



This is “Drafting”, chapter 6 from the book [Writers' Handbook \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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Chapter 6

Drafting

More Involved Than Following a Map or Outline

Once you have created a map or outline or gathered your ideas in another way, you might think that the hardest part of the writing project is over, so now you can just follow your plan. However, the drafting process is actually much more complicated than that. You need to pay attention and think while you are writing and reading about your topic, so you notice meaningful changes you can make in your plan. You should continue to generate questions throughout the drafting and revising process. Even though you have a chosen topic, you need to formulate, support, and test your thesis (or main idea) and be prepared to modify it significantly in the face of new evidence or a change in your attitude toward the topic. You will also need to strive for an interesting, varied, appropriate, and mechanically sound approach to the paragraphs and sentences that will make up your essay.

6.1 Forming a Thesis

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what a thesis is.
2. Know the relationship between a topic, your opinion, and your thesis.
3. Understand techniques for discovering how you are personally related to a topic.

Most academic writing includes a thesis, which is the main stance you decide to take toward your topic. Your thesis tells readers what your paper will be about. It also serves as a target you must ultimately hit as you write, though that target may move around quite a bit as you go through the drafting process. You might have an idea about your thesis early on, or you might only decide upon it once you have worked with your topic and plan for a while. You might continually tweak your thesis as you learn more and develop your opinions about your topic. This table shows how topics and personal stances relate:

Topic	Personal Stance
College students' schedules	College students' schedules should be set by the students, not by their parents.
Fallen logs in national parks	Fallen logs in national parks should be harvested rather than left to decay and increase the likelihood of forest fires.

Developing your personal stance is critical for several reasons. It narrows your topic to a final manageable level, and it makes the written work uniquely yours. Taking a personal stance gives you a point of view to develop, support, and defend. When you present your stance, it ultimately awakens emotions in your readers as they determine for themselves whether they agree or disagree with your stance.

If you have trouble deciding on a thesis, keep in mind that your thesis ties directly to the main purpose and audience of your writing project. It is the main point you want to make to your audience. Ask yourself how you personally relate to the topic. Take the college students' schedules topic, for example. Your response to how you are personally related to the topic could be one of the following:

1. I am a person with knowledge to share since my mother always set my college schedules for me resulting in me having little understanding about designing a schedule that works.
2. I am an angry student since my father insisted on setting up my schedule, and my classes are all spread out in a way that will make my year miserable.
3. I am an interested observer since my roommate's mother always set her schedules and almost always ruined our plans to have some common free blocks of time.
4. I have an opinion that I would like to share about "helicopter parents," and this is a particularly good example of the phenomenon.
5. This semester, after talking with an advisor, I sketched out the rest of the coursework in my major, and I see for the first time how everything's going to fit together.

Once you see how you personally relate to your topic, you can then more clearly see what stance you want to take. Once you take a stance, work on wording it effectively, and you will have a working thesis.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A thesis is your personal stance toward the topic that you are writing about.
- The difference between a topic and a thesis is that a thesis involves taking a personal stance.
- You can determine your personal stance about a topic by asking yourself how you are personally related to it.

EXERCISE

1. For each of the following topics, think of a personal stance that might work for a thesis:
 - a. Student housing
 - b. Healthy food in restaurants
 - c. Online classes (and/or partially online or hybrid classes)
 - d. The future of hard-copy newspapers
 - e. Minimum age for college students

6.2 Testing a Thesis

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand why you should test your thesis.
2. Use questions to test a thesis.

Now that you have formed your working thesis, you are ready to test it. The purpose of the test is to satisfy yourself that your thesis will work well. To test your satisfaction, answer the following questions. Read the tips if you need some help answering the questions.

QUESTIONS

Question #1: Is your proposed thesis **interesting**?

Tip: When you read the thesis statement, do you find yourself wondering about different aspects of the topic? In other words, do you want to know the answer to the thesis question? Do you think others will also want to know?

Question #2: Is your proposed thesis **arguable**?

Tip: If you are writing an argumentative essay and developing a thesis for a topic that is controversial, make sure you can also formulate in your head what the thesis for “the other side” would sound like.

Question #3: Is your proposed thesis **specific** enough?

Tip: Make certain that your thesis addresses a specific point about a specific person, place, idea, or situation. Do not proceed with vague wording, such as “all over the world,” “many people,” or “will cause problems.” Avoid relying too much on qualitative, superlative, or hyperbolic language, such as excellent, awesome, interesting, sad, or silly. Such words do not carry any concrete meaning.

Question #4: Is your proposed thesis **manageable**?

Tip: If you would have to research for two solid months to cover the breadth of the thesis, it is not suitable for a five-page paper. On the other hand, if a reader can understand the whole point simply by reading the thesis, the thesis is not suitable.

Question #5: Is your proposed thesis **researchable**?

Tip: Make sure you are confident that you will be able to find the information you need. Proceeding when you think you will have trouble finding enough information can cost you a lot of time if you come to a point where you think you have to start over.

Question #6: Is your proposed thesis **significant** to you and others?

Tip: If you choose a thesis that you care deeply about, others are likely to also find it significant. After you determine that your thesis is something about which you care deeply, you should double-check that your desired audience will also care.

After you have chosen a topic and a thesis and have begun work on the essay, you will be invested in your idea, so it won't be as easy to answer these questions objectively. But doing so early on is worth the effort since the process will likely result in a more successful essay in the long run.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You should test your thesis for your satisfaction that your thesis will work well.
- To test a thesis, you need to ask questions to determine whether it is sufficiently interesting, arguable, specific, manageable, researchable, and significant.
- The thesis-testing process requires effort but will likely result in your satisfaction and a more successful essay.

EXERCISE

Each of the following six thesis-testing questions is followed by two sample theses. In each case, choose the thesis for which the answer to the question is “yes.” Explain why the option that wasn’t chosen does not receive a “yes” answer.

1. Is your proposed thesis interesting?
 - a. Textbooks are unpleasant to read.
 - b. Students who have a steady love interest in college tend to receive higher grades.
2. Is your proposed thesis arguable?
 - a. America’s foreign policy in the Balkans from 1991 to the present has had a stabilizing influence in the region.
 - b. The world would be a better place if we would just give peace a chance.
3. Is your proposed thesis specific?
 - a. American toddlers who live with small pet dogs are more comfortable playing by themselves without the attention of a playmate or parent.
 - b. Girls who marry young have lifelong self-esteem problems.
4. Is your proposed thesis manageable?
 - a. Native Americans in North America want to maintain old customs.
 - b. Music can actually provide a helpful studying background for some students.
5. Is your proposed thesis researchable?
 - a. Milk chocolate doesn’t taste as good as it did when I was a kid.

- b. Costa Rica's declining cacao crop over the last twenty years has been caused by several factors: climate change, natural disasters, and a changing workforce.
6. Is your proposed thesis significant?
- a. Reality television and social networking sites have contributed to changes in how eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds view their own privacy.
 - b. Television provides an inexpensive and meaningful form of entertainment.

6.3 Supporting a Thesis

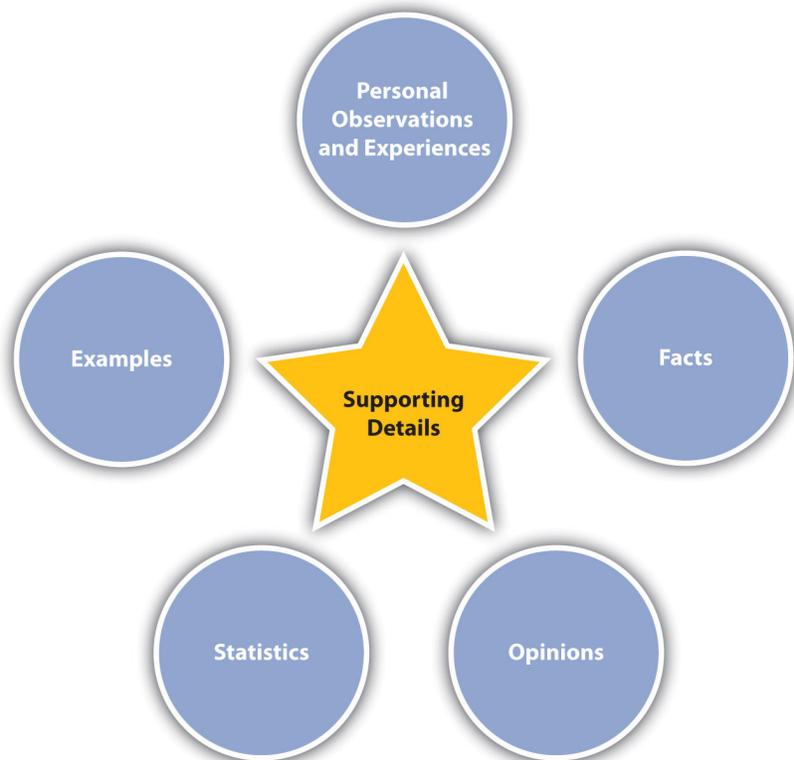
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the general goal of writing a paper.
2. Be aware of how you can create supporting details.
3. Recognize procedures for using supporting details.

Supporting your thesis is the overall goal of your whole paper. It means presenting information that will convince your readers that your thesis makes sense. You need to take care to choose the best supporting details for your thesis.

Creating Supporting Details

Figure 6.1



You can and should use a variety of kinds of support for your thesis. One of the easiest forms of support to use is personal observations and experiences. The strong point in favor of using personal anecdotes is that they add interest and emotion, both of which can pull audiences along. On the other hand, the anecdotal and subjective nature of personal observations and experiences makes them too weak to support a thesis on their own.

Since they can be verified, facts can help strengthen personal anecdotes by giving them substance and grounding. For example, if you tell a personal anecdote about having lost twenty pounds by using a Hula-Hoop for twenty minutes after every meal, the story seems interesting, but readers might not think it is a serious weight-loss technique. But if you follow up the story with some facts about the benefit of exercising for twenty minutes after every meal, the Hula-Hoop story takes on more credibility. Although facts are undeniably useful in writing projects, a paper full of nothing but fact upon fact would not be very interesting to read.

Like anecdotal information, your opinions can help make facts more interesting. On their own, opinions are weak support for a thesis. But coupled with specific relevant facts, opinions can add a great deal of interest to your work. In addition, opinions are excellent tools for convincing an audience that your thesis makes sense.

Similar to your opinions are details from expert testimony and personal interviews. Both of these kinds of sources provide no shortage of opinions. Expert opinions can carry a little more clout than your own, but you should be careful not to rely too much on them. However, it's safe to say that finding quality opinions from others and presenting them in support of your ideas will make others more likely to agree with your ideas.

Statistics can provide excellent support for your thesis. Statistics are facts expressed in numbers. For example, say you relay the results of a study that showed that 90 percent of people who exercise for twenty minutes after every meal lose two pounds per week. Such statistics lend strong, credible support to a thesis.

Examples¹—real or made up—are powerful tools you can use to clarify and support your facts, opinions, and statistics. A detail that sounds insignificant or meaningless can become quite significant when clarified with an example. For example, you could cite your sister Lydia as an example of someone who lost thirty pounds in a month by exercising after every meal. Using a name and specifics makes it seem very personal and real. As long as you use examples ethically and logically, they can be tremendous assets. On the other hand, when using examples, take care not to intentionally mislead your readers or distort reality. For example, if your sister

1. Choices of details used to clarify a point for readers.

Lydia also gave birth to a baby during that month, leaving that key bit of information out of the example would be misleading.

Procedures for Using Supporting Details

You are likely to find or think of details that relate to your topic and are interesting, but that do not support your thesis. Including such details in your paper is unwise because they are distracting and irrelevant.

In today’s rich world of technology, you have many options when it comes to choosing sources of information. Make sure you choose only reliable sources. Even if some information sounds absolutely amazing, if it comes from an unreliable source, don’t use it. It might sound amazing for a reason—because it has been amazingly made up.

Figure 6.2



When you find a new detail, make sure you can find it in at least one more source so you can safely accept it as true. Take this step even when you think the source is reliable because even reliable sources can include errors. When you find new information, make sure to put it into your essay or file of notes right away. Never rely on your memory.

Take great care to organize your supporting details so that they can best support your thesis. One strategy is to list the most powerful information first. Another is to present information in a natural sequence, such as **chronological**² order. A third

2. A method of narrative arrangement that places events in their order of occurrence.

option is to use a **compare/contrast**³ format. Choose whatever method you think will most clearly support your thesis.

Make sure to use at least two or three supporting details for each main idea. In a longer essay, you can easily include more than three supporting details per idea, but in a shorter essay, you might not have space for any more.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A thesis gives an essay a purpose, which is to present details that support the thesis.
- To create supporting details, you can use personal observations and experiences, facts, opinions, statistics, and examples.
- When choosing details for your essay, exclude any that do not support your thesis, make sure you use only reliable sources, double-check your facts for accuracy, organize your details to best support your thesis, and include at least two or three details to support each main idea.

3. A writing pattern used to explain how two (or more) things are alike and different.

EXERCISES

1. Choose a topic of interest to you. Write a personal observation or experience, a fact, an opinion, a statistic, and an example related to your topic. Present your information in a table with the following headings.

Topic:	
Personal observation or experience	
Fact	
Opinion	
Statistic	
Example	

2. Choose a topic of interest to you. On the Internet, find five reliable sources and five unreliable sources and fill in a table with the following headings.

Topic:			
Reliable Sources	Why Considered Reliable	Unreliable Sources	Why Considered Unreliable

3. Choose a topic of interest to you and write a possible thesis related to the topic. Write one sentence that is both related to the topic and relevant to the thesis. Write one sentence that is related to the topic but not relevant to the thesis.

6.4 Learning from Your Writing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Realize that it is normal for a writing project to come together differently than you initially planned.
2. Know some unexpected situations that often happen during a writing project.
3. Understand why and how to maintain a constant sense of critical inquiry as you write.

As you start writing, you are likely to discover that your ideas don't always come together as you expected. The following list gives some examples of types of unexpected situations you might encounter:

- Some ideas you thought would expand into multiple paragraphs actually are not meaningful enough to receive that much space. You might have to do some additional brainstorming, research, or both to fill the unexpected extra space or adjust the scope of your topic by broadening it.
- Some ideas you thought would take only a paragraph or two turn out to take considerably more space. You might have to cut something out if you have a tight page limit or adjust the scope of your topic by narrowing it.
- As you write, you get additional ideas that change the direction you intended to take with some of your original ideas. Stop and rethink your direction and make adjustments so that your paper works well.
- Once you get started with your research, you might develop a different attitude about some of the facts you encounter. This change could alter your whole plan and thesis. Decide whether you want change your plan and thesis or incorporate the evolution of your thinking into the essay.
- You could discover that you need to do more research to clarify your ideas, support them, or both. This discovery is extremely common, so you might as well just plan on at least one round of additional, targeted, inquiry-based research after you start writing.
- You might find that you do not have the information you need to transition smoothly from one topic to the next. Take the time to flesh out and articulate the transitions between points and ideas that are probably already half-formed in your head.

- You might find that your writing doesn't sound as professional as you would like it to sound. Slowly work through your paper replacing some of your more casual wordings with more formal wordings. Conversely, you might find that you need to adjust your tone to a less formal register to meet the needs of your chosen audience and purpose.
- As you are writing, you might realize that you have not included enough of your thoughts and opinions to make the work your own. Add some of your thoughts throughout the work.
- You might realize your writing sounds like a lot of different topics lined up and strung together haphazardly. If this happens, consider if you failed to slow your thinking down enough. Perhaps your topic is still too broad.
- You could realize that the topic on which you are currently focused should have been aligned with a previous idea. If this happens, stop and move things around. Continually pay attention to the organization so that, in the end, your paper flows well.

If you pay attention to your thoughts while you write, you are likely to find that your thoughts can lead to more good ideas. In other words, maintain constant critical inquiry about your content, your formatting, and your relationship to your main topic.

Some people tend to “write in the moment” without paying close attention to what they wrote a page ago or what they intend to write on the next page. If you are a person who tends to wander in this way, you should periodically stop and step back to consider how your writing direction is going.

As you write, make notes of all the points that come to your mind as they come so you don't lose any of them before you can fully incorporate them into your writing or decide if you want to incorporate them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Your writing projects will almost never come together exactly as you planned since many unexpected situations can occur, and at least some of them will have an impact on your writing direction.
- Some unexpected situations include ideas taking more or less space than you intended, ideas coming together differently than you planned, a change in your idea about what you want to include, missing transitions, writing that is too casual or formal, and ideas you decide should be in a different order.
- You will generate your best work if, instead of being an overly mechanical and rigid writer and thinker, you maintain constant critical inquiry while you write.

EXERCISES

1. Choose a passage from a text you are reading for this course or another course, from an advertisement, or from a political speech. On a scale of zero to one hundred, determine the relative level of informality (zero) or formality (one hundred) in the text's **tone** (defined in [Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"](#)). Next, rewrite the text to adjust the tone at least fifty points in one direction or the other.
2. Choose a passage from a text you are reading for this course or another course, from an advertisement, or from a political speech. On a scale of zero to one hundred, determine the text's **attitude** toward its subject matter (defined in [Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"](#)), with negative being zero, positive being one hundred, and neutral being fifty. Next, rewrite the text to adjust the attitude at least fifty points in one direction or the other, at the very least from negative to neutral, or from neutral to positive, and so on.
3. Working with a partner, create a humorous presentation showing the traits of an overly mechanical and rigid thinker and writer.

6.5 Learning from Your Reading

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what it means to read carefully and critically.
2. Know how to read with an open mind.
3. Recognize that, for a writing project, you should use careful, critical, and open-minded reading both with research material and with your writing.

It would probably not surprise you if your professor told you to read your research sources carefully and critically and with an open mind. It simply sounds like a logical, good idea. But how do you know if and when you are reading carefully and critically? Do you really know how to read with an open mind?

These are important questions to consider even when you can easily find what appears to be objective, unbiased, unfiltered information about your topic. Let's return to the idea (from [Chapter 1 "Writing to Think and Writing to Learn"](#), [Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader"](#), [Chapter 3 "Thinking through the Disciplines"](#), and [Chapter 4 "Joining the Conversation"](#)) about reading closely and carefully. Some sources for a writing assignment can be less than thrilling, so your mind might wander a bit or you might speed-read without really focusing. Reading without your full attention or speeding through the text without taking it in not only is a waste of your time but also can lead to critical errors. To use your time wisely, you should try some techniques for getting the most out of your reading. Anything that gets you physically involved, mentally involved, or both will probably help, such as the following ideas:

- Use sticky notes to mark points to which you want to return.
- Take notes.
- Ask questions while you read and then look for the answers.
- Copy and paste or type the parts that are relevant to your topic into a document saved as "Source Material for Essay."

Once you are reading carefully, you are in the proper position to also read critically. To read critically does *not* mean to judge severely. Rather, it means to determine what the author's intent or assumptions are, if the author's points are adequate to support the intent or assumptions, and if the conclusions work. You have to decide what sense the text makes and whether the information in it will help support the

points you are trying to make (or perhaps complicate them or even contradict them).

One key roadblock that can get in the way of reading critically is letting personal ideas and opinions cloud your judgment. To avoid this possible problem, you need to do your best to read your possible sources with an open mind. Don't slam a door before you really know what's behind it.

Along with reading other sources carefully, critically, and with an open mind, you should also apply these techniques to your work. By reading your work carefully as you are writing, you will see things you want to change. By reading your work critically and with an open mind, you can get a sense for the parts that are working well and those that aren't.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- To read carefully means to take your time and focus. To read critically means to make judgments about what you are reading and decide if the assumptions, support, and conclusions work.
- Reading with an open mind means putting your personal ideas and opinions aside so you can consider other ideas and opinions.
- You should apply the techniques of careful reading, critical reading, and reading with an open mind to both your research sources and your writing.

EXERCISE

1. Choose a text you are reading for this course or for another course. Make sure the text includes some opinions that you do not hold, that are new or unfamiliar to you, or both. Print or copy the text so you can mark it up if needed to answer the following questions:
 - a. Choose one of the careful reading techniques in this section or in [Chapter 2 "Becoming a Critical Reader"](#). Use the technique to read your selection. Then discuss with your classmates whether you found the careful reading technique you used to be helpful.
 - b. Read the selection critically and write a paragraph sharing your critical judgment of the selection. Include your opinions about the article's assumptions, support, and conclusions.
 - c. Create a three-column table with the following headings. For each idea in the first column, record your opinion and the opinion presented in the article.

New or unfamiliar ideas or ideas with which you disagree	Your opinions	Opinions presented in the article
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6.6 Generating Further Questions

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize that a writing plan is fluid, not set in stone.
2. Understand that you can improve your writing plan by continually asking questions.
3. Know the types of questions you can ask to improve your writing plan.

Even after you have your core plan in place and start to do some initial research, you should still be very flexible with your plan and let your research and critical thinking guide you. You can help solidify your plan by continually and repeatedly asking questions at all stages of the writing process. Some possible questions follow:

- Am I following the assignment guidelines?
- Do these details actually support these ideas?
- Am I truly representing my intended position?
- What aspects of this topic have I not covered that would add positively to my paper?
- Is my core topic a solid choice?
- What organizational structure would best present my ideas?
- Is a first-person, second-person, or third-person essay the most powerful form to use for this topic?
- What can I do to make my ideas matter to my audience?
- Exactly what is my purpose in pursuing this topic?
- Do my key points directly address my purpose?

Every time you make some adjustments to your topic, audience, purpose, or form, ask these same questions again until you stop adjusting and stop getting different answers to the questions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A writing plan is the first step in shaping a writing project. The next step is to adjust and shape the plan to make the best possible end product.
- A core method of adjusting a writing plan is to systematically ask and answer questions about the plan until you stop getting different answers.
- When asking questions to adjust a writing plan, ask about all aspects of the writing project, including questions about the topic, audience, purpose, form, and assignment guidelines.

EXERCISES

1. Discuss how you would write a descriptive, informative essay for the following audiences on a subject in which you have a passionate interest:
 - a. People who share your passion for and knowledge about the subject
 - b. People who have a passing knowledge and limited interest in the subject
 - c. People who know absolutely nothing about the subject and who might even be a little hostile toward it

2. Discuss how would you approach writing a descriptive, informative essay on the following subjects for the third audience listed in question 1 (people who know absolutely nothing about the subject and who might even be a little hostile toward it):
 - a. A violent video game
 - b. A controversial celebrity or politician
 - c. A reality television show

3. Let's say you have a specific topic and audience in mind, category (a) from questions 1 and 2: people who share your passion for and knowledge about violent video games. Discuss how your plan for an essay would change based on the following purposes:
 - a. To persuade an audience that your favorite game is the best in its class
 - b. To inform an audience about some of the cutting-edge methods for reaching new levels in the game
 - c. To compare and contrast the features of the newest version of the game with previous versions
 - d. To analyze why the game is so appealing to certain demographic profiles of the population

6.7 Using a Variety of Sentence Formats

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the need for varied sentence formats.
2. Know how to use variety to start sentences.
3. Understand how to vary sentences by making changes within the sentences.

Varied sentences help create more interesting prose. Two key methods of varying your sentences are to use different starting techniques and to change the sentences from within. These two choices have some overlap, but for clarity, we'll discuss them as separate options here.

Avoiding “The...The...The”

You have all read “The...The...The” and “There...There...There” and “I...I...I” texts. When almost every sentence of a text begins exactly alike, it develops a boring and monotonous rhythm. As a rule, within a given paragraph, you should try to avoid starting more than two sentences with the same word.

The need for varied sentence formats is a little less obvious but along the same lines. Even if you are starting all your sentences with different words, you could still fall into the trap of having every sentence use the same format, thus creating a similarly monotonous rhythm. Typical examples are sentences that all follow the simple subject format of subject–verb–object. Consider the sing-songy rhythm in this example:

Rover had a bone. Princess wanted it. He snarled at Princess. She snarled at Rover. Princess looked to her left. Rover followed her eyes. Princess snatched the bone. Rover started barking.

In the (rather extreme) example, no more than two sentences within the paragraph begin with the same word, but the sentence is still too rhythmic due to the similar format of each simple sentence.

One technique that will help you avoid using the same format is to make a conscious effort to vary your sentence constructions. Consider how the following formats provide interesting variation.

Sentence Constructions	Examples
Opening adverb	Slyly, Princess snatched the bone while Rover was looking away.
Conjunctive adverb	Rover thought he was guarding his bone; however, Princess was setting up her moment.
Coordinating conjunction	Rover had the bone, but Princess was determined to get it.
Dependent clause	While Rover was looking away, Princess snatched the bone.
Introductory phrase	Feeling jealous, Princess made a plan to get the bone.

Varying from the Inside

Along with changing the beginnings of sentences, you can add variety by combining sentences, adding words, expanding **descriptions**⁴ or ideas, and creating and moving clauses. Using all these techniques throughout a paper will create a nice mix of sentence formats.

Combining Sentences

Choosing exactly the right mix of sentence lengths can be challenging. If you use too many short sentences, your writing will be viewed as simplistic. If you use too many long sentences, your writing will be considered convoluted. Even if you use all medium-length sentences, your writing might be dubbed as monotonous. The trick is to use a variety of sentence lengths. If you find you have too many short, choppy sentences, you can combine some of them to add a little variety.

Two short, choppy sentences	Combined sentence
He snarled at Princess. She snarled at Rover.	Rover snarled at Princess, but she proved to be the alpha dog by snarling right back at him.

4. Depicting something so that readers can get a clear impression.

Adding Words

You can add variety and interest to your sentences by adding words to expand the sentences. This suggestion in no way means to add meaningless words to a sentence just to enlarge and change the sentence. Only add words when they add value to your work.

A short sentence	Value-adding words added to a short sentence
Rover had a bone.	Rover was gnawing on a bone in the corner of the yard under the cherry tree.

Expanding Descriptions or Ideas

This tactic is more specific than the “add words” tactic, but it can be coupled with it.

An existing sentence	Expanded descriptions and ideas
Rover was gnawing on a bone in the corner of the yard under the tree.	My Lab, Rover, was gnawing on a rawhide bone in the corner of the yard under the cherry tree.

Creating and Moving Clauses

Adding new clauses or moving existing clauses is another way to add interest and variety.

Sentence with a clause	Sentence with the clause moved
Rover was a large Labrador, and Princess was a small poodle who got the best of him.	Although Princess was a small poodle, she got the best of Rover, a large Labrador.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You should use a variety of sentence formats to create interesting text.
- Within a paragraph, plan to start no more than two sentences with the same word. Also, use more than one sentence format so you can avoid repetitive, monotonous text.
- Additional techniques you can use to vary sentences that do not necessarily relate to how you start the sentences include combining short sentences, adding words, expanding descriptions or ideas, and creating and moving clauses.

EXERCISES

1. Rewrite the following paragraph using some of the sentence variation ideas in this section. After you are finished rewriting, identify the types of changes you made:

My family went on vacation. It was the summer after my first year of college. It was odd not to be in charge of my own actions. My parents were nice but always in charge. My brother and sister were fine with it. It wasn't OK with me, though. It wasn't OK with me to have to go to bed at 10:00 p.m. My idea would have been to go to town then. My parents said it was bedtime since we had to get up early to go hiking. It wasn't my idea to go walking early! My next vacation might be with friends. It will be nice to go with my family again as long as it isn't too soon.

2. Rewrite this sentence so that it begins with an adverb:

My roommate found my cell phone.

3. Rewrite this sentence so that it begins with an introductory phrase:

It is a long, interesting drive.

4. Try writing a paragraph with the following sentence constructions: opening adverb, conjunctive adverb, coordinating conjunction, dependent clause, and introductory phrase.

6.8 Creating Paragraphs

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the overall key ideas involved in a good paragraph.
2. Know how to use specialized paragraphs.
3. Understand common organizational patterns for paragraphs and means of maintaining the internal integrity of paragraphs.

Each paragraph in a piece of writing has to function well independently so that the work as a whole comes together. This section presents a variety of ideas you should think about and methods you should consider using when writing paragraphs.

Starting with an Introduction or a Transition

Each paragraph needs to start with an introduction, a transition, or a combination of the two. The first sentence of a paragraph always has to help a reader move smoothly from the last paragraph. Sometimes two paragraphs are close enough in content that a transition can be implied without actually using transition words. Other times, specific transitions are needed. When no transition is used, an introductory sentence is needed so the reader knows what is going on. If a transition sentence is used, it is logical to follow it with an introductory sentence or to have one joint sentence.

Here are some examples:

- **A transition sentence:** Canned goods are not the only delicious foods available at a farmers' market.
- **An introductory sentence:** Farmers' markets feature a wide variety of fresh produce.
- **A transition/introductory combination sentence:** Along with canned goods, farmers' markets also feature whatever produce is fresh that week.

Sticking to One Main Idea

5. Clarification of key words or concepts.

By **definition**⁵, all sentences in the paragraph should relate to one main idea. If another main idea comes up as you are drafting a paragraph, it is most likely time

to start a new paragraph. If in revising a draft you notice that a paragraph has wandered into another main idea, you should consider splitting it into two paragraphs. The main idea should be clear and obvious to readers and is typically presented within the topic sentence. The topic sentence is, in essence, a one-sentence summary of the point of the paragraph. The topic sentence is often the first sentence in a paragraph, but it does not have to be located there.

Building around a Topic Sentence

While the main idea is presented within the **topic sentence**⁶, the rest of the sentences in the paragraph support it. The other sentences should present details that clarify and support the topic sentence. Together, all the sentences within the paragraph should flow smoothly so that readers can easily grasp its meaning.

When you choose sentences and ideas to support the topic sentence, keep in mind that paragraphs should not be overly long or overly short. A half page of double-spaced text is a nice average length for a paragraph. At a minimum, unless you are aiming for a dramatic effect, a paragraph should include at least three sentences. Although there is really no maximum size for a paragraph, keep in mind that lengthy paragraphs create confusion and reading difficulty. For this reason, try to keep all paragraphs to no more than one double-spaced page (or approximately 250 words).

Structuring Specialized Paragraphs

Many of the same common patterns of organizing your writing and thinking are available at the paragraph level to help you make your case to support your thesis. Using these common patterns helps readers understand your points more easily.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Analogy ⁷	Analogies are used to draw comparisons between seemingly unlike people, items, places, or situations. Writers use analogies to help clarify a point.	Walking down an aisle at a farmers' market is like walking down the rows in a garden. Fresh mustard greens might be on one side and fresh radishes on another. The smell of green beans meshes with the smell of strawberries and the vibrant colors of nature are everywhere. You might find that you even have a little garden dirt on your shoes.

6. A sentence that presents the main idea of a paragraph.

7. A writing pattern used for drawing comparisons between unlike people, items, places, or situations.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Cause and effect	Cause-and-effect paragraphs point out how one thing is caused by another and are used to clarify relationships.	You will find that your meals benefit greatly from shopping at the farmers' market. You will eat fewer unnatural foods, so you will feel better and have more energy. The freshness of the foods will make your dishes taste and look better. The excitement of finding something new at the market will translate to eagerness to try it out within a meal. It won't be long until you anticipate going to the farmers' market as a way to enhance the quality of your meals.
Comparison and contrast	Comparison and contrast is simply telling how two things are alike or different. You can choose to compare and contrast by selecting a trait, explaining how each thing relates, and then moving on to another trait (alternating organization, as here). Or for more complex comparisons and contrasts, you can describe all the features of one thing in one or more paragraphs and then all the features of the other thing in one or more paragraphs (block organization).	Tomatoes purchased at the farmers' market are almost totally different from tomatoes purchased in a grocery store. To begin with, although tomatoes from both sources will mostly be red, the tomatoes at the farmers' market are a brighter red than those at a grocery store. That doesn't mean they are shinier—in fact, grocery store tomatoes are often shinier since they have been waxed. You are likely to see great size variation in tomatoes at the farmers' market, with tomatoes ranging from only a couple of inches across to eight inches across. By contrast, the tomatoes in a grocery store will be fairly uniform in size. All the visual differences are interesting, but the most important difference is the taste. The farmers' market tomatoes will be bursting with flavor from ripening on the vine in their own time. The grocery store tomatoes are often close to flavorless. Unless you have no choice, you really should check out a farmers' market the next time you're shopping for fresh produce.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Definition	Definition paragraphs are used to clarify key word or concepts.	If you see a “pluot” at the farmers’ market, give it a try. It might seem odd to see a fruit you have never heard of before, but pluots are relatively new in the fruit world. A pluot is a hybrid fruit created from joining an apricot and a plum. Pluots range in size from that of a small apricot to that of a large plum. The outer skin varies in color from sort of cloudy golden to cloudy purplish. Overall, a pluot looks and tastes more like a plum than an apricot, although the skins are less tart than those of typical plums.
Description	You can use description to bring something to life so that the readers can get a clear impression of it.	The farmers who sell their wares at the farmers’ market near my house are as natural as their foods. They are all dressed casually so that they look more like they are hanging out with friends than trying to entice people to purchase something from them. The women aren’t wearing makeup and the men have not necessarily shaved in a few days. They are eager to share information and samples without applying any sales pressure. They are people with whom you would likely enjoy sitting around a campfire and trading stories.
Examples	Examples are commonly used to clarify a point for readers.	You will find some foods at the farmers’ market that you might not typically eat. For example, some farmers bring pickled pigs’ feet or mustard greens that taste like wasabi. Some vendors sell gooseberry pies and cactus jelly. It is not uncommon to see kumquat jam and garlic spears. The farmers’ market is truly an adventuresome way to shop for food.
Narration ⁸	Narration is writing that sounds like a	Sauntering through the farmers’ market on a cool fall day, I happened upon a small lizard.

8. Writing that sounds like a story and is often used to personalize and intensify a point for readers.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
	<p>story. You might use narration within a nonfiction paper as a means of personalizing a topic or simply making a point stand out.</p>	<p>Actually, my foot nearly happened upon him, but I stopped just in time to pull back and spare him. As I stooped to look at him, he scampered up over the top of a watermelon and out of sight. Glancing behind the melon, I saw that the lizard had a friend. I watched them bopping their heads at each other and couldn't help but wonder if they were communicating. Perhaps the one was telling the other about the big brown thing that nearly crashed down upon him. For him, I expect it was a harrowing moment. For me, it was just another charming trip to the farmers' market.</p>
<p>Problem-solution⁹</p>	<p>A problem-solution paragraph begins with a topic sentence that presents a problem and then follows with details that present a solution for the problem.</p>	<p>Our farmers' market is in danger of closing because a building is going to be constructed in the empty lot where it has been held for the past ten years. Since the market is such an asset to our community, a committee formed to look for a new location. The first idea was to close a street off for a few hours each Saturday morning. Unfortunately, the city manager nixed that idea since he believed that too many people would complain. Barry Moore suggested that the market could be held in the state park that is just a few miles out of town. Again, a government worker struck down the idea. This time, the problem was that for-profit events are not allowed in state parks. Finally, I came up with the perfect idea, and our government blessed the idea. Since the high school is closed on Saturday, we will be having the market in the school parking lot.</p>

9. A writing order that presents a problem followed by a proposal for solving it.

Using a Clear Organizational Pattern

Depending on your writing topic, you might find it beneficial to use one of these common organizational patterns.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Process analysis ¹⁰	A process analysis paragraph is used to describe how something is made or to explain the steps for how something is done.	The first key to growing good tomatoes is to give the seedlings plenty of room. Make sure to transplant them to small pots once they get their first leaves. Even when they are just starting out in pots, they need plenty of light, air, and heat. Make sure to warm up the ground in advance by covering it in plastic sheeting for a couple of weeks. When you are ready to plant them in soil, plant them deeply enough so they can put down some strong roots. Mulch next, and once the stems of the tomato plants have reached a few inches in height, cut off the lower leaves to avoid fungi. Carefully prune the suckers that develop in the joints of the developing stems.
Chronological	Chronological arrangement presents information in time order.	As soon as I arrived at the farmers' market, I bought a large bag of lettuce. I walked around the corner and saw the biggest, most gorgeous sunflower I had ever seen. So I bought it and added it to my lettuce bag. The flower was so big that I had to hold the bag right in front of me to keep it from being bumped. At the Wilson Pork Farm booth, I tasted a little pulled pork. You guessed it—I had to buy a quart of it. I went on with a plastic quart container in my left hand and my lettuce and flower in my right hand. I was handling it all just fine until I saw a huge hanging spider plant I had to have. Ever so gently, I placed my pulled pork container inside the spider fern plant pot. Now I was holding everything right in front of me as I tried to safely make my way through the crowd. That's when I met up with little Willie. Willie was about seven years old and he was playing tag with his brother. I'm not sure where their mother was, but Willie came running

10. A writing pattern that is used to describe how something is made or to explain the steps for how something is done.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
		<p>around the corner and smacked right into me. You are probably thinking that poor Willie had pulled pork all over his clothes and an upside-down plant on his head. But no, not at all. That was me. Willie didn't even notice. He was too busy chasing his brother.</p>
<p>General-to-specific¹¹</p>	<p>A common paragraph format is to present a general idea and then give examples.</p>	<p>The displays at the farmers' market do not lack for variety. You will see every almost every kind of fresh, locally grown food you can imagine. The featured fruits on a given day might be as varied as pomegranates, persimmons, guava, jackfruit, and citron. Vegetables might include shiitake mushrooms, artichokes, avocados, and garlic. Some vendors also sell crafts, preserves, seeds, and other supplies suitable for starting your own garden.</p>
<p>Specific-to-general¹²</p>	<p>The reverse of the above format is to give some examples and then summarize them with a general idea.</p>	<p>Your sense of smell is awakened by eighteen varieties of fresh roma tomatoes. Your mouth waters at the prospect of sampling the fresh breads. Your eye catches a glimpse of the colors of handmade, embroidered bags. You linger to touch a perfectly ripe peach. Your ears catch the strain of an impromptu jug band. A walk up and down the aisles of your local farmers' market will engage all of your senses.</p>
<p>Spatial</p>	<p>A paragraph using spatial organization¹³ presents details as you would naturally encounter them, such as from top to bottom or from the</p>	<p>From top to bottom, the spice booth at our farmers' market is amazing. Up high they display artwork painstakingly made with spices. At eye level, you see at least ten different fresh spices in small baggies. On the tabletop is located an assortment of tasting bowls with choices ranging from desserts to drinks to salads. Below the table, but out of the way of customers, are large bags of the different spices. Besides being a great use of space, the spice booth looks both professional and charming.</p>

11. A writing order that moves from a broad concept to narrower examples.

12. A writing order that moves from particular points to a more general conclusion.

13. A descriptive method based on the natural physical location of the subjects or items.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
	inside to the outside. In other words, details are presented based on their physical location.	

Maintaining Internal Integrity of Paragraphs

A paragraph is more than just a group of sentences thrown together. You need to make **linkages**¹⁴ between your ideas, use **parallelism**¹⁵, and maintain **consistency**¹⁶.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Linkages	Paragraphs with linkages flow well so that readers can follow along easily. You need to present an idea and then link the rest of the ideas in the paragraph together. Do not leave any pulling together for your readers to do mentally. Do it all for them.	Not all the booths at a farmers' market feature food. One couple has a booth that sells only fresh flowers. They display some flowers in antique containers and sell the flowers, the containers, or both. A clothesline above our heads displays a variety of dried flowers. A table holds about fifty vases of varying sizes, and they are all full of flowers. Some vases hold only one kind of long-stem flowers. Others hold mixtures of uncut flowers. Still others showcase gorgeous arrangements. Both the man and the woman wear a wreath of flowers on their heads. The whole display is so attractive and smells so fabulous that it really draws people in.
Parallelism	Parallelism means that you maintain	The history of this farmers' market followed a fairly typical pattern. It started out in the 1970s as a co-op of local farmers, featuring a

- 14. Techniques used within and between paragraphs to relate one piece of content or one idea with the next.
- 15. The internal logic of a paragraph that aids in readers' comprehension.
- 16. An expectation in paragraphs that the tense and point of view will remain the same.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
	<p>the same general wording and format for similar situations throughout the paragraph so that once readers figure out what is going on, they can easily understand the whole paragraph.</p>	<p>small city block of modest tables and temporary displays every Saturday morning from April to October from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In the early 1990s, with the help of a grant from the city, the market expanded its footprint to a larger, more centrally located city block with ample parking. It benefited greatly from the installation of permanent booths, electrical outlets, and a ready water supply. These amenities drew far more customers and merchants. Its popularity reached unprecedented levels by 2000, when the city offered to help with the staffing needed to keep it open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Recently, discussions began about how to open the market on weeknights in the summer from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.</p>
<p>Consistency</p>	<p>A paragraph with consistency uses the same point of view and the same verb tense throughout. In other words, if you are using third person in the beginning of the paragraph, you use it throughout the paragraph. If you are using present tense to start the paragraph, you stick with it.</p>	<p>There comes a time each year when you must begin the all-important step of actually harvesting your vegetable garden. You will want to pick some of your vegetables before they are fully ripe. Eggplants, cucumbers, and squash fall into this category because they can further ripen once you have picked them. On the other hand, you will find that tomatoes, pumpkins, and most melons really need to ripen fully before you harvest them. You should also keep in mind that you will need plenty of storage space for your bounty. And if you have a good harvest, you might want to have a few friends in mind, especially as recipients for your squash and cucumbers.</p>

Using Transitions

Transitions within paragraphs are words that connect one sentence to another so that readers can easily follow the intended meanings of sentences and relationships between sentences. The following table shows some commonly used transition words:

Commonly Used Transition Words	
To compare/contrast	after that, again, also, although, and then, but, despite, even though, finally, first/second/third/etc., however, in contrast, in the same way, likewise, nevertheless, next, on the other hand, similarly, then
To signal cause and effect ¹⁷	as a result, because, consequently, due to, hence, since, therefore, thus
To show sequence or time	after, as soon as, at that time, before, during, earlier, finally, immediately, in the meantime, later, meanwhile, now, presently, simultaneously, so far, soon, until, then, thereafter, when, while
To indicate place or direction	above, adjacent to, below, beside, beyond, close, nearby, next to, north/south/east/west, opposite, to the left/right
To present examples	for example, for instance, in fact, to illustrate, specifically
To suggest relationships	and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, too

Closing the Paragraph

Each paragraph needs a final sentence that lets the reader know that the idea is finished and it is time to move onto a new paragraph and a new idea. A common way to close a paragraph is to reiterate the purpose of the paragraph in a way that shows the purpose has been met.

17. A writing pattern used to clarify how one thing is a result of another thing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A good paragraph should cover one main idea, be built around a topic sentence, follow a clear organizational pattern, have internal integrity, and include a final closing sentence.
- Specialized paragraphs are common writing patterns that you can use to help support your thesis. Some common examples include analogy, cause and effect, comparison/contrast, definition, description, examples, narration, opening and closing, problem and solution, and process explanation.
- Common organizational patterns include chronological, general-to-specific, specific-to-general, and spatial. Some methods of maintaining paragraph integrity include linking ideas, using parallel structure, being consistent, and transitioning.

EXERCISES

1. Use cause and effect to write a paragraph about high humidity and rust.
2. Choose a word with which you are unfamiliar and write a definition paragraph so that others will understand the meaning of the word. Make sure to choose a word about which you are able to write a whole paragraph.
3. Choose a problem that is often discussed at election time and write a problem-and-solution paragraph presenting your ideas about the solution. Make sure to use facts to support any opinions you present.
4. Draw from one of the readings from this course or from another course you are taking. Find at least five different kinds of paragraphs, using the labels provided and described in this section.