Becoming a good writer depends on your becoming a good reader and thinker. Writing, reading, and thinking are so closely related that it is difficult to imagine one without the others. Knowledge provides the basis for your writing—knowledge that you gain from thinking or reflecting about what you read, experience, and observe.

Discovering ideas can be exciting. Studying and writing, you find that you know enough about a subject to make judgments and draw conclusions. You discover possibilities that no one else has imagined quite the way you have. With something to write about, you begin to understand that you are not a recorder, transcribing what others have said. Rather, you are a thinker—a writer with ideas of your own to express. You have the power to cause others to sit up and take notice. You know something, and you know how to say it.

As a writer, you often want to move as quickly as possible from coherent sentences to good paragraphs and then on to full-length pieces of writing such as interesting essays or reports. But you can gain a great deal by moving gradually and deliberately instead of leaping ahead too fast. Reviewing the fundamentals can help you write better. Another look at the basics about sentences can reveal not only how to write different kinds of sentences but also how to vary sentences to interest your readers and to help you develop ideas. Reconsidering the fundamentals of paragraph writing can show you
how paragraphs, like good essays, vary according to purpose and rely on different kinds of evidence depending on the nature of your idea.

Reviewing these fundamentals, you can become aware of just how exciting words and syntax (the arrangement of words into sentences) can be. Consider these two sentences:

The woman walked down the trail.

The frail woman walked with a slight limp as she made her way down the narrow, winding trail, looking, as she went along, for the thief who had assailed her when first she turned round the bend, the thief who had been dogging her for nearly a mile as she made her way home, deep in the woods, way out beyond help and the telephone and the police.

Each of these sentences has its own special qualities. Neither is preferable. The simplicity and directness of the first, complemented by the surprising revelations of the second, suggest possibilities available to you as a writer. The first sentence conveys information. The second also conveys information but suggests as well an idea—the idea that movement deeper into the woods is movement toward isolation and danger. The writer does not declare that idea straight out but implies it in the details of the sentence. Like a good story, the second sentence draws you into it, inviting you to decipher its meaning. The sentence conveys more than the writer states.

When you write, you have options, endless possibilities for helping your readers understand what you have to tell them. Learning about the options and variations by writing and practicing, you will begin to discover how satisfying it is to find an idea and express it so that others know just what you know. Therein lie the writer’s most gratifying rewards.

1b An overview of the writing process

The writing process often begins with a fleeting hunch about something you want to write about and ends with a completed essay. Writing that essay depends very much on your ability to think, read, and take notes, but it also depends on your capacity to complete a series of related tasks: accumulating evidence, formulating ideas, considering audience and purpose, preparing, organizing, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. We will look closely at these tasks in this chapter.
But to suggest that the writing process is linear—that you go through these tasks step by step, the same way every time—would be to deny its most important characteristic: flexibility. You may discover differences in the process almost every time you write an essay.

Writing an essay can be, and most often is, a messy business. Thinking and reading and drafting and rethinking and revising and rereading go on and on as you write. The process moves back and forth; it is recursive. It usually involves some false starts as well as botched endings, jumbled middles, and muddled ideas. Do not be dismayed by the complications. You will get better and more efficient as you learn to be more comfortable with the writing process and its interesting complications. All writers face them, no matter what their level of experience. In Chapter 4, you can watch E. B. White, a professional essayist, struggling to develop an idea in a single paragraph about the first moon walk. But you can tell that the struggle is accompanied by the pleasure of getting the words right, finally.

**1c Accumulating evidence and formulating ideas**

To become a good writer, you need the two kinds of knowledge you have just read about—knowledge about how to write and knowledge of a subject. You will accumulate knowledge about how to write as you study writing and as you write. You can acquire knowledge about a given subject
much more deliberately, by way of experience, of course, but also through concentrated study. Let us consider briefly the subject civil disobedience—disobeying seemingly unjust laws through passive resistance—and how you might begin to acquire knowledge and evidence about it to gain insight that will lead to ideas.

Reading about civil disobedience, you discover that people often have to make complex choices in the face of the law. As you read and think about civil disobedience and then start to write about it, you discover how disobedience can be civilized and nonviolent, how it can affect lives, and how it can lead to violence, just as it can lead to changes in laws that a community considers unjust.

Studying such a controversial issue, you begin to realize that you have something to say about it that no one else has imagined quite the way you have. Your acquired knowledge provides the foundation for your ideas and eventually becomes the evidence you use in your essays.

Ideas and evidence have a symbiotic relationship; they feed off each other. Stephen Jay Gould, an evolutionary biologist, makes some interesting observations about his own science that should help you understand more clearly the relationship between evidence and ideas:

Well, evolution is a theory. It is also a fact. And facts and theories are different things, not rungs in a hierarchy of increasing certainty. Facts are the world’s data. Theories are structures of ideas that explain and interpret facts. Facts do not go away when scientists debate rival theories to explain them. Einstein’s theory of gravitation replaced Newton’s, but apples did not suspend themselves in mid-air pending the outcome. [...] In science, “fact” can only mean “confirmed to such a degree that it would be perverse to withhold provisional assent.”

—Stephen Jay Gould, “Evolution as Fact and Theory”

An idea accounts for evidence, provides a theory about it. An idea is your sense of what the evidence means, your explanation or interpretation of the facts. Your essay will be shaped and controlled by a leading idea (often called a thesis).

Think again about the topic civil disobedience. It is not a new concept. The United States was founded on disobedience, not all of it civil. Looking back at U.S. history, you can find numerous examples of important changes
brought about by disobedience and revolution. But the term acquired new meaning during the civil rights demonstrations in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States when African Americans began to speak out against racial injustice. If, as a writer, you choose to look into the matter of civil disobedience, you might focus on what has already happened, or you might focus on what is going on in the United States today. Wherever you look, you will find controversy—disagreement about past events or about future courses of action. When you find such controversy, you are probably on the scent of an idea.

The evidence you assemble about civil disobedience leads to questions: Under what conditions is it permissible to break the law? What is justifiable violence? How should oppressed citizens respond to unjust laws? At first, such questions lead to a search for more evidence, but then those questions lead to answers, to your interpretation of what the evidence means. That interpretation is your idea, something you reason or intuit from the evidence.

As a writer, your dual tasks are to create a good idea from the available evidence and to find an interesting way to express that idea, often in an essay. You can never be sure about that available evidence—where it will come from, what you will think about it once you find it, how you will use it in your essay. At the outset, you cannot predict where your search for evidence will take you. Every time you begin the process of writing an essay, you are on the trail of discovery, on the scent of something new, something you can discover and express in words.

An essay is your attempt to express an idea through writing so that readers can understand and accept what you have discovered. As you have just seen, the knowledge you acquire through study becomes the evidence you need in your essay to illustrate and develop your leading idea.

When you begin to decide how best to explain your idea and your reasons for believing it, you will have to select evidence from all that acquired knowledge. You have to consider what you know, think about your purpose, and think about what your readers need to know so that you can choose only the specific evidence that will help you present your idea. You will also have to organize your presentation into the form of an essay.
1d Assessing audience and purpose

1 How audience influences writing

Your readers, those people you are trying to reach with your writing, constitute your audience. The relationship between your audience’s needs—based on its knowledge and level of expertise—and your own selection and presentation of evidence is important. Much of what you say and how you say it depends on whether your audience is a group of experts or a more general audience consisting of diverse people interested in your topic.

Even the way you organize your writing and the amount of detail you include (the terms you define, the amount of context you provide, the level of your explanations) depend in part on what your audience needs to know. If you are writing about civil disobedience for a group of historians, you can assume that because they are experts they know the meaning of civil disobedience and know its history. At the outset of your essay, you would need to remind them only of key points important to the development of your idea. But if you are writing about the same subject for a general audience with little expert knowledge (e.g., your English class), you may have to prepare your audience by filling in important background information and defining basic terms. You have to establish context so they can understand your idea.

As a writer, you must always consider what your audience needs to know to understand your essay. It pays to think often of that audience. Think about what assumptions you share with your readers and what you might disagree about. Use the Audience Checklist on p. x to help you think about your audience and make decisions on how best to communicate with that audience.

2 How to assess audience feedback

Often in a college course your instructor will be your primary audience, providing written feedback and guidance as you develop your papers. Your instructor may also designate classmates as your audience and at the same time ask them to be your collaborators. They will provide feedback during the time that you are drafting and revising. You will not have to imagine their response as you often do with other audiences. They will tell you how well they understand what you have written.
Your instructor and your classmates serve as important reminders that you rarely write just for yourself. Unless you are writing a personal journal, you are writing to reveal your thoughts to someone else, so you always have to put yourself to the test of your readers’ understanding. To put yourself in your readers’ place takes practice and skill at separating yourself from what you have written. But it is not only a matter of learning to stand apart from your drafts and see them objectively; it is also a matter of learning to spot gaps even as you write. Develop the good habit of pausing occasionally as you write to ask yourself whether you think your audience will be able to understand your point.

3 How to influence an audience—Purpose and tone

You write for any number of reasons or purposes—to provide information; to persuade others to accept your point of view; to explain an event that you witnessed, a poem that you read, or a movie that you saw; to entertain—but beneath all of these reasons for writing is the desire to be understood. You also often write to get a response.

You may simply want your readers to know something—to respond by understanding—but you may also want to stir them to action. Whatever your purpose, you are not likely to accomplish it without carefully considering your own relationship to your audience. When you write, you not only provide evidence and explanation so that your audience can follow along and understand what you have to say; you also provide a crucial sense of your own attitude to that audience through the tone of your writing. Tone conveys your attitude toward your subject and your sense of how best to approach your audience according to your purpose. Tone, therefore, includes strategy. Let us consider a few of your options by examining four professional writers at work. All of these writers are targeting a general audience.

In the following example, the writer’s tone is conversational, light, and humorous. The writer’s purpose is to interest his readers in a subject of great interest to him—his own writing.

Occasionally I write familiar essays. When I send them to editors, I usually explain that I am trying to write my way to a new car, adding that I have done well recently and have earned the front half of a station wagon, the automatic transmission, power brakes, and a luggage rack.
Of course, that’s not true. My essays will never earn me a new car. Besides I am happy with my 1973 Pontiac.

—Samuel Pickering, “Being Familiar”

The tone of the following example is biting, witty, and angry, and the author’s purpose is to evoke awareness. Carter is having a bit of fun about women’s makeup, but anger lurks behind her playfulness, anger intended to evoke awareness and perhaps to change habits. Hers is a serious cultural argument.

White-based lipsticks, colourless glosses, or no lipstick at all, were used in the 1960s. Now the mouth is back as a bloody gash, a visible wound. This mouth bleeds over everything, cups, ice-cream, table napkins, towels. Mary Quant has a shade called (of course) “Bloody Mary,” to ram the point home. We will leave our bloody spoor behind us, to show we have been there.

—Angela Carter, “A Wound in the Face”

In the passage that follows, the author uses a clear, unemotional tone. She also uses images to lull her readers into awareness and understanding about the relationship between the stark beauty of winter and winter’s effect on the mind. The transparent, unemotional flatness here leads her audience to accept a revelation at the end of the paragraph.

Winter is smooth-skulled, and all our skids on black ice are cerebral. When we begin to feel cabin-feverish, the brain pistons thump against bone and mind interrupts—literally invading itself—unable to get fresh air. With the songbirds gone only scavengers are left: magpies, crows, eagles. As they pick on road-killed deer we humans are apt to practice the small cruelties on each other.


Finally, the tone of the following passage is technical and academic but inviting. The author seeks to interest a general audience in a technical experiment, but without becoming so technical and formal that he turns away all but the experts. Heinrich tries to figure out how he will gather experimental data that will in turn allow him to explain how the sphinx moth regulates its body temperature during flight.
My problem was now specific: Is heat loss regulated by way of the circulatory system? I couldn’t stay away from the lab for more than a few hours at a time. Once I went to camp out for a weekend in the Sierras, but my mind was in the lab and I didn’t see the birds or flowers. My measurements of heat production (oxygen consumption rate) and thoracic temperature showed that the moths thermoregulated by as much as tripling their rate of heat loss during flight at high air temperatures. But how could you measure heat loss facilitated by blood flow in a flying moth? Sphinx moths are extremely fast. You can’t trail them in flight with instruments attached. I decided to mimic the overheating that normally occurs in flight and to control it myself.

—Bernd Heinrich, “The Thesis Hunt”

The four preceding passages give you a glimpse of how you can vary tone to suit your purpose. Academic writing often has a formal and technical tone, and it should always be reasonable and objective, serious and thoughtful. It should also avoid contractions such as they’re, we’ll, and you’re, and casual expressions such as “I’d thought long and hard about Sylvia Plath’s

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Assessing Audience and Purpose

**Audience Checklist**

- Who are my readers? Are they experts or are they generalists?
- What reasonable assumptions can I make about what my audience knows? Do I need to provide detailed background information? Can I assume that my audience will understand the technical terms and language?
- What sort of audience response do I hope for?
- If my audience’s response is hostile, what can I say to make my readers more receptive? What concessions can I make to them without compromising my own position? If my audience is friendly, how can I keep their interest?
- What can I discover by looking at my writing objectively—that is, by reading my writing as if I am a member of the audience? What evidence or explanations have I left out?
- What tone would be most appropriate and produce the desired effect with this audience?
images.” Write instead, “Sylvia Plath expresses her sense of despair in a number of images that form a pattern within her poem,” and then go on to discuss each of those images and explain the pattern in clear, direct analytical language.

Despite its formality, academic writing can, at appropriate times, accommodate humor, personal experience, and even satire. But it is not ordinarily as conversational or personal as Samuel Pickering’s is in the preceding passage from “Being Familiar.” Your tone will depend on your subject, but it will depend as well on your purpose and your sense of what your audience will be most receptive to. No formula specifies what tone to use for what effect. You will learn what is appropriate by experimenting, by practicing, and by studying how other writers use tone effectively.

Preparing to write

Most of the evidence for your essays will come from actual experience and from reading, so it is useful to keep journals. It will also help to know other preparatory strategies.

Keeping a reading journal

Try to become an active reader who not only questions and thinks about what you read but also keeps ongoing records of those questions and reflections. Such written records may turn out to be your best source of ideas. Because remembering and reflecting can add to and enhance your preparation for writing, read with pen in hand. Keep track of your mind’s play by noting what interests you and by jotting down your thoughts in a reading journal as you read.

The format for your reading journals can vary. If you are reading a book or copies of articles that you own, you can record your observations directly on the printed pages—highlighting or underlining what seems important, writing down questions that occur to you as you read, making note of connections you see within the piece you are reading and of connections with other books or articles you have read or with observations from your field research. The book or article itself becomes a journal that you can go back to, studying both it and your reflections all in one place.

At times you will need more space than the printed page provides. In that case, you can keep a journal in a separate notebook, on a pad of paper,
or in your computer. This type of journal would consist of your **freewriting**. This is writing in which you let your mind play more expansively over what you have read, recording your thoughts in whatever way they occur. Or you can keep a double-column notebook in which you can align your reflections with your summary of the text you are reading. Simply divide your notebook pages so that in one column you summarize what you have read and in the facing column you reflect on what you have summarized.

Reviewing your journals should help you get your bearings, suggesting the importance of what you have read and of your reflections about that reading. That record helps prepare you for writing, reminding you of how you made sense of what you read, of your questions, of tentative connections you made, of controversies that seemed intriguing, of other books you have read that seem to relate to the assigned or chosen reading. Most important, however, is that your reading journals help you discover your own ideas.

## Keeping a personal journal

You will not, of course, depend solely on evidence that you have gleaned from reading. Sometimes, when writing essays, you will make use of your own experiences, such as in an exploratory essay. Those experiences will actually constitute much of the evidence from which you develop ideas.

Keep a record of interesting experiences in a **personal journal**. You should be especially mindful of moments that stop you in your tracks and make you take notice—a little walled-in enclosure with a tiny headstone just off the side of a quiet country road; the shimmering effect of the breeze on the
leaves of the birch trees outside your window; a scene you saw on television
or at the movies; music you heard on the radio or at a concert. Think of your-
self as a writer trying to remember the essence of what you have seen. You are
less interested in creating a detailed report of what happened than in convey-
ing what the event meant to you. You want to account for why it struck you
so powerfully.

As you make notes about those events, remember to describe how you
felt about them and what you thought about those feelings. Later, when you
sit down to write, these memories may come back to mind when you least
expect them, and if they do, you will be able to turn to your journal for
details. As your mind plays over the moment and as you consider your
recorded evidence, you may begin to connect those recorded events with
books you have read, with other experiences, with movies or songs or
visual images. Connecting those pieces of evidence can create the trace of
an idea.

3 Using other preparatory strategies

Besides journal writing, a number of other important strategies can help
you prepare to write and can lead you to develop ideas. The accompanying
list identifies those strategies and refers you to the sections of the Handbook
that discuss and illustrate them.
EXERCISE 1–1  Recording Your Ideas

1. Create a reading journal. Select a textbook from your syllabus and read a portion of it. Then make a list of two or three major ideas you found in the book. Reflect on those ideas, writing down what you think about them. Finally, see if those ideas lead you to an idea of your own or to questions that you would like answered.

2. Create a personal journal. Make observations about interesting details for about a week. Remember also to keep track of how those observations affected you.

3. After you have kept your personal journal for several days, look back through it for connections between two events that you recorded, events that might not on the surface seem related. If you see such connections, add notes to your journal about them. Look back to your reading journal as well. Make notes about the connections you see between what you have been reading and what you have been observing. Let your imagination have free rein; let your mind play over this recorded evidence. Begin to write, preparing two typed pages in which you try to reveal your discoveries to a general audience.

1f Organizing

After you have become knowledgeable about an assigned subject or one you have selected on your own, and after you have begun to develop an idea
about your evidence (gathered from reading, field research, your own experiences and observations, and so forth), you will have to figure out how to convey that idea to your readers. To do this, you will have to answer two interesting questions:

1. How do I decide what evidence to select from all of the evidence I have accumulated?
2. In what order do I present the evidence to my readers?

The answers to these questions are quite simple: You select the evidence that will, in your mind, help your audience see what it is that you want to convey. You then present that evidence—along with your explanation of it—in a way that you think will make it easy for your audience to follow.

How then should you go about organizing your evidence and your essay? Each essay you write will have a basic, three-part organizational structure—a beginning, a middle, and an ending—that will give shape to your essay and help readers understand your idea. Each part of the essay serves a particular function:

The **beginning** introduces your leading idea.

The **middle** presents evidence and develops the idea.

The **ending** offers a closing perspective on the idea and reminds readers of your main supporting points.

The beginning and the ending lead readers into and out of the essay. They are relatively short and easy to organize. The middle can be more difficult because you have to deal with those vexing questions about selecting and presenting evidence.

Organizing an essay has to do with how you finally decide to present your idea. Will you provide historical background information—a context for understanding—just after your introduction, or will you spread the information throughout your essay? Will you present your best evidence first, or should you save it for last? Do you need to define an important term such as civil disobedience early in your essay, or will your audience already know a great deal about it? These kinds of practical, organizational decisions will
depend on the kind of essay you decide to write, on the essay’s purpose, and on your imagined or targeted or assigned audience—what the members of that audience already know about your subject, whether they are likely to be hostile or friendly to your idea, and whether you will try to get them involved in an inquiry about that idea or whether you want to do everything in your power to convince them of the truth of what you have discovered.

A number of organizational methods can help you present ideas and organize evidence within paragraphs of an essay. These methods include organizing from general to specific or from specific to general, climactic order, time order, and spatial order. Two of these methods—climactic order and time order—also have broad application to the organization of entire essays. They help you decide in what order to present your supporting ideas.

When you use **climactic order**, you present your least important idea first and move toward your most important, most convincing idea. Or, you present simpler ideas first and move toward more complex ones. The overall effect of using climactic order is to build your essay toward an emphatic climax. Climactic order is especially effective for analytical and argumentative essays. When you use **time order**, you present your ideas in accordance with a time sequence, narrating how the ideas themselves developed or accounting for the actual order in which events occurred. Organizing the presentation of your ideas will ultimately depend on your subject, your evidence, your essay’s purpose, and your sense of how your audience will respond.

### 1 Outlining

There are two main types of outlines—informal and formal. An informal outline is a sketch consisting of a few key terms or phrases listed in an order that will guide you as you write or as you think about what you have written. This type of outline does not follow the conventions of a formal outline. (See 1f-2 for examples of two types of informal outlines.)

Outlines can also be detailed and formal, written out in complete sentences (a *sentence outline*) or with words and phrases (a *topic outline*) and organized into units that show the structure of every section of the essay. A **formal outline** reveals the logical relationships among the various sections of the essay; those relationships are only suggested by an informal outline.

The following example of a conventional formal outline shows how to organize major and subordinate headings. As you can see, major headings are designated by roman numerals, while subordinate headings are signaled
by indented capital letters, arabic numbers, or lowercase letters. The headings indicate the level of importance of your ideas and evidence and their relationship with each other. Note that outline headings should always contain at least two parts (e.g., if you have an A heading you should also have a B heading).

**FORMAL OUTLINE FORMAT**

*Leading idea*

I. First major idea
   A. First supporting idea
      1. First illustration or explanation (your supporting evidence)
      2. Second illustration or explanation
   B. Second supporting idea
      1. First illustration or explanation
      2. Second illustration or explanation
      3. Third illustration or explanation

II. Second major idea
   A. First supporting idea
      1. First illustration or explanation
      2. Second illustration or explanation
      a. First additional illustration or explanation
      b. Second additional illustration or explanation
   B. Second supporting idea

As the formal outline shows, a well-developed essay often has a hierarchy of ideas—a leading idea that you are presenting and developing, along with a number of supporting ideas that contribute to your readers’ understanding of the leading idea. Each subordinate idea must be illustrated or explained by evidence that clarifies it. The relationship of each supporting idea to the leading idea must also be clear if your essay is to be persuasive and coherent.

2 **Mapping**

Some writers like to use an outline to begin thinking and getting organized, but others prefer to use a different method—a diagram that results from keeping up with the mind as it plays over a given subject. **Mapping** can lead to sketchy, informal outlines, to drafting, and then, perhaps, to a more formal outline that will accompany the final essay submitted to the instructor. (Instructors often require that a formal outline accompany a research essay.)
You begin mapping by choosing a piece of evidence—a quotation, a discovery from an experiment, a recollected experience, a cliché—and writing it in the center of a blank piece of paper. Then you begin to think about it, keeping track, mapping the mind’s play as in the accompanying example. The sample mind map traces how one student, Robin Dumas, was motivated to write an essay about skiing. By mapping her thoughts about a cliché—“Nothing lasts forever”—she came up with a subject and a question she wanted to answer. She went directly from her mind map to an informal outline because she got an idea about teaching intermediate skiers how to ski moguls—the small mounds that form on a ski slope and present a challenge to skiers. Robin saw right away how to organize her thoughts, but
she could just as well have started another mind map, beginning with the words *Of course*, placing that new starting point in the center of the map and venturing out to other discoveries about skiing as her mind played over her experiences. What you do and how you get organized depend on what works best for you.

Writers who prefer to begin with a mind map often say they find a linear outline too structured and confining. They want to explore their imagination and express their findings in a diagram. But an outline is not necessarily confining; it can be quite flexible. An outline, like a mind map, can help you get organized and discover ideas. In fact, mind maps and outlines are useful, complementary techniques.

Robin went from mapping to this informal outline:

Purpose: To convince the intermediate skier that mogul skiing is within reach
- Moguls
- Turning and sliding
- Riding the troughs
- Rhythm

After mapping and outlining, Robin wrote a preliminary draft and then reconstructed what she had written (to think about it) by outlining again. She recorded her concerns within the outline so she could consider them with her instructor when they met to discuss her draft.

**Beginning:** Introduce readers to the subject of mogul skiing and the essay’s purpose--to convince the intermediate skier that mogul skiing is within reach. Define **moguls**.

**Middle:** Approaching the mogul--like stopping.
- Initiating the turn, reaching for the sky--nothing new for an intermediate.
- Compressing, sinking down to earth--a brief rest on the way up again.
- Repeating the process--up, down, around.
- Getting the rhythm--speed in the troughs.

**Concerns:** Should I use sketches within my essay? Do I need photographs to illustrate each phase of the turning? How technical should the terms be? Do I need to get into the physics of it all?
Ending: Pull the essay together, emphasizing the ease of the transition from intermediate to expert. Point out the joys of skiing rather than the sore back and wobbly legs that follow. Reveal what it’s like to sit in the lodge at the end of the day talking about skiing the bumps.

As you can see from Robin’s more detailed informal outline, she has a good idea of how she intends to develop her essay. She will use this outline like a road map, aware that she will also navigate side roads and alternate routes to reach the final destination—a well-developed essay. She does not want to exclude alternate routes altogether, but, like all of us, she does want to be able to begin her essay with a clear sense of direction, reserving the right to change her course if necessary. Good writers know that changes in direction can lead to new insights and greater clarity.

**EXERCISE 1–2  Mapping and Drafting**

1. Select a cliché (You can’t teach an old dog new tricks; No pain, no gain; What can’t be cured must be endured) that you have been carrying around in your memory. Write it in the center of a blank piece of paper and circle it. Let your mind play over the cliché. Devise a mind map, keeping track of where your mind takes you, jotting down the thoughts and memories you associate with the cliché. Model your efforts on the mapping diagram in 1f.

2. Look at the evidence you recorded about your cliché on the mind map—your thoughts and associated memories—and see if you can form an idea, something new and fresh to say, about that old cliché (see 1c on evidence and ideas).

3. Write a draft paragraph about your idea.

**1g Drafting and revising**

Writers almost never get the words right the first time. They are always drafting and revising. **Drafting** involves successive attempts to say what you mean and to say it clearly. **Revising** involves going over what you have written, rethinking it with an eye to whether your audience can understand you. Drafting and revising also lead to ideas.

When you set out to write the draft of an essay, you are not trying to produce letter-perfect writing. It is to be expected that your punctuation and
grammar might not be perfect and that your spelling may not always be correct. You will get a chance to fine-tune those details later in the writing process. You can make notations to correct any errors as you are revising. But deal with them when you edit and proofread your work not when you draft. When drafting, you want to write your way to a clear expression of your idea. This process takes time and, often, successive efforts. Trying to make everything perfect from the beginning will almost surely divert you from your larger purpose: developing your idea so that your readers can understand it.

Your first draft—your first effort to create the essay—is always an exploration, so you should expect to get off track. Your mind does not like to be controlled. Turn it loose with a pen in your hand or a keyboard at your fingertips, and you can expect it to take detours away from the main idea. Let that happen. Let your mind have free rein as you write the initial draft.

Set your first draft aside for a few hours and return to it later to revise it. Come back and ask probing questions: Does this draft make sense? Have I stayed on track? Was that diversion really illogical, or is there something in that wayward paragraph I need to think more about? As you read your draft, you will undoubtedly find problems: fuzzy sentences, a need for an illustration to help clarify a point, an important paragraph that needs to be moved, a connection that needs more explanation. You can also try reading your essay

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**Computer Tip**

**Writing without Seeing**

As a kind of game you can play to see what you write without keeping track of it as you go, turn off your computer screen and write “in the dark.” One reason for doing this is to free yourself from worrying about making corrections. Another is to help you write freely without worrying about transitions and logical connections from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. Such freedom allows you to shift direction and let your thinking direct your writing.
aloud; often you will become aware of errors that you could not spot reading silently. A sentence that is hard to read aloud usually needs revising.

If you give your draft to a fellow student or collaborator to read, or talk about it with your instructor, you are likely to get additional insight about what you have done and what needs to be revised. Out of these helpful readings, you get direction for revising your draft and creating another one.

Revising leads to new writing and often results in reorganizing, more reading, gap filling—new drafts. As you draft and revise, you want to improve what you have already written. When you discover a gap in your explanation, you sometimes must do additional reading, which in turn leads

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**Drafting and Revising Guidelines**

- Read your first draft carefully, looking for signs of a good idea.
- Determine whether you can see a clear relationship between each paragraph and the idea you are trying to develop in your essay. Are those relationships logical?
- Pause over sentences that are not clear. Then revise for clarity.
- Consider key words in your draft. Check the dictionary for the meanings of words and then revise if necessary.
- Begin another draft, taking your direction from the idea you discovered in the first draft. Think more about your audience now. Explain and develop your idea for that audience.
- Pause occasionally to let your mind make connections with new evidence that occurs to you. Write about those connections.
- Question your evidence. Consider what it might mean to someone whose ideas may differ from yours.
- Put the draft aside for a few hours or, if you can, for a few days. Get some distance from your writing, and then reread what you have written. Think about the relationship between your evidence and your idea. Clarify wherever you can.
- If you have work groups in class, ask the group to read your draft and identify its strengths and weaknesses. If you do not have a work group, ask a classmate to read the draft.
- Write other drafts if you still need to clarify your thinking.
to further reflection and additional changes. As you fill the gaps and make your presentation clearer, you can begin to pay attention to the way you use words, to the structure of your sentences, to the way in which your sentences flow from one to the other, and to the transitions between paragraphs.

How, then, you ask, does a writer know when to stop drafting and revising? There is no conclusive answer, but when you can say “yes” to the following questions, you have likely reached your final draft.

1. Can my readers follow my train of thought?
2. Have I made my points clearly and convincingly?
3. Have I included sufficient evidence to illustrate what I mean and to convince my readers?
4. Am I satisfied with what I have written?

Remember to refer to the Drafting and Revising Guidelines (p. xx) at this stage in the writing process.

1h Collaborating

During the processes of drafting and revising, you can benefit from the help of your instructor and your classmates—in the form of collaboration.
Your instructor can assist you as you draft and revise, responding occasion-
ally to your drafts and helping you answer tough questions and make
important decisions. Your instructor may also ask you to do collaborative
writing in a work group in class so that you and your classmates can help
each other become better writers. You might work in a small group within
the class at times specified by your instructor, or on a one-to-one basis out-
side of class, reading and responding to each other’s writing. Nothing can
spur you on like a friendly but critical collaborator who is willing to give you
an honest reaction to your writing. That collaborator can save you the misery
of self-doubt by pointing out strengths in what you have done. That person
can also help you identify troubling
gaps in your writing and offer con-
structive suggestions for improvement.
Most writers thrive on collaborative
feedback.

Writing is a lonely act only up to a
certain point. Few good writers stay isolated from readers during the entire
process. Collaboration can bring you out of hiding and remind you that you
are writing for an audience, that there is someone outside your head who
wants to understand what is going on inside.

The accompanying Guidelines for Collaboration will help you provide
feedback about written texts. (Also see 1d-2 on audience feedback.)

### Computer Tip

**Sharing Drafts Online**

All writers need feedback, and the best time to get that feedback is
just after or shortly after you have completed a draft. You can ask friends
or colleagues at your school or at other schools to read your work and give
you feedback simply by sending them an e-mail with a file attachment
that they can download. You can also send your draft as a
paste-up into an e-mail message. This use of the computer can
speed up the entire drafting, feedback, and revising process.
Guidelines for Collaboration

- Work in a small group of two to five students so that everyone has a chance to be heard. Your task is to provide feedback to the other writers—a genuine response to what you have read. That feedback can be about ideas, about the cited evidence, or about the overall effectiveness of the student’s text.

- Write the word *nice* in the margin or insert a check mark (_) to identify the most satisfying parts of the essay: a fine sentence, a telling detail, a good paragraph, an arresting line of dialogue, a sentence or two that give you a clear sense of the essay’s meaning.

- In the margin of the paper, write the word *gap* where you believe you need more information. If you are confused at some point, write a brief marginal note explaining what troubles you.

- Write specific questions in the margin as you read: *What do you mean? Please explain. What does this passage or this paragraph have to do with your leading idea?*

- Always write a note to the student (at the bottom of the page or on the reverse side) saying what you think the essay is about. Try to restate the essay’s idea in your own words, whether that idea is expressed explicitly or implicitly.

- Offer constructive comments about how you think the essay could be revised. Refer back to the gaps or your marginal questions.

- Remember that as a collaborator, you are serving as both audience and editor—offering advice and feedback about your reaction to the essay. Be friendly and evenhanded, but talk back, giving your writer a chance to hear an audience response.

Editing and proofreading

Once you have a typed final draft, you should edit and proofread it to identify and correct errors that might distract your readers. Surface errors in your writing are quite different from the problems you address while drafting and revising your essay. These sur-
Editing Guidelines

- Check your grammar (Chapters 9–21).
- Check your sentences (Chapters 22–25).
  — Do you avoid sentence errors such as fragments (Chapter 16) and misplaced and dangling modifiers (Chapter 18)?
  — Are your sentences parallel (Chapter 23), varied (Chapter 24), and concise (Chapter 25)?
- Check the appropriateness of the words you use (Chapter 26).
  — Do you avoid biased language (Chapter xx)?
  — Are all words spelled correctly (Chapter 27)?
- Check your use of punctuation marks (Chapters 28–33).
- Check your use of capitalization, italics, abbreviations, numbers, and hyphens (Chapters 34–38).

How to Proofread

- Carefully read the final draft, line by line.
- Use a ruler to help you stay focused on individual sentences and words rather than on your idea and how it is expressed.
- Try reading backward to stay focused on the details.
- Check the final draft against the edited draft, sentence by sentence.
- Read the final draft aloud to hear and detect any remaining errors.

  Look for omitted words or letters, misspellings, punctuation errors, illegible type, and anything that does not look neat. Retype or reprint the essay if you find too many errors.

face errors have to do with grammar, spelling, usage, punctuation, mechanics, and format rather than with the more conceptual revision of your idea. During editing you read specifically to identify and correct surface errors; in proofreading you ensure that you have corrected those errors and that your
final draft is in near-perfect shape. The accompanying guidelines will help you with these tasks.

If you use a computer when you are writing your paper, edit first on the computer screen using the computer’s special features, such as the spell checker. Then check the printed copy of your paper for errors. You can often spot mistakes in the printed copy that you did not notice on the computer screen.

EXERCISE 1–3  Revising and Collaborating

1. After setting it aside for a few hours or a day, look at your paragraph from Exercise 1–2. Reread it, and think about what you could change to make it easier for someone else to understand your idea. Make those revisions.

2. Write a letter or e-mail to a friend explaining your idea. In the letter, try to interest your friend in the idea. Finally, ask for feedback: What do you like about the idea? Is it confusing? Did I convince you about my idea?

Critical Reading

The reading you do in college most often is critical reading; it requires careful analysis and thoughtful response. More specifically, critical reading involves reacting to what you read, analyzing it, interpreting it, and evaluat-
ing its ideas and assessing its values. The word *critical* in this approach to reading does not mean “being critical of” in the familiar sense of disapproval. Critical reading is more encompassing than this, involving a wider range of possible judgments and a deeper sense of understanding. This chapter provides an approach to reading that incorporates the major aspects of critical reading that are outlined in the accompanying chart.

### 2a Adjusting to different kinds of texts

Reading a written text critically requires knowing what kind of work you are reading. Your expectations and response derive from the nature of the text you are reading and your purpose in reading it. Different kinds of texts require different ways of reading. You may skim a magazine article to pick up essential information. You may read a popular novel swiftly to discover what happens. You read your textbooks more slowly, taking time to absorb information, understand concepts, and consider questions. You read a newspaper editorial or an article in a serious journal carefully to analyze its argument and evaluate the evidence used to support it.

In the same way that we analyze a written text we can analyze the constructed “text” of an object, an action, a work of art, or a historical event. Thus a *text* can be something made or socially constructed, something that happens, as well as something written. Texts include works of art such as paintings, drawings, sculptures, and architectural monuments. They also include historical events, such as the Vietnam War. And they include other kinds of actions and events such as sports contests, beauty pageants, social
celebrations (such as wedding ceremonies and receptions), and public ceremonies (such as presidential inaugurations).

You take a different approach to reading stories and poems than to reading informative essays and popular and scientific articles in periodicals. Fiction and expository prose make their points in different ways. Whereas expository writing presents ideas directly, fiction does so indirectly. In expository prose, the writer’s ideas are usually stated and described explicitly. But in fiction you must often infer a writer’s implied idea or interpret the meaning of a story or novel.

2b Writing from reading

You can expect much of your college reading to lead to writing assignments such as essays, research papers, and reports. To develop those assignments, it helps to write both while and after you read. React to what you read by making marginal notes or annotations (only if you own the text, of course). Afterward, do some reflective writing, such as freewriting. Either keep a double-column notebook or a reading journal, or write a summary. The kind of writing you do will be determined by your purpose. But whatever your purpose, you can begin responding to what you read by using the following writing techniques.

1 Reacting to a text with annotations

Annotations are brief notes you write about a text while reading it. You can underline and circle words and phrases that strike you as important. You can highlight passages. You can make marginal comments that reflect your attitude toward the text. Your annotations might also include arrows that identify related points, question marks that indicate your confusion, and exclamation marks to express your surprise. Annotations can be single words or brief phrases; they can be statements, exclamations, or questions. Depending on how extensively you annotate a text, your annotations may form a secondary text that reminds you of the text you are reading. Annotations used this way serve as an abbreviated outline of what the text says and what you think about it.

As you read the following passage, notice the various types of annotations and add some of your own.
To be called beautiful is thought to name something essential to women’s character and concerns. (In contrast to men—whose essence is to be strong, or effective, or competent.) It does not take someone in the throes of advanced feminist awareness to perceive that the way women are taught to be involved with beauty encourages narcissism, reinforces dependence and immaturity. Everybody (women and men) knows that. For it is “everybody,” a whole society, that has identified being feminine with caring about how one looks. (In contrast to being masculine—which is identified with caring about what one is and does and only secondarily, if at all, about how one looks.)

It is not, of course, the desire to be beautiful that is wrong but the obligation to be—or to try. What is accepted by most women as a flattering idealization of their sex is a way of making women feel inferior to what they actually are—or normally grow to be. For the ideal of beauty is administered as a form of self-oppression. Women are taught to see their bodies in parts, and to evaluate each part separately. Breasts, feet, hips, waistline, neck, eyes, nose, complexion, hair, and so on—each in turn is submitted to an anxious, fretful, often despairing scrutiny. Even if some pass muster, some will always be found wanting. [...]

In men, good looks is a whole, something taken in at a glance. It does not need to be confirmed by giving measurements of different regions of the body; nobody encourages a man to dissect his appearance, feature by feature. As for perfection, that is considered trivial—almost unmanly.

—Susan Sontag, “A Woman’s Beauty: Put-Down or Power Source?”

The types of annotations used most often include the following:

1. Restating the language of the text
2. Asking questions about the text
3. Challenging the text’s ideas or details
4. Comparing and contrasting the text with other things
Reflecting on a text in freewriting

Your initial impressions of a text, which you can record with annotations, will often lead you to further thoughts about it. You can develop these thoughts with freewriting. Like annotating, freewriting is an invention technique that serves as a source of ideas for writing. In freewriting, you record your ideas, reactions, or feelings about a text without arranging them in any special order. You simply write down what you think about the passage, without worrying about spelling or grammar. The point is to get your ideas down on paper and not to censor or judge them prematurely. Freewriting, in fact, offers you a way to pursue an idea, to develop your thinking to see where it may lead.

Both annotation and freewriting precede the more intricate and deliberative work of analysis, interpretation, and evaluation (see 2c–e). Annotation and freewriting also provide a convenient way to prepare for writing essays, papers, and reports. These two informal techniques work well together; the brief, quickly noted reactions of annotation complement the more leisurely paced reflections of freewriting.

Here is an example of one reader’s freewriting about the preceding annotated passage by Susan Sontag. Notice how the writer uses the freewriting exercise to reflect on and ask questions about the passage.

Example of Freewriting

Interesting questions. Women do seem to think more about their looks than men do. But since it’s men women wish to please by looking good, men may be responsible (some? much?) for women’s obsession with appearance. How far have women bought into the beauty myth? How far are they responsible for obsessing about beauty? How about money and profit? And at whose expense?

Why don’t men need to be beautiful? To please parents--employers? To attract a mate? To be considered “normal”? Sontag says that beauty is irrelevant to men--men judged by different measures--strength, effectiveness, competence. She doesn’t mention power, money, status. She leaves things out--intelligence and moral qualities, kindness, decency, generosity. How important are these?

Distinction between desiring to be beautiful (perhaps to be desired or admired) and needing to be. There’s nothing wrong with women wanting to be attractive, to
look their best. The problem occurs when desire becomes obligation, wasting women’s talents, minimizes them, keeps them subservient.

Parts and whole--are women concerned with parts of their bodies--certain parts? Their overall appearance? Their sense of self? Silicone breast implants? Cosmetic surgery generally? (But: men have nose jobs, facelifts, even pectoral implants.) Men are concerned with some parts of their bodies more than others.

What about the words used to describe good-looking women—or good-looking men? A “beautiful” woman but a “handsome” man. A “foxy” lady, a “gorgeous” woman (guy?), an “attractive” girl, a ??? And what of men? “Handsome” does most of the work. So too does “good-looking.” Though we also have “pretty boy” and “hunk”--derogatory? Hmm. Statuesque? Powerfully built? A real he-man?

**EXERCISE 2–1  Annotating And Freewriting**

Annotate one of the following passages. Then develop your initial thoughts about the passage by freewriting.

1. Americans are at last realizing that the acquisition of goods is not the whole of life. Consumption, on one level, is turning insipid, especially as the quality of the artifacts themselves seems to be deteriorating. On another level, consumption is turning sour. There is a growing guilt about the masses of discarded junk—rusting automobiles and refrigerators and washing machines and dehumidifiers—that it is uneconomical to recycle. Indestructible plastic hasn’t even the grace to undergo chemical change. America, the world’s biggest consumer, is the world’s biggest polluter. Awareness of this is a kind of redemptive grace, but it doesn’t appreciably lead to repentance and a revolution in consumer habits.

   —Anthony Burgess, “Is America Falling Apart?”

2. I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are “handicapped” and “disabled.” I made the choice a number of years ago, without thinking, unaware of my motives for doing so. Even now, I’m not sure what those motives are, but I recognize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People—crippled or not—wince at the word “cripple,” as they do not at “handicapped” or “disabled.” Perhaps I want them to wince.

   —Nancy Mairs, “On Being a Cripple”
Using a double-column notebook

To create a double-column notebook, simply divide your page in half. One half is for summarizing and interpreting what you read. Use this side of the page to record as accurately as you can your understanding of what the text says. Use the other side to respond to what you have read, to think about its implications, and to relate it to other things you have read or otherwise experienced.

The advantage of a double-column notebook is that it encourages you to be an active reader, to think about what you read and to make connections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARIZE</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summarize the text.</td>
<td>Respond to your summary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret the author’s ideas.</td>
<td>Reflect on the author’s ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain the ideas succinctly.</td>
<td>Consider whether you agree or disagree—and why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify important details.</td>
<td>Raise questions about the details you have observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate the details to the central idea.</td>
<td>Relate the text and the writer’s main idea to other things you have read and to your own experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computer Tip

Using Separate Windows for Writing

You can work on more than one document at a time by using separate windows for each document. You can view documents simultaneously, or you can switch between them. You may wish, for example, to add material from one document into another, perhaps material from an earlier draft into a later one, or perhaps notes from a brainstorming document into a draft, which elaborates those notes. You can also view the documents at the same time by selecting the VIEW or WINDOW feature of your word processing program.
**SUMMARY**

Sontag argues that beauty is an essential attribute of women but that it is an incidental attribute of men.

Sontag suggests that women’s concern for beauty makes them narcissistic—preoccupied with themselves and fascinated with their looks.

Sontag emphasizes the way women’s concern for beauty makes them appear immature and dependent.

Society—men and women—hold women to a high standard of beauty—focus first on how women look.

Women are viewed by their parts—figure, face, eyes, legs, breasts, lips, etc. Men are viewed as a whole. Women have great legs, hair, breasts, complexion etc. Men aren’t dissected this way.

**COMMENTS**

Does she mean that people always consider beauty in looking at women? What replaces beauty in looking at men—their height? Strength? Power?

Is this necessarily the case? Can’t a woman be beautiful—or not—and know it, but not be preoccupied with beauty?

Dependency on other people’s views of them. Immaturity because beauty is superficial.

Men are to “blame” for expecting women to be as beautiful as they can be. Women are complicit in going along, and thus are also to “blame”?

A man’s parts are “private”—not viewed and commented on. Other things matter more for men—money and status and power.

Sample Double-Column Notebook

with your reading and experience rather than to consider a text in isolation. You can use the double-column notebook to think further about your earlier reactions, which you may have recorded in annotations or freewriting, and to sustain a conversation with the writer and with yourself. The accompanying chart outlines how to use a double-column notebook.

Here is an example of the double-column notebook. Notice how one side of the two-column notebook summarizes and interprets Sontag’s idea and how the other side raises questions, offers judgments, and makes connections.

**EXERCISE 2–2  Beginning a Double-Column Notebook**

Create your own double-column notebook by following Highlights of the Double-Column Notebook. You may use a passage from a reading required for one of your courses or choose a reading selection from this book. Then consider how your double-column notebook entries might prepare you to write an essay or report.
Writing a summary

A summary is a compressed version of a text in which you explain the author’s meaning in your own words. You summarize a text when you need to give your readers the gist of what it says. A summary should present the author’s text accurately and represent his or her views fairly. Although there is no rule for how long or short a summary should be, a summary of a text is always shorter than the text itself. Your goal in summarizing a text is to render a writer’s ideas accurately and fairly.

A paraphrase, which is similar to a summary, tends to be nearly as long as the text paraphrased. When you paraphrase a poem, for example, you explain its meaning in your own words, line by line or stanza by stanza. Unlike a summary, a paraphrase follows the order of ideas, images, and details in the original text.

Writing a summary requires essentially two kinds of skills: identifying the idea of the text you are summarizing and recognizing the evidence that supports that idea. One strategy for writing a summary is to find the key points that support the main idea. You can do this by looking for clusters of sentences or groups of paragraphs that convey the writer’s meaning. Because paragraphs work together, you cannot simply summarize each paragraph independently. You may need to summarize a cluster of paragraphs to convey the idea of a text effectively.

The accompanying chart explains what you need to do.

How to Write a Summary

1. Read the text carefully, looking for the main idea and important supporting points.
2. Write a sentence that identifies the writer’s main idea.
3. Write a few sentences that explain the key supporting points from different paragraphs or paragraph clusters.
4. Write a draft of your summary by putting together the sentences you wrote for steps 1–3, in the order you wrote them.
5. Revise your summary by adding transitional words and phrases to link your sentences. Add introductory and concluding sentences as necessary.
Here is an example of the process at work on the passage about women’s beauty by Susan Sontag (see 2b-1).

General idea of passage: Women are seen as superficial and trivial, concerned with surface beauty rather than with deeper qualities of character. Women are viewed as beautiful objects, valued for how they look rather than for who and what they are.

Key supporting points:
- Women’s preoccupation with their beauty is a sign of their self-absorption and inconsequentiality.
- Women’s concern for beauty is a form of enslavement that results from their need to always care about their appearance, all the while being objectified as mere body parts.
- Men are less concerned about their appearance, especially with trying to perfect their outward look.

To create a smooth summary from these sentences, it is necessary to add introductory and concluding sentences. Transitional wording is also needed. Basically, however, you can follow the order devised for the passage as reflected in the sentences for the main idea and key supporting points.

Here is a revised version that avoids direct quotation from the original text. Also avoided are opinions or judgmental words and phrases. Notice, too, how the writer and text are identified in the opening sentence.

Revised Summary

In her essay “A Woman’s Beauty: Put-Down or Power Source?” Susan Sontag explains how women’s need to appear beautiful trivializes them, making them concerned with superficial appearances and identifying them as creatures pre-occupied with how they look rather than who and what they really are. Sontag suggests that women’s preoccupation with physical beauty is a sign of their self-absorption and lack of power. Through being taught to see themselves as mere body parts, women become both objectified and ridden with anxiety that their parts may not measure up. Unlike women, men are viewed for their good looks overall rather than for the beauty of their particular parts. Also unlike women, men are perceived as more serious, more sure of themselves, and more powerful than the women who anxiously labor to be beautiful to please them.
A final note: When you are working with readings for a research essay or project, you have a choice of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting the text. For advice about deciding when to summarize, paraphrase, or quote, see 45i.

**EXERCISE 2–3**  **Writing a Summary**
Write a summary of a passage of your choice.

**2c  Analyzing what you read**

When you **analyze** a text, you isolate and look closely at its parts (the beginning, middle, and ending of an essay or article, for example, or the sequence of events in a story). You focus on one element at a time, observing its details. Then you look for connections and relationships among those details. Your goal in analyzing a text is to understand it, to see how its parts fit together to make sense as a whole.

Your analysis of a text can only be as good as the evidence that supports it. And that evidence begins with what you notice or observe in the text. It is crucial, then, to learn to look carefully, to notice details, and to make accurate observations about the texts you read.

**1  Observing details**

The kinds of observations you make about a text will depend on the kind of text you are reading. If you are reading a scientific report, you will observe its argument and the evidence that supports it. If you are reading a psychological abstract, you will attend to the purpose and limits of the study as well as to the kind of field research it may involve. In reading literary works you will consider such elements as diction and imagery (especially for poetry), character and conflict (especially for fiction and drama), and style and structure.

Here are some observations you might make about the Sontag piece.

- Sontag focuses throughout on surface beauty—on appearance.
- She distinguishes between beauty in women and men.
• She sees women’s obsession with beauty as dangerous.
• She describes men as strong and competent.
• She italicizes certain words.
• She places some sentences in parentheses.
• She puts certain words in quotation marks.
• She punctuates heavily with dashes.

2 Connecting the details

It is not enough, however, simply to observe details about a text. You must also connect them with one another. To make a connection is to see one thing in relation to another. You may notice that some details reinforce others, or that the writer repeats certain words. Perhaps the writer sets up a contrast (as Sontag contrasts women’s and men’s attitudes toward beauty).

While you are noticing aspects of a text, you can also begin making connections among its details. Your goal is to see how the connected details help you make sense of the text as a whole. Making observations about a text and establishing connections among them form the basis of analysis. From that basis you begin to consider the significance of what you observe and proceed to develop an interpretation.

EXERCISE 2–4 Making Observations and Connections
Read the passage by Susan Sontag and make at least two new observations about it. Relate these observations to one another or to any you made earlier. As you begin to group your observations, identify the connections that emerge.

2d Formulating an interpretation

An interpretation is a tentative or provisional conclusion about a text based on your analysis of it (your observations and connections). To arrive at an interpretation, you need to make inferences based on your observations. An inference is a statement you make based on what you have observed. You infer a writer’s idea or point of view, for instance, from the examples and evidence he or she provides. Inferences drive the interpretative process. They push you beyond making observations toward explaining them and the text.
1 Making inferences

You make inferences in everyday life all the time, and there is nothing mysterious about the process of making them. If you see someone at 8 A.M. with a large ring of keys opening a classroom door in a university building, you may infer that he or she is a member of the school staff whose job it is to unlock classroom doors. You may, of course, be right or wrong about your inference, but you will have made a reasonable inference nonetheless.

The same is true when you make inferences about a text. Your inferences are a way of understanding the text by “reading between the lines,” by discovering what is implied rather than explicitly stated.

The freewriting about the Sontag passage contains examples of inferences. Here are a few additional inferences a reader could draw from the Sontag passage.

• Sontag thinks the double standard by which women are judged for their beauty and men by other qualities is wrong (paragraph 1).
• She implies that few women can meet the high standards for beauty that society imposes (paragraph 2).
• She seems to approve of the way masculine beauty is considered as a sum of each feature of a man’s appearance and implies that this would be better for women as well (paragraph 3).

Sontag does not say any of these things explicitly, but readers might infer them. Remember that an inference can be right or wrong, and thus different readers might debate the reliability of these or other inferences. The important thing is not to be afraid to make an inference because you think a particular inference might be challenged or questioned. Critical reading involves thinking. Thinking involves making inferences. Making inferences and thinking about what you read help you arrive at an interpretation of a text.

2 Arriving at an interpretation

The step from drawing inferences to arriving at an interpretation is small. An interpretation is a way of explaining the meaning of a text; it represents your way of understanding the text expressed as an idea.

Your goal in interpreting any text is to understand it so that you can explain its meaning accurately. Informative texts, such as newspaper reports
about current events or textbook material about scientific processes, require factual understanding and accuracy. Literary texts demand accurate observations and defensible inferences. Persuasive interpretations are characterized by these qualities.

When you arrive at an interpretation, look back at the text’s details to reconsider your initial observations as well as to review the connections you established to see if they still make sense. Consider whether your inferences are defensible—that is, whether you can offer support on their behalf. Look also to see if additional details can support your inferences, or whether you wish to make different inferences that may lead to another interpretation.

2e Evaluating a Text

In reading to interpret, you give the author a chance to make a point or to develop an idea without judging the merit of that point or the value of that idea. You thus recognize the writer’s meaning as paramount and your primary aim to understand what the writer says. In reading to evaluate, however, you want to both understand and assess the writer’s idea. If you find yourself disagreeing with the writer’s idea, you may refuse to accept other dimensions of the text, including the values it reflects.

Evaluating a text involves making judgments about it. You consider its effectiveness, and you assess the cultural values it embodies. When you evaluate a text, then, you make two kinds of judgments: one about quality, the other about values.

Your evaluation of a text grows out of your interpretation of it. To make fair and reasoned judgments about a text, you first need to be clear about what it says. You can evaluate the quality of a text only after you understand
its meaning. And you can evaluate the cultural values of a text only after you understand the cultural values it embodies or promotes.

Evaluating a text requires more than interpreting it reasonably. You also need to be alert to your own personal and cultural values. This is so in part because evaluation is affected by your likes and dislikes, by what attracts you or repels you, as well as by your knowledge of what the text reveals. Your evaluation of a text may also be entangled with your feelings about its subject.

Consider the following brief passage by Ernest Hemingway, a vignette based on a war experience.

While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you’ll only keep me from getting killed I’ll do anything you say. I believe in you and I’ll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy, and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody.

—Ernest Hemingway, In Our Time

In the process of interpreting this passage, consider your personal response to the events it describes. If you are repelled by the soldier’s behavior, ask yourself why. Is it because he acts cowardly? Is it because he prays out of desperation? Is it because once out of danger he forgets his promise, or because he visits a prostitute? Perhaps you are not bothered by his behavior or by his language. Do not be surprised if your reaction to this text differs from the reactions of others—in fact, be prepared for it. Every reader has a unique perspective on what a text reveals and a unique set of personal values to bring to Hemingway’s text.

Here is one reader’s evaluation of the Hemingway passage. The evaluation includes judgments about both its effectiveness and the cultural and moral values the text suggests.

**Evaluation**

In his brief vignette from In Our Time, Ernest Hemingway describes some realities of war. The young soldier in the trenches is terrified of the artillery shells
exploding near the trench, where he lies praying to God for deliverance. Instead of behaving heroically or courageously, the young soldier bargains desperately with God. His behavior is far from the ideal not only in the way he prays, but also in the way he breaks his promise. He is neither courageous nor honest. And his visit to a prostitute degrades the ideal of love as his earlier behavior degraded the ideals of war and faith.

The image of war Hemingway describes in the vignette is brutally realistic. He avoids glorifying war or idealizing the soldier’s behavior. And yet even though some may find the soldier’s behavior repugnant, Hemingway does not explicitly condemn that behavior. In fact, it might be argued that he helps readers understand the young soldier’s predicament. His visit to the prostitute, given the circumstances, is convincing. The passage brings readers into the soldier’s mind so they can understand how he feels. In its refusal to idealize war, it convinces us of its truth.

Evaluating this vignette or any text is not easy. Readers will disagree about both the cultural values this passage displays and how well the writer has described the soldier’s predicament. Readers also will disagree in their judgments of the soldier, some finding his behavior inexcusable and morally reprehensible, others finding it neither extraordinary nor troubling—given the situation. Making your own judgments about the text is what is important. Equally important, however, is to make those judgments responsibly, by grounding your evaluation in a thoughtful consideration of meaning.

**EXERCISE 2–5  Evaluating a Text**
Write one paragraph identifying the cultural values in the Sontag passage. Write another paragraph in which you evaluate the strengths and successes of either text.

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**Guidelines for Evaluation**

- Consider your initial reaction to the text and why you react as you do.
- Interpret the text, using the Steps to Interpretation.
- Decide whether you agree with what the text argues or illustrates.
- Identify and respond to the cultural values the text presents.
- Decide whether the text relates an idea or an experience effectively.
EXERCISE 2–6  Reading Evaluatively

Read the following passages carefully. Then write a couple of paragraphs in which you evaluate what the two writers are saying.

1. I have always disliked being a man. The whole idea of manhood in America is pitiful, in my opinion. [. . .] Even the expression “Be a man!” strikes me as insulting and abusive. It means: Be stupid, be unfeeling, obedient, soldierly, and stop thinking. Man means “manly”—how can one think about men without considering the terrible ambition of manliness? And yet it is part of every man’s life. It is a hideous and crippling lie; it not only insists on difference and connives at superiority, it is also by its very nature destructive—emotionally damaging and socially harmful.

   —Paul Theroux, “Being a Man”

2. I am demanding something of you that takes more courage than entering a battle: not to enter the battle. I am asking you to say no to the values that
have defined manhood through the ages—prowess, competition, victory—and to grow into a manhood that has not existed before. If you do, some men and women will ridicule and even despise you. They may call you spineless, possibly even (harshest of curses) womanish. But your life depends on it. My life depends on it.


Reading and interpreting visual texts is similar in many ways to reading and interpreting written texts. You make observations and connections; you draw inferences and formulate an interpretive conclusion for visual images—photographs, paintings, Web pages, advertisements—just as you do for written texts. In fact, some visual texts, advertisements, and Web pages, for example, often include both visual and verbal elements.

The following advertisement, for example, for Harley-Davidson motorcycles includes both language and a visual image. Notice how the motorcycle is highlighted in the picture. Notice, too, how there is no rider, since we are meant to picture ourselves sitting on the motorcycle. You will also notice that the picture includes a distant view of mountains. The outdoor space pictured is wide open, to suggest that the rider of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle is free to roam.

In fact, the language of the ad picks up on and develops what the picture suggests. It makes clear what the ad’s picture implies about the Harley as a symbol of freedom and independence. Notice, too, how the language of the ad talks directly to “you,” the reader. The tone is personal; the appeal is to living “on your terms.” The ad writer pulls us in further with a direct question: “Why not break for it”? Why not, indeed? The language and the picture reinforce each other to persuade us of the charms of riding into the sunset on our Harleys.

We should not overlook the ad’s headline and clincher. The headline refers to how cows sometimes will kick down a fence to get free. The clincher
“The Legend Rolls On,” refers to the reputation Harley-Davidson motorcycles have as the grandest and greatest of cycles, a favorite of serious bikers everywhere. Harleys have a history.

The next advertisement is a Web page for Verizon, the telecommunications company. Notice how the visual image and the words work together to convey a single impression. The words emphasize the ways customers can gain access to help. The picture similarly emphasizes service—with a smile.

**EXERCISE 3–1  Comparing Web Pages**

Write two paragraphs comparing the following Web page for WorldCom with the Verizon Web page. Be sure to comment on the pictures and the words for each. Explain the main idea of each Web page, and explain which company’s Web page you find more enticing, and why.
Responding to a Painting

The techniques you have been using to analyze ads and Web pages in this chapter and those you used to analyze verbal texts in Chapter 2 can be applied now to a painting by the nineteenth century painter Vincent van Gogh, whose *The Starry Night* is one of the best known of all modern paintings. Van Gogh painted *The Starry Night* in 1889 in St. Remy, located in southern France. After spending a few minutes looking carefully at Van Gogh’s painting, use the following questions to formulate a response to Van Gogh’s art. Use one or more of the techniques discussed in Chapter 2—annotating, freewriting, and the double-column notebook—to record your response. The questions in the following exercise can help you get started.
EXERCISE 3–2 Responding to *The Starry Night*

1. What is your first reaction to van Gogh’s painting? Why?
2. What strikes you most about *The Starry Night*?
3. What is your overall impression of the painting? How can you characterize its mood?
4. Do you like van Gogh’s choice of colors? Their intensity? Why or why not?
5. How do you respond to the painting’s swirling cyclical lines? To the thick brushstrokes?
6. Would you prefer a painting of the night sky that more closely resembled a photograph? Why or why not?
Writing to interpret a visual work

When you write to interpret a work of art, or a visual image, you must go beyond first impressions. It is not enough simply to state your opinion of the work or to express your feelings about it. Nor is it enough to offer an interpretation without providing evidence in its support. You need to explain why readers or viewers should understand the work as you do. Your evidence derives from your analysis or close scrutiny of the work’s elements.

To arrive at an interpretation you must also come up with an idea about the work. That idea will be based on connections you discover among your observations about the work’s details and inferences you draw from those observations.

When you interpret, you ask what a work means, not how you feel about it. Interpretation aims at understanding, at intellectually comprehending a work rather than simply reacting to it. To arrive at an interpretation, you will need to move beyond your personal reaction to a broader understanding of the work’s significance. One way to do this is to relate the work you are interpreting to other works by the same artist, to similar works by different artists, and to your own knowledge—what you know about the subject being analyzed. Another approach is to do some research.

A condensed version of the interpretive process follows. Here you will see how these steps can be applied in an interpretation of Vincent van Gogh’s painting *The Starry Night*.

### Steps in Interpreting Works of Art

1. Make observations about the work’s details (3b-1 and 2c-1).
2. Establish connections among your observations (3b-2 and 2c-2).
3. Develop inferences based on those connections (3b-3 and 2d-1).
4. Formulate an interpretation based on your inferences (3b-4 and 2d-2).
5. Relate the work (and your interpretation of it) to other works (2b).
1 Observing

To begin understanding a work, you must observe its details closely. In looking at a painting or photograph, you observe the shape, size, and color of its figures. You notice their relative positions in the foreground or background. You pay attention to shape, line, and color (and in a painting such as van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, to brushstroke as well). You look, in short, at the elements or characteristic features of works of literature and art.

In viewing Vincent van Gogh’s painting *The Starry Night*, for example, you will likely notice the intensity of its colors. You might notice as well the thickness of its brushstrokes. And you might also observe the way van Gogh surrounds each star with a circular burst of light, the cypress trees in the left foreground, and the whitish disc of the sun. You are likely to notice many other details as well. To interpret *The Starry Night*, however, you will also need to establish connections and discover patterns among your many observations.

2 Connecting

Once you observe the details and other aspects of a work, whether a painting or a work of art or literature, you should look for connections among your observations. Try to relate the things you see to one another as you look for both similarities and differences. Making connections is essential to analysis and interpretation: it helps you begin thinking about works of literature and art. Without connections you have only a series of fragmented observations.

In the van Gogh painting, for example, you might notice how the dark and quiet village in the bottom quarter of the painting contrasts with the bright sky. You might relate the shape of the cypress trees to that of the stars since both convey an intense image of burning. You might notice that the village’s scale is small compared with the sky and stars. And you might begin to reflect on the significance of such connections, asking yourself why the artist depicted these things as he did.

3 Inferring

By considering the significance of a work’s related details, you will be leaping to the third interpretive stage—inferring. There is no way around
drawing inferences when you interpret a work. If you do not draw inferences, you may wind up saying “I have no idea what this artist is doing.” And while particular works may stump you, you need to move beyond making observations and connections to thinking about their significance.

In the van Gogh painting, for instance, you might notice how much of the painting is occupied by moon, stars, and sky and how little space is accorded the village. On the basis of that contrast in scale you might wonder whether van Gogh’s painting describes the overwhelming power of nature, its potential to wreak destruction on helpless human inhabitants. In connecting van Gogh’s portrayal of the stars, moon, and sun with his depiction of the cypress as a flame shooting into the sky, you might see the painting as an image of an imminent conflagration. But you might see it in other ways as well.

**EXERCISE 3–3  Analyzing and Interpreting The Starry Night**

Answer the following questions about van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. Try to use the questions in conjunction with your own observations about the painting and the connections you make among those observations.

1. Since van Gogh does not depict the night sky realistically, what feeling or attitudes might he be expressing with his bright colors, thick brushstrokes, and swirling forms?

2. What can you infer from the painting about the artist’s state of mind?

3. How might someone from a culture in which stars are seen as sacred symbols, perhaps even as supernatural beings, interpret van Gogh’s work?

4. How might knowledge about van Gogh’s life and work aid you in understanding what he is portraying in *The Starry Night*? What kinds of information might be helpful in interpreting his painting?

**4  Interpreting**

Once you make observations, establish connections among those observations, and start to draw inferences, you are ready to formulate an interpretation of the work. Your interpretation should convey your understanding of the work. The evidence that supports your interpretation should come from the work’s details, whether you are interpreting van Gogh’s painting or another work of art or literature. Your interpretation may also be informed by what you have learned from consulting secondary sources.
Following is a short sample interpretation of *The Starry Night*. It is based on an analysis of the work’s elements along with information and ideas gleaned from reading about van Gogh’s life and work. Notice how the interpretation is organized. The authors begin by describing what they see. They then build on those observations to arrive at an interpretation, which they place in the final sentence of their paragraph for emphasis.

The artist is looking down on a village from an imaginary viewpoint. It [the painting] is framed by his newly discovered motifs: at left a cypress towers skywards, at right a group of olive trees clusters into a cloud, and against the horizon run the undulating waves of the Alpilles [a mountain range]. Van Gogh’s treatment of his motifs prompts associations with fire, mist and the sea; and the elemental power of the natural scene combines with the intangible cosmic drama of the stars. [. . .] The church spire seems to be stretching up into the elements, at once an antenna and a lightning conductor, like some kind of provincial Eiffel Tower. [. . .] van Gogh’s mountains and trees (particularly the cypresses) seemed to crackle with an electric charge. Confident that he had grasped their natural appearance, van Gogh set out to remake their image in the service of the symbolic. Together with the firmament, these landscape features are singing the praises of Creation in this painting.

—Ingo F. Walther and Rainer Metzger, *Van Gogh: The Complete Paintings II*

Although the authors did research to arrive at their interpretation of *The Starry Night*, you do not necessarily need to know a great deal about the artist’s life, about his other paintings, or about how his work relates to that of other artists. Such additional knowledge, however, can give you a different understanding of a work.

Here, for example, is some additional information about the painting, taken from one of van Gogh’s letters.

To look at the stars always makes me dream as simply as I dream over the black dots of a map representing towns and villages. Why, I ask myself, should the shining dots of the sky not be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France? [. . .]

I go out at night to paint the stars [. . .] I have a terrible lucidity at moments when nature is so beautiful; I am not conscious of myself any more, and the pictures come to me as in a dream [. . .]
That does not keep me from having a terrible need of—shall I say the word—religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars.

—The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh

Sources such as van Gogh’s letters and Walther and Metzger’s comments can help you better understand van Gogh’s work. They may lead you to see The Starry Night (or another work) in a way you might not have arrived at by simply viewing the painting. Consider, too, how the following interpretations that have been made of van Gogh’s painting influence your own interpretation of The Starry Night.

1. The painting is a realistic account of the position of the stars in June 1889 in St. Rémy, France (where van Gogh painted this nocturnal scene).
2. The painting expresses van Gogh’s personal agony and suffering during an especially trying time of his life.
3. The painting is an attempt to express a state of shock, to convey the inner turmoil of the artist’s mind and spirit.
4. The painting portrays the power and grandeur of nature, conveying simultaneously a sense of its beauty and its terror.
5. The painting expresses van Gogh’s sense of apocalypse, of the biblical end, and the imminent destruction of the world.

To arrive at your own understanding of the painting, you could consider these interpretations along with your own observations. You could also go to the library to read more of van Gogh’s letters as well as books about his life and art.

**EXERCISE 3–4  Interpreting The Starry Night**

Use your own observations along with the information and interpretive leads presented to develop a 500–750-word interpretation of van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. Use the artist’s own remarks if you wish, or do additional research.

**EXERCISE 3–5  Writing an Interpretation of a Visual Work**

Look carefully at a work of fine art—a painting, sculpture, or work of architecture. Using the four stages of interpretation discussed earlier, develop an interpretation of the work. Document any secondary sources you use, following the guidelines in Chapter xx.
3c Genre, medium, form

In writing about a visual work (as in writing about a verbal text) you need to determine just what kind of work you are look at—its genre. Genre refers to the type or category of a work. A painting, for example, might belong to the genre of landscape, still life, or portrait, and so on. Leonardo da Vinci’s famous *The Mona Lisa* combines elements of portrait and landscape. Van Gogh’s *The Starry Night* is a portrayal of nature, though it includes human elements as well. In any work that combines elements of different genres, you should consider the relationship between them, as you did in your analysis of van Gogh’s painting. The following questions provide some suggestions for what to focus on when looking at paintings.

1 Painting (Portraits)

• How much of the figure(s) is portrayed?
• What does the figure’s clothing and accessories reveal?
• What does the figure’s expression and posture convey? In portraits of two or more figures, how do the figures interact, and what is the significance of that interaction (or lack of interaction)?
• To what extent is the figure individualized?
• To what extent is the figure symbolic or representative of some political or social ideal?

2 Paintings (Landscapes)

• What does the landscape suggest about the natural world?
• What relationship is shown between human figures and nature?
• To what extent can the landscape be considered symbolic?

3 Photographs

We are so familiar with photographs that we may not look carefully at them or ever really consider them to be works of art. In fact, most photographs we look at are typical snapshots taken without much preparation
and without artistic intent. But photographs taken with intent and thoughtful planning are worth a closer look. Consider the photograph above, by Tina Barnes, which presents a picture of a family. Notice how each family member is isolated in his or her own space, and how each is occupied with his or her own thoughts and actions.

A photograph from the most casual snapshot to the most artistically arranged picture is always a selection of the details desired by the photographer from the multitude of details available. It is important also to recognize that photographers alter their photographs by cropping them. In this and other ways photographers control and shape the images they provide, just as painters do.

In addition to the questions provided for looking at paintings, here are some others to guide your viewing of photographs.

- What is the subject of the photograph?
- What details are visible? What details are emphasized? How?
• What kind of lighting does the photograph exhibit?
• What is conveyed through the photo’s color or lack of color?
• What is the relationship of the figures depicted?
• Who took the photograph and for what purpose?
• What is its title, and who provided it when?
• What is the overall impression conveyed by the photograph?

EXERCISE 3–6  Writing about a Visual Text
Select a visual text—a photograph, advertisement, or Web page with a visual image, or a reproduction of a painting. Use the techniques of observing, connecting, inferring, and concluding along with the questions provided for paintings and photographs to analyze the visual text. Then write a few paragraphs in which you offer your interpretation of it.