

Explore an Issue

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As you stand in line to order a soda at a local fast food restaurant, you notice a young mother with three children taking their food to a table. The trays Mom is juggling are piled with burgers and fries, even though the restaurant offers more healthful kids' meals. You're puzzled. If healthful options are offered, why hasn't this mother taken advantage of them? You begin to think that maybe the mother just doesn't know any better. By offering healthful choices for children, fast food restaurants are doing their part. But is there more that can be done?

As you think about the family while developing your ideas for a nutrition course paper, you wonder what your claim should be. Should you argue the causes of childhood obesity or the effects of children eating a fast food diet? Should you work to discover the problem underlying childhood obesity and offer a solution? Along the way, you will need to define terms and evaluate any solutions you propose. How can you use similar child-food dilemmas, such as food in school cafeterias, to compare with fast food?

COMMUNITY

School-Academic
Workplace
Family-Household
Neighborhood
Social-Cultural
Consumer
Concerned Citizen

TOPIC: Food Consumption

ISSUE: Fast Food and Health

AUDIENCE: Fast Food Restaurant Owners

CLAIM: Fast food restaurants should move beyond just offering healthful foods to encourage children to eat healthier.

Chapter 7 is designed to help you explore your issue from different angles, further developing your claim so that the argument's organizational structure becomes clear.

In this chapter, you will work toward solidifying your claim as you:

- Develop an argument strategy based on:
 - Definitions.
 - Causes or consequences.
 - Comparisons.
 - Solution proposals.
 - Evaluations.
- Write an exploratory essay.

Prewrite on Your Issue

Is the topic one that has been assigned, or are you able to select your own? Either way, your argument will be much more successful if you are able to find a way into the topic based on your own interests. If you are just going through the motions to fulfill a writing assignment, your reader will notice. Your argument will not be as persuasive when you yourself are not enthusiastic about the topic. Hal is interested in Internet privacy because he uses the Internet at work and wants to know what his company is allowed to access on his computer. Because he is part of the community of people who use the Internet and email at work, the issue is one that is of high interest. His argument will reap the benefits of an active search into the questions Hal has about his privacy at work. Later in this chapter, you will follow

This arguer begins with the assumption that childhood obesity is linked to the consumption of unhealthy foods. The 13 steps will test that assumption and its application to possible solutions.



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Lise's progress as she works on an issue that has meaning to her: childhood obesity as it is linked to a diet of fast food.

It often happens, though, that a topic is assigned and may not be one you wish to argue. Ask yourself some questions about the topic. As you work on your argument, at any stage before and after collecting your research, you should take some time to prewrite. Prewriting is a low-stakes process of thinking about your issue. There is no right or wrong way to go about prewriting, and its function is to give you time to reflect on your argument as it comes together. All methods do not work for all people. Some writers find freewriting provides them with the most ideas; some look at a blank page and freeze. Find what works for you, but do spend time prewriting. During this process, you may find an angle to your argument you had not expected, or you may be able to anticipate some problems that you can avoid later. The purpose of writing at different points in the argument process is to allow you to see what you know so far and what you still need to know, to question your assumptions, and to better explore your understanding of the audience.

There are some standard methods of coming up with ideas that you may already be familiar with: brainstorming, mapping (or clustering), and freewriting. A more nontraditional method is that of moving from boring to interesting, and this is the method covered here.

For more prewriting tips, visit the tutorial online at CengageBrain.com.

Move from Boring to Interesting

One of America's best-loved authors, Ray Bradbury, loves to write and has enjoyed his writing career immensely. But even now in his late eighties, Bradbury remembers the worst essay he ever wrote. In *Bradbury Speaks* (2005), the author discusses a magazine piece editors asked him to write about life on other planets. He wasn't really interested in the assignment, but he forged ahead. He researched the topic to death and produced a dead piece of writing. It took several editors to bring the article back to life. Bradbury, best known for his science fiction stories about life on other planets, was embarrassed. Bradbury's advice, and ours, is to write about what you are interested in—a topic that means something to you.

Angry at your city council for refusing to do anything about the graffiti problem near your child's school? Write a letter. See a problem at work? Send a memo. Have an assignment that seems boring? Find your own angle into the topic. Become engaged, and your writing will be engaging as well.

Writing about real-life situations rarely leads to boring arguments, whereas trying to write about an instructor-assigned topic can. How can you take a boring topic and find an interesting way to write about it? We call this method **moving from boring to interesting**.

The Method

Let's say you are assigned the topic of wastewater treatment plants in your Urban Studies course. Perhaps not the most exciting of topics. Can you really find something interesting to say about treating wastewater? Try this. List all of the things you are interested in; it doesn't matter if they appear to have nothing to do with clean water.

- White-water rafting
- Cooking
- Doll making
- Gardening

Now try to make a connection between each of these topics and the one assigned: wastewater treatment plants.

- Where does the water come from for the new artificial white-water rafting course in town?
- How does cooking grease going down the drains get cleaned out of the water?
- How did the old process of draining dyes from nineteenth century fabric manufacturers into rivers change the way water is treated today?
- Can gray water be used safely for gardens?

Your Turn 7a: *Get Started:* Use Boring to Interesting Strategies

For each of the following topics, make a connection to a topic that is of interest to you:

- Circadian rhythms
- The fall of the Roman Empire
- *Moby Dick*
- Rural health care

Develop an Argument Strategy

There are many writing tasks you may be asked to perform in your college writing career. You may be assigned an evaluative essay in a business course that asks you to determine the feasibility of a new project. You may be asked to compare the governmental systems of two countries in a political science course. You may be asked to trace the development of a species in a biology course. Most frequently, you will be asked to argue a position. In Chapter 8, you will learn about formal argument types (Toulmin, Rogerian, etc.). Here we will discuss the practicalities of presenting definitions, causes or consequences, comparisons, solution proposals, and evaluations.

Use Definitions

Use a **definition** when an argument may benefit from an in-depth discussion of the terms involved in the argument. Throughout your college career (and very frequently in your professional career as well), you will be asked to define terms. Maybe you are developing a brochure for your clients and want your services to be clear. You would define each one. Maybe you are debating the outcome of a battle in a history course. Who won? That depends on the definition of *winning* that you use. Sometimes you will need to define terms within a paper in conjunction with other types of support; other times, the definition will be the point of the paper.

Defining terms can be a useful way to begin your argument. But please do not begin every essay with, “according to Webster’s Dictionary. . . .” Supply a definition only under these circumstances:

- Your definition of a term is very different from that normally provided.
- There is controversy surrounding the definition of a term, and it is important for your audience either to know about this controversy or to understand why you have settled on the definition you are using.

In the field of mental health, for example, there is a diagnostic volume called the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The *DSM* is currently in its fourth edition, but this edition was published in 1994, with a fifth edition not anticipated until 2012. I can think

of all kinds of arguments based on definition that would arise from the long revision delays between editions of this extremely important reference work.

EXAMPLE #1:

CLAIM: Employees should receive disability compensation for generalized anxiety disorder.

SUPPORT ONE: The *DSM-IV* definition of generalized anxiety disorder.

SUPPORT TWO: The insurance company’s definition of a disability that may receive compensation.

Discussion: Perhaps in your Abnormal Psychology course you are arguing about which disabilities should be compensated by insurance. For an employee diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder, for example, what do you do first? Your first step would probably be to research the disorder. Then you would need to research what insurance companies determine is a disorder. According to the *DSM-IV*, generalized anxiety disorder must affect a person’s ability to function in social or occupational situations. Most insurance providers, however, don’t recognize the disorder unless it is one that will affect an employee’s performance without medication. If the employee can be treated with medication, then the insurance provider will not grant disability.

Here we have two different definitions, or rather, one definition that adds a limitation to the other. The diagnostic manual currently defines the disorder on the basis of functionality only; the insurance provider defines the disorder in terms of functionality and how that functionality is affected by medication. You would then have to decide which definition you want to go with. If you elect to follow the insurance company’s definition, you would argue that a person diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder will not be in a position to receive disability payments unless the employee’s ability to work is impaired even with medication. If you prefer the *DSM-IV* definition, you will have to argue against the insurance company on the basis of that medical (as opposed to the insurance) definition. And that argument could change for future employees as the *DSM-IV* is revised.

EXAMPLE #2:

CLAIM: The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* should be updated more frequently.

SUPPORT: The definition of many disorders changes quickly.

Discussion: Another argument may be developed: Should the *DSM-IV* be updated more frequently? This argument could be addressed in many ways, particularly supported by cause-and-effect evidence, but definition plays a crucial role as well. For example, it wasn’t until the

1994 revision that homosexuality was no longer defined as a disorder. The definition of homosexuality changed. What other disorders will need to be redefined or reclassified based on new research before 2012? An argument could be made that these changing definitions need to be in print more frequently to provide better services to those who need it.

Six Types of Definition (SERFIN)

There are six main types of definitions that you can use in your academic writing. They may be combined as needed. Below is an overview of each of the types (scientific, example, riddle, function, irony, and negation).

Define with Science (Descriptive, Factual)

In this type of definition, whether the subject is scientific or not, you are answering the question how big, what color, how old, and so forth. You are describing the subject systematically. Usually, you are describing those characteristics that make the subject what it is—a mammal, a poem, a weapon, a disease.

EXAMPLE

Bees are insects, with six legs and two pairs of wings. Bees vary in size from roughly four millimeters to well over four centimeters in length, and they weigh anywhere from . . .

Your Turn 7b: Get Started: Define with Science

Define an issue that you are working on in terms of science. What are its component parts? Describe it accurately.

Define by Example

When you are arguing by example, you are providing the reader with examples of the category being defined. What are some examples of great athletes, poor drivers, or early mammals? By describing the features of the individuals in the group, you will be defining the group as well.

EXAMPLE

A great writer is someone like William Chaucer, Jane Austen, or Theodore Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss.

Your Turn 7c: Get Started: Define by Example

Use examples to define your issue. Why are these examples good representations of the category into which your issue falls?

Define with a Riddle

Riddles work well in introductions. The definition is given, but the reader has to guess what is being defined.

EXAMPLE

If we allow these people to be integrated into the military, they will cause great harm to morale and discipline. They will cause dissension in the ranks and destroy unit cohesion. If unit cohesion goes, so will military readiness. If we lose military readiness, the defense of our country will be at risk. Our very survival is at stake. We must keep these people separate. (Who are we talking about? Homosexuals? No. Women then? No. This is a great example of misdirection. Keep going back in time to the first people the military tried to keep from integrating.)

Of course, the remainder of the argument can use any of the other SERFIN methods to expand upon the answer to the riddle.

Your Turn 7d: Get Started: Define with a Riddle

Write an introduction that poses your issue as a riddle. If you can mislead your reader, all the better. How is this an effective strategy as a way to introduce your issue?

Define by Function

When you are looking at your subject's function, you are explaining what it can (or sometimes cannot) do. It is also important to understand your audience's values in explaining the functions of your term.

EXAMPLE

The function of the space program is what? It can be argued that the space program is important to advance scientific knowledge and to remain ahead of other countries. The argument then provides support for these functions.

Your Turn 7e: Get Started: Define by Function

Define your issue in terms of its functions. Identify at least three functions related to your issue. Which may be the most important function and why?

Define with Irony

In an ironic definition, you are arguing that something is not necessarily what it seems, or is something other than it seems, usually whatever the thing seems least likely to be.

EXAMPLE

A forest fire is the bringer of life. This statement seems counterintuitive, going against reason. After all, so much is destroyed in a forest fire. However, there are lots of important benefits that come from the destruction. One benefit is that certain pine cones cannot release their seeds without the high temperatures of a fire.

Your Turn 7f: *Get Started:* Define with Irony

Irony is related to tone of voice, yet you are not going for sarcasm here. Your goal is to present your issue in a way that most people would not see it. How can you present your issue in a way that seems to go against reason, yet once you explain it will seem very logical?

Define by Negating

When you define a subject by what it isn't, you are setting up an interesting essay. For example, you could define education as NOT being a focus on recall. You can use negation with description, example, function, and so on.

EXAMPLE

Love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong. . . .

Your Turn 7g: *Get Started:* Define by Negation

Sometimes it is easier to define your issue by what it is not, particularly if you are trying to highlight how your issue is lacking or approached differently in a different culture or situation. For example, you may define democracy by describing a country where democracy is not the standard way of life. Define your issue in terms of what it is not.

Discover Causes or Consequences

A thorough examination of the causes or consequences of your argument (both good and bad) can help you select the best evidence to support your claim. What good would come out of your argument? What bad? What might happen if your argument is not accepted? **Consequences** (or effects) look to the future; **causes** look at the past. Together they create a chain of evidence that can be very convincing.

Are you interested in arguing based on causes or consequences? If you need to explain how something came about, you are arguing causes. Do you want to argue what the outcomes of a particular event will be? Then you're interested in presenting evidence of effects. But it's not as simple as it appears. In the example posed in Figure 7.1, we can see that a few of the

causes of air pollution are on the left, and some of the effects of air pollution are on the right. Air pollution can be both a cause and an effect. The effects themselves can go on to be causes of future events:



Figure 7.1 Cause and consequence (simple).

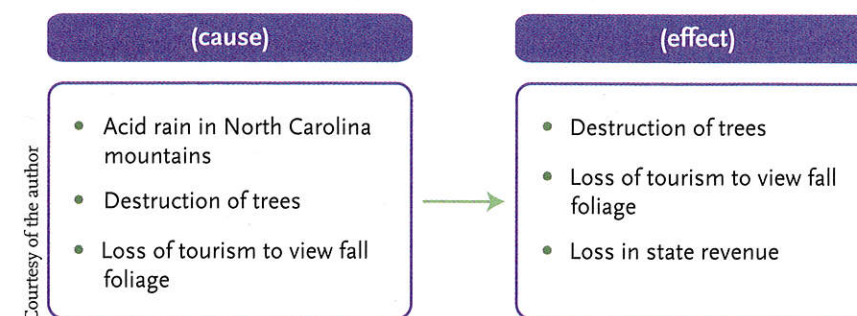


Figure 7.1 Cause and effect (complex).

EXAMPLE 1

Claim: Several factors are responsible for the acid rain destroying North Carolina's mountain trees.

Causes: Factory smoke and car emissions cause acid rain.

EXAMPLE 2

Claim: Acid rain in the North Carolina mountains results in the loss of state revenue.

Consequences: The destruction of trees will discourage tourists from visiting the North Carolina mountains to view the fall foliage.

As you can see, each effect in turn becomes the cause of something else. And each one of these effects could be argued as being caused by factors other than the ones selected. Cause and/or consequence support can be useful but very tricky. How far back to you need to research before you feel comfortable that you have reached the earliest cause? How far do you need

Tip 7a

Difference between Affect and Effect

Effect is a noun:

- The *effect* of cutting back on welfare payments is that single mothers have to pay more for childcare.

Affect is a verb:

- This *affects* their budgets adversely.

to project into the future to feel confident that you have anticipated all reasonable consequences? Can you differentiate between primary causes and secondary causes?

A **primary cause** is one that results in an immediate effect. It can be very difficult to determine what the primary cause of any event is. As a humorous example, follow this student example of a causal narrative:

This morning I broke my arm. This is how it happened. Last night my husband and I had an argument. Because I was so angry, I forgot to set the alarm clock before I went to bed. The next morning we all woke up late, so we were rushing around. As I went to leave, I realized I could not find my glasses. Figuring it was too late to search for them, I rushed out of the door and, to my dismay, stepped on the skateboard my son had left on the front steps. I fell and broke my arm.

The scenario may be silly, but an analysis of cause is not. Can we determine the primary cause of the student's broken arm? Was it the fight with her husband? Not wearing her glasses? The skateboard being in the wrong place? Actually, I would venture to say it was the contact of the cement steps with her arm that was the primary cause of the injury! It is the one cause about which there can be no dispute. Concrete usually wins out over unprotected bone.

But what about secondary, sometimes called peripheral, causes of the accident? **Secondary causes** are contributing factors. The list of factors contributing to the broken arm is quite long: an unset alarm clock, missing glasses, a misplaced skateboard. How far and wide should the net be cast when exploring secondary causes? It depends. Here are a couple of examples. The first is real; the second is hypothetical.

EXAMPLE

CLAIM: The rubella outbreak in the mid-1960s resulted in closed captioning television.

CAUSES: 1963–1965 Rubella outbreak high numbers of deaf children
→ As these children grew, they demanded closed captioned TV

Discussion: A claim can be made that I have here a clear cause, yet the effect could leave many scratching their heads. What is the link between the two? According to an April 1982 *New York Times* article, between 1963 and 1965, 8,000 pregnant mothers became infected by the rubella virus and gave birth to deaf children. As these children became adults in the early 1980s, they (along with other hearing-impaired individuals) demanded equal access to television programming. Closed captioning was developed in 1980 and spread quickly through the industry. So the claim that the rubella outbreak led to the development of a technology that allowed deaf people to access television programming seems at

first unlikely. Yet, through a presentation of contributing factors, the connection is clear. The link must be established with a chronology of events bridging the cause to the effect.

This next example involves a hypothetical plane crash.

EXAMPLE

Claim 1 (made by attorneys for crash victims' families): A stress fracture (effect) in the plane's wing was the result of poor inspections by the airline (cause).

Support: The inspectors were poorly qualified.

Claim 2 (made by attorneys for the airline): The stress fracture was missed (effect) because the inspectors were poorly trained by FSAM, an accredited school from which we have been hiring inspectors for years (cause).

Support: Inspectors are trained by FSAM, not the airline.

Claim 3 (made by attorneys for FSAM): A lack of funding (cause) has led to the loss of quality instructors (effect).

Support: FSAM's president embezzled millions of dollars affecting the school's budget.

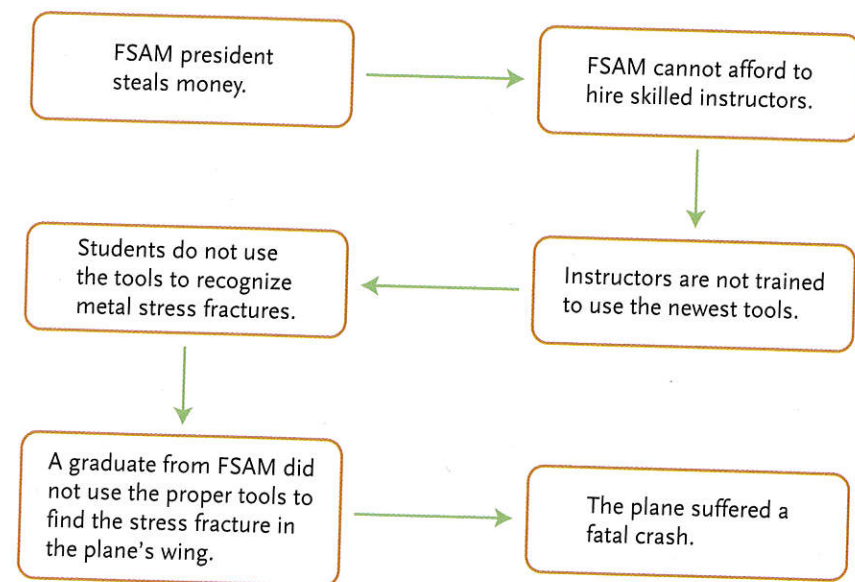
Discussion: Plane crashes are investigated thoroughly for reasons that are not always strictly humanitarian. The primary cause of a crash can often be determined fairly quickly: a wing fell off, a bomb was detonated, the controls jammed, the pilot ignored the traffic controller. The secondary causes, however, are often messier, and uncovering them can be a more protracted task. The reason? Blame has to be assessed. Who is at fault, and therefore who must pay the cost of lost lives, cleanup, and so forth?

Claim 4 (made by the attorneys of the families): Because the airline hired the inspectors, it is responsible for the plane crash (cause).

Consequence: The airline must pay restitution to the victims' families (effect).

Discussion: Obviously it is in the airline's best interests to argue that the cause of the plane crash lies elsewhere. After all, if held liable for the crash, all sorts of consequences could arise: loss of revenue due to loss in reputation and millions of dollars lost in insurance claims are two.

How far back can we go to find contributing factors in a plane crash? Would it be unreasonable for the airline's attorneys to argue that the cause of the crash was the embezzlement of millions of dollars of school funds by the Florida School of Aviation Maintenance (FSAM) president? Follow this flowchart to see how such a chain of evidence could evolve.



Courtesy of the author

The immediate, primary cause of the plane crashing may have been the wing falling off of the plane, but the secondary causes are more important in this argument. Most important in determining cause is to find the right one for the effect. Too often, arguments are based on the most flimsy of cause-and-effect relationships, and the results are arguments that are not persuasive.

How far in both directions do you need to go to be comfortable in supporting your claim?

Your Turn 7h: **Get Started:** Explore Causes and Effects

Cast your claim in terms of causes. What is the primary cause of your claim? What are at least two secondary causes? Which of these causes would be most persuasive to your audience? What about effects? List at least three effects of your claim. Are they positive? Negative?

Present Comparisons

Comparisons can be very useful for establishing precedence and examining how similar situations have been handled. Perhaps your claim is one that is often lumped in with other topics. You may want to argue that, compared with the other topics, your claim is significantly different and should be examined separately. Or you might argue that your claim is similar to other claims made and should be addressed in the same way.

EXAMPLE 1

CLAIM: Stop signs need to be installed at the intersection of Beadle and Poppin streets, which is surrounded by a shopping center and a large neighborhood.

SUPPORT: The intersection of East and West streets, similarly situated in a neighborhood and a shopping center, has benefited from traffic signs.

Discussion: It can be useful to compare the intersection to another one in town that has the same shopping center-neighborhood configuration. Why does location B have a light, but location A does not? What is similar about the locations? What is different? Are the differences significant enough to allow B to have a light but not A?

EXAMPLE 2

CLAIM: The intersection of Beadle and Poppin streets is being denied a traffic signal because it is in a less desirable section of town.

SUPPORT: Of the requests for improvements (roads, sidewalks, lights, etc.) in upscale Mayfair, 80 percent are granted; yet only 10 percent of requests from lower-income Saxony are granted.

Discussion: What if there is no closely related situation? Then you should look for a situation that has similar characteristics. This comparison is larger in scope than just comparing a particular type of intersection, but it is helpful in shoring up your argument.

You can look historically for similar situations as well. This is called precedence, and it is one of the tools used by lawyers and judges in evaluating court cases. What kinds of cases have there been like this before (in this town or in other towns)? How were they handled? Knowing how previous problems were solved may be useful in arguing how the new problem can be solved (see "Propose a Solution," later in this chapter).

For example, a similar case of seeming discrimination was handled in Atlanta by the establishment of a citizen's group, which investigated all requests and routed them on to the correct departments after the investigations were complete. This group was composed of individuals from all areas of the city and therefore was less likely to discriminate or show favoritism. Can such a solution be effective in Saxony? You may argue that it could.

One of the most frustrating experiences you can have in doing research is *not* finding anything on your particular subject. You know your issue is important, but you are just not finding any support that points directly to it. Let's look at the issue of including extreme sports in the Olympic Games. We'll narrow the issue even further to target

the inclusion of skateboarding. You have spent hours online and in the library, but you have found nothing really useful on skateboarding and the Olympics. Perhaps you need to do some historical research.

Maybe you can answer the question, “When were women allowed to compete in the Olympics?” Another question to research is “How did an obscure sport like curling become part of the Olympics?” Based on the answers you find, you may be able to argue by analogy. An **analogy** is a type of comparison. What about the history of curling is similar to the history of skateboarding? Can the same types of arguments for including the one sport be extended to the inclusion of the other? When were women granted access? Why were women not even considered athletic competitors in the first place? How can the answers relate to including a sport that is not even considered a sport by some?

Your Turn 7i: *Get Started:* Look for Comparisons

In support of your claim, to what can you compare your claim? How is the situation to which you are comparing similar? How is it different? Are there enough similarities that your audience would agree to the comparison you are making?

Propose a Solution

In the real world, you could spend a lifetime working on a single problem. Your challenges, though, may have a tighter time constraint: a proposal must be in to your boss this Friday; a researched argument must be submitted for your political science class in two weeks. But rushing to meet a deadline does not mean rushing to write before you have given yourself time to think about a topic and explore it thoroughly. Your instinct may be to rush, but doing so will cost you more time. Thinking about your problem, issue, or topic will yield valuable insights that will make the research process more focused and effective, thus saving you time. We have created a checklist of questions that can guide you through the process of exploration. Only you can decide how many of these steps are necessary in any situation, but by answering all of them, you will give yourself the opportunity to write a rich argument that is well thought out and examined from every angle.

There are 13 exploratory steps you can take in proposing a solution to a problem. You may find that you need to look at all 13 for your issue, or you might need only examine a few. For example, you may already know the problem; maybe your instructor has assigned you a particular issue to research. Your goal may then be to find support for your claim, Section B. Or maybe you have a great solution, but you are not sure how to implement it; Section C would be the most useful for you. The following chart offers an overview of the problem–solution exploration process.

Section A: Exploring the Problem

1. Preparation and Persistence
2. Understanding the Problem
3. Ethical Considerations

Section B: Different Types of Exploration

4. Historical
5. Process
6. Creative
7. Critical Thinking
8. Metaphorical and Analogical

Section C: Exploring Implementation

9. Selecting Solutions
10. Implementing Solutions
11. Communicating Solutions
12. Evaluating Solutions
13. Future and System Considerations

Courtesy of the author

These steps need not be followed in order, but by considering all of them, you will see that you will have not only a clearer idea of what your actual argument is about but also an idea how to creatively find ideas and solutions that may elude you otherwise. As you skim over the list, you can see that there are many different directions that can lead you to ideas you had not considered, or that may help you in solving a problem or implementing a solution. You may find that you are reinventing the wheel because you have not looked at how a particular problem has been solved historically. What has been done before, and why did it not work? You sometimes have to consider the ethical nature of a problem in determining fair and equitable solutions.



Using the science behind obesity and nutrition can help identify a process solution.

At the heart of our process is creative thinking. Ask yourself, "How can I approach my topic in a more creative way?" A wonderful book about creative thinking is Robert and Michèle Root-Berstein's *Sparks of Genius* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). The authors researched ways that creative people in varying fields and disciplines came up with ideas. They made many interesting discoveries. A physicist might get ideas by listening to a Bach concerto. A sculptor might discover a new technique by meditating. An engineer might find a solution to a problem while rowing a sea kayak in a storm. Creative thinking refuses to shut out possibilities and embraces ideas that can be found in all avenues of life. The most creative people do not close the door to ideas but find them in areas they would not have expected to find them.

Our 13 items address many of the ideas that the Root-Bernsteins developed in their research. These steps are meant to be practical tools you can use to come up with ideas that will make your arguments stronger. Let's follow Lise's progress as she works through all 13 steps to develop a solution to the persistent problem of unhealthy fast food meals and their link to childhood obesity.

Section A: Exploring the Problem

The steps in this section are very basic. What exactly is the problem at hand? Problems can be challenging to solve because, very often, the exact cause is not clear, and it can be difficult to find the causes of the problem, who is affected, and who is responsible for it. Moving through these steps can help you find your way to answering these initial considerations.

Preparation and Persistence

What do you need to solve the problem? What resources, assistance, persistence, and what work will be involved? Do you have the time, money, strength, and faith to continue toward a solution? Thomas Edison said that "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." It is easy to be inspired, but it takes hard work to complete a task. What do you need to complete your task?

- Do you need to talk to people in your field?
- Do you need research help from librarians?
- Do you need to start all over from scratch?

Lise's issue is one that she is arguing in her health course at the local community college, so her motivation to find a solution is tied to her grade. As she is studying to be a dietician, though, the motivation is personal as well. She genuinely wants to help people eat better. A strong database of medical articles is available to her, making research easy. Lise's college's health program is linked to the local hospital, which means she has access to faculty at the hospital as well. She envisions interviews with doctors at the hospital along with traditional library research.

Understanding the Actual Problem about Which You Are Writing

What exactly is the problem? Identify it. Define it. Define it scientifically, descriptively, metaphorically, and by example; define the solution without naming it; define the problem by its function; and define it ironically, by its negation, using elaboration, and using evaluation.

- What exactly is the problem? *definition*
- Is it made up of several smaller problems?
- Who is it a problem for? Who is it not a problem for?
- What caused the problem? *cause + effect*

Answering this set of questions will ensure that you are arguing about the real problem.

What does Lise really know about the problem of childhood obesity? Lise's reading so far indicates that there are both controllable reasons (diet and exercise) and uncontrollable reasons (genetics). Which of the controllable reasons are the biggest culprits for weight gain in children?

- Fast food diets
- School lunches
- Lack of exercise at school and at home
- Too many unhealthy snacks

Lise will have to decide which problem is the one she wants to tackle. After witnessing the family at the restaurant, she is leaning toward fast food diets.

Ethical Considerations

What are the rights and wrongs of solving your problem? In other words, how will solving your problem be right and wrong, and for whom?

- Should this problem even be solved?
- What will solving it do to the people involved?
- What will solving or not solving it do to the main purpose or core business of the problem solver?
- What happens if the problem isn't solved?

Solutions require us to expend resources, and they also affect everything else we do. Is solving the problem worth the costs, and to whom? Always consider the main purpose of the problem solver. At our college, our main purpose is to serve students and our community. We consider our decisions ethical if they're good for students and good for the community.

But right and wrong are complicated. My purpose is to make a good living for my family. If the state raises instructor salaries, where will the money come from? Higher taxes on other families? Ethics can be a cloudy area.

Does it resemble anything else?

Lise is convinced that it is extremely important to solve the problem of unhealthful fast food choices being targeted to children. She feels restaurants have a moral obligation to improve their choices for children and to provide encouragement and education through programs or even brochures. If the problem is not solved, those families who, by lack of choices or knowledge, frequently eat fast food will be raising an unhealthy generation of children who will develop health problems that will strain our medical system.

Your Turn 7j: **Get Started:** Explore the Problem

For steps 1–3 above, explore your own issue, following the student models of Lise.

Section B: Different Types of Exploration

Now that you know what the problem is, where can you look for answers?

Historical Exploration

How have similar problems been solved in the past? Historical exploration uses cases and examples to generate solutions. There is no sense in always starting from scratch. If we know how similar problems have been solved in the past, we may be able to adapt those solutions to fit our current needs. Looking to the past is often the most productive step to take in looking for solutions to problems. Always start here.

- What have been some of the historical solutions to the problem?
- Why have they failed?
- Did they fail because the solution was a poor one or because it was not implemented correctly?
- Can any of the historical solutions be used because times have changed, or with some modifications that were not previously available?

Of course there have always been overweight children, but studies show that the number of children considered overweight in this country is increasing by alarming rates. In the past, most childhood weight gain was due to overeating and lack of exercise. The solution was considered simple: eat less and exercise more. Today, though, the weight gain problem is complicated by families eating out more; skyrocketing food prices moving parents to buy cheaper, and usually less healthful, foods; and the increase of fast food options geared toward children. If families are having to cut back and are going to be eating out frequently, then the only solution is to make sure fast food has healthier choices and that families know how to make these choices.

Process Exploration

How does the problem work? How do possible solutions work? When we explore processes, we are looking at how things work in order to generate

solutions. Areas of exploration can be laws, policies, rules, psychology, and scientific theories. For example, advertisers market their products to younger people, even though older folks buy more products. The reason? They know that the older we are, the less likely we are to change brands, which is one main purpose for advertisements. The idea is that if we know how things work, we can use known processes, theories, tendencies, and behaviors to help craft solutions.

Some processes are causal in that they change; they aren't written in stone. Whenever a new president comes into office, or a new manager in a business, agencies and staffs have to figure out what the new person likes and dislikes, what she will and won't permit, or expect, and so forth. These processes may depend on an individual's personality, but they are every bit as real as the law of gravity, or criminal statutes.

- What processes are at work in our problem?
- What are the existing theories in this field or area of activity?
- Which sciences are involved, and what do the experts tell us about how our problem works?
- What are some predictable behaviors at work surrounding our problem, or possible solutions?

How did fast food restaurants begin serving such bad foods to children? When did kids' meals become popular? Lise suspects advertising during Saturday morning cartoons was the beginning of the craze for products included in kids' meals. What about the tie-ins from movies that restaurants use to lure children? Who makes the choices at the local level about what restaurants serve? For example, McDonalds has locations all around the world, and in these different locations, different foods are served. Therefore, there must be some local management decisions that can be made about products sold. Lise needs to learn the processes that govern who makes these choices.

Creative Exploration

How else might the situation be viewed? What could we add to it or put in its place? As important as it is to research past solutions to your problem, it is also important to use creative out-of-the-box thinking to explore your topic. For this step, ignore processes, past examples, and assumptions. If you could wave a wand to come up with any solution you like, what would that solution be? Then, once you've imagined the solution, no matter how far-fetched it is, work backwards to see how you might get there. Freeing yourself from logical thinking can often have amazing results. You may have had a good solution all along, but your fears of looking foolish prevented you from actually committing this idea to paper. And the idea may actually work! Here are some examples of creative problem solving:

- When the Japanese invaded Okinawa, in 1607, the locals were forbidden to carry weapons, so they developed a form of open-hand combat known as karate.

- According to legend, Irish step dancing came about because, when dancing was outlawed, holding the arms still and moving only the legs allowed people to dance behind stone walls without appearing to be dancing at all.
- Desperate parents pay their children to get good grades.

The real stories are more complicated, but people have a long history of coming up with creative solutions to difficult problems. Climb out of the box for solutions. Read books or articles about topics related to yours to see how other problems have been solved. For example, if your company has tried unsuccessfully to motivate employees with bonuses, try reading trade journals in other fields to see how different kinds of businesses motivate their employees.

Creativity shows up in the restaurant business frequently. Thinking outside of the box has led to foods being served in tortilla wraps instead of buns. The focus on low-carb eating has introduced elements from ethnic cuisines. But all fields solve problems in creative ways.

In the best of all possible worlds, children would be able to eat hamburgers and french fries that would actually be healthy for them. Fast-food restaurants are missing an opportunity to think outside the box about what eating healthy means. If a mother insists on feeding her children a steady diet of burgers, then the burgers should be healthy. There are dozens of vegetarian versions of burgers that kids love. Potatoes are not inherently unhealthy, but frying is. So bake the fries instead. Serve apples instead of apple pie; low-fat yogurt with granola instead of full-fat yogurt with M&M's. It is easy to think there is no solution to a problem when the problem is being viewed from the same angle it's always been viewed.

Thinking Critically Exploration

How else might the situation be evaluated? What could we take away from the problem or from any possible solution? Question the basic assumptions to generate solutions.

- Do you even need to solve the problem?
- Are the rules governing the problem mandatory?
- Did past solutions work for the reasons you thought they worked?

Question Everything At a local Papa John's pizza shop, whenever customers pay with plastic, they have a long wait time. The cashier has a problem serving people in a timely fashion because she has to ring up the order at the register, swipe the card, then walk across the store, around a shelving unit, wait to gather the receipt once it prints, and then come back and complete the transaction. The cashier's explanation was that this problem of wasting time and foot-power was necessary because "our credit card machine runs through the computer." And moving the systems closer wouldn't have made sense? A little critical thinking could have saved the day.

It often pays to ask, what if it's not true? What if there really is no gravity? If we're *not* all going to die someday? If the earth *isn't* round. The weird people who ask these odd questions end up discovering new things. Our latest theory of gravity (Einstein's), for example, is being questioned and may be replaced. In fact, science may cure the dying process in your lifetime. In fact, the earth is bulgy.

Is fast food really the problem? Isn't lack of exercise just as important a factor in childhood obesity? The assumption is that children are getting too many "bad" calories from burgers and chicken fingers, but do we know that is true? Is the number of times a week a family stops at Burger Barn a bigger factor than what is actually consumed? Lise asks questions that seem obvious but need to be addressed. She also needs to examine what the most popular fast food chains actually offer children. Have they tried healthy options in the past? Were these attempts profitable? What could they do to increase the profitability of healthy selections?

Metaphorical or Analogical Exploration

Metaphorical thinking asks us to see the connections and similarities between different things. Analogies involve seeing similarities between different situations. Using metaphors and analogies can help you think more creatively about your issue. For example, Lise was having difficulties untangling all the threads of her issue in determining which one to present as her claim. She could concentrate on fast food advertising, the types of kids' meals restaurants serve, the types of families that eat out frequently, or the cost of the food. Until the image of a tree with branches came to her, she couldn't see that the different areas of her argument all had a common trunk and that they could be organized into branches. Her metaphorical thinking yielded an organizational format that she couldn't see before.

- What is the problem like?
- What are possible solutions like?
- Can a metaphor be created?
- Is an analogy better?

EXAMPLE OF METAPHOR

Let's say I sell used cars and I'd like to double my sales. I can cast about in my mind and say, what else doubles? Bread dough. How? Yeast. What's the yeast in sales? Energy, charisma, good looks, manipulation, reciprocity, value, compassion—whatever is needed. No matter which of these I land on, it might well be important, no matter what an expert consultant might say. My car lot might well need sprucing up. Or my cars might not seem to have much value. Or my staff might smell bad. Textbook solutions (historical and scientific) are

wonderfully important in many cases, but it could also help to think of my sales as bread and go looking for the missing “yeast.”

EXAMPLE OF ANALOGY

I had a problem keeping leaves and debris out of my pool. I live in the country surrounded by nature's abundance. Lots of stuff gets in the pool. It is almost an everyday affair to keep it cleaned. I could do this myself, but this would take up immense amounts of my time and energy. While I was watching a show on hippos, sharks, and other animals that have a relationship with animals that clean their bodies or mouths for them, I thought of my pool-cleaning problem. If these animals were to do their own cleaning, it would take up a lot of energy and it would also entail them growing appendages they don't have, much like the time I don't have and can't grow either. I decided to invest in an automatic pool cleaner, which will clean the pool for me every day.

If a solution were found to a problem similar to yours, perhaps you can apply or adapt that solution.

What else does the problem of childhood obesity resemble? The more Lise read, the more the issue seemed to branch off into other issues. Before long, her issue had become as tangled as tree branches. The metaphor of a tree worked for Lise. She could see the different types of problems (poor nutrition, lack of family time, low cost) as branches of a tree (fast food). Chopping the tree down is not an option, but leaving it alone only causes it to continue to grow wildly in any direction it chooses. Lise started to think about ways that the branches could be pruned and shaped so, as the tree continues to grow, the branches (the issues) will be maintained. How could the food itself be modified to be more healthy?

Your Turn 7k: **Get Started:** Look for Creative Answers

For steps 4–8 above, explore your own issue, following the student models of Lise.

Section C: Exploring Implementation

Maybe your problem is not in coming up with solutions to your issue but rather determining which solution of the several you've identified would be the best. Or maybe you have settled on a solution but don't know to whom to direct it or how to implement it.

Selecting Solutions

Which proposed solution should be chosen? There are always several solutions to each problem. Deciding which one to choose is difficult. If it's your problem, you have to satisfy yourself, right? What if it satisfies you but makes your family mad? Or your boss? Or what if you can't afford it?

- Which is the best solution?
- The simplest solution?
- The one that best fits the goals?
- The most ethical solution?
- The cheapest?
- How will you decide?

(See “Evaluate Your Claim,” later in this chapter, for more details.)

As Lise continued her research, she began to see different types of solutions that other companies had used and began thinking of how to apply those solutions to the problem of fast food meals for children. But which of these solutions should be present in her argument? Some solutions would be more expensive than others involving new products to be introduced, but more expensive meals would drive lower-income parents to search out other types of fast food. Some would involve developing clear nutritional guidelines as to what fast food restaurants can offer as kids' meals. Others would have varying degrees of success though the cost may be less. Cost and effectiveness were the two variables that Lise decided to use as her guide in crafting solutions that would make both fast food restaurants and families happy.

Implementing Solutions

How can the solution best be implemented?

- What resources will the solution entail?
- What process should we put in place?
- Will it involve monitoring and enforcement?
- Who should do the implementing?

I went to a Wal-Mart the other day and encountered a problem. When I asked the cashier for six bags of dirt, she looked up the kind of dirt I wanted and then told me I needed to go outside and check to see if it was there. I said it was probably there, and please ring it up. She was very nice but refused to let me buy the dirt until I had gone personally to verify its existence. I looked at the long line behind me and went down the road to Home Depot. The problem was how to save time and money. One solution was to keep employees from ringing up things they were out of. The first method of implementing this obviously didn't work. It relied too much on training employees to know what they had in stock.

The next time I purchased dirt at Wal-Mart, the manager had checked the stock and put a little yellow sticker over the bar code on the scan sheets for each item they were out of. That way no one could ring up something they didn't have. That solution was easier to implement and a lot cheaper than training. They had a solution all along; they just weren't implementing it well enough.

Lise comes to realize how big a problem fast food causes for children who need to maintain a healthy weight. When children eat a steady diet of fast food, they will not thrive physically. Intertwined with the issue of food itself is cost and convenience. Lise decides that the problem of family time and finances is not as easily solved as the problem of food quality. Because restaurants can be required to provide nutritional information for the foods they sell, then surely they can be required to provide nutritious food for children. School lunch programs have become healthier by providing options that appeal to children; fast food restaurants can do the same.

Communicating Solutions

Very often, solutions are devised at the very top of an organization, and the steps to take in order to implement the solutions are communicated quite efficiently throughout the organization. Unfortunately, the reason for those steps often does not filter down. How, then, can the solution best be communicated?

Lise's argument has to be presented as a researched paper to a college instructor. If she were developing solutions to a particular restaurant's desire to provide healthier foods, she would probably have several choices in how to communicate her findings to her boss. Here are two of her choices:

- A formal report may be the result of a request by the boss for a study conducted on the issue.
- A memo may be appropriate if she wants to bring up the issue with her boss informally.

Evaluating Solutions

How can the solution be evaluated to determine if it really does work? Was it really the best solution? As with every other stage, the key to good evaluation is to understand the real values we need to measure the results against. Also, evaluation is actually part of every step: before, during, and after a solution is chosen and implemented.

To determine that a solution is effective, Lise will have to develop an evaluation tool to decide what she means by "effective." What would such a tool look like? To whom should she propose her solution, and how might they implement it? Lise's research led her to believe that the fast food restaurant in her neighborhood, a locally owned eatery, would be a good place to pitch her argument, along with her class report. She develops ways that a new policy to move children from fat to fit in the restaurant, including a fat-to-fit program, would result in increased sales. She now has an angle from which to write her argument that narrows the type of research she needs to do. A narrow angle can really benefit an argument by allowing the writer to focus on specifics.

Future Considerations

Now that we've solved the problem and evaluated the effectiveness of the chosen solution, where does that leave us?

- Should we consider the process closed? Or has our solution created another problem to solve?
- Has it eliminated our reason for being?
- Has it changed the nature of our core business?
- What are the unintended consequences?
- How has the solution changed the organizational system or even the larger system the organization operates within?

A positive example is the G.I. Bill. After World War II, huge numbers of young men came back from the war and enrolled in college using money from the G.I. Bill. That gave them the skills they needed to compete for good-paying jobs. In turn, that boosted our economy, which in turn helped people make more money and buy houses and pay more in taxes, so that the government had even more money to loan the next generation of soldiers to go to college. It helped the whole system.

After using the problem-solving process to evaluate her topic, Lise now has a claim that she can research and propose a solution for. She may even be able to see it implemented in her community. A change in a small local business may spark interest in the larger chains, prompting them to implement changes in their own offerings for children. She is ready to tackle her research in earnest and will be more effective and focused, using specifics instead of abstractions to make her argument strong.

Your Turn 7!: Get Started: Implement Your Solutions

For steps 9–13 above, explore your own issue, following the student models of Lise.

Evaluate Your Claim

An **evaluation** should be used when you are attempting to convince your audience that one thing is better, more efficient, or more feasible than another. Evidence that provides an evaluation of your subject can be important in persuading your audience, as long as you explain clearly what criteria you have selected for your evaluation and why. When presenting your evaluation, you will sometimes be asked to offer a solution, or to suggest several solutions and indicate which is best based on the criteria used. Present each solution, and explain why it is not as good a solution as the one you finally selected.

EXAMPLE

CLAIM: We should move our company to Site Y.

SUPPORT: An evaluation of three sites indicates that Site Y meets the evaluative criteria of having a building of at least 75,000 sq ft, of being near a major highway, and of being capable of expansion.

Discussion: As an example, say you are developing a proposal for a new warehouse site for your company. As criteria you have selected size of facility, proximity to the interstate, and ability to expand as needed. You have found three sites: site X, site Y, and site Z.

Site X is 100,000 sq ft and is fairly close to I77, but its lot barely extends past the warehouse itself. However, 100,000 sq ft is bigger than your foreseeable needs.

Site Y is 75,000 sq ft, again close to I77, and it has an additional two acres of undeveloped land. The lot, though, is divided by a creek.

Site Z also has a 75,000 sq ft warehouse and has a two-acre lot, but it is a ways from I77.

In an evaluation, you will:

- Select the criteria that you will use to evaluate your subject.
- Discuss your selection of criteria.
- Present an evaluation of the three sites based on those criteria.

You need to present your solution in terms of why the sites you rejected were not the best choice and why the site you did select was.

Your Turn 7m: *Get Started: Evaluate Your Solution*

From your exploration of your issue from the 13-step problem-solution perspective, evaluate the solution you decided upon. Make sure to select the criteria you will use, and evaluate the solution based on those criteria. Alternately, develop three solutions and use your criteria to determine which solution best fits the problem.

Write an Exploratory Essay

An exploratory essay is a useful way to examine both (a) what you know about your topic so far and (b) what directions you may still need to pursue before putting your argument together.

What do you know about your issue? An exploratory essay usually is undertaken after you have completed some research on the issue—maybe after you have worked through some of the prewriting methods or the problem-solving items. Don't settle on your research too soon. At the beginning, read enough on the subject to be conversant with the players involved, the problems, and the different points of view. You can then sift

through your materials and decide what parts of the issue you are now comfortable with. What you do know may include the following:

- Historical or cultural background to the issue
- The players involved in the issue
- What claims you may want to make

Once you have seen what you do know, it is time to examine what elements about your issue are confusing or even lacking. As you tackle what you do know, you may often find more questions that need to be answered.

What you don't know may include:

- Support for your claims
- Where to look for materials (e.g., statistics, interviews, articles)
- Possible solutions

Your essay should present the reader with a clear idea of what your questions are, what you have learned so far, and what you still need to do to complete your argument.

Sample Exploratory Essay

Following is an annotated copy of Lise's exploratory essay.

Fast food restaurants have been around for quite a while now. They have not traditionally been known for their healthful foods; they are popular for their ability to get hungry, busy people in and out fast. Can't the two goals, health and speed, be combined? In particular, can't healthful foods and a healthful eating program be combined to help families eat healthier? I am arguing that fast food restaurants should add healthful programs through education and brochures to their healthier kids' menus. My primary strategy will be to offer a solution with a fat-to-fit program at Mama Maya's Italian Eatery in town. The program will be both healthy and cost effective.

Who is involved in the issue? Families with children who eat at fast food restaurants are the focus of my claim; they would be the beneficiaries of any improvements restaurants make to their kids' menus. The restaurant owners are the second interested parties. Their motivation is keeping customers. How would they be motivated to change their menus? Are they receiving any complaints now? If not, what would be their motivation to offer different menu selections?

I became interested in this topic when I was standing in line at Mama Maya's ordering dinner. It occurred to me after seeing several parents ordering food for their children that they were ignoring the healthier options on the menu. In my health class, we are currently debating the issue of obesity in children, and I immediately thought of the kids at the restaurant.

What is the specific claim to be made? What organizational strategy would best be employed?

Who are the players involved in this issue?

By selecting a topic that generates personal interest, Lise will be able to begin forming opinions about the issue and selecting research that is more focused on her particular claim.

What is there still to be done? Lise has now identified a claim that will help her direct her research and gather appropriate support.

My next step will be to research the argued causes of childhood obesity. I will also need to find out why some restaurants have begun offering healthier options for kids and others haven't. Finally, I will develop a fat-to-fit program to accompany Mama Maya's menu.

Your Turn 7n: **Get Started:** Write an Exploratory Essay

Address these items in an exploratory essay about a topic you are researching.

- What is the historical or cultural background to the issue?
- Who are the players involved in the issue?
- What tentative claims do you want to make?

Include what you do not know that needs more research. What you don't know may include the following:

- Support for your claims
- Where to look for materials (e.g., statistics, interviews, articles)
- Possible solutions

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Often an argument rests on the appropriateness of defined terms to the claim. There are six different types of definitions described in this chapter: scientific, example, riddle, function, irony, and negation. What is the function of each of these definitions, and when would they be useful in an argument?
2. It can be difficult to determine if you are arguing cause or consequence, as the two often overlap and produce more causes and consequences. What are some strategies for developing claims or cause; claims of consequence?
3. How can using comparisons benefit your argument?
4. This chapter offers a thorough process to assist in the exploration of a problem-solution claim. Why is it important to explore the problem as a first step and consider the ethical considerations of the problem?
5. The problem-solution process describes five different creative ways to come at problems from different angles. Describe these five exploration strategies, and identify situations where each would be valuable.
6. Why is it important to examine the outcomes of any solution to a problem?
7. What is the function of an exploratory essay? At what points in the argument process would the essay be useful and how?

Keeping It Local

In every town, there is at least one popular local restaurant that everyone flocks to after football games, soccer practice, or even church on Sunday. For as diverse a culture as we have in the United States, the offerings of these restaurants are surprisingly similar. Most menus will include hot dogs, hamburgers, fried fish or shrimp, chili, ice cream or shakes, and cakes and pies. Even those eateries that offer veggie plates fry their okra or boil their field peas with fat back. If we want our children to eat better, we cannot rely on fast food restaurants to magically begin putting healthier

foods on the menus. By using different argument strategies, we can compare restaurants' offerings in this country with those in places where people are considered healthier. We can define what healthful food choices mean to us and outline processes to meet these definitional goals. We can campaign against bad food choices based on their effects on children's lifestyles and health. By examining the restaurant issue, or any other issue important to us, through multiple lenses, we can discover powerful methods of developing solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems.