CHAPTER 10
Rhetorical Modes

1. NARRATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of narrative writing
2. Recognize how to write a narrative essay

Rhetorical modes simply mean the ways in which we can effectively communicate through language. This chapter covers nine common rhetorical modes. As you read about these nine modes, keep in mind that the rhetorical mode a writer chooses depends on his or her purpose for writing. Sometimes writers incorporate a variety of modes in one essay. In covering the nine rhetorical modes, this chapter also emphasizes these as a set of tools that will allow you greater flexibility and effectiveness in communicating with your audience and expressing your ideas.

1.1 The Purpose of Narrative Writing

Narration means the art of storytelling, and the purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Any time you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration. In addition, a narrative can be factual or fictional. A factual story is one that is based on, and tries to be faithful to, actual events as they unfolded in real life. A fictional story is a made-up, or imagined, story; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as he or she sees fit.

However, the big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is based on a writer’s purpose. The writers of factual stories try to recount events as they actually happened, but writers of fictional stories depart from real people and events, because the writers’ intents are not to retell a real-life event. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories, whereas novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

Tip
Because the line between fact and fiction often blurs, it is helpful to understand what your purpose is from the beginning. Is it important for you to recount history exactly? Or does your interest lie in reshaping the world in your own image—how you would like to see it or how you imagine it could be? Your answers will go a long way in shaping the stories you tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. You want your audience to be moved by your story, which could mean through laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly you tell your story, the more emotionally engaged your audience will be.
1.2 The Structure of a Narrative Essay

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in chronological order, the order in which events unfold, from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events are typically organized by time.

A plot summary can help you create a chronological, structural outline for your narrative essay. Rather than describing all events in intricate detail, a plot summary describes only the main events that drive the story forward. The more specific details about the plot, characters, conflict, and theme can be developed as you draft the narrative. The summary may take the shape of bulleted points or a brief paragraph.

Certain transitional words and phrases help keep the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed in Table 10.1. For more information about chronological order, see Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 10.1 Time Transition Words and Phrases</th>
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<tr>
<td>After/Afterward</td>
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<tr>
<td>As soon as</td>
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Read the following example sentences from the narrative essay in Chapter 15:

- Full of anxiety, I first set out to read Camus’ essay several times to make sure I really knew what was it was about.
- I did my best to take careful notes. Yet, even after I took all these notes and knew the essay inside and out, I still did not know the right answer.
- Next, when I sat down to write, the words just did not come to me.
- Then, a week or two later, came judgment day. The professor gave our papers back to us with grades and comments

Each sentence, taken from different paragraphs of the essay, contains a vital transition word. These words show the chronological order of the narrative. Other basic components of a narrative are:
plot: the events as they unfold in sequence

characters: the people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the protagonist

conflict: the primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.

theme: the ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

Read the following excerpt from the narrative essay “My College Education” in Chapter 15:

I entered college intending to earn a degree in engineering. I always liked the way mathematics had right and wrong answers. I understood the logic and was very good at it. So, when I received my first philosophy assignment that asked me to write my interpretation of the Camus essay, I was instantly confused. What is the right way to do this assignment, I wondered? I was nervous about writing an incorrect interpretation and did not want to get my first assignment wrong. Even more troubling was that the professor refused to give us any guidelines on what he was looking for; he gave us total freedom. He simply said, “I want to see what you come up with.”

This paragraph introduces all the basic components of the narrative. Readers learn that the plot will follow the speaker’s conflict: completing a challenging and open-ended philosophy assignment. The characters are the speaker and the professor. Readers can also predict themes based on early introductions of plot, conflict, and characters. For example, this essay’s theme may focus on gaining knowledge through independent research and inquiry. To read the entire narrative essay, see Chapter 15, Section 2.

Writing at Work

When interviewing candidates for jobs, employers often ask about conflicts or problems a potential employee has had to overcome. They are asking for a compelling personal narrative. To prepare for this question in a job interview, write out a scenario in the narrative mode structure. This will allow you to troubleshoot rough spots, as well as better understand your own personal history. Both processes will make your story better and your self-presentation better as well.

EXERCISE 2

Take your freewriting exercise from the last section and start crafting it chronologically into a rough plot summary. To read more about summary, see Chapter 6. Be sure to use the time transition words and phrases listed in Table 10.1 to sequence the events.

For Answers to this Exercise, please see Section 11 at the end of this chapter.
1.3 Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, start by asking yourself if you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then freewrite about topics that are of general interest to you. For more information about freewriting, see Chapter 8.

Once you have a plot summary, you can further develop the major events of the story that will comprise your plot. Typically these events will be revealed chronologically and climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as you describe the events and characters in your narrative. You want the reader to emotionally engage with the world that you create in writing. Read the following example from the narrative essay in Chapter 15. As you read each sentence, note the use of strong details.

*I remember feeling simultaneously afraid and eager to get the paper back in my hands.* The simultaneous feelings of fear and anxiety evoke strong emotions. The speaker balances these abstract details with the concrete details of the paper and his hands. Both descriptions connect the reader to the speaker’s world.

**Tip**

To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. You want your reader to be immersed in the world that you create, so focus on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your narrative.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook your reader into wanting to read more. Try opening the essay with an event that is interesting to introduce the story and get it going.

**Strong example:** The first class I went to in college was philosophy, and it changed my life forever.

**Weak example:** I entered college intending to earn a degree in engineering.

**Strong example:** I could not know that on the first day of college, I would find my true calling in life.

**Weak example:** My philosophy class interested me.

**Strong example:** On my first day of philosophy class, I gripped my pencil in hand and began writing notes for the most important assignment of my life.

**Weak example:** The first paper in philosophy class was about Albert Camus.

Each strong example introduces the story in a way that creates curiosity in the minds of the readers. How did this class change the speaker’s life? The profound question ushers readers into an interesting story and urges them to keep reading. If these strong examples interest you, you can read the whole narrative essay in Chapter 15.

Finally, your conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story, as well as impress upon your reader the ultimate theme of the piece. See Chapter 15 to read a sample narrative essay.

**EXERCISE 3**

On a separate sheet of paper, add two or three paragraphs to the plot summary you started in the last section. Describe in detail the main character and the setting of the first scene. Try to use all five of your senses in your descriptions.

**Narration Essay Structural Components**

- Engaging introduction
- The beginning, middle, and end of a story
- Chronological order organizing method
- Body paragraphs that include plot, characters, conflict, and themes
- Time transition words and phrases
The intersection of Central Avenue and Lake Street is dangerous and demands immediate consideration for the installation of a controlling mechanism.

This thesis effectively articulates the controlling idea of the essay while also suggesting the types of evidence the writer will use to support his or her thesis. The writer’s first point expresses the danger of the intersection. To support this point, the writer will likely rely on statistics, experts, and personal anecdotes. To read how the writer effectively uses these types of evidence, see Chapter 15, Section 3.

Using evidence effectively can be challenging, however. The evidence you choose will usually depend on your subject and who your reader is (your audience). When writing an illustration essay, try keep in mind the following:

- Use evidence that is appropriate to your topic as well as appropriate for your audience.
- Assess how much evidence you need to adequately explain your point depending on the complexity of the subject and the knowledge of your audience regarding that subject.

For example, if you were writing about new communication software and your audience was a group of English major undergrads, you might want to use an analogy or a personal story to illustrate how the software worked. You might also choose to add a few more pieces of evidence to make sure the audience understands your point. However, if you were writing about the same subject and your audience was information technology (IT) specialists, you would likely use more technical evidence, because they would be familiar with the subject.
Keeping in mind your subject in relation to your audience will increase your chances of effectively illustrating your point.

Tip
You never want to insult your reader’s intelligence by overexplaining concepts the audience members may already be familiar with, but it may be necessary to clearly articulate your point. When in doubt, add the extra example to illustrate your idea.

EXERCISE 1
On a separate piece of paper, form a thesis based on each of the three topics listed below. Then list the types of evidence that would best explain your point for each of the two audiences.

1. Topic: Combat and mental health
   Audience: family members of veterans, doctors
2. Topic: Video games and teen violence
   Audience: parents, children
3. Topic: Architecture and earthquakes
   Audience: engineers, local townspeople

2.2 The Structure of an Illustration Essay
The controlling idea, or thesis, belongs at the beginning of the essay. Evidence is then presented in the essay’s body paragraphs to support the thesis. You can start supporting your main point with your strongest evidence first, or you can start with evidence of lesser importance and have the essay build to increasingly stronger evidence. You learned about this type of organization—order of importance—in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

The time transition words listed in Table 10.1 are also helpful in ordering the presentation of evidence. Words like first, second, third, currently, next, and finally all help orient the reader and sequence evidence clearly. Because an illustration essay uses so many examples, it is also helpful to have a list of words and phrases to present each piece of evidence. Table 10.2 provides a list of phrases for illustration.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>TABLE 10.2 Phrases of Illustration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Case in point</td>
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<td>For example</td>
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<tr>
<td>For instance</td>
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<tr>
<td>In particular</td>
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The writer of the illustration essay “Letter to the City” in Chapter 15 relies on the phrase for example in the following sentence:

For example, when I try to cross Central Avenue as a pedestrian, I frequently wait over 10 minutes for the cars to clear, and even then I must rush to the median.

Tip
Vary the phrases of illustration you use. Do not rely on just one. Variety in choice of words and phrasing is critical when trying to keep readers engaged in your writing and your ideas.
Writing at Work

While in the workplace, keep the phrases of illustration in mind. Whether you are writing out directives that colleagues will have to follow or requesting a new product or service from another company, making a conscious effort to incorporate a phrase of illustration will force you to provide examples of what you mean.

EXERCISE 2

On a separate sheet of paper, form a thesis based on one of the following topics. Then support that thesis with three pieces of evidence. Make sure you use a different phrase of illustration to introduce each piece of evidence you choose.

1. Cooking
2. Baseball
3. Work hours
4. Exercise
5. Traffic

2.3 Writing an Illustration Essay

First, decide on a topic you feel interested in writing about. Then create an interesting introduction to engage the reader. The main point, or thesis, should be stated at the end of the introduction.

Gather evidence that is appropriate to both your subject and your audience. You can order the evidence in terms of importance, either from least important to most important or from most important to least important. Be sure to fully explain all of your examples using strong, clear supporting details. See Chapter 15, Section 3 to read the entire sample illustration essay.

EXERCISE 3

On a separate sheet of paper, write a five-paragraph illustration essay. You can choose one of the topics from exercise 1 or 2, or you can choose your own.

Illustration Essay Structural Components

- Introduction and thesis
- Strong evidence
- Order of importance organizing method
- Phrases of illustration
- Time transition words
- Compelling conclusion

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An illustration essay clearly explains a main point using evidence.
- When choosing evidence, always gauge whether the evidence is appropriate for the subject as well as the audience.
- Organize the evidence in terms of importance, either from least important to most important or from most important to least important.
- Use time transitions to order evidence.
- Use phrases of illustration to call out examples.
3. DESCRIPTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of the description essay
2. Recognize how to write a description essay

3.1 The Purpose of Description in Writing

Writers use description in writing to make sure their audience is fully immersed in the words on the page. This requires a concerted effort by the writer to describe his or her world through the use of sensory details.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, sensory details are descriptions that appeal to our senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Your descriptions should try to focus on the five senses because we rely on these senses to experience the world. The use of sensory details, then, provides you the greatest possibility of relating to your audience and thus engaging them in your writing, making descriptive writing important not only during your education but also during everyday situations.

Tip

Avoid “empty” descriptors if possible. Empty descriptors are adjectives that can mean different things to different people. Good, beautiful, terrific, and nice are examples. The use of such words in descriptions can lead to misreads and confusion. A “good” day, for instance, can mean far different things depending on one’s age, personality, or tastes.

Writing at Work

Whether you are presenting a new product or service to a client, training new employees, or brainstorming ideas with colleagues, the use of clear, evocative detail is crucial. Make an effort to use details that express your thoughts in ways that will register with others. Sharp, concise details are always impressive.

EXERCISE 1

On a separate sheet of paper, describe the following five items in a short paragraph. Use at least three of the five senses for each.

1. Night
2. Beach
3. City
4. Dinner
5. Stranger

3.2 The Structure of a Description Essay

Description essays typically describe a person, place, or object using sensory details. The structure of a descriptive essay is more flexible than in some of the other rhetorical modes. The introduction of a description essay should set up the tone and point of the essay. The thesis should convey the writer’s overall impression of the person, place, or object described in the body paragraphs.
The organization of the essay may best follow spatial order, an arrangement of ideas according to physical characteristics or appearance. Depending on what the writer describes, the organization could move from top to bottom, or left to right, or near to far, warm to cold, frightening to inviting, etc.

For example, if the subject were a client’s kitchen in the midst of being renovated, you might start at one side of the room and move slowly across to the other end, describing appliances, cabinetry, etc. Or you might choose to start with older remnants of the kitchen and progress to the new installations. Maybe start with the floor and move up toward the ceiling.

**EXERCISE 2**

On a separate sheet of paper, write a short paragraph for three of the following five items. Use spatial order to organize the paragraph.

1. Train station
2. Your office
3. Your car
4. Coffee shop
5. Lobby of a movie theater

### 3.3 Writing a Description Essay

Choosing a subject is the first step in writing a description essay. Once you have chosen the person, place, or object you want to describe, you then have to figure out your overall impression, which will serve as the thesis of your essay. Even if your instructor has chosen your subject, you must reflect on the subject to articulate your overall impression in the thesis.

The remainder of your essay is spent describing your subject in a way that best expresses your thesis. Remember, you should have a strong sense of how you will organize your essay. Choose a strategy and stick to it.

Every part of your essay should be filled with vivid sensory details. The more you can appeal to your readers’ senses, the more they will be engaged in your essay. Read the following example sentences from the description essay “America’s Pastime” in Chapter 15. Note the use of the senses in each sentence.

**Sound:** First, the entrance turnstiles click and clank, and then a hallway of noise bombards me.

**Smell:** The smell of hot dogs carries through the park, down every aisle, and inside every concourse.

**Touch:** The [hot dogs] are always as unhealthy as possible, dripping in grease, while the buns are soft and always too small for the dog.

**Taste:** I quickly eat my juicy hot dog and wash it down with what is left of my soda pop.

**Sight:** While singing the song, putting my arms around friends and family with me, I watch all of the players taking the field. It is wonderful to see the overwhelming amount of players on one team from around the world: Japan, the Dominican Republic, the United States, Canada, and Venezuela.

See Chapter 15 to read the entire description essay.

**EXERCISE 3**

On a separate sheet of paper, choose one of the topics that you started in Exercise 2 and try to expand it into a five-paragraph essay. Expanding on ideas in greater detail can be difficult. Sometimes it is helpful to look closely at each of the sentences in a summary paragraph. Those sentences can often serve as topic sentences to larger paragraphs.

**Description Essay Structural Components**

- Overall impression of the subject
- Spatial order organizing method
- Vivid sensory details
4. CLASSIFICATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of the classification essay
2. Recognize how to write a classification essay

4.1 The Purpose of Classification in Writing

The purpose of classification is to break broad subjects down into smaller, more manageable, and more specific parts. We classify things in our daily lives all the time, often without even thinking about it. Cell phones, for example, have now become part of a broad category. They can be classified as feature phones, media phones, and smartphones.

Smaller categories, and the way in which these categories are created, help us make sense of the world. Keep both of these elements in mind when writing a classification essay.

Tip

Choose topics you know well when writing classification essays. The more you know about a topic, the more you can break it down into smaller, more interesting parts. Adding interest and insight will enhance your classification essays.

EXERCISE 1

On a separate sheet of paper, break the following categories down into smaller classifications.
1. The United States
2. Colleges and universities
3. Beverages
4. Fashion

4.2 The Structure of a Classification Essay

The classification essay opens with an introductory paragraph that introduces the broader topic. The thesis should then explain how that topic is divided into subgroups and why. Take the following introductory paragraph, for example:

When people think of New York, they often think of only New York City. But New York is actually a diverse state with a full range of activities to do, sights to see, and cultures to explore. In order to better understand the diversity of New York state, it is helpful to break it down into five separate regions: Long Island, New York City, Western New York, Central New York, and Northern New York.

The underlined thesis explains not only the category and subcategory but also the rationale for breaking it into those categories. Through this classification essay, the writer hopes to show his or her readers a different way of considering the state.

Each body paragraph of a classification essay is dedicated to fully illustrating each of the subcategories. In the example above, then, each region of New York would have its own paragraph.
The conclusion should bring all the categories and subcategories back together again to show the reader the big picture. In the example above, the conclusion might explain how the various sights and activities of each region of New York add to its diversity and complexity.

**Tip**

To avoid settling for an overly simplistic classification, make sure you break down any given topic at least three different ways. This will help you to think originally and perhaps even learn something entirely new about a subject.

### Exercise 2

Using your classifications from Exercise 1, write a brief paragraph explaining why you chose to organize each main category in the way you did.

### 4.3 Writing a Classification Essay

Start with an engaging opening that will adequately introduce the general topic that you will be dividing into smaller subcategories. Your thesis should come at the end of your introduction. It should include the topic, your subtopics, and the reason you are breaking the topic down in the way that you are. Thesis statements often depend on the audience and the purpose for writing. When writing to classify, a thesis typically contains three elements:

\[
\text{Topic} + \text{Subtopics} + \text{Rationale for the subtopics}
\]

Read the following thesis from the classification essay “Types of Higher Education Programs” in Chapter 15:

> With all the different options to consider, potential students should learn about the different types of colleges so they can find a school that best fits their personality, budget, and educational goals.

In this thesis, the writer clearly communicates the topic: potential students’ selections of college campuses and programs. The writer continues to articulate the subtopics by identifying the options students must consider: their personality, budget, and educational goals. The writer also states the reason, or rationale, for these considerations: Potential students must learn about colleges in order to make the best selection. This thesis not only introduces the points contained within the classification essay but also dictates the organization of the body paragraphs.

The organizing strategy of a classification essay is dictated by the initial topic and subsequent subtopics. Each body paragraph is dedicated to fully illustrating each of the subtopics. In a way, coming up with a strong topic pays double rewards in a classification essay; not only do you have a good topic but you also have a solid organizational structure within which to write. In the classification essay “Types of Higher Education Programs,” for example, the writer dedicates the first body paragraph to the topic of liberal arts, one of the college programs potential students must learn about. The paragraph then illustrates the three subtopics—personality, budget, and goals—that accompany a liberal arts program.

As you read the following body paragraph from “Types of Higher Education Programs,” pay attention to the use of details and examples.
One type of higher-education program for students to consider is a liberal arts college. These schools tend to be small in size and offer a range of undergraduate degrees in subjects like English, history, psychology, and education. Students may choose a liberal arts college if they want a more intimate classroom setting rather than large lecture-style classes. Students may also consider a liberal arts college if they want to gain knowledge from a variety of disciplines, rather than focusing on a single area of study. Many liberal arts schools are privately owned, and some have religious affiliations. Liberal arts schools can come with a hefty price tag, and their high cost presents an obstacle for students on a tight budget; moreover, while some students might appreciate a liberal arts school’s intimate atmosphere, others might encounter a lack of diversity in the student body. Still, students seeking a well-rounded education in the humanities will find liberal arts colleges to be one option.

As you compose your own classification essay, be sure you use strong details and explanations for each subcategory paragraph that help explain and support your thesis. Also be sure to give examples to illustrate your points.

Finally, write a conclusion that links all the subgroups together again. The conclusion should successfully wrap up your essay by connecting it to your initial topic introduced in the introduction. See Chapter 15 to read the entire classification essay and its conclusion.

**Exercise 3**

Building on exercises 1 and 2, write a five-paragraph classification essay about one of the four original topics. Include the topic, subtopics, and rationale for your breakdown in your thesis, and make sure your essay is organized into paragraphs that each describe a subtopic.

**Classification Essay Structural Components**

- Introduction
- Thesis that contains the topic, subtopic, and rationale
- Body paragraphs that illustrate each subcategory
- Strong details, explanations, and examples
- A conclusion to connect all subcategories with the topic

**Key Takeaways**

- The purpose of classification is to break a subject down into smaller, more manageable, more specific parts.
- Smaller subcategories help us make sense of the world, and the way in which these subcategories are created also helps us make sense of the world.
- A classification essay is organized by its subcategories.
5. PROCESS ANALYSIS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of the process analysis essay
2. Recognize how to write a process analysis essay

5.1 The Purpose of Process Analysis in Writing

The purpose of a process analysis essay is to explain:

- how to do something
- how something works

In either case, the formula for a process analysis essay remains the same: The process is articulated into clear, definitive steps.

Almost everything we do involves following a step-by-step process. From riding a bike as children to learning various jobs as adults, we initially needed instructions to effectively execute the task. Likewise, we have likely had to instruct others, so we know how important good directions are—and how frustrating it is when they are poorly put together.

EXERCISE 1

On a separate sheet of paper, make a bulleted list of all the steps that you feel would be required to clearly illustrate three of the five processes below:

1. Tying a shoelace
2. Parallel parking
3. Planning a successful first date
4. Being an effective communicator
5. Preparing a sandwich

5.2 The Structure of a Process Analysis Essay

The process analysis essay opens with a discussion of the process and a thesis statement that states the goal of the process. Read the following introduction from the process analysis essay “How to Grow Tomatoes from a Seedling” in Chapter 15:

Growing tomatoes is a simple and rewarding task, and more people should be growing them. This essay walks readers through the main steps for growing and maintaining the patio tomatoes from a seedling.

Although brief, this introduction introduces readers to the process and the goal of the process. After reading the essay, the audience should be able to start with a seedling and grow and maintain patio tomato plants. The introduction also expresses the simplicity and rewards associated with completing the process.

The organization of a process analysis essay typically follows chronological order. The steps of the process are conveyed in the order in which they usually occur. Body paragraphs will be constructed based on these steps. On one hand, if a particular step is complicated and needs a lot of explaining, then it will likely take up a paragraph on its own. On the other hand, if a series of simple steps is easier to understand, then the steps can be grouped into a single paragraph.
The time transition phrases covered in the Narration and Illustration sections are also helpful in organizing process analysis essays (see Table 10.1). Words such as first, second, third, next, and finally are helpful cues to orient reader and organize the content of essay.

To follow the chronological order of “How to Grow Tomatoes from a Seedling” read each of the first sentences from the essay’s body paragraphs. The study of these sentences shows how the writer organized the body paragraphs, and the entire essay, based on the steps in the process.

**Body Paragraph 1:** The first step in growing tomatoes is determining if you have the appropriate available space and sunlight to grow them.

**Body Paragraph 2:** Next, you need to find the right seedling.

**Body Paragraph 3:** Once you have found the right seedlings to plant back home, you need to next find the best way of planting them. [The very next sentence identifies the writer’s recommendation for planting: I recommend that you plant your tomatoes in containers.]

**Body Paragraph 4:** In addition to the container, you also need the appropriate soil mixture and draining mechanisms.

**Body Paragraph 5:** Once you have the gravel in the bottom of the container and the soil on top, you are ready to transplant the tomato.

**Body Paragraph 6:** Next, carve out a hole in the soil to make space for the plant.

**Body Paragraph 7:** Once the mulch is laid, you are mostly done. The rest is all watering, waiting, and maintenance.

To read the entire process analysis essay, see Chapter 15, Section 6.

### Tip

Always have someone else read your process analysis to make sure it makes sense. Once we get too close to a subject, it is difficult to determine how clearly an idea is coming across. Having a friend or coworker read it over will serve as a good way to troubleshoot confusing spots.

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### Exercise 2

Choose two of the lists you created in Exercise 1 and start writing out the processes in paragraph form. Try to construct paragraphs based on the complexity of each step. For complicated steps, dedicate an entire paragraph. If less complicated steps fall in succession, group them into a single paragraph.

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### 5.3 Writing a Process Analysis Essay

Choose a topic that is interesting, relatively complex, and can be explained in a series of steps. As with other rhetorical writing modes, choose a process that you know well so that you can more easily access finer details about each step in the process. Your thesis statement should come at the end of your introduction, and it should state the final outcome of the process you are describing.

Body paragraphs are composed of the steps in the process. Each step should be expressed using strong details and clear examples. Use time transition phrases to help organize steps in the process as well as to orient readers. The conclusion should thoroughly describe the result of the process described in the body paragraphs. See Chapter 15 to read a sample process analysis essay.

### Writing at Work

The next time you have to explain a process to someone at work, be mindful of how clearly you articulate each step. Strong communication skills are critical for workplace satisfaction and advancement. Effective process analysis plays a critical role in developing that skill set.

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### Exercise 3

Choose one of the expanded lists from Exercise 2. Construct a full process analysis essay from the work you have already done. That means adding an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, time transition phrases, body paragraphs, and a solid conclusion.
Process Analysis Essay Structural Components

- Introduction and thesis
- Identification of process and final outcome
- Body paragraphs composed of the steps in the process
- Strong details and clear examples
- Time transition words and phrases
- Conclusion to describe the final result of the process

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A process analysis essay explains how to do something and/or how something works.
- The process analysis essay opens with a discussion of the process and a thesis statement that states the outcome of the process.
- The organization of a process analysis essay typically follows a chronological sequence.
- Time transition phrases are particularly helpful in process analysis essays to organize steps and orient the reader.

6. DEFINITION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of the definition essay
2. Recognize how to write a definition essay
3. Explain the four basics of effective definition in writing

6.1 The Purpose of Definition in Writing

The purpose of a definition essay may seem self-explanatory: The purpose of the definition essay is to simply define something. But defining terms in writing is often more complicated than just consulting a dictionary. In fact, the way we define terms can have far-reaching consequences for individuals as well as collective groups.

Take, for example, a word like alcoholism. The way in which one defines alcoholism depends on its legal, moral, and medical contexts. Lawyers may define alcoholism in terms of its legality; parents may define alcoholism in terms of its morality; and doctors may define alcoholism in terms of symptoms and diagnostic criteria. Think also of terms people have debated recently in our broader culture. How we define words and phrases such as marriage and climate change has enormous impact on both personal and policy decisions. Think about conversations couples may have in which words like commitment, respect, or love need clarification.

Defining terms within a relationship, or any other context, can at first be difficult, but once a definition is established between two people or a group, it is easier to have productive dialogues. Definitions, then, establish the way in which people communicate ideas. They set parameters for a given discourse, which is why they are so important.

Tip

When writing definition essays, avoid terms that are too simple, that lack complexity. Think in terms of concepts, such as hero, immigration, or loyalty, rather than physical objects, such as fruit, stethoscope, or personal computer. Definitions of concepts, rather than objects, are often fluid and contentious, making for a more effective definition essay.
The circumstances, conditions, or setting in which something exists or occurs.

Writing at Work

Definitions play a critical role in all workplace environments. Take the term sexual harassment, for example. Sexual harassment is broadly defined on the federal level, but each company may have additional criteria that define it further. Knowing how your workplace defines and treats all sexual harassment allegations is important. Think, too, about how your company defines lateness, productivity, or contributions.

EXERCISE 1

On a separate sheet of paper, write about a time in your life in which the definition of a word, or the lack of a definition, caused an argument. Your term could be something as simple as the category of an all-star in sports or how to define a good movie. Or it could be something with higher stakes and wider impact, such as a political argument. In three paragraphs, explain how the conversation began, how the argument hinged on the definition of the word or phrase, and how the incident was finally resolved.

6.2 The Structure of a Definition Essay

The definition essay opens with a general discussion of the term to be defined. You then state as your thesis your definition of the term.

The rest of the essay should explain the rationale for your definition. Remember that a dictionary’s definition is limiting, and you should not rely strictly on the dictionary entry. Instead, consider the context in which you are using the word. Context identifies the circumstances, conditions, or setting in which something exists or occurs. Often words take on different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. For example, the ideal leader on a battlefield setting could likely be very different than a leader in an elementary school. If a context is missing, the essay may be too short, or the main points could be confusing or misunderstood.

The remainder of the essay should explain different aspects of the term’s definition. For example, if you were defining a good leader in an elementary school classroom, you might define such a leader according to personality traits: patience, consistency, and flexibility. Each attribute would be explained in its own paragraph.

Tip

For definition essays, try to think of concepts you have a personal stake in. You are more likely to write a more engaging definition essay if you are writing about an idea that has personal value and importance.

Writing at Work

It is a good idea every once in a while to assess your role in the workplace. You can do this through the process of definition. Identify your role at work by defining not only the routine tasks but also those gray areas where your responsibilities might overlap with those of others. Coming up with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities can add value to your résumé and even increase productivity in the workplace.

EXERCISE 2

On a separate sheet of paper, define, in your own terms, each of the following items. If you can, try to establish a context for your definition.

1. Bravery
2. Adulthood
3. Consumer culture
4. Violence
5. Art
6.3 Writing a Definition Essay

A definition essay must contain the following four basics:

- A word or phrase that requires defining
- A clear definition of the word or phrase
- Examples that illustrate and support the definition
- Strong details of each example

To write the definition essay, you must choose a topic complex enough to be discussed at length. Choosing a word or phrase of personal relevance often leads to a more interesting and engaging essay.

After you have chosen your word or phrase, start your essay with an introduction that establishes the relevancy of the term in the chosen context. Your thesis comes at the end of the introduction and should clearly state the first two basics: the word or phrase, and your definition of the term in the specific context. Establishing a functional context from the beginning will orient readers and minimize misunderstandings. The introduction may also state how the term is not defined.

For example, the definition essay “Defining Good Students Means More Than Just Grades” in Chapter 15 focuses on the definition of the phrase “good student.” The writer’s thesis accomplishes the first two basics of definition writing by stating and defining the phrase:

A good student pursues scholarship, actively participates in class, and maintains a positive, professional relationship with instructors and peers.

In this thesis, readers understand the writer will define “good student” as one who “pursues scholarship, actively participates in class, and maintains a positive, professional relationship with instructors and peers.” The writer also uses the introduction to communicate what the definition of “good student” does not include: good grades.

The body paragraphs should each be dedicated to the third and fourth basics: examples and details that explain a different facet of your definition and illustrate your points. Read the following body paragraph from the definition essay in Chapter 15:
Good students have a passion for learning that drives them to fully understand class material rather than just worry about what grades they receive in the course. Good students are actively engaged in scholarship, which means they enjoy reading and learning about their subject matter, not just because readings and assignments are required. Of course good students will complete their homework and all assignments, and they may even continue to perform research and learn more on the subject after the course ends. In some cases, good students will pursue a subject that interests them but might not be one of their strongest academic areas, so they will not earn the highest grades. Pushing oneself to learn and try new things can be difficult, but good students will challenge themselves rather than remain in their educational comfort level for the sake of a high grade. The pursuit of scholarship and education rather than concern over grades is the hallmark of a good student.

In this paragraph, the writer elaborates on a facet of the definition by describing examples of engagements in scholarship: enjoying reading and learning, completing homework and assignments, and pursuing an interesting subject. The writer adds details to these examples as well.

Lastly, your concluding paragraph should pull together all the different elements of your definition to reinforce your thesis. See Chapter 15, Section 7, to read the rest of the definition essay, including the rest of the body paragraphs and the conclusion.

**EXERCISE 3**

Select one of the terms you already defined in Exercise 2. To prepare for drafting an entire definition essay, explain the four basics of your definition:

- Identify the term you will define.
- Express a clear definition for the term.
- List examples that illustrate and support your definition.
- Add details for each example.

**EXERCISE 4**

Create a full definition essay from one of the items you already defined in Exercise 2. Be sure to include an interesting introduction, a clear thesis, a well-explained context, distinct body paragraphs, and a conclusion that pulls everything together.
7. COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of comparison and contrast in writing
2. Select the most effective comparing and contrasting organizational method
3. Recognize how to write a comparison and contrast essay

7.1 The Purpose of Comparison and Contrast in Writing

Comparison in writing discusses elements that are similar, while contrast in writing discusses elements that are different. A comparison and contrast essay, then, analyzes two subjects by either comparing them or contrasting them, or both.

The key to a good comparison and contrast essay is to choose two or more subjects that connect in a meaningful way. The purpose of conducting the comparison or contrast is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities. For example, if you wanted to focus on contrasting two subjects, you would not pick apples and oranges; rather, you might choose to compare and contrast two types of oranges or two types of apples to highlight subtle differences. For example, Red Delicious apples are sweet, while Granny Smiths are tart and acidic. Drawing distinctions between elements in a similar category will increase the audience’s understanding of that category, which is the purpose of the comparison and contrast essay.

Similarly, to focus on comparison, choose two subjects that seem at first to be unrelated. For a comparison essay, you likely would not choose two apples or two oranges because they share so many of the same properties already. Rather, you might try to compare how apples and oranges are quite similar. The more divergent the two subjects initially seem, the more interesting a comparison essay will be.

Writing at Work

Comparing and contrasting is also an evaluative tool. To make accurate evaluations about a given topic, you must first know the critical points of similarity and difference. Compare and contrasting is a primary tool for many workplace assessments. You have likely compared and contrasted yourself to other colleagues. Employee advancements, pay raises, hiring, and firing are typically conducted using comparison and contrast. Comparison and contrast could be used to evaluate companies, departments, or individuals.
7.2 The Structure of a Comparison and Contrast Essay

The comparison and contrast essay starts with a thesis that clearly states the two subjects that are to be compared and/or contrasted, and the reason for doing so. The thesis could lean more toward comparing, contrasting, or both. Remember, the point of comparing and contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the thesis below as an example that leans more toward contrasting:

Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but, when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny.

Here, the thesis sets up the two subjects to be compared/contrasted (organic vs. conventional vegetables), and also makes a claim about the results that might prove useful to the reader.

You may organize comparison and contrast essays by:

1. the subjects themselves, one then the other
2. by individual points, in which you discuss each subject in relation to each point

See Figure 10.1, which diagrams the ways to organize our organic vs. conventional vegetable thesis above.
The organizational structure you choose depends on the nature of the topic, your purpose, and your audience.

Given that comparison and contrast essays analyze the relationship between two subjects, it is helpful to have some phrases on hand that will cue the reader to such analysis. See Table 10.3 for examples.
### TABLE 10.3 Phrases of Comparison and Contrast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>contrast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One similarity</td>
<td>One difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another similarity</td>
<td>Another difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Conversely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>In contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likewise</td>
<td>Unlike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarly</td>
<td>While</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whereas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EXERCISE 3

Create an outline for each of the items you chose in exercises 1 and 2. Use the point-by-point organizing strategy for one of them, and use the subject organizing strategy for the other.

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### 7.3 Writing a Comparison and Contrast Essay

First, choose whether you want to compare seemingly disparate subjects, contrast seemingly similar subjects, or compare and contrast subjects. Once you have decided on a topic, introduce it with an engaging opening paragraph. Your thesis should come at the end of the introduction, and it should establish the subjects you will compare and/or contrast, as well as state what can be learned from doing so. For example, the comparison and contrast essay in Chapter 15, "Comparing and Contrasting London and Washington, D.C.,” presents the following thesis statement:

```
Comparing and contrasting the two cities based on their history, culture, and residents show how different and similar the two are.
```

The body of the essay can be organized in one of two ways: by subject or point by point. The organizing strategy you choose will depend on, as always, your audience and your purpose. You may also consider your approach to the subjects as well as the nature of the subjects themselves; some subjects might better lend themselves to one structure or the other. Make sure to use comparison and contrast phrases to cue reader to the ways in which you are analyzing the relationship between the subjects.

The writer of “Comparing and Contrasting London and Washington, D.C.” organized the essay point by point. Read the first body paragraph, which describes the differences and similarities between London and Washington’s histories:
Both cities are rich in world and national history, though they developed on very different timelines. London, for example, has a history that dates back more than 2,000 years. It was part of the Roman Empire, known by the similar name, Londinium. It was one of the northernmost points of the Roman Empire, but the epicenter of the British Empire, where it held significant global influence from the early 16th century on through the early 20th century. Washington, D.C., on the other hand, has only formally existed since the late 18th century. Though Native Americans inhabited the land several thousand years earlier, and settlers inhabited the land as early as the 16th century, the city did not become the capital of the United States until the 1790s. From that point onward to today, however, Washington, D.C., has increasingly maintained significant global influence. Even though both cities have different histories, they have both held, and continue to hold, significant social influence in the economic and cultural global spheres.

The writer continues analyzing the subjects in the same organized manner within the rest of the body paragraphs.

After you finish analyzing your subjects, write a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay and reinforces your thesis. See Chapter 15, Section 8 to read the entire comparison and contrast essay.

Writing at Work

Many business presentations are conducted using comparison and contrast. The organizing strategies—by subject or point by point—could also be used for organizing a presentation. Keep this in mind as a way of organizing your content the next time you or a colleague have to present something at work.

EXERCISE 4

Choose one of the outlines you created in Exercise 3 and write a full comparison and contrast essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, well-defined and detailed paragraphs, and a fitting conclusion that ties everything together.

Comparison and Contrast Essay Structural Components

- Introduction and thesis
8. CAUSE AND EFFECT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the purpose and structure of cause and effect in writing
2. Recognize how to write a cause and effect essay

8.1 The Purpose of Cause and Effect in Writing

It is often considered human nature to ask why? and how? We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future, or why our colleague earned a pay raise because we want one as well. We want to know how much money we will save over the long term if we buy a hybrid car. These examples identify only a few of the relationships we think about in our lives, but each shows the importance of understanding cause and effect.

A cause is something that produces an event or condition; an effect is what results from an event or condition. The purpose of the cause-and-effect essay is to determine how various phenomena are related in terms of origins and results. Sometimes the connection between cause and effect is clear, but often determining the exact relationship between the two is very difficult. For example, the effects of a cold may be easily identifiable: a sore throat, runny nose, and a cough. But determining the cause of the sickness can be far more difficult. A number of causes are possible, and, to complicate matters, these possible causes could have combined to cause the sickness. That is, more than one cause may be responsible for any given effect. Cause and effect discussions are therefore often complicated and frequently lead to debates and arguments.

Tip

Use the complex nature of cause and effect to your advantage. Often it is not necessary, or even possible, to find the exact cause of an event or to name the exact effect. So, when formulating a thesis, you can claim one of a number of causes or effects to be the primary, or main, cause or effect. As soon as you claim that one cause or effect is more crucial than the others, you have developed a thesis.
EXERCISE 1

Identify the causes and effects in the following thesis statements.

1. The growing childhood obesity epidemic is a result of technology.
2. Much wildlife is dying because of the oil spill.
3. The town continued programs it could no longer afford, so it went bankrupt.
4. More young people became politically active as use of the Internet spread throughout society.
5. While many experts believed the rise in violence was due to the poor economy, it was really due to the summer-long heat wave.

EXERCISE 2

Write three cause-and-effect thesis statements of your own for each of the five broad topics listed below.

1. Health and nutrition
2. Sports
3. Media
4. Politics
5. History

8.2 The Structure of a Cause-and-Effect Essay

The cause-and-effect essay opens with a general introduction to the topic, which then leads to a thesis that states the main cause, main effect, or various causes and/or effects of a condition or event.

The cause-and-effect essay can be organized in two primary ways:

1. Start with the cause(s) and then talk about the effect(s).
2. Start with the effect(s) and then talk about the causes.

For example, if your essay was on childhood obesity, you could start by talking about the effect(s) of childhood obesity and then discuss the cause(s), or you could start by talking about the cause(s) of childhood obesity and then move to the effect(s).

Regardless of what structure you choose, be sure to explain each element of the essay fully and completely. Explaining complex relationships requires the full use of evidence, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and anecdotes.

Because cause-and-effect essays determine how phenomena are linked, they make frequent use of certain words and phrases that denote such linkage. See Table 10.4 for examples of such terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrases of Causation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conclusion should wrap up the discussion and reinforce the thesis, leaving the reader with a clear understanding of the relationship that was analyzed.

Tip

Be careful of resorting to empty speculation or unsubstantiated guessing. Writers are particularly prone to such trappings in cause-and-effect arguments due to the complex nature of finding links between phenomena. Be sure to have clear evidence to support the claims that you make.
EXERCISE 3

Review the three cause-and-effect thesis statements you drafted in Exercise 2. Outline one using a cause-then-effect structure. Outline another using the effect-then-cause structure.

8.3 Writing a Cause-and-Effect Essay

Choose an event or condition that you think has an interesting cause-and-effect relationship. Introduce your topic in an engaging way. End your introduction with a thesis stating the main cause(s), main effect(s), or both.

Read the following introduction from the cause-and-effect essay “Effects of Video Game Addiction” in Chapter 15:

Video game addiction is a serious problem in many parts of the world today and deserves more attention. It is no secret that children and adults in many countries throughout the world, including Japan, China, and the United States, play video games every day. Most players are able to limit their usage in ways that do not interfere with their daily lives, but many others have developed an addiction to playing video games and suffer detrimental effects.

The writer opened the essay on video game addictions with a call for the reader’s attention. This statement will not only engage readers already interested in the topic but also attract readers new to the urgency of the issue. The writer’s thesis statement expresses the two results of video game playing: addiction and detrimental effects. Readers understand from reading this thesis that the essay focuses first on the effects.

Organize your essay by either starting with the cause-then-effect structure or the effect-then-cause structure. Within each section, you should clearly explain and support the causes and effects you discuss using a full range of evidence. If you are writing about multiple causes or multiple effects, you may choose to sequence either in terms of order of importance. In other words, order the causes from least to most important (or vice versa), or effects from least important to most important (or vice versa).

Use the phrases of causation when trying to forge connections between various events or conditions. This will help organize your ideas and orient the reader. End your essay with a conclusion that summarizes your main points and reinforces your thesis. See Chapter 15, Section 9 to read the entire cause-and-effect essay.

EXERCISE 4

Choose one of the ideas you outlined in Exercise 3 and write a full cause-and-effect essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, strong evidence and examples, and a thoughtful conclusion.

Cause-and-Effect Essay Structural Components

- Introduction and thesis
- Cause-then-effect or the effect-then-cause body paragraph structure
- Evidence to support causes and effects
9. PERSUASION

9.1 The Purpose of Persuasive Writing

The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view or opinion. The very act of trying to persuade implies more than one opinion on the subject can be argued.

The idea of an argument often conjures up images of two people yelling and screaming in anger. In writing, however, an argument is very different. An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue in writing is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way. Written arguments often fail when they employ ranting rather than reasoning.

Tip

Most of us feel inclined to try to win the arguments we engage in. On some level, we all want to be right and want others to see the error of their ways. More times than not, however, arguments in which both sides try to win end up producing losers all around. The more productive approach is to persuade your audience to consider your opinion as a valid one, not simply the “right” one.

9.2 The Structure of a Persuasive Essay

Five features make up the structure of a persuasive essay:

- Introduction and thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- Strong evidence in support of claim
- Style and tone of language
- A compelling conclusion
Introduction and Thesis

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that introduces the general topic. The thesis typically appears somewhere in the introduction and states the writer’s point of view.

**Tip**

Avoid forming a thesis based on a negative claim. For example, “The hourly minimum wage is not high enough for the average worker to live on.” This is probably a true statement, but persuasive arguments should make a positive case. That is, the thesis statement should focus on how the hourly minimum wage is low or insufficient.

Acknowledging Opposing Ideas and Limits to Your Argument

Because an argument implies differing points of view on the subject, you must acknowledge those opposing ideas. Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus, it is essential that you not only address counterarguments, but also do so respectfully.

Try to address opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay. Rhetorically speaking, ordering your positive arguments last allows you to better to address ideas that conflict with your own, so you can spend the rest of the essay countering those arguments. This way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else’s. You utter the last word.

Acknowledging points of view different from your own also has the effect of fostering more credibility between you and the audience. They know from the outset you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space. Although your opponents’ ideas may differ from your own, you should still acknowledge the validity of the opponents’ ideas. Treating your opponents’ ideas respectfully will lead to a more evenhanded argument.

It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you are conceding early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward earning credibility and trust with an audience. Audience members will know from the beginning that you are a reasonable writer, and audience members will trust your writing as a result. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws, but she admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

> Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence in our streets, such legislation cannot end these problems alone, nor are guns the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcome by those who might be at odds with this writer’s argument in the first place. To effectively persuade their readers, writers need to be modest in their goals and humble in their approach to get readers to listen to the ideas. See Table 10.5 for some useful phrases of concession.

**TABLE 10.5 Phrases of Concession**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Although</th>
<th>Still</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>While</td>
<td>Though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of course</td>
<td>Yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.3 Bias in Writing

Everyone has various biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward wearing black instead of brightly colored clothes, or wearing jeans rather than formal wear. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the morning, or working by deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These examples identify minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas.

The strength of a personal bias is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are personally invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you are apt to put forth, and so the better the final product will be.

The weakness of bias is when the bias begins to take over the essay—when, for example, you neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using I too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you to avoid them. Remember, too, that the first-person pronoun I should be avoided in formal academic writing.

The Use of I in Writing

The use of I in writing is often a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences for all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects it can have on your writing.

Be mindful of the use of I in your writing, because it can make your argument sound overly biased. There are two primary reasons:

1. Excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader’s attention—and usually not in a good way. The use of I is no different.

2. The insertion of I into a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. I is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position. In the following example, the subject of the sentence is underlined:

   - Smoking is bad.
   - I think smoking is bad.

   In the first sentence, the rightful subject, smoking, is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of I and think replaces smoking as the subject, and so draws attention to itself and away from the topic that is supposed be discussed. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate.

Checklist 10.1: Developing Sound Arguments

Does my essay contain …

- An engaging introduction?
- Reasonable, specific thesis able to be supported by evidence?
9.4 Distinguishing between Fact and Opinion

Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as true or false. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$. This expression identifies a true “statement,” or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views or judgments. An opinion is what an individual believes about a particular subject. However, an opinion in argumentation has to have legitimate backing; adequate evidence and credibility should support the opinion. Consider the credibility of expert opinions; experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinion meaningful to a larger audience.

For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your teeth, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the health of your car. Both have the knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should he or she offer an opinion about your car, and likewise for your mechanic about your teeth.

In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience than it gains.

Tip

The word prove is frequently used in the discussion of persuasive writing. Writers may claim that one piece of evidence or another “proves” the argument, but “proving” an argument is often not possible. No evidence “proves” a debatable topic one way or the other; that is why the topic is debatable. Facts can be proved, but opinions can only be supported and explained.

9.5 Using Visual Elements to Strengthen Arguments

Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can often strengthen its persuasive effect. There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

Quantitative visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to “see” statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if you can see how the disparity actually looks graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data with spatial dimensions.

Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience’s emotions. Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals. Such images often try to convey a story, and “seeing” an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example.

For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing.
Writing at Work

When making a business presentation, you typically have limited time to get across your idea. Providing visual elements for your audience can be an effective time-saving tool. Quantitative visuals serve the same purpose as they do in persuasive writing: They should be making logical appeals by showing numerical data in a spatial design. Quantitative visuals should be pictures that appeal to your audience’s emotions. You will find that many of the rhetorical devices used in writing are the same ones used in the workplace. For more information about visuals in presentations, see Chapter 14.

9.6 Writing a Persuasive Essay

Choose a topic that you feel passionate about. If your instructor requires you to write about a specific topic, try to approach the subject from an angle that interests you. Begin your essay with an engaging introduction. Your thesis should typically appear somewhere in your introduction.

Read the following introduction from the persuasive essay “Universal Health Care Coverage for the U.S.” in Chapter 15:

The United States is the only modernized Western nation that does not offer publicly funded health care to all its citizens; the costs of health care for the uninsured in the U.S. are prohibitive, and the practices of insurance companies are often more interested in profit margins than providing health care. These conditions are incompatible with U.S. ideals and standards, and it is time for the U.S. government to provide universal health care coverage for all its citizens. Like education, health care should be considered a fundamental right of all U.S. citizens, not simply a privilege for the upper middle classes.

The writer begins by clearly stating the issue and the problems associated with it. The reader understands immediately the problems that the writer believes should be addressed. The writer then engages the reader’s interest further by making a strong statement of why the issue matters and concludes with a clear thesis defining exactly what the writer will argue for in the rest of the essay. Note how the writer’s thesis makes a persuasive positive case rather than a negative claim.

Start the body of your essay by acknowledging and explaining points of view that may conflict with your own to build credibility and trust with your audience. Also state the limits of your argument. This too helps to make you sound more reasonable and honest to those who may be inclined to disagree with your view. By respectfully acknowledging opposing arguments and conceding limitations to your own view, you set a measured and responsible tone for the essay. Notice how the writer acknowledges the opposing argument in the following concessionary statement:
While providing health care for all U.S. citizens would cost a lot of money for every taxpaying citizen, citizens need to examine exactly how much money it would cost, and more importantly, how much money is “too much” when it comes to opening up health care for all.

Make your own appeals in support of your thesis by using sound, credible evidence. Use a balance of facts and opinions from a wide range of sources, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and personal anecdotes. Each piece of evidence should be fully explained and clearly stated.

Make sure your style and tone are appropriate for your subject and audience. Tailor your language and word choice in relation to these two factors, while still being true to your own voice. Finally, write a conclusion that effectively summarizes the main argument and reinforces your thesis. See Chapter 15, Section 10 to read the entire sample persuasive essay.

**EXERCISE 3**

Choose one of the topics you have been working on throughout this section. Use the thesis, evidence, opposing argument, and concessionary statement as the basis for writing a full persuasive essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, clear explanations of all the evidence you present, and a strong conclusion. As you are writing, be aware of your personal bias and provide sound evidence for your argument while reasonably addressing opposing ideas. Use the rhetorical devices that best help you persuade the reader, and be careful to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.

**Persuasive Essay Structural Components**

- Introduction and thesis
- Opposing and qualifying ideas
- Strong evidence in support of claim
- Style and tone of language
- A compelling conclusion
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The purpose of persuasion in writing is to convince or move readers towards a certain point of view, or opinion.
- An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue, in writing, is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way.
- A thesis that expresses the opinion of the writer in more specific terms is better than one that is vague.
- It is essential to not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully.
- It is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish through a concession statement.
- To persuade a skeptical audience, you will need to use a wide range of evidence. Scientific studies, opinions from experts, historical precedent, statistics, personal anecdotes, and current events are all types of evidence you might use in explaining your point.
- Make sure your word choice and writing style is appropriate for both your subject and your audience.
- Let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas.
- You should be mindful of the use of I in your writing because it can make your argument sound more biased than it needs to.
- Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data.
- Opinions are personal views or judgments that cannot be proven.
- In writing, you want to strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.
- Quantitative visuals present data graphically. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical appeals to the audience.
- Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions.

10. END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

EXERCISES

I. The thesis statement is a fundamental element of writing regardless of what rhetorical mode you are writing in. Try to formulate one more thesis for each of the modes discussed in this chapter.

II. Which rhetorical mode seems most aligned with who you are as a person? That is, which mode seems most useful to you? Explain why in a paragraph.

III. Over the next week, look closely at the texts and articles you read. Document in a journal exactly what type of rhetorical mode is being used. Sometimes it might be for an entire article, but sometimes you might see different modes within one article. The more you can detect various ways of communicating ideas, the easier it will be to do yourself.

11. ANSWERS TO CHAPTER EXERCISES

Section 1 Exercise 2 Answers:

- First, we drove to Thanksgiving to see my family at my grandmother’s house; I was thinking of everyone I would see (especially Grandma) and of fond memories of the past.
- When I get there, everything seems so familiar. The same. My cousin Jodie is there with her husband, Frank, and their two kids. Kayla is there solo. Mom and Dad, my sisters and brothers. Grandpa watching football.
- Then, I see Grandma walk out to greet me and she seems off. Not there. She walks more slowly, almost seems like she is limping. She does not seem quite as happy to see me. And I am really bothered and upset by this.
- After we sit down for dinner, we hear a crash in the kitchen. Grandma dropped the gravy bowl, and some of it splattered on her apron and clothes. She was embarrassed.
Later, when we were sitting in the parlor, I asked my sister if anything was wrong with Grandma, and she got annoyed with me. Like it was a stupid question. “She’s getting old,” she said.

The next day, when I hugged her to leave, I wondered if I would ever see her again. If it was age or something else. I wondered why I could not ask her. I got in my car and drove off, feeling more and more ashamed that I did not ask.