RR-1

1 Getting Started

Key Questions

Getting started can be the hardest part of a research writing project. You'll likely find yourself staring at a blank computer screen or twirling a pen in your fingers as you ask, "Is this project really necessary?" or "What in the world should I write about?"

This chapter helps you get started. It explains how you can use your experiences in spoken and online conversations to gain confidence as a writer. It provides an overview of research writing processes and project management strategies. And it discusses how to select, reflect on, and take a position on an appropriate topic.

1a

How can I research and write with confidence?

Even writers who are new to research writing can approach it confidently. That confidence is founded on the recognition that research writing is similar to something you already do well: engage in conversations with people who share your interests in a subject. Your confidence will increase as you learn about the processes involved in research writing and the situations in which it takes place. It will grow as you gain an understanding of the role technology plays in writing of all kinds. And it will become even stronger as you take ownership of your research writing projects.

Think of Writing as a Form of Conversation

Throughout this book, writing is treated as an activity similar to engaging in conversation. As a writer, the conversations you might join will vary widely, from discussions of popular and political issues to conversations about your profession or discipline to exchanges about historical and cultural issues. As you engage in these conversations, you'll create documents that move a conversation forward, using designs that reflect your purposes and those of your readers. By thinking of writing as conversation, you'll be able to use your already extensive understanding of how conversations work to become a confident, effective writer.

Reflect on Your Experience in Conversations Think about the last time you were at a party, reception, or some other public gathering. When you arrived, you probably walked around, said hello to friends, and listened in on several conversations. Before long, you likely joined a group that was talking about something you found interesting.

If you're like most people, you didn't jump right into the conversation. Instead, you listened for a few minutes and thought about what was being said. Perhaps you learned something new. Eventually, you added your voice to the conversation, other members of the group picked up on what you said, and the conversation moved along.

By thinking of writing as a conversation, you'll realize that good writing involves more than simply stating what you know. You'll see writing, instead, as a process of joining, reflecting on, and contributing to a conversation about a topic or an issue.

Thinking of writing as a form of conversation allows you to build on skills you already possess. In addition, because written conversations take place over much longer periods of time than spoken conversations do, you can use your conversational skills to far greater advantage. You can thoroughly consider your purposes and analyze your readers' needs, interests, knowledge, experiences, values, and beliefs. And you can explore the contexts—physical, social, and cultural—that will shape how your document is written and read.

Use Your Understanding of Conversations to Write Confidently Much like a spoken conversation, a written conversation involves an exchange of information, ideas, and arguments among readers and writers. Instead of spoken words, however, the people engaged in the conversation communicate through written documents. Just as most people listen to what's being said before contributing to a conversation, most writers begin the process of writing about a topic by reading.

After they've read about a topic, most writers reflect on what they've learned and search for something new to offer to the other members of the conversation. Then they contribute to the conversation by writing their own document. In turn, that document will be read by other participants in the conversation. If these participants are interested, concerned, or even offended by what another

FIGURE 1.1 Thinking of Writing as a Form of Conversation

writer has added to the conversation, they might write their own documents in response. In this sense, a conversation among writers and readers becomes a circular process in which the information, ideas, and arguments shared through documents lead to the creation of new documents.

My Research Project

Create a Research Log

Create your research log now so you'll be prepared to face the challenges of planning and carrying out your project. A research log can take many forms:

- a notebook
- a word processing file or a folder on a laptop or desktop computer
- a folder or binder
- a set of note cards
- notes taken on a smartphone or a tablet
- a voice recorder

Although it might seem like extra work now, creating a research log as you begin your project will save time in the long run. You can also use Web resources to make progress on your research writing project, keep track of sources, and decide how to use sources to develop and present your argument.

Use Your Experiences with Technology to Improve Your Writing Interestingly, if you ask people who spend significant amounts of time online whether they do much writing, they'll often say they don't. They don't think of creating text messages, e-mail messages, or status updates as writing. Yet it is. And the

writing you've done in these settings can help prepare you for the writing you'll be asked to do in class or at a job.

Of course, there are differences between the writing you do online and the writing you do in an academic essay. Using abbreviations such as OMG or LOL in an essay might go over just about as well as writing "In summary, the available evidence suggests" in a text message. Despite these differences, you can build on your experiences as a writer in a wide range of settings. Just as you will adapt your tone or level of formality in a spoken conversation to the people involved in the conversation—for example, treating new acquaintances differently than you treat old friends—you're likely to adapt your writing to the situation in which you find yourself. Just as you'll tailor your comments to friends when you write on their Facebook pages, you can consider the interests and experiences of the people who will read your next academic essay. And just as you've learned to be critical—even suspicious—of what you read online, you can apply the same caution to your reading of the sources you encounter as you work on assignments.

My Research Project

Find a Written Conversation

We're surrounded by written conversations. Some focus on politics, others on sports, and still others on issues in an academic discipline. You'll find contributions to conversations on the front page of newspapers, on websites such as **CNN.com** and **Foxnews.com**, in academic and professional journals, and in the blogs at Tumblr or **Blogger.com**. Spend some time locating a conversation about a topic that interests you. Use the following prompts to find the conversation.

1. **List a topic that interests you.** Because you'll be searching for sources, jot down a list of search terms, or keywords (p. 146), that you can use to locate sources on the topic.
2. **Choose a newspaper or magazine or search for sources.** Browse a newspaper or magazine or search for sources on a Web search site (p. 33), a library database (p. 33), or a library catalog (p. 32) using the keywords you jotted down about your topic.
3. **Identify sources that seem to address the topic.** Skim each source (p. 61) to get a sense of how it addresses your topic.
4. **Decide whether the sources are engaged in the same conversation.** Ask whether the sources are addressing the same topic. If they are, list the ways in which they are "talking" to one another about the topic. Identify any agreements, disagreements, or differences in their approach to the topic.
5. **Reflect on the conversation.** Ask whether the sources you've identified tell you enough to understand the conversation. Consider whether you might need to locate more sources to give you a fuller picture of the conversation.

Understand the Rhetorical Nature of Writing Situations

? WHAT'S MY PURPOSE?

Your confidence as a writer will grow as you gain an understanding of the situations in which writing takes place. A writing situation is another name for *rhetorical situation*, a concept that has been studied for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks, and in particular Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, contributed in important ways to our understanding of rhetorical situation. So did rhetoricians in China, Japan, India, Africa, Rome, and the Arab world, to name only a few. Viewing writing as a rhetorical act helps us understand how writers or speakers pursue their purposes, consider the needs and interests of their audiences, adapt to the conditions in which they address their audiences, and present, organize, or design their documents or speeches.

This book is based strongly on a rhetorical approach to writing. Throughout the book, you'll find discussions of how you might pursue your purposes and take on various roles; how readers' reactions are affected by their needs, interests, knowledge, experience, values, and beliefs; and how contexts shape how documents are written and read. You'll also find discussions of other important factors, including the sources you use, the type of document you decide to write, opportunities you can take advantage of, and limitations that will reduce your choices about how to craft your document.

As you read this book, look for What's My Purpose? sections like this one. They will help you consider and reconsider your purpose throughout your research writing process.

Writers Have Purposes, Roles, and Biases As is the case with spoken conversations, writers join written conversations for particular **purposes**: to inform, to analyze, to convince or persuade, to solve a problem, and so on. In many cases, writers have more than one purpose, such as learning something about a subject while earning a good grade or a promotion.

To accomplish their purposes, writers adopt **roles** within a conversation. A writer might explain something to someone else, in a sense becoming a guide through the conversation. Another writer might advance an argument, taking on the role of an advocate for a particular approach to an issue. As in spoken conversations, these roles are not mutually exclusive. For example, a writer might create a website to inform readers about the potential benefits of geothermal power. In addition to providing information, that writer might also argue for increased reliance on this form of power.

Your purposes will be informed by a set of interests, experiences, knowledge, attitudes, values, and beliefs that shape your understanding of the conversation. Sometimes characterized as biases, these factors are better understood as the reasonable influence of knowledge and experience on your reactions to the information, ideas, and arguments you encounter. As you consider your purposes and roles, reflect on the interests, experiences, and background you bring to your writing project.

TABLE 1.1 WRITING PURPOSES AND ROLES

Purpose	Role	Actions
To share reflections on an individual, event, object, idea, or issue	Observer	Consider a topic by sharing what is learned through the process of reflecting on it
To help readers become aware of the facts and ideas central to a written conversation	Reporter	Present information on an issue without adopting an argumentative or evaluative position
To analyze and explain the origins, qualities, significance, or potential impact of an idea, event, or issue	Interpreter	Apply an interpretive framework (p. 70) to a subject and seek answers to an analytical question
To help readers reach an informed, well-reasoned understanding of a subject's worth or effectiveness	Evaluator	Make judgments about an individual, event, object, or idea
To make progress on understanding and developing a solution to a problem	Problem solver	Identify and define a problem; discuss the effects of a problem; assess potential solutions; offer a solution
To convince, persuade, or mediate a dispute among readers	Advocate	*Convincing* involves gaining readers' agreement that a position on an issue is reasonable and well founded. *Persuading* involves getting them to take action. *Mediating* involves bringing readers into agreement on how to address an issue.
To share new knowledge with readers	Inquirer	Conduct research and other forms of inquiry; report results
To amuse readers in an engaging manner	Entertainer	Although seldom a primary goal of academic or professional writing, writers often write articles in an entertaining way in an attempt to maintain their readers' interest.

Readers Have Purposes and Biases Just as writers have purposes and biases, so do readers. Among other purposes, readers often want to learn about a subject, assess or evaluate ideas and arguments, or understand opposing perspectives. And like writers, readers are strongly affected by their own needs, interests, knowledge, experiences, values, and beliefs.

As you craft your contribution to a written conversation, ask who your readers are likely to be. Then reflect on their values and beliefs, determine what they probably know about your subject, and take into account their likely experiences—if any—with the subject. Ask what your readers need to know about a subject and what they might be interested in knowing. Most important, ask why readers might want to read your document—and what might cause them to stop reading. In short, attempt to understand and connect with your readers.

Writing Builds on the Work of Others One of the most important ways in which writing situations resemble spoken conversations is their reliance on taking turns. In spoken conversations—at least in those that are productive—people take turns sharing their ideas. To move the conversation forward, speakers build on what has been said, often referring to specific ideas or arguments and identifying the speakers who raised them. Comments such as "As Ellen said . . ." and "Reid made a good point earlier when he pointed out that . . ." are frequently made in spoken conversations. They show respect for the contributions made by others and help speakers align themselves with or distance themselves from other members of the conversation.

Written conversations also build on earlier contributions. Writers refer to the work of other authors to support their arguments, provide a context for their own contributions, or differentiate their ideas from those advanced by other authors. For example, a blogger concerned with new developments in the health care industry might conduct research on trends and use what she learns to inform readers about their implications. When writers use sources in this way, they provide citations to indicate that the information is provided by other authors and to help readers locate the sources should they wish to review them.

Contexts Shape Writing Situations Writing is affected by shared social experiences, shared knowledge and history, work within particular disciplines and professions, and the physical and technological contexts in which documents are written and read.

Social contexts shape the relationships between writers and readers. Are they friends? Strangers? Supervisor and employee? Instructor and student? Whatever the social dynamic, social context will influence how writers and readers approach the writing situation.

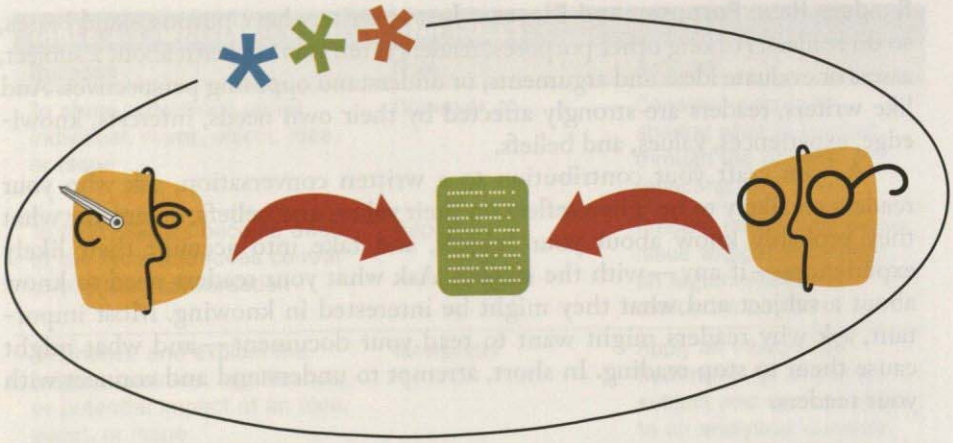

FIGURE 1.2 The Writing Situation

Cultural and historical contexts are a larger set of similarities and differences among writers and readers. The attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, is one example of a historical event that has strongly affected the people of the United States, influencing much of what has been written in the popular press, in professional journals, and on the Web. Similarly, widely shared cultural values—such as a belief in the importance of personal freedom—can shape writers' and readers' willingness to accept arguments that run counter to those values.

Disciplinary and professional contexts are the shared experiences of members of particular disciplines, such as chemistry or sociology. As disciplines develop over time, members of a discipline develop consensus about the kinds of documents, such as journal articles or grant proposals, that are best used to share information, ideas, and arguments. Agreements also develop about how to document sources of information (see pp. 100–101), how to report new findings, and how to offer criticism of previous work in the field.

Physical and technological contexts include physical and temporal factors shaping the writing and reading of a document. Will your readers have time to read your document carefully? Will they read it in a quiet room, on a train, or in a coffee shop? Will they read it in print, on a tablet or smartphone, or on a large computer screen? The answers to these questions will affect both the kind of document you choose to write and the design of your document.

Writing Situations Influence Genre Choices and Design Decisions Writers make choices about the genre—or type of document—and the design of their documents largely in response to physical, social, and disciplinary contexts. They recognize that they are more likely to accomplish their purposes if they create documents that meet their readers' expectations, that are designed to help readers understand ideas and information, and that present their arguments clearly and effectively.

Genres are general categories of documents. Opinion columns, academic essays, and blogs are all genres. So are scholarly articles and posts on social networking sites. Typically, genres develop to help writers accomplish a general purpose. Informative essays, for example, help writers demonstrate their knowledge to an instructor, while informative articles in newspapers, magazines, and newsletters help writers share information and ideas with their readers.

In most cases, genres are social inventions, shaped by the social, cultural, and disciplinary contexts from which they emerge. When writers and readers form a community—such as an academic discipline, a professional association, or a group that shares an interest in a particular topic or activity—they begin to develop characteristic ways of communicating with one another. As the needs and interests of a community change, genres evolve to reflect those needs and interests. Academic essays, for example, might begin to make greater use of color and illustrations. In other cases, a single genre, such as websites, might evolve into several more specialized genres, such as blogs, social networking sites, and news sites.

Design —or more specifically, document design—is the use of visual elements such as fonts, colors, page layout, and illustrations to enhance the effectiveness of written documents. A well-designed chart, for example, can be far more effective at conveying complex information to a reader than even the most clearly written paragraph can. Similarly, the emotional impact of a well-chosen illustration, such as a photograph of a starving child or a video clip of aid workers rushing to help victims of a natural disaster, can do far more than words alone to persuade a reader to take action. Throughout this book, you'll find design treated as a central writing strategy, and you'll find numerous examples of the design characteristics of the genres discussed in each chapter. You'll also find in-depth discussions of design in Chapters 16 and 18.

Writing Situations Present Limitations and Opportunities Each writing situation presents a writer with limitations and opportunities. You might be required to use a particular documentation system or expected to produce a document of a specific length. You might also find yourself presented with opportunities, such as access to useful databases or experts on your topic. Recognizing the limitations and opportunities associated with your writing situation can help you work more effectively, efficiently, and confidently.

Understand and Manage Your Research Writing Processes

Research writing involves learning about a topic, taking a position on that topic, and sharing your position with your readers. Understanding how to carry out and manage the processes involved in research writing will help you write with confidence.

WORKING TOGETHER

Analyze a Writing Situation

Work together with your classmates to analyze a writing situation. Generate a list of documents that members of the group have written recently. Then choose one and analyze its writing situation. To conduct your analysis, respond to the following prompts.

1. **What was written?** Describe the document in enough detail to allow other members of the class to understand its main point. Identify the genre and describe its design features.

2. **What were the writer's purposes?** List the purpose or purposes that drove the writer's work on the document. Why did he or she write it? What did he or she hope to gain by writing it? How was the writer's purpose shaped by his or her needs, interests, knowledge, experiences, values, and beliefs?

3. **Who were the intended readers?** Describe the people who might have been expected to read the document, and list their purpose or purposes for reading it. How would their reading of the document have been shaped by their needs, interests, knowledge, experiences, values, and beliefs?

4. **What sources were used in the document?** Identify the sources of information, ideas, and arguments used in the document. Indicate how the sources were used (for example, to support a point or to differentiate the writer's ideas from those of another author).

5. **What contexts shaped the writing and reading of the document?** Identify the physical, technological, social, cultural, and disciplinary contexts that shaped the writer's work on the document and the readers' reading of it.

6. **What limitations and opportunities affected the writing of this document?** Reflect on the potential requirements the writer might have faced. Think about the likely limitations and opportunities that might have shaped the writer's decisions.

View Research Writing Processes as Flexible and Overlapping Writing processes are best understood as a set of related activities that writers engage in over the course of a writing project. It is rare to see writers carrying out these activities in precisely the same way. In fact, few writers use exactly the same process each time they work on a project. Instead, they assess their writing situation and adapt their writing and research processes to fit that situation.

The discussions of "the research writing process" in this book, as a result, are not intended to provide a one-size-fits-all recipe for success. As a writer, you'll be the best judge of which processes are most appropriate for a given writing project. To make that judgment, however, requires a thorough understanding of your options. Figure 1.3 illustrates the processes that writers typically engage in as they work on research writing projects.

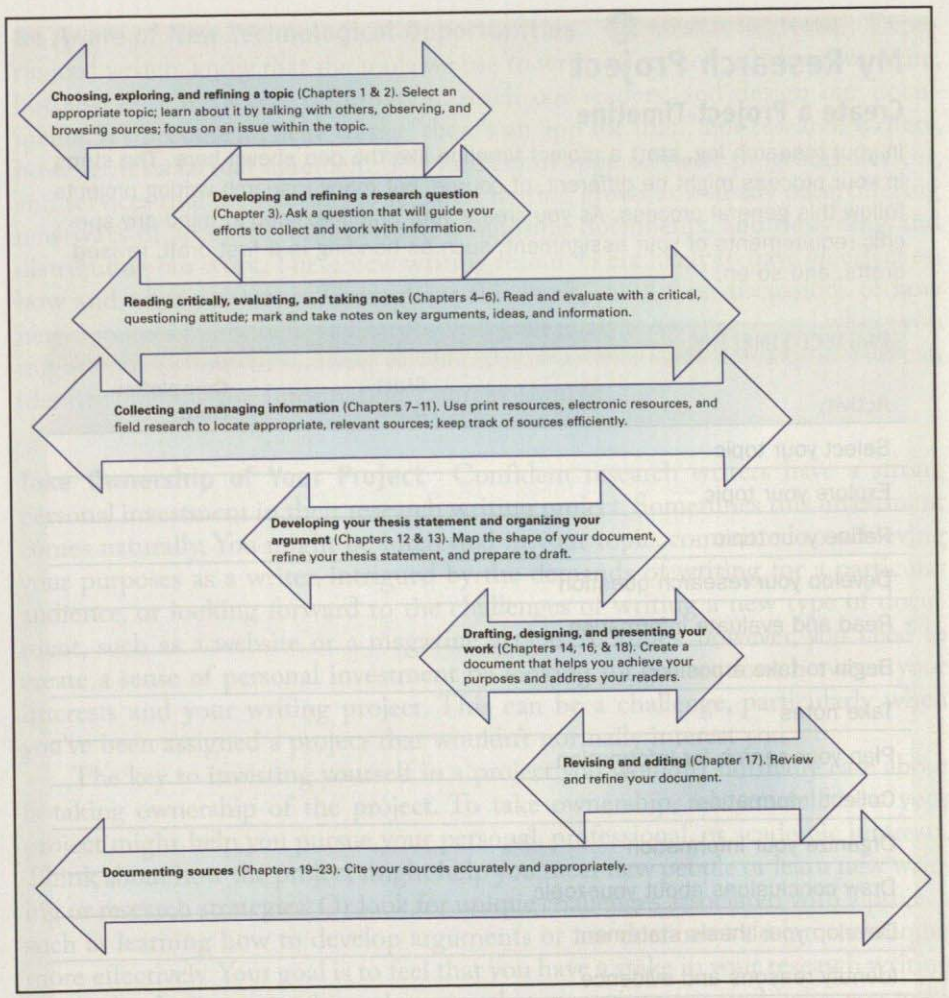

FIGURE 1.3 Research Writing Processes *As you learn about your topic and reflect on your progress, you'll move back and forth among these processes.*

Understand How to Manage Your Research Writing Project Understanding how to manage a research writing project can also help you write with confidence. Project management strategies include setting aside time to work on the project, deciding when and in which order you should carry out various research writing processes, deciding how to manage the information you collect (see Chapter 8), and monitoring your progress on the project.

Time management is particularly important to the success of a project. If you don't schedule your time well, for example, you might spend far too much time collecting information and far too little working with it. As you begin thinking about your research writing project, consider creating a project timeline. A timeline can help you identify important milestones in your project and determine when you need to reach them.

My Research Project

Create a Project Timeline

In your research log, start a project timeline like the one shown here. The steps in your process might be different, of course, but many research writing projects follow this general process. As you create your timeline, keep in mind any specific requirements of your assignment, such as handing in a first draft, revised drafts, and so on.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Activity	Start Date	Completion Date
Select your topic		
Explore your topic		
Refine your topic		
Develop your research question		
Read and evaluate information		
Begin to take a position		
Take notes		
Plan your search for information		
Collect information		
Organize your information		
Draw conclusions about your topic		
Develop your thesis statement		
Identify reasons and evidence		
Organize your document		
Write the first draft of your document		
Review and revise your first draft		
Write and revise additional drafts		
Edit your draft		
Design your document		
Finalize in-text and end-of-text citations		
Publish and submit your document		

Be Aware of New Technological Opportunities INFORMATION LITERACY Experienced writers know that the tools we use to write affect not only how we write, but also how we access information, reach our readers, and design our documents. It's become a cliché to say "there's an app for that." For research writers, however, it's a factual statement. The number of apps, software programs, devices, and services that are relevant to research writing grows at a steady pace, offering new ways of accessing information, composing documents, and designing and distributing our work. These new writing resources are likely to have an effect on how and what you write. Throughout this book, you'll find discussions of how new resources might help you accomplish your goals as a writer—and where you might turn to find the newest developments in writing technologies. You can identify them by the Information Literacy icon. ■

Take Ownership of Your Project Confident research writers have a strong personal investment in their research writing project. Sometimes this investment comes naturally. You might be interested in your topic, committed to achieving your purposes as a writer, intrigued by the demands of writing for a particular audience, or looking forward to the challenges of writing a new type of document, such as a website or a magazine article. At times, however, you need to create a sense of personal investment by looking for connections between your interests and your writing project. This can be a challenge, particularly when you've been assigned a project that wouldn't normally interest you.

The key to investing yourself in a project you wouldn't normally care about is taking ownership of the project. To take ownership, ask yourself how your project might help you pursue your personal, professional, or academic interests. Think about how the project might help you meet new people or learn new writing or research strategies. Or look for unique challenges associated with a project, such as learning how to develop arguments or use document design techniques more effectively. Your goal is to feel that you have a stake in your research writing project by finding something that appeals to your interests and helps you grow as a researcher and writer.

1b

How can I approach an assignment?

Research writers in academic and professional settings often work in response to an assignment. You might be given general guidelines, such as "choose a topic in your major"; you might be asked to choose a topic within a general subject area, such as gender identity; or you might be given complete freedom in your choice of topic. To get started on an assignment, consider your writing situation, generate ideas about potential topics, and choose the most promising topic.

FEATURED WRITERS

Discussions throughout this book are illustrated by seven featured writers—real students who crafted a variety of research projects, including traditional essays, a multimodal essay, and a website. You can learn from these real-life examples as you plan and conduct your own research and draft and revise your own document.

Alexis Alvarez · Writing about the Impact of Competitive Sports on Adolescent Girls
Alexis wrote an informative research essay about the effects competitive sports can have on adolescent girls. She explored the general topic of competitive sports and women before refining her topic to the use of steroids by female teenaged athletes. You can read her essay on p. 375.

Nicholas Brothers · Writing about Private Military Corporations and the War on Terror
Nicholas wrote a research essay that analyzed and argued against the growing importance of private military corporations in U.S. wars. He supported his analysis and argument with published sources and interviews. You can read his essay on p. 404.

Elizabeth Leontiev · Writing about the Impact of the U.S. War on Drugs on Coca Farmers in South America
Elizabeth wrote an argumentative research essay for her composition course. She explored the general topic of the war on drugs and then joined a conversation about the effects of U.S. efforts to eradicate coca farming in South America. You can read her research essay on p. 350.

Lauren Mack · Writing a Multimodal Essay about Saving Coral Reefs
Lauren wrote a multimodal essay—an essay created in PowerPoint that used text, images, audio, and video to convey an argument—about the importance of saving coral reefs. You can see slides from her essay on pp. 279–80.

Cori Schmidtbauer · Writing about Portia's Unconventional Role in *The Merchant of Venice*
Cori wrote an analytic research essay that addressed whether Portia fits the ideal of the Renaissance woman. She used sources from literary theorists to debate whether Shakespeare's play was ahead of its time. You can read her essay in the Palmquist LaunchPad Solo.

Brandon Tate · Creating a Website about Hydraulic Fracturing
Brandon created a website about hydraulic fracturing, a process used during drilling for gas or oil to release hydrocarbons from rock formations. Widely known as fracking, its use had become an important topic of discussion in his community. You can view his website in the Palmquist LaunchPad Solo.

Josh Woelfle · Writing a Scientific Essay about Cancer Research
Josh, who was enrolled in a life-sciences seminar, wrote an informative essay exploring promising new treatments for cancer. You can read his essay on p. 428.

Consider Your Writing Situation

Your assignment will provide important clues about what your instructor and your other readers will expect. To uncover those clues, ask yourself the following questions about your research writing situation.

Who are my readers and why would they read my document? Your assignment might identify your readers, or audience, for you. If you are writing a research project for a class, one of your most important readers will be your instructor. You are also likely to have additional readers, such as your classmates, people who have a professional or personal interest in your topic, or if your project will be published in print or online, the readers of a particular newspaper, magazine, or website. If you are writing in a business or professional setting, your readers might include supervisors, customers, or other people associated with the organization. In some cases, you might be asked to define your own audience. As you consider possible topics, ask yourself which subjects these readers would be most interested in learning about. Featured writer Cori Schmidtbauer, for example, would probably not have written about the work of William Shakespeare if her target audience had been the readers of a magazine such as *PC World* or *Street Rod*.

What will influence me and what will influence my readers? Research writers aren't mindless robots who churn through sources and create documents without emotion or conviction—or at least they shouldn't be. Your topic should interest you. An appropriate topic will keep you motivated as you carry out the work needed to complete your research project successfully. Your project should also be your own, even if it's been assigned to you. One of the most important things you can do as a research writer is to make a personal connection with the topic. To make that connection, look for topics that can help you pursue your personal, professional, and academic interests.

Readers are influenced by their interest in a particular topic, their knowledge of the topic, and their values and beliefs. If your readers have no interest in your topic, know little about it, or are offended by it, you aren't likely to meet with much success.

What type of document am I writing? Assignments often specify the type of document—or genre—you will be writing. You might be asked to write essays, reports, websites, articles, letters to the editor, multimedia presentations, or any of a number of other genres. The genre that is assigned will have an impact on the kinds of topics you choose. For example, consider the differences among the topics addressed in articles in newsmagazines such as *Time*, the topics addressed in scholarly journals in biology, and the topics addressed on websites published by the U.S. Department of Education. Genre will also affect your decisions about the design of your document. To better understand the relationships among genre, design, and topic, review the research essay written by featured writer Alexis Alvarez, the website developed by featured writer Brandon Tate, and the

multimodal essay written by featured writer Lauren Mack. As you reflect on potential topics for your research writing project, keep in mind the type of document specified in your assignment.

What contexts will affect my work on the document? Assignments often give important clues about the contexts—or settings—in which a document will be read. Contexts range from the immediate shared experiences of readers and writers to shared cultures, histories, and disciplines to the physical settings in which documents are written and read (p. 9).

For students, one of the most important social and cultural contexts shaping their written work is academic life itself, that complex mix of instructors, fellow students, classes, tests, labs, and writing assignments that you negotiate on a daily basis. As you analyze an assignment, ask whether it will require you to consider particular disciplinary contexts, whether you'll be asked to consider your class as a community, whether you'll be asked to address readers outside of your class setting, and what physical settings might be involved in the writing and reading of your document.

What role will I adopt toward my readers? A role is a way of relating to your readers. The roles you take on will reflect your purpose, your understanding of your readers, and the type of document you plan to write. As you consider which topics might interest you, think about how you plan to relate to your readers. Some topics will be more appropriate for an assignment that asks you to interpret an object, an event, or a process for your readers, while others will be more appropriate for assignments that ask you to inform or persuade or solve problems. For a list and explanation of the roles you might adopt, see Table 1.1 on p. 8.

What will affect my ability to work on this project? The requirements of your assignment, the limitations you face as you work, and the opportunities you can capitalize on will affect your ability to work on your research project.

Requirements and Limitations If you are writing your research project for a class, examine the requirements of your assignment:

- type of document
- required length
- due date
- number and type of sources (digital, print, and field)
- suggested or required resources, such as a library catalog or database
- requirements about the organization and structure of your document (title page, introduction, body, conclusion, works cited list, and so on)
- documentation system (such as MLA, APA, *Chicago*, or CSE)

TUTORIAL

How do I analyze the audience for a research writing assignment?

Learn about your readers by looking for clues about their needs, interests, and expectations.

COMP 150: College Composition Portfolio 3: Engaging in a Public Issue
Due Date: May 2nd at the beginning of class

1. Analyze the assignment's purpose for clues about your audience.

2. Look for terms such as *reader* and *audience*. Then examine the text near those terms for clues about your readers' expectations.

3. Identify clues about the assignment's genre; look for terms such as *essay*, *report*, *argument*, *article*, or *website*.

In this essay, you will write a public response—an article or essay directed to a specific publication—for readers who are interested in the issue you analyzed in your last portfolio. To accomplish this goal, you will: (a) assess the writing situation surrounding the issue; (b) collect information from a variety of sources, including written texts, personal experience, and, if appropriate, field research; (c) evaluate your sources to choose those that best support your argument; and (d) make a sufficiently narrow argumentative claim and support that claim with sound reasoning and evidence.

You should address your article or essay to readers of a publication that has published work about your issue. You will need to analyze the publication, its readers (specifically, their needs, interests, knowledge, experiences, values, and beliefs), and the writing situation that has shaped discourse about this issue. In general, your audience is likely to expect you to thoroughly explain the points you are making and to support your argument using appropriate forms of evidence. In addition, it is likely that your audience will expect you to use a reasonable tone, to respect your readers and sources, and to avoid slang. Your readers are also likely to expect you to acknowledge and cite your sources in a manner consistent with other sources published by your target publication.

- intermediate reports or activities (such as thesis statements, notes, outlines, and rough drafts)

You might also face limitations, such as lack of access to information or lack of time to work.

Determining your requirements and limitations will help you weigh the potential drawbacks of a topic. You might find that you need to narrow the scope of your topic significantly given your time and page limit.

Opportunities Sometimes writers get so wrapped up in the requirements and limitations of the assignment that they overlook their opportunities. As you think about your topic, ask yourself whether you can take advantage of opportunities such as:

- access to a specialized or particularly good library
- personal experience with and knowledge about a topic
- access to people who are experts on a topic

For example, Alexis Alvarez thought about her personal experiences and those of her friends before deciding to focus on the impact of competitive sports programs on adolescent girls.

Generate Ideas about Potential Topics

You can use prewriting activities such as brainstorming, freewriting, looping, clustering, and sentence starters (writing prompts in which you fill in the blanks) to generate ideas about potential topics.

Brainstorm Brainstorming involves listing ideas as they occur to you. This list should not consist of complete sentences; in fact, brainstorming is most successful when you avoid censoring yourself. Although you'll end up using only a few of the ideas you generate during brainstorming, don't worry until later about weeding out the useful ideas from the less promising ones.

Brainstorming sessions are usually conducted in response to a specific question. Featured writer Lauren Mack generated the following list in response to the question, "What interests me personally about this project?"

> I already know a lot about marine biology from my courses, and I learned a lot about the fragility of sea life from my dive trip to the Florida Keys last spring.
>
> I'd like to do more research and learn about ways marine life can be protected.
>
> Some of my connections from my internship at the New England Aquarium would be great resources for my research.
>
> The documentary film about the ocean that I worked on last summer also sparked my interest in the topic and would also provide good background information.

My Research Project

Generate Ideas by Brainstorming

In your research log, brainstorm responses to the following questions.

- What do I want to accomplish with this project?
- What interests me personally about this project?
- What interests me academically about this project?
- Who are my readers?
- What topics do my readers need to read about?
- What topics would my readers like to read about?

Freewrite Freewriting involves writing full sentences quickly, without stopping and—most important—without editing what you write. You might want to start with one of the ideas you generated in your brainstorming activity, or you could begin your freewriting session with a prompt, such as "I am interested in _____ because . . ." Some writers set a timer and freewrite for five, ten, or fifteen minutes; others set a goal of a certain number of pages and keep writing until they meet that goal.

After brainstorming about the general topic of protecting marine life, Lauren focused her freewriting on her readers' purposes and interests. The following is an excerpt from Lauren's freewriting.

> Everyone loves the ocean and has a general understanding of its significance to our global environment. My readers probably want to know about the challenges facing the health of our oceans and what can be done to protect them. They may want to know whether the problems are natural or caused by humans. They may also want to know what could happen if we don't take action. And they may want to know what they can do as individuals to make a difference.

Lauren did not edit her work or worry about spelling, grammar, or style.

My Research Project

Generate Ideas by Freewriting

In your research log, freewrite in response to one of the following prompts, replacing the blanks with the ideas for topics that you generated during your brainstorming session. Before you begin, set a goal of a certain number of minutes or a set amount of pages you will write.

- Writing about ____ will help me accomplish the following purposes . . .
- I am personally interested in ____ because . . .
- I am academically interested in ____ because . . .
- My readers need or would like to know about ____ because . . .

Blind Write or Dictate If you find it difficult to freewrite without editing, try blind writing—freewriting on a computer with the monitor turned off—or dictating. Many smartphones and tablets allow you to speak your thoughts aloud and convert them immediately to text. These forms of freewriting can take your focus off generating text, because you carry them out without looking at a computer screen.

Use Looping Looping is another form of freewriting. During a looping session, you write for a set amount of time (say, five minutes) and then read what you've written. As you read, identify one key idea in what you've written and then write for five minutes with the new key idea as your starting point. Lauren, for example, wrote in response to a sentence she had generated during freewriting, "And they may want to know what they can do as individuals to make a difference."

> My readers will be both my marine biology professor, who probably knows a lot about the causes and cures of damage to marine life, and my fellow students, who know the basic stuff that I know, such as the fact that both climate change and human pollution are affecting ocean life. But readers will want some specific information about steps we can take to decrease damage to the ocean. They'll need to see it as relevant to their own lives, even if they don't have the passion for sea life that I have.

My Research Project

Generate Ideas by Looping

In your research log, select a response from your freewriting activity and carry out the following looping exercise.

1. Paste the response at the top of your word processing file or write it at the top of a page in your notebook. Then freewrite for five minutes about the response.
2. Identify the best idea in this freewriting.
3. Freewrite for five more minutes about the idea you've identified.

Repeat the process until you've refined your idea into a potential topic.

Use Clustering Clustering involves presenting your ideas about a potential topic in graphical form. Clustering can help you gain a different perspective on a topic by helping you map out the relationships among your ideas. It can also help you generate new ideas. Featured writer Nicholas Brothers used clustering to map out his ideas and further refine his topic (see Figure 1.4).

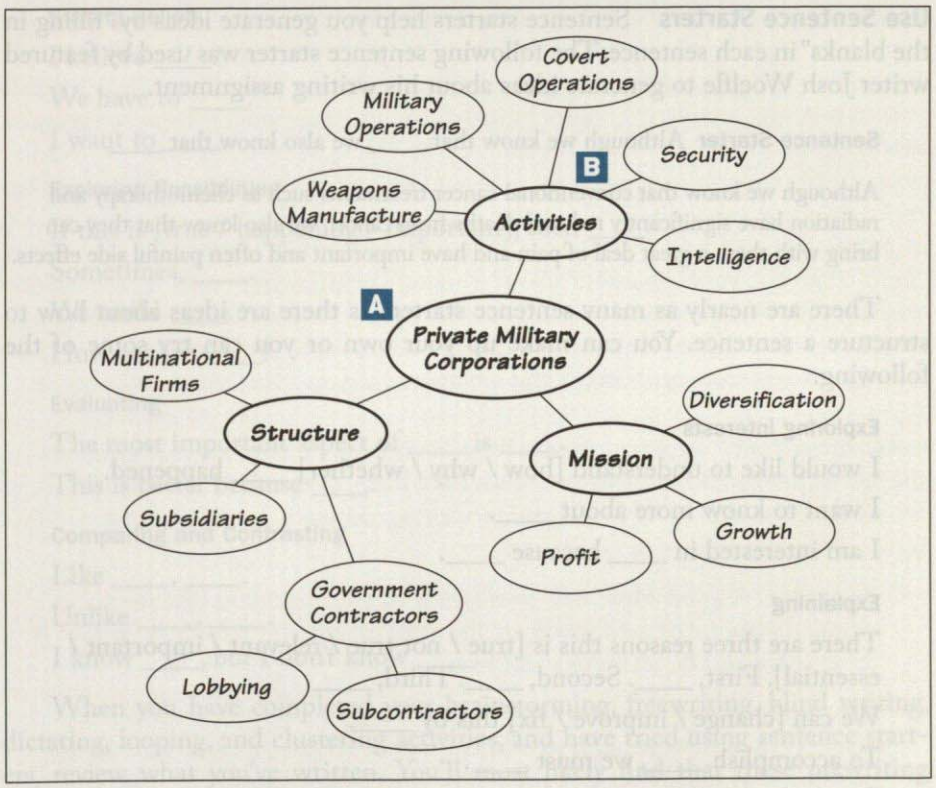

FIGURE 1.4 A Cluster of Ideas Created by Nicholas Brothers

A Nicholas listed a central idea and three key areas to explore.

B Key areas are also linked to related ideas.

My Research Project

Generate Ideas by Clustering

In your research log, generate additional ideas about your potential topic by using a clustering exercise.

1. In the middle of a sheet of paper, or in the center of a digital document (word processing file or graphics file), write your potential topic.
2. Identify ideas that are related to your central topic and list them near it. Think about the importance and relevance of each related idea, and draw lines and circles to show the relationships among your ideas.
3. Write additional ideas related to the ideas in Step 2. In turn, draw lines and circles to show their relationships to the other ideas in your cluster.
4. Repeat the process until you've created a cluster of ideas that represents your current understanding of the topic you are considering.

Use Sentence Starters Sentence starters help you generate ideas by "filling in the blanks" in each sentence. The following sentence starter was used by featured writer Josh Woelfle to generate ideas about his writing assignment.

Sentence Starter Although we know that ____, we also know that ____.

Although we know that conventional cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation have significantly reduced deaths from cancer, we also know that they can bring with them a great deal of pain and have important and often painful side effects.

There are nearly as many sentence starters as there are ideas about how to structure a sentence. You can make up your own or you can try some of the following.

Exploring Interests

I would like to understand [how / why / whether] ____ happened.

I want to know more about ____.

I am interested in ____ because ____.

Explaining

There are three reasons this is [true / not true / relevant / important / essential]. First, ____. Second, ____. Third, ____.

We can [change / improve / fix] this by ____.

To accomplish ____, we must ____.

People do this because ____.

We were trying to ____, but we ended up ____.

Interpreting and Analyzing

This means that ____.

If we were starting over, we would ____.

It has always been the case that ____.

Understanding Causes and Effects

When I was ____, I decided ____. That decision has ____.

When I was ____, I believed ____. But now I believe ____.

The root cause of this problem is ____.

This happened because ____.

Predicting

When this happens, ____.

We would prefer that ____ were true, but we must recognize that ____.

Too often, we ____.

If we ____, then ____.

Stating Beliefs

I believe ____.
We have to ____.
I want to ____.

Exploring Possibilities

If this is [true / happening / important], then ____.
Sometimes, ____.
We could ____.
How can we ____?

Evaluating

The most important aspect of ____ is ____.
This is better because ____.

Comparing and Contrasting

Like ____, ____.
Unlike ____, ____.
I know ____, but I don't know ____.

When you have completed your brainstorming, freewriting, blind writing, dictating, looping, and clustering activities, and have tried using sentence starters, review what you've written. You'll most likely find that these prewriting techniques have generated a useful list of ideas for a topic.

Choose an Appropriate Topic [FRAMING MY ARGUMENT]

In the most general sense, your topic is what you will research and write about—it is the foundation on which your research writing project is built. An appropriate topic, however, is much more than a simple subject heading in an almanac or encyclopedia. It is a subject of debate, discussion, and discovery. As you prepare to choose a topic, consider your writing situation, the time and effort you'll put into your research writing project, and the characteristics of appropriate topics.

Look for Framing My Argument sections like this one throughout this book. They provide advice on developing sound arguments and using appropriate evidence.

Reflect on Your Writing Situation After you've spent time thinking and generating ideas about potential topics for your research project, review the topics you've identified and see whether you're ready to choose a topic. As you carry out your review, think carefully about the level of interest you and your readers might have in the topic, the number of readers who will be interested in the topic, and the appropriateness of the topic for your assignment.

Think of Your Topic as a Conversation You'd Like to Join Thinking of your topic as a topic of conversation is critical to your success as a research writer. Research writing goes beyond merely locating and reporting information. Instead, it is an ongoing process of inquiry in which you must consider your purposes, your readers, and the conventions associated with the type of document you plan to write. Ultimately, research writing is about taking and sharing a position on your topic. In some cases, this will involve sharing your understanding or evaluation of a topic with your readers. In other cases, it will involve attempting to convince them to accept your argument about a topic. In still other cases, it will involve sharing your interpretation or analysis of a topic with your readers. Sharing your position—and the information, ideas, and arguments you draw on to support it—allows you to contribute to and advance a conversation about your topic.

Look for a Topic Appropriate to Your Writing Situation As you reflect on the list of potential topics you've generated, keep in mind the characteristics of topics that are well suited to research writing projects. In general, appropriate topics share the following qualities.

- **Relevance** A good topic will be relevant to your personal life, your academic discipline or profession, or the assignment you have been given. A great topic will be relevant to all of these.
- **Specificity** A good topic will be broad enough to interest you and your readers yet narrow enough to address within the length and time limitations of your assignment. If you begin with a broad topic, such as "food," you'll want to narrow it eventually to something more manageable, such as "organic food in fast-food restaurants."
- **Current Interest** Without exception, good topics are the subject of debate or discussion. A topic need not be controversial—it might simply be something readers want to learn about—but many topics certainly are, and generally the more controversial a topic the easier it will be to find sources that are relevant to your research writing project.
- **Accessible** Keep in mind that you need to be able to locate sources on your topic. If you choose a topic that is too cutting edge, technical, arcane, or obscure, you may have trouble doing your research within the parameters of the assignment.

Be Flexible As you consider your choice of topic, remember that your decision is subject to change. It's a starting point, not a final destination. As you explore your topic, you'll begin to focus on a specific issue—a point of disagreement, uncertainty, concern, or curiosity—that is being discussed by a community of readers and writers. As you learn about your topic, you might find that related topics are more appealing or more appropriate. You might even find that you need to rethink your choice completely.

QUICK REFERENCE

Getting Started

- ☑ Build confidence by thinking of writing as a form of conversation. (p. 4)
- ☑ Create a research log to manage information and ideas as you work. (p. 5)
- ☑ Increase confidence by understanding the rhetorical nature of writing situations. (p. 7)
- ☑ Learn about the role of genre and design in research writing. (p. 10)
- ☑ Gain confidence about research writing by becoming acquainted with research writing processes. (p. 11)
- ☑ Develop a project timeline to help manage your time. (p. 14)
- ☑ Begin working with your assignment by reflecting on your research writing situation. (p. 17)
- ☑ Generate ideas about appropriate topics by brainstorming, freewriting, blind writing, dictating, looping, clustering, and using sentence starters. (p. 20)
- ☑ Choose a promising and appropriate topic. (p. 25)

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