

Writing about Literature

When it comes to the study of literature, reading and writing are closely interrelated—even mutually dependent—activities. On the one hand, the quality of whatever we write about a literary text depends entirely upon the quality of our work as readers. On the other hand, our reading isn't truly complete until we've tried to capture our sense of a text in writing. Indeed, we often read a literary work much more actively and attentively when we integrate informal writing into the reading process—pausing periodically to mark especially important or confusing passages, to jot down significant facts, to describe the impressions and responses the text provokes—or when we imagine our reading (and our informal writing) as preparation for writing about the work in a more sustained and formal way.

Writing about literature can take any number of forms, ranging from the very informal and personal to the very formal and public. In fact, your instructor may well ask you to try your hand at more than one form. However, the essay is by far the most common and complex form that writing about literature takes. As a result, the following chapters will focus on the essay.* A first, short chapter covers three basic ways of writing about literature. The second chapter, “The Elements of the Essay,” seeks to answer a very basic set of questions: *When an instructor says, “Write an essay,” what precisely does that mean? What is the purpose of an essay, and what form does it need to take in order to achieve that purpose?* The third chapter, “The Writing Process,” addresses questions about how an essay is produced, while the fourth chapter explores the special steps and strategies involved in writing a research essay—a type of essay about literature that draws on secondary sources. “Quotation, Citation, and Documentation” explains the rules and strategies involved in quoting and citing both literary texts and secondary sources using the documentation system recommended by the Modern Language Association (MLA). And, finally, we present a sample research essay, annotated to point out some its most important features.

28 PARAPHRASE, SUMMARY, DESCRIPTION

Before turning to the essay, let's briefly consider three other basic ways of writing about literature: *paraphrase*, *summary*, and *description*. Each of these can be useful both as an exercise to prepare for writing an essay and as part of a completed essay. That is, an essay about a literary text must do more than paraphrase, summarize, or describe the text; yet a good essay about a literary text almost always incorporates some paraphrase, summary, and description of the literature and, in the case of a research essay, of secondary sources as well.

*In chapters 28–32, unless otherwise specified, page numbers in the examples refer to this volume, *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, Shorter 9th edition.

28.1 PARAPHRASE

To paraphrase a statement is to restate it in your own words. Since the goal of paraphrase is to represent a statement fully and faithfully, paraphrases tend to be at least as long as the original, and one usually wouldn't try to paraphrase an entire work of any length. The following examples offer paraphrases of sentences from a work of fiction (Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*), a poem (W. B. Yeats's "All Things Can Tempt Me"), and an essay (George L. Dillon's "Styles of Reading").

ORIGINAL SENTENCE	PARAPHRASE
It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.	Everyone agrees that a propertied bachelor needs (or wants) to find a woman to marry.
All things can tempt me from this craft of verse: One time it was a woman's face, or worse— The seeming needs of my fool-driven land; Now nothing but comes readier to the hand Than this accustomed toil. . . .	Anything can distract me from writing poetry: One time I was distracted by a woman's face, but I was even more distracted by (or I found an even less worthy distraction in) the attempt to fulfill what I imagined to be the needs of a country governed by idiots. At this point in my life I find any task easier than the work I'm used to doing (writing poetry).
. . . making order out of Emily's life is a complicated matter, since the narrator recalls the details through a nonlinear filter.	It's difficult to figure out the order in which events in Emily's life occurred because the narrator doesn't relate them chronologically.

Paraphrase resembles translation. Indeed, the paraphrase of Yeats is essentially a "translation" of poetry into prose, and the paraphrases of Austen and of Dillon are "translations" of one kind of prose (formal nineteenth-century British prose, the equally formal but quite different prose of a twentieth-century literary critic) into another kind (colloquial twentieth-century American prose).

But what good is that? First, paraphrasing tests that you truly understand what you've read; it can be especially helpful when an author's diction and syntax seem difficult, complex, or "foreign" to you. Second, paraphrasing can direct your attention to nuances of tone or potentially significant details. For example, paraphrasing Austen's sentence might highlight its irony and call attention to the multiple meanings of phrases such as *a good fortune* and *in want of*. Similarly, paraphrasing Yeats might help you to think about all that he gains by making himself the object rather than the subject of his sentence. Third, paraphrase can help you begin generating the kind of interpretive questions that can drive an essay. For example, the Austen paraphrase might suggest the following questions: *What competing definitions of "a good fortune" are set out in Pride and Prejudice? Which definition, if any, does the novel as a whole seem to endorse?*

28.2 SUMMARY

A summary is a fairly succinct restatement or overview of the content of an entire text or source (or a significant portion thereof). Like paraphrases, summaries should always be stated in your own words.

A summary of a literary text is generally called a *plot summary* because it focuses on the action or plot. Here, for example, is a summary of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven":

The speaker of Poe's "The Raven" is sitting in his room late at night reading in order to forget the death of his beloved Lenore. There's a tap at the door; after some hesitation he opens it and calls Lenore's name, but there is only an echo. When he goes back into his room he hears the rapping again, this time at his window, and when he opens it a raven enters. He asks the raven its name, and it answers very clearly, "Nevermore." As the speaker's thoughts run back to Lenore, he realizes the aptness of the raven's word: she shall sit there nevermore. But, he says, sooner or later he will forget her, and the grief will lessen. "Nevermore," the raven says again, too aptly. Now the speaker wants the bird to leave, but "Nevermore," the raven says once again. At the end, the speaker knows he'll never escape the raven or its dark message.

Though a summary should be significantly shorter than the original, it can be any length you need it to be. Above, the 108 lines of Poe's poem have been reduced to about 160 words. But one could summarize this or any other work in as little as one sentence. Here, for example, are three viable one-sentence summaries of *Hamlet*:

A young man seeking to avenge his uncle's murder of his father kills his uncle, while also bringing about his own and many others' deaths.

A young Danish prince avenges the murder of his father, the king, by his uncle, who had usurped the throne, but the prince himself is killed, as are others, and a well-led foreign army has no trouble successfully invading the decayed and troubled state.

When, from the ghost of his murdered father, a young prince learns that his uncle, who has married the prince's mother, is the father's murderer, the prince plots revenge, feigning madness, acting erratically—even insulting the woman he loves—and, though gaining his revenge, causes the suicide of his beloved and the deaths of others and, finally, of himself.

As these *Hamlet* examples suggest, different readers—or even the same reader on different occasions—will almost certainly summarize the same text in dramatically different ways. Summarizing entails selection and emphasis. As a result, any summary reflects a particular point of view and may even imply a particular interpretation or argument. When writing a summary, you should try to be as objective as possible; nevertheless, your summary will reflect your own understanding and attitudes. For this reason, summarizing a literary text may help you to begin figuring out just what your particular understanding of a text is, especially if you then compare your summary to those of other readers.

28.3 DESCRIPTION

Whereas both summary and paraphrase focus on content, a description of a literary text focuses on its overall form or structure or some particular aspect thereof. Here, for example, is a description (rather than a summary) of the rhyme scheme of "The Raven":

Poe's "The Raven" is a poem of 108 lines divided into eighteen six-line stanzas. If you were to look just at the ends of the lines, you would notice only one or two unusual features: not only is there only one rhyme sound per stanza—lines 2, 4, 5, and 6 rhyming—but one rhyme sound is the same in all eighteen stanzas, so that seventy-two lines end with the sound "ore." In addition, the fourth and fifth lines of each stanza end with an identical word; in six of the stanzas that word is "door" and in four others "Lenore." There is even more repetition: the last line of six of the first seven stanzas ends with the words "nothing more," and the last eleven stanzas end with the word "Nevermore." The rhyming lines—other than the last, which is very short—in each stanza are fifteen syllables long, the rhymed line sixteen. The longer lines give the effect of shorter ones, however, and add still further to the frequency of repeated sounds, for the first half of each opening line rhymes with the second half of the line, and so do the halves of line 3. There is still more: the first half of line 4 rhymes with the halves of line 3 (in the first stanza the rhymes are "dreary" / "weary" and "napping" / "tapping" / "rapping"). So at least nine words in each six-line stanza are involved in the regular rhyme scheme, and many stanzas have added instances of rhyme or repetition. As if this were not enough, all the half-line rhymes are rich feminine rhymes, where both the accented and the following unaccented syllables rhyme—"dreary" / "wary."

You could similarly describe many other formal elements of the poem—images and symbols, for example. You can describe a play in comparable terms—acts, scenes, settings, time lapses, perhaps—and you might describe a novel in terms of chapters, books, summary narration, dramatized scenes. In addition to describing the narrative structure or focus and voice of a short story, you might describe the diction (word choice), the sentence structure, the amount and kind of description of characters or landscape, and so on.

29 THE ELEMENTS OF THE ESSAY

As you move from reading literary works to writing essays about them, remember that the essay—like the short story, poem, or play—is a distinctive subgenre with unique elements and conventions. Just as you come to a poem or play with a certain set of expectations, so will readers approach your essay. They will be looking for particular elements, anticipating that the work will unfold in a specific way. This chapter explains and explores those elements so that you can develop a clear sense of what makes a piece of writing an essay and why some essays are more effective than others.

An essay has particular elements and a particular form because it serves a specific purpose. Keeping this in mind, consider what an essay is and what it does. An essay is a relatively short written composition that articulates, supports, and develops an idea or claim. Like any work of expository prose, it aims to explain something complex. Explaining in this case entails both *analysis* (breaking the complex “thing” down into its constituent parts and showing how they work together to form a meaningful whole) and *argument* (working to convince someone that the analysis is valid). In an essay about literature, the literary work is the complex thing that you are helping a reader to better understand. The essay needs to show the reader a particular way to understand the work, to interpret or read it. That interpretation or reading starts with the essayist’s own personal response. But an essay also needs to persuade the reader that this interpretation is reasonable and enlightening—that it is, though it is distinctive and new, it is more than merely idiosyncratic or subjective.

To achieve these ends, an essay must incorporate four elements: an appropriate *tone*, a clear *thesis*, a coherent *structure*, and ample, appropriate *evidence*.

29.1 TONE (AND AUDIENCE)

Although your reader or audience isn’t an element *in* your essay, tone is. And tone and audience are closely interrelated. In everyday life, the tone we adopt has everything to do with whom we are talking to and what situation we’re in. For example, we talk very differently to our parents than to our best friends. And in different situations we talk to the same person in different ways. What tone do you adopt with your best friends when you want to borrow money? when you need advice? when you’re giving advice? when you’re deciding whether to eat pizza or sushi? In each case you act on your knowledge of who your friends are, what information they already have, and what their response is likely to be. But you also try to adopt a tone that will encourage them to respond in a certain way.

In writing, as in everyday life, your audience, situation, and purpose should shape your tone. Conversely, your tone will shape your audience’s response. You

need to figure out both who your readers are and what response you want to elicit. Who is your audience? When you write an essay for class, the obvious answer is your instructor. But in an important sense, that is the wrong answer. Although your instructor could literally be the only person besides you who will ever read your essay, you write about literature to learn how to write for an audience of peers—people a lot like you who are sensible and educated and who will appreciate having a literary work explained so that they can understand it more fully. Picture your reader as someone about your own age with roughly the same educational background. Assume the person has some experience in reading literature, but that he or she has read this particular work only once and has not yet closely analyzed it. You should neither be insulting and explain the obvious nor assume that your reader has noticed, considered, and remembered every detail.

Should you, then, altogether ignore the obvious fact that an instructor—who probably has a master’s degree or doctorate in literature—is your actual reader? Not altogether: you don’t want to get so carried away with speaking to people of your own age and interests that you slip into slang, or feel the need to explain what a stanza is, or leave unexplained an allusion to your favorite movie. Even though you do want to learn from the advice and guidelines your instructor has given, try not to be preoccupied with the idea that you are writing for someone “in authority” or someone utterly different from yourself.

Above all, don’t think of yourself as writing for a captive audience, for readers who have to read what you write or who already see the text as you do. (If that were the case, there wouldn’t be much point in writing at all.) It is not always easy to know how interested your readers will be or how their views might differ from yours, so you must make the most of every word. Remember that the purpose of your essay is to persuade readers to see the text your way. That process begins with persuading them that you deserve their attention and respect. The tone of your paper should be serious and straightforward, respectful toward your readers and the literary work. But its approach and vocabulary, while formal enough for academic writing, should be lively enough to interest someone like you. Try to imagine, as your ideal reader, the person in class whom you most respect but who often seems to see things differently from you. Write to capture and hold that person’s attention and respect. Encourage your reader to adopt a desirable stance *toward* your essay by adopting that same stance *in* your essay. Engage and convince your reader by demonstrating your engagement and conviction. Encourage your reader to keep an open mind by showing that you have done the same.

29.2 THESIS

A thesis is to an essay what a theme is to a short story, play, or poem: it’s the governing idea, proposition, claim, or point. Good theses come in many shapes and sizes. A thesis cannot always be conveyed in one sentence, nor will it always appear in the same place in every essay. But you will risk both appearing confused and confusing the reader if you can’t state the thesis in one to three sentences or if the thesis doesn’t appear somewhere in your introduction, usually near its end.

Regardless of its length or location, a thesis must be debatable—a claim that all readers won’t automatically accept. It’s a proposition that *can* be proven with evidence from the text. Yet it’s one that *has* to be proven, that isn’t obviously true or factual, that must be supported with evidence in order to be fully understood

or accepted by the reader. The following examples juxtapose a series of inarguable topics or fact statements—ones that are merely factual or descriptive—with thesis statements, each of which makes a debatable claim about the topic or fact:

TOPIC OR FACT STATEMENTS	THESIS STATEMENTS
"The Story of an Hour" explores the topic of marriage.	In "The Story of an Hour," Chopin poses a troubling question: Does marriage inevitably encourage people to "impose [their] private will upon a fellow-creature" (450)?
"The Blind Man," "Cathedral," and "The Lamé Shall Enter First" all feature characters with physical handicaps.	"The Blind Man," "Cathedral," and "The Lamé Shall Enter First" feature protagonists who learn about their own emotional or spiritual shortcomings through an encounter with a physically handicapped person. In this way, all three stories invite us to question traditional definitions of "disability."
The experience of the speaker in "How I Discovered Poetry" is very ambiguous.	In "How I Discovered Poetry," what the speaker discovers is the ambiguous power of words—their capacity both to inspire and unite and to denigrate and divide.
"London" consists of three discrete stanzas that each end with a period; two-thirds of the lines are end-stopped.	In "London," William Blake uses a variety of formal techniques to suggest the unnatural rigidity and constraints of urban life.
<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> uses a lot of Darwinian language.	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> asks whether or not it is truly the "fittest" who "survive" in contemporary America.
Creon and Antigone are both similar and different.	Creon and Antigone are alike in several ways, especially the inconsistency of their values and the way they are driven by passion below the surface of rational argument. Both are also one-sided in their commitments. . . . This does not mean, however, that they are equally limited in the values to which they adhere. —Mary Whitlock Blundell, "Helping Friends . . ." (ch. 27)

All of the thesis statements above are arguable, but they share other traits as well. All are clear and emphatic. Each implicitly answers a compelling interpretive question—for instance, *What do Antigone and Creon stand for? Which character and worldview, if any, does the play as a whole ultimately champion?* Yet each statement entices us to read further by generating more questions in our minds—*How and why do Creon and Antigone demonstrate "inconsistency" and "one-sidedness"? If these two characters are not equally limited, which of them is more limited?* An effective thesis enables the reader to enter the essay with a clear sense of what its writer will try to prove, and it inspires the reader with the desire to see the writer do it. We want to understand how the writer arrived at this view, to test whether it's valid, and to see how the writer will answer the other questions the thesis has generated in our minds. A good thesis captures the reader's interest and shapes his or her expectations. It also makes promises that the rest of the essay should fulfill.

At the same time, an arguable claim is not one-sided or narrow-minded. A thesis

needs to stake out a position, but a position can and should admit complexity. Literary texts tend to focus more on exploring problems, conflicts, and questions than on offering solutions, resolutions, and answers. Their goal is to complicate, not simplify, our way of looking at the world. The best essays about literature and the theses that drive them often share a similar quality.

29.2.1 Interpretive versus Evaluative Claims

All the theses in the previous examples involve *interpretive* claims—claims about how a literary text works, what it says, how one should understand it. And interpretive claims generally work best as theses.

Yet it's useful to remember that in reading and writing about literature we often make (and debate) a different type of claim—the *evaluative*. Evaluation entails judging or assessing. Evaluative claims about literature tend to be of two kinds. The first involves aesthetic judgment, the question being whether a text (or a part or element thereof) succeeds in artistic terms. (This kind of claim features prominently in book reviews, for example.) The second involves philosophical, ethical, or even socially or politically based judgment, the question being whether an idea or action is wise or good, valid or admirable. All interpretive and evaluative claims involve informed opinion (which is why they are debatable). But whereas interpretive claims aim to elucidate the opinions expressed *in* and *by* the text, the second kind of evaluative claim assesses the value or validity of those opinions, often by comparing them with the writer's own.

The following examples juxtapose a series of interpretive claims with evaluative claims of both types:

INTERPRETIVE CLAIMS	EVALUATIVE CLAIMS
"A Conversation with My Father" explores the relative values of realistic and fantastic fiction. Rather than advocating one type of fiction, however, the story ends up affirming just how much we need stories of any and every kind.	"A Conversation with My Father" fails because it ends up being more a stilted Platonic dialogue about works of fiction than a true work of fiction in its own right. The father in "A Conversation with My Father" is absolutely right: realistic stories are more effective and satisfying than fantastic ones.
The speaker of John Donne's "Song" is an angry and disillusioned man obsessed with the infidelity of women.	In "Song," John Donne does a very effective job of characterizing the speaker, an angry and disillusioned man obsessed with the infidelity of women. John Donne's "Song" is a horribly misogynistic poem because it ends up endorsing the idea that women are incapable of fidelity.
"How I Learned to Drive" demonstrates that, in Paula Vogel's words, "it takes a whole village to molest a child."	"How I Learned to Drive" is at once too preachy and too self-consciously theatrical to be dramatically effective. By insisting that sexual abuse is a crime perpetrated by a "whole village" rather than by an individual, Paula Vogel lets individual abusers off the hook, encouraging us to see them as victims rather than as the villains they really are.

In practice, the line between these different types of claims can become very thin. For instance, an essay claiming that Vogel's play conveys a socially dangerous or morally bad message about abuse may also claim that it is, as a result, an aesthetically flawed play. Further, an essay defending an interpretive claim about a text implies that it is at least aesthetically or philosophically worthy enough to merit interpretation. Conversely, defending and developing an evaluative claim about a text always requires a certain amount of interpretation. (You have to figure out what the text says in order to figure out whether the text says it well or says something worthwhile.)

To some extent, then, the distinctions are ones of emphasis. But they are important nonetheless. And unless instructed otherwise, you should generally make your thesis an interpretive claim, reserving evaluative claims for conclusions. (On conclusions, see 29.3.3.)

29.3 STRUCTURE

Like any literary text, an essay needs to have a beginning (or introduction), a middle (or body), and an ending (or conclusion). Each of these parts has a distinct function.

29.3.1 Beginning: The Introduction

Your essay's beginning, or introduction, should draw readers in and prepare them for what's to come by:

- articulating the thesis;
- providing whatever basic information—about the text, the author, and/or the topic—readers will need to follow the argument; and
- creating interest in the thesis by demonstrating that there is a problem or question that it resolves or answers.

This final task involves showing readers why your thesis isn't dull or obvious, establishing a specific *motive* for the essay and its readers. There are numerous possible motives, but writing expert Gordon Harvey has identified three especially common ones:

1. The truth isn't what one would expect or what it might appear to be on a first reading.
2. There's an interesting wrinkle in the text—a paradox, a contradiction, a tension.
3. A seemingly tangential or insignificant matter is actually important or interesting.

(On motives specific to research essays, see 31.1.1.)

29.3.2 Middle: The Body

The middle, or body, of your essay is its beating heart, the place where you do the essential work of supporting and developing the thesis by presenting and analyzing evidence. Each of the body paragraphs needs to articulate, support, and

develop one specific claim—a debatable idea directly related to, but smaller and more specific than, the thesis. This claim should be stated fairly early in the paragraph in a *topic sentence*. And every sentence in the paragraph should help prove, or elaborate on, that claim. Indeed, each paragraph ideally should build from an initial, general statement of the claim to the more complex form of it that you develop by presenting and analyzing evidence. In this way, each paragraph functions like a miniature essay with its own thesis, body, and conclusion.

Your essay as a whole should develop logically just as each paragraph does. To ensure that that happens, you need to:

- order your paragraphs so that each builds on the last, with one idea following another in a logical sequence. The goal is to lay out a clear path for the reader. Like any path, it should go somewhere. Don't just prove your point; develop it.
- present each idea/paragraph so that the logic behind the sequential order is clear. Try to start each paragraph with a sentence that functions as a bridge, carrying the reader from one point to the next. Don't make the reader have to leap.

29.3.3 Ending: The Conclusion

In terms of their purpose (not their content), conclusions are introductions in reverse. Whereas introductions draw readers away from their world and into your essay, conclusions send them back. Introductions work to convince readers that they should read the essay. Conclusions work to show them why and how the experience was worthwhile. You should approach conclusions, then, by thinking about what sort of lasting impression you want to create. What precisely do you want readers to take with them as they journey back into the “real world”?

Effective conclusions often consider three things:

1. *Implications*—What picture of your author's work or worldview does your argument imply or suggest? Alternatively, what might your argument imply about some real-world issue or situation? Implications don't have to be earth-shattering. For example, it's unlikely that your reading of O'Connor's “Everything That Rises Must Converge” will rock your readers' world. Moreover, trying to convince readers that it can may well have the opposite effect. Yet your argument should in some small but significant way change the way readers see O'Connor's work; alternatively, it might give them new insight into how racism works, or how difficult it is for human beings to adjust to changes in the world around us, or how mistaken it can be to see ourselves as more enlightened than our elders, and so on.
2. *Evaluation*—What might your argument about the text reveal about the literary quality or effectiveness of the text as a whole or of some specific element? Alternatively, to what extent and how do you agree and/or disagree with the author's conclusions about a particular issue? How, for example, does your own view of how racism works compare to the viewpoint implied in “Everything That Rises Must Converge”? (For more on evaluative claims, see 29.2.1.)

3. *Areas of ambiguity or unresolved questions*—Are there any remaining puzzles or questions that your argument and/or the text itself doesn't resolve or answer? Alternatively, might your argument suggest a new question or puzzle worth investigating?

Above all, don't repeat what you've already said. If the essay has done its job to this point, and especially if the essay is relatively short, your readers may feel bored and insulted if they get a mere summary. You should clarify anything that needs clarifying, but go a little beyond that. The best essays are rounded wholes in which conclusions do, in a sense, circle back to the place where they started. However, the best essays remind readers of where they began only in order to give them a more palpable sense of how far they've come.

29.4 EVIDENCE

In terms of convincing readers that your claims are valid, both the amount and the quality of your evidence count. And the quality of your evidence will depend, in great part, on how you prepare and present it. Each of the ideas that makes up the body of your essay must be supported and developed with ample, appropriate evidence. Colloquially speaking, the term *evidence* simply refers to facts. But it's helpful to remember that a fact by itself isn't really evidence for anything, or rather that—as lawyers well know—any one fact can be evidence for many things. Like lawyers, essayists turn a fact into evidence by interpreting it; drawing an inference from it; giving the reader a vivid sense of why and how the fact supports a specific claim. You need, then, both to present specific facts and to actively interpret them. *Show* readers why and how each fact matters.

Quotations are an especially important form of evidence in essays about literature; indeed, an essay about literature that contains no quotations will likely be relatively weak. The reader of such an essay may doubt whether its argument emerges out of a thorough knowledge of the work. However, quotations are by no means the only facts on which you should draw. Indeed, a quotation will lead your reader to expect commentary on, and interpretation of, its language. As a general rule, you should quote directly from the text only when its wording is significant. Otherwise, simply paraphrase, describe, or summarize. The following example demonstrates the use of both summary and quotation. (On effective quotation, see 32.1; on paraphrase, summary, and description, see ch. 28.)

At many points in the novel, religion is represented as having degenerated into a system of social control by farmers over workers. Only respectable young men can come courting at Upper Weatherbury farm, and no swearing is allowed (ch. 8). Similarly, the atmosphere in Boldwood's farm kitchen is "like a Puritan Sunday lasting all the week." Bathsheba tries to restrict her workers to drinking mild liquor, and church attendance is taken as the mark of respectability.

—Fred Reid, "Art and Ideology in *Far from the Madding Crowd*,"
Thomas Hardy Annual 4 (London: Macmillan, 1986)

NOTE: Pay special attention to the way this writer uses paraphrase, summary, and quotation. At the beginning of the paragraph, he simply paraphrases certain rules; at its end, he summarizes or describes one character's action. Here, he can use his own words because it's the rules and actions that illustrate his point, not the words that the novelist uses to describe them. However, Reid does quote the text when its (religious) language is the crucial, evidentiary element.

29.5 CONVENTIONS THAT CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS

A mastery of basic mechanics and writing conventions is essential to convincing your readers that you are a knowledgeable and careful writer whose ideas they should respect. This section explores three conventions that are especially crucial to essays about literature.

29.5.1 Tenses

Essays about literature tend to function almost wholly in the present tense, a practice that can take some getting used to. The rationale is that the action within any literary work never stops: a text simply, always *is*. Thus yesterday, today, and tomorrow, Ophelia *goes* mad; “The Lost World” *asks* what it means to grow up; Wordsworth *sees* nature as an avenue to God; and so on. When in doubt, stick to the present tense when writing about literature.

An important exception to this general rule is demonstrated in the following example. As you read the excerpt, pay attention to the way the writer shifts between tenses, using various past tenses to refer to completed actions that took place in the actual past, and using the present tense to refer to actions that occur within, or are performed by, the text.

In 1959 Plath **did not** consciously **attempt** to write in the domestic poem genre, perhaps because she **was not** yet ready to assume her majority. Her journal entries of that period **bristle** with an impatience at herself that **may derive** from this reluctance. . . . But by fall 1962, when she **had** already **lost** so much, she **was** ready. . . . In “Daddy” she **achieved** her victory in two ways. First, . . . she symbolically **assaults** a father figure who is **identified** with male control of language.

—Steven Gould Axelrod, “Jealous Gods” (ch. 24)

29.5.2 Titles

Underline or italicize the titles of all books and works published independently, including:

- long poems (*Endymion*; *Paradise Lost*)
- plays (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; *Death and the King’s Horseman*)
- periodicals: newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, and the like (*New York Times*; *College English*)

Use quotation marks for the titles of works that have been published as part of longer works, including:

- short stories (“A Rose for Emily”; “Happy Endings”)
- essays and periodical articles (“A Rose for ‘A Rose for Emily’”; “Art and Ideology in *Far from the Madding Crowd*”)
- poems (“Daddy”; “Ode to a Nightingale”)

Generally speaking, you should capitalize the first word of every title, as well as all the other words that aren’t either articles (e.g., *the*, *a*); prepositions (e.g., *among*, *in*, *through*); or conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*). One exception to this rule is the poem in which the first line substitutes for a missing title (a category that includes

everything by Emily Dickinson, as well as the sonnets of Shakespeare and Edna St. Vincent Millay). In such cases, only the first word is capitalized. Often, the entire phrase is placed in brackets—as in “[Let me not to the marriage of true minds]”—but you will just as often see such titles without brackets.

29.5.3 Names

When first referring to an author, use his or her full name; thereafter, use the last name. (For example, although you may feel a real kinship with Robert Frost, you will appear disrespectful if you refer to him as Robert.)

With characters' names, use the literary work as a guide. Because “Bartleby, the Scrivener” always refers to its characters as *Bartleby*, *Turkey*, and *Nippers*, so should you. But because “The Management of Grief” refers to Judith Templeton either by her full name or by her first name, it would be odd and confusing to call her *Templeton*.

30 THE WRITING PROCESS

It's fairly easy to describe the purpose and formal elements of an essay. Actually writing one is more difficult. So, too, is prescribing a precise formula for how to do so. In practice, the writing process will vary from writer to writer and from assignment to assignment. No one can give you a recipe. However, this chapter presents a menu of possible approaches and exercises, which you should test out and refine for yourself.

As you do so, keep in mind that writing needn't be a solitary enterprise. Most writers—working in every genre, at every level—get inspiration, guidance, help, and feedback from other people throughout the writing process, and so can you. Your instructor may well create opportunities for collaboration, having you and your colleagues work together to plan essays, critique drafts, and so on. Even if that isn't the case, you can always reach out to others on your own. Since every essay will ultimately have to engage readers, why not bring some actual readers and fellow writers into the writing process? Use class discussions to generate and test out essay topics and theses. Ask the instructor to clarify assignments or to talk with you about your plans. Have classmates, friends, or roommates read your drafts.

Of course, your essay ultimately needs to be your own work. You, the individual writer, must be the ultimate arbiter, critically scrutinizing the advice you receive, differentiating valid reader responses from idiosyncratic ones. But in writing about literature, as in reading it, we all can get a much better sense of what we think by considering others' views.

30.1 GETTING STARTED

30.1.1 Scrutinizing the Assignment

For student essayists, as for most professional ones, the writing process usually begins with an assignment. Though assignments vary greatly, all impose certain restrictions. These are designed not to hinder your creativity but to direct it into productive channels, ensuring that you hone certain skills, try out various approaches, and avoid common pitfalls. Your first task as a writer is thus to scrutinize the assignment. Make sure that you fully understand what you are being asked to do (and not do), and ask questions about anything unclear or puzzling.

Almost all assignments restrict the length of the essay by giving word or page limits. Keep those limits in mind as you generate and evaluate potential essay topics, making sure that you choose a topic you can handle in the space allowed. Many assignments impose further restrictions, often indicating the texts and/or topics to be explored. As a result, any given assignment will significantly shape

the rest of the writing process—determining, for example, whether and how you should tackle a step such as “Choosing a Text” or “Identifying Topics.”

Here are three representative essay assignments, each of which imposes a different set of restrictions:

1. Choose any story in this anthology and write an essay analyzing the way in which its protagonist changes.
2. Write an essay analyzing one of the following sonnets: “The New Colossus,” “Range-Finding,” or “London, 1802.” Be sure to consider how the poem’s form contributes to its meaning.
3. Write an essay exploring the significance of references to eyes and vision in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. What, through them, does the play suggest about both the power and the limitations of human vision?

The first assignment dictates the topic and main question. It also provides the kernel of a thesis: *In [story title], [protagonist’s name] goes from being a _____ to a _____*. OR *By the end of [story title], [protagonist’s name] has learned that _____*. The assignment leaves you free to choose which story you will write about, although it limits you to those in which the protagonist clearly changes or learns a lesson of some kind. The second assignment limits your choice of texts to three. Though it also requires that your essay address the effects of the poet’s choice to use the sonnet form, it doesn’t require this to be the main topic of the essay. Rather, it leaves you free to pursue any topic that focuses on the poem’s meaning. The third assignment is the most restrictive. It indicates both the text and the general topic to be explored, while requiring you to narrow the topic and formulate a specific thesis.

30.1.2 Choosing a Text

If the assignment allows you to choose which text to write about, try letting your initial impressions or “gut reactions” guide you. If you do so, your first impulse may be to choose a text that you like or “get” right away. Perhaps its language resembles your own; it depicts speakers, characters, or situations that you easily relate to; or it explores issues that you care deeply about. Following that first impulse can be a great idea. Writing an engaging essay requires being engaged with whatever we’re writing about, and we all find it easier to engage with texts, authors, and/or characters that we like immediately.

You may discover, however, that you have little interesting or new to say about such a text. Perhaps you’re too emotionally invested to analyze it closely, or maybe its meaning seems so obvious that there’s no puzzle or problem to drive an argument. You might, then, find it more productive to choose a work that provokes the opposite reaction—one that initially puzzles or angers you, one whose characters or situations seem alien, one that investigates an issue you haven’t previously thought much about or that articulates a theme you don’t agree with. Sometimes such negative responses can have surprisingly positive results when it comes to writing. One student writer, for example, summed up her basic response to William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* with the words “He’s crazy.” Initially, the poem made no sense to her. And that’s precisely why she decided to write about it: she needed to do so, to make sense of it for other readers, in order

to make sense of it for herself. In the end, she wrote a powerful essay exploring how the poem defined, and why it celebrated, seeming insanity.

When writing about a text that you've discussed in class, you might make similar use of your "gut responses" to that conversation. Did you strongly agree or disagree with one of your classmate's interpretations of a particular text? If so, why not write about it?

30.1.3 Identifying Topics

When an assignment allows you to create your own topic, you will much more likely build a lively and engaging essay from a particular insight or question that captures your attention and makes you want to say something, solve a problem, or stake out a position. The best papers originate in an individual response to a text and focus on a genuine question about it. Even when an instructor assigns a topic, the effectiveness of your essay will largely depend on whether or not you have made the topic your own, turning it into a question to which you discover your own answer.

Often we refer to "finding" a topic, as if there are a bevy of topics "out there" just waiting to be plucked like ripe fruit off the topic-tree. In at least two ways, that's true. For one thing, as we read a literary work, certain topics often do jump out and say, "Hey, look at me! I'm a topic!" A title alone may have that effect: What rises and converges in "Everything That Rises Must Converge"? Why is Keats so keen on that darn nightingale; what does it symbolize for him? Why does Wilde think it's important *not* to be earnest?

For another thing, certain general topics can be adapted to fit almost any literary work. In fact, that's just another way of saying that there are certain common types (or subgenres) of literary essays, just as there are of short stories, plays, and poems. For example, one very common kind of literary essay explores the significance of a seemingly insignificant aspect or element of a work—a word or group of related words, an image or image-cluster, a minor character, an incident or action, and so on. Equally common are character-focused essays of three types. The first explores the outlook or worldview of a character and its consequences. The second considers the way a major character develops from the beginning of a literary work to its end. The third analyzes the nature and significance of a conflict between two characters (or two groups of characters) and the way this conflict is ultimately resolved. (Many of the arguments about *Antigone* excerpted in chapter 27 do this.) Especially when you're utterly befuddled about where to begin, it can be very useful to keep in mind these generic topics and essay types and to use them as starting points. But remember that they are just starting points. One always has to adapt and narrow a generic topic such as "imagery" or "character change" in order to produce an effective essay. In practice, then, no writer simply "finds" a topic; he or she *makes* one.

Similarly, though the topic that leaps out at you immediately might end up being the one you find most interesting, you can only discover that by giving yourself some options. It's always a good idea to initially come up with as many topics as you can. Test out various topics to see which one will work best. Making yourself identify multiple topics will lead you to think harder, look more closely, and reach deeper into yourself and the work.

Here are some additional techniques to identify potential topics. In each case,

write your thoughts down. Don't worry at this point about what form your writing takes or how good it is.

- *Analyze your initial response.*

If you've chosen a text that you feel strongly about, start with those responses. Try to describe your feelings and trace them to their source. Be as specific as possible. What moments, aspects, or elements of the text most affected you? Exactly how and why did they affect you? What was most puzzling? amusing? annoying? intriguing? Try to articulate the question behind your feelings. Often, strong responses result when a work either challenges or affirms an expectation, assumption, or conviction that you, the reader, bring to the work. Think about whether and how that's true here. Define the specific expectation, assumption, or conviction. How, where, and why does the text challenge it? fulfill and affirm it? Which of your responses and expectations are objectively valid, likely to be shared by other readers?

- *Think through the elements.*

Start with a list of elements and work your way through them, thinking about what's unique or interesting or puzzling about the text in terms of each. When it comes to tone, what stands out? What about the speaker? the situation? other elements? Come up with a statement about each. Look for patterns among your statements. Also, think about the questions implied or overlooked by your statements.

- *Pose motive questions.*

In articulating a motive in your essay's introduction, your concern is primarily with the readers, your goal being to give them a solid reason to keep on reading. But you can often work your way toward a topic (or topics) by considering motive. As suggested earlier (29.3.1), there are three common motives. Turn each one into a question in order to identify potential topics:

1. What element(s) or aspect(s) of this work might a casual reader misinterpret?
2. What interesting paradox(es), contradiction(s), or tension(s) do you see in this text?
3. What seemingly minor, insignificant, easily ignored element(s) or aspect(s) of this text might in fact have major significance?

30.1.4 Formulating a Question and a Thesis

Almost any element, aspect, or point of interest in a text can become a topic for a short essay. Before you can begin writing an essay on that topic, however, you need to come up with a thesis or hypothesis—an arguable statement about the topic. Quite often, one comes up with topic and thesis simultaneously: you might well decide to write about a topic precisely because you've got a specific claim to make about it. At other times, that's not the case: the topic comes much more easily than the thesis. In those cases, it helps to formulate a specific question about the topic and to develop a specific answer. That answer will be your thesis.

Again, remember that your question and thesis should focus on something specific, yet they need to be generally valid, involving more than your personal

feelings. Who, after all, can really argue with you about how you feel? The following example demonstrates the way you might freewrite your way from an initial, subjective response to an arguable thesis:

I really admire Bartleby.

But why? What in the story encourages me to respond that way to him? Well, he sticks to his guns and insists on doing only what he "prefers" to do. He doesn't just follow orders. That makes him really different from all the other characters in the story (especially the narrator). And also from a lot of people I know, even me. He's a nonconformist.

Do I think other readers should feel the same way? Maybe, but maybe not. After all, his refusal to conform does cause problems for everyone around him. And actually it doesn't do him a lot of good either. Plus, he would be really annoying in real life. And, even if you admire him, you can't really care about him because he doesn't seem to care about anybody else.

Maybe that's the point. Through Bartleby, Melville explores both how rare and important, and how dangerous, nonconformity can be.

Regardless of how you arrive at your thesis or how strongly you believe in it, it's still helpful at this early stage to think of it as a working hypothesis—a claim that's provisional, still open to rethinking and revision (for another example of an initial response, turn to p. 616).

30.2 PLANNING

Once you've formulated a tentative thesis, you need to (1) identify the relevant evidence, and (2) figure out how to structure your argument, articulating and ordering your claims or sub-ideas. Generally speaking, it works best to tackle structure first—that is, to first figure out your claims and create an outline—because doing so will help you get a sense of what kind of evidence you need. However, you may sometimes get stuck and need to reverse this process, gathering evidence first in order to then formulate and order your claims.

30.2.1 Moving from Claims to Evidence

If you want to focus first on structure, start by looking closely at your thesis. As in many other aspects of writing, it helps to temporarily fill your readers' shoes, trying to see your thesis and the promises it makes from the readers' point of view. What will they need to be shown, and in what order?

If a good thesis shapes readers' expectations, it can also guide you, as a writer. A good thesis often implies what the essay's claims should be and how they should be ordered. For instance, a thesis that focuses on the development of a character implies both that the first body paragraphs will explain what the character is initially like and that later paragraphs will explore how and why that character changes over the course of the story, poem, or play. Similarly, the *Bartleby* thesis developed in the previous example—*Through Bartleby, Melville explores both how rare and important, and how dangerous, nonconformity can be.*—implies that the writer's essay will address four major issues and will thus have four major parts. The first part must show that Bartleby is a nonconformist. The second part should establish

that this nonconformity is rare, a quality that isn't shared by the other characters in the story. Finally, the third and fourth parts should explore, respectively, the positive and negative aspects or consequences of *Bartleby's* nonconformist behavior. Some or all of these parts may need to include multiple paragraphs, each devoted to a more specific claim.

At this stage, it's very helpful to create an outline. Write down or type out your thesis, and then list each claim (to create a *sentence outline*) or each of the topics to be covered (to create a *topic outline*). Now you can return to the text, rereading it in order to gather evidence for each claim. In the process, you might discover facts that seem relevant to the thesis but that don't relate directly to any of the claims you've articulated. In that case, you may need to insert a new claim into the outline. Additionally, you may find (and should actively look for) facts that challenge your argument. Test and reassess your claims against those facts.

30.2.2 Moving From Evidence to Claims

If you are focusing first on evidence, start by rereading the literary work in a more strategic way, searching for everything relevant to your topic—words, phrases, structural devices, changes of tone, and so forth. As you read (slowly and single-mindedly, with your thesis in mind), keep your pen constantly poised to mark or note down useful facts. Be ready to say something about the facts as you come upon them; immediately write down any ideas that occur to you. Some of these will appear in your essay; some won't. Just like most of the footage shot in making a film, many of your notes will end up on the cutting-room floor. As in filmmaking, however, having too much raw material is preferable to not having enough.

No one can tell you exactly how to take notes. But here is one process that you might try. Be forewarned: this process involves using notecards or uniform sheets of paper. Having your notes on individual cards makes it easier to separate and sort them, a concrete, physical process that can aid the mental process of organizing thoughts and facts. If you are working on a computer, create notecards by putting page breaks between each note or by leaving enough space so that you can cut each page down to a uniform size.

1. Keep your thesis constantly in mind as you reread and take notes. Mark all the passages in the text that bear on your thesis. For each, create a notecard that contains both (a) a single sentence describing how the passage relates to your thesis, and (b) the specific information about the passage's location that you will need to create a parenthetical citation. (The information you need will depend on the kind of text you're working with; for specifics, see 32.2.1.) Also, make cards for other relevant, evidentiary facts—like aspects of a poem's rhyme scheme.
2. Keep reading and taking notes until you experience any of the following:
 - get too tired and lose your concentration. (Stop, take a break, come back later.)
 - stop finding relevant evidence or perceive a noticeable drying up of your ideas. (Again, it's time to pause. Later, when your mind is fresh, read the text one more time to ensure that you didn't miss anything.)
 - find yourself annotating every sentence or line, with the evidence all

- running together into a single blob. (If this happens, your thesis is probably too broad. Simplify and narrow it. Then continue notetaking.)
 - become impatient with your notetaking and can't wait to get started writing. (Start drafting immediately. But be prepared to go back to systematic notetaking if your ideas stop coming or your energy fades.)
 - find that the evidence is insufficient for your thesis, that it points in another direction, or that it contradicts your thesis. (Revise your thesis to accommodate the evidence, and begin rereading once more.)
3. When you think you have finished notetaking, read all your notecards over slowly, one by one, and jot down any further ideas as they occur to you, each one on a separate notecard.

Use your notecards to work toward an outline. Again, there are many ways to go about doing this. Here's one process:

1. Sort your cards into logical groups or clusters. Come up with a keyword for that group, and write that word at the top of each card in the group.
2. Set your notecards aside. On a fresh sheet of paper or in a separate document on your computer, write all the major points you want to make. Write them randomly, as they occur to you. Then read quickly through your notecards, and add to your list any important points you have left out.
3. Now it's time to order your points. Putting your points in order is something of a guess at this point, and you may well want to re-order later. For now, take your best guess. Taking your random list, put a "1" in front of the point you will probably begin with, a "2" before the probable second point, and so on.
4. Copy the list in numerical order, revising (if necessary) as you go.
5. Match up your notes (and examples) with the points on your outline. Prepare a title card for each point in the outline, writing on it the point and its probable place in the essay. Then line them up in order before you begin writing. If you're working on a computer, use the search function to find each instance of a keyword, phrase, or name. Then cut and paste in order to arrange your electronic "cards" under the headings you've identified.
6. At this point, you may discover cards that resist classification, cards that belong in two or more places, and/or cards that don't belong anywhere at all. If a card relates to more than one point, put it in the pile with the lowest number, but write on it the number or numbers of other possible locations. Try to find a place for the cards that don't seem to fit, and then put any that remain unsorted into a special file marked "?" or "use in revision."

Before you begin drafting, you may want to develop a more elaborate outline, incorporating examples and including topic sentences for each paragraph; or you may wish to work directly from your sketchy outline and cards.

30.3 DRAFTING

If you've taken enough time with the planning process, you may already be quite close to a first draft. If you've instead jumped straight into writing, you may have to move back and forth between composing and taking some of the steps described in the last section. Either way, remember that first drafts are often called *rough drafts* for a reason. Think of yourself as a painter "roughing out" a sketch in preparation for the more detailed painting to come. The most important thing is to start writing and keep at it.

Try to start with your thesis and work your way step by step through the entire body of the essay at one sitting. (However, you don't actually have to sit the whole time; if you get stuck, jump up and down, walk around the room, water your plants. Then get back to work.) You will almost certainly feel frustrated at times—as you search for the right word, struggle to decide how the next sentence should begin, or discover that you need to tackle ideas in a different order from what you originally had planned.

Stick to it. If you become truly stuck, try to explain your point to another person, or get out a piece of paper or open a new computer file and try working out your ideas or freewriting for a few minutes before returning to your draft. Or, if you get to a section you simply can't write at the moment, make a note about what needs to go in that spot. Then move on and come back to that point later.

Whatever it takes, stay with your draft until you've at least got a middle, or body, that you're relatively satisfied with. Then take a break. Later or even tomorrow come back and take another shot, attaching an introduction and conclusion to the body, filling in any gaps, doing your utmost to create a relatively satisfying whole. Now pat yourself on the back and take another break.

30.4 REVISING

Revision is one of the most important and difficult tasks for any writer. It's a crucial stage in the writing process, yet one that is all too easy to ignore or mismanage. The difference between a so-so essay and a good one, between a good essay and a great one, often depends entirely on effective revision. Give yourself time to revise and develop revision strategies that work for you; the investment in time and effort will pay rich dividends.

Ideally, the process of revision should involve three distinct tasks: assessing the elements, improving the argument, and editing and proofreading. Each of these may require a separate draft. Before considering those three tasks, however, you should be aware of the following three general tips.

First, effective revision requires you to temporarily play the role of reader, as well as writer, of your essay. Take a step back from your draft, doing your utmost to look at it from a more objective point of view. Revision demands re-vision—looking again, seeing anew. As a result, this is an especially good time to involve other people. Have a classmate or friend read and critique your draft.

Second, at this stage it helps to think less in absolute terms (right and wrong, good and bad) than in terms of strengths and weaknesses (elements and aspects of the draft that work well and those that can be improved through revision). If you can understand what's making your essay work as well as what's detracting from it, then you're better able to improve it. Don't get distracted from this impor-

tant work by grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, or other minutiae; there will be time to correct them later.

Third, learn to take full advantage of all the capabilities of the computer, but also recognize its limitations. Cutting and pasting make experimenting with different organizational strategies a breeze; word-processing programs identify problems with grammar, spelling, and syntax; the search function can locate repetitive or problematic wording; and so on. You should familiarize yourself with, and use, all of the tools your computer provides and be thankful that you barely know the meaning of the word *white-out*. But you should also remember that the computer is just a tool with limits and that you must be its master. Like any tool, it can create new problems in the process of solving old ones. When it comes to grammar, syntax, and spelling, for instance, you should always pay attention to your program's queries and suggestions. But if you let it make all the decisions, you may end up with an essay full of malapropisms at once hilarious and tragic (one student essay consistently referred to human beings as *human beans*!) or of sentences that are all exactly the same size and shape—all perfectly correct, and all perfectly boring. Also, because the computer makes cutting and pasting so easy and only shows an essay one screen at a time, it's much easier to reorganize but much harder to recognize the effects of doing so. During revision, then, you should at times move away from the computer screen. Print out a hard copy periodically so that you can assess your essay as a whole, identifying problems that you can return to the computer to fix.

30.4.1 Assessing the Elements

The first step in revision is to make sure that all the elements or working parts of the essay are indeed working. To help with that process, run through the following checklist in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your draft. Try to answer each question honestly.

Thesis

- ☐ Is there *one* claim that effectively controls the essay?
- ☐ Is the claim debatable?
- ☐ Does the claim demonstrate real thought? Does it truly illuminate the text and the topic?

Structure

BEGINNING

- ☐ Does the introduction establish a clear motive for readers, effectively convincing them that there's something worth thinking, reading, and writing about here?
- ☐ Does it give readers all (and only) the basic information they need about the text, author, and/or topic?
- ☐ Does the introduction clearly state the central claim or thesis? Is it obvious which claim is the thesis?

MIDDLE

- ☐ Does each paragraph state one debatable claim? Is the main claim always obvious? Does everything in the paragraph relate to, and help to support and develop, that claim?
- ☐ Is each of those claims clearly related to (but different from) the thesis?

- ☐ Are the claims/paragraphs logically ordered?
- ☐ Is that logic clear? Is each claim clearly linked to those that come before and after? Are there any logical “leaps” that readers might have trouble taking?
- ☐ Does each claim/paragraph clearly build on the last one? Does the argument move forward, or does it seem more like a list or a tour through a museum of interesting observations?
- ☐ Do any key claims or steps in the argument seem to be missing?

TIP: You may be better able to discover structural weaknesses if you:

1. re-outline your draft as it is. Copy your thesis statement and each of your topic sentences into a separate document. Then pose the above questions.
OR
2. read through the essay with highlighters of various colors in hand. As you read, color-code parts that could be restatements of the same or closely related ideas. Then reorganize to match up the colors.

ENDING

- ☐ Does the conclusion give readers the sense that they’ve gotten somewhere and that the journey has been worthwhile?
- ☐ Does it indicate the implications of the argument, consider relevant evaluative questions, and/or discuss questions that remain unanswered?

Evidence

- ☐ Is there ample, appropriate evidence for each claim?
- ☐ Are the appropriateness and significance of each fact—its relevance to the claim—perfectly clear?
- ☐ Are there any weak examples or inferences that aren’t reasonable? Are there moments when readers might ask, “But couldn’t that fact instead mean this?”
- ☐ Is all the evidence considered? What about facts that might complicate or contradict the argument? Are there moments when readers might think, “But what about this other fact?”
- ☐ Is each piece of evidence clearly presented? Do readers have all the contextual information they need to understand a quotation?
- ☐ Is each piece of evidence gracefully presented? Are quotations varied by length and presentation? Are they ever too long? Are there any unnecessary block quotations, or block quotations that require additional analysis? (For more specific explanations and advice on effective quotation, see 32.1.)

Though you want to pay attention to all of the elements, first drafts often have similar weaknesses. There are three especially common ones:

- *Mismatch between thesis and argument or between introduction and body*

Sometimes a first or second draft ends up being a tool for discovering what your thesis really is. As a result, you may find that the thesis of your draft (or your entire introduction) doesn’t fit the argument you’ve ended up making. You thus need to start your revision by reworking the thesis and introduction. Then work your way back through the essay, making sure that each claim or topic sentence fits the new thesis.

- *The list, or “museum tour,” structure*

In a draft, writers sometimes present each claim as if it were just an item on a list (*First, second, and so on*) or as a stop on a tour of ideas (*And this is also important . . .*). But presenting your ideas in this way keeps you and your readers from making logical connections between ideas. It may also prevent your argument from developing. Sometimes it can even be a symptom of the fact that you’ve ceased arguing entirely, falling into mere plot summary or description. Check to see if number-like words or phrases appear prominently at the beginning of your paragraphs or if your paragraphs could be put into a different order without fundamentally changing what you’re saying. At times, solving this problem will require wholesale rethinking and reorganizing. But at other times, you will just need to add or rework topic sentences. Make sure that there’s a clearly stated, debatable claim up-front and in charge of each paragraph and that each claim relates to, but differs from, the thesis.

- *Missing sub-ideas*

You may find that you’ve skipped a logical step in your argument—that the claim you make in, say, body paragraph 3 actually depends on, or makes sense only in light of, a more basic claim that you took for granted in your draft. In that case, you’ll need to create and insert a new paragraph that articulates, supports, and develops this key claim.

30.4.2 Enriching the Argument

Step 1 of the revision process aims to ensure that your essay does the best possible job of making your argument. But revision is also an opportunity to go beyond that—to think about ways in which your overall argument might be made more thorough and complex. In drafting an essay our attention is often and rightly focused on emphatically staking out a particular position and proving its validity. This is the fundamental task of any essay, and you certainly don’t want to do anything at this stage to compromise that. At the same time, you do want to make sure that you haven’t purchased clarity at the cost of oversimplification by, for example, ignoring evidence that might undermine or complicate your claims, alternative interpretations of the evidence you do present, or alternative claims or points of view. Remember, you have a better chance of persuading readers to accept your point of view if you show them that it’s based on a thorough, open-minded exploration of the text and topic. Don’t invent unreasonable or irrelevant complications or counterarguments. Do try to assess your argument objectively and honestly, perhaps testing it against the text one more time. Think like a reader rather than a writer: Are there points where a reasonable reader might object to, or disagree with, the argument? Have you ignored or glossed over any questions or issues that a reasonable reader might expect an essay on this topic to address?

30.4.3 Editing and Proofreading

Once you’ve gotten the overall argument in good shape, it’s time to focus on the small but important stuff—words and sentences. Your prose should not only convey your ideas to your readers but also demonstrate how much you care about your essay. Flawless prose can’t disguise a vapid or illogical argument, but faulty,

flabby prose can destroy a potentially persuasive and thoughtful one. Don't sabotage all your hard work by failing to correct misspelled words, grammatical problems, misquotations, incorrect citations, or typographical errors. Little oversights make all the difference when it comes to clarity and credibility.

Though you will want to check all of the following aspects of your essay, it will probably be easier to spot mistakes and weaknesses if you read through the essay several times, concentrating each time on one specific aspect.

Every writer has individual weaknesses and strengths, and every writer tends to be overly fond of certain phrases and sentence structures. With practice, you will learn to watch out for the kinds of mistakes to which you are most prone. Eventually, you can and should develop your own *personalized* editing checklist.

Sentences

- ☐ Does each one read clearly and crisply?
- ☐ Are they varied in length, structure, and word order?
- ☐ Is my phrasing direct rather than roundabout?

TIPS:

1. Try circling, or using your computer to search for, every preposition and *to be* verb. Since these can lead to confusion or roundabout phrasing, weed out as many as you can.
2. Try reading your paper aloud or having your roommate read it to you. Note places where you stumble, and listen for sentences that are hard to get through or understand.

Words

- ☐ Have I used any words whose meaning I'm not sure of?
- ☐ Are the idioms used correctly? Is my terminology correct?
- ☐ Do my key words always mean *exactly* the same thing?
- ☐ Do I ever use a fancy word or phrase where a simpler one might do?
- ☐ Are there any unnecessary words or phrases?
- ☐ Do my metaphors and figures of speech make literal sense?
- ☐ Are my verbs active and precise?
- ☐ Are my pronoun references clear and correct?
- ☐ Do my subjects and verbs always agree?

Mechanics

- ☐ Is every quotation correctly worded and punctuated?
- ☐ Is the source of each quotation clearly indicated through parenthetical citation?
- ☐ Have I checked the spelling of words I'm not sure of? (Remember that spell-checks won't indicate how to spell every word and that they sometimes create mistakes by substituting the wrong word for the misspelled one.)
- ☐ Are my pages numbered?
- ☐ Does the first page of my essay clearly indicate my name (and any other required identifying information), as well as my essay's title?

30.5 CRAFTING A TITLE

Complete your essay by giving it a title. As any researcher trying to locate and assess sources by browsing titles will tell you, titles are extremely important.

They're the first thing readers encounter and a writer's first opportunity to create a good impression and to shape readers' expectations. Every good essay deserves a good title. And a good title is one that both *informs* and *interests*. Inform readers by telling them both the work(s) your essay will analyze and something about your topic. Interest them with an especially vivid and telling word or a short phrase from the literary work (" 'We all said, "she will kill herself" ': The Narrator/Detective in William Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily' "), with a bit of wordplay (" 'Tintern Abbey' and the Art of Artlessness"), or with a little of both ("A Rose for 'A Rose for Emily' ").

31 THE RESEARCH ESSAY

Writing a research essay may seem like a daunting task that requires specialized skills and considerable time and effort. Research does add a few more steps to the writing process, so that process will take more time. And those steps require you to draw upon, and develop, skills somewhat different from those involved in creating other kinds of essays. But a research essay is, after all, an essay. Its core elements are those of any essay, its basic purpose exactly the same—to articulate and develop a debatable claim about a literary text. As a result, this kind of essay draws upon many of the same skills and strategies you’ve already begun to develop. Similarly, though you will need to add a few new steps, the writing process still involves getting started, planning, drafting, and revising—exactly the same dance whose rhythms you’ve already begun to master.

Indeed, the only distinctive thing about a research essay is that it requires the use of secondary sources. Though that adds to your burden in some ways, it can lighten it in others. Think of secondary sources not as another ball you have to juggle but as another tool you get to add to your toolbelt: you’re still being asked to build a cabinet, but now you get to use a hammer *and* a screwdriver. This chapter will help you make the best use of this powerful tool.

31.1 TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF SECONDARY SOURCES

Whenever we write an essay about literature, we engage in a conversation with other readers about the meaning and significance of a particular work (or works). Effective argumentation always depends on imagining how other readers are likely to respond to, and interpret, the literary text. As the “Critical Contexts” chapters in this anthology demonstrate, however, almost all texts and authors are the subject of actual public conversations, often extending over many years and involving numerous scholarly readers. A research essay can be an opportunity to investigate this conversation and to contribute to it. In this case, your secondary sources will be works in which literary scholars analyze a specific text or an author’s body of work.

As the “Author’s Work as Context” and “Cultural and Historical Contexts” chapters show, each literary work is significantly shaped by, and speaks to, its author’s unique experience and outlook, as well as the events and debates of the era in which the author lived. So a research assignment can be an opportunity to learn more about a particular author, about that author’s canon, or about the place and time in which the author lived and worked. The goal of the essay will be to show how context informs text or vice versa. Secondary sources for this sort of research essay will be biographies of the author, essays or letters by the author, and/or historical works of some kind.

Generally speaking, three types of secondary sources are used in essays about literature: *literary criticism*, *biography*, and *history*. The goal of a particular essay and the kinds of questions it raises will determine which kind of sources you use.

In practice, however, many secondary sources cross these boundaries. Biographies of a particular author often offer literary critical interpretations of that author's work; works of literary criticism sometimes make use of historical or biographical information; and so on. And you, too, may want or need to draw on more than one kind of source in a single essay. Your instructor will probably give you guidance about what kinds of sources and research topics or questions are appropriate. So make sure that you have a clear sense of the assignment before you get started.

Unless your instructor indicates otherwise, *your* argument should be the focus of your essay, and secondary sources should be just that—secondary. They should merely serve as tools that you use to deepen and enrich your argument about the literary text. They shouldn't substitute for it. Your essay should never simply repeat or report on what other people have already said.

Thus even though secondary sources are important to the development of your research essay, they should not be the source of your ideas. Instead, as one popular guide to writing suggests,* they are sources of:

- *opinion* (or *debatable claims*)—other readers' views and interpretations of the text, author, or topic, which “you support, criticize, or develop”;
- *information*—facts (which “you interpret”) about the author's life; the text's composition, publication, or reception; the era during, or about which, the author wrote; or the literary movement of which the author was a part;
- *concept*—general terms or theoretical frameworks that you borrow and apply to your author or text.

Again, any one source will likely offer more than one of these things. For example, the excerpt from Stephen Gould Axelrod's “Jealous Gods” in chapter 24 provides Axelrod's *opinion* on (or interpretation of) Sylvia Plath's “Daddy”; *information* about the status of the domestic poem in the 1950s; and *concepts* drawn from Freud's theories of psychological development.

Nonetheless, the distinction between opinion (debatable claim) and information (factual statement) is crucial. As you read a source, you must discriminate between the two. And when drawing upon sources in your essay, remember that an opinion about a text, no matter how well informed, isn't the same as evidence. Only facts can serve that function. Suppose, for example, that you are writing an essay on “Daddy.” You claim that the speaker adopts two voices, that of her child self and that of her adult self—an opinion also set forth in Axelrod's “Jealous Gods.” You cannot prove this claim to be true by merely saying that Axelrod makes the same claim. Like any debatable claim, this one must be backed up with evidence from the primary text.

In this situation, however, you must indicate that a source has made the same claim that you do in order to:

- give the source credit for having this idea or stating this opinion before you did (see 31.4.1);

* Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998) 1.

- encourage readers to see you as a knowledgeable and trustworthy writer, one who has taken the time to explore, digest, and fairly represent others' opinions;
- demonstrate that your opinion isn't merely idiosyncratic because another informed, even "expert," reader agrees with you.

Were you to disagree with the source's opinion, you would need to acknowledge that disagreement in order to demonstrate the originality of your own interpretation, while also (again) encouraging readers to see you as a knowledgeable, careful, trustworthy writer.

You will need to cite sources throughout your essay whenever you make (1) a claim that complements or contradicts the opinion-claim of a source, or (2) a claim that requires secondary-source information or concepts. In essays that draw upon literary critical sources, those sources may prove especially helpful when articulating motive (see 31.1.1).

TIP: In addition to being secondary sources of the type you might use in a research essay, many of the pieces excerpted in the "Critical Contexts" chapters draw on other secondary sources. Look over these pieces to see what kinds of sources professional literary critics use and how they use them. For example, Lawrence R. Rodgers's essay on "A Rose for Emily" (ch. 11) makes use of *information* garnered from biographies of Faulkner (§3), applies to the story *concepts* taken from another literary critic's argument about detective fiction (§4), and refers to other critics' *opinions* about the story in order to suggest the distinctiveness and value of his own (§11, 18).

31.1.1 Source-Related Motives

Not all research essays use sources to establish motive. However, this is one technique you can use to ensure that your own ideas are the focus of your essay and to demonstrate that (and how) your essay contributes to a literary critical conversation rather than just reporting on it or repeating what others have already said.

In addition to the general motives described above (29.3.1), writing expert Gordon Harvey has identified three common source-related motives:

1. Sources offer different opinions about a particular issue, thus suggesting that there is still a problem or a puzzle worth investigating.

[A]lmost all interpreters of [*Antigone*] have agreed that the play shows Creon to be morally defective, though they might not agree about the particular nature of his defect. [examples] . . . I want to suggest [instead] that. . .

—Martha Nussbaum, "*The Fragility of Goodness* . . ." (ch. 27)

2. A source (or sources) makes a faulty claim that needs to be challenged or clarified.

Modern critics who do not share Sophocles' conviction about the paramount duty of burying the dead and who attach more importance than he did to the claims of political authority have tended to underestimate the way in which he justifies Antigone against Creon. [examples] —Maurice Bowra, "*Sophoclean Tragedy*" (ch. 27)

3. Sources neglect a significant aspect or element of the text, or they make a claim that needs to be further developed or applied in a new way.

At first sight, there appears little need for further study of the lovers in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and even less of their environment. To cite but a few critics, David Cecil has considered the courtship of Bathsheba, Virginia Hyman her moral development through her varied experience in love, George Wing her suitors, Douglas Brown her relation to the natural environment, Merryn Williams that of Gabriel Oak in contrast to Sergeant Troy's alienation from nature, and, most recently, Peter Casagrande Bathsheba's reformation through her communion with both Gabriel and the environment. To my knowledge, none has considered the modes or styles in which those and other characters express love and how far these may result from or determine their attitude to the land and its dependents, nor the tragic import in the Wessex novels of incompatibility in this sense between human beings, as distinct from that between the human psyche and the cosmos.

—Lionel Adey, "Styles of Love in *Far from the Madding Crowd*,"
Thomas Hardy Annual 5 (London: Macmillan, 1987)

31.2 RESEARCH AND THE WRITING PROCESS

Keeping in mind the overall goal of making secondary sources secondary, you have two options about when and how to integrate research into the writing process: (1) you may consult sources in the exploratory phase, using them to generate potential topics and theses for your essay, or (2) you may consult sources during (or even after) the planning or drafting phases, using them to refine and test a tentative thesis. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages.

31.2.1 Using Research to Generate Topic and Thesis

You may consult secondary sources very early in the writing process, using them to help generate your essay topic and thesis (or several potential ones from which you will need to choose). This approach has three advantages. First, you approach the research with a thoroughly open mind and formulate your own opinion about the text(s) only after having considered the range of opinions and information that the sources offer. Second, as you investigate others' opinions, you may find yourself disagreeing, thereby discovering that your mind isn't nearly as open as you'd thought—that you do, indeed, have an opinion of which you weren't fully aware. (Since you've discovered this by disagreeing with a published opinion, you're well on your way to having a motive as well as a thesis.) Third, because you begin by informing yourself about what others have already said, you may be in less danger of simply repeating or reporting.

The potential disadvantage is that you may become overwhelmed by the sheer number of sources or by the amount and diversity of information and opinion they offer. You may agree with everyone, being unable to discriminate among others' opinions or to formulate your own. Or you may find that the conversation seems so exhaustive that you despair of finding anything new to add. If you take this approach, you should maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages by keeping in mind a set of clearly defined motive-related questions.

If your sources are works of literary criticism, your goal is to answer two general

questions: *What's the conversation about? How can I contribute to it?* To answer those questions, it helps to recall the various motives described in section 31.1.1. Turn them into questions that you can pose about each source:

- ☐ Do the critics tend to disagree about a particular issue? Might I take one side or another in this debate? Might I offer an alternative?
- ☐ Do any critics make a claim that I think deserves to be challenged or clarified?
- ☐ Do the critics ignore a particular element or aspect of the text that I think needs to be investigated? Do any of the critics make a claim that they don't really develop? Or do they make a claim about one text that I might apply to another?

If your sources are historical or biographical, you will instead need to ask questions such as:

- ☐ Is there information here that might help readers understand some aspect of the literary work in a new way?
- ☐ Does any of this information challenge or complicate my previous interpretation of the text, or an interpretation that I think other readers might adopt if they weren't aware of these facts?

31.2.2 Using Research to Refine and Test a Thesis

Because of the potential problems of consulting secondary sources in the exploratory phase of the writing process (31.2.1), your instructor may urge you to delay research until later—after you've formulated a tentative thesis, gathered evidence, or written a complete rough draft. This approach may be especially appealing when you begin an assignment with a firm sense of what you want to write. The chief advantage of this approach is that you can look at secondary sources more selectively and critically, seeking information and opinions that will deepen, confirm, or challenge your argument. And since you've already formulated your opinion, you may be in less danger of becoming overwhelmed by others'.

There are, however, several things to watch out for if you take this approach. First, you must be especially careful not to ignore, distort, or misrepresent any source's argument in the interest of maintaining your own. Second, you must strive to keep your mind open, remembering that the goal of your research is to *test* and *refine* your opinion, not just to *confirm* it. A compelling argument or new piece of information may well require you to modify or broaden your original argument. Third, you still need to pose the general questions outlined above (31.2.1).

31.3 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Regardless of when you begin your research, the process will involve four tasks:

- creating and maintaining a working bibliography;
- identifying and locating potentially useful secondary sources;
- evaluating the credibility of sources;
- taking notes.

31.3.1 Creating a Working Bibliography

A working bibliography lists all the sources that you *might* use in your research essay. It is a “working” document in two ways. For one thing, it will change throughout the research process—expanding each time you add a potentially useful source and contracting when you omit sources that turn out to be less relevant than you anticipated. Also, once you have written your essay, your working bibliography will evolve one last time, becoming your list of works cited. For another thing, you can use your bibliography to organize and keep track of your research “work.” To this end, some researchers divide the bibliography into three parts: (1) sources that they need to locate, (2) sources that they have located and think they will use, and (3) sources that they have located but think they probably won’t use. (Keeping track of “rejects” ensures, first, that you won’t have to start from scratch if you later change your mind; second, that you won’t forget that you’ve already located and rejected a source if you come across another reference to it.)

Because you will need to update your bibliography regularly and because it will ultimately become the kernel of your list of works cited, you should consider using a computer. In that case, you’ll need to print a copy or take your laptop along each time you head to the library. However, some researchers find it helpful to also or instead use notecards, creating a separate card for each source. You can then physically separate cards dedicated to sources to be located, sources already located, and “rejected” sources. Just in case your cards get mixed up, however, you should also always note the status of the source on the card (by writing at the top “find,” “located,” or “rejected”).

Regardless of the format you use, your record for each source should include all the information you will need in order both to locate the source and to cite it in your essay. Helpful location information might include the library in which it’s found (if you’re using multiple libraries), the section of the library in which it’s held (e.g., “Reference,” “Stacks”), and its call number. As for citation or publication information, it’s tempting to ignore this until the very end of the writing process, and some writers do. But if you give in to that temptation, you will, at best, create much more work for yourself down the road. At worst, you’ll find yourself unable to use a great source in your essay because you can’t relocate the necessary information about it. To avoid these fates, note down all facts you will need for a works cited entry (see 32.2.2). Finally, consider noting where you first discovered each source, just in case you later need to double-check citation information or to remind yourself why you considered a source potentially useful or authoritative. (Though you can use abbreviations, make sure they’re ones you’ll recognize later.)

Here are two sample entries from the working bibliography of a student researching Adrienne Rich’s poetry. Each entry includes all the required citation information, as well as notes on where the student discovered the source and where it is located.

Sample Working Bibliography Entries

Boyers, Robert. “On Adrienne Rich: Intelligence and Will.” *Salmagundi* 22–23 (Spring–Summer 1973): 132–48. Source: *DLB* 5. Loc.: UNLV LASR AS30.S33

Martin, Wendy. *American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrienne Rich*.
U of North Carolina P, 1984. Source: LRC/CLC. UNLV Stacks PS310.F45 M3
1984

Once you locate a source, double-check the accuracy and thoroughness of your citation information and update your working bibliography. (Notice, for example, that this student will need to check *American Triptych* to find out the city where it was published and then add this information to her bibliography.)

31.3.2 Identifying and Locating Sources

Regardless of your author, text, or topic, you will almost certainly find a wealth of sources to consult. Your first impulse may be to head straight for the library catalog. But the conversation about literature occurs in periodicals as well as books, and not all contributions to that conversation are equally credible or relevant. For all these reasons, consider starting with one of the reference works or bibliographies described in this section. Then you can head to the catalog armed with a clear sense of what you're looking for.

Once you find one good secondary source, you can use its bibliography to refine your own. Checking the footnotes and bibliographies of several (especially recent) sources will give you a good sense of what other sources are available and which ones experts consider the most significant.

REFERENCE WORKS

Your library will contain many reference works that can be helpful starting points, and some may be accessible via the library's Web page. Here are six especially useful ones.

Literature Resource Center (LRC)

One online source to which your library may subscribe is Gale's *Literature Resource Center*. Designed with undergraduate researchers in mind, it's an excellent place to start. Here you can access and search:

- all the material in two of the reference works described below (*Dictionary of Literary Biography* and *Contemporary Authors*) and in both Merriam-Webster's *Encyclopedia of Literature* and Gale's For Students series (*Novels for Students*, *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, etc.);
- much (though not all) of the material contained in Gale's Literary Criticism series (another of the reference works described below);
- selected full-text critical essays (or articles) from more than 250 literary journals.

Depending upon your library's subscription arrangement, LRC may also give you access to the *MLA Bibliography* (from 1963) and/or to the Twayne's Authors series (both described below).

You can search the database in numerous ways, but you should probably start with an author search. Results will appear as a list of sources divided into four files: Biographies; Literary Criticism, Articles, and Work Overviews; Bibliographies (of works by and about the author); Additional Resources (such as author-focused Web sites). You can access each file or list by simply clicking on the appropriate tab. (There will be a good deal of overlap among the files.) You can then click any item on the list in order to open and read it. Once an item is open, you can also

print or e-mail it by clicking on the appropriate icons and following the directions.

If your library doesn't subscribe to *LRC*, consider starting with the printed reference works listed below. Because each is a multivolume work, you will need to consult its cumulative index to find out which volumes contain entries on your author. None of these series can keep up to the minute with the literary critical conversation about a particular author or work, and all offer only selective bibliographies. Such selectivity is both the greatest strength and the greatest limitation of these reference works.

Dictionary of Literary Biography (DLB)

One of the most important and authoritative reference works for students of literature, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* covers primarily British and American authors, both living and dead. Each volume focuses on writers working in a particular genre and period. (Volume 152, 4th series, for example, covers *American Novelists since World War II*.) Written by a scholar in the field, each entry includes a photo or sketch of the author, a list of his or her publications, a bibliography of selected secondary sources, and an overview of the author's life and work. The overviews are often very thorough, incorporating brief quotations from letters, interviews, reviews, and so on. You will find multiple entries on any major author, each focusing on a particular portion of his or her canon. The volume titles will give you a good sense of which entry will be most relevant to you. Entries on W. B. Yeats, for example, appear in volume 10, *Modern British Dramatists, 1900–1945*; volume 19, *British Poets, 1880–1914*; volume 98, *Modern British Essayists, First Series*; and volume 156, *British Short-Fiction Writers, 1880–1914: The Romantic Tradition*.

Contemporary Authors: A Biobibliographical Guide to Current Authors and Their Works (CA)

Gale's *Contemporary Authors* focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers from around the world and in a range of fields (including the social and natural sciences). In terms of content, its entries closely resemble those in the *DLB* (see above). But *CA* entries tend to be much shorter.

Literary Criticism (LC)

Also published by Gale, the *Literary Criticism* series is, in effect, a series of series, each of which covers a particular historical period. (See below for individual series titles, as well as information about the periods covered by each one.) Each entry includes a very brief overview of the author's life and work. (There is often overlap between these overviews and those in *CA*.) But there are two key differences between the *LC* series and both the *DLB* and *CA*. First, the *LC* series includes entries devoted entirely to some individual works, as well as entries on an author's entire canon. (For example, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* contains both a general entry on Charlotte Brontë and one devoted exclusively to *Jane Eyre*.) Second, the bulk of each entry is devoted to excerpts (often lengthy) from some of the most important reviews and literary criticism on an author and/or work, and coverage extends from the author's day up to the time when the *LC* entry was written. Each entry concludes with a bibliography of additional secondary sources. The *LC* series will thus give a lot of guidance in identifying authoritative sources, as well as access to excerpts from sources that your library doesn't own.

Here are the titles of the five series, along with information about the period each one covers. To identify the appropriate series, you will need to know the year in which your author died.

- Contemporary Literary Criticism (living authors and those who died from 1960 on)
- Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (authors who died 1900–1959)
- Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (authors who died 1800–1899)
- Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (authors [except Shakespeare] who died 1400–1799)
- Shakespearean Criticism

The Critical Heritage

For some major authors, you can find information and excerpts like those offered by *LC* within the individual volumes of the Critical Heritage series. Unlike the reference works described above, this series is a collection of discrete publications such as *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*. Each will be held not in the reference department, but in the section of the stacks devoted to scholarship on a specific author. You will thus need to search your library's catalog to find it. These volumes are not regularly updated, so each will give a good sense of your author's reception only up to the time it was published.

Twayne's Authors

The Twayne's Authors series incorporates three distinct series: Twayne's United States Authors, Twayne's English Authors, and Twayne's World Authors. Each volume in each series is a distinct book focusing on one author and typically offering both biographical information and interpretation of major works. All aim to be generally accessible and introductory. (As the publishers themselves put it, "The intent of each volume in these series is to present a critical-analytical study of the works of the writer; to include biographical and historical material that may be necessary for understanding, appreciation, and critical appraisal of the writer; and to present all material in clear, concise English.") Yet because each volume is the work of an individual specialist, it represents that scholar's particular point of view (or opinion), and volumes differ a good deal in terms of organization, approach, and level of difficulty.

Each volume will be held not in the reference department, but in the section of the stacks devoted to scholarship on a specific author. To find it, you will need to search the catalog.

MLA INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

For much more thorough, up-to-date lists of secondary sources—especially periodical articles—you should consult scholarly bibliographies. In terms of literary criticism, the most comprehensive and useful general bibliography is *The MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures*. Since 1969, the *MLA Bibliography* has aimed to provide a comprehensive list of all scholarship published anywhere in the world on literature and modern languages, including books, dissertations, book chapters, and articles in over two thousand periodicals. Though it doesn't quite live up to that aim, it comes closer than any other reference work. (The *Bibliography* in fact began in 1922 but initially included

only American scholarship; international coverage began in 1956, but the range of publications remained limited until 1969.) Updated annually, the bibliography is available in print, CD-ROM, and online versions, so what the bibliography encompasses, how many years it covers, and how you use it will depend on the version you consult.

In the print version, each volume lists articles and books published in a specific year, so you should start with the most recent volume and then work your way backward through earlier volumes. Each volume is arranged by nationality or language, then by period, then by author and title.

The CD-ROM and online versions allow you to do topic or keyword searches to find all relevant publications, regardless of the year of publication. Ask a librarian for help with accessing and searching the database.

ONLINE AND CARD CATALOGS

Your library's catalog will guide you to books about the author's work. However, the title of a potentially useful book may be too general to indicate whether it covers the text and topic in which you're interested. If your library's catalog is online, use keyword searches to limit the number and range of books that the computer finds. For example, if you're writing about William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," first limit the search to items that include both "Faulkner" and "A Rose for Emily." If you find few matches or none, broaden the search to include all books about William Faulkner.

The books that you find through a catalog search will lead you to a section of the library where other books on your subject are held (because each will have a similar Library of Congress call number). Even if you locate the books you were looking for right away, take a moment to browse. Books shelved nearby probably cover similar topics, and they may prove even more useful than the ones you originally sought. You can also do this kind of browsing online because most online catalogs offer the option of moving from the record of one book to the records of those that appear just before and after it in the catalog.

THE INTERNET

With its innumerable links and pathways, the Internet seems the perfect resource for research of any kind. And in fact some excellent online resources are available to students of literature. *Bartleby.com* is a good, general information site. Here you can access and search several reference works, including the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, and the eighteen-volume *Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, as well as full-text versions of numerous poems and works of fiction and nonfiction.

There are also many scholarly sites dedicated to specific authors, works, and literary periods. Most sites provide links to others. One site especially useful as a gateway to thousands of more specific sites is *The Voice of the Shuttle* <<http://vos.ucsb.edu/>>.

If you don't find an appropriate link on *The Voice of the Shuttle*, you will probably want to conduct a search using one of the commonly available search engines. Searches using keywords such as "Chekhov" or "poetry" will lead you to thousands of possible matches, however, so you should limit your search by creating search strings longer than one word. Read onscreen directions carefully to make sure that the search engine treats the search string as a unit and doesn't find every mention of each individual word.

Despite the obvious benefits of the Internet, you should be cautious in your use of online sources for two reasons. First, although many sites provide solid information and informed opinion, many more offer misinformation or unsubstantiated opinion. Unlike journal articles and books, which are rigorously reviewed by experts before they are accepted for publication, many Internet sources are posted without any sort of review process, and authorship is often difficult to pin down. As a result, you need to be especially careful to identify and evaluate the ultimate source of the information and opinions you find in cyberspace. (For more on evaluating sources, see 31.3.3.)

Second, because the Internet enables you to jump easily from one site to another and to copy whole pages of text merely by cutting and pasting, you may lose your place and be unable to provide readers with precise citations. More serious, you may lose track of where your own words end and those of your source begin, thereby putting yourself at risk of plagiarizing (see 31.4.1). In addition, the Internet is itself constantly mutating; what's there today may not be there tomorrow. All this makes it difficult to achieve the goal of all citation: to enable readers to retrace your steps and check your sources. When you find sites that seem potentially useful, bookmark them if you can. If not, make sure that you accurately write down (or, better, copy directly into a document) the URL of each, as well as the other information you will need for your list of works cited: the author's name, if available; the site or page title; the date the site was last revised or originally published; and the date you accessed it. If the material on the site has been taken from a printed source, note all of the particulars about this source as well.

As a general rule, Internet sources should supplement print sources, not substitute for them.

31.3.3 Evaluating Sources

Not all sources are equally reliable or credible. The credibility and persuasiveness of your essay will depend, in part, on the credibility of the sources you draw on. This is a good reason to start with reference works that will guide you to credible sources.

Nonetheless, it is very important to learn how to gauge for yourself the credibility of sources. As you do so, keep in mind that finding a source to be credible isn't the same as agreeing with everything it says. At this stage, concentrate on whether the opinions expressed in a source are worthy of serious consideration, not on whether you agree with them. Here are some especially important questions to consider:

1. *How credible is the publisher (in the case of books), the periodical (in the case of essays, articles, and reviews), or the sponsoring organization (in the case of Internet sources)?*

Generally speaking, academics give most credence to books published by academic and university presses and to articles published in scholarly or professional journals because all such publications undergo a rigorous peer-review process. As a result, you can trust that these publications have been judged credible by more than one recognized expert. For periodicals aimed at a more general audience, you should prefer prominent, highly respected publications such as the *Los Angeles Times* or the *New Yorker* to, say, the *National Enquirer* or *People* magazine.

Internet sources are not subjected to rigorous review processes, but many sites are created and sponsored by organizations. Be sure to identify the sponsoring organization and carefully consider its nature, status, and purpose. The last part of the domain name will indicate the kind of organization it is: the suffix *.com* indicates that the ultimate source is a *company* or commercial, for-profit enterprise; *.org*, a nonprofit or charitable *organization*; *.gov*, a *government* agency; and *.edu*, an *educational* institution. Though you will often find more reliable information via *.gov* or *.edu* sites, this won't always be the case. *Bartleby.com* is, for example, only one of many extremely useful commercial sites, whereas many *.edu* sites feature the work of students who may have much less expertise than you do.

2. *How credible is the author? Is he or she a recognized expert in the relevant field or on the relevant subject?*

Again, publication by a reputable press or in a reputable periodical generally indicates that its author is considered an expert. But you can also investigate further by checking the thumbnail biographies that usually appear within the book or journal (typically near the beginning or end). Has this person been trained or held positions at respected institutions? What else has he or she published?

3. *How credible is the actual argument?*

Assess the source's argument by applying all that you've learned about what makes an argument effective. Does it draw on ample, appropriate, convincing evidence? Does it consider all the relevant evidence? Are its inferences reasonable? Are its claims sound? Does the whole seem fair, balanced, and thorough? Has the author considered possible counterarguments or alternative points of view?

Finally, researchers in many fields would encourage you to consider the source's publication date and the currency of the information it contains. In the sciences, for example, preference is almost always given to the most recently published work on a given topic because new scholarly works tend to render older ones obsolete. In the humanities, too, new scholarly works build on old ones. You should consult recently published sources in order to get a sense of what today's scholars consider the most significant, debatable questions and what answers they offer. Though originality is as important in the humanities as in other scholarly fields, new work in the humanities doesn't necessarily render older work utterly obsolete. For example, a 1922 article on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may still be as valid and influential as one published in 2002. As a result, you should consider the date of publication in evaluating a source, but don't let age alone determine its credibility or value.

31.3.4 Taking Notes

Once you've acquired the books and articles you determine to be most credible and potentially useful, it's a good idea to skim each one. (In the case of a book, concentrate on the introduction and on the chapter that seems most relevant.) Focus at this point on assessing the relevance of each source to your topic. Or, if you're working your way toward a topic, look for things that spark your interest. Either way, try to get a rough sense of the overall conversation—of the issues and topics that come up again and again across the various sources.

After identifying the sources most pertinent to your argument, begin reading more carefully and taking notes. Again, some researchers find it easier to organize (and reorganize) notes by using notecards, creating one card for each key point. (If you use this method, make sure that each card clearly indicates the source author and short title because cards have a tendency to get jumbled.) Today, however, most researchers take notes on the computer, creating a separate document or file for each source.

Regardless of their form, your notes should be as thorough and accurate as possible. Be thorough because memory is a treacherous thing; it's best not to rely too heavily on it. Be accurate to avoid a range of serious problems, including plagiarism (see 31.4.1).

Your notes for each source should include four things: summary, paraphrase, and quotation, as well as your own comments and thoughts. It's crucial to visually discriminate among these by, for instance, always recording your own comments and thoughts in a separate computer document or file or on a separate set of clearly labeled or differently colored notecards.

Whenever you write down, type out, or paste in more than two consecutive words from a source, you should:

- place these words in quotation marks so that you will later recognize them as quotations;
- make sure to quote with absolute accuracy every word and punctuation mark;
- record the page where the quotation is found (in the case of print sources).

Keep such quotations to a minimum, recording only the most vivid or telling.

In lieu of extensive quotations, try to summarize and paraphrase as much as possible. You can't decide how to use the source or whether you agree with its argument unless you've first understood it, and you can best understand and test your understanding through summary and paraphrase. Start with a two- or three-sentence summary of the author's overall argument. Then summarize each of the relevant major subsections of the argument. Paraphrase especially important points, making sure to note the page on which each appears.

You may want to try putting your notes in the form of an outline. Again, start with a brief general summary. Then paraphrase each of the major relevant subclaims, incorporating summaries and quotations where appropriate.

Especially if you're dealing with literary criticism, it can be useful to complete the note-taking process by writing a summary that covers all of your sources. Your goal is to show how all the arguments fit together to form one coherent conversation. Doing so will require that you both define the main questions at issue in the conversation and indicate what stance each source takes on each question—where and how their opinions coincide and differ. One might say, for example, that the main questions about *Antigone* that preoccupy all the various scholars represented in chapter 31 are (1) *What is the exact nature of the conflict between Creon and Antigone, or what two conflicting worldviews do they represent?* and (2) *How is that conflict resolved? Which, if any, character and worldview does the play as a whole endorse?* A synthetic summary of these sources would explain how each critic answers each question. This kind of summary can be especially helpful when you haven't yet identified a specific essay topic or crafted a thesis because it may help you to see gaps in the conversation, places where you can enter and contribute.

31.4 INTEGRATING SOURCE MATERIAL INTO THE ESSAY

In research essays, you can refer to sources in a number of ways. You can

briefly allude to them:

Many critics, including Maurice Bowra and Bernard Knox, see Creon as morally inferior to Antigone.

summarize or paraphrase their contents:

According to Maurice Bowra, Creon's arrogance is his downfall. However prideful Antigone may occasionally seem, Bowra insists that Creon is genuinely, deeply, and consistently so (1456).

quote them directly:

For Bowra, Creon is the prototypical "proud man" (1456); where Antigone's arrogance is only "apparent," Creon's is all too "real" (1457).

With secondary sources, be very careful about how often you quote and when and how you do so. Keep the number and length of quotations to a minimum. After all, this is *your* essay, and you should use your own words whenever possible, even to describe someone else's ideas. Save quotations for when you really need them: when the source's author has expressed an idea with such precision, clarity, or vividness that you simply can't say it any better; or when a key passage from your source is so rich or difficult that you need to analyze its ideas and language closely. As with primary texts, lengthy quotation will lead the reader to expect sustained analysis. And only rarely will you want to devote a large amount of your limited time and space to thoroughly analyzing the language of a source (as opposed to a primary text). (For more on responsible and effective quotation, see 32.1.)

One advantage of direct quotation is that it's an easy way to indicate that ideas derive from a source rather than from you. But whether you are quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing a source, use other techniques as well to ensure that there's no doubt about where your ideas and words leave off and those of a source begin (see 31.4.1). A parenthetical citation within a sentence indicates that something in it comes from a specific source, but unless you indicate otherwise, it will also imply that the entire sentence is a paraphrase of the source. For clarity's sake, then, you should also mention the source or its author in your text, using signal phrases (*According to X*; *As X argues*; *X notes that*, etc.) to announce that you are about to introduce someone else's ideas. If your summary of a source goes on for more than a sentence or two, keep on using signal phrases to remind readers that you're still summarizing someone else's ideas rather than stating your own, as Lawrence Rodgers does in the example below.

The ways of interpreting Emily's decision to murder Homer are numerous. . . . For simple clarification, they can be summarized along two lines. One group finds the murder growing out of Emily's demented attempt to forestall the inevitable passage of time—toward her abandonment by Homer, toward her own death, and toward the steady encroachment of the North and the New South on something loosely defined as the "tradition" of the Old South. Another view sees the murder in more psychological terms. It grows out of Emily's complex relationship to her father, who, by elevating her above all of the eligible men of Jefferson, insured that

to yield what one commentator called the “normal emotions” associated with desire, his daughter had to “retreat into a marginal world, into fantasy” (O’Connor 184).

These lines of interpretation complement more than critique each other. . . . Together, they de-emphasize the element of detection, viewing the murder and its solution not as the central action but as manifestations of the principal element, the decline of the Grierson lineage and all it represents. Recognizing the way in which the story makes use of the detective genre, however, adds another interpretive layer to the story by making the narrator . . . a central player in the pattern of action.

—Lawrence R. Rodgers, “‘We All Said . . .’” (ch. 11)

NOTE: In the first paragraph, Rodgers summarizes other critics’ arguments in his own words, briefly but clearly. To ensure that we know he’s about to summarize, he actually announces this intention (“*For simple clarification, they can be summarized . . .*”). As he begins summarizing each view, he reminds us that it is a “view,” that he’s still not describing his own thoughts. Finally, he uses this unusually long summary to make a very clear and important point: *everyone except me has ignored this element!*

31.4.1 Using Sources Responsibly

Both the clarity and the credibility of any research essay depend upon the responsible use of sources. And using sources responsibly entails accurately representing them and clearly discriminating between your own words and ideas and those that come from sources. Since ideas, words, information, and concepts not directly and clearly attributed to a source will be taken as your own, any lack of clarity on this score amounts to *plagiarism*. Representing anyone else’s ideas or data as your own, even if you state them in your own words, is plagiarism—whether you do so intentionally or unintentionally; whether ideas are taken from a published book or article, another student’s paper, the Internet, or any other source. Plagiarism is the most serious of offenses within academe because it amounts to stealing ideas, the resource most precious to this community and its members. As a result, the punishments for plagiarism are severe—including failure, suspension, and expulsion.

To avoid both the offense and its consequences, you must always:

- put quotation marks around any quotation from a source (a quotation being any two or more consecutive words or any one especially distinctive word, label, or concept);
- credit a source whenever you take from it any of the following:
 - a quotation (as described above);
 - a nonfactual or debatable claim (an idea, opinion, interpretation, evaluation, or conclusion) stated in your own words;
 - a fact or piece of data that isn’t common knowledge; or
 - a distinctive way of organizing factual information.

To clarify, a fact counts as common knowledge—and therefore doesn’t need to be credited to a source—whenever you can find it in multiple, readily available sources, none of which seriously question its validity. For example, it is common knowledge that Sherman Alexie is Native American, that he was born in 1966, and that he published a collection of short stories entitled *Ten Little Indians*. No source can “own” or get credit for these facts. However, a source can still “own” a partic-

ular way of arranging or presenting such facts. If, for example, you begin your essay by stating—in your own words—a series of facts about Alexie’s life in exactly the same order they appear in, say, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, then you would need to acknowledge that by citing the *Dictionary*. When in doubt, cite. (For guidance about *how* to do so, see 32.2.)

32 QUOTATION, CITATION, AND DOCUMENTATION

The bulk of any essay you write should consist of your own ideas expressed in your own words. Yet you can develop your ideas and persuade readers to accept them only if you present and analyze evidence. In essays about literature, quotations are an especially privileged kind of evidence. If your essay also makes use of secondary sources, you will need to quote (selectively) from some of these as well. In either case, your clarity and credibility will depend on how responsibly, effectively, and gracefully you move between others' words and your own. Clarity and credibility will also depend on letting your readers know—through precise citation and documentation—exactly where they can find each quotation and each fact or idea that you paraphrase. This chapter addresses the issue of *how* to quote, cite, and document texts and sources. (For a discussion of *when* to do so, see 29.4 and 31.4.)

32.1 EFFECTIVE QUOTATION

When it comes to quoting, there are certain rules that you must follow and certain strategies that, though not required, will help to make your argument more clear and effective.

32.1.1 Rules You Must Follow

1. Generally speaking, you should reproduce a quotation exactly as it appears in the original: include every word and preserve original spelling, capitalization, italics, and so on. However, there are a few exceptions:
 - When absolutely necessary, you may make minor changes to the quotation as long as (a) they do not distort the sense of the quotation, and (b) you clearly acknowledge them. For instance:
 - Additions and substitutions (e.g., of verb endings or pronouns) may be necessary in order to reconcile the quotation's grammar and syntax with your own or to ensure that the quotation makes sense out of its original context. Enclose these additions and changes in brackets.
 - Omit material from quotations to ensure you stay focused only on what's truly essential. Indicate omissions with ellipsis points unless the quotation is obviously a sentence fragment.

Notice how these rules are followed in the two examples below:

Sethe, like Jacobs, experiences the wish to give up the fight for survival and die, but while Jacobs says she was “willing to bear on” “for the children’s sakes” (127), the reason that Sethe gives for enduring is the physical presence of the baby in her womb: “[I]t didn’t seem such a bad idea [to die], . . . but the thought of herself stretched out dead while the little antelope lived on . . . in her lifeless body grieved her so” that she persevered (31).

When Denver tries to leave the haunted house to get food for her mother and Beloved, she finds herself imprisoned within her mother’s time—a time that, clinging to places, is always happening again: “Out there . . . were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again. . . .”

—Jean Wyatt, “Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *PMLA* 108 (May 1993): 474–88

NOTE: In the first example, Wyatt uses brackets to indicate two changes, the capitalization of “it” and the addition of the words “to die.” Ellipses indicate that she’s omitted a word or words within the sentence that follows the colon. However, she doesn’t need to begin or end the phrases “*willing to bear on*” and “*for the children’s sake*” with ellipses because both are obviously sentence fragments. In the second example, notice that Wyatt does need to end the quotation with ellipsis points. Even though it reads like a complete sentence, this isn’t the case; the sentence continues in the original text.

—Occasionally, you may want to draw your readers’ attention to a particular word or phrase within the quotation by using italics. Indicate this change by putting the words “emphasis added” (not underlined or in italics) into your parenthetical citation.

Like his constant references to “Tragedy,” the wording of the father’s question demonstrates that he is almost as hesitant as his daughter to confront death head-on: “When will you look it in the face?” he asks her (34; emphasis added).

- Although you should also accurately reproduce original punctuation, there is one exception to this rule: when incorporating a quotation into a sentence, you may *end* it with whatever punctuation mark your sentence requires. You do not need to indicate this particular change with brackets.

Whether portrayed as “queen,” “saint,” or “angel,” the same “nameless girl” “looks out from all his canvases” (Rossetti, lines 5–7, 1).

NOTE: In the poem quoted (“In an Artist’s Studio”), the words *queen* and *angel* are not followed by commas. Yet the syntax of this sentence requires that commas be added. Similarly, the word *canvases* is followed by a comma in the poem, but the sentence requires that this comma be changed to a period.

2. When incorporating short quotations into a sentence, put them in quotation marks and make sure that they fit into the sentence grammatically and syntactically. If necessary, you may make changes to the quotation (e.g., altering verb endings or pronouns) in order to reconcile its grammar and syntax with your own. But you should—again—always indicate changes with brackets.

It isn’t until Mr. Kapasi sees the “topless women” carved on the temple that it “occur[s] to him . . . that he had never seen his own wife fully naked” (292).

3. When quoting fewer than three lines of poetry, indicate any line break with a slash mark, any stanza break with a double slash mark.

Before Milton's speaker can question his "Maker" for allowing him to go blind, "Patience" intervenes "to prevent / That murmur" (lines 8–9), urging him to see that "God doth not need / Either man's work or his own gifts . . ." (lines 9–10).

"The cane appears // in our dreams," the speaker explains (Dove, lines 15–16).

4. Long quotations—four or more lines of prose, three of poetry—should be indented and presented without quotation marks to create a *block quotation*. In the case of poetry, reproduce original line and stanza breaks.

Whereas the second stanza individualizes the dead martyrs, the third considers the characteristics they shared with each other and with all those who dedicate themselves utterly to any one cause:

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream. (lines 41–44)

Whereas all other "living" people and things are caught up in the "stream" of change represented by the shift of seasons, those who fill their "Hearts with one purpose alone" become as hard, unchanging, and immovable as stones.

5. Unless they are indented, quotations belong in double quotation marks; quotations within quotations get single quotation marks. However, if everything in your quotation appears in quotation marks in the original, you do not need to reproduce the single quotation marks.

The words of Rufus Johnson come ringing back to the reader: " 'Listen here,' he hissed, 'I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't *right*!' " (381).

As Rufus Johnson says of Sheppard, "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't *right*!" (381).

6. Follow a word-group introducing a quotation with whatever punctuation is appropriate to your sentence. For instance:

—If you introduce a quotation with a full independent clause (other than something like *She says*), separate the two with a colon.

Ironically, Mr. Lindner's description of the neighborhood's white residents makes them sound exactly like the Youngers, the very family he's trying to exclude: "They're not rich and fancy people; just hard-working, honest people who don't really have much but . . . a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in" (1664).

—If you introduce or interrupt a quotation with an expression such as *she says* or *he writes*, use a comma (or commas) or add a *that*. Likewise, use a comma if you end a quotation with an expression such as *he says*, unless the quotation ends with a question mark or exclamation point.

Alvarez claims, "The whole poem works on one single, returning note and rhyme . . ." (958).

Alvarez suggests that "The whole poem works on one single, returning note and rhyme . . ." (958).

"The whole poem," Alvarez argues, "works on one single, returning note and rhyme . . ." (958).

"Here comes one," says Puck. "Where art thou, proud Demetrius?" asks Lysander (Shakespeare 3.2.400–401).

—If quoted words are blended into your sentence, use the same punctuation (or lack thereof) that you would if the words *were not* quoted.

Miriam Allott suggests that the odes, like "all Keats's major poetry," trace the same one "movement of thought and feeling," which "at first carries the poet . . . into an ideal world of beauty and permanence, and finally returns him to what is actual and inescapable."

Keats's poetry just as powerfully evokes the beauty of ordinary, natural things—of "the sun, the moon, / Trees," and "simple sheep"; of "daffodils" and "musk-rose blooms" (*Endymion*, lines 13–14, 15, 19); of nightingales, grasshoppers, and crickets; of "the stubble-plains" and "barred clouds" of a "soft-dying" autumn day ("To Autumn," lines 25–26).

When the narrator's eighty-six-year-old father asks her to tell him a "simple story" with "recognizable people" and a plot that explains "what happened to them next" (31), he gets "an unadorned and miserable tale" whose protagonist ends up "Hopeless and alone" (31).

7. Commas and periods belong inside quotation marks, semicolons outside. Question marks and exclamation points go inside quotation marks if they are part of the quotation, outside if they aren't. (Since parenthetical citations will often alter your punctuation, they have been omitted in the following examples. On the placement and punctuation of parenthetical citations, see 31.2.1.)

"You have a nice sense of humor," the narrator's father notes, but "you can't tell a plain story."

Wordsworth calls nature a "homely Nurse"; she has "something of a Mother's Mind."

What does Johnson mean when he says, "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't right!" ?

Bobby Lee speaks volumes about the grandmother when he says, "She was a talker, wasn't she?"

32.1.2 Useful Strategies

1. Make the connection between quotations and inferences as seamless as possible. Try to put them next to each other (in one sentence, if possible). Avoid drawing attention to your evidence as evidence. Don't waste time with phrases such as *This statement is proof that . . .* ; *This phrase is significant because . . .* ; *This idea is illustrated by . . .* ; *There is good evidence for this . . .* ; and

the like. Show why facts are meaningful or interesting rather than simply saying that they are.

INEFFECTIVE QUOTING	EFFECTIVE QUOTING
Wordsworth calls nature a “homely Nurse” and says she has “something of a Mother’s mind” (lines 81, 79). This diction supports the idea that he sees nature as a beneficent, maternal force. He is saying that nature is an educator and a healer.	Wordsworth describes nature as a beneficent, maternal force. A “homely Nurse” with “something of a Mother’s Mind,” nature both heals and educates (lines 81, 79).
Tennyson advocates decisive action, even as he highlights the forces that often prohibited his contemporaries from taking it. This is suggested by the lines “Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will, / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (lines 69–70).	Tennyson advocates forceful action, encouraging his contemporaries “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (line 70). Yet he recognizes that his generation is more tempted to “yield” than earlier ones because they have been “Made weak by time and fate” (line 69).

2. Introduce or follow a quotation from a source (as well as a paraphrase or summary) with a *signal phrase* that includes the source author’s name; you might also include the author’s title and/or a bit of information about his or her status, if that information helps to establish credibility.

In his study of the Frankenstein myth, Chris Baldick claims that “[m]ost myths, in literate societies at least, prolong their lives not by being retold at great length, but by being alluded to” (3)—a claim that definitely applies to the Hamlet myth.

Oyin Ogunba, himself a scholar of Yoruban descent, suggests that many of Soyinka’s plays attempt to capture the mood and rhythm of traditional Yoruban festivals (8).

As historian R. K. Webb observes, “Britain is a country in miniature” (1).

To avoid boring your readers, vary the content and placement of these phrases while always choosing the most accurate verb. (*Says*, for example, implies that words are spoken, not written.) You may find it useful to consult the following list of verbs that describe what sources do.

Verbs to Use in Signal Phrases

affirms	considers	explains	insists	shows
argues	contends	explores	investigates	sees
asks	demonstrates	finds	maintains	speculates
asserts	describes	focuses on	notes	states
believes	discusses	identifies	observes	stresses
claims	draws attention to	illustrates	points out	suggests
comments		implies	remarks	surmises
concludes	emphasizes	indicates	reports	writes

3. Lead your readers into fairly long quotations by giving them:
- a clear sense of what to look for in the quotation;
 - any information they need to understand the quotation and to appreciate its significance. Quite often, contextual information—for instance, about who’s speaking to whom and in what situation—is crucial to a

quotation's meaning; this is especially true when quoting dialogue. Also pay attention to pronouns: if the quotation contains a pronoun without an obvious referent, either indicate the specific referent in advance or add the appropriate noun into the quotation. (Again, place added words in brackets.)

INEFFECTIVE QUOTING	EFFECTIVE QUOTING
<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> seems to endorse traditional gender roles: "I'm telling you to be the head of this family . . . like you supposed to be" (1659); "the colored woman" should be "building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody" (1627).	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> seems to endorse traditional gender roles. When Mama tells Walter "to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be" (1659), she affirms that Walter, rather than she or Ruth or Beneatha, is the rightful leader of the family. Implicitly she's also doing what Walter elsewhere says "the colored woman" should do—"building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody" (1627).
Julian expresses disgust for the class distinctions so precious to his mother: "Rolling his eyes upward, he put his tie back on. 'Restored to my class,' he muttered" (403).	Julian professes disgust for the class distinctions so precious to his mother. At her request, he puts back on his tie, but he can't do so without "[r]olling his eyes" and making fun of the idea that he is thereby "[r]estored to [his] class" (403).

NOTE: Here, the more effective examples offer crucial information about who is speaking ("When Lena tells Walter") or what is happening ("At her request, he puts back on his tie"). They also include statements about the implications of the quoted words ("she affirms that Walter . . . is the rightful leader of the family"). At the same time, background facts are subordinated to the truly important, evidentiary ones.

4. Follow each block quotation with a sentence or more of analysis. It often helps to incorporate into that analysis certain key words and phrases from the quotation.

The second stanza of the poem refers back to the title poem of *The Colossus*, where the speaker's father, representative of the gigantic male other, so dominated her world that her horizon was bounded by his scattered pieces. In "Daddy," she describes him as

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
 Ghastly statue with one grey toe
 Big as a Frisco seal

 And a head in the freakish Atlantic
 Where it pours bean green over blue
 In the waters off beautiful Nanset.

. . . Here the image of her father, grown larger than the earlier Colossus of Rhodes, stretches across and subsumes the whole of the United States, from the Pacific to the Atlantic ocean.
 —Pamela J. Annas, "A Disturbance of Mirrors" (ch. 25)

5. Be aware that even though long (especially block) quotations can be effective, they should be used sparingly. Long quotations can create information overload or confusion for readers, making it hard for them to see what is most significant. When you quote only individual words or short phrases, weaving them into your sentences, readers stay focused on what's

significant, and it's easier to show them why it's significant, to get inferences and facts right next to each other.

6. Vary the length of quotations and the way you present them, using a variety of strategies. Choose the strategy that best suits your purpose at a specific moment in your essay, while fairly and fully representing the text. It can be very tempting to fall into a pattern—always, for example, choosing quotations that are at least a sentence long and introducing each with an independent clause and a colon. But overusing any one technique can easily render your essay monotonous. It might even prompt readers to focus more on the (inelegant) way you present evidence than on its appropriateness and significance.

32.2 CITATION AND DOCUMENTATION

In addition to indicating which facts, ideas, or words derive from someone else, always let your readers know where each can be found. You want to enable readers not only to “check up” on you, but also to follow in your footsteps and build on your work. After all, you hope that your analysis of a text will entice readers to reread certain passages from a different point of view.

At the same time, you don't want information about how to find others' work to interfere with readers' engagement with your work. Who, after all, could really make sense of an essay full of sentences such as these: (1) *“I know not ‘seems,’” Hamlet claims in line 76 of Act 1, Scene 2*, and (2) *On the fourth page of her 1993 PMLA article (which was that journal's 108th volume), Jean Wyatt insists that Morrison's “plot . . . cannot move forward because Sethe's space is crammed with the past.”*

To ensure that doesn't happen, it is important to have a system for conveying this information in a concise, unobtrusive way. There are, in fact, many such systems currently in use. Different disciplines, publications, and even instructors prefer or require different systems. In literary studies (and the humanities generally), the preferred system is that developed by the Modern Language Association (MLA).

In this system, parenthetical citations embedded in an essay are keyed to an alphabetized list of works cited that appears at its end. Parenthetical citations allow the writer to briefly indicate where an idea, fact, or quotation appears, while the list of works cited gives readers all the information they need to find that source. Here is a typical sentence with parenthetical citation, as well as the works cited entry to which it refers.

Sample Parenthetical Citation

In one critic's view, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” explores “what great art means” not to the ordinary person, but only “to those who create it” (Bowra 148).

NOTE: Here, the parenthetical citation indicates that readers can find this quotation on page 148 of some work by an author named Bowra. To find out more, readers must turn to the list of works cited and scan it for an entry, like the following, that begins with the name “Bowra.”

Sample Works Cited Entry

Bowra, C. M. The Romantic Imagination. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1950.

This example gives a basic sense of how parenthetical citations and the list of works cited work together in the MLA system. Note that each parenthetical citation must “match up” with one (and only one) works cited entry.

The exact content of each parenthetical citation and works cited entry will depend upon a host of factors. The next two sections focus on these factors.

32.2.1 Parenthetical Citation

THE GENERIC PARENTHETICAL CITATION: AUTHOR(S) AND PAGE NUMBER(S)

The generic MLA parenthetical citation includes an author's name and a page number (or numbers). If the source has two or three authors, include all last names, as in (Gilbert and Gubar 57). If it has four or more, use the first author's name followed by *et al.* (Latin for "and others") in roman type, as in the second example below. In all cases, nothing but a space separates author's name(s) from page number(s).

Most domestic poems of the 1950s foreground the parent-child relationship (Axelrod 974).

Given their rigid structure, it is perhaps "[n]ot surprisin[g]" that many sonnets explore the topic of "confinement" (Booth et al. 780).

Notice the placement of the parenthetical citations in these examples. In each one the citation comes at the end of the sentence, yet it appears *inside* the period (because it is part of the sentence) and *outside* the quotation marks (because it isn't part of the quotation). Such placement of parenthetical citations should be your practice in all but two situations (both described in the next section).

VARIATIONS IN PLACEMENT

In terms of placement, the first exception is the block quotation. In this case, the parenthetical citation should immediately *follow* (not precede) the punctuation mark that ends the quotation.

As historian Michael Crowder insists, Western-style education was the single "most radical influence on Nigeria introduced by the British" because it

came to be seen as a means not only of economic betterment but of social elevation. It opened doors to an entirely new world, the world of the white man. Since missionaries had a virtual monopoly on schools, they were able to use them as a means of further proselytization, and continued to warn their pupils of the evils of their former way of life. (195)

The second exception is the sentence that either incorporates material from multiple sources or texts (as in the first example below) or refers both to something from a source or text and to your own idea (as in the second example below). In either situation, you will need to put the appropriate parenthetical citation in mid-sentence right next to the material to which it refers, even at the risk of interrupting the flow of the sentence.

Critics describe Caliban as a creature with an essentially "unalterable natur[e]" (Garner 458), "incapable of comprehending the good or of learning from the past" (Peterson 442), "impervious to genuine moral improvement" (Wright 451).

If Caliban is “incapable of . . . learning from the past” (Peterson 442), then how do we explain the changed attitude he seems to demonstrate at the end of the play?

VARIATIONS IN CONTENT

The generic MLA citation may contain the author’s name(s) and the relevant page number(s), but variations are the rule when it comes to content. The six most common variations occur when you do the following:

1. *Name the author in a signal phrase*

Parenthetical citations should include only information that isn’t crucial to the sense and credibility of your argument. Yet in nine cases out of ten, information about *whose* ideas, data, or words you are referring to is crucial in precisely this way. As a result, it is usually a good idea to indicate this in your text. When you do so, the parenthetical citation need only include the relevant page number(s).

Jefferson’s “new generation” are, in Judith Fetterley’s words, just “as much bound by the code of gentlemanly behavior as their fathers were” (492).

According to Steven Gould Axelrod, most domestic poems of the 1950s foreground the parent-child relationship (974).

2. *Cite a poem or play*

In the case of most poetry, refer to line (not page) numbers.

Ulysses encourages his men “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (line 70).

In the case of classic plays, indicate act, scene, and line numbers, and separate them with periods.

“I know not ‘seems,’ ” Hamlet claims (1.2.76).

3. *Cite multiple works by the same author or a work whose author is unknown*

When citing multiple works by the same author or an anonymous work, you will need to indicate the title of the specific work to which you refer. Either indicate the title in your text, putting only the page number(s) in a parenthetical citation (as in the first example below), or create a parenthetical citation in which the first word or two of the title is followed by the page number(s) (as in the third example below). In the latter case, you should format the title words exactly as you would the full title, using quotation marks for essays, short stories, and short poems, and using italics or underlining for books.

As Judith Fetterley argues in “A Rose for ‘A Rose for Emily,’ ” Jefferson’s younger generation is just “as much bound by the code of gentlemanly behavior as their fathers were” (492).

Jefferson’s “new generation” is, in Judith Fetterley’s words, just “as much bound by the code of gentlemanly behavior as their fathers were” (“A Rose” 492).

Arguably, Jefferson’s “new generation” is just “as much bound by the code of gentlemanly behavior as their fathers were” (Fetterley, “A Rose” 492).

4. *Cite a source quoted in another source*

When quoting the words of one person as they appear in another author's work, mention the person's name in a signal phrase. Then create a parenthetical citation in which the abbreviation "qtd. in" is followed by the author's name and the relevant page number(s).

Hegel describes Creon as "a moral power," "not a tyrant" (qtd. in Knox 1457).

5. *Cite multiple authors with the same last name*

In this case, you should either use the author's full name in a signal phrase (as above) or add the author's first initial to the parenthetical citation (as below).

Beloved depicts a "a specifically female quest powered by the desire to get one's milk to one's baby" (J. Wyatt 475).

6. *Cite multiple sources for the same idea or fact*

In this case, put both citations within a single set of parentheses and separate them with a semicolon.

Though many scholars attribute Caliban's bestiality to a seemingly innate inability to learn or change (Garner 458; Peterson 442; Wright 451), others highlight how inefficient or problematic Prospero's teaching methods are (Willis 443) and how invested Prospero might be in keeping Caliban ignorant (Taylor 384).

7. *Cite a work without numbered pages*

Omit page numbers from parenthetical citations if you cite:

- an electronic work that isn't paginated;
- a print work whose pages aren't numbered;
- a print work that is only one page long;
- a print work, such as an encyclopedia, that is organized alphabetically.

If at all possible, mention the author's name and/or the work's title in your text (so that you don't need any parenthetical citation). Otherwise, create a parenthetical citation that contains, as appropriate, the author's name and/or the first word(s) of the title.

8. *Italicize words that aren't italicized in the original*

If you draw your readers' attention to a particular word or phrase within a quotation by using italics or underlining, your parenthetical citation must include the words "emphasis added."

Like his constant references to "Tragedy," the wording of the father's question demonstrates that he is almost as hesitant as his daughter to confront death head-on: "When will you look it in the face?" he asks her (34; emphasis added).

32.2.2 The List of Works Cited

The alphabetized list of works cited should appear at the end of your completed essay. It must include all, and only, the texts and sources that you cite in your

essay; it also must provide full publication information about each one.

If you're writing a research essay and have created and maintained a working bibliography (see 30.3.1), that bibliography will become the core of your works cited list. To turn the former into the latter, you will need to:

- delete sources that you did not ultimately cite in your essay;
- add an entry for each primary text you did cite;
- delete notes about where you found sources (call numbers, etc.).

FORMATTING THE LIST OF WORKS CITED

The list of works cited should appear on a separate page (or pages) at the end of your essay. (If you conclude your essay on page 5, for example, you would start the list of works cited on page 6.) Center the heading "Works Cited" (without quotation marks) at the top of the first page, and double-space throughout.

The first line of each entry should begin at the left margin; the second and subsequent lines should be indented 5 spaces or ½ inch.

Alphabetize your list by the last names of the authors or editors. In the case of anonymous works, alphabetize by the first word of the title other than *A*, *An*, or *The*.

If your list includes multiple works by the same author, begin the first entry with the author's name and each subsequent entry with three hyphens followed by a period. Alphabetize these listings by the first word of the title, again ignoring the words *A*, *An*, or *The*.

FORMATTING WORKS CITED ENTRIES

The exact content and style of each entry in your list of works cited will depend upon the type of source it is. Following are examples of some of the most frequently used types of entries in lists of works cited. For all other types, consult the sixth edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

Book by a single author or editor

Webb, R. K. Modern England: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present. New York: Columbia UP, 1969.

Wu, Duncan, ed. A Companion to Romanticism. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

Book with an author and an editor

Keats, John. Complete Poems. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1982.

Book by two or three authors or editors

Gallagher, Catherine, and Thomas Laqueur, eds. The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.

Book by more than three authors or editors

Zipes, Jack, et al. The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature. New York: Norton, 2005.

Introduction, preface, or foreword

O'Prey, Paul. Introduction. Heart of Darkness. By Joseph Conrad. New York: Viking, 1983. 7-24.

Essay, poem, or any other work in an edited collection or anthology

- Shaw, Philip. "Britain at War: The Historical Context." A Companion to Romanticism. Ed. Duncan Wu. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 48-60.
- Yeats, W. B. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." The Norton Introduction to Literature. Shorter 9th ed. Ed. Alison Booth, J. Paul Hunter, and Kelly J. Mays. New York: Norton, 2005. 1020.

Multiple short works from one collection or anthology

- Booth, Alison, J. Paul Hunter, and Kelly J. Mays, eds. The Norton Introduction to Literature. Shorter 9th ed. New York: Norton, 2005.
- Frost, Robert. "The Road Not Taken." Booth, Hunter, and Mays. 988.
- Keats, John. "Ode to a Nightingale." Booth, Hunter, and Mays. 843.

Article in a reference work

- "Magna Carta." Encyclopaedia Britannica. 14th ed. 630-35.

Article in a scholarly journal

- Wyatt, Jean. "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's Beloved." PMLA 108 (May 1993): 474-88.

Article in a newspaper or magazine

- McNulty, Charles. "All the World's a Stage Door." Village Voice 13 Feb. 2001: 69.

Review or editorial

- Leys, Simon. "Balzac's Genius and Other Paradoxes." Rev. of Balzac: A Life, by Graham Robb. New Republic 20 Dec. 1994: 26-27.

NOTE: The first name here is that of the reviewer, the second that of the author whose book is being reviewed.

Internet site

- U.S. Department of Education (ED) Home Page. US Dept. of Education. 12 Aug. 2004 <<http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>>.
- Yeats Society Sligo Home Page. Yeats Society Sligo. 12 Nov. 2004 <<http://www.yeats-sligo.com/>>.

Article on a Web site

- Padgett, John B. "William Faulkner." The Mississippi Writers Page. 29 Mar. 1999. 8 Feb. 2004 <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/ms-writers/dir/faulkner_william/>.

NOTE: The first date indicates when material was published or last updated. The second date indicates when you accessed the site.