

CHAPTER 12

Classification and Division

Classification and *division* are among humanity's most advanced, yet most basic, modes of thought. These thinking skills allow us to see relations among parts and so make the world around us more comprehensible.

Classification and Division in Action

Saturday night is just around the corner, and you've decided to spend a quiet evening at home—cook some pasta, make a salad, stream a movie onto your computer, and pick up the latest Stephen King book for a little nighttime terror before bed. If you're walking, biking, driving, or taking a bus, you're already plotting the most efficient route. Maybe in your room you first take a look at online video services for a movie rental, then it's a trip to Pathmark Supermarket, and finally you pay a visit to the local library.

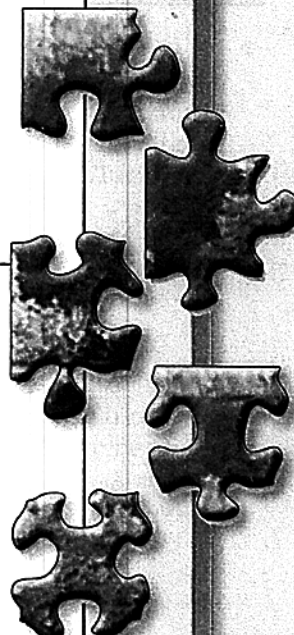
At Netflix or Amazon Instant Video you see different groups of films at the site—new releases, comedies, adventure classics, romances, and others. You decide on *The Hangover Part III*—you've seen it at least twice before, but its antics seem to be the perfect antidote to Stephen King. So you jump to the comedies section and click to select it. There's a two-for-one special—well, maybe you'll be bored the third time around with Zach Galifianakis, Ed Helms, and Bradley Cooper and company—so you click over to the adventure classics section. Your friend Magdalena has been raving about *The Monuments Men*, with George Clooney and Matt Damon, a film set in World War II that she loves. You arrange for streaming both films.

When you get to Pathmark, you go first to the produce area for the makings of a small salad, then to the boxes of macaroni and spaghetti piled high in the pasta section (it's linguine tonight, you've decided), and then over to the shelves marked "Sauces" for a jar of Ronzoni's marinara sauce. Finally, you go to the frozen food section, check out the ice-cream bin, and pick Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia.

Finally, it's off to the library. Inside is a section called New Releases near the checkout desk. You look for the King book and note that one copy is in the

In this chapter you will

- distinguish between classification and division as rhetorical modes
- identify the strategies for writing a classification paper
- identify a topic and write your own classification paper
- analyze student classification essays
- explore classification writing from the world around you
- analyze classification writing by professionals

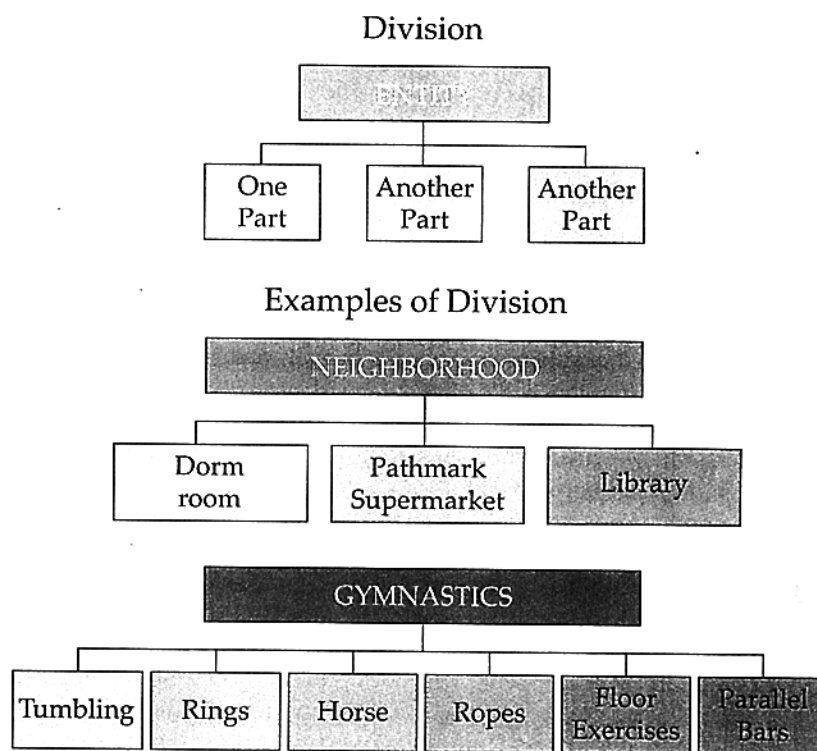


group of books to rent with a daily fee and another copy in the group of free books—from which you grab your copy and head home.

Using Division (or Analysis)

When you established your method for picking up the various items you needed for Saturday night at home, you used *division*, maybe even unconsciously. You considered the whole map of your town, campus, or neighborhood and divided it into separate units to make your trip easier. Your room, the supermarket, the library—these are the sections of your larger surrounding geography. When you divide, you break down something (here, your town, campus, or neighborhood) into parts or sections. Your purpose in dividing was for ease of transport, and so you divided the entity into units that served your purpose.

Clearly, many other possibilities exist for dividing the neighborhood you live in, all depending on the purpose for the division. You could separate the neighborhood by the way people vote in elections; by the ethnic makeup of various sections; by the architectural varieties of buildings; by the lawns and flower gardens and what they look like; and by the school districts and the businesses—the options are numerous.



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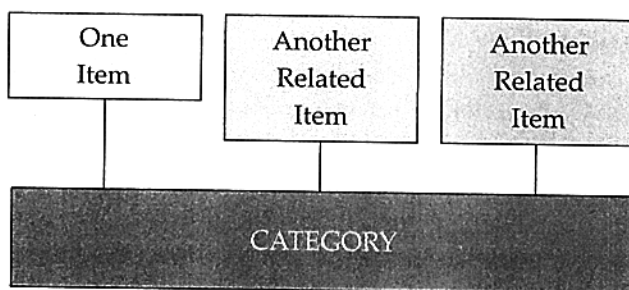
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In the process of division—which, incidentally, many people call *analysis*—you break down an entity into its discrete parts, all based on some organizing principle. Division moves from the general to the specific; you look at a large category and try to understand it better by seeing what makes it up. When you analyze a Big Mac, a rock song, a television program, a magazine ad, or a poem, you divide it into distinct elements in order to understand the parts and how they contribute to the whole.

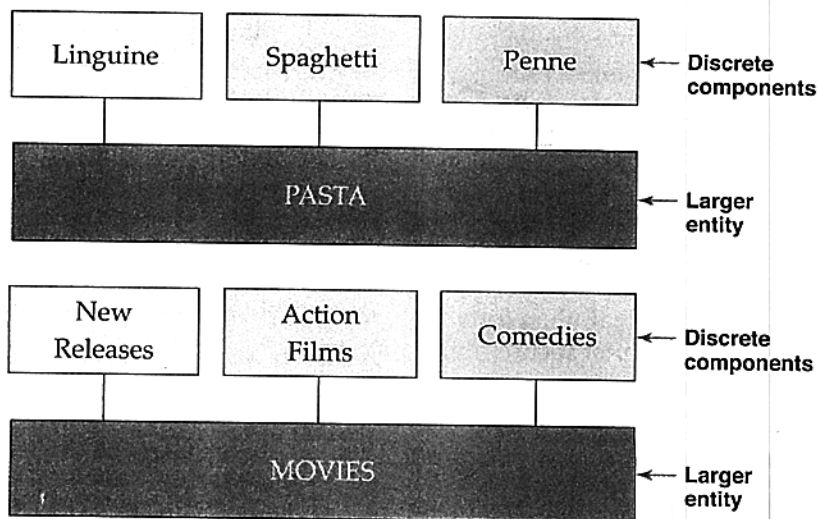
Using Classification

As you scooted around from the computer in your room, to the supermarket, to the library, you used a different, but related, thinking skill. When you searched for movies, pasta, vegetables, ice cream, and a King thriller, you relied on *classification*. To locate specific items, you had to identify the large group into which someone had placed them. Classification creates large entities from discrete components.

Classification



Examples of Classification



How Are Classification and Division Different?

Do you see the differences? *Division* moves from the larger group to the smaller parts. *Classification* moves from the smaller parts to the larger group. Division and classification as rhetorical strategies often work hand in hand and overlap considerably.

If you wanted to write about preparing for your Saturday night at home, as we've revealed it here, you might explain how you *divided* your surroundings into entities that let you move easily from one stop to the other. Then you'd explain how *classification* at your various stops helped you set up an evening of leisure according to your own design.

To take another example, if you wanted to write about violence on television, you might *divide* the topic into news shows, daytime soap operas, and children's programs. Selecting one or more of these, you might then *classify* the soaps, for example. You might identify categories of violence that you saw on the soap operas, such as violence against children; violence among husbands, wives, and lovers; and violence at the workplace. Each category would require supporting detail to make your classification stick—but we'll have more to say later about how to write your classification essay.

Reviewing Division Strategies

As you've seen, another name for division is *analysis*. When you analyze—a poem or short story, a process or procedure, or the reasons for some behavior or action—you divide the issue into components. In analysis by *division*, you break down a subject usually thought of as a single unit into each one of its parts. An analysis of a stereo system, for example, requires naming and describing each of its components. An analysis of a breakfast cereal requires a listing of the number of calories and the grams of protein, carbohydrates, fat, and sodium in a single serving. An analysis of a process—how to change a light bulb or how to make iron ore into steel—requires discussing the separate steps of the process. So, in fact, if you have written a process paper, you have already used one major form of division.

If you wrote a literary analysis using the comparison-contrast strategies in Chapter 11, you used division to break the piece of literature into the components that concerned you before you showed similarities and differences.

When you write a cause-and-effect paper, often called *causal analysis* (see Chapter 13), division will help you separate an entity—an event, an action, or a consequence—into components.

We deal, therefore, with analysis (division) in other sections of this book. This chapter focuses on *classification*.

Writing Your Classification Paper

As you have seen, **classification** is the process by which we categorize members of a large group—ideas, people, plants, animals, books, pasta, films, and so on—on the basis of a single principle. Classification enables us to cope with a large



body of material by organizing it into smaller, more workable categories. Besides, we all like to classify. We do it naturally. Students classify their professors as boring or stimulating. Homemakers classify their cooking utensils, perhaps as those used often and those used occasionally, and place them in drawers and cupboards accordingly. But whether used for fun or for profit, classification has certain requirements, many of which you have already used in developing outlines.



TIPS for Writing a Classification Essay

- **Determine the basis for classification and then apply it consistently.** To classify automobiles, you would not want to establish as the categories "foreign cars," "expensive cars," and "sedans" because these classes do not have the same basis of classification. The first class is based on country of origin, the second on price, and the third on body style. A member of one class would be likely to overlap into others. A Rolls-Royce or a Mercedes, for example, could fit into any of the three classes. Logic requires selecting a single basis of classification, such as price, and then sticking to the issue of price with subclasses like "expensive," "medium-priced," and "low-priced." Likewise, if you were going to classify the courses you are taking according to level of interest, you shouldn't establish as the categories "dull," "moderately interesting," and "difficult." The class "difficult" violates the principle of classification—level of interest, in this case.
- **Define terms that might be unfamiliar to your audience or that are used in a special way.** A writer using technical terms like *mesomorph*, *ectomorph*, and *endomorph* to describe human body types would need to define those terms. Even familiar terms like *mature* and *immature* or *realistic* and *unrealistic* may often require definitions because their interpretations can vary. Similarly, suppose you invent names for your categories. You might, for instance, classify joggers as red-faced wobblers, short-legged two-steppers, and long-legged striders. You must share with your reader your understanding of these made-up terms.
- **Decide whether you need only describe each category fully or whether you need to add clarifying examples.** A classification of people as overweight, underweight, and average, for example, would require merely a complete description of each type. Readers could, on the basis of the description, decide which category the various people they meet belong to. On the other hand, a classification of the present Supreme Court justices as liberals or conservatives, in addition to giving the characteristics of liberal and conservative justices, should also give the names of the justices who belong to each category and some explanation of why they appear in each group.
- **Have a thesis.** In one sense, of course, the classification itself provides the basis for a thesis. If you assert that there are three classes of teachers

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or four classes of pet owners or five classes of social drinkers and can support your assertion, you have a thesis. But as usual, your thesis should express your opinion about or attitude toward your subject. You could show, for example, that one of the categories is preferable to the others, or that all of the categories are silly or despicable or admirable. Having a thesis gives force and interest to your categories.

- **Establish some kind of order.** In some cases, you can order your categories according to time, from earliest to latest. Or, depending on your thesis, several other possibilities for ordering the categories present themselves. You might order the categories from worst to best, best to worst, least enjoyable to most enjoyable, or weakest to strongest, for example. In most listings, you may have more interesting comments to make about some classes than about others. Arrange your classes so that the less interesting ones are in the middle of your paper. Hook your readers with a strong first category and leave them satisfied with an even stronger last category. The practice of ordering categories will make an important contribution to your classification papers.
- **Revise your drafts.** As you revise, be sure that the basis for your classification is clear and consistent. Make sure that your details support the categories you have established. Reread Chapter 6 for suggestions about how to revise your papers.
- **Proofread carefully.** Edit your essay for your own usual errors after you are satisfied with your revision. Be sure to proofread as well.

Source citation.

ASSIGNMENT: CLASSIFICATION

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Write a classification essay in which you break a broad or complex topic into categories according to some logical organizing principle. Be sure to show the special features of each category and also, where appropriate, how the features of each group vary among the categories. Use the tips on the preceding pages and the student model later in this chapter on pages 245–247 as guides. The following list of subjects may offer you some ideas for a topic for your classification paper. Notice how some subjects can easily be limited further than they are: “summer jobs” could be limited to summer jobs at resorts, “outstanding teachers” to outstanding physical education teachers, and so on.

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| 1. Tyrants | 5. Summer jobs |
| 2. Fast food franchises | 6. Smartphones |
| 3. Viet-Nam war battles. | 7. Automobiles |
| 4. Outstanding teachers | 8. Male or female chauvinists |

Writer establishes different categories by names to make reading about the different groups easier.

Smooth connection to thesis for unity and coherence.

Commas used to separate items in a series; members distinguished from others in the group.

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| 9. Video games | 16. Holiday gifts |
| 10. Natural disasters | 17. Terrorism |
| 11. People at a sporting event | 18. Shoppers |
| 12. Attitudes toward mental illnesses | 19. The contents of my handbag
(or bookbag or briefcase) |
| 13. Good drugs | 20. Great leaders |
| 14. Concert goers | |
| 15. Voters | |

Student Writing: Classification

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Examine this student's classification essay; use the annotations to guide your reading.

Nick Halikas Television Watchers

Source citation.

According to a major company that studies TV viewers' habits, the average American spends more than 34 hours a week watching TV (Hinkley). That's almost five hours a day! We're all television addicts, it would seem. With so many types of programs available and so many different people having different interests, we might expect a wide range of behaviors for those who watch television programs. But careful observation makes it clear that there are really only three different groupings for ways that people watch TV: the schedulers, the backgrounders, and the couch potatoes. Anyone can fall into any of these groups at any given moment, but we all know in our heart of hearts that we fit into one of these categories most of the time.

The first group, the schedulers, consists of people who value their time enough to plan ahead when they are going to watch television. Whether they are hardworking professionals or studious students, or are just very busy, schedulers consider the amount of time they have to dedicate to watching TV as opposed to doing anything else, and they plan their lives accordingly. Schedulers are very familiar with the days and times that their favorite shows are on, and either they clear their personal calendars to watch these shows, or they record the shows and plan to watch them at some other time. They do find the time to carry out other responsibilities

Writer establishes different categories by names to make reading about the different groups easier.

Smooth connection to thesis for unity and coherence.

Commas used to separate items in a series; members distinguished from others in the group.

1

Thesis states topic clearly and identifies writer's opinion.

2

Commas used for interrupting element.

Specific example helps make the point successfully.

and follow other interests. For example, if a Phish concert at the local stadium conflicts with a showing of *Two and a Half Men*, schedulers will give in to the music, hoping to catch up on the comedy series through reruns by recording the show in their absence or by the "On Demand" function. These types of viewers know what they like to watch, know when their favorite shows reach the screen, make time to watch them, and rarely skip the commitment to view their favorite programs

Effective transition.

- 3 Not as committed to specific shows as the schedulers, the backgrounders don't need to make time to watch television. They're not especially good at budgeting daily events; with them the TV is always on! As soon as a backgrounder stands within hearing distance of a television set, the remote control unit swings into action. Anything on TV at the moment will do for the undiscerning backgrounders. They appreciate the dull murmur of the TV in another room, even if they miss the substance of a show. Sooner or later, they'll stop vacuuming or shaking out the bed sheets to try to catch up with what's on the screen. But after a few minutes they're back to their chores and the distant rumble of television voices. Whether it is a news show while the washing machine sputters, a nature show while the dog is being fed, or an infomercial for a juicer while the children beg for cookies and milk, the backgrounder keeps the television turned on for constant entertainment.

Specific examples.

- 4 Finally, there are the couch potatoes (also called sofa spuds), who are somewhat comparable to the backgrounders in that the television is always on. The term *couch potato* commonly refers to someone who is very sedentary, particularly a person who puts in a considerable amount of time lying around and watching television. These viewers need nothing more than a color screen to set their TV juices flowing. Like the backgrounders, couch potatoes have the TV on all the time and either don't care what is on or love everything that is on all the time. From a Cowboys game to a reality show on young marrieds to a cooking demonstration, couch potatoes don't discriminate. They watch whatever glows on the television screen and keeps them glued to their worn leather seats. An occasional snooze is perfectly in keeping with the couch potatoes' "I don't care" attitude. Unlike the backgrounders, who perform other tasks while viewing, the couch potatoes do nothing more than sit (or recline) before the screen. If there are other things to do, the couch potato will ignore

Use of new vocabulary; no citation needed for dictionary entry; general knowledge.

Photo adds specificity and humor.

Common items in series.

Works cited list identifies sources fully.

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them for the reassuring murmur of the video screen. An avowed couch potato took this selfie and sent it to friends in an e-mail; it's an excellent example of these types of viewers (Edwards).

Sometimes television people enjoy just sitting on the couch and doing nothing, other times they know they have other commitments so they schedule their TV viewing, and even other times they just want something on television while they do chores and prepare meals. But one thing is clear. The television has a central role in households today, and no matter what group you're in, it's certain that the video screen is the center of leisure activity at home.

Works Cited

- Edwards, Jerry. "Couch potato." Received by Nick Halikas, 4 July 2014.
Hinkley, David. "Americans Spend 34 Hours a Week Watching TV, According to Nielsen Numbers." *New York Daily News*, 19 Sept. 2012, www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/americans-spend-34-hours-week-watching-tv-nielsen-numbers-article-1.1162285.

FOR WRITING OR DISCUSSION

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1. What is the writer's thesis here?
2. Which group do you think the writer has identified most clearly? Which details help you best see that group?
3. What do the sources that the writer used contribute to the essay? Do you find the sources credible? Why or why not? What is your opinion of the photograph? How does it support the writer's statements about the "couch potato"? Where has the writer used transitions to create a flow of ideas?

Commas for
items in a
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Works cited
list identifies
sources fully.

4

Conclusion
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5

Classification in the World Around You

MyWritingLab

For thirty years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued guidelines for an appropriate diet for people to stay healthy. The Department uses classification to identify food groups, their essential elements, and the manner in which people should use the groups to advantage. The well-known food guide called "My Pyramid: Steps to a Healthier You" (shown on the next page) draws on the principles of classification explored in this chapter.

Basis of classification — The presentation takes discrete components, the various food groups, and organizes them under the larger entity of foods for a healthful diet.

Thesis — The food group pyramid identifies food categories—grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat and beans—and their essential elements.

Category descriptions — Every group includes specific details: "dark green veggies like broccoli, spinach, and other dark leafy greens"; "fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds."

Visuals — Each color represents a different classification, and the color coordinates with the elements in each group. Drawings of food objects are clarifying examples. The figure ascending the steps highlights the need for exercise.

Order — The categories go from least to most complex food groups, visually from left to right.

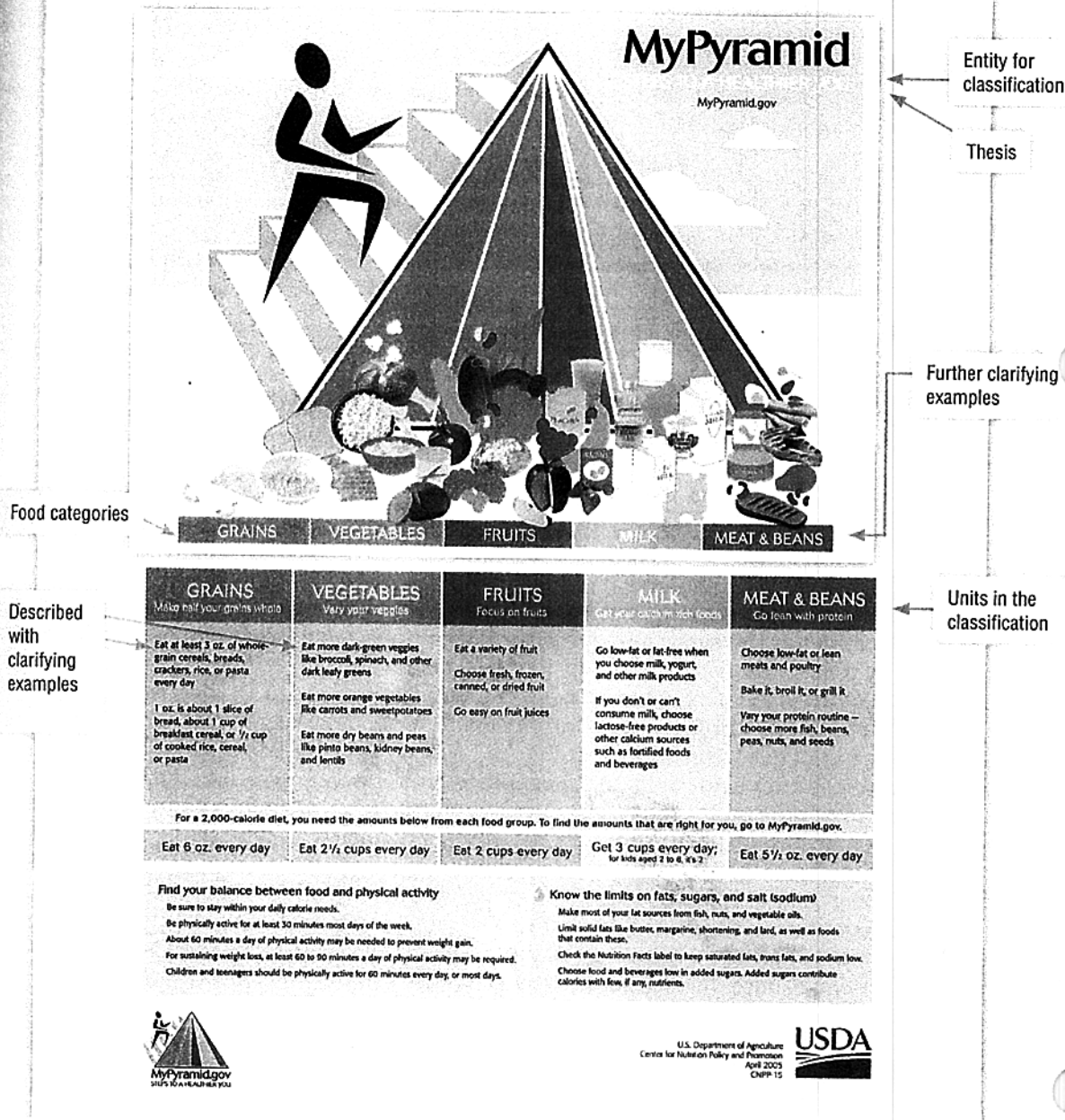
Definition of terms — Most language is familiar to readers; "sodium," in parentheses, serves as alternative to "salt."

Your Turn

Check the Web for other classification schemes represented verbally and visually. Look for classifications of automobiles, financial investments, health plans, or mental or physical illnesses. Make sure that you're looking at a large group broken down into smaller groups so that users will understand them. You might want to look at other food groups diagrams to see which presentation better uses the classification scheme.

Food category

Described
with
clarifying
examples



STRATEGY CHECKLIST: Writing and Revising your Classification Paper

Plan the paper.

- ☐ Have I used prewriting to identify a topic for classification?
- ☐ Have I determined a basis for my classification that allows a logical grouping?
- ☐ Have I thought carefully about my purpose in writing the classification essay?
- ☐ Do I have my audience clearly in mind?
- ☐ Have I used an outline to identify groups and suggest examples in each group?

Write a first draft.

- ☐ Have I written a thesis that expresses an opinion about the topic I will develop through classification?
- ☐ Have I identified the reason for the classification in my introduction?
- ☐ Have I explained each category with sufficient examples and details?
- ☐ Have I determined an effective order for the categories: time order, least to most important, most to least important, best to worst, worst to best?

Revise and edit the paper.

- ☐ Have I sought peer feedback to assure that my categories make sense?
- ☐ Have I checked to see that categories do not overlap?
- ☐ Should I add any examples, details, or categories to improve my paper?
- ☐ Should I eliminate any examples, details, or categories to improve my paper?

Proofread the paper.

- ☐ Have I proofread for grammar, spelling, and mechanics?

CROSSCURRENTS

MyWritingLab

John Holt's "Three Kinds of Discipline" in this chapter and Susan Douglas's "Remote Control: How to Raise a Media Skeptic" in Chapter 10 both deal with rearing children. What would Holt say to Douglas? What would she say to him?