

The New School of Northern Virginia Writing Handbook

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Preface

The purpose of this handbook is to guide New School students through the writing process towards completion of a formal, unified work of writing. By *formal*, we mean a composition that is directed towards a reader and respects the rules of its discipline; by *unified*, we mean a composition that is controlled by the paragraph-by-paragraph development of a thesis or theme. A formal, unified work – be it a work of fiction or non-fiction – expresses an author’s main point or perspective convincingly and meaningfully to its reader.

In particular, this handbook seeks to help students master the essay. The essay is not the be-all-end-all of writing, of course, but it’s nevertheless the principal form of writing at The New School and in college and thus deserves special attention in any academic writing handbook.

Importantly, the teacher who assigns an essay assumes the student can (1) read a text and understand its content and (2) compose clear, grammatically correct sentences. We have therefore included in the Appendix a refresher on sentence mechanics and grammar. The third building block of the essay – the ability to think critically – is addressed in detail throughout the handbook. Good essay writers are not born (believe us, we know from personal experience!), and anyone who learns to think critically and write clear, grammatically correct sentences can become a skilled essay writer – with practice.¹

A more unique aspect of this handbook is that, while it addresses writing in general, it also guides students through The New School’s research paper exhibition process. As such, this handbook is a companion work to *The New School Exhibition Handbook* and *The New School Senior Exhibition Handbook*. We encourage you to study each of The New School handbooks carefully, because they provide direct guidance on the principal forms of assessment you will encounter as a New School student.

Every writer is unique in his or her writing process, and no one document may realistically provide a guaranteed formula for good writing. We hope that this handbook, combined with collaboration with your teachers, helps you to develop a writing process that is individualized and allows you to produce quality – again, formal and unified – compositions.

The New School Faculty
June 2013

¹ Michael C. Milam. *Writing in the Humanities*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003, 3.

I. Introduction

Writing at The New School
The Importance of Questions
Reports and Arguments

Writing at The New School

The New School is not a writing school, per se, but we believe writing is important and use it as a model of authentic assessment. As such, teachers often require students to demonstrate their true understanding of course content and skills in writing assignments, ranging from short-answer, one-paragraph responses to extensive research papers and reports. Indeed, the Senior Exhibition includes a 10- to 15-page research paper, and thus each New School student must demonstrate proficiency in academic writing to graduate.

As a New School student, you may expect to encounter several types of writing assignments, including:

- Essays (personal, persuasive, compare and contrast, analytical)
- Reports (science labs, book reviews)
- Short-answer responses
- Research papers
- Reading responses
- Fiction (plays, short stories, poetry)

As diverse as these forms are, they nevertheless share the common principles of formality and unity. You can't just make up your own rules. We're a school, after all, and it's our job to teach you the conventions (formality) of the essay, the lab report, etc. But rules are not the heart of writing. The real mark of quality is unity, where your work is grounded on and crafted around a *central idea* and represents *your perspective* meaningfully to your reader.

The Importance of Questions

Nearly every writing assignment at The New School is a response to a question. Not all questions are alike, however, and New School teachers typically ask open-ended, rather than factual, questions as the basis of writing assignments.

For example, *What countries made up the Allied Powers in World War I?* is a factual question because it has, really, only one correct answer. With a factual question, a teacher is assessing how well the student has understood

the factual content of a lesson or reading. Note that such questions are typically encountered in reading quizzes, rather than writing assignments.

In contrast, *Why did the United States join the Allied Powers in World War I?* is an open-ended question because it may have more than one answer. Note too that the logical response to such a question is a reforming of the question as a statement followed by an explanation:

- **[Answer/Statement]** *The United States joined the Allied Powers because of Germany's decision to lift all restrictions on submarine warfare. [Explanation] Germany's decision led to the sinking of American cargo and passenger ships, and public sentiment in the United States shifted from pro-neutrality to pro-war. In addition, unrestricted u-boat activity...etc.*

The importance of this **Answer/Statement – Explanation** model, more commonly known as the **Thesis – Support** model, cannot be overestimated. It is the foundation of academic writing, and the teacher who asks you an open-ended question expects you to respond with a thesis and supporting explanation. In a word, the teacher is asking you to construct an argument.

Test Yourself

The first step towards understanding the Thesis-Support model is to recognize it in others' writing. Choose an article from the Opinions page of *The Washington Post* and underline (1) the thesis and (2) supporting points for the thesis.

Reports and Arguments

Just as there are two basic forms of questions, factual and open-ended, there are also two principal forms of writing assignments: reports and arguments.

a. Reports

A report is a presentation of information designed to inform, rather than persuade, the reader. With a report assignment, such as a book report, science report, research report, etc., the teacher is asking you to communicate a comprehensive understanding of the factual content of a work or subject. While it's true that reports often include an analysis section where the author expresses an opinion or assesses data, the starting-point and overall content of reports is factual. Put mathematically, a report is roughly 80% description and 20% opinion/analysis.

Example Book Report

A look at the basic structure of a book report is telling. Note that, with the exception of the Analysis and Evaluation section, the book report begins and is dominated by an organized retelling of facts:

- **Introduction**

Provide the basic information about the book, including title, publication information (publisher, year), and genre.

- **Body**

For fiction: Describe setting and main characters. Provide a plot summary, concentrating on the book's main events and climax and resolution. You may also be asked to discuss the author's use of literary devices, such as metaphor, foreshadowing, etc.

For non-fiction: Provide an overview of the author's overall argument, including topic, thesis, and main points.

- **Analysis and Evaluation**

Provide a critique of the book, considering the author's writing and the overall strengths and weaknesses of the book.

- **Conclusion**

Conclude with a brief, personal response to the work, focusing on what you liked or disliked about the book.²

Finally, it's important to note that reports are most commonly assigned in the sciences as lab reports, where emphasis is placed on presenting the set up, findings, and analysis of experiments. At The New School, reports are also assigned at the junior high level to teach students to engage texts and information deeply and to express their understanding in clear, organized writing. In high school, teachers assume the students are proficient readers and writers, and the great majority of writing assignments are argumentative, where the student must formulate a thesis and support that thesis with evidence.

² "How to Write a Book Report (Middle and High School Level)." 2000-2012. Pearson Education, publishing as Infoplease. July 8, 2012
<<http://www.infoplease.com/homework/wsbookreporths.html>>.

b. Arguments

We said that reports are 80% description and 20% analysis. Well, in general, you may think of arguments as the reverse of this rule, i.e., 80% analysis and 20% description. But what exactly is analysis, and how does it relate to an argument?

Simply put, analysis is the process of examining a subject. When you dissect a frog and begin to see and understand the organ system of a typical amphibian, you are performing analysis.³ When you then – based on your dissection and analysis – formulate a thesis about human anatomy and explain why you believe your thesis – again based on your dissection-analysis – you are proposing an argument.

We may therefore define an argument as including:

- Analysis of subject
- Thesis
- Support for thesis based on analysis

Think of Sherlock Holmes. After an examination of the scene [***analysis of subject***], he claims the man was in fact murdered [***thesis***], because of *x*, *y*, and *z* [***support for thesis based on analysis***]. Importantly, note too that Holmes follows a deductive model (“You know my methods, Watson”), with first a claim and then support for his claim based on evidence drawn from analysis.

As we will see, argumentative writing assignments – essays, research papers, short-answer paragraphs, etc. – are also deductive in structure, with a thesis in the introduction and support for the thesis in the body paragraphs.

³ “What is Analysis.” 2010. The University of Richmond’s Writer’s Web. July 8, 2012 <<http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb.html>>.

II. Academic Integrity

Honesty as a Beginning Principle

Plagiarism

Avoiding Plagiarism

Honesty as a Beginning Principle

In this section, we explain plagiarism and provide examples of acceptable and unacceptable uses of an author's words or ideas. We also provide strategies for avoiding plagiarism.⁴

We spent a lot of time debating the best place for a discussion of plagiarism in this handbook. Typically, such sections on plagiarism appear at the end of writing handbooks, even in the Appendix, as a final note or warning. Our goal in beginning with plagiarism is not to scare you, and certainly we do not feel that plagiarism is a problem at The New School. Rather, we believe that academic honesty must be a beginning principle for every student in every aspect of his or her work.

That said, know that the consequences for plagiarism are great. Indeed, in college and the professional world, plagiarism – *whether intentional or unintentional* – typically results in immediate expulsion or dismissal. We therefore feel a strong sense of responsibility to teach our students how to recognize and avoid plagiarism.

At The New School, the consequences for academic dishonesty are serious. For a first offense, the student is referred to the Department Chair and High School or Lower School Director, who log the incident on the student's internal record. The student receives a zero for the assignment, and may have the possibility to redo the assignment for an average of the two scores. For a second offense, the student receives a zero without the possibility of a redo and is referred to the Fairness Committee, which may recommend suspension. Subsequent offenses may lead to expulsion from school.

Plagiarism

We define plagiarism as the use of someone else's words, ideas, or sentence structure without giving credit. Most students understand the first type of plagiarism – using an author's exact words without acknowledgement – but many have trouble recognizing, and therefore avoiding, the unacceptable use

⁴ For simplicity, we discuss only plagiarism here. How to quote, paraphrase, and correctly cite sources is explained in detail in Section IV, "Working with Sources."

of an author's ideas or sentence structure.⁵ Let's look at these three types of plagiarism in turn, based on the following source:

Original Source

In the years ahead, climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings—possibly greater even than war. Shifting precipitation patterns and ocean currents could change where and how food crops grow. If icecaps melt and low-lying areas are flooded, as is predicted, entire populations could be forced to move to higher ground. The tsunami of 2004 and Hurricane Katrina, in 2005, provided vivid examples of what large-scale climactic catastrophes entail.

Ruth Greenspan Bell, "What to Do About Climate Change," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2006.

a. Using Another's Words

You may not use an author's exact words unless you (1) use quotation marks and (2) cite the source.

Plagiarism

In the May/June 2006 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Ruth Greenspan Bell claims that climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings—possibly greater even than war (105).

Explanation

Although the author and source are acknowledged and cited, this is still plagiarism because the words "climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings—possibly greater even than war" are the author's exact words and should therefore be placed in quotation marks.

Acceptable Use

In the May/June 2006 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Ruth Greenspan Bell claims that "climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings—possibly greater even than war" (105).

b. Using Another's Idea

You may not use an author's idea unless you (1) acknowledge the author either in your text or in a citation and (2) cite the source.

⁵ Robert DiYanni. *Writing About the Humanities*. Third Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008, 156.

Many students have trouble distinguishing an idea from a fact or common knowledge. By definition, an idea is an opinion or view – i.e., something that is refutable – while a fact or common knowledge is popularly accepted as true and therefore found in multiple sources. As a general rule, you may consider something a fact or common knowledge if it appears in three separate sources.

There are exceptions to this rule, however. In some fields, for example, there are disputed facts,⁶ such as the “fact” in religious studies that John is the author of Revelation. While it’s possible to find such a claim in three separate sources, it’s inaccurate to call John’s authorship of Revelation common knowledge, because there are also reputable sources that refute the claim.

The rule is: when in doubt, cite the source.

Plagiarism

Climate change will have serious consequences for everyone on the planet. Food production will be altered, and as water levels rise low-lying areas will become inhabitable.

Explanation

Although the words and sentence structure are the writer’s, this is still plagiarism because he uses, without acknowledgement, three ideas of the original source: (1) “climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings”; (2) “Shifting precipitation patterns and ocean currents could change where and how food crops grow”; and (3) “If icecaps melt and low-lying areas are flooded, as is predicted, entire populations could be forced to move to higher ground.”

Acceptable Use

Climate change will have serious consequences for everyone on the planet. Food production will be altered, and as water levels rise low-lying areas will become inhabitable (Bell 105).

c. Using Another’s Sentence Structure

It is not acceptable to mix your own words with the general sentence structure of the original source – in effect, to change a word here and there in the original text – *even if you cite the source*. Rather, you must either quote or paraphrase the text, not forgetting, still, to cite the source.

⁶ Ted Barker-Hook and Liz Perry. *The Brimmer and May Research and Writing Handbook*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Brimmer and May School, 2001, 8.

This is perhaps the most common form of plagiarism, and often students are confused about why their work is considered plagiarism, when confronted. It is not enough to use your own words while maintaining the structure of the original; rather, you must rewrite *the whole idea* in your own words. A simple way to avoid such plagiarism is to close, rather than reference, the original source as you write. Still, always review your writing for unintentional plagiarism; it's ultimately your responsibility to guarantee the integrity of your work, and the fact that a plagiarism is unintentional does not lessen the offense and consequences.

Plagiarism

In the future, climate change will have serious consequences for all human beings—even greater than war. Changing rain and ocean patterns will surely impact farming. Assuming the icecaps melt, people will have to move to higher ground. Just think about the 2004 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, which clearly demonstrated the impact of climate-related catastrophes (Bell 105).

Explanation

Here, the sentences and sequence of ideas follow the same structure as the original, and the writer has simply substituted words with synonyms (“In the future” for “In the years ahead”; “serious consequences” for “significant impact”; “farming” for “where and how food crops grow”; etc.). Again, it's as if the writer simply lifted the original word-for-word and switched out words and phrases here and there.

Acceptable Use

Ruth Greenspan Bell claims that climate change will be the primary issue facing humanity in the future. She cites the 2005 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina as examples of the magnitude of climate-related disasters, trying to impress upon her readers a sense of urgency to take climate change seriously. Bell also believes food production and low-lying population centers will be significantly and negatively impacted by climate change (105).

Avoiding Plagiarism

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to own your work. Remember, by giving you a writing assignment, the teacher wants to see how well *you* understand and can apply the content and skills of a lesson or class, and how well *you* express your ideas in formal, unified writing. Thus, in every aspect of your writing – from prewriting to final editing – you need to be self-reliant. Of course you will often work with sources and borrow others' ideas (always remembering to cite correctly), but your final paper must be wholly yours in

content and form; simply, you must use your own words, and there should be nothing in your paper that you do not understand.

Plagiarism is often rooted in fear or ignorance.⁷ The student may be insecure about his writing, or he may procrastinate and, with little time to think through his writing, rely too heavily on the words and ideas of a particular source.

Remember:

- Ignorance is not an excuse. It is your responsibility to understand plagiarism and guarantee the integrity of your work.
- Give yourself enough time.
- Close the source and take notes in your own words, focusing on the source's main points.
- Never cut and paste information from the Internet. Rather, paraphrase or quote.
- Do not take notes on a source that you do not understand. Rather, talk to your teacher. You are expected to have questions.
- When in doubt, ask. New School teachers like questions, and we strive to be fair and supportive.

⁷ DiYanni 156.

III. The Writing Process

Overview of the Writing Process

Prewriting

Drafting

Revising

Overview of the Writing Process

When you are given a writing assignment, you do not simply write to the page requirement and hand in your work. Rather, your teacher expects you to follow a series of steps towards the completion of the work you ultimately hand in. In a word, your teacher expects you to follow a process.

Sometimes, especially in larger writing assignments, such as an exhibition research paper, your teacher will structure the writing process for you with benchmark assignments (e.g., proposal, claim-evidence worksheets, outline, first and final draft). With a shorter assignment, however, such as a one-page analysis, you may be given a due date only, and you will therefore have to structure your own writing process.

In this section, we describe the writing process, which is widely defined as (1) prewriting, (2) drafting, and (3) revising. Note, though, that while these three steps are universal – yes, you should *always* prewrite and revise your compositions – there is no one-size-fits-all strategy at each step of the writing process. All writers prewrite, for example, but they do not prewrite quite the same way.

Know that the writing process is not a formula, but a structure designed to help you refine your thinking and formalize your final draft.

Note on The Writing Process

Many of us remember in college students pulling “all-nighters” to write their term papers – literally beginning and “finishing” their papers the evening before the due date – with the fundamental misunderstanding that writing is simply documentation. Writing is thinking, and you cannot hope to produce a thought-through, intelligent paper in one shot.

Prewriting

The purpose of prewriting is to think through a topic or question towards the development of a thesis, overall argument, and plan for drafting. Remember, writing is thinking, and you don't know what you know, so to speak, until you get your ideas on paper.

The timeframe for prewriting will depend on the assignment. For example, for an in-class essay, you may prewrite for as little as 60 seconds, just enough time to sketch a brief outline. In contrast, for your senior exhibition research paper, the prewriting phase lasts several months and has formal benchmarks (i.e., annotated bibliography, research question and thesis, outline). As a general rule, the more significant the assignment in terms of weight and time allotted, the more time you are expected to craft your ideas prior to drafting.

The strategy for prewriting – e.g., brainstorming, annotating, freewriting, webbing, outlining – will also depend on the assignment and personal preference. Importantly, virtually every writing assignment at The New School is a response to a question, and what distinguishes a writing assignment is whether (1) you are given the question or (2) must devise your own question. Ultimately, though, the prewriting strategy you use will be directed towards developing an answer, i.e., a thesis and argument, to an academic question.

In this section, we discuss various strategies for prewriting, distinguishing between prewriting to answer a question and prewriting to develop a question. Because the principal objective of prewriting is to develop a thesis, we discuss effective and ineffective thesis statements. Finally, because teachers typically assign outlines, especially for larger papers, we provide guidelines for outlining.

Responding to a Question

Academic questions, such as essay and research questions, are important because they (1) frame the topic and (2) focus our thinking on a specific and meaningful response. As such, questions also direct us in our prewriting.

As an example, let's look at the following question from the humanities:

Essay Question

- *How does Ibsen use dress and stage props to convey meaning in A Doll's House?*

Here the topic is narrowly defined as dress and props in *A Doll's House*. We are not asked, nor allowed, to address any other aspect of the play, and our prewriting will therefore concentrate on assessing the dress and props' meaning in the play.

Let's now look at three common prewriting strategies – listing, webbing, and freewriting – in response to our example question.

Note on Prewriting

The great value of early prewriting is that it allows you to focus on exploring your ideas in a private space. You do not have to worry about style – your teacher will not see your prewriting. Your goal is simply to get your ideas on paper. Later, with outlining, you will formalize your prewriting.

a. Listing

Making a list involves listing the elements that relate to your topic. Although listing is largely a factual exercise, it may still help you discover patterns and themes that will help you develop your thesis. Based on our example question, a list might look like this:

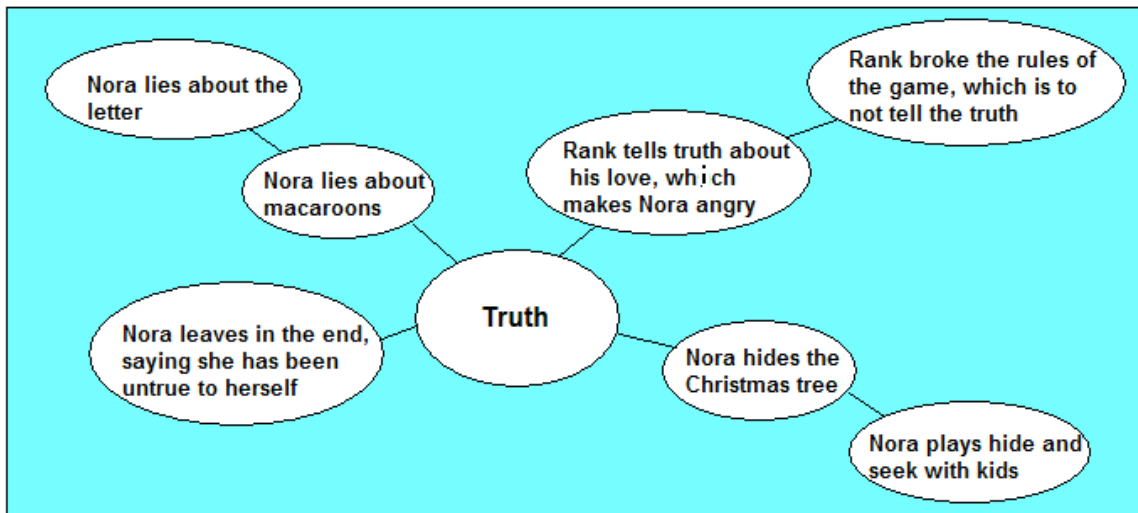
Props	Dress
Christmas tree (at opening of both acts; Nora wants to hide it in opening act, and it's wilted at opening of second act)	Children's clothes
Piano	Mrs. Linde's plain clothes (in contrast to Nora's expensive dresses)
Macaroons (Nora always hiding them)	Nora's black dress for tarantella dance
Lamp (Nora asks maid to bring in when Rank confesses his love)	Nora's hair coming undone as she dances (Torvald says, "Don't be so wild!")
	Nora plainly dressed as she leaves at the end

You might notice that some elements are more important than others, based on connections made. The Christmas tree is connected to the opening of both acts and is transformed from vibrant to wilted; Nora seeks to hide the Christmas tree and the macaroons; Nora’s dress is transformed from elegant to ordinary; the lamp is connected to Rank’s unhidden, true feelings. From our list, then, we may deduce the important themes of *transformation* and *truth / dishonesty*.

b. Webbing

With webbing, you begin with a main idea and associate on that idea. Traditionally you web by hand, placing the main idea in a bubble in the center of the page and encircling it with your line-connected ideas, thus creating a “web.” Really, though, the point is to associate on a main idea, and you should feel free to web in anyway – in a column, in a row, on your computer, whatever works for you. You just need to be sure to start with an idea and associate on that idea alone.

Let’s create a web based on our conclusions from the listing example:



The value of this exercise is that it requires you to explore a single idea completely, which is exactly what a good essay does. For example, based on the web example above, we could posit the working thesis that *Ibsen’s A Doll’s House is essentially about truth and dishonesty*, knowing that we would have considerable evidence to support our claim.

c. Freewriting

There are two kinds of freewriting – general freewriting and focused freewriting. With general freewriting, also called brainstorming, you simply write without regard to rules of grammar, spelling, style, etc. The point is to “just go,” to write on a subconscious level and get your ideas on paper without stopping to reflect.

Focused freewriting is also unstructured, but it’s nevertheless thoughtful writing in essence. You can think of focused freewriting as a more verbal form of webbing, where you begin with a main idea and write about that idea without stopping.⁸

Here is a focused freewriting based on our conclusions from the webbing example:

Truth and Dishonesty
 Truth and dishonesty are the major themes of the play. Nora is dishonest about little things – the macaroons, the Christmas tree – and large things – her forgery of the letter. In the end, Nora recognizes that she has been dishonest with herself and therefore leaves to “discover herself.” Her plain clothes symbolize her transformation and commitment to being honest with herself. The props, the macaroon and the Christmas tree, reinforce the theme of dishonesty.

Krogstad is a parallel character to Nora. He is guilty of the same crime, forgery (dishonesty). Torvald condemns him as degenerate for his lies and says that such a person poisons a home. Nora becomes anxious.

Rank confesses his love to Nora, he tells the truth, and is condemned by Nora. She has the maid light the lamp – exposing him in his honesty. She is mad at Rank because he broke the rules of the game – he told the truth – and the lamp symbolizes truth in this instance.

Although the writing here is informal and lacks focus, we nevertheless see the beginnings of an argument, one based on a working thesis (e.g., the props and dress are symbolic of the theme of dishonesty/honesty) and supporting evidence from the text. Indeed, freewriting is a good way to test yourself to see if you are ready to begin outlining and drafting your essay.

⁸ DiYanni 4.

Developing a Question

At The New School, students are often given choices about the direction of their work, especially for exhibitions, final projects, and final papers. Indeed, it's inevitable that, at some point, you will have to formulate your own question for a writing assignment.

The first step towards developing a question is to understand the following characteristics of an effective question:

- Its scope is appropriate to the page requirement of the paper.
- It is answerable, whereby there is sufficient material to support the thesis with evidence.
- It has more than one answer.
- It is meaningful to its department.

a. Scope

You only have so much time to formulate your ideas and compose your work, and the scope of your question should be appropriate to the page requirement and timeframe for your essay. For example, *What is the history of children's literature?* is unworkable as a question because it would take thousands of pages to answer. Better, more focused questions would be:

- *How does Disney's Cinderella reinforce gender stereotypes?*
- *What role does reading to children during the first three years of life play in their future language development?*

b. Answerable

You need to know that there is textual evidence you may draw from in your response to your question. For example, *Why did Leonardo da Vinci paint The Mona Lisa?* cannot be answered because we have no primary records of da Vinci's explanation for his painting. There are, however, many critical sources on the meaning and significance of *The Mona Lisa*, and a more answerable question would be:

- *How was The Mona Lisa revolutionary for its time?*

c. Multiple Answers

If there is only one answer to your question, then your paper will be purely informational and of no value to your reader. For example, *What are*

Newton's laws of motion and how are they expressed mathematically? has, really, only one answer, and thus there is no argument or meaningful application of information. A reader could simply type such a question into Google and *get* the answer. Why, then, should she read your paper? A more open-ended and engaging question would be:

- *How may Newton's laws of motion help us understand, and thus improve, fuel efficiency of cars?*

d. Meaningful

Teachers ask questions that are meaningful to their disciplines. For example, history teachers ask cause and effect questions (e.g., *How did the invention of the telegraph serve European imperialism?*); science teachers ask application questions (e.g., *How has the discovery of DNA benefited modern medicine?*); and English teachers ask questions of character motivation (e.g., *What do Hamlet's soliloquies tell us about his character?*).

These are generalizations, of course – teachers ask many types of questions – but it's still fair to say that there are typical *forms* of questions, depending on the subject.

In her much-cited book, *A Writer's Reference*, Diane Hacker puts it this way: "...scholars often generate ideas with specific questions related to their discipline: one set of questions for analyzing short stories, another for evaluating experiments in social psychology, still another for reporting field experiences in anthropology."⁹

Pay attention to the types of questions you encounter in your classes; they will serve as models for your own question.

Developing a Thesis Statement

Your principal goal in prewriting is to analyze your subject and develop a *working* thesis and argument. We say *working*, because you may expect your ideas to change slightly as you compose your essay.

⁹ Diane Hacker. *A Writer's Reference*. Fifth Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2003, 7.

The thesis statement is *your* answer to the essay question, and it is just that – a statement – without the details of your supporting argument. However, your thesis, if phrased well, should indicate that you have a supporting argument.

The thesis, then, is critical because it gives meaning and direction to your work, and without an effective thesis – one that is focused and demands explanation – you run the risk of producing a meaningless assemblage of facts in your final paper, rather than an organized argument.

A good way to test the quality of your thesis is to imagine your reader demanding such proof in response to your thesis, as in our example from the Introduction:

Question: *Why did the United States join the Allied Powers in World War I?*

Thesis: *The United States joined the Allied Powers because of Germany's decision to lift all restrictions on submarine warfare.*

Reader: *How so? What's the connection?*

Support: *Germany's decision led to the sinking of American cargo and passenger ships, and public sentiment in the United States shifted from pro-neutrality to pro-war. In addition, unrestricted u-boat activity...etc.*

If there is no natural *How so?* in response to your thesis, then it's likely that your thesis is either **too factual** or **too vague**. For example:

Question: *Why did the United States join the Allied Powers in World War I?*

Thesis: *The United States joined the Allied Powers to defeat Germany.*

Reader: *Well of course. But why should the United States feel it's so important to defeat Germany in particular?*

Here, the thesis is so self-evident as to be a fact. Note too that the reader responds with a question (which is really just another essay question), asking the writer to be more specific and not just state the obvious. In effect, the reader is demanding a more specific thesis.

Finally, note the critical role the question plays in the quality of the thesis. A good question demands a specific, opinion-based thesis.

Student Example: Question with Thesis Statement

Question: *How did the Moog synthesizer change popular music?*

Thesis Statement: *The Moog was the first affordable, easy to program, and performance-worthy synthesizer. These factors allowed the Moog to become available for a new class of musicians, which in turn allowed electronically generated sounds to be used in popular music for the first time.*

(Ben Daley, 12th Grade)

Outlining

Because others may dispute your thesis, you have to defend it in the form of an argument. The outline is the blueprint of your argument, encompassing: (1) your thesis; (2) the reasons you believe your thesis; and (3) the evidence that support your reasons.¹⁰

Teachers often assign outlines because they want to be sure you have a viable and effective argument before you begin to compose your essay. You may still use a different prewriting strategy, but you should expect to have to transfer your ideas into outline form as a formal assignment.

As you construct your outline, you should keep in mind this tiered model: at the top is your question and thesis, followed by your reasons, each of which must be supported by evidence. Importantly, *nothing* may be included in the outline that does not relate to the thesis.

Outline

- I. Thesis (Response to Research Question)**
- II. Reason 1.**
 - A. Evidence 1.**
 - B. Evidence 2.**
- III. Reason 2.**
 - A. Evidence 1.**

¹⁰ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. Third Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 130-131.

- B. Evidence 2.**
- IV. Reason 3.**
 - A. Evidence 1.**
 - B. Evidence 2.**
- V. Conclusion**

Drafting

We said that the purpose of prewriting is to think through your topic or question to develop a working thesis and general plan for your argument. As important as prewriting is, be careful not to spend too much time webbing, outlining, etc. You cannot hope to master your topic through outlining alone, and at some point, given the time constraints, you will need to decide that it is time to move on to drafting.

Drafting, like prewriting, is a thinking process. You do not simply take your outline and “write up” your paper – as though it were simply a question of data entry – but must, again, work through your reasons and evidence and compose your argument with care. Still, having devised a good working thesis and general plan, you should feel confident as you begin to draft your paper.

Finally, remember that an academic argument is not the same as a typical argument, where two people fight over who is right and who is wrong. Rather, an academic argument is a *contribution* to an academic community’s understanding of its topic. You are addressing your paper to colleagues, not adversaries, and you should seek a collegiate tone as you draft your paper.¹¹

As you know, an academic paper has three main sections:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

Let’s look at each of these sections in turn.

Introduction

The purpose of your introduction is to (1) establish the context of your paper and to (2) state your thesis and supporting points. You are not expected, nor encouraged, to state your essay question directly. Rather, your question should be implied by your thesis.

¹¹ Booth, Colomb, Williams 105-106.

Importantly, your thesis must be clear to your reader, because you want her to read on and understand why you believe that thesis. If your thesis is unclear, then you have already lost your reader.

A classic structure for the introduction is the “upside-down triangle” model, where you begin with the general topic and build towards your thesis in the last sentence. However, this is only a common structure, not an absolute, and you may find that your thesis is best placed at the start or middle of your introductory paragraph, or even in the second paragraph.

Finally, remember that your introduction is effectively a statement – not a discussion – of your thesis and supporting points. You do not begin the details of your argument in your introduction, and as such your introduction should be only one or two paragraphs in length. For now, you seek to make your point of view clear and to inspire the reader to think, *Really? You’ll have to convince me.*

Student Example: Introduction (Thesis in Italics)

Heroes have played an important role in shaping societies and cultures. From Achilles to King David, heroes have not only inspired those in their time, but generations thereafter. Past heroes are still looked to as models of behavior. *However, heroes are not only of the past, and societies today still find and create new heroes.*

(Peter Wilder, 11th Grade)

Body

As stated earlier, an argument is made up of (1) a thesis, (2) the reasons that support that thesis, and (3) the evidence that support those reasons. In your introduction, you stated your thesis and supporting reasons. Now, in the body section of your paper, you must support your reasons with evidence. In other words, you made a promise to the reader when you stated your thesis, and now you must deliver on that promise by presenting your evidence.

The types of evidence you use (e.g., statistical data, expert opinion, visuals, textual quotes, etc.) will depend on the nature of your thesis and supporting reasons. In short, there must be a logical connection between your claims and corresponding evidence.

Example

If you want to argue that *Mayor A's zero-tolerance policy has led to a decrease in crime*, you will need statistical data to back up your claim.

Similarly, if you write that *Painter A was greatly influenced by Painter B*, you will need a supporting quote from Painter A to that effect or a comparative analysis of Painter A's work with Painter B's.

The body is, by definition, the paragraph-by-paragraph development of a thesis, and any discussion of the body must focus on paragraph development. We have therefore divided our discussion of the body into two sections on paragraphing: (1) a detailed examination of an effective body paragraph and (2) a consideration of the organization of the body paragraphs as a whole.

a. Characteristics of an effective body paragraph

You may think of a body paragraph as a kind of mini-essay, with its own introduction, body, and conclusion:

1. Introduction. You begin the paragraph with a topic sentence that introduces a supporting point.
2. Body. You explain the significance of the supporting point – i.e., how it supports your thesis – and you defend your supporting point with sound evidence.
3. Conclusion. You conclude the paragraph with a statement that reinforces/demonstrates the connection between the supporting point and thesis.

Student Example: Body Paragraph

In the following example, taken from a literary analysis of Dante's *Inferno*, the student (1) begins with a clear topic sentence and point (i.e., Virgil's wisdom cannot rival Divine Love); (2) explains why she believes her claim based on a close reading of the text; (3) cites evidence from the text to support her claim; (4) explains how her cited evidence supports her claim; and (5) concludes by reasserting her claim made in her topic sentence.

Although Virgil's wisdom is admirable, it cannot rival the power of Divine Love. Virgil, who represents reason and wisdom, guides Dante only because he was summoned by Beatrice, his beloved. When Dante first meets Virgil, he is in awe because of the

admiration he has for his poetry, but his admiration for Virgil's intellect is not enough to make him overcome his fear of Hell. However, Virgil gives Dante the courage to continue through Hell by explaining the details of his deal with Beatrice, thus showing him that he is protected by the powers of love and grace. Dante reacts ecstatically: "O she, compassionate, who moved to help me! And you, all kindness, in obeying quick those words of truth she brought with her for you- you and the words you spoke have moved my heart with such desire to continue onward that now I have returned to my first purpose" (lines 133-138). Dante is reassured knowing he will be guided by love rather than knowledge, only pursuing the path through Hell and to God when he knows love watches over him. The reader understands that, although reason is important on the path to understanding God, it is not as crucial as love or faith.

(Elena Galloway, 11th Grade)

b. Choosing a plan for organization

In addition to the types of evidence you use to support your claims, you must also consider the plan of action, or organization, for presenting your argument. The plan of action you choose will depend on the nature of your thesis. In general, there are four types of plans:

- **Chronological**
In the Chronological Plan, you discuss a process or historical sequence in order, one major event, decision, or action after another.
- **Problem-Solution**
In the Problem-Solution Plan, you first describe in detail the problem, which may include sub-problems. Once you have established the problem, you then discuss the possible solutions.
- **Cause and Effect**
In the Cause and Effect Plan, you offer an explanation for why a certain event has occurred. Thus, the plan consists of two parts: you first discuss the event, reaction, etc. (i.e., the effect), then the reasons, forces, etc. that caused the event.
- **Main Ideas**
In the Main Ideas Plan, you present a list of ideas that answers your research question.

Conclusion

The conclusion is your chance to redirect your reader back to your overall argument and provide a final statement for why your paper is significant. You should write with the confidence that the reader has understood and appreciated your argument, and, as such you should not restate your thesis or provide further discussion of your supporting points. Again, you seek to provide a closing statement on the value of your thesis and its implications.

Student Example: Conclusion

In this example, taken from a research paper on graph theory, the student concludes with a statement on the potential application of mathematics and graph theory within the sciences.

Graph theory is more than a branch of mathematics, and it may be applied in the social and natural sciences. For example, the Chinese Postman Problem, where the goal is to find the shortest distance with the highest efficiency, may be easily solved with the Eulerian graph. We see, then, that graph theory may solve social problems. For mathematicians, graph theory provides an opportunity to see real mathematics; for scientists, graph theory demonstrates the importance of making the relationship between mathematics and science stronger.

(Zhou Ding Yan, 12th Grade)

Revising

Once you have a completed first draft, you are ready to revise your paper. With revision, your goal is to strengthen the unity and formality of your paper. Yes, correcting grammar and spelling mistakes is an important step in the revision process, but your first priority must be to consider the quality of your paper as a whole, which is controlled by the paragraph-by-paragraph development of your main idea. After all, you want to sign your name and submit your final paper to your teacher with the confidence that you have fully considered your main idea and done your best work.

It's best to think of revision as a prioritized, three-step process where you (1) **revise** your thesis and support, paragraph organization, and consistency of tone, (2) **edit** for spelling, grammar, and formatting mistakes, and (3) **proofread** for typos.¹²

Importantly, the amount of time you spend revising and editing your paper will depend on the quality of your initial draft. For example, some writers prefer to revise and edit as they draft, which takes considerable time but ends with a relatively polished first draft; others write more quickly, and roughly, and spend considerable time revising and editing their work.

a. Revising

With revision, you want to consider the big picture, i.e., your paragraph-by-paragraph development of your thesis. In particular, you need to be sure that your introduction effectively captures your thesis and main points and that your body paragraphs follow a logical order towards supporting your thesis and main points.

To be useful to your reader, your introduction and body section need to match. Remember, writing is thinking, and it's common for your thesis and ideas to change somewhat as you write. You want to be sure that the thesis and main points you presented in your introduction are the same as those developed in your body and conclusion.

¹² This revision model is borrowed largely from DiYanni 10-13.

Revision Checklist

- **Thesis.** Are you satisfied with your thesis? How might you change your thesis to make it clearer, more accurate, or more interesting?¹³
- **Introduction vs. Body and Conclusion.** Do the thesis and ideas presented in your introduction match those in your body and concluding paragraphs? Do your body paragraphs follow logically from your introduction?¹⁴
- **Organization.** Do your main points, presented in your body paragraphs, connect logically to your thesis? Is it possible to strengthen the logical flow and unity of your paper by altering your paragraph or sentence order?
- **Topic Sentences.** Do you begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that states the paragraph's main idea? Does the topic sentence connect logically to your thesis?
- **Support/Evidence.** Does each paragraph have evidence supporting the topic sentence?
- **Tone and Consistency of Terminology and Tense.** Is your level of language appropriate for your reader? Do you maintain a consistent tone throughout your paper? Do you use consistent terminology and tense throughout your paper?
- **Clarity.** Are your sentences clear? Is it possible to eliminate unnecessary words? Do you avoid jargon, the passive voice, and wordiness?

b. Editing

Once you are satisfied with your paragraph-by-paragraph development of your thesis, you need to check for mistakes in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and documentation. The danger of such mistakes is that they may distract your reader and therefore break her concentration as she tries to follow your argument.

Note

There are many software and online tools to help you edit your paper, such as spelling and grammar checkers and citation websites. While these may be helpful, you still need to edit your paper yourself. Spellcheckers, for example, do not catch usage mistakes (e.g., *its* vs. *it's*).

¹³ DiYanni 11.

¹⁴ Evergreen Writing Center, "Strategies for Essay Revision." August 26, 2012
<<http://www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter/handouts/general/revision.pdf>>

Editing Checklist

- **Grammar and Punctuation.** Have you checked for grammar and punctuation mistakes, especially mistakes in:
 - Subject-verb and pronoun-verb agreement
 - Sentence fragments
 - Run-on sentences
 - Comma errors (comma splices, missing comma after introductory element, etc.)
 - Misplaced or confusing modifiers
 - Faulty parallelism
 - Possessive errors
 - Capitalization
- **Spelling and Usage.** Have you checked for spelling mistakes? Have you checked for these common usage mistakes:
 - It's / Its
 - There / Their / They're
 - That / Which / Who
 - Who / Whom
 - Since / Because
 - Affect / Effect
 - Than / Then
 - No contractions or undefined abbreviations
- **Documentation.** Have you cited your sources throughout your paper? Have you cited your sources in the correct format?

c. Proofreading

With proofreading, your goal is to correct any typos before you hand in your paper to your teacher. It's a good idea to print your paper before you give it a final proofreading. You might also ask a parent or friend to proofread your paper, because she will be reading your work with fresh eyes, so to speak, and is likely to catch mistakes. If you find that you need to make a few minor corrections (correct a spelling mistake, insert a missing comma, etc.), you may do so by hand, preferably in black ink, and do not need to print out a new copy. If, however, you need to make several corrections, it's best to make the changes on your soft copy and reprint your paper.

Proofreading Checklist

- **Word-by-Word, Sentence-By-Sentence.** Read your final draft word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence, concentrating on typos and spelling/grammar mistakes, rather than ideas.
- **Read Aloud.** Read your paper aloud, either to yourself or a parent or guardian.¹⁵

¹⁵ DiYanni 12.

Evaluating the Final Draft

The following rubric summarizes each of the discussion points of the previous sections.

Overall Impression

The author has a clear, meaningful thesis and sound supporting evidence. The author's discussion follows a logical order: body paragraphs are relevant to the author's thesis and supporting points, and she uses consistent language throughout her paper. The author uses careful and specific wording, and her work impresses the reader as fair, competent, and honest.

Introduction (1 to 2 Paragraphs)

The author establishes the context, or problem, of her paper. The author directly states her thesis and supporting points – *without* providing a detailed discussion. The author's introduction inspires the reader to read on and understand how/why she believes as she does.

Body

Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence that introduces a supporting point previously stated in the introduction. The significance of the supporting point – i.e., how it supports her thesis – is made evident to the reader. The author effectively defends her supporting point with sound evidence, and her treatment of her evidence – and counter evidence – is fair. The author's language is consistent with the terminology and vocabulary she established in her introduction and background paragraphs. The author concludes each body paragraph with a statement that reinforces the connection between her supporting point and thesis.

Conclusion (1 to 2 Paragraphs)

The author revisits her argument with the confidence that the reader has understood and appreciated her argument. As such, there is no discussion of her thesis or supporting points. The author provides a final statement on the significance and implications of her thesis.

IV. Working with Sources

Overview of the Research Process and Writing with Sources

Developing a Research Plan

Using the Library to Gather Sources

Using the Internet to Gather Sources

Evaluating Sources

Paraphrasing

Quoting

Citing Sources

Overview of the Research Process and Writing with Sources

In this section we discuss researching and writing with sources. Importantly, we do not discuss the research paper itself, because there is essentially no difference between the essay and the research paper, other than the documentation of sources; both are based on the Thesis-Support model we outlined in Section III, “The Writing Process.”¹⁶ Here, our goal is to describe how to locate and use sources wisely and responsibly.

From the start, it’s important to understand the difference between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are documents or objects written or created at the time being studied, including creative works (e.g., novels, paintings), original documents (e.g., newspaper articles, speeches, statistical reports), and relics or artifacts (e.g., furniture, clothing, pottery). Secondary sources are documents, typically publications such as books and articles, about primary sources.¹⁷ All scholars – historians, physicists, literary critics, etc. – base their works on primary sources, because they are expected to offer original ideas, rather than simply restate others’ interpretations. Importantly, as a New School student, you are also required to offer your own ideas and interpretations, and you should therefore expect the majority of your writing assignments to include primary sources.

Finally, note that the depth of your research and the number of sources you use will depend on the requirements and subject matter of your paper. For example, for a final research paper for a history class, you should expect to conduct both library and online research and use several sources, both primary and secondary; for a lab report, you will need to generate your own primary source material through experiments; and for a literary analysis, you may have only one source, i.e., the primary text itself.

Developing a Research Plan

Research writing is at once challenging and exciting. It takes considerable time gathering, evaluating, and annotating sources, but it’s rewarding to

¹⁶ Milam xi.

¹⁷ The Princeton Library Reference Desk, “What is a Primary Source?” August 26, 2012 <<http://www.princeton.edu/~refdesk/primary2.html>>

achieve a deep understanding and formulate your own ideas of your topic through independent and investigative work. Understand, too, that the research process – like the writing process – is a thinking process, and as you gather and work through your sources – what we call “the literature” on your topic – you will encounter new ideas and continually reassess your own thoughts on your topic.

To begin, you need to determine the types of sources you will need (e.g., books, websites, journal or newspaper articles, etc.). In a word, you need a research plan.

Your research plan will depend on the topic and requirements of your paper. For example, for a paper on recent studies in genetics, your research plan will most likely include scientific journal and magazine articles and recently-published books. In contrast, for a paper on an upcoming congressional or presidential election, your sources will mostly come from online articles, rather than books, given the currency of the topic.¹⁸ But although the extent and principal center of your research – whether in the library or online – will depend on the requirements of your paper, you should always expect to conduct both library and online research for any major project.

Note

If you are new to research or unsure about where to start, talk to your teacher or a reference librarian; they want to help, and they will direct you towards relevant sources and thus save you considerable in your initial research.

¹⁸ Hacker 298-299.

Using the Library to Gather Sources

Libraries are centers of both print and electronic information. Not all libraries' holdings are the same, however, and, depending on your research plan, you may need to conduct your research at your county's regional library or a local university library, rather than a smaller reading library.

It goes without saying, but every student *must* have a library card. Importantly, as a New School student, you have the right to a Fairfax County library card, which will allow you to check out books and access the library system's subscription ebooks and periodical databases.¹⁹

In general, with library research, your goal is to locate books and articles from newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. Let's look at search strategies for each of these sources.

Searching Books

To locate library books, you need to access your library's catalog, which is most likely online and accessible via the Web. Importantly, then, you do not need to search for library books at the library, but may, instead, search for and gather your sources' call numbers²⁰ from home, school, etc. Note, too, that there is one catalog for all of a county's libraries, with the holding library of a book indicated on the book's record page.

Area County and University Library Catalogs

- Fairfax County Libraries
<http://fcplcat.fairfaxcounty.gov/uhtbin/cgisirsi/?ps=7LASAw7uxG/ZTECHOPS/206810011/60/1180/X>
- Arlington County Libraries
<http://libsys.arlingtonva.us/>
- City of Falls Church Libraries
<http://encore.fallschurchva.gov/iii/encore/home?lang=eng>
- Washington, DC Public Libraries
<http://www.dclibrary.org/>
- Loudoun County Public Libraries

¹⁹ See the New School Media Specialist for information on how to obtain your Fairfax County library card.

²⁰ The call number is the unique code, usually a combination of letters and numbers, that indicates where the source is located in the library.

<http://catalog.lcpl.lib.va.us/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=adm#focus>

- Montgomery County Public Libraries

http://webcat.montgomerylibrary.org/uhtbin/cgiirsi/0/0/0/57/49?user_id=webserver

- George Mason University Library

<http://library.gmu.edu/>

- American University Library

<http://www.american.edu/library/>²¹

Typically, library catalogs allow you to search for books by author, title, or subject. The subject search is most common, however, because we generally do not know exactly which books we want when we research.²² Indeed, many library catalogs default to a simple *Search* field or homepage, much like *Google.com*, which is really a subject search field. Here, for example, is the homepage for the Arlington Public Library catalog:



Search: 

[Advanced Search](#)

Browse:

New Fiction	New Kids Fiction	New Teen Fiction
New Nonfiction	New Kids Nonfiction	New Teen Nonfiction
New DVDs	New Kids DVDs	New Teen DVDs
New Audiobooks	New Kids Audiobooks	New Teen Audiobooks

With a subject search, also known as a *keyword search*, you enter the words and/or phrases that best capture the types of books you are looking for. We may say, then, that the secret to good research is knowing (1) how to construct an effective keyword search and (2) how to narrow or broaden a keyword when a search yields too many or too few results.

²¹ The George Mason and American University libraries are open to the public, although only students and faculty may check out books. The Georgetown and George Washington University libraries are open only to students and faculty and thus not listed here.

²² Hacker 303.

Constructing a Keyword Search

In general, a keyword will follow naturally from the topic or research question. For example, if your topic is the art of William Blake, your keyword search might be *William Blake art*. There is no formula for a keyword search, however, and the best way to learn the art of research is through trial and error and knowing how to broaden or narrow a keyword search, depending on the search results.

Narrowing and Broadening Keyword Searches

Most library databases recognize the following commands, known as Boolean operators, which may be used to narrow or broaden a keyword search.

- **AND.** Use AND to indicate that *all* search terms must be present in the search results. For example, *William Blake AND art*. Note, however, that most databases and online search engines automatically use an AND operator between search terms.
- **OR.** Use OR to indicate that *any* of your search terms be present in the search results. For example, *Burma OR Myanmar*.
- **NOT.** Use NOT to exclude words from your search results. For example, *Genetics NOT disorders*.

Using the Internet to Gather Sources

The Web is a powerful research tool. In particular, the Web is a rich resource for primary documents, typically found via library, museum, and university websites; newspaper websites, too – for example, www.nytimes.com, www.washingtonpost.com, etc. – commonly allow users to access their complete archives. In addition, primary sources are often not subject to copyright publishing restrictions and may therefore be accessed for free on the Web.

Sample Archives

The following websites house noteworthy archives of primary sources. These sites do not represent the complete list of archives on the Web, of course; we list them here only to give you a sense of the possibilities of locating vast sources of primary documents. Note that all of the sites are affiliated with government (.gov), non-profit (.org), and university (.edu) institutions, as opposed to commercial institutions (.com).

- *American Memory*
<http://memory.loc.gov>
- *Internet History Sourcebooks*
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/>
- *Primary Sources on the Web*
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/primarysourcesontheweb.html>
- *Project Gutenberg*
<http://www.gutenberg.org/>
- *Repositories of Primary Sources*
<http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html>

The Web is also a valuable resource for secondary documents, such as journal articles and scholarly essays, but – because *anyone can publish on the Web* – you need to evaluate the quality of secondary Web sources with discerning care.²³ In general, it's best to draw Web sources from online publications of magazines and journals, where the articles are peer-reviewed, that is, vetted by scholars in the same discipline.

The downside to such online publications is that their contents are often accessible only to subscribers or for an individual fee per article. The good

²³ See the next section, “Evaluating Sources,” for guidance on evaluating the appropriateness and reliability of Web sources.

news, however, is that library systems (e.g., Fairfax County, Arlington County, etc.) subscribe to major online publications, which are in turn accessible to library cardholders. Talk to your county librarian or Joanna, our Media Specialist, about how to access your library system's online subscriptions.

Online Resources

You should take advantage of your library system's online resources, which include eBooks, eVideos, articles, reports, statistics, visual documents, and a wealth of other sources. These sources are available to you for free as a library cardholder. We list here links to the Fairfax County, Arlington County, City of Falls Church, and Washington, DC libraries' online resources.

- Fairfax County Library Online Resources
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/dbsremote/>
- Arlington County Library Online Resources
<http://library.arlingtonva.us/collections/ecollection/>
- City of Falls Church Library Online Resources
<http://www.fallschurchva.gov/content/library/onlinedatabases/default.aspx?cnlid=3928>
- Washington, DC Library Online Resources
<http://www.dclibrary.org/research>

But how do you maximize a resource as seemingly endless as the Web, especially when you're working under a deadline and within specific requirements from your teacher? You don't simply go to *Google.com*, type in your topic, and click *Search*; you would find yourself having to comb through hundreds of search results, only a fraction of which would be of useable quality. Rather, skilled researchers know that the secret to effective online research is (1) choosing an appropriate search engine and (2) constructing an effective keyword search. We already talked about constructing a keyword search (p. 41-42). Now, let's take a closer look at search engines.

a. Choosing a Search Engine

A search engine is an online tool that helps you locate information, via websites, on the Web. Today, in 2013, the most popular search engine is *Google.com*. Certainly Google is an excellent tool, but it's not necessarily an academic search engine and will therefore show search results for *all* types of websites (i.e., popular, business, academic, etc.). You may, then, do better to use a search engine – or better yet, a group of search engines – that are academic by nature; you may also do well to choose a search engine

dedicated to the broad discipline of your topic (e.g., science, technology, social sciences, etc.).

Sample Academic Search Engines

The following search engines are noteworthy for their access to vast resources of scholarly articles. Importantly, these search engines may be used for free. A more comprehensive list of academic search engines may be found at the Wikipedia page “List of academic databases and search engines”

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_academic_databases_and_search_engines).

- *BASE* (multidisciplinary)
<http://www.base-search.net/about/en/index.php>
- *BioOne* (biology, ecology, environmental science)
<http://www.bioone.org/>
- *Google Scholar* (multidisciplinary)
<http://scholar.google.com/>
- *OJOSE* (general science)
<http://www.ojose.com/>
- *Refseek* (multidisciplinary)
<http://www.refseek.com>
- *Scirus* (general science)
<http://www.scirus.com/>
- *SSRN (Social Science Research Network)* (social sciences)
<http://www.ssrn.com/>

Evaluating Sources

When many of us, your teachers, were high school students, it was not easy locating information for research projects. There was no Web, and library research was conducted through card – literally paper – catalogs. Today, though, nothing could be easier than locating information, and your real task as a researcher, therefore, is not to locate information, but to evaluate the *value* of the many sources you encounter while researching. We define the value of a source by (1) its appropriateness to your topic and (2) its reliability.²⁴ Let's look at each of these criteria in turn.

Remember

Your teacher will judge your paper in large part by the sources you cite. Appropriate, reliable sources will reflect positively on your work; inappropriate, unreliable sources will reflect negatively on your work.

Appropriateness

In Section III, "Developing a Question," we noted that teachers ask questions that are meaningful to their disciplines. It follows, too, that your research question, or field of study, will determine the appropriateness of a source. For example, if your research question is *How are antibiotics potentially harmful?*, your science teacher will expect to find up-to-date, scientific, peer-reviewed articles cited in your paper. Note, however, that such a source, which represents the latest findings, would not be appropriate for a history paper on the discovery of penicillin. The point is, a source that is appropriate for one project may not be appropriate for another.²⁵ Talk to your teacher about what types of sources will be appropriate for your research question.

²⁴ "Evaluating Sources." 2013. Harvard Guide to Using Sources. July 31, 2013 <<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup107786>>

²⁵ "Making Decisions Based on Your Discipline." 2013. Harvard Guide to Using Sources. July 31, 2013 <<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page346377>>

Reliability

Once you have determined that a source is appropriate to your project, you need to assess its reliability. Although you will assess websites somewhat differently from books and articles, you will always need to determine (1) the qualifications of a source's author and (2) the intended reader, purpose and publisher of the source. It's also likely that the currency of the source (i.e., its date of publication) will be an important factor in your assessment of its reliability, especially if your paper topic falls within the social sciences or natural sciences.²⁶

Questions to Ask When Evaluating All Sources

Authorship

- *What are the credentials of the author?*
- *Does the author have any affiliations that would affect his/her objectivity?*

Purpose

- *What is the author's central argument?*
- *Who is the intended audience?*
- *Why did the author write the work?*
- *Who published the work?*

Currency

- *How current is the source? Is the information still relevant?*

Questions to Ask When Evaluating Web Sources

Authorship

- *Is there an author? (If not, be wary about using the site as a source.)*

Sponsorship

- *Who sponsors the site?*
- *Why was the site created?*
- *What is the domain name -- .com (commercial), .edu (educational), .org (nonprofit), .gov (governmental), .mil (military), or .net (network)? (In general, .edu and .org sites are viewed as more reliable than .com sites.)*

Currency

- *What is the creation date of the site? Is the site up-to-date?*

²⁶ This model of evaluating sources and the Questions to Ask When Evaluating Sources that follow are borrowed largely from Hacker 314-315 and the Harvard Guide to Evaluating Sources, "Evaluating Sources."

<<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup107786>>

Paraphrasing

When taking notes on a source or when citing a source as evidence in your paper, you will often need to paraphrase, i.e., to restate the author’s ideas in your own words. Paraphrasing is a necessary skill in academic writing because (1) we often use others’ ideas as evidence in our papers and (2) quoting is only appropriate when the author’s words are particularly important or unique. Let’s return to our example from Section II, “Academic Integrity,” to deconstruct effective paraphrasing – and understand that failing to paraphrase correctly will likely result in plagiarism.

Original Source

In the years ahead, climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings—possibly greater even than war. Shifting precipitation patterns and ocean currents could change where and how food crops grow. If icecaps melt and low-lying areas are flooded, as is predicted, entire populations could be forced to move to higher ground. The tsunami of 2004 and Hurricane Katrina, in 2005, provided vivid examples of what large-scale climactic catastrophes entail.

Ruth Greenspan Bell, “What to Do About Climate Change,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2006.

Acceptable Paraphrase

Climate change will have serious consequences for everyone on the planet. Food production will be altered by changes in rainfall, and as water levels rise low-lying areas will become inhabitable (Bell 105).

Explanation

In this example, the student recasts the three main ideas of the original source in her own words, as follows:

Main Ideas of Original Source	Student’s Paraphrase
“...climate change will have a significant impact on every aspect of daily lives of all human beings.”	Climate change will have serious consequences for everyone on the planet.
“Shifting precipitation patterns and ocean currents could change where and how food crops grow...”	Food production will be altered by changes in rainfall...
“If icecaps melt and low-lying areas are flooded, as is predicted, entire populations could be forced to move to higher ground.”	...as water levels rise low-lying areas will become inhabitable.

Most importantly, the student cites the original source immediately after she uses the ideas in her paper, thus acknowledging her source and not claiming the ideas as her own, which would be plagiarism.

Paraphrasing is difficult, because good research demands that you work closely with your sources, and it's therefore hard to separate form from content, i.e., to borrow an author's ideas but not her sentence structure and particular word choice.

It is a *dangerous mistake* to mix your own words with the general sentence structure and particular word choice of the original source – in effect, to change a word here and there in the original text – *even if you cite the source*. Your work will be considered plagiarism. Again, to paraphrase correctly, you must rewrite the whole idea of the original source in your own words.

Unacceptable Paraphrase (Plagiarism)

In the future, climate change will have serious consequences for all human beings—even greater than war. Changing rain and ocean patterns will surely impact farming. Assuming the icecaps melt, people will have to move to higher ground. Just think about the 2004 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, which clearly demonstrated the impact of climate-related catastrophes (Bell 105).

Explanation

Here, the sentences and sequence of ideas follow the same structure as the original, and the writer has simply substituted words with synonyms (“In the future” for “In the years ahead”; “serious consequences” for “significant impact”; “farming” for “where and how food crops grow”; etc.). Again, it's as if the writer simply lifted the original word-for-word and switched out words and phrases here and there.

Quoting

When you need to cite a source and want to use the author's exact words, because they are particularly unique or important, you must use quotation marks. Importantly, you should only quote what is directly relevant to your point and avoid over-quoting, because you do not want the author's words to overshadow your own. In effect, you want your quotes to read as short, integrated highlights or supports to *your* discussion.

Here are the most common ways to integrate quotes into your paper:

- **Signal Phrase.**

Simply introduce the quote by stating its author, either at the beginning, within, or end of the quote.

Signal Phrase

Geertz claims, "Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products" (50).²⁷

"Our ideas, our values, our acts," Geertz claims, "even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products" (50).

"Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products," Geertz claims (50).

- **Weaving.**

Weave the quote into your own sentence or paraphrase of the original.

Weaving

Geertz makes the bold claim that we are not autonomous beings and that "Our ideas, our values, even our emotions..." are culturally determined (50).

- **Key Word or Phrase.**

Quote only the critical word or phrase to emphasize your point.

²⁷ The following examples are from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973.

Key Word or Phrase

Geertz claims that we are “cultural products,” rather than autonomous beings (50).

- **Block.**

If your quote is longer than four lines, set it off as a block quote within your text, as follows: (1) indent the passage 10 spaces, or 1”, from the left margin (block quotes run flush with the right margin; (2) do not use quotation marks; and (3) cite the source after, rather than before, the final punctuation mark of the passage. It is also common to introduce a block quote with a colon (:).

Block

Geertz believes that we are products of our time and place, rather than fully autonomous beings. He writes:

Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products—products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured. Chartres is made of stone and glass. But it is not just stone and glass; it is a cathedral, and not only a cathedral, but a particular cathedral built at a particular time by certain members of a particular society. (50)

Finally, if you need to alter or note a word or phrase within a quote, follow these guidelines:

- To indicate that a quote has been shortened, use ellipses (...) at the place of the missing words. For example, “Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are...cultural products” (50).
- To emphasize a key word or phrase within a quote, underline or italicize the word or phrase and add “my emphasis” or “emphasis mine” within parentheses at the end of the quote. For example, “Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are...*cultural* products” (my emphasis) (50).
- To indicate a misspelling or factual mistake within a quote, add *sic* within brackets immediately after the mistake. For example, “Albert Einstien [*sic*] was critical of quantum physics.”
- To add letters or words to a quote, place them in brackets. For example, “George [W.] Bush initiated significant programs to fight AIDS in Africa.”

Citing Sources

When you borrow ideas or information from a work, you must cite the source. Importantly, you always cite your sources *within* your paper, i.e., immediately after the material needing documentation.

There are three methods for citing sources. These are:

- In-text citations (also known as parenthetical citations)
- Footnotes
- Endnotes

Which citation method you use will depend on the documentation format required by your teacher. In general, MLA (Modern Language Association) is used in the humanities and APA (American Psychological Association) is used in the sciences. CMS (*Chicago Manual of Style*) is also commonly used. MLA and APA format use in-text citations; *Chicago* format uses footnotes and endnotes.

In-text Citations

Both the MLA and APA systems use in-text citations. For simplicity, we discuss only the MLA system here.²⁸

With an MLA in-text citation, you (1) place the author's last name and the page number(s) within parentheses immediately after the material needing documentation, and (2) include the full bibliographic information for the source in a Works Cited page at the end of your paper. The author's name may be omitted from the in-text citation, however, if mentioned in the text of your paper.

²⁸ For comprehensive guidance on APA and MLA formatting, refer to each association's official handbook or website. For MLA: Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Sixth Edition, www.mla.org. For APA: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition, www.apastyle.org.

In-text Citations

- Art and physics are both “investigations into the nature of reality” (Shlain 16).
- Leonard Shlain argues, “Revolutionary art and visionary physics are both investigations into the nature of reality” (16).
- Shlain believes there is a connection between art and physics (16).

Works Cited

In turn, the full bibliographic information for the source is listed at the end of the paper on a Works Cited page. Sources are listed in alphabetical order by author last name; the first line of each entry is flush against the left margin with subsequent lines indented five spaces. Note that the entire Works Cited page should be double-spaced without additional spaces between entries.

- Shlain, Leonard. *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time & Light*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991. Print.

Note on MLA Formatting for Works Cited Page

The complete list of MLA formatting by source type (books, articles, websites, videos, etc.) is too large to include here. For comprehensive guidance on MLA formatting, refer to the official MLA handbook or website. Another excellent source on MLA formatting is the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/>.

Footnotes and Endnotes

Chicago format uses footnotes or endnotes to document sources. The only difference between footnotes and endnotes is that footnotes are placed at the bottom of individual pages while endnotes are listed at the end of the paper. Importantly, you should use either footnotes or endnotes in your paper, rather than a combination of the two methods.

To create a footnote or endnote: (1) insert a superscript number immediately after the material needing documentation and (2) add a corresponding, numbered note at the bottom of the page (footnote) or end of the paper (endnote). Both footnotes and endnotes should be single-spaced and

indented five spaces from the left margin.²⁹ Importantly, once a source has been cited, you need only include the author's last name and page number(s) in subsequent notes.

Footnotes

- Leonard Shlain has argued that art and physics are both “investigations into the nature of reality.”¹ In particular, Shlain presents an interesting case for a visual connection between cubism and relativity.²

Notes

- ¹ Leonard Shlain, *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time & Light* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991) 16.
- ² Shlain 187-203.

Note on Formatting for Footnotes / Endnotes

The complete list of formatting by source type (books, articles, websites, videos, etc.) is too large to include here. For comprehensive guidance on footnote and endnote formatting, refer to the official *Chicago Manual of Style*, Sixteenth Edition. An excellent source on *Chicago* formatting is also found at the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>.

²⁹ Most word processors, including Microsoft Word, include a function that automatically inserts and formats footnotes and endnotes.

V. The Research Paper Exhibition

Why a Research Paper as Exhibition?

The Nature of an Essential Question

Exhibition Timeline

Why a Research Paper as Exhibition?

At The New School, we believe the best tests are those that require students to apply critical thought and *exhibit* their true understanding of course content and skills. Importantly, our small class sizes allow us to put this belief into practice, because teachers have a limited number of students and may devote their energies to evaluating and providing feedback to students' work. Indeed, the great value of a New School education is that it challenges students, through close collaboration with their teachers and authentic models of assessment, to master bodies of information and skills.

The morning module – a nine-week, intense study of a topic framed by an essential question and culminating in an exhibition – is a key institution of The New School because it encapsulates this essential process of a New School education: (1) The essential question provides unity to the content of the course and requires the students to engage that content critically; (2) students respond to the essential question throughout the course and work closely with their teachers to develop final, individual responses; and (3) students publish, so to speak, their formal answers to the essential question in an exhibition.

For the Quarter 2 Morning Module, the exhibition format is a research paper. We require all students to respond to their essential questions in a research paper because (1) it is an authentic model of assessment and (2) we believe critical writing must be a central component of any college preparatory curriculum. Make no mistake, you *will* write research papers in college, and the second-quarter research paper exhibition is grounded in our sense of responsibility to prepare our students for university-level writing.

In this section, we discuss the research paper exhibition process. Importantly, we do not discuss the writing process, which we outlined in detail in Section III, because there is essentially no difference between the essay and the research paper, other than the use and documentation of sources. Both are based on the Thesis-Support model.³⁰ For now, our goal is to place the Quarter 2 Morning Module on a timeline and outline the major milestones towards developing a research paper in response to an essential question.

³⁰ Milam xi.

Requirements

The specific requirements for the exhibition research paper vary somewhat depending on the subject, course level, and teacher. For example, your teacher may require an abstract or that you use a particular format for your citations. The page requirement will also vary, though in general you may expect to write 3-5 pages for a Level 1 course and 5-7 pages for a Level 2 class.

Most significantly, the depth of your research and the number of sources you use will depend largely on the subject of the course. For example, for a history class, you should expect to research your topic extensively and use several sources to support your argument in your paper. For an English class, however, your paper may be essentially a literary analysis, and your argument may be based solely on a close reading of a single text.

Differences of research and sources aside, note that ***all Quarter 2 papers must be research papers in the sense that they are (1) organized as an argument, based on the Thesis-Support model, and (2) cite source material as the basis and evidence for the thesis and claims made.***

The following critique form summarizes the school-wide requirements for the Quarter 2 research paper. Your exhibition research papers will be evaluated on this form. Note too that the form is essentially the same as the final paper rubric presented at the end of Section III, “The Writing Process.”

Research Paper Peer Critique Form			
Overall Impression			
	Weak	Good	Notable
The author has a clear, meaningful thesis and sound supporting evidence.			
The author's discussion follows a logical order: body paragraphs are relevant to the author's thesis and supporting points, and she uses consistent language throughout her paper.			
The author cites her sources throughout her paper, and she demonstrates a full understanding of her sources and the body of knowledge on her topic.			
The author uses careful and specific wording, and her work impresses the reader as fair, competent, and honest.			
Particular strength(s):			
Area(s) needing improvement:			
Introduction			
	Weak	Good	Notable
The author establishes the context, or problem, of her paper.			
The author directly states her thesis and supporting points – <i>without</i> providing a detailed discussion.			
The author inspires the reader to read on and understand how/why she believes as she does.			
Particular strength(s):			
Area(s) needing improvement:			
Body			
	Weak	Good	Notable
The author begins each body paragraph with a topic sentence that introduces a supporting point previously stated in the introduction.			
The author makes evident to the reader the significance of the supporting points by connecting them to the thesis.			
The author effectively defends her supporting points with sound evidence, and her treatment of her evidence – and counter evidence – is fair.			
The author's language is consistent with the terminology and vocabulary that she established in her introduction and background paragraphs.			
The author concludes each body paragraph with a statement that reinforces the connection between her supporting point and thesis.			
Particular strength(s):			
Area(s) needing improvement:			
Conclusion			
	Weak	Good	Notable
The author provides a final statement on the significance and implications of her thesis.			
Particular strength(s):			
Area(s) needing improvement:			

Exhibition Protocol

The Quarter 2 research paper exhibition is organized as a structured discussion of student work, rather than a formal presentation, and the purpose of the exhibition is to provide good-natured, critical feedback to each student on his/her research paper. Although your exhibition grade is based almost entirely on your final paper, rather than a presentation, you should still take care to understand the exhibition protocol out of responsibility to the other members of your exhibition group.

Exhibition Protocol

1. Abstract (3 minutes)

The author provides a verbal abstract of the paper, focusing on his/her overall argument. The author may request that the group focus on a particular question in its discussion.

2. Questions (7 minutes)

Participants ask author clarifying and probing questions in preparation for group discussion of the paper.

3. Discussion (10 minutes)

The group discusses the paper while the author listens without responding; the group should not direct its discussion towards the author. The group uses the peer critique form to guide its discussion.

4. Response (2 minutes)

The author responds to points made in the discussion and offers any final comments.

The Nature of an Essential Question

A successful exhibition is an organized, thesis-centered argument in response to the essential question, and thus the first step towards planning your research paper is to understand the nature of an essential question.

An essential question provides a unifying theme for a course. As such, the essential question sets a limit on content and focuses the students' thinking on a particular aspect of the course subject. Most importantly, an essential question is broad and open-ended – *with no one correct answer* – and therefore engages the students to think critically about a response. In the end, for your exhibition, you do not simply recite a list of facts or present prescribed conclusions. Rather, you must construct an individual and informed argument in response to the essential question.

The value of a broad essential question is that it allows the students to focus on particular areas of interest with regard to the question. However, by itself, an essential question may be so broad as to be unworkable, and you may therefore have to reframe your class's essential question as a research question to give your exhibition paper direction and purpose.

Example

For the essential question “What area of the brain’s structure most affects our experience of the world,” a student might focus on the thalamus and narrow the essential question to “How does the thalamus affect our experience of the world.”

Finally, because the essential question guides the course curriculum, you should begin to answer the question *from the first day of class*. It's true your initial responses to the essential question may be uninformed, but you need to keep the question in the back of your mind as you encounter course content. Importantly, your teacher expects your exhibition paper to represent nine weeks of critical thought.

Exhibition Timeline

In this section, we timeline the major steps towards developing a successful exhibition research paper. Of course there may be variations to this schedule, depending on your teacher's course plan and exhibition assignments, but you should *always* expect to (1) begin to explore answers to the essential question from the first day of class; (2) have a working thesis and argument by the interim; (3) prewrite, draft and revise your paper throughout the second half of the class.

1. Explore Ideas (Weeks 1-2)

During the first two weeks of class, you should become familiar with the essential question and the requirements for the final research paper. After all, the exhibition is a significant portion of your final grade, and it's in your best interest to begin to explore ideas and understand teacher expectations from the start of class. In particular, explore personal interests within the boundaries of the course, and talk to your teacher about ways to translate those interests into responses to the essential question.

2. Research (Weeks 2-4)

In most cases, the material for your research paper will come from a combination of course lessons and readings and independent research. A major shortcoming of a research paper is lack of sources, and you therefore need to begin to gather sources as soon as possible. At the same time, you need to follow good research practice and track your sources – as you research – so you may cite your sources properly in your final paper. Often researchers use a system of note cards or a research journal for tracking. Talk to your teacher about best practices for research.

3. Develop a Working Thesis (Week 5)

By the mid-point of the class, you should be able to posit a working thesis. Importantly, you may have to reframe the essential question as a research question to make sure your thesis is sufficiently narrow and thus provides direction and meaning to your work as you continue to research and begin to outline and draft your paper.

For example:

In an American Literature class where the essential question is “How does the literature of a period parallel the growth of American civilization,” the student narrows the broad category of “a period” to the 19th century, and posits the following working thesis: “American literature of the 19th century parallels the cultural maturation of the United States.” The student now has a clear direction: he needs to explain what he means by the “cultural maturation” of America during the 19th century and how the literature of the period reflects this so-called maturation.

4. Prewrite and Outline Argument (Week 5-6)

Once you have a good, teacher-approved working thesis, you are ready to focus your prewriting on developing a clear plan for your paper. At this point, you need to determine your primary evidence to support your thesis, and it’s possible you will need to continue to research. It is also likely that your teacher will require you to formalize your argument in a detailed outline.

5. Draft and Revise Final Paper (Week 6-9)

You should expect to draft and revise your paper for at least two weeks. Remember, your exhibition should reflect nine weeks’ effort, and without giving yourself enough time to craft your ideas and collaborate with your teacher, you run the risk of producing an informal and underdeveloped final paper.

VI. Appendix

Appendix A: Understanding Teacher Feedback

Appendix B: Sentence Mechanics

Appendix A: Understanding Teacher Feedback

The great value of a New School education is that it allows for close collaboration between students and teachers. Teachers spend considerable time reading and evaluating students' written work, and, to make the most of your education, you need to understand your teachers' correction and suggestion marks. Your teacher may use some or all of these marks, or may have different ones. Be sure to ask if you are unsure about the meaning of any comments on your work.

Common Teacher Marks

The following list represents common teacher corrections and suggestions:³¹

- *agree.* – The subject and verb do not agree.
- *avoid* – Do not use.
- *awk.* – The sentence is awkward and should be rewritten.
- *doc.* – Documentation (footnote, in-text citation, endnote) is needed.
- *expl.* The point, sentence, or paragraph needs further explanation or development.
- *frag.* – Sentence fragment.
- ¶ – Start new paragraph.
- *point?* – The point being made is unclear.
- *run-on* – Run-on sentence.
- *thesis?* – The thesis is unclear.
- *t.s.* – Need better topic sentence.
- *unclear* – The point is unclear and needs more explanation.
- *wc* – Poor word choice.
- *wordy* – The marked word, sentence or paragraph is wordy and need to be made more concise.

Your teacher may use some or all of these marks, or may have different ones. Please be sure to ask if you are unsure about the meaning of any comments on your work.

³¹ Adapted from Milam 87-88.

Appendix B: Sentence Mechanics

*Parts of Speech*³²

In many ways, the sentence is a basic unit of expression in an essay. There are eight types of words that compose sentences:

- **Noun** – a person, place, thing, or abstract idea.
- **Verb** – a word which expresses action, events or a state of being pertaining to a noun.
- **Pronoun** – a more generic word taking the place of a noun (e.g., “he,” “she,” “which”).
- **Adjective** – a word which provides more information about a noun (e.g., “the red barn”).
- **Adverb** – a word which provides more information about a verb (e.g., “she recalled sadly”).
- **Preposition** – a word which establishes a relationship in space, in time, or logically between an object and the rest of a sentence (e.g., “after,” “between,” “under,” “until,” “to,” “toward,” “of”).
- **Conjunction** – a word which joins words, phrases and clauses (e.g., “and,” “but,” “or,” “once,” “since”).
- **Interjections** – a word or phrase added to a sentence to express emotion, sometimes followed by an exclamation point (e.g., “ouch!” “oh no!”).

Subject and Predicate

At the simplest level, a sentence consists of a subject (a noun, noun phrase, or noun clause) and a predicate that gives information about the subject.

Subject – Predicate

- **The girl** *walked.*
- **School** *prepares you for future challenges.*
- **Tim** *tries to like The Beatles.*
- **Forty wild horses** *galloped through town on Friday.*

³² Adapted from the University of Ottawa Writing Center, “The Parts of Speech.”
September 10, 2012

<<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/interjct.html#interjection>>

Phrases and Clauses

The eight parts of speech can be grouped together into phrases and clauses.

A *phrase* is a group of words that serve as a single part of speech. For example, “tries to like” is a *verb phrase* that serves as the verb in the third sentence above. “Forty wild horses” is a *noun phrase* that serves as the subject of the fourth sentence.

Phrases and Clauses

A clause is a group of words that consists of a subject and a predicate. Thus each of the sentences listed below is also a clause.

- What Jenna said shocked Bill. (Noun phrase: “What Jenna said”.)
- Going to the mall was out of the question. (Noun phrase: “Going to the mall”.)
- Luis found the key under the mat. (Prepositional phrase: “under the mat”.)

Independent and Dependent Clauses

Clauses can be independent (able to stand alone as a complete sentence) or dependent (supporting another clause in some way). For example:

Independent Clause

In the example below, “he defends Tom Robinson” is an independent clause, because it is a complete sentence by itself.

- Because Atticus believes everyone deserves fair treatment under the law, he defends Tom Robinson.

Dependent Clause

Note, however, that the first part of the sentence is a dependent clause, because it cannot stand alone as a complete sentence – it depends, or is subordinate to, the other clause in the sentence.

- Because Atticus believes everyone deserves fair treatment under the law...

A dependent clause begins with a subordinating conjunction:

Subordinating Conjunctions

after	every time	the first time
although	if	though
as	in case	unless
as soon as	in the event that	until
because	just in case	when
before	now that	whenever
by the time	once	whereas
even if	only if	whether or not
even though	since	while

A subordinating conjunction joins a clause to another, but makes the meaning of the clause subordinate, or in service of the meaning of the other clause. For example:

- Even though the CDC predicts that one-third of American children born after 2000 will develop Type 2 diabetes, many beverage companies still market sugary drinks to children and still sell them in public schools.

The clause, “Even though the CDC predicts...” provides extra information about the second clause, “many beverage companies still market sugary drinks...” It is subordinate to it.

Simple, Compound, Complex, and Compound-Complex Sentences***Simple Sentences***

Simple sentences consist of one clause.

- Stan lives in Newark.
- Jill plays racquetball from one until three every Saturday.

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences consist of more than one independent clause joined by one or more conjunctions.

- Macbeth lives in Scotland, and Hamlet lives in Denmark.
- In colonial times, 95% of Americans were farmers, and in 1900 approximately 40% of Americans were still farmers, but today only 2% or so of Americans are farmers.

Complex Sentences

Complex sentences consist of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.

- Since many potentially Earth-like planets are much larger than the Earth, humans would feel heavier if they ever visited them.

Compound-Complex Sentences

Compound-complex sentences are, unsurprisingly, both compound sentences and complex sentences. In other words, they include at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

- After Supreme Court rulings ended the recounts in Florida, Al Gore conceded the presidential election, and George W. Bush became the 43rd U.S. president.

For a true master, sentences can get very long, without necessarily being run-on. Such mastery, however, takes time.

- Elizabeth, New Jersey, when my mother was being raised there in a flat over her father's grocery store, was an industrial port a quarter the size of Newark, dominated by the Irish working class and their politicians and the tightly knit parish life that revolved around the town's many churches, and though I never heard her complain of having been pointedly ill-treated in Elizabeth as a girl, it was not until she married and moved to Newark's new Jewish neighborhood that she discovered the confidence that led her to become first a PTA "grade mother," then a PTA vice president in charge of establishing a Kindergarten Mothers' Club, and finally the PTA president, who, after attending a conference in Trenton on infantile paralysis, proposed an annual March of Dimes dance on January 30 -- President Roosevelt's birthday -- that was accepted by most schools.

-- Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*

Sentence Rules and Common Errors

When writing sentences, it is worthwhile to abide the rules and avoid common errors. The examples listed below are meant to sensitize the writer to particular types of mistakes, but are not meant to be an utterly exhaustive exploration of any topic raised. A student seeking a more comprehensive discussion of any of the topics here is advised to consult Barron's *Essentials of English, Sixth Edition*, from which this section was adapted.

Fragments

A fragment is an expression represented as a complete sentence that doesn't contain both a subject and a predicate. For example:

- He wasn't sure whether his leg was broken, so he tried to walk. Bad idea.

“Bad idea.” is a fragment. It is punctuated as a sentence, but it has no verb. Under certain circumstances, fragments have a place, particularly in fiction, and, regrettably, they are increasingly used in the media, but they should be avoided in formal writing.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Most importantly, a subject and its verb should agree in number. If the subject is singular, the verb should be conjugated singularly; if a subject is plural, the verb should be conjugated accordingly. For example:

- The mayor and his staff **were** indicted.
- The mayor, along with his entire staff, **was** indicted.
- Neither sibling **was** present at the arraignment.
- None of the water **was** left in the glass.
- Contrary to popular opinion, none of the 9-11 hijackers **were** Iraqi.

Agreement of Pronoun and Antecedent

The antecedent of a pronoun is the noun to which the pronoun refers. For example, in the sentence below, the pronoun “they” refers to the antecedent “lamps.”

- Sylvester bought three used lamps, but they were all broken.

Much like a verb, a pronoun should agree with its subject in number:

- The mayor, along with his entire staff, **was** indicted.
- None of the water was left in **its** glass.
- None of the 9-11 hijackers claimed Iraq as **their** country of origin.

It should also agree with its subject in gender and person:

- Scott didn't always like being around **Aunt Alice**, but he did always respect **her**.
- You can't have **your** cake and eat it, too.

Unclear Antecedent

The antecedent should be stated, not just implied. If the exact antecedent is not present, the sentence will be vague or unclear.

UNCLEAR:

Instead of setting a total fee, the orthodontist charged twenty dollars a month until the work was completed, **which** the dental profession considers unethical.

CLEAR:

Instead of setting a total fee, the orthodontist charged twenty dollars a month until the work was completed, **an arrangement** that the dental profession considers unethical.

UNCLEAR:

My father wants me to be a doctor, but **this** is a profession that does not appeal to me.

CLEAR:

My father wants me to be a doctor, but **medicine** is a profession that does not appeal to me.

Unclear Pronoun

Sometimes a pronoun becomes unclear if it is too far from its antecedent:

UNCLEAR:

While bathing in **the surf** at Malibu beach, he was almost knocked down and drowned. **It** was too strong for him.

CLEAR:

While bathing in the surf at Malibu beach, he was almost knocked down and drowned. **The surf** was too strong for him.

A pronoun can also be unclear if it anticipates its antecedent.

UNCLEAR:

If **they** are washed gently in a mild detergent and are then wrapped in a soft, absorbent cloth and left to dry, **these orlon garments** will retain their original shape and texture.

CLEAR:

If **these orlon garments** are washed gently in a mild detergent and are then wrapped in a soft, absorbent cloth and left to dry, **they** will retain their original shape and texture.

Person and Number

Writers should beware more subtle errors in person and number:

BLURRED:

James Joyce's *Dubliners* is a collection of short stories about the moral life of Dublin. **He** was a native of Dublin and knew intimately the life of the city.

CLEAR:

James Joyce's *Dubliners* is a collection of short stories about the moral life of Dublin. **Joyce** was a native of Dublin and knew intimately the life of the city.

BLURRED:

Students should understand that the school cannot allow registration to be completed unless full payment of fees is made at the time of registration. If paying by check, **you** should make the check out to the bursar of the college.

CLEAR:

Students should understand that the school cannot allow registration to be completed unless full payment of fees is made at the time of registration. If paying by check, **students** should make the check out to the bursar of the college.

Pronoun as Subject / Object of Sentence

Writers should also note when a pronoun is the subject of a sentence, and when it is the object – including when to use “who” (subject) and when to use “whom” (object).

- *Jones and I* went on adventures.
- The supervisor sent Jones and **me** to Thailand.
- Jones was the one **who** wanted to go.
- I was the one **whom** they invited reluctantly.

This attention to subject and object pertains to clauses where a portion of a clause is omitted because it is implied (ellipsis).

- He received the appointment because he has more experience than **I** [have].
- Ms. Anderson did not recommend him as highly as [she recommended] **me**.

Lastly, the pronoun (or noun) preceding a gerund should be possessive. (Note: a gerund is a verb that is turned into a noun by adding “-ing” to it.)

- I won't be blamed for **somebody else's** cheating.

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a modifying structure that is mistakenly associated with the wrong word in a sentence. In the INCORRECT sentences below, the modifier that begins a sentence is associated with the subject of the clause that follows.

INCORRECT:

Looking through her field glasses, the bird flew away.

CORRECT:

Looking through her field glasses, she saw the bird fly away.

INCORRECT:

To bake a delicious cake, the eggs and butter must be fresh.

CORRECT:

To bake a delicious cake, you need fresh eggs and fresh butter.

Misplaced Noun and Verb Modifiers

The placement of adverbs and other modifiers can lead to ambiguous sentences.

AMBIGUOUS:

She shouted at the bus driver trembling with rage.

CLEAR:

Trembling with rage, she shouted at the bus driver.

AMBIGUOUS:

She merely asked the question because she was curious.

CLEAR:

She asked the question merely because she was curious.

AMBIGUOUS:

He almost washed all the dishes.

CLEAR:

He washed almost all the dishes.

Unnecessary Separation of Words Within a Structure

AWKWARD:

There stands the house that I will, within five years, purchase and remodel.

IMPROVED:

There stands the house that I will purchase and remodel within five years.

Parallel Structure

In a parallel structure, two or more words or groups of words are involved in a sentence in the same way. They should be given the same form.

INCORRECT:

Jill likes biking, running, and to take long walks.

CORRECT:

Jill likes biking, running, and taking long walks.

INCORRECT:

From his income tax he deducted the expenses for his office and showroom.

CORRECT:

From his income tax he deducted the expenses for his office and his showroom.

INCORRECT:

She had never expressed trust or loyalty to anyone.

CORRECT:

She had never expressed trust in or loyalty to anyone.

Notes on Punctuation

a. Commas

Commas are used:

- To separate parts of a series.

Sarah, Bill, and Lisa came to dinner.

- To separate clauses joined by a conjunction:

I haven't balanced my checkbook, yet I plan to keep writing checks.

- To separate interjections and other nonintegrated elements from the rest of a sentence:

Ouch, you're really criticizing him!

Hello, I'm glad to see you.

- To set off a long phrase or clause preceding the subject of a sentence:

During the long winter of 1881, the king suffered a severe illness.

- To indicate interruptions of normal word order:

The firm, old and respected, went bankrupt.

- To set off nonrestrictive elements in the sentence:

My brother, who sat in the balcony, enjoyed the play.

(Note: Nonrestrictive elements, which are not essential to the meaning of the sentence, are different from restrictive elements, which are essential to the meaning of the sentence. Restrictive elements are not separated by commas:

The people who sat in the balcony did not see the commotion in the audience.)

- To separate contrasted sentence elements:

His diet was wholesome, not appetizing.

She had aimed for happiness, but found misery.

- To prevent misreading:

During the summer, days become longer.

Soon after, the meeting was adjourned.

Common Mistakes with Commas

Commas should *not* be used:

- To separate compound verbs:
She went to the office, and opened the rest of her mail.
- To separate a noun phrase from the predicate:
The great wizened magician with sparkling eyes, faced the queen.
- Between a conjunction and the words it introduces:
He wanted to pull over and sleep but, he knew he should keep driving until he reached the hotel.
- Simply for dramatic effect:
The answer that he finally received, was no.

b. Semicolons

Semicolons separate two independent clauses:

The policeman stood on the corner; he disliked this duty on rainy days.

c. Colons

A colon can be used to mean:

- “as follows”:

To date, five of Malick’s films have show in theaters: Badlands, Days of Heaven, The Thin Red Line, The New World, and Tree of Life.

- “as a result”:

The president died: the firm failed.

d. Dashes

A dash is used to indicate a sudden or unexpected break in the normal sentence structure.

After the banquet -- and really, who knows what I was thinking -- I decided to go running.

e. Quotations

If a sentence with a quotation ends with an indication of the speaker (e.g., “he said,” “she said”), the quoted speech ends in a comma or question mark, and the sentence ends in a period.

“It shouldn’t be too long before we know the results,” he said.

“How cold is Ottawa this time of year?” she asked.

If a sentence features the indication of the speaker in the middle of a quoted sentence, it is punctuated the following way:

“It shouldn’t be too long,” he said, “before we know the results.”

Lastly, if a sentence features the indication of the speaker between two quoted sentences, it is punctuated this way:

“How cold is Ottawa this time of year?” she asked. “I’m thinking about visiting Uncle Nelson.”