# Composition I: Join the Conversation

# COMPOSITION I: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Lexi Stuckey

# CONTENTS

PART I

# WRITING GENRES

# GENRE: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

# 1

# RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: INTERPRETING THE ART OF RHETORIC

Additional Resources

- SPAACE PowerPoint, available in Blackboard
- Essay Planning Sheet, available in Blackboard

People having a conference together by Henri Mathieu-Saint-Laurent / Pexels

## Introduction

Because humans exist in social situations, communication has always been a part of what it means to be human. Basic forms of communication, such as smiling or adopting certain physical stances, may be considered instinctive. However, when language began to replace sounds and gestures, communication became more specific. People used language to give and seek information, to express and react to emotions, and to persuade others to think or act in certain ways.

Beginning with the ancient Greeks, a large part of language education has focused on the ability to persuade. The Greeks used the word *rhetoric*, which originally meant "the act of speaking a language," and expanded its importance to include a focus on situations in which language was used for a persuasive purpose: to motivate an audience to action.

These ideas became central to Greek culture and patterns of behavior that characterized their way of life. This chapter will address persuasive techniques: how people use words to influence, lead, create new understanding, and rouse others to action. Your writing task will be to identify, explain, and analyze the strategies a particular writer uses to persuade readers. Analyzing the rhetorical strategies of other writers will help you develop your writing identity as you learn to incorporate some of these strategies into your own work while rejecting others.

## 9.1 Breaking the Whole into Its Parts

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify and explain ethos, logos, pathos, and kairos.
- Identify and analyze logical fallacies used in persuasion.
- Explain how rhetorical strategies are used in real-life situations.

Communicative situations nearly always contain rhetoric, the craft of persuading through writing or speaking. Think of your earliest instances of communication with parents or caregivers. Before you were proficient in language, you learned to navigate situations with your other senses, such as sight, sound, and touch. Consider people's facial expressions and tones of voice. How did you know when they were pleased, displeased, or confused by your actions? The emphasis is on the word *how*, because the *how* is what starts you on the path of analyzing the forms, intent, and effectiveness of communication. The point is that even facial expressions and tones of voice serve communicative functions and contain a rhetoric that one can observe, process, and analyze.

Now, as an adult, you have learned to use rhetoric to be persuasive and to recognize when others are trying to persuade you. Imagine the following situation. A basic question arises among roommates: *Where should we go for dinner?* Your roommates want to go to Emiliano's Pizza Pavilion again, and their reasoning seems sound. First, having tried all pizza places in town, they know Emiliano makes the tastiest pizza—just the right combination of spices, vegetables, and cheese, all perfectly baked in the right oven at the right temperature. Furthermore, the pizza is fairly cheap and probably will provide leftovers for tomorrow. And they add that you don't really want to stay home all alone by yourself.

You, on the other hand, are less keen on the idea; maybe you're tired of Emiliano's pizza or of pizza in general. You seem resistant to their suggestion, so they continue their attempts at persuasion by trying different tactics. They tell you that "everyone" is going to Emiliano's, not only because the food is good but because it's *the* place to be on a Thursday evening, hoping that others' decisions might convince you. Plus, Emiliano's has "a million things on the menu," so if you don't want pizza, you can have "anything you want." This evidence further strengthens their argument, or so they think.

Your roommates continue, playing on your personal experience, adding that the last time you didn't join them, you went somewhere else and then got the flu, so you shouldn't make the same mistake twice. They add details and try to entice you with images of the pizza—a delicious, jeweled circle of brilliant color that tastes like heaven, with bubbling cheese calling out to you to devour it. Finally, they try an extreme last-ditch accusation. They claim you could be hostile to immigrants such as Emiliano and his Haitian and Dominican staff, who are trying to succeed in the competitive pizza market, so your unwillingness to go will hurt their chances of making a living.

However, because you know something about rhetoric and how your roommates are using it to persuade, you can deconstruct their reasoning, some of which is flawed or even deceptive. Your decision is up to you, of course, and you will make it independent of (or dependent on) these rhetorical appeals and strategies.

### Rhetorical Strategies

As part of becoming familiar with rhetorical strategies in real life, you will recognize three essential building blocks of rhetoric:

Ethos is the presentation of a believable, authoritative voice that elicits an audience's trust. In the case of the pizza example, the roommates have tried all other pizzerias in town and have a certain expertise.

Pathos is the use of appeals to feelings and emotions shared by an audience. Emiliano's pizza tastes good, so it brings pleasure. Plus, you don't want to be all alone when others are enjoying themselves, nor do you want to feel responsible for the pizzeria's economic decline.

Logos is the use of credible information—facts, reasons, examples—that moves toward a sensible and acceptable conclusion. Emiliano's is good value for the money and provides leftovers.

In addition to these strategies, the roommates in the example use more subtle ones, such as personification and sensory language. Personification is giving an inanimate object human traits or abilities (the cheese is calling out). Sensory language appeals to the five senses (a delicious, jeweled circle of brilliant color).

### Logical Fallacies

Familiar with the three main rhetorical strategies and literary language, you also recognize the "sneakier" uses of flawed reasoning, also known as logical fallacies. Some of the roommates' appeals are based on these fallacies:

Bandwagon**:** argument that everyone is doing something, so you shouldn't be left behind by not doing it too. "Everyone" goes to Emiliano's, especially on Thursdays.

Hyperbole**:** exaggeration. Emiliano's has "a million things on the menu," and you can get "anything you want."

Ad hominem**:** attacking the person, not the argument. Because you are hesitant about joining your roommates, you are accused of hostility toward immigrants.

Causal fallacy**:** claiming or implying that an event that follows another event is the result of it. Because you ate elsewhere, you got the flu.

Slippery slope**:** argument that a single action could lead to disastrous consequences. If Emiliano's misses your business, they may go bankrupt.

In a matter of minutes, your roommates use all these strategies to try to persuade you to act or to agree with their thinking. Identifying and understanding such strategies, and others, is a key element of critical thinking. You can learn more about logical fallacies at the Purdue University Online Writing Lab.

### Kairos

As a whole, rhetoric also depends on another Greek rhetorical strategy, kairos. Kairos is the idea that timing is important in trying to persuade an audience. An appeal may succeed or fail depending on when it is made. The moment must be right, and an effective communicator needs to be aware of their audience in terms of kairos. Going back to the roommates and pizza example, kairos might be an influence in your decision; if you were tired of pizza, had to save money, or wanted to study alone, your roommates would have less chance of persuasion. As a more serious example, if a recent series of car accidents has caused serious injuries on the freeway, an audience might be more receptive to a proposal to reassess speed limits and road signage. Awareness of rhetorical strategies in everyday situations such as this will help you recognize and evaluate them in matters ultimately more significant than pizza.

## 9.2 Glance at Genre: Rhetorical Strategies

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify key rhetorical strategies that authors use to persuade readers.
- Analyze texts to demonstrate understanding of key rhetorical concepts.
- Identify genre conventions and explain how they are shaped by purpose, culture, and expectation.

Rhetorical analysis is the genre, or type of writing, that examines the way writers and speakers use language to influence readers. Rather than describing or summarizing content—the *what* of characters or themes—rhetorical analysis focuses on the individual parts of a text to show *how* language works to create the effects the writer wants. In other words, in addition to content, writers use rhetorical strategies to deliver and strengthen their ideas and thus influence their readers. A rhetorical analysis should, therefore, address the rhetorical situation, or conditions of communication that surround the rhetoric. These consist of the author (who), message (what), readers (to whom), purpose (why), means (how), context (where and when), and culture (community).

*Culture* refers to the way of life that a defined group of people establish. Their beliefs, laws, customs, and habits represent them as a group and may provide a signature to identify who they are and what they have accomplished. Rhetorical analysis must take these factors into full consideration, especially because cultural patterns are constantly changing and evolving with new knowledge and behaviors. Moreover, culture will vary greatly from group to group. Subgroups within a larger culture—for example, minorities within a majority population—may have distinct expressions of culture. When rhetorical analysis approaches lan-

guage of a particular culture, questions may arise about who is best equipped to do the analysis and on what criteria, based on time and place.

Writers of rhetorical analyses consider these elements carefully and ask questions based on them. *What are the goals of the author of the text? What factors are at play in the author's choice of strategies used to make a rhetorical impact? What may occur in the interaction between the writer and reader? Will readers approach the piece neutrally, with no previous opinions? Are they likely to agree because they are of the same opinion, or are they hostile and ready to reject the arguments? Have they heard or read the ideas before? Will the ideas be too radical or too familiar? Are readers likely to see the author as sharing the field with them or as a stranger who must win their confidence?*

### The Workings of Rhetorical Analysis

The aim of rhetorical analysis is not to find agreement with or praise for the writer, although either may be implied or stated. The essential task of analyzing requires a detachment that will convince the readers of the *validity* and *effectiveness* (or lack thereof) of the writing by identifying the writer's tools and what they accomplish.

As you formulate your rhetorical analysis, be aware of the following approaches and strategies that writers use to persuade an audience. Your goal will be to identify them in your analysis, explain their use, and evaluate their effectiveness.

**Establishing credibility.** Writers include their credentials or experience with the subject to ensure that readers will take them seriously as someone who knows what they're talking about. To reinforce their authority, they cite reliable sources as support for their points.

**Sharing personal experience.** Sharing a personal experience related to the subject enhances credibility and may also appeal to readers' emotions.

**Targeting emotional concerns.** By specifically addressing those incidents or outcomes that readers may fear or desire, the author can rally them to take a particular position. Emotional concerns also include appeals to the five senses and to broader sentiments such as love, loyalty, anger, justice, or patriotism.

**Using devices that draw attention to claims.** These include literary devices such as parallelism, repetition, and rhetorical questions that writers and speakers use to emphasize points and unify a text.

**Supporting claims with convincing evidence.** Ways of supporting claims include quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing expert opinions; relating anecdotes and examples; and citing appropriate statistics and facts.

**Acknowledging the opposition.** If a writer makes a point of explaining other groups' positions carefully and respectfully, readers from those groups, as well as the target audience, are more likely to be responsive to the writer. By acknowledging the opposition, writers show they have considered opposing views and can then demonstrate that their position is preferable.

**Questioning the motivation of the opposition.** By exposing others' possibly conflicting interests, the writer can undermine the credibility of an opponent's character or argument.

In addition to these, writers may use more questionable rhetorical devices to persuade readers. While the techniques of each strategy differ, all lead away from the actual argument and seek to persuade through means other than reasonable, logical thought. Such strategies include bandwagon, ad hominem (name-calling), bait and switch, and more.

### Rhetorical Strategies in Advertising and Public Policy

The strategies and other devices of rhetorical writing that are open to analysis are present in many types of communication, including multimodal examples such as advertisements that combine visuals with carefully crafted texts, dialogue, and voice-over.

Figure 9.3 M&Ms (credit: "Plain M&Ms Pile" by Evan-Amos/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Look at the M&Ms commercial, for example, in this collection of Super Bowl ads. Starting at minute 4:57, the prize-winning ad for M&Ms initially shows the widely recognizable candy in its multiple colors as both speaking cartoon figures and symbols of human behavior. The simple pitch: when people have offended others in one of a range of interpersonal blunders, the candy is offered as a peace offering. For example, the first image shows a man on a plane bumping into another passenger's seat, causing him to spill his drink. The offender then offers the passenger a package of M&Ms. What is the rhetorical strategy behind the situation and the gesture? The ad appeals to pathos in the sense that people feel the need to be liked. Despite the humorous twist in the comment that he kicked the seat on purpose, the offending man nonetheless doesn't want to be disliked. Nor do the others who commit other blunders. The sense of taste—sweetness—also comes into play, appealing to the senses, as does the sense of sight in the images of the colorful candy.

Furthermore, placing the ad during the Super Bowl targets an audience of game watchers whose ages, interests, and habits have been studied. They may be in a snacking frame of mind, so the appeal of candy is timely (kairos). The ad combines sophistication, appropriate adult behavior, and childishly amusing animation and personification. Seeing the product makes it more memorable. On the other hand, note the subtle use of the bandwagon fallacy: different people in different situations are doing the same thing—offering M&Ms. The bandwagon implication is that if you do something you're sorry for or should be sorry for (or even if you don't), giving out M&Ms is the way to apologize and be likable. Because travelers, businesspeople, the religiously observant, and others from different walks of life are doing it, so should you.


Figure 9.4 Smokey Bear has been the symbol of wildfire prevention since 1944. (credit: "Dear Smokey" by Rudy Wendelin/Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library, Public Domain)

Figure 9.4 is an image from the U.S. Forest Service that also reflects the use of rhetorical strategies. Smokey Bear is a symbol created in 1944 to raise awareness of the danger of forest fires. Images of this gentle, personified bear are often accompanied by the slogan "Remember . . . only you can prevent forest fires" or a variation of it. The image shows Smokey dressed in rolled-up jeans, a name belt, and a ranger's hat. He is reading letters delivered by a mail truck and sent to his own ZIP code, 20252, from children and adults promising to cooperate with his environmental efforts. The entire image is among the most recognizable of American cultural symbols.

The continuing identification of the bear and his appeal over decades is an example of the powerful use of rhetorical devices that speak without seeming to become dated and lose impact. First, a wild and dangerous animal is personified and made credible so that the credibility (ethos) of Smokey as a domesticated father figure with a fuzzy, playful cub climbing on the family mailbox removes any sense of danger and instead makes him into a believable voice for safety. No humans are emphasized in the illustration; the mail truck is seen only in the distance after having delivered another stack of fan mail. Other small animals are present in the background, as are familiar household items such as a shovel, a mailbox, an American flag, a boat on crystal clear water, and the playful images of the ranger's hat and rolled-up jeans on crossed legs. The drawing features bright primary colors and the dark forest green of bountiful nature. The print medium in the center of the illustration, the sign reading "Prevent forest fires," unifies the visual.

Because the images are emotionally accessible to children as well as adults, they appeal to widely shared pathos. The unspoken implication is that preventing forest fires will allow these young animals and forest plants to live rather than die in a carelessly started—and deadly—fire. In addition, it will allow human life to continue safely and pleasurably, as viewers can see, far in the background, people sailing and enjoying the water. If children's wisdom and receptivity to images are present, this idealized picture has great appeal. Rather than a harsh rebuke for adult negligence, the lesson of Smokey relies on the power of rhetoric to modify behavior with specific, carefully crafted appeals. Yet the most frequently used slogan, "Only you can prevent forest fires," is an example of hyperbole. Certainly "you" are not the sole person responsible for starting or preventing fires. Other people and other factors are at work aside from yourself.

More explicit, however, is this earlier image:


Figure 9.5 Dating from about 1960, this image shows a member of the Boy Scouts and a member of the Camp Fire Girls with Smokey. (credit: "Smokey with Scouts" by United States Department of Agriculture/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

The rhetorical strategy again is pathos, appealing to a sense of guilt. If these children can help prevent fires, then surely adults can do the same, as they are likely more knowledgeable and care for the safety and health of their children.

## Rhetorical Analysis: Key Terms

### Rhetorical Appeals

When doing a rhetorical analysis, notice these appeals writers use to persuade their audiences.

Ethos**:** believable, authoritative voice that elicits credibility and audience trust.

Kairos**:** sense of appropriate timing when attempting to persuade.

Logos**:** credible information—facts, reasons, or examples—presented as evidence that moves toward a sensible and acceptable conclusion.

Pathos**:** the use of appeals to feelings and emotions shared by an audience. Some of the general categories are fear, guilt, anger, love, loyalty, patriotism, and duty.

### Rhetorical Devices and Language Use

When doing a rhetorical analysis, notice these devices writers use to organize and emphasize their writing.

Figurative language**:** similes and metaphors. Comparing one aspect of things that in other ways are completely different is an essential part of rhetorical language. Simile example: "The treasure chest of nature's wonders shone like a pirate's gold tooth." Metaphor example: "The pizza was a disk of saucy sunlight."

Numerical data**:** statistics and figures. When accurate, numerical data can strengthen an argument.

Parallel structure**:** repetition of the same pattern of words to show that ideas are equally significant. Parallel structure, or parallelism, calls attention to these ideas, achieves balance, and makes the statements more memorable. Example: "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country."

Personification**:** giving an inanimate or nonhuman object human characteristics to make it seem alive and relatable. Examples: "The virus packed its bags and spread across the ocean"; "Twitter erupted in outrage."

Repetition**:** repeating a single word or group of words to build emphasis. Example: "The first underlinecauseend underline is poverty; the second underlinecauseend underline is poor health; the third underlinecauseend underline is discrimination. These underlinecausesend underline have been studied, but to what effect?"

Rhetorical question**:** a question that is not expected to be answered, one for which there is no answer, or one that creates a dramatic effect. Examples: "Has it occurred to you to ask why the economy is so unstable? A first point to consider is . . ."; "Do you think poverty will go away by itself?"

Understatement**:** presenting something as less important than it is as a way of distancing from the truth. Understatement is often used sarcastically or ironically. Example: "It may not have occurred to politicians that poverty leads to a host of health-related issues."

### Rhetorical Fallacies

When doing a rhetorical analysis, notice these fallacies writers may use to unethically persuade their audiences.

Ad hominem**:** logical fallacy that attempts to discredit a person, not an argument. *Ad hominem*, meaning "against the man," is often termed *name-calling*. Examples: "She's just a leftover from another era who can't accept change"; "He's a stupid bully and an outright thief."

Bait and switch**:** logical fallacy that introduces a point about one thing that is likely to be accepted and then changes the terms once initial agreement occurs. Example: "Buy these phones at this price before they're all gone!" When you go to buy one, moments later, the phones are gone—and they're far more expensive.

Bandwagon**:** logical fallacy often used in advertising and propaganda. It tries to make people do something or think a certain way because everyone is doing it, and if they don't go along, they will be excluded. Example: "Everyone is buying these sneakers; get yours now before you're left out." Negative example: "This style is so dated; no one wears things like this now."

Causal fallacy**:** the faulty logic of claiming or believing that an event that follows another event is the result of it. For example, losing your keys after going to a concert does not mean the events are connected causally; going to the concert did not cause you to lose your keys.

Hyperbole**:** exaggeration. Hyperbole is one of the staples of advertising language. Examples: "Season's Best Peppermint Glazed Delights"; "I have a ton of homework."

# 2

# THE RHETORICAL APPEALS AND SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Regardless of the style of argument you use, you will need to consider the ways you engage your audience. Aristotle identified three kinds of *rhetorical appeals*: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

The best argumentation engages all three of these appeals, falling in the center where all three overlap. Unbalanced application of rhetorical appeals is likely to leave your audience suspicious, doubtful, or even bored.

Woman wearing blue top beside table by Christina Morillo / Pexels

## Logos

Logos refers to an appeal to an audience's logical reasoning. Logos will often employ statistics, data, or other quantitative facts to demonstrate the validity of an argument. For example, an argument about the wage gap might indicate that women, on average, earn only 80% of the salary that men in comparable positions earn; this would imply a logical conclusion that our economy favors men.

However, stating a fact or statistic does not alone constitute logos. For instance, when I show you a graph, I am not yet making a logical appeal. Yes, a graph might be "fact-based," drawing on data to illustrate a phenomenon. That characteristic alone, though, doesn't make a logical appeal. For my appeal to be logical, I also need to *interpret* the graph. Your logic is only complete when you've drawn a logical conclusion from your facts, statistics, or other information.

There are many other ways we draw logical conclusions. There are entire branches of academia dedicated to understanding the many kinds of logical reasoning, but we might get a better idea by looking at a specific kind of logic. Let's take as an example the logical syllogism, which might look something like this:


Figure 6.1

Pretty straightforward, right? We can see how a general rule (major premise) is applied to a specific situation (minor premise) to develop a logical conclusion. I like to introduce this kind of logic because students sometimes jump straight from the major premise to the conclusion; if you skip the middle step, your logic will be less convincing.

## Logical Fallacies

When logic is faulty or misused to manipulate, that's a logical fallacy. Logical fallacies are part of our daily lives; we have all encountered fallacies like stereotypes, generalizations, and misguided assumptions. You may have heard some terms about fallacies already (red herring, slippery slope, non sequitur).

Fallacies follow patterns of reasoning that would otherwise be perfectly acceptable to us, but within their basic structure, they make a mistake. Aristotle identified that fallacies happen on the "material" level (the content is fallacious—something about the ideas or premises is flawed) and the "verbal" level (the writing or speech is fallacious—something about the delivery or medium is flawed).

It's important to be able to recognize these so that you can critically interrogate others' arguments and improve your own. Here are some of the most common logical fallacies:

**Table 6.1 A list of the most common logical fallacies with examples**

| Fallacy | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **Post hoc, ergo propter hoc** | "After this, therefore because of this"—a confusion of cause and effect with coincidence, attributing a consequence to an unrelated event. This error assumes that correlation equals causation, which is sometimes not the case. | Statistics show that rates of ice cream consumption and deaths by drowning both increased in June. This must mean that ice cream causes drowning. |
| **Non sequitur** | "Does not follow"—a random digression that distracts from the train of logic (like a "red herring") or draws an unrelated logical conclusion. John Oliver calls one manifestation of this fallacy "whataboutism," which he describes as a way to deflect attention from the subject at hand. | *Sherlock is great at solving crimes; therefore, he'll also make a great father.* "Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe, which is unhealthy. But what about Bill Clinton? He eats McDonald's every day, which is also unhealthy." |
| **Straw man** | An oversimplification or cherry-picking of the opposition's argument to make them easier to attack. | "People who oppose the destruction of Confederate monuments are all white supremacists." |
| **Ad hominem** | "To the person"—a personal attack on the arguer rather than a critique of their ideas. | "I don't trust Moriarty's opinion on urban planning because he wears bowties." Truly, though, bowties are the most suspicious; just look at Eleven. The most sus Doctor. |
| **Slippery slope** | An unreasonable prediction that one event will lead to a related but unlikely series of events that follows. | "If we let people of the same sex get married, then people will start marrying their dogs too!" |
| **False dichotomy** | A simplification of a complex issue into only two sides. | "Given the choice between pizza and Chinese food for dinner, we simply must choose Chinese." |

## Pathos

The second rhetorical appeal we'll consider here is perhaps the most common: pathos refers to the process of engaging the reader's emotions. (You might recognize the Greek root pathos in "sympathy," "empathy," and "pathetic.") A writer can evoke a great variety of emotions to support their argument, from fear, passion, and

joy to pity, kinship, and rage. By playing on the audience's feelings, writers can increase the impact of their arguments.

There are two especially effective techniques for cultivating pathos:

1. ***Make the audience aware of the issue's relevance to them specifically—***"How would you feel if this happened to you? What are we to do about this issue?"
2. ***Tell stories.*** A story about one person or one community can have a deeper impact than broad, impersonal data or abstract, hypothetical statements.

Consider the difference between "About 1.5 million pets are euthanized each year" and "Scooter, an energetic and loving former service dog with curly brown hair like a Brillo pad, was put down yesterday." Both are impactful, but the latter is more memorable and more specific.

Pathos is ubiquitous in our current journalistic practices because people are more likely to act (or at least consume media) when they feel emotionally moved. Consider, as an example, the outpouring of support for detained immigrants in June 2018, reacting to the Trump administration's controversial family separation policy. As stories and images surfaced, millions of dollars were raised in a matter of days on the premise of pathos, resulting in the temporary suspension of that policy.

## Ethos

Your argument wouldn't be complete without an appeal to ethos. Cultivating ethos refers to the means by which you demonstrate your authority or expertise on a topic. You'll have to show your audience that you're trustworthy if they are going to buy your argument.

There are a handful of ways to demonstrate ethos:

***By personal experience***

Although your lived experience might not set hard-and-fast rules about the world, it is worth noting that you may be an expert on certain facets of your life. For instance, a student who has played rugby for fifteen years of their life is in many ways an authority on the sport.

***By education or other certifications***

Professional achievements demonstrate ethos by revealing status in a certain field or discipline.

***By citing other experts***

The common expression is "Stand on the shoulders of giants." You can develop ethos by pointing to other people with authority and saying, "Look, this smart/experienced/qualified/important person agrees with me."

A common misconception is that ethos corresponds with "ethics." However, you can remember that ethos is about credibility because it shares a root with "authority."

## Kairos and the Sociohistorical Context of Argumentation

"Good" argumentation depends largely on your place in time, space, and culture. Different cultures throughout the world value the elements of argumentation differently, and argument has different purposes in different contexts. The content of your argument and your strategies for delivering it will change in every unique rhetorical situation.

Continuing from logos, pathos, and ethos, the notion of *kairos* speaks to this concern. To put it in plain language, kairos is the force that determines what will be the best argumentative approach in the moment in which you're arguing; it is closely aligned with rhetorical occasion. According to rhetoricians, the characteristics of the kairos determine the balance and application of logos, pathos, and ethos.

Moreover, your sociohistorical context will bear on what you can assume of your audience. What can you take for granted that your audience knows and believes? The "common sense" that your audience relies on is always changing: common sense in the US in 1950 was much different from common sense in the US in 1920 or common sense in the US in 2022. You can make assumptions about your audience's interests, values, and background knowledge, but only with careful consideration of the time and place in which you are arguing.

As an example, let's consider the principle of logical noncontradiction. Put simply, this means that for an

argument to be valid, its logical premises must not contradict each other: if A = B, then B = A. If I said that a dog is a mammal and a mammal is an animal, but a dog is not an animal, I would be contradicting myself. Or "No one drives on I-84; there's too much traffic." This statement contradicts itself, which makes it humorous to us.

However, this principle of noncontradiction is not universal. Our understanding of cause and effect and logical consistency is defined by the millennia of knowledge that has been produced before us, and some cultures value the contradiction rather than perceive it as invalid. This is not to say that either way of seeing the world is more or less accurate but rather to emphasize that your methods of argumentation depend tremendously on sociohistorical context.

The original chapter, Argumentation by Shane Abrams, is from EmpoWord: A Student-Centered Anthology and Handbook for College Writers

**Works Cited**

Wetzel, John. "The MCAT Writing Assignment." *WikiPremed*, Wisebridge Learning Systems, 2013.

# GENRE: CAUSAL ANALYSIS

# 3

# ANALYTICAL REPORT: WRITING FROM FACTS

Additional Resources

- Causal Thesis Statements PowerPoint, available in Blackboard
- Essay Planning Sheet, available in Blackboard

Black woman working with documents in office by Sora Shimazaki / Pexels

## Introduction

The writing genre for this chapter is the analytical report. The broad purpose of an analytical report is to inform and analyze—that is, to teach your readers (your audience) about a subject by providing information based on facts supported by evidence and then drawing conclusions about the significance of the information you provide. As an academic and professional genre, reports are necessarily objective, which can make for dry reading. Consider the writing identity that you have been developing throughout this course as you tackle this genre. *In what ways can you give your report voice? In what ways can you acknowledge or challenge the conventions of the genre?*

You have likely written or presented a report at some point in your life as a student; perhaps you wrote a lab report on a science experiment, presented research you conducted, or analyzed a book you read. While some reports seek to inform readers about a topic, an analytical report examines a subject or an issue by considering its causes and effects, by comparing and contrasting, or by discussing a problem and proposing one or more solutions.

## 11.1 Information and Critical Thinking

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Recognize bias in reading and in yourself.
- Ask critical thinking questions to explore an idea for a report.

Knowledge in the social and natural sciences and technical fields is often focused on data and ideas that can be verified by observing, measuring, and testing. Accordingly, writers in these fields place high value on neutral and objective case analysis and inferences based on the careful examination of data. Put another way, writers describe and analyze results as they understand them. Likewise, writers in these fields avoid subjectivity, including personal opinions, speculations, and bias. As the writer of an analytical report, you need to know the difference between fact and opinion, be able to identify bias, and think critically and analytically.

### Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

An analytical report provides information based on facts. Put simply, facts are statements that can be proven or whose truth can be inferred.

It may be difficult to distinguish fact from opinion or allegation. As a writer, use a critical eye to examine what you read. The following are examples of factual statements:

- Article I, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution specifies that the legislative branch of the government consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- The school board voted to approve the administration's proposal.
- Facts that use numbers are called statistics. Some numbers are stated directly:
- The earth's average land and ocean surface temperature in March 2020 was 2.09 degrees Fahrenheit higher than the average surface temperature during the 20th century.
- The total number of ballots cast in the 2020 presidential election was approximately 159 million.
- The survey results showed that 45 percent of first-year students at this university attended every class, whether in person or online.

Other numbers are implied:

- Mercury is the planet closest to the sun.
- College tuition and fees have risen in the past decade.

Factual statements such as those above stand in contrast to opinions, which are statements of belief or value. Opinions form the basis of claims that are supported by evidence in argumentative writing, but they should be avoided in informative and analytical writing. Here are two statements of opinion about an increase in college tuition and fees:

Although tuition and fees have risen, the value of a college education is worth the cost.

The increase in college tuition and fees over the past 10 years has placed an unreasonably heavy financial burden on students.

Both statements indicate that the writer will make an argument. In the first, the writer will defend the increases in college tuition and fees. In the second, the writer will argue that the increases in tuition and fees have made college too expensive. In both arguments, the writer will support the argument with factual evidence.

Want to know more about facts? Read the blog post Fact-Checking 101 by Laura McClure, posted to the TED-Ed website.

### Recognizing Bias

In addition to distinguishing between fact and opinion, it is important to recognize bias. Bias is commonly

defined as a preconceived opinion about something—a subject, an idea, a person, or a group of people. As the writer of a report, you will learn to recognize bias in yourself and in the information you gather.

### Bias in What You Read

Some writing is intentionally biased and intended to persuade, such as the editorials and opinion pieces described above. However, a report and the evidence on which it is based should not be heavily biased. Bias becomes a problem when a source you believe to be neutral, objective, and trustworthy presents information that attempts to sway your opinion. *Identifying Bias,* posted by Tyler Rablin, is a helpful guide to recognizing bias.

As you consider sources for your report, the following tips can also help you spot bias and read critically:

**Determine the writer's purpose.** Is the writer simply informing you or trying to persuade you?

**Research the author.** Is the writer known for taking a side on the topic of the writing? Is the writer considered an expert?

**Distinguish between fact and opinion.** Take note of the number of facts and opinions throughout the source.

**Pay attention to the language and what the writer emphasizes.** Does the author use emotionally loaded, inflammatory words or descriptions intended to sway readers? What do the title, introduction, and any headings tell you about the author's approach to the subject?

**Read multiple sources on the topic.** Learn whether the source is leaving out or glossing over important information and credible views.

**Look critically at the images and any media that support the writing.** Do they reinforce positive or negative aspects of the subject?

### Bias in Yourself

Most individuals bring what psychologists call cognitive bias to their interactions with information or with other people. Cognitive bias influences the way people gather and process new information. As you research information for a report, also be aware of confirmation bias. This is the tendency to seek out and accept information that supports (or confirms) a belief you already have and may cause you to ignore or dismiss information that challenges that belief. A related bias is the false consensus effect, which is the tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people agree with your beliefs.

For example, perhaps you believe strongly that college tuition is too high and that tuition should be free at the public colleges and universities in your state. With that belief, you are likely to be more receptive to facts and statistics showing that tuition-free college benefits students by boosting graduation rates and improving financial security after college, in part because the sources may seem more mainstream. However, if you believe strongly that tuition should *not* be free, you are likely to be more receptive to facts and statistics showing that students who don't pay for college are less likely to be serious about school and take longer to graduate—again, because the sources may seem more mainstream.

### Asking Critical Questions about a Topic for a Report

As you consider a topic for a report, note the ideas that occur to you, interesting information you read, and what you already know. Answer the following questions about potential topics to help you understand a topic in a suitably analytical framework for a report.

- What is/was the cause of _____?
- What is/was the effect of _____?
- How does/did _____ compare or contrast with another similar event, idea, or item?
- What makes/made _____ a problem?
- What are/were some possible solutions to _____?
- What beliefs do I have about _____?
- What aspects of _____ do I need to learn more about to write a report about it?

In the report that appears later in this chapter, student Trevor Garcia analyzes the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Trevor began thinking about his topic with the question *What was the U.S.*

*response to the COVID-19 pandemic?* Because he had lived through 2020, he was able to draw upon personal experience: his school closed, his mother was laid off, and his family's finances were tight. As he researched his question, he moved beyond the information he gathered from his own experiences and discovered that the United States had failed in several key areas. He then answered the questions below to arrive at an analytical framework:

- What was the cause of the poor U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?
- What was the effect of the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?
- How did the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic compare/contrast with the responses of other countries?
- What are some possible solutions to the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What do I already believe about the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What aspects of the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic do I need to learn more about?

For his report, Trevor chose to focus on the first question: *What was the cause of the poor U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?*

## 11.3 Glance at Genre: Informal and Formal Analytical Reports

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Determine purpose and audience expectations for an analytical report.
- Identify key features of informal and formal reports.
- Define key terms and characteristics of an analytical report.

It is important to understand the purpose of your report, the expectations of the audience, any specific formatting requirements, and the types of evidence you can use.

### Defining a Specific Purpose

Your purpose is your reason for writing. The purpose of a report is to inform; as the writer, you are tasked with providing information and explaining it to readers. Many topics are suitable for informative writing—how to find a job, the way a disease spreads within a population, or the items on which people spend the most money. Some textbooks are examples of informative writing, as is much of the reporting you find on reputable news sites.

An analytical report is a type of report. Its purpose is to present and analyze information. An assignment for an analytical report will likely include words such as *analyze*, *compare*, *contrast*, *cause*, and/or *discuss*, indicating the specific purpose of the report. Here are a few examples:

- Discuss and analyze potential career paths with strong employment prospects for young adults.
- Compare and contrast proposals to reduce binge drinking among college students.
- Analyze the Cause-and-effect of injuries on construction sites and the effects of efforts to reduce workplace injuries.
- Discuss the Effect of the 1965 Voting Rights Act on voting patterns among U.S. citizens of color.
- Analyze the success and failure of strategies used by the major political parties to encourage citizens to vote.

### Tuning In to Audience Expectations

The audience for your report consists of the people who will read it or who could read it. *Are you writing for your instructor? For your classmates? For other students and teachers in professional fields or academic disciplines? For people in your community?* Whoever your readers are, they expect you to do the following:

Have an idea of what they already know about your topic, and adjust your writing as needed. If readers are

new to the topic, they expect you to provide necessary background information. If they are knowledgeable about the topic, they will expect you to cover the background quickly.

Provide reliable information in the form of specific facts, statistics, and examples. Whether you present your own research or information from other sources, readers expect you to have done your homework in order to supply trustworthy information.

Define terms, especially if audience members may be unfamiliar with your topic.

Structure your report in a logical way. It should open with an introduction that tells readers the subject and should follow a logical structure.

Adopt an objective stance and neutral tone, free of any bias, personal feelings, or emotional language. By demonstrating objectivity, you show respect for your readers' knowledge and intelligence, and you build credibility and trust, or ethos, with them.

Present and cite source information fairly and accurately.

### Informal Reports

An informal analytical report will identify a problem, provide factual information about the problem, and draw conclusions about the information. An informal report is usually structured like an essay, with an introduction or summary, body paragraphs, and a conclusion or recommendations. It will likely feature headings identifying key sections and be presented in academic essay format, such as APA Documentation and Format. For an example of an informal analytical report documented in APA style, see Trevor Garcia's paper on the U.S. response to COVID-19 in 2020 in the Annotated Student Sample.

Other types of informal reports include journalism reports. A traditional journalism report involves a reporter for a news organization reporting on the day's events—the results of an election, a political crisis, a plane crash, a celebrity marriage—on TV, on radio, or in print. An investigative journalism report, on the other hand, involves reporters doing original research over a period of weeks or months to uncover significant new information, similar to what Barbara Ehrenreich did for her book *Nickel and Dimed*. For sample traditional and investigative journalistic reports, visit the website of a reliable news organization or publication, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Economist,* the *New Yorker*, or the *Atlantic*.

### Formal Reports

Writers in the social sciences, the natural sciences, technical fields, and business often write formal analytical reports. These include lab reports, research reports, and proposals.

Formal reports present findings and data drawn from experiments, surveys, and research and often end with a conclusion based on an analysis of these findings and data. These reports frequently include visuals such as graphs, bar charts, pie charts, photographs, or diagrams that are captioned and referred to in the text. Formal reports always cite sources of information, often using APA Documentation and Format, used in the examples in this chapter, or a similar style.

If you are assigned a formal report in a class, follow the instructions carefully. Your instructor will likely explain the assignment in detail and provide explicit directions and guidelines for the research you will need to do (including any permission required by your college or university if you conduct research on human subjects), how to organize the information you gather, and how to write and format your report. A formal report is a complex, highly organized, and often lengthy document with a specified format and sections usually marked by headings.

Following are the components of a formal analytical report. Depending on the assignment and the audience, a formal report you write may include some or all of these parts. For example, a research report following APA format usually includes a title page, an abstract, headings for components of the body of the report (methods, results, discussion), and a references page. Detailed APA guidelines are available online, including at the Purdue University Online Writing Lab.

#### Components of Formal Analytical Reports

Letter of transmittal. When a report is submitted, it is usually accompanied by a letter or email to the recipient explaining the nature of the report and signed by those responsible for writing it. Write the letter of transmittal when the report is finished and ready for submission.

Title page. The title page includes the title of the report, the name(s) of the author(s), and the date it was written or submitted. The report title should describe the report simply, directly, and clearly and should not try to be too clever. For example, *The New Student Writing Project: A Two-Year Report* is a clear, descriptive title, whereas *Write On, Students!* is not.

Acknowledgments. If other people and/or organizations contributed to the report, include a page or paragraph thanking them.

Table of contents. For long reports (10 pages or more), create a table of contents to help readers navigate easily. List the major components and subsections of the report and the pages on which they begin.

Executive summary **or** abstract. The executive summary or abstract is a paragraph that highlights the findings of the report. The purpose of this section is to present information in the quickest, most concentrated, and most economical way possible to be useful to readers. Write this section after you have completed the rest of the report.

Introduction **or** background. The introduction provides necessary background information to help readers understand the report. This section also indicates what information is included in the report.

Methods. Especially in the social sciences, the natural sciences, and technical disciplines, the methods or procedures section outlines how you gathered information and from what sources, such as experiments, surveys, library research, interviews, and so on.

Results. In the results section, you summarize the data you have collected from your research, explain your method of analysis, and present this information in detail, often in a table, graph, or chart.

Discussion **or** Conclusion. In this section, you interpret the results and present the conclusions of your research. This section also may be called "Discussion of Findings."

Recommendations. In this section, you explain what you believe should be done in response to your research findings.

References **and** bibliography. The references section includes every source you cited in the report. The bibliography contains, in addition to those cited in the report, sources that readers can consult to learn more.

Appendix. An appendix (plural: *appendices*) includes documents that are related to the report or contain information that can be culled but are not deemed central to understanding the report.

The following links take you to sample formal reports written by students and offer tips from librarians posted by colleges and universities in the United States. These samples may help you better understand what is involved in writing a formal analytical report.

Product review report, from the University/College Library of Broward College and Florida Atlantic University

Business report, from Wright State University

Technical report, from the University of Utah

Lab report, from Hamilton College

Field report, from the University of Southern California

### Exploring the Genre

The following are key terms and characteristics related to reports.

Audience: Readers of a report or any piece of writing.

Bias: A preconceived opinion about something, such as a subject, an idea, a person, or a group of people. As a reader, be attentive to potential bias in sources; as a writer, be attentive to your own biases.

Body: The main part of a report between the introduction and the conclusion. The body of an analytical report consists of paragraphs in which the writer presents and analyzes key information.

Citation of sources: References in the written text to sources that a writer has used in a report.

Conclusion **and/or** recommendation: The last part of a report. In this section, the writer summarizes the significance of the information in the report or offers recommendations—or both.

Critical thinking: The ability to look beneath the surface of words and images to analyze, interpret, and evaluate them.

Ethos: The sense that the writer or other authority is trustworthy and credible; also known as *ethical appeal*.

Evidence: Statements of fact, statistics, examples, and expert opinions that support the writer's points.

Facts: Statements whose truth can be proved or verified and that serve as evidence in a report.

Introduction: The first section of a report after any front matter, such as an abstract or table of contents. In an analytical report, the writer introduces the topic to be addressed and often presents the thesis at the end of the introduction.

Logos: The use of facts as evidence to appeal to an audience's logical and rational thinking; also known as *logical appeal*.

Objective stance: Writing in a way that is free from bias, personal feelings, and emotional language. An objective stance is especially important in report writing.

Purpose: The reason for writing. The purpose of an analytical report is to examine a subject or issue closely, often from multiple perspectives, by looking at causes and effects, by comparing and contrasting, or by examining problems and proposing solutions.

Statistics: Factual statements that include numbers and often serve as evidence in a report.

Synthesis: Making connections among and combining ideas, facts, statistics, and other information.

Thesis: The central or main idea that you will convey in your report. The thesis is often referred to as the central claim in argumentative writing.

Thesis statement: A declarative sentence (sometimes two) that states the topic, the angle you are taking, and the aspects of the topic you will cover. For a report, a thesis indicates and limits the scope of the report.

# GENRE: PROPOSAL

# 4

# PROPOSAL: WRITING ABOUT PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Additional Resources

- Proposal Thesis Statements PowerPoint, available in Blackboard
- Essay Planning Sheet, available in Blackboard

## Introduction

Clear light bulb by Pixabay / Pexels

You are likely familiar with the term proposal—people propose toasts to celebrate occasions and make marriage proposals. Businesses create proposals to describe the services they will provide and at what cost—from electricians, plumbers, and decorators to advertising firms, website designers, and caterers. Sometimes the proposals are for a specific project; sometimes they are general. In these types of real-world proposals, the problem being solved is straightforward, but often it is not stated directly: for example, someone needs an extra bathroom built in their house, a revision to their website, or food for a gathering, and the person needing a service will contact a provider.

The purpose of the kind of proposal you will write in this chapter is to propose, or suggest, a solution to a problem, usually one whose solution is not straightforward. Proposals of this type call on writers to explain the problem so that readers understand it is real and needs a solution. Because these problems are often complex, they usually have more than one solution, and sometimes the writer will recommend several possible solutions. For example, imagine you are studying food science. You likely pay more attention to food than most people do, and perhaps you've noticed a lot of food being thrown away in a cafeteria on your campus. You believe it is important to reduce food waste. Solving this problem of wasted food will require investigation and research into what food is being thrown away; why students, faculty members, and employees are throwing it away; possible ways to reduce the amount of wasted food; and a recommendation to the people

who can put your proposal—that is, your proposed solution— into action. This is one example of the kind of problem you might write about in this chapter.

## 12.1 Proposing Change: Thinking Critically About Problems and Solutions

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Ask critical-thinking questions about problems to explore an idea for a proposal.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Recognize and locate bias in reading and in yourself.

As a proposal writer, you will offer factual evidence to show a problem exists and needs to be addressed. Then you will present and recommend one or more solutions, again providing evidence to show that your solution or solutions are viable. To accomplish this task, you'll need to think critically about problems and potential solutions, know the difference between fact and opinion, and identify bias.

### Adopting a Problem-Solving Mindset

As you start thinking about a problem you would like to explore, gather information by reading, viewing, or talking with others. Is there a local problem you have noticed—perhaps you think your campus needs better transportation, more diverse food options, more mental health services, or a new student organization related to a cause you care about? Or is there a larger issue that is important to you, such as funding for public schools, better access to health care, or helping the environment?

As you gather ideas, think critically about what you are learning. Asking questions like the ones below can help you get into a problem-solving mindset:

#### Questions about Problems

- What is/was the cause of the problem?
- What is/was the effect of the problem?
- What makes this problem a problem?

#### Questions about Solutions

- Have solutions to this problem been proposed in the past? What are they?
- Why have the solutions proposed in the past succeeded or not succeeded in solving the problem?
- Who can put the solutions into action?

The proposal that appears in Annotated Student Sample of this chapter, written by student Shawn Krukowski, takes on a large, complex problem: climate change. At the start of the project, Shawn thought about his topic in terms of the questions above:

- What is the cause of climate change?
- What is the effect of climate change?
- What makes climate change a problem?
- What are some possible solutions to climate change?
- What solutions to climate change have been tried in the past?
- Why have the solutions tried in the past been unsuccessful in solving climate change?
- Who can put the solutions into action?

In writing answers to these questions, Shawn identified what he needed to learn about climate change before he began his reading and research.

### Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

A proposal contains both fact and opinion. Proposal writers use facts as evidence to show that the problem they are writing about is real. They use facts to show that the proposed solution can work. They give opinions (based on evidence) when they recommend a solution to their audience and call them to action.

It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish fact from opinion, allegations, and fake news. Social media platforms, in particular, make it hard for many people to distinguish between sources that are credible and those that are not. As a writer, you need to use a critical eye to examine what you read and see.

Facts are statements that can be proven or whose truth can be inferred. They are built on evidence and data. The following are examples of factual statements:

- The first mass-produced hybrid vehicle was the Toyota Prius, which was launched in Japan in 1997.
- Americans born after 1996 are considered Generation Z.

Facts that use numbers are called statistics:

- According to the Pew Research Center, 50 percent of Gen Z-ers aged 18–23 reported that they or someone in their household had lost a job or taken a pay cut in March 2020, the first month of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The six-year graduation rate for full-time undergraduate students was 62 percent in 2018.

Opinions are statements of belief or value. Opinions form the basis of recommended solutions in proposals. Below is an opinion that precedes a list of recommendations to raise the graduation rate:

- The six-year graduation rate for full-time undergraduate students, which was 62% in 2018, can and should be improved by taking the following steps…

### Recognizing Bias

Critical thinking and reading of information involve recognizing bias. Bias is commonly defined as a preconceived opinion, or a prejudice, about something—a subject, an idea, a person, or a group of people, for example. As a proposal writer, you will need to recognize bias in the information you read as you learn about the problem and to recognize possible bias in your own thinking as well.

#### Bias in Sources

Some writing is intentionally biased and intended to persuade, such as editorials and opinion essays, also called op-eds (because of their placement *opposite* the *editorial* page in print newspapers). Writing meant to persuade is generally not used as source material in a proposal. Instead, seek out informative, neutral sources that consider more than one aspect of a problem. Be aware, however, that even sources that seem impartial may contain some bias. Bias becomes a problem when a source that seems objective and trustworthy contains language and images intended to sway your opinion, or when a source downplays or ignores one or more aspects of a topic.

The evidence you use to support the discussion of a problem or the worth of a solution should not be heavily biased. As you consider sources for your proposal, the following tips can help you spot bias and read critically:

**Determine the purpose of the source.** Is the writing intended to inform you or to persuade you?

**Distinguish between fact and opinion.** Mark facts and opinions when gathering information from the source.

**Pay attention to the language and what the writer emphasizes.** Does the language include inflammatory words or descriptions intended to sway readers? What do the title, introduction, and any headings tell you about the author's approach to the subject?

**Research the author.** Is the writer an impartial expert? Or is the writer known for being biased?

**Read multiple sources on the topic.** Learn whether the source is omitting or glossing over important information and credible views.

**Look critically at the images and any media that support the writing.** How do they reinforce positive or negative treatment of the subject?

#### Bias in Yourself

Most individuals bring what psychologists call cognitive bias to the interactions in their lives, whether with information or with other people. Cognitive bias refers to how humans' thinking patterns affect how they take in and process new information. As you research information for a proposal, also be aware of confirmation bias, which is the tendency to seek out and accept information that supports (or confirms) a belief you already have and to ignore or dismiss information that challenges that belief.

For example, perhaps you believe strongly that the graduation rate at the college you attend is too low and that more students would graduate if the college provided more financial aid in the form of grants. With that belief, you would likely be more receptive to facts and statistics showing that students who receive financial aid in the form of grants, not loans, are more likely to graduate. However, if you believe that more students would graduate if they took advantage of the academic support services the college offers, then you would likely be more receptive to facts and statistics showing that students who work hard and use academic support services graduate in higher numbers.

As you read about problems and solutions, the best way to guard against bias is to be aware that bias exists, to question what you read, and to challenge your own beliefs.

## 12.2 Glance at Genre: Features of Proposals

#### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Discuss the roles of purpose and audience in writing a proposal.
- Define key features and characteristics of proposals.

As you think about the problem for your proposal, it is important to understand the rhetorical situation, or the circumstance in which a writer communicates with an audience of readers, including your purpose, audience expectations, and the key elements of the proposal genre. The rhetorical situation and its relationship to writing your proposal is discussed more fully in Writing Process: Creating a Proposal.

#### Defining Your Purpose

Your purpose is your reason for writing. The broad purpose for most academic and real-world proposals is to offer a solution to a problem. You, the writer, are tasked with identifying a problem and recommending a solution. You may need to write a proposal for a research project in a sociology class, or you may need to write a business proposal for a marketing class or a business you've started. Many topics are suitable for a proposal in a college writing class. For example, some problems are local and can be acted on directly, such as improving access to mental health services on your campus, offering a new food delivery option to campus buildings, designating quiet study spaces in your library, or bringing a farmer's market to your campus. Others are large-scale, research-oriented proposals such as reducing automobile emissions, providing broadband Internet access nationwide, or reforming immigration policies in the United States. Read your assignment carefully, and be sure you know the requirements and the amount of flexibility you have.

#### Tuning in to Audience Expectations

The audience for your writing consists of the people who will read it or who could read it. *Are you writing for your instructor? For your classmates? For students or administrators on your campus or people in your community?* Think about the action they can take to solve the problem. For example, if the problem you're presenting is a lack of diverse food options on your campus, a proposal to other students would perhaps ask students to join you in calling for change in dining options, whereas a proposal to administrators would request specific changes.

Whoever your readers are, they expect you to do the following:

**Address a specific, well-defined problem.** As the writer, ensure that your readers know what the problem is and why it needs to be solved. Some problems are well-known, whereas others need to be explained.

**Have an idea of what they already know.** It is up to you as the writer to learn as much as possible about your audience. You need to know how receptive your audience may be to your suggestions and what they know about the problem you're proposing to solve. Their knowledge—or lack thereof—will require you to adjust your writing as needed. If readers are new to the problem, they expect you to provide the necessary background information. If they are knowledgeable about the problem, they expect you to cover background information quickly.

**Provide reliable information.** in the form of specific facts, statistics, and examples. Whether you present your own research or information from sources, readers expect you to have done your homework and present trustworthy information about the problem and the solution.

**Structure your proposal in a logical way.** Open with an introduction that tells readers the subject of the proposal, and follow with a logical structure.

**Adopt an objective stance.** Writing objectively means adopting a position and tone that are neutral and free from bias, personal feelings, and emotional language. In doing so, you show respect for your readers' knowledge and intelligence, and you build credibility and trust, or ethos, with your readers.

**Tell them what you want them to do in response to your proposal.** Do you want them to engage other members of the community? Build something? Contact their legislators? Although they may not do what you want, they are unlikely to act at all if you don't tell them what you would like them to do.

### Exploring the Genre

A formal proposal may include the components addressed in Analytical Report: Writing from Facts. If you're writing a business proposal (a document that proposes a transaction between a business and a client and also spells out deliverables, a schedule, costs, and payment), you can find a full discussion in OpenStax's forthcoming *Business Communications* text.

The following are key terms and characteristics of problem-solution proposals:

**Abstract or executive summary:** paragraph that summarizes the problem and recommended solution. The purpose is to present information in the most concise and economical way possible for your readers.

**Audience:** readers of a proposal or any piece of writing.

Bias**:** a preconceived opinion about something, such as a subject, an idea, a person, or a group of people. As a reader, be attentive to potential bias in sources; as a writer, be attentive to bias in yourself.

Body**:** main part of a proposal; appears between the introduction and the conclusion and recommendation. The body of a proposal consists of paragraphs that discuss the problem and present a solution or solutions.

**Citation of sources:** references in the text of a proposal to sources the writer has used as evidence. The sources are also listed, with full bibliographic information, at the end of the proposal. Citing sources is essential to avoid plagiarism.

**Conclusion and recommendation:** last part of a proposal. The conclusion restates the problem and recommends a solution. This paragraph often issues a call to action.

Critical thinking**:** ability to look beneath the surface of words and images to analyze, interpret, and evaluate.

Ethos**:** also known as ethical appeal; the sense that the writer or other authority is trustworthy and credible.

Evidence**:** statements of fact, statistics, examples, and expert opinion or knowledge that support the writer's points.

Facts**:** statements whose truth can be proven or verified.

Introduction**:** first part of a proposal, in which the writer introduces the problem to be addressed. Often, the thesis appears at the end of the introduction.

Objections**:** questions or opposition readers may have about a proposed solution. These also are known as counterclaims.

Objective stance**:** writing that is free from bias, personal feelings, and emotional language. An objective stance is especially important in a proposal.

Problem**:** central topic to be discussed in a proposal.

Purpose**:** reason for writing the proposal, usually to examine a problem and propose a solution.

**Solution or solutions:** proposed resolution or resolutions to the problem, the central topic of a proposal.

Statistics**:** factual statements that include numbers and often serve as evidence in a proposal.

Synthesis**:** making connections between ideas and combining them to arrive at an original conclusion. Synthesizing draws from others' opinions and ideas, facts, statistics, and the writer's information based on research or original thought.

Thesis**:** the main idea you will convey in your proposal and to which all paragraphs in the paper should relate.

Topic sentence**:** a sentence that states the main idea of each paragraph.

# GENRE: EVALUATION OR REVIEW

# 5

# EVALUATION OR REVIEW: WOULD YOU RECOMMEND IT?

Additional Resource

- Essay Planning Sheet, available in Blackboard


Evaluation by Ann H / Pexels

## Introduction

You have likely visited an unfamiliar city or neighborhood. When you aren't in familiar surroundings, what do you do if you want to find something to eat or do for fun? You probably open your phone and search on *Yelp*, *TripAdvisor*, *Google*, or another app or website dedicated to providing film reviews, or critical appraisals. Even when closer to home, many people, whether looking for a unique local restaurant, a new hiking trail, or an auto mechanic, may base their decisions on online reviews.

You may even have written a review of a product or service and posted it online yourself. In your review, you shared your evaluation—your overall thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses—of the customer service, atmosphere, prices, quality, and so on. You decided on a set of criteria, or characteristics that determine a positive experience, and made your evaluation of the business according to those criteria and your experiences with similar products or services. Ultimately, you used the evidence you gathered from your interaction with the product or service to make an evaluation, or judgment. Maybe you used a rating system to give five stars or used the phrase "would not recommend" to make your negative judgment clear.

In performing these tasks, you engaged in the review genre, or form of writing, used to evaluate businesses, products, and art forms—including restaurants, health care, cell phones, cars, video games, books, films, and more. Throughout this chapter, you will learn about the characteristics of reviews and how to write them.

## 13.1 Thumbs Up or Down?

### Learning Outcomes

- By the end of this section, you will be able to:
- Explain the role of the review genre in personal, professional, and academic contexts.
- Articulate what differentiates the review genre from other genres.

Developing evaluation skills can help you in everyday life. Just about anything you buy or use will require you to evaluate a range of choices based on criteria that are important to you. You also may be asked to evaluate the effectiveness of your courses at the end of the semester. Or you may be asked to evaluate the work of your peers to help them revise their compositions. In the professional world, you may be asked to evaluate solutions to problems, employees you supervise, and in some cases, even yourself. Evaluating effectively makes you not only a better consumer but also a better student, employee, and possible supervisor.

### Using Evidence to Make a Judgment

When you review or evaluate something, the end result is your judgment about it. *Should your readers see the film? Are the food and service good at the restaurant? Should you use this source in your essay? Does your employee deserve a raise?* Making a clear judgment about the subject of your evaluation provides guidance for the actions that audience members may take on the basis of the information you provide.

Ultimately, your judgment is your opinion. For example, it is expected that some people will love *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) and others will not. In fact, because some people may disagree with you, reviews provide a perfect opportunity to use evidence to defend your judgment. You are probably familiar with some ways in which reviewers present their judgments about their subjects. Reviews on *Facebook*, *Google*, and *Yelp* have a star rating system (the more stars the better). The film review site *Rotten Tomatoes* shows the percentage of reviewers that recommend the film. The review site *The AV Club* rates films and TV episodes by using an A-to-F grading scale.

While it is important to present your overall judgment in a review, a simple "I liked it" or "I didn't like it" is not enough to help your audience make their own judgments. It is also important to explain *why* you arrived at the judgment you did. Think about some of the titles of reviews you have seen online. One might simply read "DIRTY!" about an experience staying in a hotel. Other reviews might present a thesis, or debatable main idea, as a title, such as *Slate* culture critic Willa Paskin's "In Its Immensely Satisfying Season Finale, *Game of Thrones* Became the Show It Had Always Tried Not to Be." In both examples, the title provides an overall reason for the author's judgment.

Although a simple rating might be effective when reviewing a business, reviews of creative works such as films, TV shows, visual arts, and books are more complex. Critics —professional writers who review creative works—like Willa Paskin try to review their subjects and at the same time analyze their subjects' cultural significance. In addition to providing an overall judgment, critics guide audiences on how to view and understand a work within a larger cultural context. Critics provide this guidance by answering questions such as these:

- In what genre would I place this work? Why?
- What has this work contributed to its genre that other works have not?
- How does the creator (or creators) of this work show they understand the culture (audience) that will view the work?
- How does this work reflect the time in which it was created?

People look to critics not only to judge the overall quality of a work but also to gain insights about it.

## 13.2 Glance at Genre: Criteria, Evidence, Evaluation

### Learning Outcomes

- By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify and define common characteristics, mediums, key terms, and features of the review genre.
- Identify criteria and evidence to support reviews of different primary sources.

Reviews vary in style and content according to the subject, the writer, and the medium. The following are characteristics most frequently found in reviews:

Focused subject**:** The subject of the review is specific and focuses on one item or idea. For example, a review of all Marvel Cinematic Universe movies could not be contained in the scope of a single essay or published review not only because of length but also because of the differences among them. Choosing one specific item to review—a single film or single topic across films, for instance—will allow you to provide a thorough evaluation of the subject.

**Judgment or evaluation:** Reviewers need to deliver a clear judgment or evaluation to share with readers their thoughts on the subject and why they would or would not recommend it. An evaluation can be direct and explicit, or it can be indirect and subtle.

Specific evidence**:** All reviews need specific evidence to support the evaluation. Typically, this evidence comes in the form of quotations and vivid descriptions from the primary source, or subject of the review. Reviewers often use secondary sources—works about the primary source— to support their claims or provide context.

Context**:** Reviewers provide context, such as relevant historical or cultural background, current events, or short biographical sketches, that help readers understand both the primary source and the review.

Tone**:** Writers of effective reviews tend to maintain a professional, unbiased tone—attitude toward the subject. Although many reviewers try to avoid sarcasm and dismissiveness, you will find these elements present in professional reviews, especially those in which critics pan the primary source.

### Key Terms

These are some key terms to know and use when writing a review:

Analysis**:** detailed examination of the parts of a whole or of the whole itself.

**Connotation:** implied feelings or thoughts associated with a word. Connotations can be positive or negative. Reviewers often use words with strong positive or negative connotations that support their praise or criticism. For example, a writer may refer to a small space positively as "cozy" instead of negatively as "cramped."

Criteria**:** standards by which something is judged. Reviewers generally make their evaluation criteria clear by listing and explaining what they are basing their review on. Each type of primary source has its set of standards, some or all of which reviewers address.

Critics**:** professional reviewer who typically publishes reviews in well-known publications.

Denotation**:** the literal or dictionary definition of a word.

Evaluation**:** judgment based on analysis.

Fandom**:** community of admirers who follow their favorite works and discuss them online as a group.

Genre**:** broad category of artistic compositions that share similar characteristics such as form, subject matter, or style. For example, horror, suspense, and drama are common film and literary genres. Hip hop and reggae are common music genres.

Medium**:** way in which a work is created or delivered (DVD, streaming, book, vinyl, etc.). Works can appear in more than one medium.

Mode**:** sensory method through which a person interacts with a work. Modes include linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural.

Primary Sources**:** in the context of reviewing, the original work or item being reviewed, whether a film, book, performance, business, or product. In the context of research, primary sources are items of firsthand, or original, evidence, such as interviews, court records, diaries, letters, surveys, or photographs.

Recap**:** summary of an individual episode of a television series.

Review**:** genre that evaluates performances, exhibitions, works of art (books, movies, visual arts), services, and products

**Secondary source:** source that contains the analysis or synthesis of someone else, such as opinion pieces, newspaper and magazine articles, and academic journal articles.

Subgenre**:** category within a genre. For example, subgenres of drama include various types of drama: courtroom drama, historical/costume drama, and family drama.

### Establishing Criteria

All reviewers and readers alike rely on evidence to support an evaluation. When you review a primary source, the evidence you use depends on the subject of your evaluation, your audience, and how your audience will use your evaluation. You will need to determine the criteria on which to base your evaluation. In some cases, you will also need to consider the genre and subgenre of your subject to determine evaluation criteria. In your review, you will need to clarify your evaluation criteria and the way in which specific evidence related to those criteria have led you to your judgment. Table 13.1 illustrates evaluation criteria in four different primary source types.

| **Smartphone** | **Academic Source** | **Film** | **Employment** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Camera quality | Author's credentials | Writing/ script | Punctuality |
| Battery life | Publication's reputation | Acting | Ability to meet goals |
| Screen resolution | Sources cited | Special effects | Ability to work on a team |
| Screen size | Timeliness of research (up to date) | Sound/ music | Communication skills |
| Durability | Relevance to subject | Directing | Professional development |
| Phone reception | Quality of writing | Subject | Competence in subject area |

Table 13.1 Evaluation criteria across subjects

Even within the same subject, however, evaluation criteria may differ according to the genre and subgenre of the film. Audiences have different expectations for a horror movie than they do for a romantic comedy, for example. For your subject, select the evaluation criteria on the basis of your knowledge of audience expectations. Table 13.2 shows how the evaluation criteria might be different in film reviews of different genres.

| **Horror** | **Action** | **Romantic Comedy** | **Drama** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Makeup | Special effects | Jokes | Script/ writing |
| Cinematography | Stunt work | Conflict/ resolution | Acting |
| Type of horror depicted (jump scares, gore, etc.) | Pace of story | Chemistry between main characters | Accuracy/ believability of plot |
| Music | Relatability of "hero" | Satisfaction/ happy ending | Scenery/ setting/costumes |

Table 13.2 Evaluation criteria across film genres

### Providing Objective Evidence

You will use your established evaluation criteria to gather specific evidence to support your judgment. Remember, too, that criteria are fluid; no reviewer will always use the same criteria for all works, even those in the same genre or subgenre.

Whether or not the criteria are unique to the particular task, a reviewer must look closely at the subject and note specific details from the primary source or sources. If you are evaluating a product, look at the product specifications and evaluate product performance according to them, noting details as evidence. When evaluating a film, select either quotations from the dialogue or detailed, vivid descriptions of scenes. If you are evaluating an employee's performance, observe the employee performing their job and take notes. These are examples of primary source evidence: raw information you have gathered and will analyze to make a judgment.

Gathering evidence is a process that requires you to look closely at your subject. If you are reviewing a film, you certainly will have to view the film several times, focusing on only one or two elements of the evaluation criteria at a time. If you are evaluating an employee, you might have to observe that employee on several occasions and in a variety of situations to gather enough evidence to complete your evaluation. If you are evaluating a written argument, you might have to reread the text several times and annotate or highlight key evidence. It is better to gather more evidence than you think you need and choose the best examples rather than try to base your evaluation on insufficient or irrelevant evidence.

### Modes of Reviews

Not all reviews have to be written; sometimes a video or an audio review can be more engaging than a written review. *YouTube* has become a popular destination for project reviews, creating minor celebrities out of popular reviewers. However, a written review of a movie might work well because the reviewer can provide just enough information to avoid spoiling the movie, whereas some reviews require more visual interaction to understand.

Take reviewer Doug DeMuro's popular *YouTube* channel. DeMuro reviews cars—everything from sports cars to sedans to vintage cars. Car buyers need to interact with a car to want to buy it, and *YouTube* provides the next best thing by giving viewers an up-close look.

Technology is another popular type of review on *YouTube.* YouTube creators like Marques Brownlee discuss rumors about the next Apple iPhone or Samsung Galaxy and provide unboxing videos to record their reactions to the latest phones and laptops. Like DeMuro's viewers, Brownlee's audience can get up close to the product. Seeing a phone in Brownlee's hands helps audience members imagine it in their hands.

On the other hand, reviews don't always need to be about products you can touch, as Paul Lucas demonstrates on his *YouTube* channel "Wingin' It!" Lucas reviews travel experiences (mainly airlines and sometimes trains), evaluating the service of airlines around the world and in various ticket classes.

What do these reviews have in common? First, they are all in the video medium. *YouTube*'s medium is video; a podcast's medium is audio. They also share a mode. *YouTube*'s mode is viewing or watching; a podcast's mode is listening.

These examples all use the genre conventions of reviews discussed in this chapter. The reviewers present a clear evaluation: *should you buy this car, phone, or airline ticket?* They base their evaluation on evidence that fits a set of evaluation criteria. Doug DeMuro might evaluate a family sedan on the basis of seating, trunk storage, and ride comfort. Marques Brownlee might judge a phone on the basis of battery life, design, and camera quality. Paul Lucas might grade an airline on service, schedules, and seat comfort. While the product or service being reviewed might be different, all three reviewers use similar frameworks.

# 6

# PORTFOLIO REFLECTION: YOUR GROWTH AS A WRITER

## Introduction

Photo of woman looking at the mirror by Andrea Piacquadio / Pexels

Reflecting on your work is an important step in your growth as a writer. Reflection allows you to recognize the ways in which you have mastered some skills and have addressed instances when your intention and execution fail to match. By recognizing previous challenges and applying learned strategies for addressing them, you demonstrate improvement and progress as a writer. This kind of reflection is an example of recursive. At this point in the semester, you know that writing is a recursive process: you prewrite, you write, you revise, you edit, you reflect, you revise, and so on. In working through a writing assignment, you learn and understand more about particular sections of your draft, and you can go back and revise them. The ability to return to your writing and exercise objectivity and honesty about it is one of skills you have practiced during this journey. You are now able to evaluate your own work, accept another's critique of your writing, and make meaningful revisions.

In this chapter, you will review your work from earlier chapters and write a reflection that captures your growth, feelings, and challenges as a writer. In your reflection, you will apply many of the writing, reasoning, and evidentiary strategies you have already used in other papers—for example, analysis, evaluation, comparison and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect, examples, and anecdotes.

When looking at your earlier work, you may find that you cringe at those papers and wonder what you were thinking when you wrote them. If given that same assignment, you now would know how to produce a more polished paper. This response is common and is evidence that you have learned quite a bit about writing.

## 14.1 Thinking Critically about Your Semester

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Reflect on and write about the development of composing processes and how those processes affect your work.
- Demonstrate honesty and objectivity in reflecting on written work.

You have written your way through a long semester, and the journey is nearly complete. Now is the time to step back and reflect on what you have written, what you have mastered, what skill gaps remain, and what you will do to continue growing and improving as a communicator. This reflection will be based on the work you have done and what you have learned during the semester. Because the subject of this reflection is you and your work, no further research is required. The information you need is in the work you have done in this course and in your head. Now, you will work to organize and transfer this information to an organized written text. Every assignment you have completed provides you with insight into your writing process as you think about the assignment's purpose, its execution, and your learning along the way. The skill of reflection requires you to be critical and honest about your habits, feelings, skills, and writing. In the end, you will discover that you have made progress as a writer, perhaps in ways not yet obvious.

## 14.2 Glance at Genre: Purpose and Structure

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify conventions of reflection regarding structure, paragraphing, and tone.
- Articulate how genre conventions are shaped by purpose, culture, and expectation.
- Adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities.

Reflective writing is the practice of thinking about an event, an experience, a memory, or something imagined and expressing its larger meaning in written form. Reflective writing comes from the author's specific perspective and often contemplates the way an event (or something else) has affected or even changed the author's life.

### Areas of Exploration

When you write a reflective piece, consider three main areas of exploration as shown in Figure 14.3. The first is the happening. This area consists of the events included in the reflection. For example, you will be examining writing assignments from this course. As you describe the assignments, you also establish context for the reflection so that readers can understand the circumstances involved. For each assignment, ask yourself these questions: *What was the assignment? How did I approach the assignment? What did I do to start this assignment? What did I think about the assignment?* If you think of other questions, use them. Record your answers because they will prove useful in the second area.

The second area is reflection. When you reflect on the happening, you go beyond simply writing about the specific details of the assignment; you move into the writing process and an explanation of what you learned from doing the work. In addition, you might recognize—and note—a change in your skills or way of thinking. Ask yourself these questions: *What works effectively in this text? What did I learn from this assignment? How is this assignment useful? How did I feel when I was working on this assignment?* Again, you can create other questions, and note your responses because you will use them to write a reflection.

The third area is action. Here, you decide what to do next and plan the steps needed to reach that goal. Ask yourself: *What does (and does not) work effectively in this text? How can I continue to improve in this area? What should I do now? What has changed in my thinking? How would I change my approach to this assignment if I had to do another one like it?* Base your responses to these questions on what you have learned, and implement these elements in your writing.

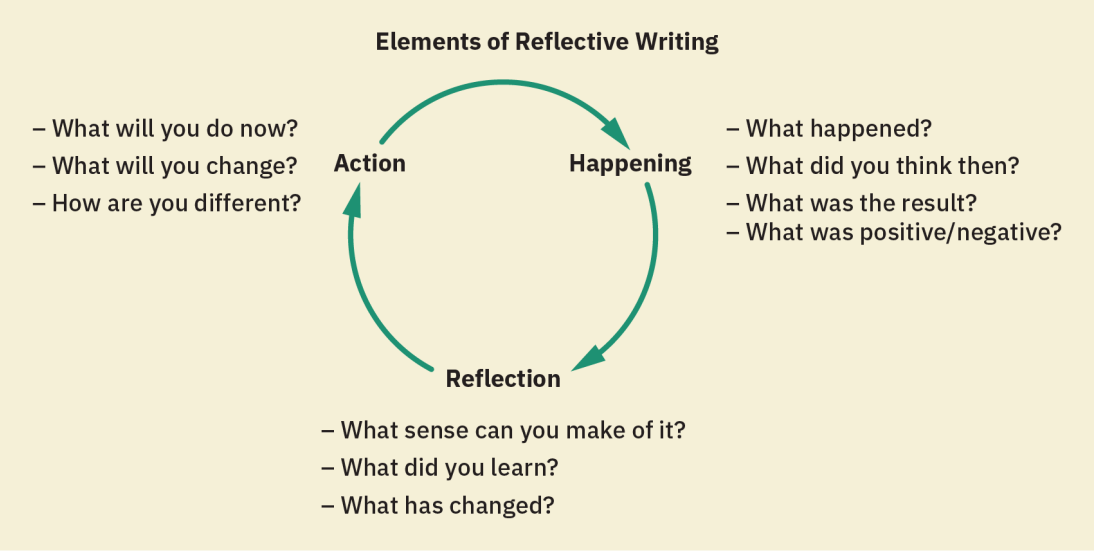


Figure 14.3 Elements of reflective writing (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

### Format of Reflective Writing

Unlike thesis statements, which often come at the beginning of an essay, the main point of a piece of reflective writing may be conveyed only indirectly and nearly always emerges at the end, almost like an epiphany, or sudden realization. With this structure, readers are drawn into the act of reflecting and become more curious about what the writer is thinking and feeling. ln other words, reflective writers are musing, exploring, or wondering rather than arguing. In fact, reflective essays are most enlightening when they are not obviously instructive or assertive. However, even though reflective writing does not present an explicit argument, it still includes evidence and cohesion and provides lessons to be learned. As such, elements of persuasion or argument often appear in reflective essays.

### Discovery through Writing

Keep in mind, too, that when you start to reflect on your growth as a writer, you may not realize what caused you to explore a particular memory. In other words, writers may choose to explore an idea, such as why something got their attention, and only by recalling the details of that event do they discover the reason it first drew their attention.

When you tell the story of your writing journey this semester, you may find that more was on your mind than you realized. The writing itself is one thing, but the meaning of what you learned becomes something else, and you may deliberately share how that second level, or deeper meaning or feeling, emerged through the act of storytelling. For example, in narrating a writing experience, you may step back, pause, and let readers know, "Wait a minute, something else is going on here." An explanation of the new understanding, for both you and your readers, can follow this statement. Such pauses are a sign that connections are being made—between the present and the past, the concrete and the abstract, the literal and the symbolic. They signal to readers that the essay or story is about to move in a new and less predictable direction. Yet each idea remains connected through the structure of happenings, reflections, and actions.

Sometimes, slight shifts in voice or tone accompany reflective pauses as a writer moves closer to what is really on their mind. The exact nature of these shifts will, of course, be determined by the writer's viewpoint. Perhaps one idea that you, as the writer, come up with is the realization that writing a position argument was useful in your history class. You were able to focus more on the material than on *how* to write the paper because you already knew how to craft a position argument. As you work through this process, continue to note these important little discoveries.

### Your Writing Portfolio

As you recall, each chapter in this book has included one or more assignments for a writing portfolio. In simplest terms, a writing portfolio is a collection of your writing contained within a single binder or folder. A portfolio may contain printed copy, or it may be completely digital. Its contents may have been created over a number of weeks, months, or even years, and it may be organized chronologically, thematically, or qualitatively. A portfolio assigned for a class will contain written work to be shared with an audience to demonstrate your writing, learning, and skill progression. This kind of writing portfolio, accumulated during a college course, presents a record of your work over a semester and may be used to assign a grade. Many instructors now offer the option of, or even require, digital multimodal portfolios, which include visuals, audio, and/or video in addition to written texts. Your instructor will provide guidelines on how to create a multimodal portfolio, if applicable. You can also learn more about creating a multimodal portfolio and view one by a first-year student.

### Key Terms

As you begin crafting your reflection, consider these elements of reflective writing.

Analysis**:** When you analyze your own writing, you explain your reasoning or writing choices, thus showing that you understand your progress as a writer.

Context**:** The context is the circumstances or situation in which the happening occurred. A description of the assignment, an explanation of why it was given, and any other relevant conditions surrounding it would be its context.

Description**:** Providing specific details, using figurative language and imagery, and even quoting from your papers helps readers visualize and thus share your reflection. When describing, writers may include visuals if applicable.

Evaluation**:** An effective evaluation points out where you faltered and where you did well. With that understanding, you have a basis to return to your thoughts and speculate about progress you will continue to make in the future.

Observation**:** Observation is a close look at the writing choices you made and the way you managed the rhetorical situations you encountered. When observing, be objective, and pay attention to the more and less effective parts of your writing.

Purpose**:** By considering the goals of these previous assignments, you will be better equipped to look at them critically and objectively to understand their larger use in academia.

Speculation**:** Speculation encourages you to think about your next steps: where you need to improve and where you need to stay sharp to avoid recurring mistakes.

**Thoughts:** Your thoughts (and feelings) before, during, and after an assignment can provide you with descriptive material. In a reflective essay, writers may choose to indicate their thoughts in a different tense from the one in which they write the essay itself.

When you put these elements together, you will be able to reflect objectively on your own writing. This reflection might include identifying areas of significant improvement and areas that still need more work. In either case, focus on describing, analyzing, and evaluating *how* and *why* you did or did not improve. This is not an easy task for any writer, but it proves valuable for those who aim to improve their skills as communicators.