The word *research* has many meanings ranging from visions of scientists working in labs to students reading piles of articles and books. The primary focus of this chapter is on students’ process of research and incorporating that research into academic writing. An important concept related to research is that it is a process, not a single action. The process includes the following:

- Developing a research plan
- Finding research related to a topic
- Evaluating the credibility of sources
- Taking notes
- Integrating the research into your writing

Knowing this process allows students to allocate their research time accordingly. Let’s dig into the research process and explore what's available to you at the Kaplan University library.

**TYPES OF RESEARCH**

Before beginning the research process, it is important to identify and understand the two major types of research: *primary* and *secondary*. Primary research involves using firsthand sources for information, where the material comes directly from an expert, researcher, or writer. Primary research is the most credible type of research because the information is original, and you, the researcher, will be the one
to gather and analyze the information. Examples of primary research include interviews, surveys, originally authored articles, witness reports, and court records. If you write a research paper that includes an interview with an expert in the field, the paper is considered primary research.

Conversely, secondary research involves using information that relies on primary research. Referencing someone else's work (which is based on a primary source) is secondary research. Examples of secondary research include citing statistics gathered by a university or organization, referring to an individual's quote found in a periodical article or popular media, and book reviews or critiques. Table 11.1 notes common sources for the two types of research.

### Table 11.1 TYPES OF RESEARCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY RESEARCH</th>
<th>SECONDARY RESEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original writing</td>
<td>References to others' work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses</td>
<td>Items found in popular media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>Journal articles that reference others' work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Newspaper articles that reference others' work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Data results quoted in another source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>Book reviews or critiques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can use both types of research, primary and secondary, in your writing; the variety of using both types of sources adds validity and depth to the paper. You determine the need for either type of research in your research plan.
DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PLAN
Developing a research plan is the first phase in the research process. A well-organized research plan provides a “road map” for the journey of researching and writing. Taking time at the beginning of the project assists in providing an organized structure needed in the research process. The following steps describe and explain the process of developing a research plan, as illustrated in Figure 11.1.

1. Decide on a topic
2. Consider the purpose
3. Identify sources and key words
4. Take notes
5. Evaluate credibility of sources
6. Develop an outline
7. Create a timeline
8. Review plagiarism guidelines
9. Request information

Figure 11.1: Steps in the Research Process

Decide on a Topic for Your Research
Choose a topic that is personally interesting and meaningful, while keeping the project requirements in mind. Having passion about the
topic makes the research process go more smoothly. It is also important to consider how much research the topic might yield, and if that research is accessible through your research venues (e.g., Kaplan University's library). It is useful to phrase the selected topic as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about the effect of stress on the body, you could use the following question: *What effect does stress have on a person’s emotional and physical well-being?*

**Consider the Purpose of the Research**

Decide what research approach to take based on the nature of the topic. Are you required to write a persuasive paper that takes a position on an issue? Is the research result intended to inform or designed to entertain? Knowing why you are writing on a certain topic and what you want to achieve as a result of your research and writing helps you narrow down your choices of research sources.

**Identify Possible Sources and Key Words for Your Information**

Look for a variety of sources for your research. Internet resources, the Kaplan library, books, government reports, surveys, and journal articles are a few possible sources. You can also consider less traditional sources, such as credible media broadcasts, documentaries, educational institution Web sites, nonprofit organization publications, and legislative or court documents. Define key words to help refine your search. In the example noted earlier, key words to use in a search on the topic of stress are *stress, effects of stress on the body, or health and stress.*

**Take Notes on Information**

Read and review your gathered information, while taking notes on important aspects of the sources. Include original quotes, summaries, paraphrases (make sure to distinguish which are which), and your reactions to the information. Organize your notes in a way that
makes sense and is most helpful to you. It is useful to arrange notes and references by major topics and then subtopics. As you take notes, be sure to accurately record which sources you are using and the page numbers from which you are getting information.

**Evaluate the Credibility of Sources**
Review sources for the credibility of the author, timeliness of the publication, and accuracy of the content. Look up the authors on the Internet or library database to see if they truly are experts on the subject. How old is the article or book? Is the information in the article still relevant? Does some of it seem outdated? If so, you might want to look for articles that are more current. Does the content claim anything incredible? If so, you might want to double-check other sources to see if this same idea is presented. If not, it is worth the time to check and make sure you have accurate and reliable information.

**Develop an Outline**
Write an outline based on the research and separate the main points of the research into main headings. Provide subheadings in the outline to address supporting topics and details. You can find information on how to create an outline in Chapter 13, *Outlining*, pp. 143–158.

**Create a Timeline for Completion**
Set dates for completing the various parts of your research plan. To create the timeline, work backward from the due date of the paper to the date work will begin on the process. Set realistic deadlines. Expecting you can complete the entire research plan in two hours probably isn’t realistic, and when you miss deadlines (even if they are personal deadlines), the experience can become stressful. Don’t let this happen. Break up your research plan into several manageable steps so you have plenty of time to complete each part of the plan effectively.
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS
An Hour a Day
It’s often difficult to block out five to seven hours of time in one or two days to “write an essay.” Furthermore, when it comes to school assignments, you must research most papers, so the “writing” actually involves researching, thinking, drafting, peer-reviewing, and then revising and editing. To do your best work, start early in the week, spending an hour a day on the tasks associated with your writing assignment. In the beginning stages, concentrate on narrowing your topic, doing research, and drafting. In the next section of this Guide, you will continue this daily schedule by exchanging papers with peers for feedback, and then revising, editing, and proofreading before you submit your assignment.

• **Day One:** Visit Live Tutoring to narrow your topic and then search the Kaplan University library for three articles on this topic. Ask other students if they want to join a study group to exchange papers or bounce ideas off one another. Set up days and times to meet throughout the week.

• **Day Two:** Read and annotate articles, take notes, and visit Live Tutoring to get help with your thesis statement. Do a 10-minute freewrite on what you've learned about the topic so far. (Freewriting is a process where you sit down for a specific period of time and just write on your topic without paying attention to spelling, grammar, or punctuation. The idea is to generate ideas for a writing assignment; therefore, you write what you know about a topic, what you would like to know, or any other ideas related to your topic that come to mind. Continue writing, without stopping to correct your work for the time you have set aside for this exercise, generally 10–20 minutes.)

• **Day Three:** Ask questions from yesterday’s research notes and freewriting; get more articles if needed to answer questions. Read and annotate articles. Begin to outline your paper using your thesis as a guide. Meet with your study group if you have one set up. If not, you may want to invite fellow students to set up a study group.

• **Day Four:** Write your first draft from the outline. Visit Live Tutoring if you need help with developing body paragraphs or integrating research. Give your draft to a friend, family member, or coworker and ask for feedback.
If you are working with your peers in a course, solicit their feedback as well.

- **Day Five:** Revisit research articles and read your first draft again. Offer feedback on a peer's paper if one has been given to you. Based on the feedback you get from your peers, revise paragraphs, fill in the gaps, or delete unnecessary information; focus on content only at this stage.

- **Day Six:** Read through your paper again and check it against the rubric and assignment description for completeness. Edit at the sentence and word level. Check in-text and reference-page citations for correctness.

- **Day Seven:** Read the paper one more time to check for errors previously overlooked. Submit your paper on time.

### Review Plagiarism Guidelines and Understand Related Issues

Review guidelines for plagiarism that include using proper citation. Any thought, idea, or expression that is not your own needs to include a reference to the original source where that information came from. Your notes from the research effort should clearly indicate what is paraphrased and what is word-for-word from a source; this helps you avoid plagiarism while integrating the research into your paper (see Chapter 12, *Basic Citation Guidelines*, pp. 121–142).

### Request Information

Write for permission to use copyrighted material if necessary. Inquire about interlibrary loans for books or journals not readily available from the Kaplan library or a public library. If necessary (and within project requirements), schedule interviews with accessible experts.

Upon completing the preceding steps of the research plan, you can begin to write your first draft. An important aspect to remember is to allow enough time to complete each part of the research plan.

### CONDUCTING AN ONLINE SEARCH

You can conduct an online search for a research project using two main sources: the Kaplan University library and the Internet. This sec-
tion first discusses ways to search the Kaplan library and then covers how to search for credible sources on the Internet.

The Kaplan University Library
With over 52,000 e-books and thousands of citations, abstracts, and full-text articles, the Kaplan University library provides students with access to a wealth of electronic study resources. If you are new to the library, it is strongly suggested that you view the Library Orientation tutorial before using the library. You can find this tutorial on the library’s home page, along with links to the following resources:

- Super Search, which is a quick way to access several online databases at one time
- Electronic articles
- Electronic books
- Traditional books
- Course reserves, which is a special area where instructors can reserve specific articles for their classes to retrieve
- How-to information on how to use the library resources
- Contact information for library assistance

The Kaplan library has a number of databases available for gaining access to research. Databases are electronic collections of references on a specific topic, compiled according to specific disciplines, such as health, science, legal study, and education. When deciding on the type of database to use, ask the following questions: Does the database cover my topic? Who is the intended audience for articles in this database? Does the database cover the appropriate time period? Table 11.2 lists the databases that are currently available in the Kaplan library and a description of the types of articles you can find in each one. This list is frequently updated, so check the online library often.
Table 11.2 LIST OF DATABASES IN THE KAPLAN LIBRARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATABASES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Search™ Premier</strong></td>
<td><em>Academic Search™ Premier is the largest academic database, providing full-text articles from more than 4500 publications.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Source® Complete</strong></td>
<td><em>Business Source® Complete provides scholarly resources in the field of business.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Source® Premier</strong></td>
<td><em>Business Source® Premier is a popular business research database.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cabell’s Directory of Publishing Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><em>Cabell’s Directory of Publishing Opportunities helps students, faculty and others find opportunities to publish their research.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computer Source™</strong></td>
<td><em>The Computer Source™ database is a great resource for finding out about technology trends.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EBSCO Animals™</strong></td>
<td><em>The EBSCO Animals™ database houses research pertaining to animals.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ERIC</strong></td>
<td><em>The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) focuses on educational topics and research.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funk &amp; Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia</strong></td>
<td><em>Funk &amp; Wagnalls provides a solely online encyclopedia covering a great diversity of topics.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Google Books</strong></td>
<td><em>Google Books provides full-text versions of thousands of books.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Source®: Consumer Edition</strong></td>
<td><em>Health Source®: Consumer Edition focuses on a variety of health-related topics including nutrition, medicine and general health.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition</strong></td>
<td><em>The Health Source®: Nursing/Academic Edition database provides resources for many medical disciplines.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[continued]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATABASES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LISTA (Library, Information Science, &amp; Technology Abstracts)</td>
<td>The LISTA database focuses on topics related to information science such as library classification and cataloging, and information retrieval and management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MasterFILE™ Premier</td>
<td>MasterFILE™ Premier is a general interest database providing resources on many diverse topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS Ultra™ - School Edition</td>
<td>MAS Ultra™ - School Edition was created for high school libraries. With a focus on current events, the database houses full-text articles for nearly 500 publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Search Plus</td>
<td>Middle Search Plus is a magazine database aimed at middle school readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Source™</td>
<td>The Newspaper Source™ database contains full-text newspaper articles from nearly 300 national and international newspapers, as well as television and radio transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Search™</td>
<td>Primary Search™ is a magazine database aimed at elementary school readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Collection™</td>
<td>The Professional Development Collection™ houses full-text articles in the field of education and is geared toward professionals in the field of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProQuest Criminal Justice Periodicals Index™</td>
<td>The ProQuest Criminal Justice Periodicals Index™ provides indexing and abstracts for nearly 200 U.S. and international journals covering a broad range of criminal justice issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PubMed</td>
<td>The National Library of Medicine’s PubMed indexes research in the field of medicine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11.2 LIST OF DATABASES IN THE KAPLAN LIBRARY  [continued]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATABASES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Regional Business News™</em></td>
<td>Regional Business News™ focuses on full-text articles from business journals, magazines, and newspapers from around the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>TOPICsearch™</em></td>
<td>TOPICsearch™ contains current event articles in popular fields such as the social and natural sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vocational &amp; Career Collection™</em></td>
<td>Vocational &amp; Career Collection™ was created for vocational and technical libraries and houses articles from hundreds of trade-related magazines and other publications.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internet Searches

The Internet provides a convenient way to conduct research because of the ease of access to a wide variety of resources. It is important to appropriately use resources found on the Internet and ensure that the information is from a credible source. A number of search engines are available to assist in finding credible sources. Some services, such as ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center (http://www.eric.ed.gov/), provide free access to academic databases. Some specialized databases require a fee.

Search engines are used to find a Web site or search a database. A variety of search engines is available for free use, including the following:

- AOL.com
- Ask.com
- Bing.com
- Dogpile.com
- Google.com
Government resources for searching for government publications include the following:

- opencrs.com for Congressional Research Service Reports
- gao.gov for the Government Accountability Office
- bls.gov/ for the Bureau of Labor Statistics
- cdc.gov/nchs/ for the National Center for Health Statistics
- census.gov/ for the U.S. Census Bureau

**HOW TO EVALUATE SOURCES**

There is a wealth of information for use in research. The quality and credibility of research sources vary considerably. As such, it is important to locate sources related to the research topic and critically evaluate those sources. Sources obtained from the Internet need special consideration. Closely review the credibility of the URL. Because anyone can publish on the Web, it is important to separate credible, researched facts from biased opinions or information not based on research or review. Evaluate all sources for the credibility of the author, timeliness of the publication, and quality of the content of information.

**Author**

Consider the author’s credentials when evaluating the credibility of a source. When researching authors, consider their institutional affiliation (where the author works). Does the author work for an institution that has a solid reputation? Have you heard of the institution? In addition, review the values and mission of the organization. Other aspects of author credibility include past publications, educational background, and experience. Credible authors commonly publish in other
documents or books. Check the references section of other research to see if course textbooks or other resources cite the author.

**Timeliness**
Check the publication date of the source. Books usually list the copyright date on the first page where the publisher information is included. Electronic sources usually list the date for the latest revision at the bottom of the home page. Timeliness of publication depends on the nature of the research. For example, when providing background or historical data, the date can be older. For topics related to current events or topics related to science and technology, you most likely will want information that is more current. A general rule regarding dates is to include information written within the last five years when historical or foundational material is not being used. When researching topics related to current events, try to find sources as close to the present year as possible. The more timely the publication, typically, the more current (relevant) the information.

**Content**
To evaluate the credibility of the content of the source, begin by reading the author’s preface and review the table of contents. Does the information include major concepts related to your topic? Also, review the references section at the end of articles and books. Frequently, authors will cite other sources to add to the credibility of the content of the information.

Consider the intended audience for the publication—and whether content appropriate for that audience is also appropriate for your paper. Highly specialized information needs to be explained in your paper, whereas too general information needs further research to add necessary insights. Look for bias and emotionally charged words and language in the writing; if the content shows bias, the author should acknowledge the bias toward the topic.
Further evaluation efforts include the writing style, which should be clear and concise. If graphics or other visuals are included, the information needs to be readable, clearly labeled, and add value to the text. Additionally, look to see if the source has been peer-reviewed (i.e., reviewed by a group of experts in the field). The peer review adds credibility because other individuals who are considered experts in the field have reviewed the information prior to publication. The information should be based on fact and researched opinion rather than unsupported claims and opinions.

Internet Sources
Because anyone can publish on the Web, carefully review Internet sources. Performing a general Internet search can be very time-consuming based on the amount of information available through a general word search. Just because something is on the Web does not mean it is a credible source. In addition to evaluating sources for the criteria listed previously, Internet sources should also include an evaluation based on the following:

- **Blogs, wikis, newsgroups, and listservs**: These sources are available to anyone, and once registered, you can post information on a topic. Although many contain credible information, the sources can be biased because anyone can post a comment or share a personal opinion and it might be difficult to distinguish fact from opinion. Be certain to verify information and the author’s qualifications prior to citing this material.

- **Commercial (.com) sites**: URLs ending in .com indicate a commercial site. The purpose of commercial sites is to sell a product or service. This information is typically biased toward a product or opinion. Commercial sites can be used for a specific purpose, but this should be indicated in the writing. For example, commercial sites are useful when conducting research on a specific product for a marketing class.
• **Noncommercial (.edu, .gov, and .org) sites:** These sites are considered to have more reliable information than commercial sites. The intention of the sites is not to sell a product or service; however, because these sites focus on a specific institution, government agency, or organization mission, some bias might exist.

• **Author affiliation:** A listing that includes author affiliation to an organization or institution does not always mean the organization approved the content of the writing. If a phone number or e-mail address for the organization is included, contact the organization or institution to verify the validity and approval of the content, especially if it is questionable.

• **Current links and information:** Links should be active and not broken. Information should not reference outdated information or events. If it does, the rest of the material might be just as outdated.

• **Promotion of products or services:** A site that includes a large number of pop-up ads or text ads takes away from the objectivity of the author. The purpose and intention of the site needs to be clearly understood.

The following is a checklist of criteria you can use to evaluate a source whether online or in print. You do not have to evaluate every source for every detail mentioned in the checklist.

1. **Author**
   - Who is the author?
   - Does the author work for an institution that has a solid reputation?
   - Have you heard of the institution?
   - What are the values and mission of the organization?
   - Has the author published in the past?
   - Does the author have a relevant academic degree?
114 RESEARCHING, OUTLINING, AND CRAFTING YOUR ESSAY

❑ What type of experience does the author have in the field?
❑ Have other publications or course textbooks referenced this author?

2. Timeliness
❑ Is the publication date current?
❑ Does the source include the most recent edition or latest revisions?
❑ Does the topic need current information?

3. Content
❑ Does the information in the preface or table of contents include major concepts related to your topic?
❑ Is there a references section at the end?
❑ Who is the intended audience for the publication?
❑ Is the content highly specialized, too basic, or appropriate?
❑ Are the words and language biased or emotionally based?
❑ If the content of the information demonstrates author bias, does the author acknowledge bias toward the topic?
❑ Is the writing style clear and concise?
❑ Do graphics or other visuals present readable and clearly labeled information? Do they add value to the text?
❑ Was the writing peer-reviewed?
❑ Is the information based on fact and researched opinion rather than unsupported claims and opinions?

4. Internet Sources
❑ Does the author have some credibility in the field?
❑ Is the author biased, as demonstrated through advertisements promoting a product, service, organization, or political view?
❑ Does the source include a phone or e-mail address to verify validity of the author and obtain approval for publishing the content?
❑ Are links active and accurate?
❑ Does the source reference current information or does it appear outdated?
Is the information referenced from a noncommercial site?
(Social networking tools such as Facebook, blogs, or wikis have not been used.)

**NOTE-TAKING METHODS**

Note taking is an important part of the research process. You use your notes in the evaluation process of deciding what information will be included in the research paper. Common note-taking methods include notebook method, note cards, outlining, mapping, and charting.

You can record notes electronically by creating a database for sources or by using handwritten 3 x 5 note cards. Although the format is dependent on the student, several points pertain to all methods of note taking:

- **Know the topic.** Note taking can assist in understanding a subject better. Avoid copying words directly from a source. If you are able to accurately paraphrase information about an idea, concept, or general information, you truly know the information. Be certain to note exactly where all your information comes from in order to avoid plagiarism.

- **Choose information that applies to the topic.** Research on a subject can cover a wide range of information. Select only information from research that directly pertains to your topic. Not every detail needs to be included in notes.

- **Write clearly.** If you take notes in a handwritten format, write legibly and record the information accurately. If using a form of shorthand, be sure you will be able to interpret the abbreviated version of writing.

- **Use color.** Highlight important sections of notes with various colors. It is useful to select a specific color for each major category in the research and a different color for the corresponding subtopics.
Select a note-taking method. Choose a note-taking method that is easy to understand and lists all the required information that will later be included in the references section of the paper.

The following sections explain the basic concepts behind each of the note-taking strategies mentioned earlier.

**Notebook Method**

Using this method, you record information on a single page or multiple pages in a notebook. When recording information electronically, you can create a template, such as the following example, in a Microsoft® Word document.

```
Author: ____________________________
Title: ____________________________
Publisher/Internet site: ________________
Year of publication/copyright: ________________

Write down the topic.

Review the source material and record important quotes, paraphrase information, summarize key points, and create any notes on the material.

Provide any personal reflection on the information.

Record the page number or URL for the source of information.

Repeat the process for information from the same source.

Create a new page for a separate source.
```

Another way to approach the notebook method is to use sheets of paper instead of your word-processing program. Begin by creating three columns. In the left column, write down the topic. In the middle column, record important quotes, paraphrase information, summarize key points, and create any notes on the material. Provide any personal reflection on
the information. In the right column, record the page number, electronic article database name, or URL for the source of information.

Note Cards
You can use note cards for research as well. You can use either 3 x 5 index cards or you can create note cards in Microsoft® Word.

Use a separate note card for each source. On each card, record the source information in a particular style format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or a specific style your instructor wants you to use. Next, compile your notes from the source, whether it is a quote, paraphrase, or summary (see Chapter 12, *Basic Citation Guidelines*, pp. 121–142, for a full explanation of these terms). You can take notes on the back of the cards themselves so you always know exactly where your references were found. It also helps to record the page number from your sources because some citation styles require that information even for paraphrases. Figure 11.2 shows a sample note card with source information. This information can be printed on one side of the card, and your notes, quotes, or paraphrases can be written on the other side of the card.

![Sample Research Notecard](image)

**Figure 11.2: Sample Research Notecard**

Outlining

The outlining format for taking notes can provide a clear division between main topics and subtopics. Often, longer sources include major headings and subheadings, which can serve as a format for the research outline. Divide information in the outline into major topics, subtopics, and supporting details. When available, it is also important to include the page number after each major topic or supporting point. A sample outline for a paper on “The Benefits of Online Learning” is shown here.

Mapping

The mapping method of note taking is useful for organizing information in a relationship format. A main idea is presented and supporting points are connected to the main idea. Figure 11.3 shows a sample map.
Charting
When conducting research on a topic involving chronological order (such as a history paper), the charting method is useful for organizing facts and dates. Create columns on notebook paper or create a tem-
plate in Microsoft® Word. Table 11.3 shows an example of the charting method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANCE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>PAGE NO.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Research is a critical step in writing a strong and interesting paper. When gathering your research, remember to critically evaluate your sources to make sure that they are relevant to your topic and credible, too. As a college student, you want to ensure your sources are also scholarly sources that can be found easily through the Kaplan University library.
Consider times when someone has taken credit for your work whether at school, in the workplace, or in other situations. Ideas, words, artwork, music, videos, and other tangible products you create are yours, and no one has the right to take those products and pass them off as their own, whether intentionally or unintentionally. To do so is simply stealing and the people doing this are misrepresenting themselves. When it comes to writing, this principle is strictly adhered to in both school and the workplace. In fact, there have been several highly publicized instances where people have suffered severe consequences for using others’ ideas or words without permission. They have lost millions of dollars, and they have been publicly humiliated by being called out on national television, in addition to facing the prospect of no one ever publishing their work again.

People can lose jobs and ruin careers when they do not provide proper credit for work they borrow from someone else. This chapter is designed to help you avoid such problems by providing you with the basics behind citation, such as why and when we cite. While you are in school, you will be asked to apply this information to your own writing assignments by using a particular style guide. There are a variety of style guides in use at Kaplan University including APA, MLA and Bluebook, so you will learn how to look up and cross-reference
source information in the most commonly used styles. Always ask your instructor which style to use if it is not clear to you.

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?
Plagiarism occurs when you use words, ideas, photographs, or other creative works such as art without giving credit to the original authors or artists. When you do not cite where or whom you borrowed from, you are passing those ideas, words, or artwork off as your own, as your original creations; thus, you are stealing and taking credit for work you did not do. Whether intentional or not, that is plagiarism. Think of it this way: If you don’t mean to cheat on your taxes but you calculate your taxes wrong, the IRS still penalizes you. The same concept holds true for plagiarism. You might not intend to plagiarize; however, if you don’t know how or when to cite when you borrow information, you are still guilty of stealing someone else’s work. Therefore, it is crucial to learn the rules and use citation properly to avoid plagiarism.

Kaplan University has a firm plagiarism policy and you should be aware of what that policy is. You will find this policy in the syllabus of most, if not all, of your courses at Kaplan. It is also shown below.

The Kaplan University Plagiarism Policy (2010)

Kaplan University considers academic honesty to be one of its highest values. Students are expected to be the sole authors of their work. Use of another person’s work or ideas must be accompanied by specific citations and references. Though not a comprehensive or exhaustive list, the following are some examples of dishonesty or unethical and unprofessional behavior:

- Plagiarism: Using another person’s words, ideas, or results without giving proper credit to that person; giving the impression that it is the student’s own work.
- Any form of cheating on examinations.
BASIC CITATION GUIDELINES

- Altering academic or clinical records.
- Falsifying information for any assignments.
- Submitting an assignment(s) that was partially or wholly completed by another student.
- Copying work or written text from a student, the Internet, or any document without giving due credit to the source of the information.
- Submitting an assignment(s) for more than one class without enhancing and refining the assignment, and without first receiving instructor permission. In cases where previous assignments are allowed to be submitted for another class, it is the responsibility of the student to enhance the assignment with additional research and to also submit the original assignment for comparison purposes.
- Assisting another student with reasonable knowledge that the other student intends to commit any act of academic dishonesty. This offense would include, but would not be limited to providing an assignment to another student to submit as his/her own work or allowing another student to copy answers to any test, examination, or assignment.

In essence, plagiarism is the theft of someone else's ideas and work. Whether a student copies verbatim or simply rephrases the ideas of another without properly acknowledging the source, it is still plagiarism. In the preparation of work submitted to meet course requirements, whether a draft or a final version of a paper or project, students must take great care to distinguish their own ideas and language from information derived from other sources. Sources include published primary and secondary materials, electronic media, and information and opinions gathered directly from other people.
A discussion thread, computer program, marketing plan, PowerPoint presentation, and other similar work produced to satisfy a course requirement are, like a paper, expected to be the original work of the student submitting it. Copying documentation from another student or from any other source without proper citation is a form of academic dishonesty, as is producing work substantially from the work of another. Students must assume that collaboration in the completion of written assignments is prohibited unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. Students must acknowledge any collaboration and its extent in all submitted coursework. Students are subject to disciplinary action if they submit as their own work a paper purchased from a term paper company or downloaded from the Internet.

Kaplan University subscribes to a third-party plagiarism detection service, and reserves the right to check all student work to verify that it meets the guidelines of this policy.

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense and may result in the following sanctions:

1st offense: Failure of the assignment in which the action occurred.
2nd offense: Failure of the class in which the action occurred.
3rd offense: Expulsion or permanent dismissal from the University.

Plagiarism charges remain on a student’s record permanently. Any offenses a student accumulates while completing a program will be carried over if and when a student reenrolls in a program or begins a new program at the University.

Procedures for processing plagiarism offenses are as follows: Charges of academic dishonesty brought against a stu-
dent shall be made in writing by the instructor to the Provost’s Office. When an offense has been committed, the Provost’s Office sends the student a copy of the plagiarism policy and a letter of the action taken, and informs the Academic Department Chair, the Academic Advisor, and the course instructor of any plagiarism charges. The Provost’s Office maintains a database of plagiarism offenses and a file of all plagiarism charges.

Self-Plagiarism
Self-plagiarism occurs when you present your own previously published work as if it were brand new. If you look at the Kaplan plagiarism policy, it states that submitting the same paper for more than one assignment is considered plagiarism. Although your paper from a previous class might not be published, you cannot use it for credit for more than one assignment. If you would like to use and expand on an assignment from a previous class, you must first submit your original assignment to your instructor and ask for permission to continue your research on the topic; however, your new assignment should be significantly different from the previous one.

In a professional sense, self-plagiarism is a serious offense because journals that publish your work want the most current research; they usually do not want to print previously published research. If you do not let publishers know that your work was previously published and they run your piece only to find out later that it was published in another journal, you will likely not ever be considered for publication again by either journal. This is also called multiple submissions and such practice is not acceptable in the publishing world unless a publisher specifically says that multiple submissions or previously published manuscripts are acceptable.

WHAT IS A CITATION?
Citing sources or providing citation means including select information about books, articles, or other sources you read and included
information from in your paper. The reasons you provide citations are (a) to give proper credit for words, ideas, graphics, or other information you borrow from others and (b) to help readers find sources you used in case they want to read more from those pieces for themselves.

Two main terms are associated with citation: in-text citation and full citation, both of which are explained in the following sections.

**In-Text Citation**

An in-text citation is a shortened notation that is inserted right into the text of a paper and indicates to readers that the information you just used was borrowed from someone else. It is shortened because a full entry with all of the information needed to look up a source would interfere with reading your paper. In most cases, an in-text citation is simply the author’s last name and date of publication or a page number. However, as you will learn shortly, in-text citation format varies depending on the style guide you use, and for some style guides, in-text citations vary between paraphrases and quotations, as well as what information is available to you on the original document that you are using. A couple of examples are as follows:

*For APA, you use the author’s last name and date of publication for a paraphrase, as in (Martinez, 2008).*

*In MLA, you use the author’s last name and page number, whether or not you paraphrase or quote, as in (Martinez 3).*

*If an author’s name is not available, you would include the title enclosed in quotation marks and then either the date of publication or page number depending on whether you are using APA or MLA, or some other guide. Here’s an example in APA format: (“The Good Student,” 2009).*
Each style guide dictates what information to include in an in-text citation, but it is important to remember that an in-text citation is a shortened citation meant to be unobtrusive to the reader, whereas a full citation is reserved for the reference page, bibliography, or works cited page (the name depends on what style guide you are using).

Full Citation
A full citation is all of the information readers need to know if they want to retrieve an article, book, or other source cited in your paper. These citations are listed on a separate page called the reference page, works cited page, or bibliography so that the full citation information does not interfere with reading the paper. Readers use in-text citations to cross-reference the full citation at the end of the document. For instance, if an in-text citation looks like this (Smith, 2002), a reader can turn to the page with the full citation and look for a book or article written by an author with the last name Smith and published in the year 2002.

One thing to remember about full citations is that the information you provide is based on the type of source because the way you look up and retrieve a book is quite different from the way you look up and retrieve a Web site or an article from an online database. A sample full citation in APA for a book looks like this:


whereas an APA full citation for a Web page looks like this:

As you can see from the previous examples, books are retrieved by looking up an author’s name, the year the book was published, the title, and the publisher. All of these are needed to ensure the reader has the same book that you used in your paper. A Web page, on the other hand, is a dynamic and electronic source, so it is retrieved by knowing the URL or Web address, as well as the title of the Web page or the name of the organization that sponsors the page or site, if one is provided.

**Why Do We Cite?**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are two main reasons to cite sources. The first is to give credit to those whose information we borrow. The United States is an individualistic society, which means individual contributions are highly valued. This also means that when we use an individual’s ideas, words, artwork, or anything else, we give credit to that individual. Giving credit is usually the main reason you cite in your school papers, but you also cite because your readers might want more information, too.

As readers make their way through your essay, article, or whatever form of writing you put out, they might take particular interest in the topic you wrote on; thus, they might want to do more research on their own. One way they can do that is to look up the sources you use in your paper. That is why there are two types of citation. The in-text citation shows readers where certain ideas or words came from, and the shortened version of citation cross-references the full citation at the end of the paper. From the full citation, readers then have all of the information they need to retrieve a source.

**When Do We Cite?**

Some students are confused by when they should cite information. A simple rule to follow is: Whenever information does not come out of your own head, you must cite it. This includes when you use someone’s words (quotations), ideas (paraphrases), and illustrations of
ideas (graphics). The following information discusses citation in relation to quotations and paraphrases in detail.

**Quotations**

You use quotations when you borrow someone else’s words and you want to use those exact words in your own paper. Quotations are actually used sparingly in most academic writing because quotations must include quotation marks and a citation, which often slow down the reading. Additionally, too many quotations make a paper sound more like a summary and your own original ideas are lost in the sea of quotations.

You can use three general guidelines for when to use quotations in a paper:

1. **When you are critiquing someone's exact words.** For instance, if you wanted to argue that your performance in the community theater last night was not as bad as a reviewer made it seem in a newspaper article, you would want to critique, thus quote, the exact words of the reviewer.

2. **When you want to include dialogue in your paper, and in that instance, you want to be sure you quote the person’s exact words.**

3. **When the original author's words are so eloquent and exact that you cannot find a way to paraphrase and still maintain the same meaning and/or image that the original passage does.**

When you borrow words (quotations) to include in your own paper, you have to do three things:

1. **Copy the words exactly as they are written in the original piece.**

2. **Enclose the words you borrowed in quotation marks, which look like this: “quotation.”**

3. **Include an in-text citation after the quotation and a full citation on the reference page.**
To help make your writing flow, it is good practice to use signal words to integrate quotations instead of just inserting them abruptly and separately. For example:

“Most conventional healthcare providers prescribe medicine that only alleviates a patient’s symptoms” (Jones, 2004, p. 3). “Alternative medicine seeks to help patients prevent illness by understanding underlying causes” (Smith, 2007, p. 99). Some people think there is a good way to balance the two for optimal health.

In this example, the quotes are related to the subject in that the paragraph is comparing conventional and alternative medicine as evidenced by the last sentence in the paragraph; however, this paragraph could be more informative and the writing could flow better if signal words were used.

Signal words help smoothly integrate a quotation into a paragraph so that the writing flows. Signal words usually indicate the position of the author on the subject you are writing about. Table 12.1 shows some sample signal words and phrases.

**Table 12.1 SIGNAL WORDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral Position</th>
<th>Shows Agreement</th>
<th>Shows Disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Admits</td>
<td>Defends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes</td>
<td>Agrees</td>
<td>Contends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains</td>
<td>Concedes</td>
<td>Holds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrates</td>
<td></td>
<td>Insists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[continued]
Table 12.1 SIGNAL WORDS [continued]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEUTRAL POSITION</th>
<th>SHOWS AGREEMENT</th>
<th>SHOWS DISAGREEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observes</td>
<td>Warns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points Out</td>
<td>Suggests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Says</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When rewriting the previous example using signal phrases, it might look something like this, where the highlighted areas include signal words that help make the writing flow more smoothly than in the previous example:

Conventional medicine is often viewed as providing immediate relief for illness. Jones (2003), a 13-year DO in New York City, contends that “most conventional healthcare providers prescribe medicine that only alleviates a patient’s symptoms” (p. 3). This sentiment is echoed by another healthcare provider who explains that “alternative medicine seeks to help patients prevent illness by understanding underlying causes” (Smith, 2007, p. 99). It seems logical, therefore, that optimal health can be achieved by balancing conventional and alternative approaches to medicine because they both have benefits to patients.

Long or Block Quotations

For most style guides, quotations that are 40 or more words are considered long or block quotes. They are often called block quotes because they are set off separate from a paragraph in an indented block. By setting off a long quote like this, it makes it easier for readers to differentiate the quote from the rest of the text. The following is a sample block quote using the MLA style:
MLA is a style guide that allows authors and readers to give credit for borrowed work in a uniform way so that there is no confusion among readers as to what information is borrowed and how to look up sources that were used in a paper. (Martinez 3)

Paraphrasing
You are paraphrasing when you borrow someone else’s idea only but you put that idea in your own words. Paraphrasing is preferred when you want to incorporate research into your writing because too many quotations interfere with reading and often make your paper come across more like summarizing instead of putting forth original ideas of your own. Please refer back to the three guidelines for when to use quotations (p. 129).

The one critical aspect about paraphrasing is that you are simply borrowing an idea, and the words in which you express that idea have to be entirely your own. If you use too many of the original author’s words in your paraphrase, that is a case for plagiarism. You may, however, use technical terms and statistics from the original when you paraphrase.

Here are some guidelines to help you avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing:

1. Always make note of the source you are working with by putting the full citation in APA format at the top of your notebook page.
2. Read the original passage several times before attempting to paraphrase. Be sure to understand completely and clearly the idea being expressed and the context in which the material is being used.
3. Write down, in your own words, the idea of the passage without looking back at the original. Looking back can sometimes make you want to use the same words.
4. Determine if the wording in the paraphrase captures the exact meaning as the original.

5. Ask is the paraphrase used in the same context as the original? Is the borrowed idea used in the same manner that it was used in the original or has it been altered so that it serves a completely different purpose? Taking an idea out of context is faulty research and damages your argument.

6. Ask someone else to read the original, then read the paraphrase, and then compare the meaning and context between the two. (Adapted from Martinez, Peterson, Wells, Hannigan, & Stevenson, 2008, p. 85)

Preventing plagiarism begins with careful note taking while first reviewing a source and ends when the borrowed material is accurately cited in the form of the preferred style guide. The actual content of the paraphrase needs to be completely original, even when using a citation. The following examples show acceptable and unacceptable paraphrases:

**Original passage:** “Educational leaders posed with the task of integrating ethics into undergraduate general education curriculum are faced with finding faculty who are interested in the topic instead of forcing faculty who are not interested into teaching a subject they are not committed to” (Stevenson, 2007, p. 5).

**Acceptable paraphrase:** When it comes to teaching ethics in undergraduate programs, it is preferable to use faculty who have a profound interest in the subject to teach such courses (Stevenson, 2007).

**Unacceptable paraphrase:** Educational leaders have to find faculty who are interested in ethics instead of forcing teachers
who are not interested in teaching a subject they are not committed to (Stevenson, 2007).

The acceptable paraphrase is fine because it rewords the main idea of Stevenson’s original passage about the effectiveness of using willing and interested faculty to teach ethics in undergraduate courses. The unacceptable paraphrase is plagiarized because too many words from the original passage are used without quotation marks around those words.

Summarizing
Summarizing is very similar to paraphrasing in that you take information from a research source and put it into your own words, but the purpose and format for a summary differ from a paraphrase in the following ways:

- A summary captures the main points of a passage.
- A summary is meant to help students learn material so that they
  - know what the main points of a document are and
  - learn the material so well that they can capture the main ideas in their own words instead of using someone else’s words.

The following is an example of how to summarize information.

**Original passage:** Collaboration with others is part of living and working in the professional world. A high portion of our daily communication occurs in groups, such as family, coworkers, and friends. Regardless of career choice, it is likely that individuals will spend a considerable part of their personal and professional lives working in collaboration with others. The
The changing environment of the workplace has caused an increase in the use of virtual teams for collaborative projects. The major difference between a virtual team and a team that meets face-to-face is the distance that lies between members. It is distance that affects the interaction between group members. Technologies, such as teleconferencing, e-mail, Web-enabled chat, groupware, and shared file programs, have made communication at a distance and virtual collaboration possible. Through technology, virtual teams are able to interact, complete projects, and resolve conflicts (Martinez et al., 2008, p. 167).

To summarize the preceding paragraph, highlight the main ideas of the paragraph.

Collaboration with others is part of living and working in the professional world. A high portion of our daily communication occurs in groups, such as family, coworkers, and friends. Regardless of career choice, it is likely that individuals will spend a considerable part of their personal and professional lives working in collaboration with others. The changing environment of the workplace has caused an increase in the use of virtual teams for collaborative projects. The major difference between a virtual team and a team that meets face-to-face is the distance that lies between members. It is distance that affects the interaction between group members. Technologies, such as teleconferencing, e-mail, Web-enabled chat, groupware, and shared file programs, have made communication at a distance and virtual collaboration possible. Through technology, virtual teams are able to interact, complete projects, and resolve conflicts (Martinez et al., 2008, p. 167).

Now, put those main ideas into your own words (paraphrase).
Paraphrased passage: Today’s workplace is quite different than it was 20 years ago. More people are working remotely or companies are so large that they have different sites throughout the world. This change in the workplace has increased the need for virtual teams; however, the need for collaboration has not changed. Distance can affect how well a group works together, but modern technology, such as e-mail, instant messaging, groupware, and shared file programs have made communication with virtual team members possible and an effective means for getting the job done (Martinez et al., 2008).

Summaries are most helpful for learning new material. Summaries should be written in your own words because when you have read a passage closely enough or enough times that you can take the main ideas expressed in the original and put those ideas into your own words, you have truly learned the material. If you have to keep looking back at the original passage and using someone else’s words, you have not quite grasped what the main ideas are; therefore, you have to study the meaning behind the passage until you can state the main points in your own words. Summarized material in your paper needs to be cited, just as paraphrased material is cited.

How Do We Cite?
Each style guide has its own rules and reasons for citation; the rules and formatting are not random. Most style guides are written for particular disciplines; therefore, the rules and format for citations are designed specifically for the kind of information needed and used within that profession. For instance, Bluebook is a style guide used in the legal field. Bluebook’s style and format cater to displaying pertinent information for retrieving court cases, legislation, and briefs. Associated Press (AP) is a style guide for journalism, which means that no citations are provided in the text and no references page is required either. This way of writing is due to the nature of journalism
in that newspaper or online news articles cater to an audience that is interested in reading about a news story with eyewitness or firsthand accounts. Generally, not much, if any, background or outside research is incorporated into a news story because it is timely, and when people read the news, they are most interested in what is happening now. Therefore, AP is a style that shows how to set up quotations or paraphrase firsthand accounts, but generally citations, if any are included, are minimized. On the other hand, American Psychological Association (APA) is a style that is used in the social sciences and sometimes in business. This means that readers are expecting writers to use the most current information and they do care where their research comes from. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) is a professional organization dedicated to technological advances, and it, too, has its own style guide that is geared toward information that scientists and engineers would need to know to retrieve informational resources like scientific papers.

Cross-Referencing

The key to properly citing your sources is to learn how to cross-reference. This means that you take the information you are given in a journal article, for instance, and you look up in your style guide how to cite a journal article retrieved from an online database, and then you set up the information from the article into the format of the style guide. Here’s an example:

Information available to you in a journal article:

Diane Martinez, “Writing in an Online Environment” in the Journal of Online Writing published in May of 2009. The journal volume is 3 and the issue number is 2. The article is 18 pages long, beginning on page 17 and ending on page 34.

If you use MLA to format this entry, here’s what you would find in the style guide:
Author’s last name, First name. “Title of the Article.” Title of the Journal Volume. Issue (Year of publication): page numbers. Medium of the publication.

Using the original information, the citation would then look like this:


Where Do We Get the Rules for Citation?
The most accurate information about how to cite using a particular style guide is going to come from official resources, such as credible Web sites or the official book put out by the organization. Table 12.2 lists online resources where you can find information about each type of style. You can also find out the title of the official book for that style on each of these sites, as most offer a way to order the books online.

Table 12.2 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR VARIOUS STYLE GUIDES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STYLE</th>
<th>ONLINE RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td><a href="http://www.apstylebook.com">http://www.apstylebook.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.apastyle.org">http://www.apastyle.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.amamanualofstyle.com">http://www.amamanualofstyle.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluebook</td>
<td><a href="http://www.legalcitation.net">http://www.legalcitation.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html">http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gpo.gov">http://www.gpo.gov</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[continued]
A Word About Citing Electronic Sources

Sometimes students think that electronic information is always found when provided with a URL or Internet address. This is rarely, if ever, the case when using a particular style guide because most professional organizations know that Web links can be broken. This is why, generally, electronic documents follow the same rules for citation as print publications. For instance, suppose you are using information from a Web site. If the Web site lists an author, for APA, MLA, and CMS, you would use the author’s last name for an in-text citation along with whatever other information the particular style guide calls for, such as date and paragraph number for APA or just paragraph number for MLA. It is a safe bet to make that none of the style guides use the URL address for the in-text citation, so take care not to fall into that habit.

Citing Graphics

Graphics, such as charts, graphs, photographs, or artwork, that you want to use in your own papers have to be cited so that the information presented in such graphics, as well as the graphic itself, is not passed off as being your own work.

It is so easy now to copy pictures and graphics from the Internet onto your own computer and insert them into your papers, but when you do that without citing the source of the graphic, that too is steal-
ing—just as if you copied and pasted words or took someone else's idea and did not cite it.

According to most style guides, when you use graphics from a copyrighted source, you must first ask for permission to use it. If you intend to use the graphic for school purposes only, you do not need to get permission, but you must still cite the graphic in your paper. If you decide later to use the paper for any other purposes outside of class, you need to obtain permission.

Fair Use and Public Domain
Fair use is a doctrine and part of the copyright law that states that there are particular instances when reproducing someone else’s work, within certain limitations, may be fair. These instances may include “criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research” (U.S. Copyright Office, 2009, para. 2). It is important to note, however, that there are no concrete guidelines for what constitutes fair use; therefore, authors should use their best judgment. It is advised that whenever information is borrowed for any reason, an author should seek permission to use it (U.S. Copyright Office, 2009).

The public domain is information or works that have not been published or that were published prior to certain dates set forth by the U.S. Copyright Office, or information that is open to the public, such as most government information. Information that falls in the public domain should be cited, but you do not need permission to use it.

Common Knowledge
There are specific times when content that is not originally yours does not need to be cited; use of common knowledge constitutes a time when, unless taken word for word from a source, a citation is not needed. Certain characteristics must be met for content to be considered common knowledge:
The same information can be located in a minimum of five different research sources.

Your reader should already know this information.

The information is easily accessible in general information sources.

Folklore, mythology, and well-known stories are considered common knowledge.

Facts that are well known in your particular field of study—and will be well known to your audience.

The key concept to remember about common knowledge is that you do not have to cite it as long as it is written in your own words. If you take a well-known fact word for word from a source, a citation is required so that it is not considered plagiarism. Furthermore, if the interpretation of the common knowledge is drawn from a source, the source needs to be cited, as the interpretation is not common knowledge or original to your writing. Another example of a fact needing a citation is statistics because statistical information is not typically equally represented in general information sources; the source of the statistic, either as a primary or secondary source, needs to be cited.

You might not know if something is common knowledge until you find it explained the same way in several sources, so it’s best to cite it like you normally would until you adequately prove to yourself that it is common knowledge.

This chapter helps you understand the basics of why and when you cite information. Each style guide has different rules and formatting, and the best way to learn citation is to know that a style guide is not meant to be memorized; it is a guide, a cross-referencing guide that you will use as a resource when you write your papers. The key is to match your sources with the rules in the selected style guide. Additionally, ask your instructor for the preferred style of citation in each class you take.
References
Outlining is a way of organizing ideas and research for essays and other complex documents. Students who are eager to get to the writing part of the assignment often overlook this tool. Furthermore, you might have recollections of creating outlines back in high school and how it felt like torture when teachers insisted on specific formats and outcomes. As a college student, you are typically allowed more freedom in the creation and use of your outline, so try to shed any pre-existing notions and anxieties about outlines. Ultimately, creating an outline saves you time in the overall writing process, which is a benefit no student can ignore.

THE BENEFITS OF CREATING AN OUTLINE
The primary benefit of taking time to create an outline is that it gives you the chance to figure out the whole organization of the essay’s potential content. Students often have many ideas swirling in their heads, and an outline compels the student to logically note each idea in the appropriate order to best serve the topic and reader (see Chapter 14, Essay Development, pp. 159–204, to learn more about essay organization options). Jumping right into the essay-writing process and writing ideas as they pop into your head might not give the essay a logical or smooth flow. Listing these ideas early on in the writing process allows inherent connections to surface and be represented in the essay.

Creating an outline puts the essay content into a format that you can easily scan and interpret during the writing process. You can quickly
look at the completed outline and see where more content might be needed, or where a point is overemphasized or off topic. Furthermore, when research is required for the essay, the outline reveals where you intend to insert evidence from sources; looking over the outline quickly reveals which paragraphs will have research and which paragraphs still need information from sources. The outline serves as a visual road map of the content. Looking at it not only gives a sense of where you are going, but also how long it might take to get to the end.

Although professors might have requirements for the assigned essay, the work involved to achieve those requirements might not be clear at the onset of the writing process. You might know that you have five pages to write and need to include research, but you might not know how much work is needed to actually write a complete essay. An outline can help give students a sense of what it might take to reach that goal. For example, the outline reveals that you'll need six paragraphs, beyond the introduction and conclusion paragraphs, to adequately make your argument and provide all relevant research. Actual writing time will vary based on writing style and the amount of research needed, but the outline should reveal the complexities of the writing and help you estimate a timeline for completion of the essay.

No matter your writing style, writer's block is an issue most students encounter at some point in the process. Without an outline, when you write yourself into a corner, it might not be immediately clear where the essay needs to go next. With an outline already written, you can refer to the outline to get back on track. A detailed outline is ideal for curing writer's block, but essentially the outline format should appeal to your own writing style and needs.

HOW TO FORMAT AN OUTLINE

Unless the outline's format is specifically dictated by an assignment's requirements, your outline can take on a variety of forms, from formal to an informal list. The objective of organizing your ideas and research is typically more important than the actual format of the outline; most
importantly, the outline should be easy for you to go back to and review during the writing process.

Although not initially intuitive to write, a formal outline is a comprehensive means to organize main and subtopics for the essay. A formal outline uses Roman numerals for the main-level topics (e.g., I, II, III). The second-level topics use uppercase letters (e.g., A, B, C); the third-level topics use Arabic numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3); the fourth-level topics use lowercase letters (e.g., a, b, c); and, if necessary, the fifth-level topics use lowercase Roman numerals (e.g., i, ii, iii). See Table 13.1 for a list of the first 10 Roman numerals. To help make the outline easier to follow, each level should be indented five spaces beyond the previous level. The example at the end of this chapter (p. 153) uses a formal outline format, although it does not reach the final level of lowercase Roman numerals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARABIC</th>
<th>ROMAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You can achieve formal outline formatting by using a multilevel list in Microsoft® Word. Several options are available, so choose the format that follows the numbering system noted previously. In Microsoft® Word 2007, you can use the button with leveled numbers in the Paragraph section on the Home tab; in Microsoft® Word 2003, you can access the outlining numbering system using the Bullets and Numbering command, found on the Format menu.

Beyond the numbering system itself, there is another rule dictated by the use of a formal outlining format: “Where there is an A, there needs to be a B; likewise, where there is a one, there needs to be a two.” This means that when dividing the information into sections, try not to break the information down so far that there is only one subtopic. For example, if under Roman numeral II there is an A, then there should also be a B; if there is only an A, consider elaborating on that subtopic to make sure it is covered with enough depth, or revise Roman numeral II’s text to accurately reflect the content of a single topic (i.e., no subtopic is needed). Unless required by the assignment, try not to get too caught up in the accuracy of the numbering and leveling as long as the information is logical to you as the writer.

If a formal outline seems too overwhelming or doesn’t match your writing style, you can instead rely on an informal outline, which serves to simply list the potential content in the essay. In an informal outline, you can use standard numbers for each paragraph, with a brief notation as to what will be included in the paragraph; you can then use bullets for any subtopics in the paragraph. It is most important for an outline, whether formal and informal, to clearly and accurately reflect all the information needed to create an effective essay.

DECIDING OUTLINE CONTENT

As for what to actually write in each level of the outline, you should first decide how much information you need to remember what you intend to write in the essay. Typically, it is best to use complete sen-
tences, or at least long phrases, for each level in the outline; using one or two words per entry might not be enough information to help you organize the essay overall or readily recall what you intended to write in the paragraphs. Writers generally benefit from the use of both short and long phrases in an outline; you can also include exact quotes and paraphrases from your sources, though be sure to note the source information so you can cite it accurately in the essay.

The outline should speak to the content for each paragraph in the essay by listing the paragraph’s main topic and subtopics or supporting information. More specifically, this process includes listing each paragraph’s potential:

- Focus (i.e., topic sentence)
- Support from research (when needed)
- Examples/illustrations
- Explanations of ideas and key words or concepts
- Analysis of research or example/illustration
- Your opinion or personal insights (if appropriate for the assignment)
- Conclusions or transition/connection to the next topic

Based on the preceding list, each section in the outline will likely consist of three to four subtopics, which correlates with the upper-case-letter level of the outline format; further subtopics or levels below the first subtopic level can be added to be sure the essay has depth and breadth in each paragraph. Subtopics below the first subtopic level might include the following:

- Specific quotes, summaries, and paraphrases from sources
- Details about a relevant example
- Path of logic for analysis and conclusions
Unless you are creating an outline for an assignment that calls for a specific format, you can also add notes to yourself beyond the previously mentioned subtopics. For example, you can note research questions to remind yourself to look for more sources to prove your conclusion on a subtopic. Because an outline's goal is to help guide you through your writing process, the content of the outline is dependent on your writing needs.

It is important to remember that strict formal outlines dictate that the content of each level in the outline is parallel. To make the content of each level parallel, the words in the phrase/sentence of each level should be grammatically alike; for example, each level should be written in the same verb tense. Although a parallel structure makes the outline easier to read overall, you can abandon this structure if it interferes with the clarity of the information you plan to include in the essay—especially if it is not a required part of an assignment.

Keep in mind that the outline is a gathering of potential ideas; therefore, the content is flexible and can change as you develop your essay. Ideally, the outline is your best estimate of the information to be included because writing with an outline constantly in flux is like trying to hit a moving target. With that said, don't feel adamantly tied to the content of the outline so that the essay seems forced or underdeveloped; you'll have the opportunity to verify the organization and content of the essay by way of a postdraft outline after the first draft is complete. The process for creating a postdraft outline is discussed later in this chapter (p. 150).

THE PROCESS OF CREATING AN OUTLINE

The process of creating an initial outline really depends on your writing style; some students need to follow each step in the process to produce a useful outline, whereas students more comfortable with the overall writing process can skip steps when creating an outline. If you are new to the outline process, you might want to follow each step, and then with experience you can determine which steps you can skip in the
future. Before beginning the process, it is ideal to have at least a working thesis statement and some research on the topic. Typically, by this point, you have already completed other brainstorming techniques in an effort to create the thesis statement, research questions, and a list of relevant sources (see Chapter 12, Basic Citation Guidelines, pp. 121–142, and Chapter 14, Essay Development, pp. 159–204). The following steps outline a suggested process for creating an outline:

1. Create an informal list of topics to be covered in the essay.
   a. This list can be a list of words or short phrases which will be refined during the creation of the full outline.
   b. Try not to list subtopics at this point.
   c. Most short essays have at least three to five main topics, plus the introduction and conclusion paragraphs.
   d. Here is a sample topic list for an essay on video games in classrooms: NY school, making learning fun, visual learning, counterargument against games, future success of children.

2. Take the topics from the informal list and use those as main topics (i.e., Roman numeral level).
   a. Rewrite the phrases from the informal list to be more complete, so that the main topic is easily understood (even when read a week or two later).
   b. You might need to add more topics or combine like topics as you develop the outline.

3. Analyze each main topic, determining what information needs to be presented.
   a. At this point, start developing the subtopics for each main topic.
   b. Subtopics may include examples, logic/arguments, details/descriptions, and definitions of key terms.

4. Sort your sources and research to see which topics/subtopics they fall under.
   a. As you decide what research to use, put the information into the outline as subtopics.
b. Be sure to note the source of the information in your outline so you can easily cite the information in the essay.

5. Review the outline, looking for logical ordering of the topics.
   a. Organization options include chronological, building on the previous point, least important to most important, or argument/counterargument.
   b. Consider adding transitional words or phrases as subtopics in each section to realize the overall flow of the essay.

6. Rely on the outline while writing the essay.
   a. If new ideas develop during the writing process, try keeping track of those ideas in a separate document, and then add them after the initial draft is complete, if they are still relevant.
   b. If you encounter writer’s block, refer to the outline to help initiate the writing process with your original ideas.
   c. Using an outline allows you to write paragraphs out of sequence, such as when research or ideas become available, and then piece the paragraphs together in the order dictated by the outline.

Although you can continue to use and revise the original outline throughout the writing process, after writing the essay, you can go back and write a second outline to map the content actually seen in the draft.

**USING THE POSTDRAFT OUTLINE**

Once the first draft of an essay is complete, many conscientious writers use an informal postdraft outline to reveal possible problems with the logical structure and content of the essay. The postdraft outline briefly lists the focus of each paragraph in the draft. As you will see in this section, to construct this type of outline, you will carefully read each paragraph in your essay and briefly describe the focus or main point of each paragraph using just one sentence. Similar to the con-
tent of the formal or informal outline, your description of the para-
graph should capture the overall focus or main point. It is crucial to
write the sentence based on the actual content of the paragraph, as
opposed to what you think the paragraph should be covering.

Here’s how to get started. Beginning with your introduction, if it
is one paragraph long, it will be represented by the number 1 on the
sheet of paper. Because the introduction establishes the thesis, its
“point” will be the thesis, so you write the thesis after the number 1.
Isolating the paragraph allows you to consider the placement of the
thesis in that paragraph as well as the clarity of the thesis itself.

Continuing on to the body paragraphs of the essay, if your paper
does not make use of topic sentences, you need to read the paragraph
as carefully and as objectively as possible to determine its point. Try
to put yourself in your audience’s shoes and do not read into a para-
graph what is not there—that is, let the actual content suggest a point.
Try to write the point in one complete, declarative sentence. If, how-
ever, after reading the paragraph and thinking about the needs of your
audience, you determine the point of the paragraph is not clear, so
be it—you have learned something valuable that you can address in
revision.

After listing each paragraph’s focus, go back and analyze this list
to make sure the essay is well organized and covers all the necessary
information to support your thesis. Although you can simply compare
the postdraft outline with the original outline, it is important to further
analyze the postdraft outline for other issues beyond missing content.
During analysis, consider the following questions, issues, and pos-
sible solutions:

- **Does the paragraph cover several topics, rather than just one
  main topic?**
  This is often a difficult question to answer, especially because
every paragraph covers a main topic by way of presenting
several subtopics. Just be sure that the topic covered in the
paragraph doesn’t go off on separate tangents; tangents should be removed and developed into separate paragraphs if they are relevant and support the thesis statement.

- **Does the information appear in a logical order?** Although you may be familiar with the topic as a whole, remember that the reader might be new to the topic; therefore, it is important to reveal information in a comprehensible way that gives the reader necessary insights to understand the essay’s argument, reflection, or description. Also, consider the organization method (e.g., chronological) that you set out to use in the essay.

- **Does each paragraph flow from one idea to the next?** You might not have specifically noted transitions in your postdraft outline, but upon review of the essay, you might find that there are no clear connections between ideas. You can use the postdraft outline to see where these connections can be drawn by way of inserting transitions at the end or beginning of paragraphs.

- **Are there gaps in information, where the paragraph or argument seems incomplete?** Small or underdeveloped paragraphs will need further research and/or explanation; the postdraft outline often reveals this need by way of a short, descriptive sentence about the paragraph.

- **Is the focus of the paragraph directly related to the thesis statement?** While writing and researching, you will likely develop interesting information, but not all of that information will directly tie to your thesis statement. If the postdraft outline reveals extraneous paragraphs, remove the paragraphs or alter the thesis statement if the information is important enough to keep in the essay.
The goal of the postdraft outline is to help you step back from your writing and evaluate it objectively by seeing it in its entirety. Just as a predraft outline serves as a map, telling you where to turn next, the postdraft outline is like seeing the entire journey marked on a map. From here, you can evaluate which turn worked and which took you away from your goal. Again, try not to get caught up in the formatting of this type of outline; create it to meet your needs as a writer, but be sure to be accurate when writing the focus of each paragraph.

EXAMPLES
This section contains three outline examples followed by an explanation of the strengths and/or weaknesses of each. The examples should serve as guidelines rather than templates because your topic and content will likely dictate different formats and outcomes. Every example is based on creating a persuasive three-page essay arguing for the inclusion of video games in public, grade school classrooms.

Example 1: Formal Outline, Detailed
1. Introduce the concept of using video games in grade school classrooms.
   A. [Quote from Times article] “67% of children from the ages of four to ten spend 3.5 hours playing video games” (Smith, 2009, p.3). [Direct quote from source.]
   B. Children typically get excited about learning when the education is in the form of a game.
   C. Being comfortable with technology is important to children’s future success.
   D. THESIS STATEMENT: Public schools should adopt the use of video games in every grade school classroom to pique children’s interest, help them to be comfortable with technology, and teach them problem-solving techniques.
II. Provide an example of a school with the entire curriculum based on video games.
   A. In New York City, there is a school where every class is based on students using video games (White, 2009). [Summary from source]
   B. Students enroll in sixth grade and stay in the school through twelfth-grade graduation.
      1. Currently, class sizes are small, but will increase over time.
      2. Students must pass an entrance exam.
   C. [Paraphrase from Educational Technology] In standardized tests given to all New York public school children, students from this school test at the same level or better (White, 2009).

III. Video games will engage students’ interests in learning.
   A. Children respond well to the visual stimuli and challenges video games provide.
   B. Example: Students who play a math-oriented video game stay focused on the task of winning the game, while learning multiplication tables.
   C. Students will learn more than basic memorization:
      1. Problem solving, as they navigate through the game’s challenges
      2. Teamwork, as they work together playing the same game
      3. Application, students can use what they learned right away
         a. Example: Students playing a geography game will learn state capitals, and then use that information to win the game.
         b. Application of information reinforces it in their long-term memory.

IV. The future will be based on computers and related technology.
   A. Exposure to computers now will increase potential for success in technology fields.
B. Students will be comfortable with technology, much like learning a second language.

C. Early exposure to technology will inspire creativity with the use and development of this technology in their futures.

V. This type of education is not for all children (counterargument).
   A. Student needs should be assessed before developing video game-based classes.
   B. If a student is not responding well to video game learning, an alternative should be provided.
   C. Like learning disabilities, students who do not respond to video game learning should be tutored to improve their responses to this technology.

VI. Video games in the classroom might seem futuristic, but they are a practical reality.
   A. Students need to be prepared for the technology they’ll face in their future.
   B. Video games are already accepted by children, so they’ll appreciate the use of these games in classrooms.
   C. Careful consideration needs to be put into the development of these classes to make them successful.

In Example 1, the writer used “reminder notes,” as suggested previously in this chapter. For example, under I. A, the writer noted that it is a direct quote from an article. This will help the writer remember to use quotation marks if he or she decides to use that exact text in the essay. It will also help the writer remember where the information came from so that an accurate citation can be inserted. These types of notes are not typically included in outlines submitted for a grade, but they are useful options for writers who rely on research to prove an argument. Overall, the details provided by the use of full sentences and several subtopics per section will help the writer remember the tone, argument, and focus of the essay during the writing process.
Example 2: Formal Outline, Not Detailed

I. Introduction
   A. 67% of children play video games
   B. Children like video games
   C. Technology will be used in their future
   D. Thesis statement

II. Sample New York school
   A. Every class is based on using video games
   B. Sixth grade through twelfth grade
   C. Good standardized test scores

III. Video games engage students
   A. Children respond to visual stimuli and challenges
   B. Sample video game
   C. More than basic memorization

IV. Technology/computer-based future
   A. Increase potential for success
   B. Increase comfort with technology
   C. Inspire creativity with technology

V. Not for all children
   A. Assess students before game use
   B. Provide alternatives
   C. Provide tutoring

VI. Conclusion
   A. Prepare students for future
   B. Students appreciate use of video games
   C. Plan classes carefully

In Example 2, the writer is likely to know what needs to be written in each paragraph as long as the essay writing begins and ends within a short time frame. Otherwise, the writer might forget what he or she meant to write in a particular section because the notes are rather vague. For example, under I. D, the thesis statement should be written
into the essay at this point; without the specific thesis statement in the outline, the writer might not remember all the aspects that need to be discussed and argued. In addition, this less detailed outline doesn’t note what information is from a source. This could potentially lead to accidental plagiarism if the writer doesn’t remember to accurately cite the information, even if the information is paraphrased. A nondetailed outline might be a good place to start but adding precise details will help strengthen the essay. The postdraft outline can then be used to double-check the essay’s content.

**Example 3: Postdraft Outline**

1. Video games should be used in classrooms because children already like playing video games, and these games can be positive learning experiences.
2. A school in New York has proven to be successful in creating a learning environment based entirely on video game usage.
3. Video games provide learning beyond memorization, while keeping students interested in learning.
4. Because technology is only becoming more prevalent, the students will be comfortable with technology at an early age and potentially excel in the future.
5. Although this technology might not be right for every student, every effort should be made to allow students to be successful in the classroom.
6. Well-planned usage of video games in the classroom is a realistic and engaging means of educating students.

Example 3 shows a well-organized essay, where the content follows the original plan in the predraft outline. Each paragraph is summarized in one sentence and clearly shows what is covered in that paragraph. One potential change the writer might want to consider is to break the third paragraph into two paragraphs, one focusing on
children's interests in visual stimuli and video game challenges and a second paragraph focusing on the content of the video game beyond memorization. Although the original outline did not break this topic into two sections, after writing the essay, it seems logical to give each topic its own paragraph and supporting research. In addition, the writer might consider moving the counterargument, as seen in number five, before the fourth paragraph, so that the essay does not end with the opposing argument.
After gathering your research and designing an outline, you can begin the writing process that yields what will be your draft and, ultimately, final version of the essay or writing assignment. This section breaks the essay down into manageable pieces, to be considered individually, and then combined for a cohesive reflection of your ideas and research.

**WHAT IS A THESIS STATEMENT?**

Every composition needs to make a clear point about its topic. Otherwise, what purpose would the writing serve? One way to ensure that readers will follow along in the development of an essay is by including a written thesis statement. The word *thesis* comes from a Greek word that means “proposition” or “position.” In an essay, the thesis establishes your position, the main idea of the paper, what you claim to be true or important about the topic. A thesis helps readers understand the direction the essay is heading and it connects body paragraphs to a controlling idea so that the essay comes together as a unified and cohesive whole.

Most thesis statements are expressed in a single declarative sentence, but depending on a number of factors such as the scope and complexity of the topic or the writer’s approach in discussing it, the thesis may require more than one sentence. For research papers, the thesis statement is not your research question, but typically the response to your main research question. In most academic writing, the thesis appears near or at the end of the introduction and
announces to readers exactly what the body paragraphs that follow will discuss.

There are two basic approaches to composing a thesis—forecasting the main points by embedding them in the thesis (an approach commonly referred to as the three-point thesis) or not including the main points, but just the overall main topic, in the thesis. Your approach will depend on the topic you are addressing as well as any particular requirements of the assignment.

A three-point thesis states the main idea of the essay and includes three key points as support. Look at the following thesis: Banning cigarette smoking in public places is an effective intervention to improve the public’s health by helping to reduce the dangers of secondhand smoke on nonsmokers, encouraging current smokers to quit, and reducing health-care costs. In this example, the main idea—the position the writer takes relative to the topic—is Banning cigarette smoking in public places is an effective intervention to improve the public’s health. This part of the thesis states what the writer claims to be true about the topic. How will the writer support this view? In this case, the thesis includes three telegraphed key points—by helping to reduce the dangers of secondhand smoke on nonsmokers, encouraging current smokers to quit, and reducing health-care costs.

The three-point thesis is the blueprint of the essay in that it not only establishes the main idea, but it also fleshes out the key points so that readers can anticipate a basic structure of the essay. Readers would expect each forecasted point to be discussed in the order presented—that is, the first section will discuss the first key point, the next section the second, and so on.

Another approach to structuring a thesis is to state the main idea minus the key points. Using the preceding example, the thesis would read: Banning cigarette smoking in public places is an effective intervention to improve the public’s health. With this approach, the key points are not included in the thesis, yet the focus and direction are clear. Readers might not know the exact key points, but they under-
stand the writer’s position on the topic and can anticipate the likely discussion that will follow. In this case, because the main idea states the view that banning smoking in public is an effective intervention to improve public health, it is logical to expect key points that address how this is so.

Whether you choose to structure your thesis statement with three specific points or just the main idea, particular characteristics are needed to make the thesis statement effective, for both keeping your writing on track and giving the reader an indication of the direction of the essay:

- **Establishes one major idea:** A thesis statement should focus on one main idea. If a thesis introduces more than one idea, the paper will not have a tight focus. Many papers you will write will be relatively short and will not have room to discuss more than one major idea. Pay particular attention to your thesis statement if it includes the word *and* as this connecting word often joins new ideas. Note how the following thesis has more than one main idea: *Health-care reform must be addressed because so many Americans are uninsured or without adequate coverage, and politicians must work together to ensure new legislation is passed.* In this example, the word *and* establishes an additional main idea and so the thesis lacks a clearly defined focus. To improve upon the thesis, you would need to streamline the thesis and focus on one main idea. For example, a better thesis might be *Politicians must work together to reform health care because too many Americans are without sufficient coverage.*

- **Reasonable in scope:** The thesis should limit the extent of the discussion to something manageable given the assignment—neither too broad nor too narrow. The thesis should establish a focus that is realistic and suitable for a substantive discussion of the main idea. Simply taking a stand on capital
punishment, for example, is not realistic for a short research paper let alone an entire book—the topic is too broad. However, limiting the focus by narrowing the scope might work. You could argue that capital punishment does not reduce the crime rate or that lethal injection is the most humane form of capital punishment. In this way, the focus is something that realistically could be addressed in the paper.

- **Clearly states the writer’s position:** The thesis should state precisely and specifically what the paper will discuss. After reading the thesis, readers should know exactly what to expect. Avoid language that is too general, abstract, or otherwise confusing. If your thesis does not clearly establish your main idea, readers might have a difficult time understanding the significance of the essay and following the development of the body paragraphs that follow. Here is an example of a thesis statement that is vague: *Television violence is an issue that many face.* Based on this thesis, do you understand what the writer is going to explore in the paper? Sure, television violence, but beyond that general subject, do you have any clear sense of what the writer will be arguing for or against? This thesis lacks the specificity it needs to orient readers appropriately so that they know what to expect in the discussion.

- **Relies on supporting evidence:** The thesis expresses an idea that moves beyond a statement of fact and requires supporting content to “prove” the main idea. For example, a thesis that proclaims Barack Obama is the first African-American to be elected president of the United States would not be very good as it states a widely known fact. A better thesis might proclaim this: *Barack Obama’s election as president of the United States marked a seminal moment in American politics.* The revised thesis moves beyond simply stating a fact and, instead, presents a main idea that would require evidence to support.
DRAFTING A WORKING THESIS
Constructing a unique thesis statement takes time; in fact, like writing itself, developing a thesis is a process, so be patient and be willing to revise as necessary. A good thesis comes about the more you work with your topic, as you get deeper and deeper into your research and your ideas get clearer and clearer. A thesis statement evolves over time. Begin with a working thesis—your tentative ideas about the topic—and be willing to modify the statement depending on what you discover about your topic and how your thinking changes as a result. Indeed, many writers find themselves in jams because they are unwilling to deviate from their original thesis and are bent on trying to support ideas that are unrealistic, perhaps even impossible.

Once you have found a suitable topic to pursue (for more information on approaching a topic, see Chapter 6, The Writing Process, pp. 35–47), you are ready to start thinking about the direction your paper will take. To this end, you need to compose a working thesis that establishes your initial ideas about the topic as well as your purpose for writing. Will you be informing? Persuading? Either way, that purpose needs to be apparent in the wording of the thesis. For many, composing a working thesis can be a challenge, but you can make the process more manageable by considering the following practical suggestions for drafting a working thesis statement. Ultimately, the thesis of your paper will grow out of your own thinking and the research conducted. The suggestions are not meant to be followed in any particular order, although a step-by-step approach might be a logical approach.

Exploring Your Thoughts
What do you already know about the topic? Use freewriting (or other prewriting methods, such as brainstorming, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, The Writing Process, pp. 35–47) to capture what you already know and think about the topic. Roll up your sleeves and spend 10, 15, or more minutes just writing. Write about what interests you about the topic and what you might like to know. Write about
what you think you want to discuss in the paper. Explore freely what is bouncing around inside your head and do not be afraid to follow your thinking wherever it takes you. Writing is an act of discovery, and you might stumble upon an interesting angle to pursue if you give yourself permission to explore. After you’ve written for a period of time, look over your writing and see if any dominant idea emerges or if some writing suggests a direction worth thinking about more. In a perfect world, the freewriting will produce enough of your ideas that you can almost see the beginning of a thesis.

Conducting Some Preliminary Research

Go to the library (online or on-ground) and read a number of articles about your topic. The more you know, the better off you will be, so this is time well spent. At this point, you are just reading to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, to generate potential ideas for further research, and to help you think more about what you might want to say about this topic or explore. Take notes as necessary, paying particular attention to content that speaks to aspects of the topic that seem interesting to you or that are repeated in other articles. The idea of this kind of research is to read enough that you are in a better position to commit your ideas to paper. Be certain to record information about each source accurately so that you can locate the source again if need be. Of course, if an article looks particularly promising, you might want to make a copy of it and/or save it to your hard drive for later use.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Turn to Online Libraries First

It’s so easy to do research today because of the Internet. It might seem like the days of visiting the library are over, but, thankfully, because of online technology, you have a choice to walk through the doors of your local library or log on to an online (or virtual) library from wherever you happen to be. Even though popular search engines are our first choice
for day-to-day searches, logging on to and using an online library is just as easy, and you will get more scholastic and refined results. In addition, using an online library is also less time consuming than doing a general Internet search because you do not have to wade through millions of nonrelevant or noncredible Web sites.

Posing Research Questions
A research question establishes an aspect of the topic that you want to investigate. What do you want to know about your topic? What interests you about the topic that you want to explore further? A good approach is to pose as many different research questions as possible to use as the basis for your research and for formulating a working thesis. The “answer” to the research question becomes the working thesis, so give some thought to the questions you ask and avoid those that elicit yes/no-type answers.

For example, if the topic is banning smoking in public, you could pose the following research questions:

- How effective are laws banning smoking in public?
- What impact do smoking bans have on businesses?
- What effects do smoking bans have on the public?
- Are public smoking bans constitutional?

At this point, you will want to select the research question that looks the most promising and then, if possible, try to answer it generally before conducting research to answer it more specifically. The research question helps you define a focus and the answer will become the working thesis.

The thesis statement serves as the crux of the essay, and the paragraphs that follow the thesis only serve to support and elaborate on your main idea in the essay. When developing each piece of the essay, be sure to keep the thesis statement in mind.
OUTLINING
As described in a previous chapter, before you begin to draft, consider devising some kind of plan that will organize your thoughts so that your writing has direction from the start. If you have a good working thesis, you should be in good shape to create an informal outline so that you have a plan for developing the thesis and organizing your points. For example, one good approach is to write the thesis and then list the supporting points in an order that seems appropriate.

As compared with an informal list, formal outlines take considerably more time to develop and for most people, they are more difficult to write before a complete draft is produced because supporting points and details usually come out of research and discovery during the composing process. However, every person’s writing process is different and formal outlines are, regardless of how they come about, useful. A formal outline allows you to see the structure of your paper in detail—the key points, the supporting points, the evidence. Formal outlines allow you to see how your essay is put together, how your ideas are organized, and how the points are developed. The formal outline offers a structural representation of your paper, which allows you to see where your ideas are fully developed and where you might need to add new information. For more information about formal and informal outlining, along with examples of each style, please see Chapter 13, Outlining, pp. 143–158.

DRAFTING AN ESSAY
After you create some kind of an outline, you are ready to draft. Do not worry about writing the introduction first unless you already have a good idea for a beginning. Instead, use your working thesis and outline as the starting point for composing body paragraphs. Concentrate on developing points and staying as organized as possible. If new ideas surface while you compose, develop them and/or add them to the outline. Although you will need to consult your notes and work in evidence from your research, you should try to compose as quickly
as possible. Do not let anything slow down your forward progress. If the development of a particular point is not going anywhere, move to another point. Just because an essay reads in a linear fashion does not mean you have to write it that way. Sure, you might need to write transitions for the sake of the flow, but you can do that kind of writing later. Initially, your focus should be on getting words down on the page so that you have a complete draft as soon as possible. Once the draft is complete, you can compose the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

After you complete the initial full draft, read it over carefully. You will undoubtedly notice where your evidence is thin. Conduct more research to strengthen your points. You might notice that your draft might not have developed exactly as your outline suggested, but that is okay.

An essay has various components, and you need to develop each component during the drafting process. The next sections break the essay down to its basic sentence/paragraph structure to help you see how you can create an effective essay overall.

**TOPIC SENTENCES**

Just as the thesis establishes the main idea of an essay, a topic sentence establishes the main idea of a paragraph. A topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph and is a direct and limited statement that announces exactly what the paragraph will discuss. The sentences that follow expand upon and support the idea put forth in the topic sentence. In a very real way, topic sentences are like mini-thesis statements for paragraphs. A thesis expresses an idea that unifies an essay just as topic sentences express an idea that unifies the content of a paragraph. Using a topic sentence helps readers understand the point of a paragraph and helps writers stay focused too. Although not every paragraph needs an explicit topic sentence, every paragraph needs a clear focus, and for many writers using a topic sentence is the best approach.
An effective topic sentence expresses a claim about its subject that is limited enough to be realistically developed in a single paragraph. Here is a paragraph that illustrates how the topic sentence establishes the focus and scope of a paragraph:

*Paris is a fabulous European city. Huge and sprawling, the city offers grand boulevards, quaint parks, world-class museums, and many fine restaurants. Locals and visitors alike enjoy people watching from outdoor cafés. Many will sit for hours with a good book and a cup of café au lait enjoying the pleasing ambiance of the city. Paris is divided in half by the Seine River; these two sides are better known as the Right Bank and the Left Bank. The Latin Quarter, which is located on the Left Bank, is a popular section of Paris. Over the years, writers and artists have found inspiration in the Latin Quarter. In the 1920s, writers such as James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway frequented the cafés in the Latin Quarter. Visitors to Paris can view many other historical sites that only enhance the attractiveness of the city. The Notre-Dame Cathedral, located near the Seine, is 700 years old and full of history. Another main attraction is the Louvre, Europe's oldest, biggest, and greatest museum. Leonardo da Vinci's The Mona Lisa resides behind bulletproof glass in the Louvre. However, perhaps the most famous sight in all of Paris is the Eiffel Tower. Rising 1,000 feet in the air, the Eiffel Tower is a familiar structure in the Paris skyline.*

This well-developed paragraph begins with a clear topic sentence—*Paris is a fabulous European city.* The topic sentence makes a claim about the city and that idea is developed in the paragraph. The topic sentence lets readers know exactly what to expect and limits the scope of what is developed.
PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

Stemming from a topic sentence, an effective paragraph will have unity, coherence, and development. *Unity* means that all of the content in the paragraph belongs, so that each sentence provides information that relates to the focus or claim of the paragraph; otherwise, the paragraph lacks unity. Once the topic sentence is established, the content that follows develops that one idea. When drafting, make sure that you stay focused so that the development does not drift from the established focus. In addition to developing the idea established in the topic sentence, the paragraph should also contain language that connects the paragraph to the main idea expressed in the thesis. In this way, paragraphs are not isolated units, but, rather, they are essential parts of an essay necessary to develop the main idea expressed in the thesis statement.

In the following paragraph, the opening sentence of the paragraph establishes a focus and each sentence that follows expands upon the idea; not one of the sentences strays from the focus and, thus, the content is unified.

*The streetcars that run on St. Charles and Carrollton avenues in New Orleans are the oldest operating street railway system in the world. The streetcar line started in 1835 to connect the city of New Orleans with the town of Carrollton. The line was first called the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad, and the company ran a fleet of 35 olive-green cars. In 1874, Carrollton became part of New Orleans and the independently owned and operated lines were combined. At one time, the streetcars were powered by mules, but steam later proved to be a more reliable source of power. With the advent of electricity, however, the line had an even more reliable and quieter form of energy. The streetcar covers a 13-mile route, and a round-trip ride, with stops, takes about an hour and a half. The St. Charles Avenue Streetcar Line is the only commuter train in*
New Orleans. Another famous streetcar line once ran down Desire Street, inspiring the title of Tennessee Williams’ play, A Streetcar Named Desire. Many tourists feel a ride on the streetcar is an essential part of a visit to New Orleans; however, residents of the city also feel the streetcars are a good way to travel to and from work or school. Because of the enormous popularity of the streetcar, the city has brought a new line to Canal Street, taking riders all the way to City Park. Riding the streetcar is a one-of-a-kind experience that makes New Orleans so unique.

Development speaks to the idea of elaborating on the claim of the topic sentence. Although a paragraph has no set length, the claim made in the topic sentence needs to be fully developed. You do this by sustaining the writing and using supporting information, such as examples and evidence from research to give your ideas meaning. What you need to be concerned with is developing your ideas thoroughly and specifically so that your audience fully understands what you are trying to communicate—that is, readers get the point. When the point is sufficiently developed, end the paragraph. In this way, some paragraphs might require less development and other paragraphs more depending on the point and the purpose of the writing (to persuade, for example, might require more development than a paper that informs).

WORDS FROM WRITERS

Explaining Our Thoughts
“I probably write just as much as I complete computations. Writing is an integral part of many professions. I mostly have to formulate e-mails and memos that portray the correct and most sensitive tone possible and still manage to get the point across. This is a skill that can be taught, and anyone can be groomed to write in this manner.

Writing can be a better form of communicating [than speaking] in some instances. Instead of verbalizing all your decisions and opinions, you might want to
Choosing to write it down first and let a coworker review your thoughts. Sometimes what we think is clearly explained and written well is quite the contrary.”

—Enryka Payton, Mathematician

Consider this sample scenario: Imagine it is summer, late July, in New Orleans. If I were to state that it is snowing outside, would you believe me? Probably not, right? After all, it is July in New Orleans and the likelihood of snow is nil. Even beyond this fact, a statement with no proof and no development is just an assertion. However, what if after I said it is snowing out (remember, it is July in New Orleans) and I showed you a handful of snow, would you believe me then? You can see the snow, touch it, and smell it. Now, you might think that I am up to something, but you would definitely be more convinced, right? If I developed my claim (topic sentence) even more and said, “Yup, it’s snowing outside. I can see my next-door neighbor, Mr. Hibble, a slight man in his 70s, out in his driveway right now, shoveling. He’s wearing a purple-and-gold hat and black gloves. And here comes the snow plow—will you listen to that clatter!” If I included all of that development, would you believe me?

Although the example is an exaggeration, the point should be clear: You need to take your time and develop your points fully so that they make sense to someone else, an audience. You need to sustain the writing and expand upon the idea expressed in the topic sentence; depending on your purpose, you need to use examples, details, facts, quotes, statistics, and/or testimony to give meaning to your ideas.

Coherence refers to content that is organized in a way that is easy to understand. One sentence logically leads to the next sentence, and the writer has provided transitions and guide words (words that help the reader progress through the writing) to make the movement fluid for the reader as the parts come together. Coherence is what gives a paragraph its sense of oneness; it is what unifies the related parts around a single idea and helps readers understand the relationship
of sentences. As a writer, you need to help your readers by guiding them through the development of the paragraph. Transitional expressions function like glue: They hold a piece of writing together and give it order. Without such expressions, a paragraph would be a jumbled, incoherent mess.

In the following example, note how the paragraph has unity yet lacks coherence.

One of the major record labels of the prewar period was Paramount, a furniture manufacturing company from Wisconsin with a notorious reputation for producing low-budget recordings. The recording equipment used was inferior by today’s standards and most recordings were crude. Many record companies did not take good care of the master recordings, which resulted in even poorer pressings of the music. Most record companies at the time went into business to make a quick profit and had little regard for the integrity of the music or of the artists. Many of the original master recordings have been destroyed or lost and little information is known of the artists on the masters that did survive. Few blues musicians before World War II are well known today. Paramount had the financial resources to sign blues artists, and most performers of the prewar era recorded for the label. The company produced such poor recordings that few survived. Many worthy prewar blues musicians are obscure.

The sentences all have something to do with prewar blues, but understanding the logical relationship of one sentence to the next is impossible as the sentences are laid one after the other with no regard to the coherence of the information. To improve the coherence of the paragraph, a topic sentence should be used at the start of the paragraph and then the sentences need to be organized in a fluid and logical manner, using guide words and transitional expressions as necessary.
Here is the paragraph revised for coherence:

*Few blues musicians before World War II are well known today. The recording equipment used was inferior by today’s standards and most recordings were crude. In addition, many record companies did not take good care of the master recordings, which resulted in even poorer pressings of the music. Unfortunately, most record companies at the time went into business to make a quick profit and had little regard for the integrity of the music or of the artists. In fact, many of the original master recordings have been destroyed or lost and little information is known of the artists on the masters that did survive. One of the major record labels of the prewar period was Paramount, a furniture manufacturing company from Wisconsin with a notorious reputation for producing low-budget recordings. Because Paramount had the financial resources to sign blues artists, most performers of the prewar era recorded for the label. However, the company produced such poor recordings that few survived and as a result, many worthy prewar blues musicians are obscure.*

As seen in these examples, it is a writer’s responsibility to make sure the essay is clear and logical for the intended audience. Keep in mind that just because the topic is clear to you, it’s likely to be new to the reader. Unity, development, and coherence are the characteristics the reader looks for to comprehend the topic.

**WORDS FROM WRITERS**

*Smoothing the Path*

“Clear communication is essential to being successful in the business world. If you cannot clearly articulate your thoughts, you might encounter unnecessary challenges.”

—Kevin DeKorte, Computer Scientist
MAINTAINING COHERENCE

You can initiate comprehension in the reader by the wording of sentences and creating the connections between your ideas, research/examples, and the thesis statement.

Transitional Expressions

Maintaining the coherence of the writing is essential for the clarity of a paragraph. In the previous example, you probably noticed a number of words and phrases that helped to show the relationship of one piece of information to the next. Phrases like in addition, unfortunately, in fact, because, and however guide the movement of the writing so that it is fluid and easy to follow. Transitions, also known as signposts, are important because they hold the writing together.

As a writer, one of your most important goals is to convey your message as clearly and effectively as possible. One powerful tool that you have to accomplish this is the use of transitions. Transitions enable you to provide connections between sentences and paragraphs by showing readers how your ideas fit together. Although they do not make a poorly organized paper any easier to read, transitions do make it easier for the reader to follow how you have chosen to organize your thoughts.

In the example that follows, the writer uses some carefully chosen transitions (see Table 14.1) to give the ideas coherence. The risk of using such transitions is that using too many will make the writing sound mechanical, so in your own writing use such words selectively. The writer of the following paragraph does a good job using an appropriate number of transitions to keep the ideas together and the prose fluid.

Most people have never heard of Richmond, Maine. However, this small town has quite a remarkable history. Because of Richmond’s proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, the town has a rich nautical history and for years has attracted people whose...
livelihoods depended on the sea. In fact, at one time, several prominent sea captains resided in Richmond, and their homes, located in what locals referred to as the Village, overlooked the Kennebec River, a natural passageway to the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, in the latter nineteenth century, the Richmond Ice Company floated huge blocks of ice down the Kennebec River to Merry Meeting Bay, an inlet that led to the ocean, where the ice was picked up and delivered to merchants and businesses. However, what makes Richmond’s history so interesting is that beginning in the early 1900s a group of Russians immigrated to Richmond to help in the town’s thriving boat-building business. Over the years, this Russian community grew and prospered until it became an important part of the community. By the 1950s, about half of the town’s residents were of Russian descent and more Russians immigrated to Richmond. One of the more notable Russians was a mild-mannered man by the name of Ivan Tolstoy, who was choirmaster at one of the twelve Russian orthodox churches. Ivan Tolstoy was the grandson of the famous Russian writer Count Leo Tolstoy, and the house on South Pleasant Street where Ivan Tolstoy lived was referred to as the Tolstoy House. Another famous Russian author who had a connection to Richmond was Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In the early 1970s, Solzhenitsyn spent a period of time with Ivan Tolstoy at his home. Unfortunately, the Russian population began to dwindle by the mid-1970s. The decline of the boat-building profession forced many Russians to find work in other towns and cities and, consequently, they left Richmond. After these people left, Russian businesses that had once flourished began to suffer and, ultimately, had to close down. Sadly, only a handful of Russians still live in Richmond, Maine.

Table 14.1 provides some examples of transitions that you can use in a paragraph to connect related ideas or to connect paragraphs.
to make sure the reader sees the connection between each paragraph and sees how those paragraphs support the thesis statement. When using these expressions, each sentence does not need a transition; rather, only use them when a logical movement is needed between related ideas. To help understand the role transitions can play, Table 14.1 is broken into categories of what goal the transitions will accomplish when used.

**Table 14.1 TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TO SHOW LOCATION</th>
<th>TO SHOW TIME</th>
<th>TO COMPARE TWO THINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>above</td>
<td>about</td>
<td>as also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>across</td>
<td>after</td>
<td>in the same way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>against</td>
<td>afterward</td>
<td>like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along</td>
<td>as soon as</td>
<td>similarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alongside</td>
<td>at</td>
<td>likewise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amid</td>
<td>before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>among</td>
<td>during</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>around</td>
<td>earlier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>away from</td>
<td>finally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back of</td>
<td>immediately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behind</td>
<td>in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below</td>
<td>meantime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beneath</td>
<td>later</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beside</td>
<td>meantime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off</td>
<td>meanwhile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beyond</td>
<td>next</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by</td>
<td>next week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down</td>
<td>now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in front of</td>
<td>second</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inside</td>
<td>soon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into</td>
<td>then</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on top of</td>
<td>third</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside</td>
<td>till</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over</td>
<td>today</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>near</td>
<td>until</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the right</td>
<td>when</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under</td>
<td>while</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yesterday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[continued]
### Table 14.1 TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS [continued]

#### TO CONTRAST THINGS (SHOW DIFFERENCES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Although</th>
<th>Even so</th>
<th>Nevertheless</th>
<th>Rather than</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As opposed to</td>
<td>Even though</td>
<td>On the contrary</td>
<td>Still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But</td>
<td>However</td>
<td>On the other hand</td>
<td>Though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversely</td>
<td>In the meantime</td>
<td>Otherwise</td>
<td>Unlike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whereas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### TO EMPHASIZE A POINT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Again</th>
<th>Furthermore</th>
<th>Nevertheless</th>
<th>Usually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But</td>
<td>In fact</td>
<td>To emphasize</td>
<td>With this in mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finally</td>
<td>Indeed</td>
<td>To repeat</td>
<td>Truly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For this reason</td>
<td>Moreover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### TO CONCLUDE OR SUMMARIZE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accordingly</th>
<th>Consequently</th>
<th>In conclusion</th>
<th>Therefore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All in all</td>
<td>Due to</td>
<td>In short</td>
<td>Thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result</td>
<td>Finally</td>
<td>In summery</td>
<td>To sum up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### TO ADD INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additionally</th>
<th>Another</th>
<th>Finally</th>
<th>In addition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After all</td>
<td>Besides</td>
<td>For example</td>
<td>Likewise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Again</td>
<td>But</td>
<td>For instance</td>
<td>Moreover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also</td>
<td>Equally</td>
<td>Further</td>
<td>Next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Furthermore</td>
<td>Yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### TO CLARIFY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For instance</th>
<th>Stated</th>
<th>That is</th>
<th>To clarify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In other words</td>
<td>Differently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repeating Key Words or Phrases
In addition to using the transitional expressions in Table 14.1, you can employ other techniques to help guide readers and ensure the writing flows smoothly and the ideas are coherent. One way to guide readers is to repeat key words or phrases. Such repetition can occur within or between paragraphs. In the following example, note how the writer repeats the word symbol over several paragraphs. Such repetition helps guide readers along and connects the content to an overriding idea.

Richard Ford’s short story, “Rock Springs” is a narrative readers can easily understand. At the story’s core is a compelling drama of a man who simply wants something better for himself and for his little daughter. Like us, the story’s narrator and protagonist, Earl Middleton, has dreams. But Earl Middleton is not without his flaws as many of the decisions he makes are the wrong decisions. Ford helps readers understand Middleton better by his symbolic use of a gold mine. Indeed, the importance of the gold mine symbol in Richard Ford’s “Rock Springs” cannot be underestimated in terms of understanding the protagonist, Earl Middleton.

Ford establishes the symbol early in the story. The narrator and protagonist Earl Middleton, a melancholic petty thief with a sensitive side, describes a sunset over the Snake River as looking “like the end of a rainbow” (1987, p. 438). What comes at the end of a rainbow? A pot of gold—good fortune, a change of luck, something the down-and-out narrator could use. By establishing the symbol—or at least laying the foundation for it—the reader can begin to grasp the importance of the journey Earl Middleton has embarked upon. He’s been trying to get to the other end of the rainbow his whole adult life and although he goes about it in all the wrong ways—stealing, lying—you can’t help empathizing with him. Though misguided, he tries.
Once the idea for the symbol is established, it’s remarkable how the subsequent development of the symbol parallels Earl Middleton’s own inner development.

When using key words to create coherence in the writing, be sure to only use the key words as needed; in other words, do not continually hit the reader over the head with the key words, as it will make the essay monotonous and potentially insult the intelligence of the reader. Just as with the use of transitions, use key words in moderation to keep the reader on track.

**Parallel Structure**

Parallel structure is another form of repetition. In this case, express similar content in grammatically similar ways to emphasize the ideas and bring them together. The following example illustrates how expressing ideas in similarly structured ways makes the ideas clearer and stronger.

*Same-sex couples in committed relationships share the same responsibilities and face many of the same challenges and issues as their heterosexual counterparts. However, because they cannot marry, they are not recognized as a family, and their rights are not protected by their state laws in most cases (Cooke, 2008). Same-sex couples are denied the right to obtain family health coverage. They are forbidden to visit their partner in the hospital after an accident or serious illness. Same-sex couples are deprived of legal and economic protections heterosexual couples enjoy. Same-sex couples do not have Social Security benefits, veterans’ benefits, health insurance benefits, or tax benefits. Some states have formed a nonmarriage marital status called “civil unions” or “domestic partnerships,” creating new legal relationships that have begun to provide such rights to same-sex couples (Masters,
2009). Though these unions are a start, they do not provide the full extent of heterosexual partnership rights, and they fall far short of being a substitute for the equal right to marry.

Notice the balanced manner in which the thoughts are expressed, which gives them both power and coherence:
- Same-sex couples are denied...
- They are forbidden...
- Same-sex couples are deprived...
- Same-sex couples do not have...

The reader might only subconsciously recognize parallelism, but the result is the same in that your main ideas are reinforced and drawn together by way of the sentences’ structure and wording.

**CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHING**

One way to compose body paragraphs is to ask yourself a series of questions once you have spent time drafting, revising, and thinking about what each paragraph is trying to accomplish—that is, the writing represents a better than first-draft effort. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is the point?
- What should readers understand after reading the paragraph?
- Is the topic sentence clear and limited?
- Do all of the supporting details belong?
- Will readers understand the relationship of the supporting details to the point of the paragraph and the larger point of the essay?
- Is the content organized in a logical, easy-to-understand manner?
- Is the development sufficient for the audience and purpose?
- Does anything need to be added or deleted?
INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Have you ever had the experience of reading something that you just couldn’t put down? Do you remember that feeling of being captivated by the first words, of being completely drawn into the text from the get-go, and then thinking about the content long after you finished? Good writing in general can have that effect on readers, but without a strong introduction or conclusion, you will never engage readers the way you need to.

Introductions and conclusions are typically the more challenging parts of a paper to write—and for good reason! The introduction introduces, that is, it sets up the parameters for the discussion and prepares readers for what follows. The conclusion brings the piece of writing to a close; it offers thoughtful analytic commentary based on what came earlier in the discussion. No wonder introductions and conclusions are difficult to write; they depend on everything that comes in between—all of the content!

Most writers should compose the beginning and ending after developing the body paragraphs. However, the writer will need some direction for writing to compose substantive body paragraphs, and to this end, a working thesis (see Drafting a Working Thesis, p. 163) and/or informal outline (see Outlining, p. 166) will probably do the trick.

Introductions and conclusions are also important because they are the first and last impressions readers get. If your introduction or conclusion does not make the right impression, this might reflect unfavorably (and perhaps unfairly) on the entire essay.

Introductions

Introductions set the stage for what is to follow in a piece of writing and are critical in preparing readers for the discussion. Without a proper introduction, readers might not be able to make sense of the content. Although you may write the introduction at any point in your process, you might find it easier to write after completing the paper when you are more certain of what you want to say. Regardless, the
introduction will probably change somewhat as you revise the paper and your focus and ideas get clearer and clearer.

Although your topic and approach might be unique, you should see some overriding characteristics in the introduction paragraph. You need to find the right balance between the following characteristics as determined by your topic and essay objective:

- **Provides relevant background information**: Regardless of the topic, readers need a context to understand your remarks. A good introduction includes necessary information about the topic that readers need to understand the importance of the issue and why what you have to say about it matters. Readers want to feel grounded so that they can easily follow the development of the essay. This doesn’t mean that the introduction provides a summary or all the relevant facts of the essay; rather, it creates a sort of skeletal structure for the reader to hook the information to while reading the body paragraphs.

- **Engages the reader**: A good introduction captures the attention of readers so that they want to read the paragraphs beyond the introduction. Enough specific information is presented so that readers are interested in the topic and what the writer plans to do with it. An engaging introduction invites readers into the world of the writing.

- **Sets the appropriate tone**: The opening paragraph establishes the tone—the spirit and attitude behind the words—that the writer will use in a piece of writing. The tone should be a conscious choice as it reflects how the writer feels about the subject and about the audience, as well as the degree of formality of the writing. In most academic writing, the general tone is formal, but it can be more or less formal depending on the exact purpose of the writing. For example, a piece of writing with the purpose of introducing a new employee will
probably be less formal and more personable than, say, a persuasive essay.

- **Establishes the focus and purpose:** The introduction must make the focus and purpose of the paper clear to readers. Many writers include a thesis statement that establishes the focus and purpose and forecasts the main points. Even if you do not use an explicit thesis statement, the focus and purpose of the paper need to be just as clear. If readers do not understand the focus or what the writer hopes to accomplish, subsequent paragraphs might not make sense to readers.

**Options for Introductions**

The following is a collection of some strategies for writing introductions. Often, an introduction will have characteristics of more than one approach, so you should treat this list as a compendium of possibilities, not as a prescription of how certain types of beginnings must look. A good approach to writing an introduction is to try out a number of options so that you get a sense of the possibilities. Don't feel locked into any one strategy, and recognize that writing an introduction often requires a process just like the rest of your writing. To this end, don’t feel you have to get the introduction right the first time. The more you work on your introduction and think about what you are trying to say in your paper as a whole, the better able you are going to be to write an effective introduction.

**Establish the Issue.** With this type of introduction, your approach is direct and authoritative. You establish the topic, provide relevant background information so the context for your remarks is clear, and place the thesis statement.

*In the last decade or so, American culture has become increasingly tolerant of teenage sexuality. Many parents, too busy in their lives, are not proactive in educating their teens on issues*
related to sexuality. Educators are often left with the role of providing basic information about the subject even as more and more sexual education classes are cut from the curriculum. Where does this leave curious teens? Statistics show that 75% of teens have had sex by the time they are 19 years old. The teenage birth rate continues to climb as do reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases (Healy, 2008). Clearly, it is imperative to develop intervention programs that teach adolescents the effective skills in delaying early sexual behaviors. Early education on delaying sexual activity for teens can drastically decrease teenage pregnancies, prevent the spread of STDs, and help teens to make the right choices that can impact the rest of their lives.

**Pose One or More Questions.** This introduction is a tricky one to pull off, in large part because it is so common. The basic idea is to engage readers by using one or more thoughtful questions at the start. These questions need to move beyond the mundane and predictable so as to pique the audience’s interest.

*Did you ever think that your life would change dramatically in a matter of 24 hours? One day you have a certain kind of life—a home, nearby schools for your kids, a wonderful neighborhood, good job, friends—and the next day, it is all gone, irreversibly changed. As a resident of New Orleans, Louisiana, I had always known that a major hurricane could strike, but even knowing this fact could not prepare me for what happened in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the need for residents to evacuate when mandated, for local and state authorities to work more efficiently together, and for the federal government to respond in a timely and responsible manner.*
Use a Narrative. Telling a brief story or anecdote is a lively way to begin an essay, but the challenge for the writer is to make sure the narrative is clearly related to the focus of the essay—that is, the story has a purpose.

The wind whipped through the trees while lightning flashed and thunder boomed. Up ahead on a hill, a rickety old house stood. In an upstairs window, a single, solitary light shone, casting an eerie shadow across the yard. I was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on business, and was driving to the outskirts of the city to visit my aunt, an old woman I hadn’t seen in nearly 20 years. According to my directions, that rickety old house was my aunt’s house, but I didn’t know if I had the nerve to knock on the door. In fact, I couldn’t remember a time I had been more scared. Everyone experiences fear just as everyone experiences happiness or sadness. Fear is a natural human emotion to the unknown and is characterized by physical changes to the body, an innate need to escape, and acute awareness of one’s surroundings.

Use an Attention-Grabbing Statement. This type of introduction presents an opening sentence that hooks readers immediately. The statement is provocative in some way and readers want to continue reading to understand better the initial sentence.

Some children cannot sit still. They fidget and do not listen. They appear distracted by every little thing and do not seem to learn from their mistakes. These children disregard rules, even when they are punished repeatedly. Many people see such kids and conclude that their parents must not know how to control them. However, the truth is that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is misunderstood. In fact, ADHD
is a growing problem that requires more research to understand, better intervention programs to help afflicted children, and improved training and support programs to help parents and educators.

Use an Extended Example or Series of Brief Examples. With this approach, you provide one or more examples that illustrate perfectly an important aspect of your topic. You need to be careful not to use content that is too sensationalistic, yet at the same time, the examples should be vivid and memorable.

According to the Federal Highway and Transportation Agency, the majority of Americans, some 57%, do not regularly wear seat belts (2008). Teddy Biro didn’t wear one when the car he was driving skidded on an icy road and hit a utility pole; Biro was catapulted through his front windshield and died of blood loss from a severed jugular vein. The coroner reported he had no other injuries besides minor abrasions. Bob Nettleblatt wasn’t wearing a seat belt when a car rear-ended him at a stop sign. Nettleblatt slammed his head into his front windshield and required 137 stitches to close up the laceration; investigators at the scene said if he had been wearing a seat belt, he would have been virtually unhurt from the 2-mph, rear-end collision (Fischer, 2007). Despite what is known about the safety of wearing seat belts, too many Americans still do not buckle up, resulting in enormous emergency medical costs and fatalities that could be avoided. Despite what some people think, wearing a seat belt is not a choice nor does it violate one’s personal rights. Wearing a seat belt is the law and more needs to be done to enforce the law, punish those who break it, and educate young drivers to the dangers of not buckling up.
Define an Essential Term. In some papers, the topic will be specialized enough that you need to define one or more terms so that readers can make sense of the discussion that follows. When defining a term, make sure the term is essential to the discussion and warrants a direct definition. In addition, define a term in your own words, not by copying it from a dictionary. Although referring to a dictionary might seem the logical approach, such definitions are predictable and usually boring. Offer a unique definition for any term that is important enough to require such attention. In the following example, note how the writer defines the term *criminal* in a way that is far more interesting than offering a dictionary definition.

*Gun control legislation is ineffective because of the nature of criminals. A criminal is someone who disobeys the law and does not respect the rules of society. It is against the law to rob banks and murder people, but there are people in society who rob banks and murder people. Criminals do not obey the law regardless of the consequences. With this understanding of the basic nature of a criminal, it seems obvious that gun control would not work at reducing crime because a criminal will not follow the law. Consider the Virginia Tech shootings in April of 2007. Seung-Hui Cho's murderous rampage took place in a gun-free zone (Brady, 2007), but as a criminal, he did not follow the law. If he respected the laws of this country, this crime would never have occurred. It wouldn’t have happened, not because of a gun-free zone, but because he understood murder was against the law. However, criminals do not obey laws—this is what makes them criminals.*

Dramatize a Scene. Beginning in the middle of a scene with action under way is a terrific way to hook readers. The scene needs to be thoughtfully portrayed and compact so that it is appropriate for an
academic essay, but this kind of opening can be very effective for some topics.

4:00 a.m., March 28, 1979, and the floor of the control room at Three Mile Island nuclear power station jumps to life. The two control room operators are jolted from their midshift doldrums as alarms begin to sound and the pounding in the auxiliary room is deafening. What those at the station did not know was that the “worst crisis yet experienced by the nation’s nuclear power industry” (Reuter, 2000, p. 31) had just begun, and its impact wouldn’t be realized for years to come, if ever.

Three Mile Island nuclear power station was located on an island in the middle of the Susquehanna River near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It contained two separate nuclear power plants, TMI 1 and TMI 2. TMI 1 had been shut down for maintenance, but TMI 2 was operating at 97% of rated power providing electricity to the area (Carraway, 2000). Within seconds of the first alarm, a chain of events would commence to destroy the nuclear reactor and with it, the future of the nuclear power industry in this country.

Use a Quote (Direct or Indirect). As with the posing-questions technique, using a quote to start can be effective, but it is also a familiar approach, so it does not come without risk. To this end, you will want to use a quote, whether direct or indirect, that is a zinger and worthy of the space and attention you give it. Be sure to cite quotes from sources, even if the quote is well known, such as those from historical figures or movies.

An observer once said that New Orleanians are either having a party, recuperating from a party, or planning a party. The biggest and best party of all and the city’s most famous celebration is Mardi Gras, the greatest free show on earth. Despite the
image the popular media displays to outsiders, Mardi Gras is not the wild party shown on TV; in fact, Mardi Gras is a yearly celebration that is much tamer than most realize, brings family and friends together, and promotes unity among diverse groups of people.

Use a Shocking Statement or Shocking Statistic(s). This approach presents information that stops readers in their tracks. Although the content is startling, it is also appropriate to the topic and provides an interesting context for the essay.

*McDonald’s has sold over 100 billion burgers. One hundred billion burgers with buns, stacked on top of one another would extend over 2.9 million miles into space—twelve times as far as the moon (Grimes, 2007). What is the secret of McDonald’s incredible success? To use the words of Ray Kroc, McDonald’s founder, the secret to McDonald’s success is that the fast-food giant produces “consistently mediocre food” (Thomas, 2001). The McDonald’s corporation has become a model of success due to its understanding of its market niche, its ability to redefine its image over time, and its ability to remain stable and produce a profit even in difficult economic times.*

Conclusions

At the other end of the essay is its conclusion. For many writers, endings tend to be more difficult to write than beginnings, so you might need to put in some extra effort to make sure your ending works. Ernest Hemingway, the great twentieth-century American writer, claimed to have written 256 different endings for his short novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Why? According to Hemingway, he needed to get it right. Although you might not have the time to try so many different endings to the conclusion you write, do keep in mind what Hemingway clearly knew: For a conclusion to be successful, it needs to be satisfy-
ing. No one likes to invest time in anything if there isn’t some kind of payoff at the end. An ending that is not satisfying is like watching a fireworks display with no grand finale. Good endings create a sense of closure, a sense that the business of the essay has come to a completion; the reader is not expecting more.

When you write your conclusion, keep in mind that it is your last chance to reach your readers, so be sure your final words leave a lasting impression. Although the tendency is to offer a summary of what came before, an effective conclusion moves beyond a mere summary and brings the writing to a thoughtful and graceful exit.

Just as the introduction paragraph has general characteristics to make it effective, the conclusion paragraph has its own characteristics to have the most impact on the reader:

- **Brings the writing to a logical close:** A conclusion provides the necessary signal to readers that the business of the essay is winding down and the reader is being returned to the world outside of the essay. This transition should be fluid and the parting content thoughtful so that readers are prepared for and satisfied with the ending.

- **Reinforces the main idea in an engaging manner:** Just as the introduction provides a first impression, the conclusion provides the last impression. The conclusion should reinforce the main idea of the work but do so in a way that is fresh and not merely a perfunctory rehashing of what the essay discussed. Use the ending as your last chance to reach your audience and make sure the main point, its significance, and/or its larger implications are understood.

- **Leaves readers with something to think about:** Ideally, a conclusion brings the world of the essay to a close in such a way that even though the business of reading has ended, the audience does not stop thinking about what the essay said—its
ideas. You don’t want an audience to end reading an essay, thinking “So what?” Provide some content that engages readers with what is important about the topic and your discussion of it so that the meaning of the writing stays with readers.

Options for Conclusions
What follows is a list of possible ways to conclude your writing. Depending on the purpose of the writing, some endings are more appropriate than others, so give careful thought to these techniques and try out a number of appropriate possibilities. Please also keep in mind that, like the offerings for introductions, you can combine these options so that a conclusion can have characteristics of more than one type of ending.

Most of the options for introductions can also be used for conclusions as well. Recall the introduction in which the writer was telling the story of the dark and stormy night he went to visit an aunt he hadn’t seen in decades. The conclusion could pick up where the introduction left off, or it could tell the story of another fearful situation the writer experienced, but the same general technique, a narrative in this case, could be used.

The Echo. The idea of the echo is to repeat key ideas or words or phrases to create an “echo” that gets at a particular meaning important to the writing.

Too many drivers act in inappropriate ways when they get behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. Too many drivers are unnecessarily aggressive, darting in and out of traffic, running stoplights, putting everyone else on the road in peril. Too many drivers are just plain inconsiderate as if they are the only ones on the road. Finally, too many of those drivers are just like you and me—good, decent people until we get in our cars.
Audience Appeal. The writer shows or points out directly to the audience how things are or the likely consequences if certain conditions remain the same. The content is presented in such a way that the burden of responsibility lies with the audience. This approach is well suited for writing that has a persuasive purpose.

The current political culture allows for staggering sums of money to be spent on campaigns. The basic idea is not so much about content as it is about getting the word out and creating a buzz. The more one hears about a candidate, the greater the buzz. Of course, creating a buzz costs money, but, as advertisers have known for a long time, it is money well spent. Getting elected is a lot like selling laundry detergent, and until American citizens let their governmental advertisers know that they’ve had enough, that spending millions of dollars—even if it’s a candidate’s own money—to hold an office is ludicrous, they have no one but themselves to blame.

State the “So What”. With this ending, the writer essentially states the deeper meaning of the piece of writing so that the idea is not only clear, but it is also emphasized.

Today, Maine is one of only 10 states that has not passed public charter school legislation. Maine’s current public school choice offerings are slim at best. Current choices include only traditional public schools or private schools. Whether the reason for wanting other alternatives is personal or educational, Maine families should be afforded another choice in public education. It’s time for Maine to recognize that public charter schools are a valuable choice in free public education.
It’s How You Say It

“I work as a financial advisor for the John Hancock Financial Network. One of the most quintessential skills in my job is communication. Without this most basic skill, my job would be ineffective. As the old adage goes, it’s not necessarily what you say, it’s how you say it, whether that be through conversation or missive. With all of the information, illustrations, and software at my disposal, the most powerful tool that I carry is the ability to hold an intelligent conversation, effectively communicating my thoughts to those with whom I share an audience.

In my industry, those who succeed do so through exceptional communication skills. All of the intelligence in the world won’t help if you can’t translate it to your clients. I believe this to be true in almost any industry from financial to retail to public service and everything in between. Books are meant to collect and store knowledge. People are meant to communicate it.”

—Kevin Scanlon, Financial Advisor

Back to the Beginning. This ending uses content that in some way refers back to the beginning of the essay, not in a redundant way but in a manner that makes an important connection.

While friends will drift in and out of our lives, disappearing and maybe reappearing, some will be as constant as the stars in the sky. These friends—the essence of true friends—we will keep forever. These few friends will always be around and will see us through thick and thin, good and bad, no matter what because that is what true friends do.

No matter how you structure your conclusion, or other paragraphs in the essay, it is vital that you take time to review what you have written in the essay; even if you have followed all the suggestions in this
Guide, every writer needs to step back and review the draft objectively.

**REVISING AND EDITING**

Writing involves a lot of hard work. The early drafts of most writing almost always need more work—sometimes it’s minor, but sometimes it’s more substantive. The real art of writing occurs not so much in the early, developmental drafts, but, rather, in the later drafts when the writer is sure the content expresses a focused meaning and is working diligently to make the prose almost sing off the page.

Revising and editing are at the center of polishing your writing so that it is as strong and clear on the page as possible. All writers, regardless of accomplishment, revise and edit. This part of the writing process is often the most time consuming, but it can also be the most satisfying the clearer and sharper your ideas and the writing get on the page.

**Revising**

For many writers, revision means nothing more than correcting errors. Although correcting errors is something the writer needs to address (at the end of the writing process when it matters), it’s not what is at the heart of revision. Revision means just that—to re-vision a piece of writing. When you revise, you re-see what is on the page in an effort to improve the content and the presentation as best as you can. Peter Elbow (1998), the author of many books on writing, put it this way: Revision is just a matter of adding, deleting, and rearranging content. Indeed, once you have completed a decent draft of your essay, you are in a position to improve upon your effort, but this takes commitment and time.

Because writing is a process, chances are you did not complete your draft in one sitting. What you thought about your topic on day one at the beginning of the process might be somewhat different from what you think about this topic a week or so later at the end of the
process. Your research might have uncovered some unexpected material that took you in a direction that you didn’t expect at the start of the draft. Indeed, your thesis might have changed a bit as well as your understanding and thoughts on the topic developed. In addition, when you write, when you are close to the material, you do not have the perspective on that content that readers will have. To this end, a draft that seems to you to be one fluid and organized piece of writing might, in fact, be bumpy and disjointed. Points that you thought were clear might not be clear or might not be in the best order. New points might have come to your mind that are not even developed in the draft, and other points that were relevant when you started might be less relevant now.

Most professional writers will tell you that the real act of writing is revision. This is not to say that the drafting process does not require hard work, for it does, but that revision allows the writer to step back from the content and think about it more objectively. Moreover, the writer is in a position to think about the relationship of the body paragraphs to the thesis and the purpose for the writing.

What follows are some practical questions to ask of your draft as you approach revision:

1. Is the tone of the essay appropriate for its audience and purpose?
2. Is the purpose of the writing clear in the development of the essay? (For example, if the purpose is to persuade, is the paper persuasive? Is each body paragraph persuasive?)
3. Is the introductory paragraph(s) compact yet thorough—that is, does it get the reader interested, provide relevant background information, and establish a clear thesis?
4. Does each body paragraph have a defined focus?
5. Is each point supported by convincing evidence?
6. Is each body paragraph developed in such a way that its relationship to the point of the paragraph as well as to the main idea of the essay is evident to readers?
7. Are the body paragraphs organized in the best order? Do the body paragraphs flow smoothly and logically one to the next?

8. Is anything missing? Will readers have any lingering questions?

**Postdraft Outlining**

In addition to the preceding global questions, another effective strategy for approaching revision is to use the postdraft outlining method, which Chapter 13, *Outlining* (pp. 143–158), covers more specifically. This type of outline requires a completed draft—one that represents substantive effort has gone into its completion. A rough draft will not work very well, so be sure that the draft you use will warrant the attention you are going to devote to it.

The postdraft outlining method allows you to take a close look at the points that you make paragraph by paragraph in a draft. Using this revision strategy allows you to identify the clarity of your points, spot repeated points, identify missing points, and determine the effectiveness of how the paragraphs are organized. Often while you are drafting, you are too close to the material to look at what you are producing objectively, which is why the postdraft outline can be so useful as it allows you to see the paper from a new perspective and then revise accordingly.

**Seven Steps to Easy Revision**

Another approach to revision is to use the Seven Steps to Easy Revision method to spruce up your sentences so that they are lean and precise. This approach to revision works best when you feel your paper is near its final form—that is, after revising your paper using a postdraft outline, and when you are fairly sure you have included all the necessary content and it is organized effectively. The Seven Steps to Easy Revision, also similar to a revision method known as the Paramedic Method of revision, is an easy, systematic method for revising your paper. Not one of these steps deals with grammar or mechanics. This approach to revision is nonthreatening, logical, and objective, so take
your time as you work through the steps. You should probably work through a few of the following steps, revise accordingly, and then continue through the steps. You could also print up the essay, and work through the steps that way, revising and printing up a new copy whenever necessary. The following are the Seven Steps to Easy Revision:

1a. Highlight every to be verb (am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being). Count the number of to be verbs you have used and change as many as possible. The verb to be is the most commonly used verb in the English language, but it is not a strong verb. Consider these two sentences:

A. The man was on the corner.
B. The man stood on the corner.

Which of the two sentences is more vivid? Sentence B, right? The verb stood creates an image whereas was does not.

Although you will need to use forms of the verb in your writing, you do not want to use too many. In other words, you do not need to change every to be verb, but you should change as many as you can. In some cases, simply substituting a to be verb for a stronger verb works, but in other cases, you need to revise sentences entirely. For example, let’s say your sentence reads, The sky is filled with stars. In this case, the sentence has two verbs working together (is filled) so that a simple substitution for the verb is does not work. In this case, think about what the sentence is saying and then try to revise it. You probably noticed that the sentence is making a statement about stars, yet stars appears in the sentence as the object of the preposition with (for some help understanding prepositions, please consult Chapter 17, Grammar, Mechanics, and Spelling, pp. 221–296). Why not revise the sentence so that stars is in the subject slot of the sentence? Such a sentence would read Stars fill the sky. The sentence is now
more direct and precise; it uses fewer words and communicates the same idea more effectively.

1b. Highlight every to have verb (have, has, had). As you did with the to be verbs, try to get rid of as many to have verbs as possible. In some cases, you can substitute one verb for another, but in some cases, you need to revise the entire sentence. Although this kind of activity takes time, the end result is a better written paper.

1c. Examine all of your verbs. Ask yourself if every verb is strong and vivid. Try to use the best verbs possible. Working on the word level will bolster your sentences so that they are sharper and easier to understand.

Consider this sentence:

*The wiretap law says that the court cannot approve an interception request unless it believes that normal investigative procedures have been tried first (Shock, 2008).*

What do you think about the highlighted verbs in the sentence? Can you think of ways to improve upon the choice of verbs? The verbs says and believes are not poor verbs to use, but are they the best verbs to use? What about have been tried? This three-word verb phrase includes forms of both to have and to be. Your job at this point is to think and try out other verbs, perhaps even restructuring the sentence entirely.

Let’s take each verb in order. The verb says is a good verb, but it might not be strong enough for the sentence. What if you changed says to states; is that better? Although the two verbs are close in meaning, states is a stronger, more formal verb to use and is, therefore, the better choice. What about believes? Is this verb strong enough? Is it appropriately reflective of what the court must do? The verb believes suggests the court thinks something is true, but is thinks enough given what the sentence
is trying to say? What about the verb finds; is that stronger than believes? In this case, finds seems more conclusive and certain, something the court should do when rendering a decision. The verb finds is the better one to use.

Lastly is the verb phrase have been tried. Suppose you are satisfied with how the sentence is taking shape and will keep have been but want to be sure tried is the best verb for the sentence. Is it? Can you think of a substitute? What about changing have been tried to have been exhausted? Does that make the sentence stronger? Is exhausted appropriate for the sentence? Although tried works well, the verb exhausted is a stronger verb to use and improves the overall authority of the sentence.

Here is what the revised sentence looks like:

The wiretap law states that the court cannot approve an interception request unless it finds that normal investigative procedures have been exhausted first (Shock, 2008).

2. Eliminate unnecessary prepositions. Prepositions are commonly used words that show a relationship between two words in a sentence. For example, I drink strong coffee with a little milk. In this sentence, the preposition with shows a relationship between coffee and milk. You might recall having to memorize a lengthy list of prepositions, words like above, after, behind, below, beneath, beyond, down, during, from, in, into, near, off, on, over, through, to, under, up, and with (for a full discussion of prepositions, please see Chapter 17, Grammar, Mechanics, and Spelling, pp. 221–296). Too often, writers compose sentences that are inefficient in that they use too many prepositions that could be eliminated with a little effort. The idea with this revision step is to highlight prepositions in a sentence and then weed out the prepositions not needed. As with revising verbs discussed in 1, apply this technique sentence by sentence. Here is an example:
The house with the purple doors at the top of the hill belongs to me.

Notice how the prepositions slow down the development of the idea, resulting in a wordy and clumsy sentence. Now imagine an entire essay chockablock full of such sentences. When you eliminate prepositions, you are going to tighten your sentences so that the meaning is clearer. The idea is not to eliminate every preposition, but, rather, to eliminate those that are not needed.

Consider these revised versions with less reliance on prepositions:

My hilltop house has purple doors.
My house is at the top of the hill and has purple doors.

In both revisions, the sentences are tighter, yet each communicates the same idea as the original. This revision step can help you reduce the clutter in your sentences so that the meaning is precise and sharp. With practice, you will find yourself composing tighter sentences from the get-go, and your papers will be better as a result.

3. Count the number of words per sentence, paragraph by paragraph. Lengths should vary. If you find that most of your sentences in a paragraph are about the same length, that is telling you something—namely, the movement of your prose is repetitive and probably predictable and boring to readers. Tinker with the rhythm and flow of your prose. Modify how you compose and join sentences. Read your words aloud and revise sentences that sound clunky or do not seem fluid. Continue to revise until the rhythm and sound of the sentences and transitions are pleasing to your ear. Experiment. You might need to combine sentences, restructure sentences, shorten sentences, and even compose
entirely new sentences—whatever it takes to improve the flow and sound of the writing.

4. Look over your use of the pronouns *it, they, everyone, and everybody*. Make sure each pronoun has a clear reference.

   For example:

   *Boyd vacationed in Jamaica, and they had a good time.*

   The pronoun *they* is used, but what does it refer to? It appears that it is referring to *Boyd*, but *they* is plural and *Boyd* is just one person, so the word is obviously singular. In this regard, the pronoun does not agree with what it is referring to, which is a grammatical error. However, all that needs to happen is clarification of *they*. Here are two revisions:

   *Boyd vacationed in Jamaica, and he and his friend had a good time.*

   *Boyd and his friend had a good time vacationing in Jamaica.*

   In some cases, the pronoun reference might come in an earlier sentence, and if that is the case, make sure the reference is close enough that readers will not be confused.

5. Identify all sentences in which *who, which,* and *that* appear. Using these words too often tends to weaken the total effect of the writing. Keep such usage to a minimum.

   For example:

   *The people who are in my writing group help me improve my work.*

   Although there is nothing grammatically wrong with this sentence, it could be more efficiently written, as seen here:
The people in my writing group help me improve my work.

Or

My writing group helps me improve my work.

6. Evaluate how many times you use the words every, really, and very. These qualifier words are rarely needed and, in fact, usually weaken your writing, so get rid of them or replace them with a more specific description.

7. Revise clichés out of your writing. A cliché is a trite and overused expression such as thick as a brick, live and let live, and you’re walking on thin ice. Get rid of clichés and replace them with original comparisons and/or expressions.

Editing

Editing is the process of fine-tuning your writing. Editing is something best done after you have revised your essay. Editing looks at the smaller but no less important aspects of the writing, such as word choice, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Do not worry about editing matters until you are ready to meet your deadline, because there is no sense laboring over aspects of your paper if it is not near its final form.

A good approach to editing is to read your work aloud slowly, listening carefully to the sound of your writing. In many instances, if the grammar is off or if a transition does not work, you will hear it. In addition, being aware of specific issues that often plague your writing will help focus your attention. In fact, it is probably a good idea to make a personal, tailor-made editing checklist. What follows is an editing checklist for some of the more common editing issues. Feel free to modify this list for your own purposes.
Editing Checklist

☐ Circle words that you are not sure of in terms of spelling and/or meaning. Use the most appropriate words. Check spelling and/or meaning. (Always run spellcheck!)

☐ Avoid second person pronouns (you, your), especially in formal writing.

☐ Do not use first person plural pronouns (we, us, our), especially in formal writing.

☐ Check for correct use of homonyms (e.g., there, their; no, know; to, too).

☐ Check for correct formatting of the paper (e.g., title page correct, proper header, title, spacing, margin).

☐ Check for formatting errors within the paper (e.g., in-text titles either italicized or in quotes; periods after citations when they end a sentence; APA in-text and reference citations correct; commas placed inside an end quote).

☐ Check the visual design of the paper—is it professional looking?

☐ Check for overuse of exclamation points.

☐ Check paragraphing. Indent first lines five spaces. Break up long paragraphs or join shorter ones if need be.

☐ Check capitalization.

☐ Check for its/it’s errors. (Here is a mnemonic for remembering which form to use: An apostrophe makes two words one. To make it possessive, you use none.)

☐ Check for correct use of punctuation (e.g., commas, semicolons, colons, apostrophes).

☐ Check for subject-verb agreement errors.

☐ Check for pronoun-antecedent errors (watch out for singular pronouns like everybody and nobody).

☐ Check for comma splices, run-ons, and fragments.
PROOFREADING

Proofreading is an activity performed after revision and editing have occurred. Although proofreading is similar to editing, your job here is to read your prose carefully as a way to catch any errors that you failed to notice earlier. Read slowly and aloud, checking for weak transitions, typos, and missing/transposed words. Read every word so that you do not skim over simple errors. The majority of errors occur unconsciously, so the best approach is to take your time and give your writing your undivided attention. It is easy to forget a word or end a word with –ed when you need –ing. Similar word form errors can occur. Perhaps you mean to write his but accidentally typed this; spell-check does not flag this kind of error.

Give your work a few good final reads spaced out over a couple of days if possible. Use a hard copy and read the paper at least once from the last word to the first so that you focus on just the words and the punctuation that are actually on the page. What you are trying to do is catch “obvious” errors that your eyes do not see when you read start to end because you are so close to the material and what the writing is supposed to say that you overlook what is actually on the page. Many writers rush through proofreading believing that their papers do not contain technical flaws or that readers will overlook typographical errors. Although this might be true to some extent, the more you practice this skill, the better you will get at proofreading and the better your papers will be because of your effort. Moreover, the more polished and professional looking your document, the more credibility you will have in the eyes of your readers and the more successful you will be at achieving your purpose in the piece of writing. Proofreading requires legwork on the part of the writer, but it is time well spent and a skill that good writers need to cultivate.

References

Style with respect to writing refers to the different ways we write in different settings and disciplines. For example, the style of writing that is appropriate for an e-mail to a close friend (a casual style filled with humor, abbreviations, contractions, and slang) is different from the style appropriate for a business memo (a direct and formal style with to-the-point sentences, bulleted summaries of findings, or next steps). In brief, what is stylistically appropriate in one type of writing might not be in another. Part of being a successful writer is determining the required style for different occasions, and then being able to write in that style. How do you learn about different styles? Let us break down some of the more common ones.

We often discuss writing as being “formal” or “informal.” Formal writing tends to have a professional purpose (e.g., business or academic) and tends to be geared toward a professional audience (e.g., a prospective employer or a professor). College papers, résumés, lab reports, legal briefs, business memos, and technical documents are all types of writing that require a formal style. It follows standard conventions of grammar, spelling, and word choice, and is clear and concise. It often requires numerous revisions to get it to its final form.

Informal writing, on the other hand, tends to have a personal purpose (e.g., building relationships with family or friends, or jotting down things to remember them) and as such is geared toward a personal audience (e.g., you, friends, and family). Text messages, Facebook® status updates, Twitter™ tweets, greeting cards, shopping
lists, and instant messages are all types of writing that are most natural with an informal style. Informal writing has more flexibility in terms of its grammatical, spelling, and wording conventions. Although being clear and concise is still a common goal (in particular when characters are limited as with text messages), humor and creativity are more highly valued.

Table 15.1 provides some examples that highlight the difference between formal and informal styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15.1 FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FORMAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any department failing to meet the March 1 implementation deadline will find its annual recruiting budget reduced by 5%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The honor of your presence is requested at the marriage of Ms. Margaret Stone and Mr. Joshua Freeman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Milltown Reservoir samples showed a mean nitrate concentration of 18 ppm, likely due to increased fertilization runoff from neighboring properties. Steps must be taken to reduce levels to 10 ppm to ensure a safe supply of drinking water for the area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within each of these styles, you will find other substyles. In the case of formal academic writing, different academic disciplines have different preferred styles. For example, you might have been told by past teachers to avoid the passive voice (no: The year’s profitability goals were established; yes: The CEO established the year’s profit-
ability goals), and first person (no: I think that the experiment demonstrated...; yes: The experiment demonstrated ...).

It might surprise you to learn that the passive voice is the preferred style in some disciplines, as is the use of first person. The sciences often use passive voice because the passive voice puts the emphasis on the object. If you are conducting an experiment, what is noteworthy are the results of the experiment, not who conducted it; therefore, the passive high levels of magnesium were found is more appropriate than the active I found high levels of magnesium. Similarly, the humanities often use the first person because humanistic research reveals personal reactions to art, literature, and philosophy; therefore, I find the artist’s use of blue to be connected to his chronic depression might be quite appropriate in the humanities.

WHAT IS VOICE?
Have you ever read something—a letter from a friend, a Facebook® posting—and thought to yourself, “I can totally hear her saying that!” It is as though you literally “hear” the voice of the author in your head, and it will often bring a smile to your face. That, in short, is what is meant by the term voice in writing. Your voice is your own individual, unique manner of expression, and we each have one.

How is voice different from style? A fashion analogy might help us here. Imagine you have been invited to a company holiday party. It is being held in the finest hotel downtown, and the invitations specify “black tie,” meaning that men should dress in tuxedos and women should dress in evening gowns. Just as with style in writing, this style in fashion tells you the guidelines for what is appropriate given the event, and showing up in Bermuda shorts and flip-flops would not be appropriate. Yet, even with this style guideline, no one will look identical at the party. The men’s tuxedos will vary in cut and fabric, and the range of women’s evening gowns in terms of color, fabric, and overall design will be very large. In this way, each person will still be unique and show their unique voice. As with fashion, your unique voice can
come through regardless of the writing style within which you are working.

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN STYLE AND VOICE

As discussed previously, the biggest difference between style and voice is that style is something already established that you adopt, whereas voice is something that comes from inside you. There are several great techniques for developing both.

The best way to develop a style is first to determine the type of writing you will be doing (e.g., a business memo, a college essay, a legal brief, a technical document, a patient report). Next, read examples written by other writers in that area, observe their stylistic choices, and follow that style. Reaching out directly to a mentor—be it a supervisor or a professor—to ask about stylistic conventions is also a great idea. Finally, remember that the goal of any communication style is still clear communication, and consistent choices lead to clarity.

The techniques for developing your voice have some overlap with those for developing your style. Once again, it is important to think about the kind of writing you are doing, and read how voice comes through in the way other authors have written in those areas. Although your voice comes through in all forms of writing, it is likely to be more noticeable in informal writing versus formal writing. It is also a great idea to read as many authors as you can, paying attention to how their voice comes through, and identifying which aspects of their writing are signatures of their voice. Is it their humor, the length of their sentences, their word choice, something else, or all of the above?

To practice finding characteristics of voice, try one or more of the following activities:

1. Visit Facebook® or another social media site, and—taking care not to see who posted what—read several posts made by your
friends. Can you tell who wrote which? How? Which characteristics identify the author?

2. Do an Internet (Google™, Bing™, Yahoo!®, etc.) search for “comedian quotes” and review quotations from several comedians with whom you are familiar. Can you “hear” the comedian say the quote, even though you are reading it? How do you know this? What characteristics establish the comedian’s voice?

3. Look at writing you have done in the past (letters, e-mails, social media postings). What characteristics in your writing make it clear you wrote it?

**STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

**Honoring Your Style and Voice**

One way to develop style and voice in your writing is to spend some private time each day writing something personal. You can write a reaction to something that happened during your day, a remembrance of a special moment or interaction with someone, or a reflection on your goals. This doesn’t have to take long, maybe 10–20 minutes, and it doesn’t have to be like a journal. You can simply label it *Reaction to…*, or *Thoughts About…*, or *My Goals for…*.

**EFFECTIVE USE OF LANGUAGE**

Effective use of language is, simply put, using the style, voice, and word choice to get your message across to your readers in the best way possible. We have discussed style and voice already, so let us turn our attention now to word choice.

Many writers—especially student writers—make the mistake of trying to write with unfamiliar words with the goal of making their writing sound “intelligent.” In fact, misusing a word is worse than not using it at all. Further, if you are unfamiliar with a word, there is a good chance that some of your readers are as well. This does not mean that you should not try to expand your vocabulary: We each learn new words every day. You simply should not feel, however, that you have
to use “big” words to make the right impression. The key is using the right word for the right setting.

Style, voice, and effective use of language are three important components of writing that works. Every writer, no matter how experienced or how new, should pay attention to these three areas and consciously work to improve them. Remember, however, at the end of the day that regardless of style or voice, the best writing is writing that is clear. If you keep clarity as your number one priority, you are bound to be successful with your writing!