

Thirteenth
Edition



The Little, Brown Handbook

Available with MyWritingLab™

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(inside back cover)

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Thirteenth
Edition

The Little, Brown Handbook

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Senior Manufacturing Buyer: Roy L. Pickering, Jr.
Printer and Binder: R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company—Crawfordsville
Cover Printer: Lehigh-Phoenix Color Corporation—Hagerstown

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fowler, H. Ramsey (Henry Ramsey)

The Little, Brown handbook / H. Ramsey Fowler, Jane E. Aaron.—Thirteenth edition.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-321-98827-0

1. English language—Grammar—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. English language—Rhetoric—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Report writing—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Aaron, Jane E. II. Title.

PE1112.F64 2016

808'.042—dc23

2014041651

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1—DOC—18 17 16 15

Student Edition

ISBN-10: 0-321-98827-2

ISBN-13: 978-0-321-98827-0

À La Carte Edition

ISBN-10: 0-13-400695-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-400695-6

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Preface for Students: Using This Book


The Little, Brown Handbook is a basic resource that will answer almost any question you have about writing. Here you can find how to get ideas, develop paragraphs, punctuate quotations, find sources for research projects, cite sources, or write a résumé. The handbook can help you not only in writing courses but also in other courses and outside of school.

Don't let the size of the handbook put you off. You need not read the whole book to get something out of it, and no one expects you to know everything included. Primarily a reference tool, the handbook is written and arranged to help you find the answers you need when you need them, quickly and easily.

Using this book will not by itself make you a good writer; for that, you need to care about your work at every level, from finding a subject to spelling words. But learning how to use the handbook and its information can give you the means to write *what* you want in the *way* you want.

Reference aids

You have many ways to find what you need in the handbook:

- **Use the directory.** “Plan of the Book,” inside the front cover, displays the book’s entire contents.
- **Use a glossary.** “Glossary of Usage” (pp. 807–23) clarifies more than 275 words that are commonly confused and misused. “Glossary of Terms” (pp. 824–46) defines more than 350 words used in discussing writing.
- **Use the index.** Beginning on page 849, the extensive index includes every term, concept, and problem word or expression mentioned in the book.
- **Use a list.** Three helpful aids fall inside the book’s back cover: (1) “ Guide” pulls together all the book’s material for students who are using standard American English as a second language or a second dialect. (2) “Editing Symbols” explains abbreviations often used to comment on papers. And (3) “Useful Lists and Summaries” indexes topics that students frequently ask about.
- **Use the elements of the page.** As shown in the illustration on the next page, the handbook constantly tells you where you are and what you can find there.

Content and organization

An overview of the handbook’s contents appears inside the front cover. Briefly, the book divides into the following sections.

The handbook's page elements

Running head (header) showing the topic being discussed on this page

325 Adjectives and adverbs

Chapter essentials summarizing key concepts and learning objectives

Chapter essentials

Link to MyWritingLab, with the eText and other resources

Page tab containing the section code (16a) and editing symbol (ad)

ad
16a

16 Adjectives and Adverbs

- Use adjectives only to modify nouns and pronouns (below).
 - After a linking verb, use an adjective to modify the subject (p. 326).
 - After a direct object, use an adjective to modify the object and an adverb to modify the verb (p. 327).
 - Use comparative and superlative forms appropriately (p. 327).
 - Avoid most double negatives (p. 329).
 - Use nouns sparingly as modifiers (p. 330).
 - Distinguish between present and past participles as adjectives (p. 330).
 - Use *a, an, the*, and other determiners appropriately (p. 331).
- Visit MyWritingLab™ for more resources on adjectives and adverbs.

Adjectives and adverbs are modifiers that describe, restrict, or otherwise qualify the words to which they relate.

Summary or checklist box providing key information in accessible form

Functions of adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives modify nouns: serious student
pronouns: ordinary one

Adverbs modify verbs: warmly greet
adjectives: only three people
adverbs: quite seriously
phrases: nearly to the edge of the cliff
clauses: just when we arrived
sentences: Fortunately, she is employed.

Culture-language connection, a pointer for students using standard American English as a second language or a second dialect



In standard American English an adjective does not change along with the noun it modifies to show plural number; white [not whites] shoes, square [not squares] spaces. Only nouns form plurals.

Section heading, a main convention or topic labeled with the section code, **16a**: chapter number (**16**) and section letter (**a**)

16a Use adjectives only to modify nouns and pronouns.

Adjectives modify only nouns and pronouns. Do not use adjectives instead of adverbs to modify verbs, adverbs, or other adjectives:

Faulty The groups view family values different.

Revised The groups view family values differently.

Examples, always indented, with underlining and annotations highlighting sentence elements and revisions

Exercise 16.1 Revising: Adjectives and adverbs

Revise the following sentences so that adjectives and adverbs are used appropriately. If any sentence is already correct as given, mark the number preceding it.

Example:

The announcer warned that traffic was moving very slow.
The announcer warned that traffic was moving very slowly.

- People who take their health serious often believe that movie-theater popcorn is a healthy snack.
- Nutrition information about movie popcorn may make these people feel different.
- One large tub of movie popcorn has twelve hundred calories and sixty grams of saturated fat—both surprisingly high numbers.
- Once people are aware of the calories and fat, they may feel badly about indulging in this classic snack.

Exercise providing opportunity for practice

- **Chapters 1–5:** The writing process, writing and revising paragraphs, and presenting your writing in print, online, and orally.
- **Chapters 6–11:** Reading and writing in and out of college, with chapters on academic writing, critical reading and writing, reading arguments, writing arguments, essay exams, and public writing.
- **Chapters 12–26:** Sentence basics, including the conventions of English grammar, errors that affect clarity, and techniques of effective sentences.
- **Chapters 27–36:** Punctuation and mechanics (capital letters, italics, and the like).
- **Chapters 37–40:** Words—how to use them appropriately and precisely, how to edit them for conciseness, how to spell them.
- **Chapters 41–48:** Research writing, from planning through revising, with detailed help on finding and evaluating sources, avoiding plagiarism, and citing sources, along with two annotated sample papers.
- **Chapters 49–52:** Writing in the academic disciplines, including concepts, tools, and source citations in literature, other humanities, the social sciences, and the natural and applied sciences.

Recommended usage

The conventions described and illustrated in this handbook are those of standard American English—the label given the dialect used in higher education, business, and the professions. (See also pp. 141–43.) The handbook stresses written standard English, which is more conservative than the spoken dialect in matters of grammar and usage. A great many words and constructions that are widely spoken remain unaccepted in careful writing.

When clear distinctions exist between the language of conversation and that of careful writing, the handbook provides examples of each and labels them *spoken* and *written*. When usage in writing itself varies with the level of formality intended, the handbook labels examples *formal* and *informal*. When usage is mixed or currently changing, the handbook recommends that you choose the more conservative usage because it will be accepted by all readers.

Preface for Instructors

The Little, Brown Handbook always addresses both the current and the recurrent needs of writing students and teachers. This thirteenth edition is no exception. Writing and its teaching change continuously, and the handbook has changed substantially in content. At the same time, much about writing does not change, and the handbook remains a comprehensive, clear, and accessible guide to a host of writing situations and challenges.

The Little, Brown Handbook is actually many books in one, and each is stronger in this edition. The revisions—highlighted below with **New**—affect most pages.

A guide to academic writing

The handbook gives students a solid foundation in the goals and requirements of college writing.

- **New** The chapter on academic writing, now at the start of Part 2, includes a greatly expanded overview of common academic genres, such as responses, critical analyses, arguments, informative and personal writing, and research papers and reports. The discussion highlights key features of each genre and points students to examples in the handbook.
- **New** Eighteen examples of academic writing in varied genres appear throughout the handbook, among them a new critical analysis of an advertisement and a new social-science research report documented in APA style.
- **New** With each of the sample papers, a summary box titled “The writing situation” gives an overview of the situation to which the student responded—subject, purpose, audience, genre, and use of sources—thus connecting concepts with actual writing.
- **New** Emphasizing critical analysis and writing, the expanded chapter on critical reading and writing includes two full-length opinion pieces as exercises in critical reading, a new advertisement with a student’s analysis, a revised discussion of writing critically about texts and visuals, and a new critical analysis paper.
- **New** Pulling together key material on academic integrity, Chapter 6 on academic writing and Chapter 44 on plagiarism discuss developing one’s own perspective on a topic, using and managing sources, and avoiding plagiarism. Other chapters throughout the handbook reinforce these important topics.
- Synthesis receives special emphasis wherever students might need help balancing their own and others’ views, such as in responding to texts and visuals.

- Parts 9 and 10 give students a solid foundation in research writing and writing in the disciplines (literature, other humanities, social sciences, natural and applied sciences), along with extensive coverage of documentation in MLA, Chicago, APA, and CSE styles.

A guide to research writing

With detailed advice, the handbook always attends closely to research writing. The discussion stresses using the library Web site as the gateway to finding sources, managing information, evaluating and synthesizing sources, integrating source material, and avoiding plagiarism.

- **New** Coverage of the working bibliography groups sources by type, reflecting a streamlined approach to source material throughout the handbook.
- **New** The discussion of libraries' Web sites covers various ways students may search for sources—catalog, databases, and research guides.
- **New** A revised discussion of keywords and subject headings helps students develop and refine their search terms.
- **New** A streamlined discussion of gathering information from sources stresses keeping accurate records of source material, marking borrowed words and ideas clearly, and using synthesis.
- **New** A chapter on documenting sources explains key features of source documentation, defines the relationship between in-text citations and a bibliography, and presents pros and cons of bibliography software.
- To help students develop their own perspectives on their research subjects, the text advises asking questions, entering into dialog with sources, and presenting multiple views fairly and responsibly.
- The discussion of evaluating sources—library, Web, and social media—helps students discern purposes and distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources. Case studies show the application of critical criteria to sample articles, Web documents, and a blog.
- The extensive chapter on avoiding plagiarism discusses deliberate and careless plagiarism, shows examples of plagiarized and revised sentences, and gives updated advice about avoiding plagiarism with online sources.
- Two complete research papers illustrate MLA style. One of them is a paper-in-progress, following a student through the research process and culminating in an annotated essay on green consumerism.

An updated guide to documentation

The extensive coverage of four documentation styles—MLA, Chicago, APA, and CSE—reflects each style’s latest version.

- **New** To help students match their sources with appropriate citation formats, a succinct guide accompanies the index to the models in each style.
- **New** Reorganized chapters for all four styles group sources by type, thus simplifying the process of finding appropriate models and clarifying differences among print, database, Web, and other sources.
- **New** Updated, annotated samples of key source types illustrate MLA and APA documentation, showing students how to find the bibliographical information needed to cite each type and highlighting the similarities and differences between print and database sources.
- **New** A complete social-science research report shows APA style in the context of student writing.
- **New** The chapter on CSE documentation reflects the new eighth edition of *Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*.
- For all styles, color highlighting makes authors, titles, dates, and other citation elements easy to grasp.

A guide to writing as a process

The handbook takes a practical approach to assessing the writing situation, generating ideas, developing the thesis statement, revising, and other elements of the writing process.

- **New** An expanded discussion of thesis covers using the thesis statement to preview organization.
- **New** A reorganized presentation of drafting, revising, and editing distinguishes revising more clearly as a step separate from editing.
- **New** A revised discussion of preparing a writing portfolio gives an overview of common formats and requirements.
- **New** Chapter 4 on paragraphs offers new, relevant examples illustrating important concepts of coherence, organization, and development.
- **New** A revised and streamlined chapter on presenting writing focuses on essential information related to document design, visuals and other media, writing for online environments, and oral presentations.

A guide to usage, grammar, and punctuation

The handbook’s core reference material reliably and concisely explains basic concepts and common errors, provides hundreds of

annotated examples from across the curriculum, and offers frequent exercises (including end-of-part exercises that combine several kinds of problems).

- **New** Throughout the handbook, revised explanations of grammar concepts and rules simplify the presentation and emphasize key material.
- **New** Dozens of new and revised examples and exercises clarify and test important concepts.
- **New** Two common trouble spots—sentence fragments and passive voice—are discussed in greater detail and illustrated with new and more examples.
- **New** Added examples in Part 8 on effective words show common shortcuts of texting and other electronic communication and how to revise them for academic writing.
- Summary and checklist boxes provide quick-reference help with color highlighting to distinguish sentence elements.

A guide to visual and media literacy

The handbook helps students process nonverbal information and use it effectively in their writing.


- **New** A student work-in-progress illustrates the process of analyzing an advertisement and culminates in a sample critical analysis.
- **New** Updated and detailed help with preparing or finding illustrations appears in Chapter 5 on presenting writing and Chapter 42 on finding sources.
- Thorough discussions of critically reading advertisements, graphs, and other visuals appear in Chapter 7 on critical reading, Chapter 8 on reading arguments, and Chapter 43 on working with sources.

A guide for writing beyond the classroom


Chapter 11 on public writing extends the handbook’s usefulness beyond academic writing.

- **New** Discussions of writing for social media encourage students to consider their potential audience now and in the future, whether they are writing to express themselves or to represent an organization.
- **New** Updated coverage of writing a job application discusses cover letters, résumés, and professional online profiles.

A guide for culturally and linguistically diverse writers

At notes and sections labeled , the handbook provides extensive rhetorical and grammatical help, with examples, for writers whose first language or dialect is not standard American English.

xii Preface for instructors

- Fully integrated coverage, instead of a separate section, means that students can find what they need without having to know which problems they do and don't share with native SAE speakers.
- “ Guide,” inside the back cover, orients students with advice on mastering SAE and pulls all the integrated coverage together in one place.

An accessible reference guide

The handbook is designed to be easy to use.

- **New** Streamlined explanations and new explanatory headings make key information easier to find.
- A clean, uncluttered page design uses color and type clearly to distinguish parts of the book and elements of the pages.
- Color highlighting in boxes and on documentation models distinguishes important elements.
- Annotations on both visual and verbal examples connect principles and illustrations.
- Dictionary-style headers in the index make it easy to find entries.
- Helpful endpapers offer several paths to the book's content.
- More than 160 boxes provide summaries and checklists of key information.
- A preface just for students outlines the book's contents, details reference aids, and explains the page layout.

Writing resources and supplements

Pearson offers a variety of support materials to make teaching easier and to help students improve as writers. The following resources are geared specifically to *The Little, Brown Handbook*. For more information on these and scores of additional supplements, visit pearsonhighered.com or contact your local Pearson sales representative.

- **MyWritingLab** This tutorial, homework, and assessment program provides engaging experiences for teaching and learning. Flexible and easy to customize, *MyWritingLab* helps students improve their writing through context-based learning. Whether through self-study or instructor-led learning, *MyWritingLab* supports and complements course work.

Writing at the center: In new composing and “Review Plan” spaces, *MyWritingLab* brings together student writing, instructor feedback, and remediation via rich multimedia activities, allowing students to learn through their own writing.

Student success: *MyWritingLab* identifies the skills needed for success in composition classes and provides personalized remediation for students who need it.

Assessment tools: *MyWritingLab* generates powerful gradebook reports whose visual analytics give insight into student achievement at individual, section, and program levels.

- The *Instructor's Annotated Edition* of *The Little, Brown Handbook* has been thoroughly revised by Cynthia Marshall, Wright State University. It provides a complete teaching system in one book. Integrated with the student text are essays on teaching, updated reading suggestions, specific tips for class discussions and activities, and answers to the handbook's exercises.
- The *Instructor's Resource Manual* includes all the teaching material and exercise answers from the *Instructor's Annotated Edition*.
- *The Little, Brown Handbook Answer Key* provides answers to the handbook's exercises.
- *Diagnostic and Editing Tests and Exercises* are cross-referenced to *The Little, Brown Handbook* and are available online.

Acknowledgments

The Little, Brown Handbook remains relevant and fresh because instructors give feedback: they talk with Pearson's sales representatives and editors, answer questionnaires, write detailed reviews, and send us personal notes. For the thirteenth edition, we wish to thank the following instructors who communicated with us directly or through reviews. Their experiences and their insights into the handbook led to the improvements in this new edition: Monique Leslie Akassi, Bowie State University; Joshua Austin, Cumberland County College; Ken Bishop, Itawamba Community College; LaToya W. Bogard, Mississippi State University; Cheryl Borman, Hillsborough Community College, Ybor City Campus; Sonia Bush, North Lake College; Helen Ceraldi, North Lake College; Michael Dittman, Butler County Community College; Jesse Doiron, Lamar University–Beaumont; Genesis Downey, Owens Community College; Anthony Edgington, University of Toledo; Guy Steven Epley, Samford University; Marilyn Y. Ford, East Mississippi Community College; Jacquelyn Gaiters-Jordan, Pikes Peak Community College; Patricia Gallo, Delaware Technical Community College; Jennifer Hazel, Owens Community College; Sue Henderson, East Central College; Debra Johanyak, University of Akron, Wayne College; Cheryl Johnson, Lamar University; Melisa Jones, Texarkana College; Erin Kramer, Owens Community College; Elizabeth Kuechenmeister, Lindenwood University; Isera Tyson Miller, State College of Florida; Steve Moore, Arizona Western College; Ann C. Spurlock, Mississippi State University; Ishmael Matthew Stabosz, Delaware Technical Community College; Greg Stone, Tulsa Community College, Metro Campus; Alex Tavares, Hillsborough Community College; John Valliere, Saint Petersburg College; Joy Walsh, Butler Community College; Natasha Whitton, Southeastern Louisiana University;

Debbie Williams, Abilene Christian University; L. Ureka Williams, Tulsa Community College, Metro Campus; Sara Yaklin, University of Toledo.

In responding to the ideas of these thoughtful critics, we had the help of several creative people. Valerie Vlahakis, John Wood Community College, prompted us to rethink and reorganize the documentation chapters and graciously allowed us to adapt her guide to finding appropriate models. Sigrid Anderson Cordell, University of Michigan, guided us through the ever-changing contemporary academic library. Sylvan Barnet, Tufts University, continued to lend his expertise in the chapter “Reading and Writing about Literature,” which is adapted from his *Short Guide to Writing about Literature* and *Introduction to Literature*. Ellen Kuhl Repetto provided creative, meticulous, and invaluable help with the material on research writing. And Carol Hollar-Zwick, sine qua non, served brilliantly as originator, sounding board, critic, coordinator, researcher, producer, and friend.

A superb publishing team helped us make this book. Our editors at Pearson—Joseph Terry, Joseph Opiela, and Anne Brunell Ehrenworth—offered perceptive insights into instructors’ and students’ needs. Our project manager, Savoula Amanatidis, and production editor, Kathy Smith, shepherded the manuscript skillfully through the many stages of becoming a book. Vernon Nahrgang copyedited the manuscript with precision and care. Jerilyn Bockorick once again made the book a pleasure to use. We are grateful to all these collaborators.

PART 1

The Process of Writing

- 1 Assessing the Writing Situation
- 2 Discovering and Shaping Ideas
- 3 Drafting, Revising, and Editing
- 4 Writing and Revising Paragraphs
- 5 Presenting Writing

1 Assessing the Writing Situation

Chapter essentials

- Understand the writing process (below).
- Analyze the writing situation (p. 4).
- Choose and limit a subject (p. 6).
- Define your purpose (p. 6).
- Consider your audience (p. 11).
- Understand the genre (p. 15).

Visit [MyWritingLab™](#) for more resources on assessing the writing situation.

“Writing is easy,” snarled the late sportswriter Red Smith. “All you do is sit down at the typewriter and open a vein.” Most writers would smile in agreement, and so might you. Like anything worthwhile, writing well takes hard work. This chapter and the next two will show you some techniques that writers have found helpful for starting, continuing, and completing college assignments.

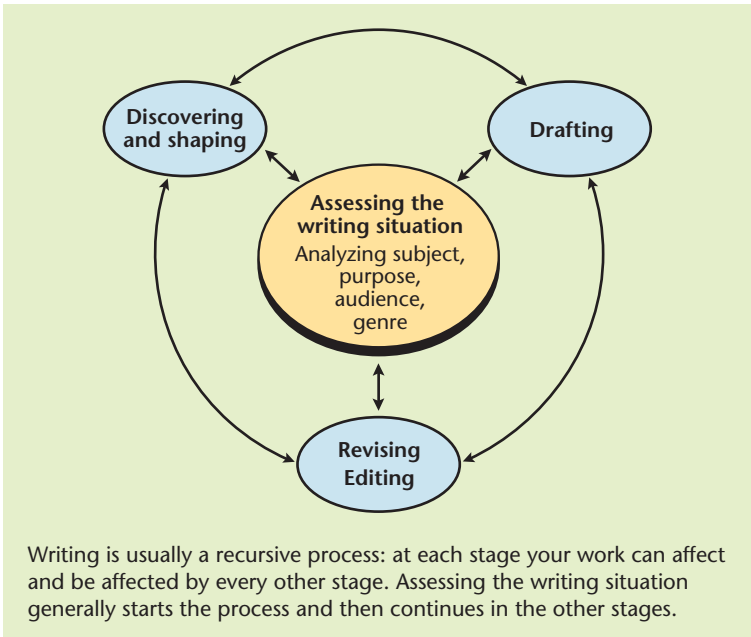
1a Understanding how writing happens

Every time you sit down to write, you embark on a **writing process**—the term for all the activities, mental and physical, that go into creating what eventually becomes a finished piece of work. Even for experienced writers the process is usually messy, which is one reason that it is sometimes difficult. Though we may get a sense of ease and orderliness from a published magazine article, we can safely assume that the writer had to work hard to achieve those qualities, struggling to express half-formed thoughts, shaping and reshaping paragraphs to make a point convincingly.

There is no *one* writing process; no two writers proceed in the same way, and even an individual writer adapts his or her process to the task at hand. Still, most writers experience writing as a **recursive process** in which the following stages overlap and influence one another:

- **Analyzing the writing situation:** considering subject, purpose, audience, genre (type of writing), and other elements of the project (pp. 4–6).
- **Discovering or planning:** posing a question, gathering information, focusing on a central theme, and organizing material (pp. 17–45).
- **Drafting:** answering the question and expressing and connecting ideas (pp. 47–51).

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- **Revising:** reconsidering the central question or idea, rethinking and improving content and organization, developing supporting ideas more thoroughly, and deleting tangents (pp. 51–55).
- **Editing:** improving sentences and checking grammar, punctuation, word choice, and presentation (pp. 61–64).

Note Like many others, you may believe that writing is only, or even mainly, a matter of correctness. True, any written message will find a more receptive audience if it is correct in grammar, spelling, and similar matters. But these concerns should come late in the writing process, after you've allowed yourself to discover what you want to say, freeing yourself to make mistakes along the way. As one writer put it, you need to get the clay on the potter's wheel before you can shape it into a bowl, and you need to shape the bowl before you can perfect it. So get your clay on the wheel, and work with it until it looks like a bowl. Then worry about correctness.

Exercise 1.1 Starting a writing journal

Recall several writing experiences that you have had—an e-mail you had difficulty composing, an essay you enjoyed writing, a term paper that involved a happy or miserable all-nighter, a post to a blog that received a surprising response. What do these experiences reveal to you about

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writing, particularly your successes and problems with it? Consider the following questions:

- Do you like to experiment with language?
- Are some kinds of writing easier than others?
- Do you have trouble getting ideas or expressing them?
- Do you worry about grammar and spelling?
- Do your readers usually understand what you mean?

Record your thoughts as part of continuing journal entries that track your experiences as a writer. (See pp. 20–22 on keeping a journal, and see the exercises titled “Considering your past work” in Chapters 1–4.) As you complete writing assignments for your composition course and other courses, keep adding to the journal, noting especially which procedures seem most helpful to you. Your aim is to discover your feelings about writing so that you can develop a dependable writing process of your own.

1b Analyzing the writing situation

Any writing you do for others occurs in a context that both limits and clarifies your choices. You are communicating something about a particular subject to a particular audience of readers for a specific reason. You may be required to write in a particular genre. You may need to conduct research. You’ll be up against a length requirement and a deadline. And you may be expected to present your work in a certain format and medium.

These are the elements of the **writing situation**, and analyzing them at the very start of a project can tell you much about how to proceed. (For more information about these elements, refer to the page numbers given in parentheses.)

Context

- **What is your writing for?** A course in school? Work? Something else? What do you know of the requirements for writing in this context?
- **What are the basic requirements of the writing task?** Consider requirements for length, deadline, subject, purpose, audience, and genre. What leeway do you have?
- **What medium will you use to present your writing?** Will you deliver it on paper, online, or orally? What does the presentation method require in preparation time, special skills, and use of technology?

Subject (pp. 6–9)

- **What does your writing assignment require you to write about?** If you don’t have a specific assignment, what subjects might be appropriate for this situation?
- **What interests you about the subject?** What do you already know about it? What questions do you have about it?
- **What does the assignment require you to do with the subject?**

Purpose (pp. 9–11)

- **What aim does your assignment specify?** For instance, does it ask you to explain something or argue a position?
- **Why are you writing?**
- **What do you want your work to accomplish?** What effect do you intend it to have on readers?
- **How can you best achieve your purpose?**

Audience (pp. 11–14)

- **Who will read your writing?** Why will your readers be interested (or not) in your writing? How can you make your writing interesting to them?
- **What do your readers already know and think about your subject?** What characteristics—such as education or political views—might influence their response?
- **How should you project yourself in your writing?** What role should you play in relation to your readers, and what information should you provide? How informal or formal should your writing be?
- **What do you want readers to do or think after they read your writing?**

Genre (pp. 15–16)

- **What genre, or type of writing, does the assignment call for?** Are you to write an analysis, a report, a proposal, or some other type? Or are you free to choose the genre in which to write?
- **What are the conventions of the genre you are using?** For example, readers might expect a claim supported by evidence, a solution to a defined problem, clear description, or easy-to-find information.

Research (pp. 542–624)

- **What kinds of evidence will best suit your subject, purpose, audience, and genre?** What combination of facts, examples, and expert opinions will support your ideas?
- **Does your assignment require research?** Will you need to consult sources or conduct interviews, surveys, or experiments?
- **Even if research is not required, what information do you need to develop your subject?** How will you obtain it?
- **What documentation style should you use to cite your sources?** (See pp. 623–24 on source documentation in the academic disciplines.)

Deadline and length

- **When is the assignment due?** How will you apportion the work you have to do in the time available?
- **How long should your writing be?** If no length is assigned, what seems appropriate for your subject, purpose, and audience?

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Presentation

- **What format or method of presentation does the assignment specify or imply?** (See pp. 108–21 on academic writing, pp. 125–29 on oral presentations, and pp. 232–44 on business and other public writing.)
- **How might you use illustrations, video, and other elements to achieve your purpose?** (See pp. 108–16.)

Exercise 1.2 Analyzing a writing situation

The following assignment was given in a survey course in psychology. What does the assignment specify about the elements of the writing situation? What does it imply? Given this assignment, how would you answer the preceding questions about the writing situation?

When is psychotherapy most likely to work? That is, what combinations of client, therapist, and theory tend to achieve good results? In your paper, cite studies supporting your conclusions. Length: 1500 to 1800 words. Post your paper online to me and to your discussion group by March 30.

1c Discovering and limiting a subject

For most college writing, you will write in response to an assignment. The assignment may specify your subject, or it may leave the choice to you. (If you're stuck, use the discovery techniques on pp. 17–27 to think of subjects.) Whether the subject is assigned or not, it will probably need thought if it is to achieve these aims:

- **The subject should be suitable for the assignment.**
- **It should be neither too general nor too limited** for the length of the project and the deadline assigned.
- **It should be something that interests you and that you are willing to learn more about.**

1 Responding to a specific assignment

Many assignments will set boundaries for your subject. For instance, you might be asked to discuss what makes psychotherapy effective, to prepare a lab report on a physics experiment, or to analyze a character in a short story.

Such assignments may seem to leave little room for you to move around, but in fact you'll have several questions to answer:

- **What's wanted from you?** Writing assignments often contain words such as *discuss*, *describe*, *analyze*, *report*, *interpret*, *explain*, *define*, *argue*, and *evaluate*. These words specify your approach to your subject, the kind of thinking expected, your general purpose, and even the form your writing should take. (See pp. 9–11 for more on purpose.)

- **For whom are you writing?** Many assignments will specify or imply your readers, but sometimes you will have to figure out for yourself who your audience is and what it expects from you. (For more on analyzing audience, see pp. 11–14.)
- **What kind of research is required, if any?** Sometimes an assignment specifies the kinds of sources you are expected to consult, and you can use such information to choose your subject. (If you are unsure whether research is required, check with your instructor.)
- **How can you narrow the assigned subject to do it justice in the length and time required?** (See below.)

2 Responding to a general assignment

Some assignments specify features such as length and amount of research, but they leave the choice of subject entirely to you. Others are somewhat more focused—for instance, “Respond to a reading assigned in this course” or “Discuss a proposal for solving a local social problem”—but still give you much leeway in choosing a particular reading or a particular proposal. To find your approach, consider your own experiences or interests:

- **What subject do you already know something about or have you been wondering about?** Athletic scholarships? Unemployment in your town?
- **Have you recently disagreed with someone over a substantial issue?** The change in relations between men and women? The cost of health insurance?
- **What have you read or seen lately?** A shocking book? A violent or funny movie? An effective Web advertisement or television commercial?
- **What topic in the reading or class discussion for a course has intrigued you?** An economic issue such as taxes? A psychological problem such as depression?
- **What makes you especially happy or especially angry?** A volunteer activity? The behavior of your neighbors?
- **Which of your own or others’ dislikes and preferences would you like to understand better?** The demand for hybrid cars? The decision to become a vegetarian?

Once you have a subject, you’ll also need to answer the questions in the bulleted list on specific assignments (opposite and above).

3 Narrowing a subject to a question

Let’s say you’ve decided to write about social-networking Web sites or about a character in a short story. You’ve got a subject, but it’s still broad, worthy of a lengthy article if not a whole book. For a relatively brief paper, you’ll need a narrow focus in order to provide the specific details that make writing significant and interesting—all within the required length and deadline.

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One helpful technique for narrowing a subject is to ask focused questions about it, seeking one that seems appropriate for your assignment and that promises to sustain your interest through the writing process. The following examples illustrate how questioning can scale down broad subjects to specific subjects that are limited and manageable:

Broad subjects

Social-networking sites

Mrs. Mallard
in Kate Chopin's
"The Story of an
Hour"

Lincoln's
weaknesses
as President

Federal aid to
college students

Specific subjects

What draws people to these sites?

How do the sites alter the ways people interact?

What privacy protections should the sites provide for users?

What changes does Mrs. Mallard undergo?

Why does Mrs. Mallard respond as she does to news of her husband's death?

What does the story's irony contribute to the character of Mrs. Mallard?

What was Lincoln's most significant error as commander-in-chief of the Union army?

Why did Lincoln delay emancipating the slaves?

Why did Lincoln have difficulties controlling his cabinet?

Which students should be entitled to federal aid?

How adequate are the kinds of federal aid available to college students?

Why should the federal government aid college students?

As these examples illustrate, your questions should not lend themselves to yes-or-no answers but should require further thinking.

Here are some guidelines for posing questions:

- **Reread the assignment.** Consider what it tells you about purpose, audience, genre, sources, length, and deadline.
- **Pursue your interests.** If questions don't come easily, try free-writing or brainstorming (pp. 22–24) or use a tree diagram (pp. 36–37).
- **Ask as many questions as you can think of.**
- **Test the question that seems most interesting and appropriate by roughly sketching out the main ideas.** Consider how many paragraphs or pages of specific facts, examples, and other details you would need to pin those ideas down. This thinking should give you at least a vague idea of how much work you'd have to do and how long the resulting paper might be.
- **Break a too-broad question down further, and repeat the previous step.**

Don't be discouraged if the perfect question does not come easily or early. You may find that you need to do some planning and writing, exploring different facets of the general subject and pursuing your specific interests, before you hit on the best question. And the question you select may require further narrowing or may shift subtly or even dramatically as you move through the writing process.

Exercise 1.3 Narrowing subjects

Following are some general writing assignments. Use the given information and your own interests to pose specific questions for three of these assignments.

1. For a writing course, consider how Web sites such as *YouTube* are altering the experience of popular culture. Length: three pages. Deadline: one week.
2. For a course in sociology, research and analyze the dynamics of a particular group of people. Length: unspecified. Deadline: four weeks.
3. For a writing course, read and respond to an essay in a text you are using. Length: three pages. Deadline: two weeks.
4. For a government course, consider possible restrictions on legislators. Length: five pages. Deadline: two weeks.
5. For a letter to the editor of the town newspaper, describe the effects of immigration on your community. Length: two pages. Deadline: unspecified.

Exercise 1.4 Considering your past work: Discovering and limiting a subject

Think of something you've recently written—perhaps an application essay, a business report, or a term paper. How did your subject evolve from beginning to end? In retrospect, was it appropriate for your writing situation? How, if at all, might it have been modified?

Exercise 1.5 Finding and narrowing a subject for your essay

As the first step in developing a three- to four-page essay for the instructor and the other students in your writing course, choose a subject and narrow it. Use the guidelines in the previous section to come up with a question that is suitably interesting, appropriate, and specific.

1d Defining a purpose

When you write, your **purpose** is your chief reason for communicating something about a topic to a particular audience. Purpose thus links both the specific situation in which you are working and the goal you hope to achieve. It is your answer to a potential reader's question, "So what?"