

**CHAPTER 2**

THE WRITING PROCESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will demonstrate an ability to do the following:

- ☐ Generate and develop their own ideas for a writing topic.
- ☐ Meet challenges that present themselves in the writing process by drafting, revising, and proofreading an essay.
- ☐ Produce an essay that shows awareness of audience, conveys an appropriate tone, is organized and focused, and demonstrates a command of spelling and grammar.

MindTap

Start with a warm-up activity, and review the chapter Learning Objectives.

THE PROCESS

Writing for any purpose involves a progression of stages that begins with determining your purpose, then finding what you want to say, developing a strategy for organizing your thoughts, writing a rough draft, revising, editing, and last, proofreading the final copy. All writers, not just college students, benefit from treating a written endeavor as a process. Even professional writers plan, draft, revise, and edit before turning in their work. This chapter discusses the challenges that writers face in the writing process, suggests ways to meet those challenges, and provides guidelines for revising and editing their paper. The guidelines presented here assume that you are writing for a college class and that your instructor has given you at least a general or broad subject area to write about with a specified purpose. Often instructors give students a number of choices, but they still outline their expectations for the assignment.



The writing process can be frustrating because it is made up of many components. The key to writing well is to take those components in turn, focusing on each stage rather than worrying about producing a perfect end product right from the beginning of the assignment. It takes time to discover how you are going to approach an assignment, what you have to say about your topic, and how you are going to organize your ideas into a clear, coherent whole. Good writers know that writing often involves false starts, wrong turns, and dead ends; but they also know that giving the writing assignment thought and taking time to prewrite, plan, draft, and revise will produce a sense of satisfaction when they hand in their finished paper to the instructor.

MindTap Read, highlight, and take notes online.

CHALLENGES IN THE PREWRITING STAGE

Prewriting is the first stage of any writing project and includes everything you do before you write your first draft. At this stage, you want to think about the best approach to your subject. You want to determine your purpose, identify your audience, and explore ideas. Whether your instructor has given you a specific assignment or you are to select your own from a variety of possibilities, you need to spend time thinking about the assignment, identifying what you already know about it, discovering what you need to know, and narrowing your focus from a general subject to a specific topic. The practices used in prewriting usually spill over into other stages of the writing process as well. Through drafting, revising, editing, and producing the finished product, you are thinking about your topic, discovering new strategies or information, and determining how best to organize, develop, and polish your piece.

Challenge: Determining a Purpose. A paper without a purpose wanders aimlessly, making the writing task difficult. As a result, the paper is vague and fails to engage reader interest.

Meeting the Challenge. Make sure that you understand the requirements of the assignment and spend time thinking about how best to satisfy those requirements. As mentioned in Chapter 1, most writing can be classified as one of several types: argumentative, expository, or expressive. These types take many forms and have differing purposes. Are you to argue a position, persuade an audience to take action, explain a phenomenon, analyze an event, conclude something, or describe or narrate an experience? Are you to write a summary or a critique? Perhaps you are to examine the ideas of several people on a specific topic, arrive at your own conclusions, and then incorporate the comments of those people into your own argument or explanation. It is crucial that you know what you hope to accomplish with the piece of writing at the beginning of each written assignment. Knowing your purpose puts you on the right track for the other stages of the process.



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Challenge: Identifying Your Audience. Even with a clear understanding of purpose, you may not achieve your goal if you do not know the audience you are to address in the assignment.

Meeting the Challenge. Often the nature of a writing assignment will help determine your audience. For college work, your audience may be your instructor alone, but more often it includes your writing group, your classmates, or an audience whom you identify specifically for the assignment. Ask yourself whether you are writing to a group of peers, to an older or younger audience, to those in authority, or to the general public. Each audience requires a different approach to your subject if you are to achieve your purpose. For instance, if you are to argue a position on a controversial topic, it makes a difference whether you write to people who agree with you or to those who disagree with you. Your argument is likely to be more effective if you write to an audience who needs to be convinced because such an audience requires strong proof or persuasive evidence. If your purpose is to explain, illustrate, or analyze, your audience is likely to be informed in general, but not have a deep understanding of your subject. Unless instructed otherwise, assume an intelligent audience of nonspecialists who are interested in learning more about the topic of your paper. Imagining this audience will keep you from having to define or explain every term or concept and will give you room for interesting, informative, and/or intriguing material about the topic. Whether your instructor tells you what audience to write for or leaves the selection of an audience up to you, knowing whom you are writing to or for will help you determine details you need to include in your paper.

Challenge: Generating Ideas and Discovering Your Topic. Students sometimes are stumped right at the beginning of the writing process because they believe they have nothing to say. This early challenge requires an investment of time that will make the drafting process go much more smoothly later on.

Meeting the Challenge. After establishing your purpose and audience, turn your thoughts next to the task of coming up with ideas or details that you can use in your paper. A number of useful exercises will help you discover what you know about your subject, generate ideas for your paper, and open up ways for you to narrow your subject to a workable topic. Keep in mind the distinction between **subject** and **topic**: subject is the general area of investigation or thought, whereas topic is one narrow aspect of that subject. These exercises will help you come up with ideas for your topic:

- **Brainstorming or free writing.** This act involves simply writing without stopping for a set time, noting everything that occurs to you as you think about your subject. Time yourself for five or ten minutes while you write on a blank sheet of paper or your computer everything that occurs to you about your broad subject in an effort to narrow to a workable topic. When your time is up, read through everything that you have written. Look for ideas that you think are promising for your assignment, and if you need to explore them further, brainstorm or freewrite on those, or try one of the other exercises for generating ideas.

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- **Asking questions.** A good way to find out more about your subject is to simply ask questions about it. The most obvious questions are those that journalists routinely use: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Depending on your initial broad subject area, any of the following may help you come up with ideas for your paper: Who is affected? Who is responsible? What does it mean? When did it happen or take place? How is it done? Why does it matter? How does it work? What are its components? What happened? Where did it happen? Why did it happen? As you can tell, not every question is relevant for a subject, but asking some of them about your subject when appropriate alerts you to areas that you may need to explore and helps anticipate the kinds of questions readers may have when reading your paper.
- **Making lists.** List everything you know or are curious about for the subject you are working on. Listing is similar to brainstorming but involves just making a simple list of ideas, thoughts, or information related to your subject. Sometimes seeing ideas, concepts, or key words in a list leads to further development of those things.
- **Clustering around a central idea.** Clustering involves placing a key word or central idea in the center of your page and writing related words, phrases, or ideas around this central idea. As you move out from the central point by creating related ideas, you may see patterns emerge or recognize ways to develop your topic.
- **Talking to others.** Discussing your subject with other people can be enormously helpful, whether it be friends, classmates, or your instructor. Often discussing a subject out loud with someone else helps you clarify thoughts or discover new ideas or approaches.
- **Researching.** Reading about or researching your subject will give you information, details, or arguments that you can use in your writing assignment. If you use the Internet to locate information, be cautious about which sources you accept. Keeping in mind the guidelines in Chapter 1 on evaluating Internet sources, choose your search engine from among the best known or most used; they are likely to be the most reliable.

If you use any of these techniques—brainstorming/freewriting, asking questions, listing, clustering, talking to others, researching your area of interest—you should be able to come up with narrow aspects of the general subject from which you can select what you want to write about. If one technique does not work, try another, and keep at it until you are satisfied with the topic you have generated.

Challenge: Adopting an Appropriate Tone. Conveying the wrong tone, or attitude toward subject and audience, suggests to your readers that you are not comfortable with your purpose, topic, or nature of your audience or that you are unsure of yourself as a writer.



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Meeting the Challenge. Adopt a suitable tone to your purpose and audience and that accurately conveys your attitude toward your subject. Tone is conveyed through word choice, diction, and even the way you structure sentences. It reflects your attitude toward your subject and your view of yourself as a writer. Thus, you want to use language that reflects your confidence as a writer and that successfully achieves your purpose. Again the questions of why you are writing, what you hope to achieve, and to whom you are writing are important. You want to be authoritative but not overly artificial and stilted, nor do you want to be too informal. Before writing your first draft, you should be aware of the tone you will take in your paper. Even if your audience is your peers, you would not write in an assignment the way you might talk to them if you were chatting informally outside the class. Likewise, if you attempt a very formal tone that seems unfamiliar to you, the result is likely to be stiff and unnatural. Because tone is linked to purpose and audience, when you have those clearly in mind, you will have a better idea of the tone you should adopt.

CHALLENGES IN THE DRAFTING STAGE

Having determined your purpose, audience, topic, and tone, you are ready to write. The first draft represents your unpolished initial effort to create the entire essay, to put all of your ideas about your topic into an organized, coherent whole. Your drafting process often begins with fashioning a working title that best reflects what you plan to do in the paper and writing a paragraph that introduces your topic by providing a context or background for it and that leads to a **thesis or central idea statement**. This is followed by the **body of your paper**, the paragraphs between your introductory and concluding paragraphs, where you will want to construct fully developed paragraphs, each of which is focused on one specific topic or main idea—often stated in a **topic sentence**—that is related to your thesis. Finally, you will bring your paper to an end by writing an appropriate **conclusion**.

Challenge: Drafting a Working Title. The title is the first thing that your readers see, so a weak or misleading title does not make a good first impression.

Meeting the Challenge. In the draft stage, do your best to come up with a working title, one that best reflects what you think you are going to do in your paper. You will almost surely change your title as your paper goes through various drafts, and you may even want to wait until you have written a draft or two before you create your title. However, many writers find it helpful to have a title in mind as one more aid in focusing the direction of the paper. Titles serve a useful purpose. For example, if you knew nothing but the title of Jeff Madrick's "The Cost of Child Poverty" (Chapter 11), you would have a fairly good idea of what his article is about. On the other hand, a colorful title may serve to capture or reflect what the paper is about, but in an intriguing way. Thus, Will Wright's title "Dream Machines" (Chapter 3) does not tell readers what his topic is, but it is enticing. As it happens, Wright never uses the phrase "dream machines" in his article, but the content of his piece very clearly indicates what he means by his title.



Challenge: Writing an Introduction. After reading your title, your audience reads the first paragraph of your paper, the introduction. If this introductory paragraph does not adequately set the stage for the rest of the paper, you might lose your readers right at the beginning.

Meeting the Challenge. Draft an introduction that presents your topic and prepares for the rest of the paper. Writing instructors often advise students to begin with a general statement that serves to intrigue readers or catch their attention. That general sentence leads to more specific sentences, which in turn lead to an even more specific one, the thesis statement. The first paragraph not only introduces readers to the specific focus of the paper but also sets the tone, prepares readers for what is to follow, and engages their interest. As with your title, you may not be satisfied with your introduction in the first draft or two. You may not know exactly how to introduce your paper until you have organized your thoughts and written at least one complete draft. Do not get frustrated if you cannot think of a good introduction as you begin the draft stage. Because of its importance, you will want a working introduction, but most likely your finished version of the introduction will come only after you are fully satisfied with the body of your paper. Professional writers often take more than one paragraph to introduce their topic, especially for longer pieces such as the readings in this textbook and other articles that you will read in your classes or leisure time. Note, though, that the opening paragraphs—whether one, two, or three—always state or imply the subject and in most cases the position of the writer on that subject.

An example of an effective introduction is the opening paragraph of Anne Trafton's "When Good People Do Bad Things" (Chapter 14):

When people get together in groups, unusual things can happen—both good and bad. Groups create important social institutions that an individual could not achieve alone, but there can be a darker side to such alliances. Belonging to a group makes people more likely to harm others outside the group.

Trafton's paragraph is a model of how to introduce one's subject, entice readers, and set the stage for what the paper will do. Her opening sentence is a general statement, but it also tells readers the specific subject of her article, group behavior. Her next sentence is also general but still about group behavior, and it introduces another element: the darker side of group behavior. Then, her closing sentence explicitly states what that "dark side" is—harming those not in the group—and implicitly promises that she will explain what she means by that enticing statement.

Challenge: Avoiding Unclear or Weak Focus. If your essay does not have a clearly recognizable central purpose that is strong or complex enough to warrant a full exploration in your paper, readers will be lost.

Meeting the Challenge. You can sharpen, clarify, or strengthen your focus with a relevant introduction and clear thesis or statement of purpose. Throughout the essay, keep your central purpose in mind and include only material that relates to that purpose. Not every kind of writing requires a thesis, but most do, especially the kinds



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of writing that you will do for your college courses. Not every thesis needs to be stated explicitly, either, but there must always be some clearly implied central point to your writing. For instance, the introduction and thesis in Diane Ravitch's "Critical Thinking? You Need Knowledge" (Chapter 10) quickly establishes the focus of her article and her position on it. Clarifying the focus early on works for both the writer in the process of drafting the essay and readers of the final version:

The latest fad to sweep K–12 education is called "21st-Century Skills." States—including Massachusetts—are adding them to their learning standards, with the expectation that students will master skills such as cooperative learning and critical thinking and therefore be better able to compete for jobs in the global economy. Inevitably, putting a priority on skills pushes other subjects, including history, literature, and the arts, to the margins. But skill-centered, knowledge-free education has never worked.

Ravitch begins with a simple statement of fact about the "21st-Century Skills" initiative in primary and secondary education. Her next sentence expands on and defines essentially what that initiative does. In her third sentence, she narrows her focus by introducing the specific topic that she wants to address, the danger that she sees in a skill-based curriculum. Her fourth sentence indicates her viewpoint on that initiative and, as a result, sets up an expectation that she will tell readers why she thinks it will not work.

Challenge: Developing a Strategy for Organizing Your Paper. In the same way that an essay without a clear purpose leaves readers confused, so does a paper that is not organized in a logical or sensible way.

Meeting the Challenge. The key questions of how you will organize your essay and what strategies you will use to develop and support your thesis assume primary importance as you begin to draft the body of your paper. Here again, a strong thesis statement will be invaluable in helping you plan your essay. After all, if it serves to direct readers of your paper, it must beforehand direct you as the writer of the paper. As noted earlier in the comments about both Anne Trafton's "When Good People Do Bad Things" (Chapter 14) and Diane Ravitch's "Critical Thinking? You Need Knowledge" (Chapter 10), both writers set up the subject of their articles and the direction it will go. Your goal as you think about organizing your paper is first to get a thesis or central idea firmly in place early on. Your thesis is essentially a guideline or a bare-bones sketch of what you will discuss in the rest of your paper.

Although your thesis is in a sense a directional statement for the paper's organization and development, more considerations come into play in planning the body of the paper. Using the thesis as your guide, write down the major points that you want to make in support or explanation of that thesis. For each major point, make a list of minor points or supporting examples or illustrations that you will use to make that point. Ask yourself if the major points are in a logical order or if they need to be shifted about to make them logical. Consider whether every major point does indeed support, illustrate, or in some way relate to your overarching purpose or



thesis. If not, discard the irrelevant ones and look for more directly relevant points. Your chief concern when considering how to organize your paper is always directly connected to whether the points you make support or illustrate your position or in same way advance the development of your paper.

Writers use many different **rhetorical modes** or patterns to organize and develop their ideas, depending on their purposes, whether those are persuasive, expository, or expressive purposes. Whatever a writer's purpose, some fairly standard models can help to organize written work. These include **argumentation/persuasion, narration, description**, or expository modes such as **cause-effect analysis, classification-division, comparison/contrast**, and **definition**. These various ways of organizing and developing ideas are almost never used in isolation. Seldom will you find a piece of writing that does not combine two or more of these strategies, and they are all equally useful, depending on your purpose for writing, the audience you are writing to, and the context you are writing in. You will notice as you read the essays in this textbook that all of the writers employ a variety of strategies to achieve their purpose.

Challenge: Drafting the Body of Your Paper. No matter how strong your title and introduction, the success of your writing efforts lies largely in how well you explain, defend, or develop your central point in the body of your paper.

Meeting the Challenge. The body of your paper should consist of a number of paragraphs that relate directly to your thesis. A successful writer ensures that each paragraph in the body contains key ideas, supporting evidence, detailed explanation, or other information that directly advances the purpose of the paper.

A **typical paragraph** in the body of the paper focuses on one topic related to the thesis of the paper; has a topic sentence that expresses that single topic; contains perhaps seven to ten supporting sentences; and has a concluding sentence that leads to the next paragraph:

- **Topic sentence.** Each of the paragraphs in the body of the paper should have a topic sentence or a clear statement of purpose. Remember that the thesis statement answers the question "What is this essay about?" In the same way, the topic sentence answers the question "What is this paragraph about?" As with a thesis, if your topic sentence is not clearly stated, it should be clearly implied.
- **Supporting sentences.** Sentences in the paragraph should have a logical organization, should support only the topic of that paragraph, and should lead clearly and smoothly from one to another. They are used to support the topic sentence, that is, to explain it, illustrate it, amplify or expand on it. Paragraphs contain details related to and supportive of the focus of the paragraph and include a mix of both general and specific or detailed statements.
- **Concluding sentence(s).** The final sentence or sentences summarize the connections between the sentences and bring the paragraph to closure. Sometimes, the final sentence points to the subject of the next paragraph.



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Challenge: Providing Transition. Transition is the linking or connecting of ideas or statements. If you do not use words that show the connection between ideas, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, your writing will seem to be a series of disconnected statements.

Meeting the Challenge. Providing effective transition helps the reader follow what you are saying. Whether at the sentence, paragraph, or whole-essay level, you need to make connections clear to your readers. In any kind of writing, you want to try to be as coherent as possible; you will go a long way toward achieving that goal when you provide clear markers to help your readers follow the development of your paper and see connections between ideas and points. We have many tools with which to link or show the connection between thoughts and ideas.

Repeating key words and using pronouns to refer to nouns are two very common ways to provide transition. Here is a paragraph from Clay Shirkey's "Why I Just Asked My Students to Put Their Laptops Away" (Chapter 9):

Despite these rationales, the practical effects of my decision to allow technology use in class grew worse over time. The level of distraction in my classes seemed to grow, even though it was the same professor and largely the same set of topics, taught to a group of students selected using roughly the same criteria every year. The change seemed to correlate more with the rising ubiquity and utility of the devices themselves, rather than any change in me, the students, or the rest of the classroom encounter.

In the first sentence, "these rationales" refers to what Shirkey wrote in the previous paragraph. Next, in expanding on "grew worse over time" in the first sentence, he states what that distraction was, followed by a transitional marker "even though" and the repetition of "same." In sentence three, "the change" repeats the word in the previous sentence, and "rather than" is a transitional phrase.

- **Another way to make sure that your sentences and paragraphs flow is to use transitional words or phrases to help** achieve clarity or coherence. The following are just a few examples of the many words and phrases that we use to make transitions clear:

- **To show addition:** furthermore, in addition, also, again, too, as well as, another
- **To show consequence:** therefore, as a result, because, consequently, thus, then, hence, so that, for this reason, because
- **To show contrast:** on the other hand, however, in contrast, instead, conversely, on the contrary, but, yet, compared to
- **To show similarity:** likewise, similarly, in the same way, moreover, analogous to
- **To illustrate:** for example, such as, in particular, to illustrate, for instance, for one thing, to explain, namely, that is, in this case
- **To show time relationship:** later, earlier, afterward, before, next, eventually, at length, before long, meanwhile, subsequently



- **To make a concession:** although, even though, still, of course, while it may be true, in spite of, at any rate
- **To emphasize:** importantly, unquestionably, without a doubt, of prime importance, certainly, undeniably
- **To summarize:** in brief, in summary, in essence, in other words, to conclude, generally, in any event, on the whole, as I have shown

Challenge: Distinguishing among Levels of Generality. A paper that stays only at the general level usually lacks substance; not providing enough detail or specificity will likely weaken your overall effect.

Meeting the Challenge. One feature of a fully developed paper is the use of exemplification, details or illustrations. Whenever you make a general statement, make sure the following sentences provide specifics about that general statement. When you feel that you have not said enough to convincingly or fully develop or explain your central idea, ask yourself where you can add examples or illustrations. Examples and illustrations are crucial to writing, no matter what the primary purpose is. Without them, writing stays at the general or abstract level and leaves readers only vaguely understanding what the writer means. They make meaning clear and help make writing more interesting, livelier, and more engaging than an essay without details. Examples may be brief and numerous or extended and limited in number, and they may take the form of narratives. They do not have to begin with the words *for example* or *to illustrate* nor ostentatiously announce that an example is coming. Most of the readings in this textbook contain examples of one kind or another to both illustrate and argue their theses. It would be difficult to find an effective piece of writing that does not use examples of some sort.

An example of the use of details to illustrate meaning appears in this paragraph of Emily Alpert Reyes's "Men Are Stuck in Gender Roles, Data Suggest" (Chapter 12):

Gender stereotypes do seem to have loosened: The Global Toy Experts survey found that most mothers would let their own sons play with dolls and dress-up sets, even if they shied from buying them for other boys. Parents in some parts of Los Angeles said their boys got barely any flak for choosing pink sneakers or toting dolls to school. And in a recent online survey by advertising agency DDB Worldwide, nearly three-quarters of Americans surveyed said stay-at-home dads were just as good at parenting as stay-at-home moms.

The opening clause is a generality, and the rest of the paragraph consists of specific examples to illustrate what that general statement means. How might the impact or effectiveness of the paragraph change if you alter the position of the sentences?

Challenge: Drafting Your Concluding Paragraph. Without a concluding paragraph, readers are left with a feeling that you have not finished whatever points you have been making.



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Meeting the Challenge. Write a final paragraph that brings the paper to a satisfying end. For a long paper, such as a research project, your conclusion may take more than one final paragraph, but no matter its length, a paper should have a conclusion. You may not be ready to write your conclusion when you write the first draft of your paper because the conclusion should come logically from all that has gone before. Sometimes you need to write several drafts before you can write your conclusion. When you are ready to write it, you have many approaches to choose from. Sometimes writers simply restate their introductions, but try to be more imaginative. You don't have to restate major points, as they should be clear in readers' minds, but referring to them or highlighting them lends emphasis to what you have written and stresses its significance. Try to leave your readers with something to think about: stress the importance of what you have written, suggest a course of action, or point to questions raised by your paper that need further study or exploration. You might refer back to your introduction by mentioning a detail or image from it, or end with an amusing anecdote or a humorous or striking comment. No matter what strategy you choose for concluding your paper, readers should feel that they have come to a satisfactory end. Will Wright, in "Dream Machines" (Chapter 3), concludes his essay about the importance of game playing in this way:

Games are evolving to entertain, educate, and engage us individually. These personalized games will reflect who we are and what we enjoy, much as our choice of books and music does now. They will allow us to express ourselves, meet others, and create things we can only dimly imagine. They will enable us to share and combine these creations, to build vast playgrounds. And more than ever, games will be a visible, external amplification of the human imagination.

Wright's concluding paragraph makes reference to the points that he has made about games, summarizes his conclusions about their importance, and ends with a statement about their long-term influence on the imagination.

REVISING YOUR PAPER GLOBALLY

After you have written a draft of your paper, set it aside for a while—a few hours, overnight, a day or two if you have the time—and then return to it to closely reexamine and revise what you have written. Revision is a crucial step in the writing process, for it is here that you turn your draft into a polished piece of writing. The word *revision* means to look again or revisit, and that is what you do at this stage: examine the substance of your paper with a critical eye, looking for ways to improve what you have written. While you might have done some rewriting when drafting your paper, the really serious work comes during revision. This section suggests approaches to revising your paper. Your first concern when revising is to consider whole-essay or "global" matters, so reread your entire paper to begin the revision process. Don't worry at this time about whether you have made grammatical errors or whether every word is spelled correctly. These are matters that you will address after



you have worked on larger issues. In the global revision stage, you may find yourself deleting or moving entire sections of what you wrote in the draft stage until you are satisfied with the focus, organization, and development of your essay.

Revision addresses the issues of purpose, audience, organization, and content, which include the development of ideas, and both the introduction and conclusion of your essay. Apply the same questions to your own writing that you ask when evaluating the writing of others, as detailed in Chapter 1 on critical reading. Writers use many techniques to make the revision process meaningful. You truly want to revise, not simply rewrite, your paper, so leave some time between drafts to give yourself a fresh perspective on what you have written. Obviously that means not starting any writing project at the last minute. You will find that it works to your advantage to begin writing as soon as possible after getting an assignment. The more time you have to draft and revise, the more satisfied you are likely to be with your final effort. When revising, try reading your paper out loud and listening to how it sounds, or read it to someone else to get feedback from an objective audience. Revise passages that sound awkward or seem to lead nowhere; move things around if the paper seems disorganized; and look for ways to improve the development of every point you make. Include entire paragraphs in the revision process. Make sure that every paragraph is itself fully explained and that each paragraph directly relates to your central purpose. Consider how well your introduction truly focuses on your paper and whether your concluding paragraph gives a sense of closure to the paper.

Of prime importance is the question of whether all components of your paper are directly related to your thesis. Remember that your thesis indicates the central idea of your paper, suggests the direction you will take with that idea, states your position on a topic, or asks a question that you will answer in the course of your paper. After you have read through your arguments or supporting examples or illustrations, ask yourself if you have left any important points out. Are there places where readers might argue with or take exception to what you have written and, if so, how would you respond? Consider addressing those matters in your paper, anticipating reader responses. For instance, if the purpose of the essay is to describe, have you conveyed the essence of the thing with appropriately vivid words? If your purpose is to argue or persuade, is your evidence convincing? Is the argument logical and reasonable? Have you avoided fallacies in the logic of your argument? Ask yourself if the essay has a clear plan or organizing principle and if your final paragraph brings your paper to a satisfactory conclusion.

GUIDELINES: A CHECKLIST FOR REVISING GLOBALLY

- ☐ Does your introduction focus on the main point or thesis of the paper? Does it state your purpose clearly? Does it create interest or otherwise pique reader curiosity?
- ☐ Is your audience clearly defined, and do you consistently write to that audience throughout the paper?



- ☐ Have you chosen an appropriate tone for your topic? Is that tone consistent throughout the paper?
- ☐ Is the essay organized logically?
- ☐ Do paragraphs have clearly stated or implied topic sentences? Are they developed in a coherent, logical way?
- ☐ Have you provided transition from thought to thought or point to point?
- ☐ Does your paper distinguish among levels of generality within paragraphs and within the essay as a whole?
- ☐ Do any passages need to be clarified?
- ☐ Does anything you have written need to be shifted to somewhere else in the paper or deleted entirely?
- ☐ Does your final paragraph bring your paper to a satisfactory end?

ILLUSTRATION: REVISING GLOBALLY

The following example illustrates how the revision process works. These are the opening paragraphs of a draft of Elizabeth's research paper "Then and Now in China: Comparing Revolutionary with Modern Ballet." The final version appears as the first two paragraphs of her paper, located in Chapter 7. Sources used in these paragraphs appear afterward in the correct MLA format.

DRAFT WITH

REVISIONS NOTED:

Elizabeth's second sentence states essentially the same thing, so she deleted the unnecessary words. This sentence is not relevant.

The sentence is wordy and redundant as written; deleting unnecessary words and changing "through the creation of" to "creating" tightens the sentence and reduces clutter.

China has a long history of **forcing women into subservient roles**, viewing **them** **women** as second-class citizens. Historically, the male dominated culture expected women to serve men, often as slaves or concubines. **The plight of a Chinese woman was once controlled first by her father and then by her husband, with whom her father had arranged the relationship.** Typically, artistic endeavors, including operas, ballets, writings, and art, perpetuated these traditional roles of women, **keeping them in their submissive places through the creation of** **creating** compliant female characters who rarely challenged their male counterparts. The ballet, **still valued and cherished by Chinese citizens of all socio-economic levels**, especially created a canvas for developing cultural expectations.;



Elizabeth noticed that she could write a more effective sentence and provide variety by shifting words about.

Elizabeth removed irrelevant or unnecessary details, combined essential ideas, and narrowed her focus.

This is a general statement of her central idea. Her specific form of proof or support is stated at the end of the second paragraph.

Not relevant to her central point.

The original wording was clumsy.

The introduction to the quotation seemed awkward. This revision makes the transition into the quotation smoother.

Elizabeth changed the singular word in the quotation to the plural, which she puts in brackets to indicate that it is her word. The plural noun now agrees with what it refers to, "non-supporters."

and citizens of all socio-economic levels valued and continue even today to cherish Chinese ballet. Over time, interactions with Western culture have influenced the way Chinese society sees women, and modernization of women's roles has occurred. Yet, artists seem unhurried to incorporate these modern roles to the stage. This slowness, however, may be intentional, as artists work to influence their audiences. At the height of the spread of Communism, China entered an organized political period called the Cultural Revolution, a time when the government was heavy handed in influencing culture and focused on imposing Mao's ideals into the State. Since the 1960s, the West has had a variety of influences on Chinese culture, but not in all genres. Though interactions with Western culture since the 1960s have helped modernize the way that Chinese society views women and their roles, artists seem unhurried to incorporate these changes to the stage. Despite changes in Chinese society since the Cultural Revolution, modern Chinese ballet continues to reflect the traditional attributes of female characters and to rely on revolutionary plots.

After the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s, Mao Zedong's power and popularity began to dissipate because of his failure at modernizing the economic system of China. Because Mao feared that the new leaders would take the State in the wrong direction; as a result, he instigated the Cultural Revolution exert that his power over the State and citizens still remained strong to maintain his influence over the State and its citizens (Trueman). As detailed in Patricia Ebrey's *explains in Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization*, "The aim of the Cultural Revolution was to attack the Four Olds—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits—in order to bring the areas of education, art and literature in line with Communist ideology" (Ebrey). To align society with his philosophy, Mao completely overhauled the Chinese culture. The Communist regime deemed non-supporters of Mao's views and the values of the State as an "enemy [enemies] of the party and people" (Ebrey). In order to avoid persecution or arrest, Chinese citizens complied with the government's mandates. Ultimately, the Cultural Revolution especially affected the arts so strongly



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Wordy and not directly
relevant

This sentence states
explicitly how she will
support her more general
central idea at the end of
the first paragraph.

~~that in fact,~~ for a period of time there was absolutely no music in China. Eventually, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, fostered the production of eight "Model Operas" that applied the acceptable revolutionary themes; ~~and were~~ performed continuously with mandatory attendance (Ebrey). ~~Different than preceding eras, the Cultural Revolution has had a significant, long-lasting effect on the Chinese society, especially on the arts, and yet,~~ Even though *the regime's policies* ended long ago, modern Chinese ballets still rely on the strong elements found in ~~of~~ the "Model Eight" (Mittler 380). Nowhere is this more evident than in the ties between the late 1950s ballet *The White-Haired Girl* and the 1990s ballet *Raise the Red Lantern*.

Works Cited

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Elizabeth's revisions eliminate wordiness and unnecessary information and combine components of some sentences for better effect. Her first two paragraphs comprise her introduction, and her thesis comes at the end of her second paragraph

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REVISING FOR STYLE AND CLARITY

Besides being focused, organized, and developed well, your paper will be more successful if it is written in an engaging style. **Style** in writing refers to your overall

written effect and is characterized by such things as word choice, tone, and sentence structure or **syntax** (the arrangement of words or phrases to create sentences). **Throughout the revision process, whether globally or at the individual sentence level, look for clumsy, wordy, ineffective, or unclear passages.** If you find that you have written several very short simple sentences in a row, for instance, try combining them. Look for ways to vary sentence structure and length to avoid monotony or chopiness, and select words and details for greatest effect and interest. Use language that is appropriate for your topic and idiomatic, avoiding slang and clichés. Structure sentences to their best advantage, as Elizabeth has done in the revision example earlier. Consider ways to reword what you have written so that it more accurately reflects what you mean. Watch out for some fairly common pitfalls in sentence construction, such as wordiness, misplaced modifiers, **passive voice for active voice**, and faulty parallelism.

ILLUSTRATION: REVISING FOR STYLE AND CLARITY

In her expository writing class, Professor Gilliar assigned students to write a cover letter for a job application. She then selected passages from the students' work and asked them to edit the passages and explain how the reworked versions are more effective than the original. Here are examples of the process that the students went through in doing this exercise.

1. **ORIGINAL SENTENCE:** Not only through my passion but also through my experience conducting research and interviews, I plan to make a difference in the outreach of a news organization.

Revised Version 1:

With my strong passion for improving the lives of others and my savvy approach to conducting research and interviews, I will thoroughly inform my readers and move them to action.

Rationale for rewrite:

The first sentence is too vague with phrases like "my experience" and "make a difference." In addition, the first sentence doesn't explain what "my passion" really is or what the "outreach of a news organization" aims to do. So, the revised sentence states what the passion is for and better explains the experience of conducting research and interviews. Rather than stating "the outreach of a news organization," I stated my aims of writing for a newspaper: inform readers and move them to action. Moreover, I said "I will" rather than "I plan" because it's more decisive and shows that this is something I'm going to do no matter what.

2. **ORIGINAL PASSAGE:** I have had a lot of fine experiences while at school that prepared me for the challenges at your competitive company. There are many ways that allow me to apply the multiple skills and expertise I have to offer.

Revised Version 1:

As a college student, I have conducted rigorous research and conveyed my findings in understandable, concise reports. My savvy approach to research,



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coupled with my excellent interpersonal skills, makes me an excellent candidate for your company.

Rationale for rewrite:

This revised version is much more specific and clearly indicates the experience I have learned at school. It touches upon the skills rather than simply saying "I have skills."

Revised Version 2:

As a college student, I researched the difference in symptoms of patients with latent tuberculosis compared to the symptoms of patients with active tuberculosis in the laboratory, collected all of my data in a research report that was published in a local science journal, and presented my findings at a Science Seminar that was attended by a large number of fellow science students, faculty, and staff members. Through this experience, I gained several skills including collecting and recording data in the laboratory, organizing the data in a professional format that led to acceptance by a local journal, and professional communication skills through my presentation of my findings. All of these skills make me a top candidate for the position you are offering.

Rationale for rewrite:

This rewrite explains specifically what my experience at college was and what skills were gained from these experiences that would make me a better candidate.

3. ORIGINAL SENTENCE: My natural ability and passion for writing can only be rivaled by my desire to write.

Revised Version 1:

I possess a natural ability to write, evidenced by my winning an English Department award for the best essay in my writing class, which is complemented by my desire to write.

Rationale for rewrite:

Ability and passion are fine qualities, but evidence to support such claims gives the sentence weight. A "desire" for writing is also important, so I chose to keep that word and stated that the "natural ability" is complemented by the "desire" to write, thus making me highly marketable by showing both stamina and ability.

Revised Version 2:

Writing is a natural ability, a passion, and a desire of mine. I constantly jot down notes, write in my journal, or make lists of ideas and prompts.

Rationale for rewrite:

The rivalry between "natural ability and passion" and the "desire to write" is not one of compelling logic. It is more powerful to put these factors together to work as a team of a love for writing.

Revised Version 3:

My natural ability and passion for writing allow me to produce effective, professional work of the kind that your prestigious company values.



Rationale for rewrite:

This version shows how my writing would help the organization. It is written more gracefully than the previous version, and it is easier to understand what I mean.

GUIDELINES: A CHECKLIST FOR REVISING FOR STYLE AND CLARITY

- ☐ Have you used colorful, engaging, and/or lively language?
- ☐ Have you constructed sentences that are varied in structure and length?
- ☐ Have you avoided slang and clichés?
- ☐ Have you avoided wordiness?
- ☐ Are verbs active rather than passive?
- ☐ Have you avoided shifts in verb tense?
- ☐ Are equal sentence parts parallel and modifiers correctly placed?
- ☐ Can you combine short sentences into longer, more complex ones to avoid a choppy effect?
- ☐ Have you written with clarity and grace, to the best of your ability?

EXERCISE

Imagine that you are applying for your dream job and want to explain in your cover letter why you would be a good choice. Compose a paragraph for this hypothetical job application. Select one or two sentences that you think would make you stand out from the other applicants and revise the sentence(s). For each revised version, write an analysis of why the revision is an improvement over the previous draft. Do this until you are satisfied that your final version is the best that you can write. Spend time reflecting on how your selection evolved from being acceptable to being outstanding. Be prepared to share your work with your classmates or hand it in to your instructor.

ILLUSTRATION: REVISING AT THE SENTENCE LEVEL

As noted earlier, revision at the sentence level focuses on style, clarity, or effectiveness. The following examples illustrate just a few of the writing problems that you might discover in a careful rereading of your draft. They represent some of the most typical sentence-level challenges.

1. **Revising to avoid wordiness and passive construction:** My first day on campus was one of learning my way around.

Revised: I spent my first day on campus learning my way around.

Rationale: The revised sentence avoids the passive construction and reduces the wordiness that of “my first day . . . was one of” causes.



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2. Revising to avoid dangling modifiers:

- a. Standing straight and breathing hard, my mother's face appeared in the aisle.

Revised: My mother, standing straight and breathing hard, appeared in the aisle.

Rationale: The revision shifts the modifying phrase "standing straight and breathing hard" to apply to "mother," not just to her face.

- b. Entering the classroom late, a pop quiz had already been collected.

Revised: Entering the classroom late, I learned that a pop quiz had already been collected.

Rationale: In the original, the "dangling" modifier does not clearly modify anything in the sentence, whereas the revision clarifies who entered the classroom.

3. Revising to avoid awkward construction: That really hit home to me, the fact that other people were having the same experiences of shyness as me when it came to meeting people for the first time.

Revised: I realized that others were just as shy as I when meeting new people.

Rationale: The revision removes unnecessary words and makes the meaning straightforward rather than getting lost among the excess words.

4. Revising to make equal sentence parts parallel:

- a. He is polite, gracious, considerate, and has high standards.

Revised: He is not only polite, gracious, and considerate, but he also has high standards.

- b. Classes are limited and not a big variety.

Revised: Classes are limited and lack variety.

- c. We worked on his reading skills, interaction with others, or I simply read to him.

Revised: We worked on his reading skills and interaction with others; sometimes, I simply read to him.

Rationale: In each of the original sentences, different parts of speech are linked. The revisions avoid that error by linking nouns with nouns and verbs with verbs.

EDITING YOUR PAPER

While sentence-level revision aims to increase the clarity and effectiveness of your work, sentence-level editing focuses on grammar, mechanics, and punctuation.

Grammar refers to such things as avoiding sentence fragments and run-on or fused sentences; subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement; correct use of case for nouns and pronouns; and using adjectives and adverbs correctly. **Mechanics** refers to spelling words correctly, including correct hyphenation; correct use of italics; and use of capital letters, numbers, and abbreviations. **Punctuation** involves using correctly



such things as commas, colons, semicolons, apostrophes, and quotation marks. Although the most important aspect of your writing is your content—what you say, how well you say it, and how well you present it—you also want to pay attention to these matters, especially if you know that you have problems in certain areas. If you have trouble with writing sentence fragments or run-ons, get confused about apostrophe or comma use, or misspell the same words all the time, make a conscious effort to look for those trouble spots. Errors at this level distract your reader from what you are saying, and too many such errors weaken your effectiveness as a writer.

GUIDELINES: A CHECKLIST FOR EDITING YOUR PAPER

- ☐ Are your words spelled correctly?
- ☐ Are sentences complete?
- ☐ Have you avoided fragments and run-on sentences?
- ☐ Are sentences punctuated according to standard conventions; that is, are commas, colons, semicolons, and apostrophes used correctly?
- ☐ Do pronouns and antecedents agree?
- ☐ Do subjects and verbs agree?
- ☐ Have you used pronouns in the correct case, that is, subjective pronouns like "I," "he," "we," and "they" used in subject positions and "me," "him/her," "us," and "them" used in object positions?

ILLUSTRATION: EDITING FOR ERRORS IN GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

Misspelling: There opening hours show that **their** willing to devote **alot** of time to **acomodating** customer needs.

Edited: Their opening hours show that **they're** willing to devote **a lot** of time to **accommodating** customer needs.

Fragment: In college, it's nothing to have a class of 150 to 200 **students**. **Whereas** in high school, my classes never had more than 30 students.

Edited: In college, it's nothing to have a class of 150 to 200 **students**, **whereas** in high school, my classes never had more than 30 students.

Comma splice: When making drives, one group of hunters stays in one **area**, **another** group walks through a nearby area and tries to make the deer move toward the group that is standing.

Edited: When making drives, one group of hunters stays in one **area**; **another** group walks through a nearby area and tries to make the deer move toward the group that is standing.

Run-on or fused sentence: There were no cars zooming or people **talking the only** sound came from the forest creatures.



Edited: There were no cars zooming or people **talking**. **The only** sound came from the forest creatures.

Misuse of semicolon: Basic communication has only two people **involved; the** sender and the receiver.

Edited: Basic communication has only two people **involved: the** sender and the receiver.

Pronoun-antecedent disagreement: A student who wants to improve **their grade** can ask for a tutor at the writing lab.

Edited: A student who wants to improve **his or her grade** can ask for a tutor at the writing lab. OR, **Students who want** to improve **their grade** can ask for a tutor at the writing lab.

Subject-verb disagreement: The **number** of violent crimes in my old neighborhood **have gone** done dramatically in the last decade.

Edited: The **number** of violent crimes in my old neighborhood **has gone** done dramatically in the last decade.

Incorrect pronoun case: Both **Steve and myself** loved hunting.

Edited: Both **Steve and I** loved hunting.

Incorrect apostrophe use: My **parent's** have been married for 30 years.

Edited: My **parents** have been married for 30 years.

PROOFREADING

- ▶ Leave time to proofread your final version and make any last-minute corrections,
- ▶ preferably on the word processor, but if necessary, written neatly in ink. At this final stage, you are looking for careless or previously undiscovered errors that you can fix easily. You might discover a misspelled word or a comma in the wrong place, or you might notice that you have left a word out. If you have given yourself time to write several drafts, edit, and revise, the proofreading stage should just be a final check of work well done.

MindTap Reflect, personalize, and apply what you've learned.

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