the required texts, attendance policy, grading system, course objectives, weekly assignments or readings, due dates of papers, and dates of exams. Think of a syllabus as a course guide or course planner that directs you through your writing class. Examine the accompanying excerpt from a sample syllabus illustrating how an instructor might organize a writing course.

A course syllabus can be prepared in various styles. Some instructors prefer to use a weekly format for a syllabus and then give specific assignments in class. The sample syllabus in Figure 2.1 is formatted this way. Some instructors avoid dates by using a

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general outline of assignments and requirements and then craft the assignment schedule as the class masters each topic. Still other instructors prefer a highly structured syllabus that lists daily assignments as well as required readings, long-term writing assignments, and group work. Whatever format the syllabus takes, read it carefully at the beginning of the course, and check it regularly so that you are prepared for class. Mark all deadlines on your calendar. Ask your instructor any questions you may have about the syllabus, course structure, deadlines, and his or her expectations about course objectives. Note his or her answers on your syllabus or in your course notebook.

Pay particular attention to the course objectives section of the syllabus, where your instructor states what he or she expects you to learn in the course. Objectives also provide clues about what the instructor feels is important and how he or she views the subject matter. Since the course objectives state what you are expected to learn, papers and exams will measure how well you have met these objectives.

Make a copy of each course syllabus. Keep one syllabus in the front of your notebook for easy reference during class or while you are studying. Keep another syllabus in a file folder at home in case you lose your notebook on campus.

Exercise 2.1 Getting the Most from Your Syllabus

Review the syllabus that your writing class instructor distributed. Write a paragraph describing your expectations and concerns about your writing course based on the syllabus. Be sure to include information on the questions listed below. If the syllabus does not contain the information, consult your college catalog for general policies and your instructor for specific questions.

1. What are you expected to learn in the course?
2. What kinds of essays will you write?
3. What are the grading and attendance policies?
4. Is class participation expected and required? Is it part of your grade?
5. Is research required? Is Internet use required or expected?

Use the Right Writing Tools

How often do you need to look up a word in a dictionary? Have you ever used an online dictionary? (If not, visit www.m-w.com.) Do you prefer using a hard-bound or an online dictionary? Each has its advantages, and which dictionary you use depends on your purpose and your personal preferences.

To be successful in college, you will need the right learning tools. Your textbooks are essential, but you will also need quick access to other sources of information. Be sure you have each of the following handy in your writing and study area:

- The URL of an online dictionary (such as www.merriam-webster.com for the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, shown on the next page)
- A reliable hard-bound collegiate dictionary, such as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* or *Webster's New World Dictionary*
- A paper-bound pocket dictionary to carry to class or to the library
- A thesaurus (dictionary of synonyms), such as *Roger's Thesaurus*. You may have a thesaurus as part of your word-processing program.

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- The URLs of Internet search engines. See Chapter 22, pages 604–5, for suggestions.
- The URL of an online reference desk, such as www.refdesk.com, for factual information
- CDs or USBs for saving and transporting your work
- Classmates' and instructors' email addresses
- Specialized accessories your classes may require, such as a graphing calculator or a foreign language dictionary

Exercise 2.2

Record below the online reference sources that you have found useful or helpful. Compare your list with lists of other students, and add any sources that seem useful to your list.

Online Reference Sources

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

The screenshot shows the Merriam-Webster website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for "Word Games", "Word of the Day", "New Words & Slang", and "Video". Below these are tabs for "Dictionary", "Thesaurus", "Spanish-English", and "Medical". A search bar is prominently displayed. The main content area is divided into two sections: "TOP 10 LISTS" and "TREND WATCH".

TOP 10 LISTS

- "Defenestration," "Kerfuffle," & Other Greatest Hits**
People's Top 10 Favorite Words

TREND WATCH

- "Prefecture"**
Reports on the disasters in Japan focused on ... more »
- "Disposition"**
As a pop song gained new exposure in other forms ... more »
- "Charlatan"**
After Charlie Sheen called a radio show to offer his opinions ... more »

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Use the College Writing Center

Many colleges have a writing center that offers individualized help with any college writing assignment—not just assignments for your writing class. The center uses student tutors as well as professional staff to help you; some centers offer online tutorial services as well. Some function on a walk-in basis; others require an appointment. Computers may be available for your use as well.

You can expect the writing center staff to help you with an assignment, but do not expect them to write your paper for you or to correct all of its errors. The staff can help you understand an assignment, come up with ideas, organize your ideas, revise, use appropriate format and documentation, and understand errors on a graded paper.

When you visit the writing center, be sure to bring your assignment, all drafts of your essay, and any articles or essays to which the assignment refers. Also bring paper and pen or pencil.

Keep a Writing Journal

Use a **writing journal** in either a notebook or a computer file to record daily impressions, reflect on events or on reading assignments, comment on experiences and observations, explore relationships among people or ideas, ask questions, and test ideas. You should write in your journal frequently—every day if possible.

Benefits of Journal Writing

- **A journal is a place to practice.** Writing can best be improved through practice. Record conversations, summarize or react to experiences, or release frustrations. Remember, regardless of what you write about, you are writing and thereby improving your skills.
- **A journal is a place to experiment.** Try out new ideas and express things that you are learning about yourself—your beliefs and values. Experiment with different voices, different topics, and different approaches to a topic.
- **A journal is a place to warm up.** Like an athlete, a writer benefits from warming up. Use a journal to activate your thought processes, loosen up, and stretch your mind before you tackle your writing assignments.
- **A journal is a place to reflect on your writing.** Record problems, strategies you have learned, and ways to start assignments. You might also find it helpful to keep an error log and a misspelled word log.
- **A journal is a source of ideas.** If you are asked to choose your own topic for an essay, leaf through your journal. You'll find plenty of possibilities.
- **A journal is a place to respond to readings.** Use it to collect your thoughts about a reading before writing an assigned essay. (You will learn more about response journals in Chapter 3.)

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How to Get Started

Your first journal entry is often the most difficult one to write. Once you've written a few entries, you'll begin to feel more comfortable. Here's how to get started.

1. **Write in a spiral-bound notebook or create a computer file.** Be sure to date each entry.
2. **Set aside five to ten minutes each day for journal writing.** "Waiting times" at the bus stop, at the laundromat, or in long lines provide opportunities for journal writing, as do "down times," such as the ten minutes before a class begins or the few minutes between finishing dinner and studying.
3. **Concentrate on capturing your ideas—not on being grammatically correct.** Try to write correct sentences, but do not focus on grammar and punctuation.
4. **If you are not sure what to write about, consult Figure 2.2 (p. 34).** Coding your entries as shown in the figure will make you more aware of your thought processes and help you distinguish different types of entries.
5. **Reread your journal entries on a regular basis.** By doing so, you will discover that rereading entries is similar to looking at old photographs: They bring back vivid snippets of the past for reflection and appreciation.

Writing Activity 1

Write a journal entry describing your reaction to one or more of your classes this semester. For example, you might write about which classes you expect to be most or least difficult, most or least enjoyable, and most or least time-consuming.

Get the Most out of Writing Conferences

Many writing instructors schedule periodic writing conferences with individual students. These conferences are designed to give you and your instructor an opportunity to discuss your work and your progress in the course. Such conferences are opportunities for you to get help with your writing skills. If the conferences are optional, be sure to schedule one.

The following tips will help you get the most out of a writing conference:

1. **Arrive on time or a few minutes early.**
2. **Bring copies of the draft essay you are currently working on as well as previously returned papers.** Have them in hand, not buried in your backpack, when your conference begins.
3. **Reread recently returned papers ahead of time,** so that your instructor's comments are fresh in your mind. Review your notes from any previous conferences.
4. **Allow your instructor to set the agenda,** but come prepared with a list of questions you need answered.
5. **Take notes, either during or immediately after the conference.** Include the comments and suggestions offered by your instructor. You might also consider writing a journal entry that summarizes the conference.
6. **Revise the draft essay you and your instructor discussed as soon as possible,** while the suggestions for revision you received are still fresh in your mind.

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FIGURE 2.2 Starting Points for Journal Writing

Codes for Your Journal Entries	Type of Writing	Ideas for Subjects
<>	Describing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a daily event a sporting event an object a cartoon or photograph an overheard conversation
!!	Reacting to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a person a world, national, local, or campus event a passage from a book a magazine or newspaper article a film, song, or concert a television program a radio personality a fashion or fad
←	Recollecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an important event a childhood experience an impression or a dream a favorite relative or friend
?	Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a policy a trend a position on an issue
↔	Comparing or contrasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two people two events or actions two issues
ex	Thinking of examples of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a personality type a type of teacher, supervisor, or doctor
+ —	Judging (evaluating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a rule or law a decision a musician or another performer an assignment a radio or television personality a political candidate

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Assessing Your Learning Style

Each person learns and writes in a unique way, depending in part on his or her experiences, personality, and prior learning. Discovering your learning style will give you an important advantage in your writing course and in your other courses. In this section and the following one, you will assess how you learn by using a Learning Style Inventory. You will learn specific strategies to learn more effectively, capitalizing on your strengths and overcoming your weaknesses.

What Is Your Learning Style?

Have you noticed that you do better with some types of academic assignments than with others? Hands-on assignments may be easier than conducting research, for example. Have you discovered that it is easier to learn from some instructors than from others? You may prefer instructors who give plenty of real-life examples or those who show relationships by drawing diagrams. Have you noticed differences in how you and your friends study, solve problems, and approach assignments? You may be methodical and analytical, whereas a friend may get flashes of insight. You may be able to read printed information and recall it easily, but a friend may find it easier to learn from class lectures or a videotape. Have you noticed that some students prefer to work alone on a project, while others enjoy working as part of a group?

These differences can be explained by what is known as **learning style**, or the set of preferences that describes how you learn. The Learning Style Inventory in the box below is intended to help you assess your learning style. After you have completed the Learning Style Inventory, you'll find directions for scoring on page 38.

LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY

Directions: Each numbered item presents two choices. Select the one alternative that best describes you. There are no right or wrong answers. In cases in which neither choice suits you, select the one that is closer to your preference. Check the letter of your choice next to the question number on the answer sheet on page 38.

1. In a class, I usually
 - a. make friends with just a few students.
 - b. get to know many of my classmates.
2. If I were required to act in a play, I would prefer to
 - a. have the director tell me how to say my lines.
 - b. read my lines the way I think they should be read.
3. Which would I find more helpful in studying the processes by which the U.S. Constitution can be amended?
 - a. a one-paragraph summary
 - b. a diagram

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Reading in College

WRITING QUICK START

Your Mass Communication instructor has asked your class to study the photograph on the opposite page and discuss its meaning.

Write a paragraph explaining what the photograph suggests to you about mass communication and why the instructor might have asked you to study it. Be detailed and specific. Study the photograph's content, and then try to discover what statement it makes about communication.

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To explain the meaning of the photograph, you had to think beyond the obvious action it portrays. You had to interpret and evaluate the photograph to arrive at its possible meaning. To complete this evaluation, you did two things. First, you grasped what the photograph showed; then you analyzed what it meant.

Reading involves a similar process of comprehension and evaluation. First, you must know what the author *says*; then you must interpret and respond to what the author *means*. Both parts of the process are essential. This chapter will help you succeed with both parts of the reading process.

In this chapter, you will learn to be a more active reader, a reader who becomes engaged and involved with a reading assignment by analyzing, challenging, and evaluating ideas. The chapter contains a Guide to Active Reading (p. 48) in which you will learn what to do before, during, and after reading to strengthen your comprehension and increase your recall. You will also learn how to approach difficult assignments and how to draw a diagram, called a *graphic organizer*, that will help you grasp both the content and the organization of an assignment. In the next chapter, you will find guidelines for thinking and reading critically, interpreting visuals, and responding to text. As you improve your ability to read and respond thoroughly and carefully, you'll learn more about what you read. You'll also do better on exams and quizzes that ask you to apply, connect, and evaluate ideas.

Getting Started

Becoming an active reader involves developing new skills, as well as changing any misconceptions you may have about reading in college.

Reading for Success

Reading skill is essential for college success. In some ways, it is a hidden skill, because when you think of college success, what probably comes to mind is attending classes, writing papers, and studying for and taking exams. A closer look at each of these activities reveals, however, that reading is involved in each task. It is the primary means through which you acquire ideas and gather information. To use reading as a tool for success, use the following suggestions:

- **Assume responsibility for reading assignments.** In college, you can expect instructors to offer you less help with your reading assignments. They won't remind you to do them, and they often won't check to see if you are keeping up with them. It is tempting to let them go undone, especially when you are pressured to complete other work. Use the time-management suggestions in Chapter 1 (pp. 5–7) to build in time each week to complete all assignments. Instructors will assume that you are keeping up with reading assignments and that you are learning the material as you do. Most instructors won't tell you *how* to learn it, either. Consequently, you will have to learn how best to learn each subject. Experiment with different methods—taking notes on assignments, preparing study sheets that summarize important information, highlighting (see pp. 55–56), outlining (see Chapter 7), and annotating (see p. 56).
- **Think and read critically.** Most students expect to learn and memorize information, but in college, reading and understanding the literal content of reading assignments is often not enough. You must go beyond what an article or essay *says* and focus on what

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it *means*. You also need to think about how true, useful, and important the information is. Instructors expect you to interpret, evaluate, and respond to the ideas you have read about. They expect you to read and think critically, questioning and challenging ideas as you encounter them. To develop your critical-thinking skills, pay particular attention to the Strategies for Critical Thinking and Reading in Chapter 4 (pp. 68–77) and to the section in Chapters 11–19 titled “Thinking Critically About . . .”

- **Pay attention to visuals.** Much of what you read will be accompanied by visuals, including drawings, photographs, charts, graphs, and so forth. Writers use these to clarify or emphasize ideas, condense information, explain a complicated process, or illustrate a particular viewpoint. Get used to thinking about the purpose of a visual and the way that it relates to the text that accompanies it. For more on visuals, see Interpreting Visuals in Chapter 4 (pp. 77–86).
- **Adapt your reading skills to different materials.** In college, you will encounter a wide range of materials, and you will be expected to read each skillfully. In addition to reading textbooks, you may read articles, essays, critiques, field reports, scientific studies, and Internet sources. You will need to use different strategies for reading each type of material. For each type, begin by noticing how it is organized and what its purpose might be. Then, devise a strategy for identifying what is important to learn and remember about it.
- **Polish your vocabulary skills.** An extensive vocabulary is a powerful tool and is essential to effective written and oral communication. Don't be satisfied with your current repertoire of words. Notice words; keep track of new ones you encounter by creating a vocabulary log or computer file. Look for new ways in which familiar words are used. Use these new words and new meanings as soon as possible, so they become part of your active vocabulary.
- **Use reading to help you write.** By studying the writing of others, you can improve your own writing. As you read an article, essay, or textbook assignment, take note of the writer's techniques. For example, notice how the writer organizes paragraphs, how he or she uses language to express ideas, and how ideas are developed throughout the work.

Avoiding Misconceptions

Much misinformation exists about how to read effectively and efficiently. This section dispels some popular misconceptions about reading.

- **Not everything on a page or a screen is equally important.** Whether you are reading an article in an online sports magazine, a biography of a president, or an essay in this book, each text contains a mixture of important and not-so-important ideas and information. Your task as a reader is to sort through the material and evaluate what you need to know.
- **You should not read everything the same way.** Your purpose affects what you read, how rapidly and how carefully you read, what you pay attention to, and what, (if anything) you skip. For instance, if your psychology instructor assigns an article from *Psychology Today* as a basis for class discussion, you would read it differently than if you were preparing for a quiz based on the article. Your familiarity with a

For more on how to read selectively by scanning and skimming, see Working with Text: Reading Sources in Chapter 21 (pp. 592–93).

topic also affects how you read. Effective readers vary their reading techniques to suit what they are reading and why they are reading it.

- **Reading material once is often not sufficient.** In many academic situations, you will need to read chapters, articles, or essays more than once to discover the author's position, summarize the author's key ideas, and analyze the strength of the supporting evidence that he or she provides.
- **Not everything in print or online is true.** Just as you don't believe everything you hear, neither should you believe everything you read. Be sure to read with a critical, questioning eye and, at times, with a raised eyebrow. To evaluate a text, consider the authority of the author and the author's purpose for writing. As you read, try to distinguish facts from opinions, value judgments, and generalizations. If you were to read an article titled "Woman Loses Thirty Pounds in One Week," for example, your critical, questioning eye would probably be wide open. Be sure to keep that eye open when you read scholarly essays as well.

A GUIDE TO ACTIVE READING

When you attend a ball game or watch a soap opera, do you get actively involved? Baseball fans cheer some players and criticize others, evaluate plays and calls, offer advice, and so forth. Similarly, soap-opera fans get actively involved in their favorite programs—reacting to sudden turns of events, sympathizing with some characters, and despising others. By contrast, if you are not a fan of a baseball team or soap opera, you might watch the game or show passively, letting it take its course with little or no personal involvement or reaction. Like fans of a sports team or soap opera, active readers get involved with the material they read. They question, think about, and react to ideas using the process outlined in Figure 3.1.

The chart on page 50 shows how active and passive readers approach a reading assignment in different ways. As you can see, active readers get involved by using a step-by-step approach. The sections that follow explain each of these active reading steps in more detail.

Before Reading

Never start reading an essay or other reading assignment without preparation. Your mind isn't ready. Instead, use previewing and guide questions to discover what the reading is about and focus your mind on the topic.

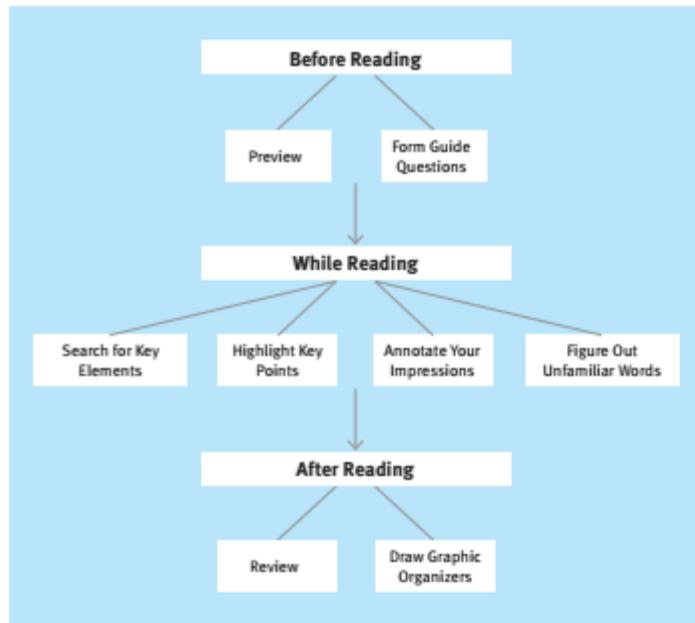
Preview

Previewing is a quick way to familiarize yourself with an essay's content and organization. Previewing enables you to decide what you need to know from the material, and it has a number of other benefits as well:

- It helps you get interested in the material.
- It enables you to concentrate more easily on the material because you have a mental outline of it before you read and know what to expect.
- It helps you remember more of what you read.

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FIGURE 3.1 The Active Reading Process



To preview a reading assignment, use the guidelines in the following list. Remember to read *only* the parts of an essay that are listed.

1. **Read the title, subtitle, and author.** The title and subtitle may tell you what the reading is about. Check the author's name to see if it is one you recognize.
2. **Read the introduction or the first paragraph.** These sections often provide an overview of the essay.
3. **Read any headings and the first sentence following each one.** Headings, taken together, often form a mini-outline of the essay. The first sentence following a heading often explains the heading further.
4. **For an essay without headings, read the first sentence in a few of the paragraphs on each page.**
5. **Look at any photographs, tables, charts, and drawings.**
6. **Read the conclusion or summary.** A conclusion will draw the reading to a close. If the reading concludes with a summary, it will give you a condensed view of the reading.
7. **Read any end-of-assignment questions.** These questions will help focus your attention on what is important in the reading and on what you might be expected to know after you have read it.

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APPROACHES TO READING: ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE

Passive Reading

Passive readers begin reading.

Passive readers read the essay only because it is assigned.

Passive readers read but do not write.

Passive readers close the book when finished.

Active Reading

Active readers begin by reading the title, evaluating the author, and thinking about what they already know about the subject. Then they decide what they need to know before they begin reading.

Active readers read the essay while looking for answers to questions and key elements.

Active readers read with a pen in hand. They highlight or underline, annotate, and write notes as they read.

Active readers review, analyze, and evaluate the essay.

The following essay has been highlighted to illustrate the parts you should read while previewing. Preview it now.

READING

American Jerk

Be Civil, or I'll Beat You to a Pulp

Todd Schwartz

Todd Schwartz is a writer based in Portland, Oregon. A longer version of this essay originally appeared in the *Oregon Humanities Review* in 2008 under the title "The Great Civility War." The version below was published in 2009 in the *Utne Reader*.

It was the most civil of times, it was the least civil of times, it was the age of politeness, it was the age of boorishness, it was the epoch of concern, it was the epoch of who cares, it was the season of hybrid, it was the season of Hummer, it was the spring of Obama, it was the winter of hate speech . . .

With apologies to Mr. Dickens (or not: screw him), we have arrived at simultaneously the most and least civil moment in U.S. history. 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.

We have never been more concerned about the feelings of minority groups, the disabled, and the disadvantaged. Yet we have never been less concerned about the feelings of anyone with whom we share the road, the Internet, or the movie theater.

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Political correctness holds such sway that holidays go unnamed for fear of insulting or excluding someone. Schools won't let teachers use red pens to correct papers, because little Ethan's or Emily's self-esteem might be bruised. No one is "poor," but many are "socioeconomically disadvantaged." Civility and thoughtfulness in speech have never been so complete or so codified. 4

All of which is well intentioned and mostly a wonderful thing. I'm all for being polite and caring and Golden Rule-ish. Sadly, like a lovely field of wildflowers—which in reality is filled with bloodsucking ticks and noxious pollen—we live oh-so-politely in what must certainly be the rudest era in recorded history. Maybe even prehistory. 5

Neanderthals were probably nicer to each other than we are. 6

Pick your poison: reality television, slasher movies, video games, online porn, cell phones, automated answering systems, giant assault vehicles for trips to the grocery store, car stereos played at volumes easily heard on Jupiter, web-powered copyright infringement, people who will not shut their inane traps in movie theaters, and, lord help us, now even people who won't shut their inane traps during live theater. 7

Highlight (orange) - 3 Reading in College > Page 52

We're all talking to someone all the time, but it's ever more rarely to the people we are actually with. Our cell phones blare ringtones that no one else wants to hear. We love to watch TV shows about the stunningly predictable results of hand-feeding a grizzly bear or lighting a stick of dynamite with a cigarette. We also love shows where people lie to others for money and programs where snarky, slightly talented folks say vicious things to hopeful, and usually more talented, contestants.

Civility rules, friends. 9

Civility is dead, jerks. 10

Why? I have a few theories. 11

The first is that America is in the same position as Rome found itself in about 420 CE, meaning that we've reached the peak of our civilization and now everything is going to Tartarus in a chariot. We're too far from our food and energy sources, and fewer and fewer of the Druids and Visigoths like us anymore. So we desperately cling to a patina of civility while we grab a snack and watch large, toothy predators devour people.

The second is that sunlight contains tiny spores that lodge in the cerebellum, making the infected believe they are the center of the universe. 13

My final and somewhat less cutting edge theory is that a large percentage of people are just clueless, distracted, and self-absorbed, unable to process concepts such as spatial awareness (for example: when you are walking in the same direction with several hundred people in, say, an airport terminal, DON'T JUST STOP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOW!). 14

But I digress. 15

I am not here to judge whether being civil and considerate is somehow better than being a mindless dillweed. You must make that choice for yourself. We inhabit the most civil of times and the least—and I completely honor and respect your freedom to choose your side in the Great Civility War. 16

Just don't get in my way. I'm on my cell in the Escalade, and I can't be bothered. 17

Exercise 3.1

Based only on your preview of the essay "American Jerk," answer the following questions as either true or false. If most of your answers are correct, you will know that previewing helped you gain a sense of the essay's context and organization. (For the answers to this exercise, see p. 65.)

1. The reading is primarily about civility and the lack of it.
2. The author blames the Internet for our society's lack of civility.
3. The author suggests that political correctness does not go far enough.
4. People are often not intentionally rude but simply are distracted or unaware.
5. Society is unconcerned about minorities.

Form Questions to Guide Your Reading

Before you begin reading, you will want to improve your intent to remember. Look again at the guidelines for previewing on pages 49–50. You can use these parts of an essay to form questions. Then, as you read, you can answer those questions and

thereby strengthen your comprehension and memory of the material. The following suggestions will help you start devising your questions:

- **Use the title of an essay to devise questions.** Then read to find the answers. Here are a few examples of titles and relevant questions.

<i>Essay Title</i>	<i>Question</i>
"Part-time Employment Undermines Students' Commitment to School"	Why does part-time employment undermine commitment to school?
"Human Cloning: Don't Just Say 'No'"	What are good reasons to clone humans?

- **Use headings to devise questions.** For example, in an essay titled "Territoriality," headings include "Types of Territoriality" and "Territorial Encroachment." Each of these headings can easily be turned into a question that becomes a guide as you read: What are the types of territoriality? and What is territorial encroachment and how does it occur?

Not all essays lend themselves to these techniques. For some essays, you may need to dig deeper into the introductory and final paragraphs to form questions. Or you may discover that the subtitle is more useful than the title. Look again at your preview of "American Jerk." Using the introductory paragraphs of that essay, you might decide to look for answers to this question: Why is Schwartz negative toward Americans?

While Reading

As an active reader, you should use a variety of techniques as you read to focus your attention, improve your comprehension, and engage and record your thoughts. While you are reading, your goal is to determine which ideas are important and which are less so. Also look for key organizational elements of the material, and record your reactions and thoughts to ideas as you encounter them. Because some readings will be difficult, be sure to pay attention to unfamiliar vocabulary and take action when you have trouble understanding the text.

Search for Key Elements

When you know what to look for as you read, you will read more easily and do less rereading. When you read assigned articles, essays, or chapters, search for the following key elements:

1. **The meaning of the title and subtitle.** In some cases, the title announces the topic and reveals the author's point of view. In others, the meaning or the significance of the title becomes clear only as you read the text.
2. **The introduction.** The opening paragraph or paragraphs should provide background information, announce the topic, and get the reader's attention.
3. **The author's main point.** Usually, a **thesis statement** directly expresses the one big idea that the piece of writing explains, explores, or supports. The thesis is often placed in the first or second paragraph to let the reader know what lies ahead. But

For more about thesis statements, see Chapter 6, p. 125.

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it may at times appear at the end instead. Occasionally, a thesis will be implied or suggested rather than stated directly.

4. **The support and explanation.** The body of the piece of writing should support or give reasons for the author's main point. Each paragraph in the body has a topic sentence, which states what the paragraph is about. Each topic sentence should in some way explain or support the essay's thesis statement.
5. **The conclusion.** The final paragraph or paragraphs should restate the author's main point or offer ideas for further thought.

You'll learn much more about each part of an essay in Chapters 6 to 8.

Now read the "American Jerk" again, paying attention to the marginal notes that identify and explain the various parts of it.

Title and subtitle suggest idea of conflict over behavior

American Jerk

Be Civil, or I'll Beat You to a Pulp

Todd Schwartz

Todd Schwartz is a writer based in Portland, Oregon. A longer version of this essay originally appeared in the *Oregon Humanities Review* in 2008 under the title "The Great Civility War." The version below was published in 2009 in the *Utne Reader*.

Introductory paragraph and illustration suggest contradictory attitudes

It was the most civil of times, it was the least civil of times, it was the age of politeness, 1
it was the age of boorishness, it was the epoch of concern, it was the epoch of who
cares, it was the season of hybrid, it was the season of Hummer, it was the spring of
Obama, it was the winter of hate speech . . .

Thesis statement

With apologies to Mr. Dickens (or not: screw him), we have arrived at simultaneously 2
the most and least civil moment in U.S. history. A moment when a roomful of even rela-
tively 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.

Support: contradictory attitudes toward groups

We have never been more concerned about the feelings of minority groups, the dis- 3
abled, and the disadvantaged. Yet we have never been less concerned about the feel-
ings of anyone with whom we share the road, the Internet, or the movie theater.

Political correctness holds such sway that holidays go unnamed for fear of insult- 4
ing or excluding someone. Schools won't let teachers use red pens to correct papers,
because little Ethan's or Emily's self-esteem might be bruised. No one is "poor," but
many are "socioeconomically disadvantaged." Civility and thoughtfulness in speech
have never been so complete or so codified.

All of which is well intentioned and mostly a wonderful thing. I'm all for being polite 5
and caring and Golden Rule-ish. Sadly, like a lovely field of wildflowers—which in real-
ity is filled with bloodsucking ticks and noxious pollen—we live oh-so-politely in what
must certainly be the rudest era in recorded history. Maybe even prehistory.

Support: examples of rudeness

Neanderthals were probably nicer to each other than we are. 6
Pick your poison: reality television, slasher movies, video games, online porn, cell 7
phones, automated answering systems, giant assault vehicles for trips to the grocery

store, car stereos played at volumes easily heard on Jupiter, web-powered copyright infringement, people who will not shut their inane traps in movie theaters, and, lord help us, now even people who won't shut their inane traps during live theater.

We're all talking to someone all the time, but it's ever more rarely to the people we are actually with. Our cell phones blare ringtones that no one else wants to hear. We love to watch TV shows about the stunningly predictable results of hand-feeding a grizzly bear or lighting a stick of dynamite with a cigarette. We also love shows where people lie to others for money and programs where snarky, slightly talented folks say vicious things to hopeful, and usually more talented, contestants.

Civility rules, friends.

Civility is dead, jerks.

Why? I have a few theories.

The first is that America is in the same position as Rome found itself in about 420 CE, meaning that we've reached the peak of our civilization and now everything is going to Tartarus in a chariot. We're too far from our food and energy sources, and fewer and fewer of the Druids and Visigoths like us anymore. So we desperately cling to a patina of civility while we grab a snack and watch large, toothy predators devour people.

The second is that sunlight contains tiny spores that lodge in the cerebellum, making the infected believe they are the center of the universe.

My final and somewhat less cutting edge theory is that a large percentage of people are just clueless, distracted, and self-absorbed, unable to process concepts such as spatial awareness (for example: when you are walking in the same direction with several hundred people in say, an airport terminal, DON'T JUST STOP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOW!).

But I digress.

I am not here to judge whether being civil and considerate is somehow better than being a mindless dillweed. You must make that choice for yourself. We inhabit the most civil of times and the least—and I completely honor and respect your freedom to choose your side in the Great Civility War.

Just don't get in my way. I'm on my cell in the Escalade, and I can't be bothered.

8 Support: more examples

9 } Contradictions introduce reasons to follow

10 }
11 }
12 Support: first reason

13 Support: second reason

14 Support: third reason

15 }
16 Conclusion: affirms thesis statement

17 Final humorous word

Highlight Key Points

As you read, you will encounter many new ideas. You will find some ideas more important than others. You will agree with some and disagree with others. Later, as you write about what you have read, you will want to return to the main points to refresh your memory. To locate and remember these points easily, it is a good idea to read with a highlighter or pen in hand. Highlighting is an active reading strategy because it forces you to sort and sift important ideas from less important ideas.

Develop a system of highlighting that you can use as you read to identify ideas you plan to reread or review later on. Use the following guidelines to make your highlighting as useful as possible:

1. **Decide what kinds of information to highlight before you begin.** What types of tasks will you be doing as a result of your reading? Will you write a paper, participate in a class discussion, or take an exam? Think about what you need to know, and tailor your highlighting to the particular needs of the task.

2. **Be selective.** If you highlight every idea, none will stand out.
3. **Read first; then highlight.** First read a paragraph or section; then go back and mark what is important within it. This approach will help you control the tendency to highlight too much.
4. **Highlight key elements, words, and phrases.** Mark the thesis statement, the topic sentence in each paragraph, important terms and definitions, and key words and phrases that relate to the thesis.

Annotate to Record Your Impressions

When you annotate, you jot down your ideas about what you are reading in the margins of the essay. Think of your annotations as a personal response to the author's ideas. Your annotations can take several forms, including questions that come to mind, personal reactions (such as disagreement or surprise), or brief phrases that summarize important points. Later on, when you are ready to write about or discuss the reading, your annotations will help you focus on major issues and questions. Following is a partial list of what you might annotate:

- Important points (such as the thesis) to which you react emotionally
- Places where you need further information
- Places where the author reveals his or her reasons for writing
- Ideas you disagree or agree with
- Inconsistencies

Sample annotations for a portion of "American Jerk" are shown below.

Exercise 3.2

Reread "American Jerk" on page 54. Highlight and annotate the essay as you read.

<p>What examples are there other than political correctness?</p>	<p>SAMPLE ANNOTATIONS</p> <p>Civility rules, friends. Civility is dead, jerks. Why? I have a few theories.</p>
<p>Need more information</p>	<p>The first is that America is in the same position as Rome found itself in about 420 CE, meaning that we've reached the peak of our civilization and now everything is going to Tartarus in a chariot. We're too far from our food and energy sources, and fewer and fewer of the Druids and Visigoths like us anymore. So we desperately cling to a patina of civility while we grab a snack and watch large, toothy predators devour people.</p>
<p>Does distractedness and lack of awareness excuse poor behavior?</p>	<p>The second is that sunlight contains tiny spores that lodge in the cerebellum, making the infected believe they are the center of the universe.</p> <p>My final and somewhat less cutting edge theory is that a large percentage of people are just clueless, distracted, and self-absorbed, unable to process concepts such as spatial awareness (for example: when you are walking in the same direction with several hundred people in, say, an airport terminal, DON'T JUST STOP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOW!).</p>

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Figure Out Unfamiliar Words

If you were to look up in a dictionary every unfamiliar word that you ever came across in a reading, you would not have enough time to complete all your assignments. You can often figure out the meaning of a word by using one of the following strategies:

- **Look for clues in surrounding text.** You can often figure out a word from the way it is used in its sentence or in surrounding sentences. Sometimes the author may provide a brief definition or synonym; other times a less obvious context clue reveals meaning.

BRIEF DEFINITION	Janice <i>prefaced</i> , or introduced, her poetry reading with a personal story. [<i>Prefaced</i> means "introduced."]
CONTEXT CLUE	In certain societies young children are always on the <i>periphery</i> , and never in the center, of family life. [<i>Periphery</i> means "the edges or the fringe," which is far away from the center.]

- **Try pronouncing the word aloud.** Hearing the word will sometimes help you grasp its meaning. By pronouncing the word *magnific*, you may hear part of the word *magnify* and know that it has something to do with enlargement. *Magnific* means "large or imposing in size" and "impressive in appearance."
- **Look at parts of the word.** If you break down the parts of a word, you may be able to figure out its meaning. For example, in the word *nonresponsive* you can see the verb *respond*, which means "act or react." *Non* means "not," so you can figure out that *nonresponsive* means "not acting or reacting."

After Reading

One of the biggest mistakes you can make when you finish reading an assignment is to close the book, periodical, or browser window and move immediately to another task. If you do, you will likely forget most of what you read because your brain will not have had time to process and digest the material. Instead, take a few minutes to review the material by drawing a graphic organizer. The time you spend drawing will increase your comprehension and recall.

Understanding Difficult Readings

At one time or another, all students experience difficulty with a reading assignment. Perhaps you just can't "connect" with the author, the topic, or the writing style. Regardless of the problem, however, you know you must complete the assignment.

The Troubleshooting Guide shown in Table 3.1 lists some typical problems that students experience with difficult reading material and identifies strategies for solving them.

Review

Do you simply close a book or put away an article after you have read it? If so, you are missing an opportunity to reinforce your learning. If you are willing to spend a few minutes reviewing and evaluating what you read, you can dramatically increase the amount of information you remember.

To review material after reading, use the same steps you used to preview a reading (see p. 49). You should do your review immediately after you have finished reading. Reviewing does not take much time. Your goal is to touch on each main point one more time, not to embark on a long and thorough study. Pay particular attention to the following elements:

- **The headings**
- **Your highlighting**
- **Your annotations**
- **The conclusion**

As part of your review, it is also helpful to write a brief summary of the essay. See the section on summarizing in Chapter 4 for detailed suggestions on how to write a summary (pp. 88–89).

Draw a Graphic Organizer

If you are having difficulty following a long or complicated essay, try drawing a graphic organizer—a diagram of the structure of an essay's main points. Even if you are not a spatial learner, you will probably find a graphic organizer helpful. Think of a graphic organizer as a means of tracking the author's flow of ideas.

The graphic organizer format is shown in Figure 3.2. When you draw a graphic organizer, be sure it includes all the key elements of an essay listed on pages 53–54. An example of a graphic organizer for “American Jerk” appears in Figure 3.3 (p. 61). Work through the organizer, and reread the essay (pp. 54–55), paragraph by paragraph, at the same time.

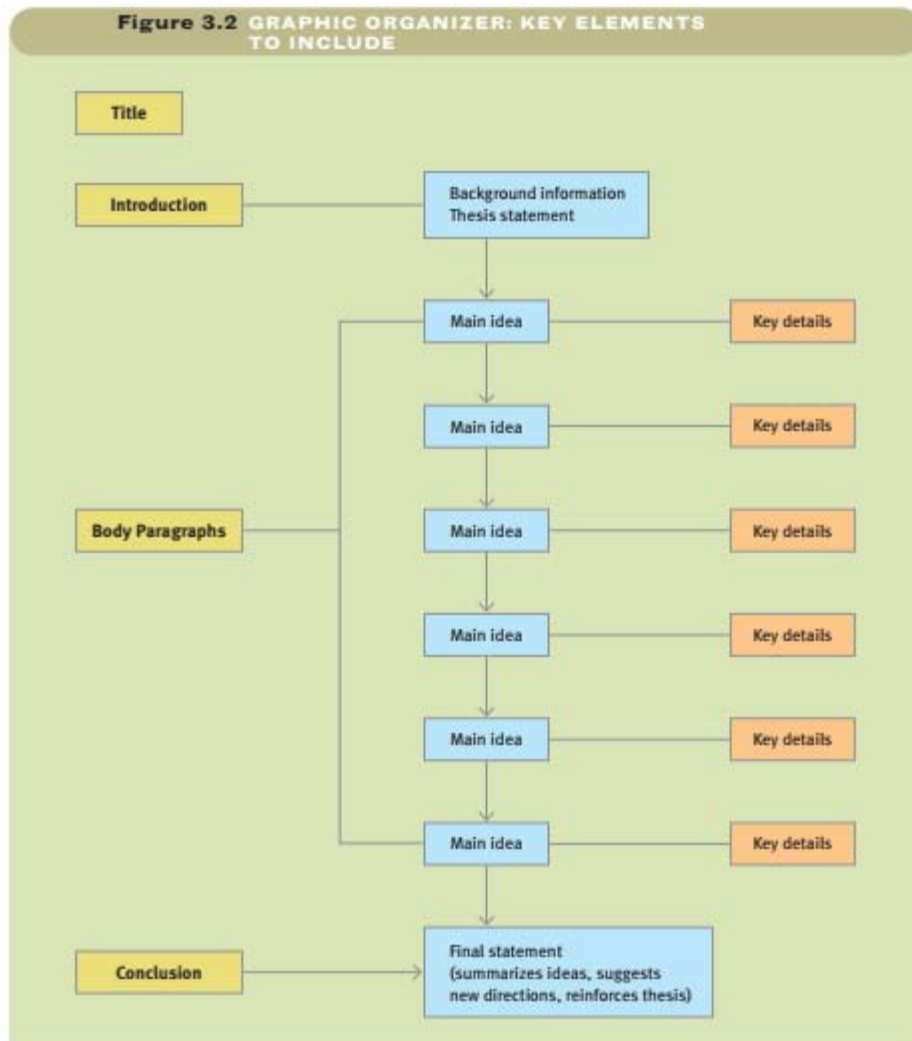
To draw detailed graphic organizers using a computer, visit www.bedfordstmartins.com/successfulcollege.

Highlight (orange) - 3 Reading in College > Page 59

TABLE 3.1 Difficult Readings: A Troubleshooting Guide

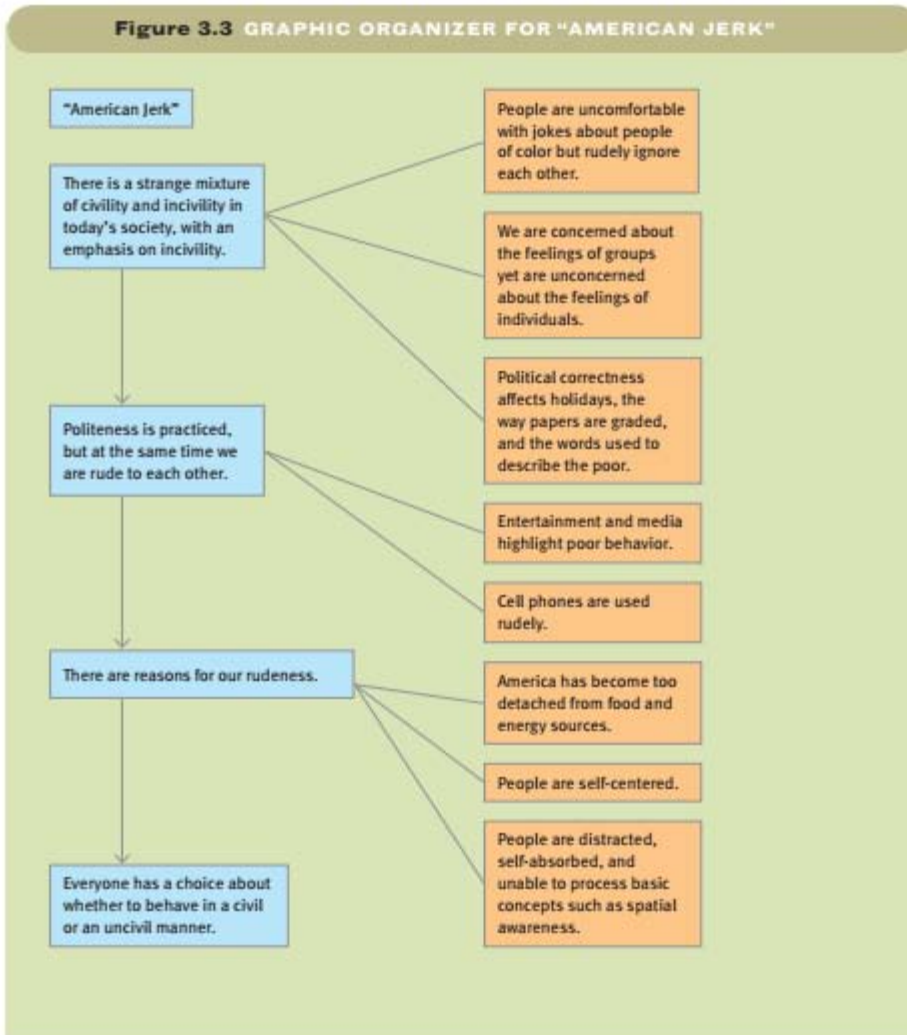
Problems	Strategies for Solving Them
The sentences are long and confusing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read aloud. 2. Divide each sentence into parts, and analyze the function of each part. 3. Express each sentence in your own words.
The ideas are complicated and hard to understand.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reread the material several times. 2. Rephrase or explain each idea in your own words. 3. Make outline notes. 4. Study with a classmate; discuss difficult ideas. 5. Look up the meanings of unfamiliar words in a dictionary.
The material seems disorganized or poorly organized.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study the introduction for clues to organization. 2. Pay more attention to headings. 3. Read the summary or conclusion. 4. Try to discover the organization by writing an outline or drawing a graphic organizer (see pp. 60 and 61).
The material contains many unfamiliar words.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look for clues to meaning in the surrounding text. 2. Try pronouncing words aloud to see if they remind you of related words. 3. Break words into parts whose meaning you know. 4. Use a dictionary when necessary.
You cannot get interested in the material.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Think about something you've experienced that is related to the topic. 2. Work with a classmate, discussing each section as you go.
You cannot relate to the writer's ideas or experiences.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find out some background information about the writer. 2. Imagine yourself having the writer's experiences. How would you react differently?
The subject is unfamiliar; you lack background information on the subject.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtain a more basic text or other source that moves slower, offers more explanation, and reviews fundamental principles and concepts. 2. For unfamiliar terminology, consult a specialized dictionary within the field of study. 3. Ask your instructor to recommend useful references.

Highlight (orange) - 3 Reading in College > Page 60



Highlight (orange) - 3 Reading in College > Page 61

Figure 3.3 GRAPHIC ORGANIZER FOR "AMERICAN JERK"



Highlight (orange) - 3 Reading in College > Page 62

Working with Text

READING

Combat High

Sebastian Junger

This essay first appeared in *Newsweek* magazine in 2010. It was adapted from the author's book *War*, which describes how a platoon of soldiers lived in the Korengal Valley of Afghanistan. Junger and Tim Hetherington, who took the photographs that appear with the essay and wrote his own book, *Infidel*, about the platoon, spent portions of a fourteen-month period in 2007 and 2008 embedded with the platoon. The documentary film they made about the experience, *Restrepo* (2010), won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. Junger is also a contributing editor to *Vanity Fair* magazine and the author of a number of other books, including *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men against the Sea* (1997).

Before you begin reading this essay, read the directions below.

1. Before you read, preview the essay using the steps on page 49. Write at least three questions to guide your reading.
2. As you read, highlight the essay, identifying its key elements. At the same time, annotate it to record your thoughts, ideas, and impressions.
3. When you have finished reading, review the essay using the guidelines on page 59. Then draw a graphic organizer showing the development of ideas.

Most of the fighting was at four or five hundred yards, so no one ever got to see—or had to deal with—the effects of all that firepower on the human body. There were exceptions, though. One day Prophet (as the American eavesdropping operation was known) called in saying they'd overheard enemy fighters discussing how they wouldn't shoot at the Americans unless a patrol crossed to the east side of the valley. Soon afterward, Afghan soldiers spotted armed men in the riverbed and started shooting at them. The men fled up the flanks of the Abas Ghar ridge, and Third Platoon sent a patrol out of the KOP (the main base in the valley) to give chase. They took contact as soon as they crossed the river and found themselves badly pinned down behind a rock wall. Within seconds every American position in the valley opened up. The enemy was caught in the open without much cover, and the valley essentially turned into one enormous shooting gallery. The KOP started dropping mortars on them, and Observation Post 3 engaged them with a .50 cal and a Barrett sniper rifle, and the trucks opened up from above Babiya, and Outpost Restrepo swung its 240s around and poured gunfire across the valley for almost an hour.

It was a hot day and there hadn't been much fighting lately, so when the men jumped on the guns most of them were wearing only flip-flops and shorts. They joked and laughed and called for cigarettes between bursts. Once in a while a round would crack past us, but mostly it was just a turkey shoot at a wide-open mountainside where the enemy had nowhere to hide. Hot brass was filling up the fighting positions, and more was cascading down out of the weapons every second. At one point I watched a shell drop into Pemble's untied shoe, and he slipped it off, wiggled the shell out, and then slipped his shoe back on without ever stopping firing. The lieutenant was shirt-

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less on the ammo hooch, calling coordinates into the KOP, and some of the Afghans were firing from the hip even though they didn't stand a chance of hitting anything that way, and Jackson was up on the guard position unloading one of the machine guns. Restrepo alone had to be putting out a thousand rounds a minute, and the Abas Ghar was sparkling with bullet-strikes even though it was broad daylight. Finally Hog showed up—Hog was the radio call-sign for the A-10s—and dropped a couple of bombs on the mountain for good measure.

At some point a call came in over the radio that the Scouts were watching a guy crawl around on the mountainside without a leg. They watched until he stopped moving, and then they called in that he'd died. Everyone at Restrepo cheered. That night I couldn't sleep, and I crept out of my bunk and went and sat on the roof of the ammo hooch. It was a nice place to watch the heat lightning out along the Pech river or to lie back on the sandbags and look up at the stars. I couldn't stop thinking about that cheer; in some ways it was more troubling than all the killing that was going on. Stripped of all politics, the fact of the matter was that the man had died alone on a mountainside trying to find his leg. He must have been crazed with thirst and bewildered by the sheer amount of gunfire stitching back and forth across the ground looking for him. At one point or another every man in the platoon had been pinned down long enough to think they were going to die—bullets hitting around them, bodies braced for impact—and that's with just one or two guns. Imagine a whole company's worth of firepower directed at you. I got the necessity for that kind of overkill, but I didn't get the joy. It seemed like I either had to radically re-understand the men on this hilltop, or I had to acknowledge the power of a place like this to change them.

"You're thinking that this guy could have murdered my friend," Steiner explained to me later. "The cheering comes from knowing that that's someone we'll never have



Messages on a grenade bandolier

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A soldier shows the hole in his helmet from a shot to the head during a fire-fight. He survived and later had two bullets with wings tattooed onto his chest to portray the "angels" that were watching over him at the time.

to fight again. Fighting another human being is not as hard as you think when they're trying to kill you. People think we were cheering because we just shot someone, but we were cheering because we just stopped someone from killing us. That person will no longer shoot at us anymore. That's where the fiesta comes in."

Combat was a game that the United States had asked Second Platoon to become 5 very good at, and once they had, the United States had put them on a hilltop without women, hot food, running water, communication with the outside world or any kind of entertainment for more than a year. Not that the men were complaining, but that sort of thing has consequences. Society can give its young men almost any job, and they'll figure how to do it. They'll suffer for it and die for it and watch their friends die for it, but in the end it will get done. That means only that society should be careful about what it asks for. In a very crude sense the job of young men is to undertake the work that their fathers are too old for, and the current generation of American fathers has decided that a certain six-mile-long valley in Kunar province needs to be brought under military control. Nearly 50 American soldiers have died carrying out those orders. I'm not saying that's a lot or a little, but the cost does need to be acknowledged. Soldiers themselves are reluctant to evaluate the costs of war (for some reason, the closer you are to combat the less inclined you are to question it), but someone must. That evalua-

Highlight (orange) - 3 Reading in College > Page 65

tion, ongoing and unadulterated by politics, may be the one thing a country absolutely owes the soldiers who defend its borders.

There are other costs to war as well—vaguer ones that don't lend themselves to conventional math. One American soldier has died for every hundred yards of forward progress in the valley, but what about the survivors? Is that territory worth the psychological cost of learning to cheer someone's death? It's an impossible question to answer but one that should keep getting asked. Ultimately, the problem is that they're normal young men with normal emotional needs that have to be met within the very narrow options available on that hilltop. Young men need mentors, and mentors are usually a generation or so older. That isn't possible at Restrepo, so a 22-year-old team leader effectively becomes a father figure for a 19-year-old private. Up at Restrepo a 27-year-old is considered an old man, an effeminate Afghan soldier is seen as a woman, and new privates are called "cherries" and thought of as children. Men form friendships that are not at all sexual but contain much of the devotion and intensity of a romance. Almost every relationship that occurs in open society exists in some compressed form at Restrepo, and almost every human need from back home gets fulfilled in some truncated, jury-rigged way. The men are good at constructing what they need from what they have. They are experts at making do.

As for a sense of purpose, combat is it—the only game in town. Almost none of the things that make life feel worth living back home are present at Restrepo, so the entire range of a young man's self-worth has to be found within the ragged choreography of a firefight. The men talk about it and dream about it and rehearse for it and analyze it afterward but never plumb its depths enough to lose interest. It's the ultimate test, and some of the men worry they'll never again be satisfied with a "normal life"—whatever that is—after the amount of combat they've been in. They worry that they may have been ruined for anything else.

War is a lot of things, and it's useless to pretend that exciting isn't one of them. It's insanely exciting. The machinery of war and the sound it makes and the urgency of its use and the consequences of almost everything about it are the most exciting things anyone engaged in war will ever know. Soldiers discuss that fact with each other and eventually with their chaplains and their shrinks and maybe even their spouses, but the public will never hear about it. It's just not something that many people want acknowledged. War is supposed to feel bad because undeniably bad things happen in it, but for a 19-year-old at the working end of a .50 cal during a firefight that everyone comes out of OK, war is life multiplied by some number that no one has ever heard of. In some ways 20 minutes of combat is more life than you could scrape together in a lifetime of doing something else. Combat isn't where you might die—though that does happen—it's where you find out whether you get to keep on living. Don't underestimate the power of that revelation. Don't underestimate the things young men will wager in order to play that game one more time.

"I like the firefights," O'Byrne admitted to me once. We'd been talking about going home and whether he was going to get bored. "I know," he added, probably realizing how that sounded. "Saddest thing in the world."

Answers to Exercise 3.1

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. False