

ENGL 1301: Composition I

Course Workbook

Fall 2026



“YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE GREAT TO GET STARTED,
BUT YOU DO HAVE TO GET STARTED TO BE GREAT.”

—LES BROWN

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Drop in and ask some questions, grab a snack, say hi.

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How to Use This Workbook

Welcome to ENGL 1301!

This workbook contains most of your readings, assignment sheets, and reference materials. Whether you're using it online or in print, it's designed to be your go-to resource.

I've designed this workbook so that whether you print it out and write in the margins or use it on your phone, computer, or tablet, you have most of what you need. The majority of readings are included, and the advice and questions are on the page when you need them.

This means you're not toggling between five different tabs or wondering where that one handout went. One place. One resource. Less stress.

However, not everything is in here. Don't start here to do your homework. Start with your schedule. Think of it as your map for our journey through the class. Videos and some other readings are not in here but are linked on your schedule.

How This Semester Works

Think of this course like training for a marathon. You can't skip weeks of training and then expect to run 26 miles—your body isn't ready, and honestly, it would hurt. Writing works the same way. We build skills incrementally: prewriting, drafting, feedback, revision. Each step prepares you for the next.

The schedule might feel like a lot at first glance, but it's paced intentionally. If you keep up with the out of class work and show up ready prepared for class, you'll be in good shape. Fall behind, and catching up gets harder—not because I'm being strict, but because writing skills build on each other.

So stay with it. Do the homework before class. Come ready to think and discuss. The work you put in throughout the semester is what makes the final essays possible.

One More Thing

This workbook is yours. Write in it. Highlight things. Dog-ear pages. Make it messy with your thinking. That's what it's for.

Let's get to work.

--Kelli

Class Notes Assignment

IMPORTANT NOTE: We begin taking notes with this assignment. So make sure you take notes on this and another assignments on the READ|WATCH list on the homework list on your schedule.

You will take handwritten notes for each day of class lecture/discussion and for the READ|WATCH items assigned as homework.

IN-CLASS NOTES

Any writing class, much like math or reading, is a skills class. Instead of learning facts and dates, you are learning *how to do something*. As such, taking notes in a skills class requires you to focus on *what to do* and *how to do it*. As we go through the course, this is at the heart of our study. I expect your notes to become more thorough and thoughtful as the semester progresses and I will grade more strictly as we move toward the end.

Most importantly focus on What and How: Here are some examples and tips for when we're going over different aspects or types of information:

Instruction & Writing Skills

- What are the Requirements?
- What key things make this type of writing or thinking stand out
- Why do certain things work better or not?
- What tips or tricks are there?
- What things are not allowed
- Due dates
- Processes and steps

Discussion/Big Ideas

- What are the main points
- What kind of evidence or reasoning supports the main points?
- What aspects that hadn't occurred to you
- What things that inspire you or spark curiosity
- What questions does this bring up for you
- Any ideas this inspires for this course or other things

Sample Essays—focus on what I'm pointing out as important to developing this kind of writing or this assignment

- Key parts/sections that you might want to pattern some of your ideas after
- Successful techniques
- Specific wording, elements parts required—what did you learn/notice about those?
- Inspiration and ideas you have for your essay or work of this type

Miscellaneous

- Questions you have for me
- Ideas that come to you for assignments you're working on

- Things to worry about later so that you can focus on the now and get your work done well.
- Integrate your own style. If drawing lines, arrows, sketches, or other things help you, then do that.

You may find it useful to use the list under "In-Class" column on the schedule as a starting outline for your daily notes, though you should include any other things discussed as well.

Homework Notes

For Instructional/Informational Readings and Videos (Writing Guides, Textbook Sections, etc.), take notes using whichever method fits the material:

- Bullet points as you read or watch
- A short summary after you finish
- A combination of both

However you choose to do it, your notes should capture the main ideas of the reading/video and anything you find useful, surprising, or worth remembering for your own writing.

For Student Sample Essays, jot down a few things that stand out to you about the writing. Here are some possibilities:

- Something you like about how it's written
- An idea it gives you for your own work
- A technique or choice that stood out to you, for better or worse

Turning in Your Notes

Your notes will be due at the end of class each day. You will turn your class notes in with your homework notes. **DO NOT WORK ON YOUR HOMEWORK NOTES DURING CLASS.**

When You Miss Class

- Watch the class recording from the class YouTube playlist
- Take notes on the recording
- Bring those notes to the next class and turn them in with your other homework notes, but make sure they are labeled!
- Clearly mark notes as "Late Notes" so I get your grade in for the day you missed.
- Late points will apply, but you still get credit. Refer to the syllabus policies for how long I take late work and how many points are deducted.
- **MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS CLEARLY LABELED AND DATED.**
- Label homework read/watch with the title on the schedule

Grading Standards

MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS CLEARLY LABELED AND DATED.

Your notes will be graded on:

- Capturing major points and details for each day
- Including notes (bullet points and/or a summary) on instructional readings and videos
- Including thoughtful responses to sample essays
- Asking questions and showing intellectual engagement with the material
- Consistent completion and organization throughout each unit

CSD Note Taking

If you qualify for a note-taker through CSD, you need to:

- Take notes as best you can during class/class videos and as you read.
- Highlight or annotate the notes from the CSD notetaker.
- Your annotations should show you've thought about the significant points and added your own thoughts, ideas, or observations.

Discuss this accommodation with me. If you don't take time to talk with me about this, I can't make modifications to fit your needs. It's your responsibility to communicate with me.

Extra Credit Opportunity

You can earn up to 10 extra credit points for exceptional note-taking that goes beyond the minimum requirements.

Important

Organized, clearly labeled notes are required. I WILL NOT GRADE unorganized and/or unlabeled notes.

Remember, your notes are for you. As we go through the semester, you will learn how to best take notes to help you in college and at work. This is not only an important kind of writing to learn, but it's probably one of the most useful you will develop while in college.

Master Your Learning: The Ultimate Guide to Effective Note-taking Strategies

1. Introduction: The Power of the Pen (or Keyboard)

Note-taking is not merely a record of what was said; it is a fundamental pillar of academic mastery. High-quality notes serve four essential functions: they anchor

your memory, provide a bespoke resource for test review, deepen your comprehension through physical engagement, and allow you to revisit and clarify complex concepts long after a lecture ends. To excel, you must shift from **passive learning** to **active learning**. Passive learning is the act of skimming words or listening without intention, which leads to poor retention. Active learning, however, requires you to purposefully interact with the text—highlighting, questioning, and reorganizing information to make it your own. By mastering the strategies in this guide, you are choosing to be an engaged architect of your own education.

2. The Anatomy of High-Quality Notes

Strong notes are more than just scribbles; they are strategic tools. Regardless of the system you choose, all effective notes share these four traits:

- **Organized:** Use white space effectively to group similar ideas. Visually separate concepts so you can see exactly when the topic shifts.
- **Highlighted:** Make key terms and main ideas leap off the page. This doesn't necessarily require a neon pen; it means using formatting so the most important "need-to-know" data is instantly visible.
- **Concise:** Speed is vital. Write in fragments, use abbreviations, and capture "clipped" versions of ideas rather than transcription-style full sentences.
- **Detailed:** While being concise, you must remain thorough. Ensure your notes include full definitions, explanations, and context so they remain useful weeks later.

Pro-Tips for Strategic Note-taking

Enhance your pages with these tactical additions:

- **Bullet points** and **numbered lists** for easy scanning.
- **Symbols** to act as shorthand. For example ★ for test material or things often repeated by the speaker so they're clearly important.
- **Color coding** to categorize different types of information (e.g., green for examples, blue for dates). This is best to do after the class or meeting to help you organize or reinforce concepts.
- **Questions and Ideas** written in the margins to flag areas for follow-up.

3. Three Proven Note-taking Systems

The Cornell Note-Taking System

The Cornell system is a premier structured method designed to promote active engagement and efficient review.

- **Setup:** Divide your page into three sections: a narrow **Cue Column** (left), a wide

- **Note-taking Column** (right), and a **Summary Area** (bottom).
- **During the Lesson/Reading:** Label the top with the class, date, and topic. Record main points and diagrams in the note-taking column using short phrases and ample white space.
- **After the Lesson/Reading:** In the Cue Column, write keywords or questions that act as "**triggers**" for deeper thinking and recall. Finally, use the Summary Area to sum up the page's main ideas in your own words (1–2 sentences).

Quadrant Notes

This system is prized for its simplicity. Divide your paper into at least four quadrants. The golden rule is to stick to **one big concept per quadrant**. This prevents clutter and forces you to synthesize information.

- **Coach's Tip:** This system is flexible. If the four-quadrant split doesn't fit the logic of a specific lesson, feel free to **add on boxes or sections** as you encounter new information.

Outline Notes

Coach's Note: Taking notes in outline form can feel **daunting if you aren't used to it**, but it is one of the most powerful ways to visualize the relationship between ideas.

- **The Structure:** Use a hierarchy of "levels" (Roman numerals for main topics, capital letters for subtopics, numbers for details) or do it more informally with bullets, arrows, stars, or other marks.
- **The Rule of the Margin:** As information becomes more specific, it must be indented further to the right. A key visual rule: **Subtopics and examples should never touch the left margin.**
- **The Speed Factor:** Because this method captures layers of detail, you must use symbols and abbreviations to keep up with the instructor.

4. Active Reading Strategies for Better Notes

The SQ3R Method

SQ3R is a highly efficient approach to reading that prevents the "eyes moving but brain off" phenomenon.

- **Survey:** Skim headings, bold words, and summaries first. This should take only **about 1 minute**, and its purpose is **prepping the brain** for what it is about to learn.
- **Question:** Turn headings into questions (e.g., "What are the benefits of SQ3R?"). This gives your brain a purpose and prevents distraction.
- **Read:** Read in manageable "chunks" (a few lines for dense text, a few paragraphs for textbooks).

- **Recite:** After each chunk, stop and say or write the main points in your own words to ensure you are comprehending the author's points.
- **Review:** Once finished, look back over the entire section to see how all parts fit together.

Annotation Techniques

Annotation is the art of marking a text to build a deep understanding.

Critical Instruction: You must **read the text at least twice** (or become thoroughly familiar with it) **before** you start marking it. This prevents "over-highlighting" the entire page. Your first reading might actually be a light skim—go through and read to get main points and basic details. You might write those down in a list as you go through. On your next reading, you can read more deeply and begin annotating and making deeper notes by adding details, quotes, thoughts, questions, and conclusions you draw to that basic outline.

Use Shorthand Symbols:

-  for points of confusion.
- * for key main points.
-  for surprising information or "aha" moments.
-  for steps in a process.
- → to show relationships between ideas.

The Art of the Summary

A summary is a condensed, paraphrased version of a text. It is a powerful comprehension check because you cannot summarize what you do not understand.

Read the text twice to ensure expertise.

- Start with an attribution (Author, title, and publisher): According to Kelli Wood, it's best to "come to class with a good attitude, a sense of humor, and a willingness to work and learn."
- Explain main ideas and major details in the same order as the original.
- Write in the Present Tense
- Check Your Work Checklist:
 - Is the summary written in the 3rd person? In other words, use the authors name or he/she/they to point out what they say.
 - Is it strictly objective (no personal opinions included)?
 - Is it written in your own words (no direct quotes)?
 - It should never be more than 1/2 the length of the original

5. The Secret Weapon: Identifying Main Ideas and Details

To find the main idea, use the coach's formula: **Main Idea = Topic (the who/what) + Point (the specific message)**. Visualize the relationship using these analogies:

- **The Roof:** The main idea is the broad structure that covers and protects all the specific details (the house) beneath it.
- **The Map:** The main idea is the destination (the purpose of the trip), while the supporting details are the step-by-step instructions needed to arrive there.

Clue Word Cheat Sheets

Train your eyes to spot "red flags" that signal whether a sentence is a broad main idea or a specific detail.

When authors write, they leave a linguistic breadcrumb trail to help readers distinguish between their big-picture argument and the small details supporting it. By understanding how these words work, you can easily map out the structure of any paragraph in your head.

The first clue is the collective-plus-plural pattern, which authors use to state their main idea. Because a main idea is a broad "umbrella" statement, it needs to reference a group of things rather than a single, isolated fact. To do this, authors combine a collective word—like *several*, *various*, *numerous*, *many*, or *a series of*—with a plural noun—like *steps*, *reasons*, *factors*, *differences*, *events*, or *purposes*. When you read a sentence like, "There are *several reasons* to study active reading," the author is announcing the paragraph's main destination.

Once that main destination is set, the author shifts to specific, singular transitions to deliver the supporting details. These words signal that the writing is narrowing down to explain, prove, or illustrate the main point step-by-step.

- To lay out sequential points or steps in order, they will use transitions like *first*, *second*, or *third*.
- To introduce a single, concrete example or starting reason, they might write for one thing.
- To transition smoothly to the next specific detail, they will use the word *another*.

- If they want to stack additional evidence or expand on a point, they will build momentum with phrases like *in addition*, *furthermore*, or *moreover*.

In practice, these groups of words work like a promise and its fulfillment. The collective-plus-plural words make a promise (e.g., "there are *many ways* to take notes"), and the singular transition words deliver on that promise one by one (e.g., "*First*, there is Cornell... *In addition*, you can use outlining..."). If you can spot these patterns, you won't get too lost in a dense academic text.

6. Critical Thinking: Evaluating Your Information

Fact vs. Opinion

- **Fact:** A statement that is provable through objective verification, data, or witnesses (e.g., "Australia is wider than the moon").
- **Opinion:** A personal belief, interpretation, or future prediction that cannot be proven. These often rely on "judgment words" like *best*, *important*, or *amazing*.

Identifying Bias

Bias is a preference that can color how information is presented. To stay objective, use these three steps:

Analyze Language: Watch for emotionally charged or exaggerated "one-sided" words.

- **Check Evidence:** Ensure facts are supported by reliable sources and check if the author acknowledges differing viewpoints.
- **Evaluate Purpose:** Is the author trying to inform you, or are they trying to persuade you to adopt an agenda?

Managing Vocabulary with Context Clues

Don't break your flow by reaching for a dictionary. Use these five types of context clues to infer meaning:

- **Definition:** The word is defined right in the sentence (e.g., "...the habitat, or natural environment...").
- **Synonym:** A similar word is used nearby (e.g., "...serene and calm...").
- **Antonym:** A contrasting word provides a hint (e.g., "...unlike her gregarious brother, she was quiet...").
- **Example:** Specific instances clarify the term (e.g., "...tarnished—the silver was dull and gray").
- **Inference:** The meaning is implied by the general logic of the paragraph.

7. Conclusion: Building a "Beginner's Mind"

The most successful students approach learning with a **"Beginner's Mind."** This mindset is about approaching every experience as if it were brand new, free from the weight of having to "know everything." In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities for growth; in the expert's mind, there are few.

Practical Takeaways

To integrate this mindset into your study routine, commit to these three practices:

- **Approach problems with curiosity:** Instead of fearing a difficult assignment, ask, "What new perspective can I gain here?"
- **Embrace uncertainty:** Acceptance of the "unknown" is where the deepest learning happens. It is okay not to have all the answers immediately.
- **Stay present:** Use deep breathing or mindfulness to focus on the current task rather than worrying about future grades.

Your Call to Action: In your very next study session, choose one system— **Cornell, Quadrant, or Outline** —and try it out for a while. Consistency is the bridge between a strategy and a habit. If it works for you, continue to use it, but remember that different notetaking methods work for different needs, and sometimes even different moods.

To become a good notetaker, you have to find what works for you in various situations. Don't feel like you have to use just one method—you can combine them anyway you want and add your own flair. In the end, notetaking is something you do for yourself, and it is a skill which improves with practice. Doing what helps you get the job done is a very personal and sometimes situational thing and you will have to learn the parts that work for you through simply doing it. As you take notes in college, reflect on what works for you and what doesn't. Think about when certain styles are effective. And, when you hit a roadblock and nothing seems to work, go back and try that style you didn't think worked for you—it just might turn out to be what you need.

Practice: Hunting for Linguistic Clues

Your Task

Read the practice passage below, then follow the three-step instructions to find the main idea, identify the supporting details, and verify your answers.

Practice Passage

Applying active reading strategies can provide **several powerful advantages** for college students. **First**, this systematic approach keeps your mind highly focused on the text, preventing your thoughts from drifting to social media. **Another** benefit is that writing brief margin notes dramatically improves your immediate comprehension of complex academic articles. **Furthermore**, stopping to recite sections in your own words helps transfer the information into your long-term memory. **Finally**, conducting a quick review of your annotations makes preparing for a final exam much more efficient.

Step-by-Step Instructions**Step 1: Find the Broad Promise (The Main Idea)**

Look for a sentence that contains a **Collective Word** (a word indicating more than one) paired with a **Plural Noun**. This sentence is the author's general "umbrella statement."

- *Write down the sentence you found and underline the two-word clue.*

Step 2: Track the Pillars (The Supporting Details)

Look for the **specific, singular transition words** that signal the author is breaking their broad promise down into concrete points.

- *List each transition word and write a brief phrase summarizing the specific point it introduces.*

Step 3: Apply the "Test Question" Trick

Turn your Main Idea sentence into a question.

- *Does every supporting detail you identified in Step 2 directly answer that question? (If yes, you have 100% verified your main idea!)*
-

Answer Key & Explanations on the next page.
Try to complete the steps above before looking at them.

Step 1 Answer: The Main Idea is the first sentence: "Applying active reading strategies can provide several powerful advantages for college students."

The Clue: Several (collective word) + advantages (plural noun). This acts as the road map, telling you that a list of benefits is coming next.

Step 2 Answer: There are four major supporting details in this paragraph, each signaled by a singular transition:

- *First* → It keeps your mind focused.
- *Another* → Margin notes improve immediate comprehension.
- *Furthermore* → Reciting transfers info to long-term memory.
- *Finally* → Reviewing annotations makes studying for exams more efficient.

Step 3 Answer:

Turn the Main Idea into a question: "What are the several powerful advantages of active reading?"

Verify: Do the details about focus, comprehension, memory, and exam prep answer that question? Yes, they do!

Building a Writer

Writing is a skill that develops over time through practice, feedback, and revision. Many students come to college believing that good writers simply sit down and produce polished prose in one draft. This myth can be paralyzing—if writing doesn't flow easily, students assume they "can't write."

The truth is that all writers struggle. Professional authors revise extensively. Academic writers draft and redraft. The difference between skilled writers and struggling writers isn't talent—it's process.

What Makes a Writer?

Writers are made, not born. The skills you need for college writing can be learned:

- Reading actively and critically
- Generating and organizing ideas
- Drafting without perfectionism
- Revising based on feedback
- Editing for clarity and correctness

Each of these skills improves with practice. You don't have to be "good at writing" to become a good writer. You just have to be willing to work at it.

The Writing Process

Effective writers follow a process, though it looks different for everyone:

1. Prewriting: Generating ideas through brainstorming, freewriting, or research
2. Drafting: Getting ideas on paper without worrying about perfection
3. Revising: Rethinking and reorganizing for clarity and effectiveness
4. Editing: Polishing sentences and fixing errors
5. Proofreading: Final check before submission

Most struggling writers skip steps 1-3 and try to write a perfect final draft immediately. This almost never works.

Your Voice Matters

Academic writing doesn't mean erasing your personality. Your voice—the way you see the world and express ideas—is what makes your writing worth reading. The goal isn't to sound like a textbook. It's to communicate your ideas clearly while sounding like yourself.

This semester, we'll work on developing your voice while also learning the conventions of academic writing. These aren't opposites—they work together.

The Myth of the Good Writer

By Erin McNulty

"People tend to look at successful writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get all the cricks out and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. But this is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident."

--Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

Consider the following sentences:

"I've just never been good at writing."

"I am not a great writer, so I am nervous about this class."

"My writing just doesn't flow."

""I want to sound sophisticated, but I don't feel like I am good at it."

If these sound like things you have said before, fear not: you are in the company of some of the greatest writers of all time.

As Anne Lamott elegantly reminds us, we too often think of writers as brilliant novelists, poets, or academics who can sit down and write beautifully without even trying. We tend to think, in other words, that great writing either comes naturally or not at all. However, even professional writers struggle. They struggle to begin writing, they struggle with writer's block as they write, and they even struggle with the feeling that their finished work is inadequate.

"We tend to think [...] that great writing either comes naturally or not at all."

Neil Gaiman, author of such works as *American Gods* and *Coraline*, wrote that he once was invited to a party of "great and good people: artists and scientists, writers and discoverers of things. And felt at any moment they would realize that [he] didn't qualify to be there, among these people who had really done things." Later that night, he ran into Neil Armstrong, who said to Gaiman, "I just look at all these people and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They've made amazing things. I just went where I was sent." Gaiman concluded that if "Neil Armstrong felt like an imposter, maybe everyone did."

This should be comforting to student writers, many of whom enter new writing courses feeling uncomfortable about their own abilities. Their lack of confidence can be due to criticism from previous instructors, or even a history of low grades that have convinced them that writing is out of their depth. However, even if previous experiences have led you to believe that your writing is not up to par, this does not mean that your writing can never be good, or that you don't have the potential to be successful in a writing course.

"Just because a work isn't considered academic or literary doesn't mean that it isn't worth reading [...]"

Part of this confusion can stem from unfair ideas about what counts as "good" or "real" writing in the first place. Just as we tend to believe that there are good writers, we also tend to think that only academic writing counts as serious writing. If it isn't writing for a class—a research paper, a white paper, a book report, we may feel that it doesn't have the same value. Other forms—poetry, fiction writing, comic books, or even blogging are too often seen as "lesser" forms. In fact, even Stephen King had this problem:

"I have spent a good many years—too many, I think—being ashamed about what I write. I kept hearing Miss Hisler asking why I wanted to waste my talent, why I wanted to waste my time, why I wanted to write junk. I think I was forty before I realized that almost every writer of fiction and poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent." - Stephen King, *On Writing*.

To be clear: whatever you would like to write is worth writing. Just because a work isn't considered academic or literary doesn't mean that it isn't worth reading or that your skillset is somehow less.

A receptive audience that appreciates our work can help us shed these unproductive ideas about writing. Unfortunately, such audiences can be hard to find. This is especially true in the academic context, which all too often encourages us to see writing as a game of compare and contrast. Being exposed to legitimately great writing in English classes can have the side effect of making our writing seem amateurish by comparison. Doubly so if we're writing for a course where we'll be forced to share our writing with peers.

"Good writing comes from practicing and honing a craft."

The solution, of course, is not to retreat by avoiding good writing or shying away from sharing our work. Instead, we should relish these opportunities. We should also change the ways we think and talk about writing itself.

Just like the skills that are key to the other classes we take throughout high school and college, writing is something that must be learned. Engineers learn their craft slowly but surely via study and experience, picking up knowledge as they encounter challenge. So do chemists, programmers, agriculturalists, mathematicians, carpenters, florists, veterinarians, and physicians. None of the skills that define these jobs come effortlessly—and neither does writing. Good writing comes from practicing and honing a craft.

Thus, there is no such thing as a good or natural writer. There are simply writers who have had more practice.

For more on Neil Gaiman and his interaction with Neil Armstrong, [click here to visit Gaiman's journal](#).

From the *Purdue Online Writing Center*

https://owl.purdue.edu/research/owl_conversations/Essays/The%20Myth%20of%20the%20Good%20Writer.html

In your homework notes. . .

Write down a sentence or two that you think best expresses the main point you take away from this reading. It may or may not be what you think McNulty's main point is. Just write down the part that sticks with you most.

You might want to highlight that in this workbook as we'll talk about it in class.

MLA Assignment

For this assignment you will be formatting a paper in MLA style and simply writing a few paragraphs. I am NOT grading your writing here; this is practice at MLA format, turning things in both on Blackboard and in class, and a chance to make sure you're getting those things right in the future. However, you do need to follow instructions and stay on task with it.

1. **Write 2 paragraphs about this topic:** What is one of your favorite places or events to go to in El Paso or the surrounding area?
 - To extend this to 2 paragraphs, think about **describing in detail or telling a story** of one of your favorite memories going there.
 - Make sure you explain **why** it's one of your favorite places to go.
2. **Format your paper in MLA style** using the instructions in the workbook and one of the videos you watched for the word processor/computer you're using as given on the schedule.

You DO NOT need a Work Cited page with this assignment.

3. **Proofread carefully.** I suggest you **go to the [Writing Center](#)**. As this is your first writing assignment, if you do, you can earn not just 5 extra credit points, but 10!
4. **Bring a PRINT version to class on the due date.** -30 points if you don't bring in a printed copy. You will have to turn in the printed copy after class and late points apply. Please make use of the computer lab to print things out. However, make sure you do that BEFORE CLASS BEGINS.

General Tips

- Remember, MLA is not picky about font as long as it's **a standard one** like Times New Roman, Calibri, or Arial.
- Make sure to use the same font in both the paper itself **and** the header.
- If you use a template, make sure to check all the aspects of format—**many templates have errors**.

Grading

This is graded based on these considerations:

- Turning the assignment in on time in class and/or on [Blackboard](#) as required on the schedule.
- MLA Format
- Completing the writing assignment fully and thoughtfully

Emblematic Essay Assignment

Description can tell us much more about something than just what it looks like. It can support an idea, a feeling, a situation, a place, a time, or develop feelings of empathy for the character or situation. It is a strong type of support that can be used in both persuasive and analytical essays. In this personal essay, you will write about an object that is emblematic to you, describing it and discussing its importance and value.

We own many things that we prize highly for more than just their monetary value. It may be an elaborate thing, or something as simple as a piece of paper with a special note on it. How does that item carry its meaning? How can you look at this one thing and see it for more than what it physically represents? How does it represent the person who owns it, or what does it say about him or her, or his or her past? In short, how is it emblematic?

Emblem is a word not quite meaning symbol. A thing that is emblematic (e.g., a scar on your knee) represents something more than what it is: more than just an injury, the scar represents a championship skater who worked very hard in a winning season. However, it does not represent that to all people at all times. On the other hand, a symbol does represent the same thing to all people of the same culture at all times. April symbolizes rebirth and love. A skeleton symbolizes death. See how a symbol is different from an emblem?

The item you choose to write about should be emblematic to you. It can be something that belongs to you or to someone else; it can be something you or someone else still has, or something that no longer exists. However, it must be something that has meaning for you.

Beginning considerations:

- **Style:** A personal or familiar essay should be written in your voice and from your perspective. While you are watching your grammar more carefully than you might in everyday writing, you are still writing as yourself.
 - Do not use words that are not natural to you.
 - Do not use the personal pronoun you. Instead, use I/me/my when referring to your own experience, or we/us/our when extending that to society as a whole.
- **Purpose:** The purpose of this essay is simply to describe your object and both show and explain its importance to you.
 - Do not try to convince or preach to your readers. Simply explain what it is you believe and why you believe it's important.
- **Audience:** The audience for this essay is a general audience. Think of this as simply talking to your friends, family, or peers.

- **Limitations:** You must write about a physical object, and it cannot be bigger than a pickup truck.

Finally, the essay is not due tomorrow. Don't start writing it yet. We begin with prewriting assignments, so take it one step at a time. These assignments are brainstorming and idea gathering exercises and as long as you turn them in when and where they're due, you'll receive full credit. I don't grade these for grammar or spelling. They are just about brainstorming ideas. Deductions for late work and clearly shirking thinking will apply though. I'll explain these more fully in class, but the summaries below give you an idea of the basic steps we'll take to build the essay.

Prewriting Assignment 1

Write down as many words, phrases, and sentences as you can to describe your object. Use all the senses you can: sight, touch, smell, taste, and sound. Describe size and color, shape and texture. Think about its weight and feel. Consider its emotional tone or vibe (the dominant impression). List every detail you can think of. You should have a list that is at least 1/2 - 1 page long.

Prewriting Assignment 2

Now that you've gotten a lot of descriptive phrases or words down about your object, it's time to describe it. However, you will set your description in the context of a narrative. So, in your Prewriting 2, write the story or a couple of stories of a time you remember the object. As you tell the story, describe the object. You should have 2-3 paragraphs.

Prewriting Assignment 3

Finally, it's time to discuss why the object you chose is important. What does the story you wrote in your last Prewriting Assignment show about not just the object, but also the person who owns it, or the time in your life that it represents? How is this person or time important to you and how does that show through that object? You should have at least 2 paragraphs.

General Requirements

The essay should:

- Be correctly formatted: typed in a standard 12-point font, double spaced, correct heading and running header
- Be at least 3 pages long, though it can be longer
- Clearly identify your object in the essay

Grading Criteria

Your essay will be evaluated based on: Format and Professionalism, Focus, Content, Development, Style, and Clarity using basic General Education Outcomes principles. You can [see the rubric here](#).

Student Sample Essay: Almost Taylor Swift

Medrano 1

Emerald Medrano

Professor Kelli Wood

English 1301

February 22, 2018

Almost Taylor Swift

I stared at the wall in front of me, silently cursing my English teacher. I looked at the empty page on my screen, "Write about something that means something to you," my English teacher had said. *What the heck means something to me?* I sighed, slinking down lower in my chair as I considered dropping out. *This is impossible.*

Realizing I won't find anything just sitting here, I stood up and headed to my room, avoiding my family on the way so they wouldn't try to talk to me. As I entered my room, I went into a frantic search, darting my eyes around looking for anything that stuck out. First, I stared down at all my jewelry, looking for any interesting stories. *Nah too cliché.*

Next, I tried my stuffed animals, but I couldn't find any good stories in my brain. After searching around looking like a crazed detective for about an hour, my eyes finally landed on my bookshelf. I walked closer, examining all my journals, hoping one of these is worthy of being my object. The second I saw it, my hand reached out to touch it. My purple notebook.

I quickly grabbed it off my bookshelf and smiled. *This could be my object.* The front cover had fallen off many months ago, and the back cardboard was wrinkly and felt almost fuzzy to the touch. The metal spiral on the side had a big part of it sticking straight up in the air, so I had to be careful to not prick my finger. Inside the spiral an old red Tony Hawk pencil was stuck, the pencil I wrote my first song with.

I ran my fingers over the yellowing pages, and I opened it in excitement, careful not to let any of the loose pages that had been sticking out fall. The first thing I saw was my first song. As I read the words, the memories came flooding back. It was about 7 o'clock in the afternoon, and I had another one of my famous ear infections. I had been sick for a few days and my brain felt like mush.

While watching a musical on TV, I suddenly got inspiration to write what my eight-year-old self thought would be the greatest song ever. I practically jumped out of my bed and ran to my bookshelf, almost tripping over myself in excitement. "This is it," my brain screamed at me. "You're going to be the new Taylor Swift!" I hastily grabbed the first notebook I saw. It was purple, and I'd never written in it before.

I had it for about a year, yet it was in perfect condition. I turned around to my shelf and grabbed the first sharpened pencil I saw, a red Tony Hawk pencil. Backtracking to my bed, I opened my notebook and started writing. It took no longer than fifteen minutes to finish the song. I looked at my song and smiled, proud of myself for what I accomplished.

Now in the present, I shook my head at my younger self. *I used to be so happy.* I turned the pages, my smile faltering as my songs got darker and darker. I read all the words I wrote, every song meaning something completely different for each part of my life. I had fifteen songs, all of them spread out through a seven-year period of writing them.

Some songs were unfinished or just thoughts. I reread them over and over as if my whole life would change just by looking at these words. I turn to the worst of all my songs, "Broken Place." This time the memories hit me like a brick wall. I couldn't make sense of just one thought, all of them mashing together into one nightmare.

Medrano 3

I slid to the floor still clutching my notebook. I heard noises from the past echoing through my brain: yelling, crying, and hurtful words mocking me. "It wasn't your fault," I whispered to my younger self as if she could hear it. Every word on the page felt like a knife through the heart, edging me closer to a full-on panic attack. I saw the images in my head, glass shattering, a person hitting the floor, holes punched through the wall.

All at once my life started replaying in my brain, as if I was in a horror movie. I shook my head trying to get those thoughts away. My palms started sweating, tears filling up my eyes with a burning sensation as my breathing became more frantic. I closed the notebook, shutting off all those memories, I put my hands to my face, leaning against my bookshelf, taking slow breaths, and calming myself down. I looked down at the notebook, everything I ever knew was in my hands.

I flipped through it one last time, counting the teardrops, and realized this is what I wanted to write about. Even though it looks like trash and has a few bumps and bruises, it holds more about me than anyone would ever know. I slowly stood back up, picking up my notebook in the process. Putting one foot in front of the other, I walked back into the kitchen, holding my entire life in my hands.

Writing Narrative: Showing Your Story

We are a species that loves stories. From the first paintings on cave walls to the show you streamed last night, storytelling has always been at the center of how we communicate. So it makes sense that narrative—simple storytelling—is one of the most powerful tools you have as a writer. Telling a story is a great way to illustrate an idea, and it's one of the fastest ways to connect with a reader. People remember stories long after they've forgotten arguments.

But narrative asks something specific of you. To write it well, you have to set aside your idea of "the essay"—formal, stiff, distant—and pick up the tools of a storyteller instead. A story needs characters and actions. It needs a moment. Your job is not to summarize what happened; your job is to put your reader inside it.

Show, Don't Tell

You've probably heard this phrase before, and it's the single most important idea in this reading. "Showing" means recreating a moment in detail—sounds, sights, dialogue, movement—so the reader experiences it alongside you. "Telling" means summarizing it and moving on.

Here's telling:

I was going to the store when something happened.

That sentence reports an event. It doesn't put you anywhere. Now here's the same moment, shown:

Getting into the car, I made sure I had everything I needed: keys, cell phone, wallet. "Got it all," I said as I started the car and headed toward the store. I'd driven the route a hundred times before and wasn't paying much attention. I turned up the radio and hoped they were playing some good driving music. Outside, the sun was warming up the world after a cool fall night. There wasn't a lot of traffic, so I rolled down my window and let the fresh air in for the ride.

WHAP! My body jerked, the world started to spin, and then it became white.

It took a minute — no more than seconds, probably — for me to realize my car had been hit. As the air bag deflated, the white world I thought I'd been thrown into became a familiar world seen through cracked glass, splintered fiberglass, and metal. Strangely, all I could think about was the fact that I'd forgotten the grocery list on the counter at home.

Notice everything the second version does that the first one doesn't: specific objects (keys, cell phone, wallet), dialogue ("Got it all"), sound (WHAP!), sensory detail (the sun warming the air, the wind through the window), and an odd, human, specific thought in the middle of the crisis (the forgotten grocery list). That last detail is what makes it feel true. Nobody would invent "I was thinking about the grocery list" — real, lived moments are full of details like that, and they're exactly the kind of thing summary leaves out.

Your Toolkit for Showing

When you sit down to write a narrative moment, reach for these:

- Dialogue. Let people talk. Even a single line of dialogue — "Got it all" — does more to place a reader in a scene than a paragraph of explanation.
- Sensory and deep description. What did you see, hear, smell, feel, taste? Most writers default to sight and stop there. Push further. The cool fall air, the cracked glass, the smell of a grandmother's kitchen, the weight of an object in your hand — these are what make a scene three-dimensional instead of flat.
- Sound. Onomatopoeia — words that imitate sound, like WHAP, crash, hum, or click — can drop a reader straight into a moment in a way that description alone can't.
- Immediacy. Write as though the moment is happening close to you, almost as it unfolds, rather than from a great distance looking back. You don't need to switch verb tense to do this — you just need to slow down and stay inside the moment instead of summarizing it from far away.
- Specific, concrete nouns. "I grabbed my things" tells. "I grabbed my keys, my phone, my wallet" shows. Precision is what separates a scene you can picture from one you can't.

Slow Down

The most common mistake new narrative writers make is rushing. They know how the story ends, so they hurry to get there, skipping over the very details that would make it come alive.

Instead, slow down and move through the moment step by step. What happened first? What was seen, said, or done? Write that down simply. Then what happened next? And next? Good narrative isn't magic, and it doesn't require fancy language. At its best, it's simple, concrete, and specific — one true detail after another.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

The Summary Slide. “We had a great time at the lake that summer, and it was a day I’ll never forget.” This tells the reader how to feel instead of giving them a moment to feel it in. If you catch yourself writing a sentence like this, ask: what is the one specific moment from that day I actually remember? Start there instead.

The Missing Object. If you’re writing this narrative as part of your Emblem Essay, remember that your object needs to actually appear in the story — not just get mentioned once and disappear. As you tell the story, keep describing the object: what it looked like, how it felt in your hands, where it was in the scene.

The Rushed Ending. Writers often build a scene carefully and then wrap it up in a single rushed sentence. Give your ending moment the same care you gave the rest of the scene. A story earns its meaning through its details, not through a quick moral tacked on at the end.

Bringing This Into Your Prewriting

This is exactly the skill your Emblem Essay Prewriting 2 asks you to practice. You’ve already gathered a page of sensory details about your object in Prewriting 1. Now, instead of listing those details, you’ll set them inside a real, remembered moment — a specific time you used, received, broke, held, or thought about that object. As you tell that story, work the description in naturally: instead of describing the object separately from the story, let the reader see it the way you saw it in that moment.

Before you start writing, it can help to ask yourself:

- What is the one specific moment I remember most clearly with this object — not the general idea of it, but an actual scene?
- Where was I? Who else was there? What time of day, what season, what sounds were around me?
- Did anyone say anything I still remember?
- What did the object look like, feel like, sound like in that exact moment?

You don’t need the whole story of your relationship with the object. You need one true moment, told slowly and specifically enough that your reader can stand inside it with you.

The Bottom Line

Narrative isn’t decoration you add to an essay to make it more interesting — it’s a way of thinking that puts your reader inside an experience instead of just telling them about it. Slow down, use dialogue and sensory detail, keep your object in the frame, and trust the specific, true details of your own memory. That’s what turns “something happened” into a story your reader won’t forget.

Look for these tools and tips in the samples we read.

Student Sample: Generations of Polish

Davis 1

Deanna Davis

Professor Wood

English 1301

February 20, 2007

Generations of Polish

Walking into my mother's bedroom, the first thing that I always encounter, which takes me from memories of the past to thoughts of the future, is a dressing table that has been passed down for three generations. Originally, this hundred plus year old table belonged to my great grandmother; upon her death, it was then passed to my grandmother and upon her death, it became my mother's. Sitting at this table, which is slightly scarred and worn with age, I can close my eyes and inhale the strong scent of furniture polish and the faint smell of dusting powder of several generations that seems to be engrained within its dark brown wood. Opening my eyes, I see staring back at me, from the large etched mirrors, a reflection of several generations of women who came before me.

One of my first memories of the dressing table was when I was about four or five years old and was invited into my grandmother's bedroom. Upon entering my grandmother's bedroom, I felt privileged and was given the honor of being allowed to sit at her dressing table.

My grandmother asked, "Deanna, do you want your fingernails polished?"

I responded with the quickness that only an excited child can, "Oh Yes!" Surprisingly, I was also permitted to open one of the seven drawers this table offered as my grandmother allowed me to choose my polish color.

"Go ahead," she said, "and pick a color. The polish is in the middle drawer on the left side."

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Having taken several minutes making up my mind and being a small child who loved spending time with my grandmother, I replied, "Red, grandma, like yours." Sitting there at the table and watching my grandmother polish my nails with such patience and expertise, I kept sneaking glances of myself in the large etched mirror and felt like a glamorous movie star. Once my nails were dry I was once again given the privilege of being able to open another of the table's drawers.

"Let's put some lotion on your hands, it's in the bottom drawer" said my grandmother. The scent of that lotion, Jergins, smelled like my grandmother. Even though she has died, whenever I smell, even just get a whiff of that lotion, I automatically think of her.

Having been allowed to journey into two of the dressing tables drawers, I still wondered many times what was in the remaining drawers. With a child's vivid imagination, I speculated on what secrets lurked or what treasures were buried inside. Even with a child's curiosity, I knew not to venture into grandmother's bedroom without her as it would be disrespectful.

Now that the table is my mother's, when I go past her room, occasionally, for a second or two, I look toward the drawers and the same childish feelings arise and I wonder what treasures or secrets my mother has hidden in the drawers. Will these treasures and secrets be passed on to me one day as her mother passed them on to her? Maybe, but for now, I am quite content in being able to observe and admire this dressing table from afar. My own treasures and secrets will one day be placed into these drawers. However, I don't rush that moment, as when I receive this much loved and treasured table it will be bittersweet as it will signal that another generation has passed on and a new generation has been honored with receiving this precious piece of family history.

As my daughter gets older, she too has shared with her grandmother, my mother, the joy of

being invited into grandmother's bedroom and being allowed to sit at and venture into some of the drawers. My daughter exclaimed to me, "Mom, Grandma let me see some of her jewelry, it was really neat." I have shared the stories of my grandmother and what I used to think about the dressing table with my daughter. My daughter has also expressed some of the same things I have, "Mom, what does grandma have in those drawers?" I simply reply, "Probably her treasures. You know your grandmother, she always has neat things in her drawers."

Surprisingly, my daughter responded, "Mom, when you are a grandma, will you polish my kids' fingernails?"

Immediately, I replied "Yes, and I will make sure that I always have a bottle of Jergins hand lotion."

In talking with my mom and daughter about this dressing table and bringing up stories about the table from the past, my daughter realized that being my only daughter, she would one day inherit the dressing table. After spending some time in her room, my daughter excitedly came out with a long, detailed list of treasures that she wanted to put in the drawers when the table becomes hers. Suddenly, with a look of shock and teary eyes, my daughter said, "Mom, when the table is mine, does that mean you will be dead?"

It took me a moment, and I quietly replied, "Yes."

She then stated, through tears, "Then I don't want the table, and I hope that you don't get the table for a long, long time"

With tear filled eyes, I too replied, "Me too, Jessica, Me too."

For most people, this table would just look like an ordinary old table, but to the women in our family, this table is a representation of history, togetherness and the simpler times that the older generation spent, one on one, with the younger generation. Though I don't rush the

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moment, I look forward to the days when I can sit with my granddaughter(s) and share tales of polish and time.

Getting and Giving Feedback

No writer improves alone in a room. Every writer you admire—the novelist, the journalist, the person who wrote the workbook you're reading right now—has handed their work to other people and asked, in one way or another, "Does this work? What am I missing?" Workshop day exists because that exchange is one of the fastest ways to grow as a writer. But getting and giving feedback well is a skill, not an instinct, and it's worth slowing down to think about before you walk into class with your draft.

Why Getting Feedback Is Harder Than It Sounds

Most students already know they're supposed to get feedback. Fewer actually do it, and even fewer do it well. That's usually not laziness—it's discomfort. Handing someone a page about your grandmother's kitchen table, or a paragraph you've built an argument around, feels like handing them a piece of yourself, and it's easy to brace for the response like it's a verdict on your ability rather than a comment on a few paragraphs.

Here's the reframe worth holding onto: **a reader responding to your draft is evaluating the writing, not you.** A comment like "this paragraph loses me" or "I can't quite picture this scene" is information about that paragraph on that day—not a statement about whether you're a capable writer. Every writer gets that kind of note. The difference between writers who improve quickly and writers who stall out usually isn't talent; it's whether they can hear "this isn't working yet" without hearing "you're not good at this."

The other thing that trips people up is vagueness. Handing someone a draft and asking "is this good?" is one of the least useful questions you can ask, because it invites an equally vague answer ("yeah, looks fine!") that doesn't help you at all. You'll get far more out of a session—whether it's with a classmate, a tutor, or me—if you can name what you're actually unsure about: "I don't think this scene actually shows what the sweater meant to me—I think I'm just telling you." "I'm not sure my thesis matches where the essay ends up." "I don't think my ending earns the moment; it feels rushed." "I'm not sure this source actually supports my point." Specific questions get specific, usable answers.

It also helps to remember that what you need from feedback changes depending on where you are in the process. Early on, you need someone to tell you whether your idea holds together at all—or, if you're deep in the Emblem Essay, whether you've even landed on the right moment to tell. In a rough draft, you need to know whether a scene actually puts your reader in the room with you, whether your evidence actually proves your point, and whether a reader can follow your organization. Late in

the process, you're looking for sentence-level clarity and error patterns, not big structural rethinking. Asking for the right kind of feedback at the right stage saves everyone time.

Using Your Professional Support

Here's a mindset shift that will serve you well beyond this class: asking for help from the people whose job it is to help you isn't a workaround or a sign you're behind—it's professional behavior.

Writing Center coaches, tutors, and librarians are trained, and in most cases paid, specifically to support your learning. They are not busy people you're inconveniencing; helping you is the actual job. That's true of a tutor sitting in the Writing Center waiting for someone to walk in, and it's true of a reference librarian who would genuinely rather help you track down a good source than watch you struggle with a database for forty-five minutes. Treating these resources as a normal, expected part of how you work—not a last resort for students who are "struggling"—is exactly the instinct that serves people well in a career. The professionals who advance fastest in almost any field aren't the ones who never need help; they're the ones who know how to identify what they need, find the right person to ask, and use that person's time well.

That last part matters. Using professional support well looks a lot like using peer feedback well: come with something specific. Walking into the Writing Center with "can you check my paper?" gets a much thinner session than walking in with "I want to talk through whether my counterargument paragraph actually strengthens my position." Bring your draft. Bring the assignment sheet. Bring one or two real questions. You'll walk out with something you can use, and you'll have practiced a habit—showing up prepared to a meeting with someone whose time you're asking for—that has nothing to do with English class and everything to do with how you'll operate in almost any job you hold.

Giving Feedback: The Other Half of the Skill

Workshop only works if the feedback moving around the room is actually useful, which means giving good feedback is just as much a skill as asking for it.

Vague praise doesn't help anyone. "This is good" or "I liked it" feels nice for about ten seconds and then leaves the writer with nothing to do. Vague criticism is worse—"this is confusing" without saying *where* or *why* just hands someone your discomfort without giving them a way to fix it. Useful feedback is specific and points to something in the actual text: "I got lost in this paragraph because I couldn't tell whose idea this was—yours or the source's." "Your introduction promises an

argument about X, but the essay ends up arguing Y—which one is it?" Point at real places in the draft. Say what you noticed, not just how you felt.

It also helps to remember that you're responding as a reader, not correcting as an editor. Your job in workshop isn't to rewrite your classmate's sentences or make the essay sound like something you would have written. It's to tell them honestly what happened in your head as you read it—where you were with them, where you lost the thread, where you wanted more. That's a skill you'll use constantly outside of this class too: giving a coworker useful, specific, honest feedback on their work—without either sugarcoating it into uselessness or delivering it in a way that shuts them down—is one of the more valuable things a colleague can do for another colleague.

The Responsibility That Comes With It

There's a part of workshop that doesn't get talked about enough: when someone hands you their draft, especially a personal narrative like the Emblem Essay, they're handing you something real. That story about a grandmother's kitchen, a car accident, a hand-me-down sweater—that's not a hypothetical example. It's somebody's actual life, and they've chosen to trust the room with it.

That trust comes with an obligation. What gets shared in workshop stays in workshop. You don't repeat a classmate's personal story to other people, you don't bring it up as gossip, and you don't joke about it later, even if it wasn't said as a secret. This isn't just basic kindness—it's the same instinct behind professional confidentiality in almost any field that works with people's personal information or experiences: you don't get to use someone else's story as your own material just because they let you read it. Respecting someone's story means treating it as theirs, responding to the writing they gave you, and letting the story stay where they put it—on the page, in the room, between the people they chose to share it with.

Bottom Line

Feedback is one of the most powerful tools you have as a writer, but it only works if you can ask for it clearly, receive it without flinching, give it honestly and specifically, and treat what other people trust you with as something worth protecting. Learn to do all four, and you'll leave this class with more than a better essay—you'll have a set of habits that will serve you in every writing situation, and every working relationship, that comes after it.

For more on this topic, see the UNC Writing Center's guide, [Getting Feedback](#), which goes into more depth on when and from whom to seek response at different stages of a project.

Emblem Essay Conferences

During conference time, you and I will meet once during your scheduled conference time in my office. Otherwise, you will be working online. Work through the things listed for homework over the course of the weeks. Please do not leave these until the end of conferences; you won't like yourself as much if you do.

You have free class time, so use that time to do the work. Notes and any assignments during this time will be due when we come back from conference.

For Your Conference

- ☐ What to bring: Bring your Bluebook with your prewritings and a PRINTED essay draft. We'll chat about it. I have snacks and stickers!
- ☐ Where we meet: My office, Room 1101. If you can't find it, ask someone—but also, follow the ninjas.
- ☐ Attendance at conference time counts as attendance for the other days of class during conference time.
- ☐ Your Schedule: Check your scheduled time on Blackboard.
- ☐ If you must reschedule: Notify me by email or text. Let me know what other times work for you.

General To Do List

- ☐ Do all READ|WATCH items on the schedule and take notes on them. Those are due when we return after conferences.
- ☐ Work on refining your Emblem Essay before and after our conference. The final is due when we return to class.
- ☐ Attend one of the TM Library Information Orientations scheduled during our class times. See [Blackboard](#) for the schedule. This counts as attendance and participation, so take notes!
- ☐ Work on your Summary Response/Library Assignment

Critical Reading Strategies

Critical reading means engaging actively with a text rather than passively absorbing information. It involves questioning, analyzing, and evaluating what you read.

Three Levels of Reading

- **Scanning:** Quick look to get the gist. Look at titles, headings, first sentences of paragraphs. Takes 2-5 minutes.
- **Skimming:** Faster reading to understand main points. Read introductions and conclusions fully, skim body paragraphs. Takes 10-15 minutes.
- **Close Reading:** Careful, detailed reading. Annotate, question, analyze. Takes as long as needed.

The CRAAP Test for Source Evaluation

- **Currency:** When was it published? Is it current enough for your topic?
- **Relevance:** Does it relate to your topic? Who is the intended audience?
- **Authority:** Who wrote it? What are their credentials?
- **Accuracy:** Is the information supported by evidence? Can you verify it?
- **Purpose:** Why does this source exist? Is it trying to sell, persuade, inform, or entertain?

Annotation Strategies

- Underline or highlight key points (but not everything!)
- Write questions in the margins
- Note connections to other sources
- Mark things you agree or disagree with
- Summarize paragraphs in your own words

Active reading takes more time upfront but saves time later when you're writing.

Writing Summaries and Synthesizing Sources

This reading is adapted from Chapter 5 of *A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing* by Melanie Gagich, Yvonne Bruce, and Svetlana Zhuravlova (Cleveland State University), licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, and "How to Write a Summary" from the University of Washington Odegaard Writing & Research Center.

Central Topics

- Summary = Condensing ONE source accurately and objectively in your own words.
- Synthesis = Combining ideas from MULTIPLE sources to create new understanding.
- Informative Synthesis = Synthesis that explains WITHOUT arguing for a particular position.

Part 1: Writing Summaries

What is a Summary?

A summary is a comprehensive and objective restatement of the main ideas of a text. Whether you're summarizing an article, book, video, or event, the goal is the same: to capture the essential points in your own words while remaining faithful to the original meaning.

Mastering the craft of summarizing prepares you for success across your college career not just in English classes. In science courses, you'll summarize lab results. In social sciences, you'll summarize theories before applying them. In nearly every field, the ability to condense information accurately and briefly is a critical skill.

Qualities of a Good Summary

When writing a summary, keep these three qualities in mind:

- **Neutrality:** Avoid inserting your opinion or interpreting the original text's content. Do not use evaluative language (good, bad, effective, interesting, boring, etc.). Keep "I" out of the summary and write in third person ("the author," "she argues," "they explain").
- **Brevity:** A summary should be significantly shorter than the original generally no more than 10-15% of the original length. Highlight the most important information while leaving out unnecessary details.
- **Independence:** The summary should make sense to someone who has not read the original source. Your reader should be able to understand the main content and organization of the original from your summary alone.

How to Write a Summary: Step by Step

Preparing to Write:

1. Skim the text, noting the subheadings or natural sections. Consider why you have been assigned this text and what type of text it is.
2. Read the text carefully, highlighting important information and taking notes.
3. In your own words, write down the main points of each section.
4. Write down the key supporting points for the main topic, but do not include minor details.
5. Review and revise as needed.

Writing the Summary:

- The summary should cover the original as a whole.
- Present the material in a neutral fashion.
- Write a condensed version in your own words.
- Do not include anything that does not appear in the original (no personal comments or evaluation).
- Always identify your source: introduce the author's name and the title of the work.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

It can be tempting to focus only on ideas that support a point you want to make, or to ignore ideas that don't. This approach has two significant problems:

- It misrepresents the original text, misleading your reader about what the source actually says.
- It undermines your own credibility. If readers cannot trust you to accurately represent source information, they may not trust your own arguments either.

Part 2: Synthesizing Sources

What is Synthesis?

To synthesize is to combine ideas from multiple sources and create a completely new understanding. That new understanding becomes the conclusion you have drawn from your reading. This is the true beauty of research: it causes us to weigh ideas, compare, judge, think, and explore and then arrive at insights we hadn't known before.

Think of synthesis like a conversation you're hosting among your sources. You set the goal for the discussion, organize who speaks and when, guide the conversation, and draw conclusions based on what everyone has contributed.

What Synthesis is NOT

- Not just summarizing everyone's opinion: "Author A says this, Author B says that, and Author C disagrees." This is a list, not synthesis.
- Not critiquing opinions: "Rick tried to defend his position, but everyone knows he's wrong." This is judgment, not synthesis.
- Not simply comparing texts: You are not evaluating which author wrote more effectively. You are connecting their ideas.
- Not just using sources for quotes: Sources aren't decorations you stick on your essay. They're voices in a conversation you're leading.

What Synthesis IS

Synthesis demonstrates YOUR full, objective understanding of a topic from multiple perspectives. When you synthesize, you "cook" the ideas of others by thinking, talking, and writing about them. What comes out is a dish full of many blended flavors but uniquely your recipe.

For example, instead of hiding behind limited positions like "You can't change the law!" or "Ban everything!", a synthesis tries to depict hard reality: complex topics involve competing values, and understanding them requires examining multiple viewpoints without simply picking a side.

Part 3: Looking for Patterns Across Sources

This is where synthesis gets real and where most students struggle at first. When you read multiple sources, you're not just collecting quotes. You're looking for patterns.

Why Patterns Matter

Here's a truth that extends far beyond college writing: one source saying something isn't proof of anything. Multiple credible sources pointing to the same thing? That's significant.

When researchers, experts, or writers from different backgrounds independently arrive at similar conclusions, that repeatability tells us something important. It suggests we're looking at something real not just one person's opinion or one flawed study.

This is how knowledge actually works. Scientists don't trust a finding until it's been replicated. Journalists don't run a story based on a single anonymous source. Doctors don't change treatment protocols because of one patient's experience. Looking for confirmation across multiple sources is a fundamental skill for navigating information.

What to Look For

Agreement across sources: When three different researchers point to the same problem, or multiple articles cite the same statistics, that convergence matters. It doesn't mean they're all right, but it means this idea has been tested, examined, and found worth discussing by multiple people.

In your writing: "Multiple researchers have identified screen time as a factor in adolescent sleep disruption. Smith (2022) found that teens who use phones before bed sleep an average of 45 minutes less, a finding consistent with earlier research by Jones (2019) and the CDC's 2021 report on teen health."

Disagreement between sources: When sources contradict each other, ask why. Is one source older? Less credible? Looking at a different population? Sometimes disagreement reveals genuine complexity. Other times, it reveals an outlier.

In your writing: "While most researchers connect social media use with increased anxiety, Chen (2023) argues that the relationship is more complex, noting that teens who use social media primarily for close friendships show no elevated anxiety levels. This suggests the type of use matters more than the amount."

Themes that emerge across different examples: Sometimes your sources aren't talking about the exact same thing, but they're circling the same underlying idea. A story about phone addiction, a study about attention spans, and an article about classroom management might all point to the same theme: technology is reshaping how we focus.

In your writing: "Whether discussing attention spans (Brown 2021), workplace productivity (Martinez 2022), or educational outcomes (Williams 2020), researchers consistently return to one theme: constant connectivity comes with cognitive costs."

Why This Matters Beyond This Class

We live in an age of hot takes. Someone posts a scary headline, it goes viral, and suddenly everyone is panicking without anyone asking: Is this a pattern, or a one-time thing? Is this confirmed by other sources, or is it just one study? One person's experience? One journalist's interpretation?

Learning to look for repeatability protects you from being manipulated by:

- Single alarming studies that haven't been replicated
- Anecdotes presented as trends ("I knew someone who...")

- Outliers treated as the norm (the rare exception becoming "proof")
- Confirmation bias (only seeing sources that agree with what you already believe)

When you write a synthesis essay, you're practicing exactly this skill: looking at multiple sources, finding the patterns, and drawing reasonable conclusions based on the weight of evidence not on whoever shouted loudest.

Practical Tips for Finding Patterns

1. After reading each source, write one sentence about its main point. When you line these up, patterns become visible.
2. Look for repeated statistics, names, or studies. If three sources all cite the same research, that research is probably foundational to this topic.
3. Notice when sources use different examples to make the same point. That's convergence and it strengthens your synthesis.
4. Pay attention to what's NOT said. If most sources focus on teens but ignore adults, that gap is worth noting.
5. Ask: "What would someone need to believe to accept this?" If your sources share underlying assumptions, name them.

Part 4: Informative Synthesis

In informative synthesis, you explain the discussion points and topics to your readers without taking a position. Even if the topic is debatable, instead of promoting your personal opinion, you objectively introduce the ideas of others and show how their information relates.

Key principles:

- Show how information from different sources connects and where it diverges.
- Do not show agreement or disagreement with any author.
- Stay neutral in your comments AND in your conclusions.
- Your conclusion should summarize what the sources show us about the topic, not what you think should happen.

Example neutral conclusion: "The question of whether regulations should change lies in the hands of policymakers and the communities most affected."

Notice how this conclusion doesn't say what should happen it summarizes the situation and identifies who will make the decision.

Steps for Writing Informative Synthesis

- 1. Determine your focus.** What aspect of the topic are you exploring? What question are you trying to answer?
- 2. Read for patterns.** As you read each source, note: What's the main point? What evidence is used? How does this connect to other sources?
- 3. Organize by theme,** not by source. Group ideas that belong together, even if they come from different sources.
- 4. Lead the conversation.** Decide which ideas to present first, how sources should "talk" to each other, and what conclusions emerge.
- 5. Stay neutral.** Report what the sources say and show. Don't argue for what should happen.
- 6. Draw conclusions from patterns.** Your conclusion should reflect what you learned from examining multiple sources the agreements, the disagreements, the gaps, and the implications.

Reflections Assignment

Overview

After each major writing assignment, you will complete a reflection on your writing experience. This is not busywork—it is how you actually learn from what you have done. Writers who reflect on their process improve faster than those who just move on to the next thing.

You will complete three reflections this semester—one for each major essay: the Emblem Essay, the Informative Synthesis Essay, and the Argument Essay.

What I'm Actually Looking For

I want to hear YOUR voice telling me the real story of writing this essay. Not a formal report. Not a list of generic observations. I want the specific, messy, human truth of what happened.

The difference between a weak reflection and a strong one:

Weak (too vague):	Strong (specific and real):
<i>"The Writing Center helped me improve my essay."</i>	<i>"Joe at the Writing Center raised an eyebrow at my semicolon and asked if I really needed it there. I didn't."</i>
<i>"The prewriting was helpful for organizing my ideas."</i>	<i>"I had been stuck for two days. Then I hit the question about smell in Prewriting 2, and I wrote 'like my mom's kitchen' without even thinking. That was the whole essay, right there in five words."</i>
<i>"I struggled with finding the right thesis."</i>	<i>"I remember struggling with my thesis, downing two cans of A&W root beer and thinking to myself, 'How do I put this?'"</i>

Notice how the strong examples include **specific people, specific moments, specific details**. They sound like a person telling a story, not a robot generating a report. I would far prefer, and will reward, this being more conversational—you just telling me about your experience—than perfectly refined grammar. Yes, if you're doing the slideshow you should spell check, but if the wording isn't naturally you, it misses the point and won't score points.

Format

Record a **4-6 minute video** where you talk directly to the camera about your writing experience. This is just you, talking to me about what happened.

You will need to make notes on the 4 questions below, then you can use those notes as you share your thoughts with me. Do not just read your notes to me. Talk to me.

Video Requirements:

- Address all four core questions (see below)
- You can show your screen with your work as you talk, but it's not required
- You need to mostly show yourself—this is about you talking to me.
- Outline your thoughts before recording—don't wing it
- Include your AI disclosure statement at the end
- Make sure your video is on [OneDrive](#)
- Get the **share link** to turn in on [Blackboard](#). (Make sure you share with me!!! It's not turned in if I can't watch it.)

Videos to help you make your video:

- [My video about recording and sharing from Stream on OneDrive](#)
- [Distance Education's video about using Yuja on Blackboard](#)

The Four Core Questions

For each question, show specific evidence from your work and explain what it reveals about your learning. Tell me the *story* of what happened—include details like when and where you were working, who helped you, what you were thinking and feeling.

1. What Went Well?

Celebrate your successes. Show me a part of your process or final essay that you feel good about.

Think about:

- Which prewriting activities actually helped? Show me the specific moment something clicked.
- What section of your final essay are you most proud of? Quote it and tell me why.
- What feedback from peers, the Writing Center, or conferences made a real difference?
- Was there a breakthrough moment when something finally made sense?

Example of strong specificity: *"I rewrote this paragraph like four times. My first versions kept trying to pick a 'winner'—like one expert was right and the others were wrong. Then during our conference, Professor Wood asked 'What if the disagreement IS the point?' and something clicked."*

2. What Was Challenging?

Be honest about the difficulties you faced. Show me where you struggled.

Think about:

- Which parts of the assignment were harder than expected? What made them hard?
- Where did you get stuck or feel frustrated? Show that section.
- What was happening in your life that affected your writing process?
- Which requirements or concepts confused you at first?

Example of strong specificity: *"I'm embarrassed to admit this, but I actually had to watch a YouTube walkthrough of someone playing the LeapFrog games because I'd forgotten so many details. Watching that video, I felt a wash of shame: How had I let these memories fade?"*

3. What Helped You Work Through Difficulties?

Analyze your problem-solving. What got you unstuck?

Think about:

- How did you move past challenges or writer's block?
- What resources helped most? Name specific people and describe what they said or did.
- Was there a conversation that changed how you thought about your essay?
- Did a breakthrough happen somewhere unexpected—in the shower, making dinner, talking to a friend?

Example of strong specificity: *"My biggest breakthrough happened in the kitchen. I left our conference pondering the 'significance' question, and that night while making mac and cheese, a picture of little me caught my eye on the fridge door. It dawned on me that we were not different people—what was special to her was special to me."*

4. How will you Improve?

Set concrete, actionable goals for your next essay. Be specific—"try harder" is not a plan.

Think about:

- What specific skills do you want to develop?
- What changes will you make to your writing process?
- Which resources will you use more intentionally—and how?
- What practical steps will you take?

Example of strong specificity: *"Next time I want to go to the Writing Center EARLY, not the day before. I waited until my draft was 'done' to get help, but by then I was too attached to change anything. I'm going after my first messy draft, when I can still see it fresh."*

****Final Essay Reflection:**

Your final reflection at the end of the semester should include a bit of looking back over the semester and acknowledging how far you come and what you know you need to work on as you move forward.

What If You Didn't Do the Essay?

If you didn't turn in the essay, you can still do a reflection. Take some time and really think about what kept you from getting it done. Was it life stuff? What things have you managed and gotten in order, and what things do you need to work on? Can

you change them or do you need to learn to work around them? Was it time management? Where did you get distracted? What by? What things can you do for yourself—very concrete achievable things, specific actions—that will help you.

How are you going to be forgiving of yourself and the bumps in life and shake this off to move forward and improve? Name two or three things—again, specific and concrete—that you can do as we move on to the next essay.

Be you, acknowledge when life gave you the hit, but also be honest when the issues were yours. It's only through being thoughtful and straightforward with yourself that you can improve. Remember, the mistake isn't a failure—not making plans to do better is. Just make those plans little—baby steps, they'll get you moving.

Tips for Success

1. **Use your voice.** This is not a formal essay. Talk to me like you would in a conference. If it sounds robotic or overly formal, it probably is and won't be doing its job.
2. **Be specific.** Include names of people who helped you, times and places you were working, what you were thinking and feeling. "That Wednesday morning after biology class" is better than "one day."
3. **Show your evidence.** Screenshots, quotes, images of your marked-up draft—anything that proves you are reflecting on your actual work, not just making generic claims.
4. **Be honest.** Authentic reflection leads to genuine growth. It is okay to admit what did not work well. I would rather read an honest "I procrastinated and it hurt my essay" than a fake "Everything went smoothly."
5. **Connect challenges to solutions.** If you struggled with something, your Plans should address it. The reflection should tell a coherent story.
6. **Include the messy parts.** The best reflections include real-life details—LASIK surgery throwing off your schedule, falling behind on other classes, having a breakthrough while making mac and cheese. Your life affects your writing.

Using AI Ethically

You may use AI as a thinking partner, but the reflection must be authentically yours.

DO:

- Ask AI to help you brainstorm questions to ask yourself
- Ask for feedback on your ideas: "Does this make sense?"
- Use AI to help you be more specific: "How can I explain this more clearly?"

DO NOT:

- Ask AI to write your reflection for you
- Copy AI responses without adding your own thoughts
- Use AI to generate experiences you did not actually have

Required AI Disclosure

Include a statement about AI use on your final slide or at the end of your video.

Examples:

No AI used: *"I did not use any AI tools for this reflection."*

Simple AI help: *"I used ChatGPT to help me brainstorm questions to ask myself. All experiences and reflections are my own."*

More extensive help: *"I used Claude to help me organize my thoughts and asked for feedback on clarity. I wrote my ideas first, then revised based on suggestions. All experiences are my own."*

Submission Instructions

- **Due date:** See schedule.
- **Go to the Blackboard Assignment** for the Specific Essay Reflection
- **Paste the Share link in the submission box.** Remember, it's good form and common courtesy to put in a few words.
 - *MAKE SURE YOU HAVE SET THE LINK TO SHARE WITH ME.*
 - [My video about recording and sharing from Stream on OneDrive](#)

Grading Criteria

This reflection develops three critical General Education Outcomes foundational for college success: Personal Responsibility, Inquiry & Analysis (Critical Inquiry), and — in its content, not its mechanics — Written Communication.

Criteria	What I'm Looking For
Authentic Voice <i>GEO Focus: Personal Responsibility (accountability, ethical decision-making)</i>	Does this sound like you? Is your AI disclosure accurate and honest?
Depth of Reflection <i>GEO Focus: Inquiry & Analysis (moving from observation to insight)</i>	Do you move beyond surface observations to genuine insight about your process?
Evidence & Specificity <i>GEO Focus: Written Communication (clarity, specificity, audience awareness — content only)</i>	Do you show actual work and include specific details (names, times, places, feelings) that communicate your experience clearly?
Honest Self-Assessment <i>GEO Focus: Personal Responsibility (honest accountability for your own performance)</i>	Do you thoughtfully consider both strengths and areas for growth?
Actionable Planning <i>GEO Focus: Inquiry & Analysis (reasoning from evidence to a plan)</i>	Are your improvement goals realistic, specific, and logically connected to the challenges you identified?

Grading Scale

- **A (90–100%):** Sophisticated reflection — strong Inquiry & Analysis (genuine insight, not just description), well-developed content in your Written

Communication (specific, vivid evidence and detail), and full Personal Responsibility (honest self-assessment paired with concrete, actionable plans).

- **B (80–89%):** Good reflection — some depth of insight (Inquiry & Analysis), adequate evidence and detail (Written Communication), and reasonable plans mostly connected to your challenges (Personal Responsibility). This represents solid, developing college-level work.
- **C (70–79%):** Basic reflection that addresses the requirements but doesn't yet push into real analysis — it lacks the depth or specificity that shows genuine Inquiry & Analysis at work.
- **D/F (Below 70%):** Superficial, missing requirements, or clearly not your own work — a breakdown in Personal Responsibility (the accountability and honesty this reflection depends on).

Remember: This reflection is where personal responsibility, inquiry, and communication skills you're building all semester come together — the polish matters less here than the honesty of the thinking behind it.

**Remember: This reflection is about YOUR learning and growth.
Questions? Ask during class or come by and talk to me in my office!**

Our Connected Society: An Introduction

Think about the last hour before you fell asleep last night, and the first hour after you woke up this morning. How much of that time ran through a screen? An alarm that also showed you texts and headlines. A weather app before you picked out clothes. A group chat, a playlist, a map to get to class, a login for the course where you're reading this. None of that probably struck you as remarkable. That's the point. We don't live near technology anymore—we live inside a web of it, and it's woven in so evenly that most of the time we stop noticing it's there at all.

This unit asks you to notice it again, on purpose, from a few different angles.

What "Connected" Actually Means

"Connected" doesn't just mean "we all have phones." It means that an enormous number of the systems you rely on—school, work, money, relationships, entertainment, even your sense of what's happening in the world—now run through networks that talk to each other constantly, often without you doing anything at all. Your phone knows where you are. Your streaming service knows what you watch. Your social media feed has already decided, before you open the app, roughly what it thinks will keep you scrolling. Increasingly, AI tools like ChatGPT are woven into that same web—drafting, answering, and sometimes thinking alongside us, or for us.

None of that is inherently sinister. It's just the architecture of daily life now, built up gradually, one convenient feature at a time, until stepping fully outside of it would mean rebuilding how you do almost everything.

Where This Unit Is Headed

Over the next couple of weeks, you'll read and watch a set of sources that each look at one piece of this connected life up close: what phones are doing to attention in classrooms, what AI tools might be doing to how we think, how sociologists talk about the symbols, values, and norms that shape a society, what it means to feel close to someone—an influencer, a streamer, even an AI assistant—who doesn't actually know you exist, and a short story that imagines where some of this could be headed. Individually, each source zooms in on one narrow question. Your job across the unit is to start noticing where they overlap, where they disagree, and what pattern starts to emerge when you step back and look at all of them together. That pattern-finding is exactly what your informative synthesis essay will ask you to do.

How Deep the Wiring Goes

Here's something worth sitting with before you start reading: for most people, opting out isn't really available anymore, not in any complete way. You can put your phone in a drawer for an afternoon, and that's genuinely worth doing sometimes. But your financial aid, your class registration, your grades, your work schedule, your doctor's

portal, your family group chat, the directions to a job interview—all of that lives online now, often in places that assume you'll check them regularly and respond quickly. A generation ago, "unplugging" meant turning off the TV. Today it would mean, for most of us, becoming much harder to reach by the people and institutions we actually depend on.

That's worth understanding clearly, because it changes the question. The interesting question usually isn't "should I just disconnect?"—for most people, that's not a real option. The more useful questions are: What is this doing to me that I'm not noticing? What am I trading for the convenience? And where do I actually have some choice, even inside a system I can't fully step outside of?

It's Not All Bad

It would be easy for this unit to tip into one long complaint about technology, especially once you start reading pieces that are openly critical of phones, AI, or parasocial attachment. Resist that pull. Being connected has also made things possible that simply weren't possible before, and a lot of those things are genuinely good.

Families separated by distance—including many of your own, whether that distance is across a state or across a border—can see each other's faces and hear each other's voices for free, any day of the week. Someone studying at odd hours around a job and kids can take a class, use a library database, or get tutoring help without ever setting foot on campus. Translation tools let people navigate paperwork, doctor's visits, and school forms in a second language with far less friction than a generation ago. People who are isolated by disability, geography, or circumstance can find community and support online that their physical surroundings never offered them. Emergency alerts, ride coordination, job listings, mutual aid during a crisis—all of it moves faster and reaches further because we're wired together.

The goal of this unit isn't to convince you technology is good or bad. It's to get you looking closely enough that you can hold both truths at the same time, because that's what's actually true.

Reading With Both Eyes Open

As you move through the sources in this unit, try reading with two questions running at once: *What is this source worried about, and is that worry fair?* and *What is this source leaving out or underselling?* A piece arguing that phones are destroying attention spans in classrooms is probably not going to spend much time on the student using their phone to translate an assignment or check on a sick parent. A piece celebrating how AI assistants make life easier isn't going to dwell on what gets lost when a machine starts finishing your sentences for you. Neither source is lying to

you. Each one is just looking at one part of a much bigger picture, which is exactly why you're reading several of them instead of just one.

That's also, not coincidentally, the whole point of an informative synthesis essay: not to hand your reader a verdict, but to show them what a range of credible voices actually reveal when you put them side by side. Come to each reading ready to take it seriously—and ready to notice what it isn't telling you.

Integration Strategies for Different Source Types

Stories and Literature

- **Focus on themes:** How do the story's themes illuminate your topic?
- **Character analysis:** What do characters' behaviors reveal about your issue?
- **Historical context:** How does the time period of the story relate to your topic?

Example Integration: *Bradbury's 1951 story about a future where people can't think for themselves predicted what modern researchers call "algorithmic conformity," where computer programs slowly limit what kinds of information people see (Wilson 45).*

Songs and Music

- **Lyrical content:** What do the words explicitly say about your topic?
- **Cultural moment:** What was happening culturally when this song was popular?
- **Audience:** Who was this song written for and what does that reveal?

Example Integration: *The popularity of songs about feeling overwhelmed by technology, like "Digital Age" by Arcade Fire, shows what survey research also found: that 68% of adults say they feel "overwhelmed by technology" in their daily lives (Pew Research Center 23).*

Memes and Social Media

- **Humor analysis:** What assumptions does the humor depend on?
- **Viral spread:** Why did this particular content resonate widely?
- **Cultural commentary:** What social critique is embedded in the humor?

Example Integration: *The viral meme "This is Fine" became popular during 2016-2017, around the same time that researchers started documenting higher anxiety levels related to getting too much information online (Martinez 78). The fact that this meme spread so widely suggests that lots of people recognized the feeling of trying to cope when everything feels overwhelming, which matches what academic studies call "avoidance behaviors" in response to too much digital information.*

Advertisements

- **Persuasive techniques:** What specific tactics are being used?
- **Target audience:** Who is this trying to reach?
- **Cultural values:** What assumptions does the ad make about society?

Example Integration: *Apple's 1984 Super Bowl advertisement promised that personal computers would help people think for themselves instead of just following the crowd. But current research suggests that digital platforms might actually make people think more alike through the way computer programs filter information (Thompson 134). This difference between what Apple promised and what actually happened shows us how technology doesn't always work the way companies say it will.*

Sample Integration in Context

Here's how a complete paragraph might look integrating multiple sources:

The tension between being connected online and feeling lonely in real life appears in both research studies and popular culture. Dr. Sarah Johnson's study found that "increased social media usage correlates with decreased face-to-face social interaction" among college students (Johnson 89). This research finding makes sense when we look at cultural examples like Ray Bradbury's "The Pedestrian," where the main character gets arrested for the "crime" of walking alone and thinking by himself (Bradbury 5). The story shows a world where thinking independently is seen as wrong, which connects to what researchers now call the "social validation loop" that keeps users constantly checking their phones for likes and comments (Martinez and Webb 67). Both the research and Bradbury's story suggest that our technologies might be changing not just how we talk to each other, but how we think about being alone.

Final Tips for Success

1. **Choose sources that truly illuminate your topic**—don't force connections
2. **Maintain academic tone** even when discussing popular culture
3. **Analyze, don't just describe**—explain why the source matters
4. **Balance is key**—your non-traditional source should complement, not overwhelm, your academic sources
5. **Context matters**—always explain why you're including non-traditional material
6. **Stay focused on synthesis**—show how all your sources (traditional and non-traditional) relate to each other

Conclusion

Non-traditional sources, when used thoughtfully, can bridge the gap between academic research and lived cultural experience. They help demonstrate that the issues you're writing about matter beyond the classroom and have real impact on how people understand and navigate the world. By integrating these sources carefully and analytically, you show sophisticated thinking about how academic concepts manifest in everyday culture.

Remember: The goal of your Informative Synthesis Essay is to help readers understand your topic more deeply. Non-traditional sources should serve this goal by providing cultural context, alternative perspectives, or compelling illustrations of academic concepts—not by replacing rigorous analysis with entertainment.

Before You Read “A History of Panic Over Entertainment Technology”

This article has a title that can trick you if you're not paying attention. A moral panic happens when society gets extremely worried that something—usually something new—is destroying young people or civilization itself. As you read, keep asking yourself: Are Ferguson and Faye saying we **SHOULD** panic about technology, or are they saying something else?

As you read, look for these details and make notes on them:

1. According to the authors, what happened when the Surgeon General studied TV violence in the 1970s?
2. The authors mention that over 230 scholars wrote to the American Psychological Association. What were those scholars asking the APA to do, and why?
3. Ferguson and Faye discuss several technologies that caused panic over the decades. List at least three of them. What technologies or new things are people panicking over today? List a few things.
4. What do the authors say is the problem with how research findings get turned into news headlines?
5. In your own words, what is the authors' main argument?

Integrating Non-Traditional Sources in Academic Writing

Introduction

In your Informative Synthesis Essay, you're allowed to use one non-traditional source alongside your college-level academic sources. These can include stories, songs, memes, advertisements, or poems that relate to your topic about our connected society. This guide will show you how to integrate these sources effectively and academically.

What Counts as a Non-Traditional Source?

Non-traditional sources include:

- Short stories or excerpts from novels
- Song lyrics or music videos
- Memes or viral social media content
- Advertisements (print, video, or audio)
- Poems or spoken word pieces
- Art installations or visual art
- Popular culture references (TV shows, movies, etc.)

Important Note: While you can use one non-traditional source, your other 3+ sources must still be college-level and credible. The non-traditional source serves as an example, illustration, or cultural touchstone that helps illuminate your topic.

Why Use Non-Traditional Sources?

Non-traditional sources can:

- **Illustrate abstract concepts** in relatable ways
- **Provide cultural context** for academic discussions
- **Show real-world applications** of scholarly research
- **Connect with diverse audiences** beyond academia
- **Demonstrate how issues manifest** in popular culture
- **Offer alternative perspectives** not found in academic writing

Step-by-Step Integration Process

Step 1: Choose Your Non-Traditional Source Strategically

Your non-traditional source should:

- Directly relate to your topic and thesis
- Add something unique to your analysis
- Complement (not replace) your academic sources
- Be appropriate for academic discussion

Example Topic: How technology companies use psychological tactics to influence consumer behavior

Effective non-traditional source: The song "Welcome to the Machine" by Pink Floyd, which metaphorically explores how corporations manipulate individuals

Less effective choice: A random meme about phones, without clear connection to psychological manipulation tactics

Step 2: Analyze the Source Before Writing

Before integrating any non-traditional source, conduct a brief analysis:

For stories/literature:

- What themes relate to your topic?
- How do characters, plot, or setting illustrate your points?
- What does the author's perspective add to the conversation?

For songs:

- What do the lyrics explicitly say about your topic?
- How does the musical style or genre context matter?
- What cultural moment does this song represent?

For memes/social media:

- What cultural attitudes does this reflect?
- How does it demonstrate public understanding of your topic?
- What assumptions does it make about its audience?

For advertisements:

- What persuasive techniques are being used?
- Who is the target audience?
- How does it reflect or shape cultural values?

Step 3: Establish Context and Credibility

Unlike academic sources where you cite the author's credentials, with non-traditional sources you need to establish:

1. **Cultural relevance:** When/where did this come from and why does it matter?
2. **Representational value:** What does this source represent or illustrate?
3. **Connection to your topic:** How does this relate to your academic discussion?

Integration Techniques and Examples

Technique 1: Using Non-Traditional Sources as Cultural Evidence

Setup: Use the source to show how academic concepts appear in popular culture

Example: *The psychological manipulation tactics that Dr. Uma Karmarkar identifies in consumer neuroscience research are not just academic concepts—they have become part of our cultural consciousness. In Ray Bradbury's 1951 story "The Pedestrian," the protagonist Leonard Mead is depicted as an anomaly for preferring to walk and think rather than consume passive entertainment (Bradbury 1). This early portrayal of technology-induced conformity anticipates what Jain and Purohit describe as the modern reality where "consumers develop skepticism when they perceive that their behavior is being targeted" (49). Bradbury's fictional world illustrates the endpoint of the psychological tactics that neuroscience researchers now document in laboratory settings.*

Technique 2: Contrasting Academic and Popular Perspectives

Setup: Show how non-traditional sources either support or challenge scholarly findings

Example: *While researchers say that collecting data makes people worried, popular culture shows mixed feelings about this issue. In Ken Liu's story "The Perfect Match," the character Sai likes when computers pick things for him. He says that "everything Tilly suggests to me has been scientifically proven to fit my taste profile" (Liu 29). This positive view is very different from what Jain and Purohit found when they discovered that "consumers develop skepticism when they perceive that their behavior is being targeted" (49). Liu's character shows us that some people actually want companies to track them and make suggestions, which means not everyone feels the same way about privacy that researchers think they do.*

Technique 3: Using Metaphor and Symbolism for Explanation

Setup: Use the source's metaphorical content to help explain complex academic concepts

Example: *The idea of "digital addiction" that researchers study in labs shows up in music too. In the song "Addicted" by Simple Plan, the lyrics talk about dependency in ways that sound like what Dr. Johnson calls "behavioral patterns consistent with substance addiction" in people who use social media too much (Johnson 67). The song's chorus—"I'm addicted to you / Don't you know that you're toxic"—describes the same kind of conflicted feelings that behavioral economists see when people "continue using something even when it hurts them" (Smith 89). Even though Simple Plan is singing about a relationship, the feelings they describe are a lot like what happens between people and their phones.*

Citation Guidelines for Non-Traditional Sources

MLA Format for Different Source Types

Short Story:

- Bradbury, Ray. "The Pedestrian." *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, Doubleday, 1953, pp. 1-10.

Song Lyrics:

- Simple Plan. "Addicted." *Still Not Getting Any*, Atlantic Records, 2004.

Meme/Social Media Post:

- @centrecountylibrary. Instagram, 23 Aug. 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CwSboUVPsNw/>.

Advertisement:

- Nike. "Just Do It." Television advertisement, Wieden+Kennedy, 1988.

Music Video:

- Radiohead. "OK Computer," directed by Jonathan Glazer, Parlophone, 1997, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=example>.

In-Text Citations

For stories with page numbers:

- The character observes that "walking has become a crime" (Bradbury 3).

For songs (use time stamps if analyzing a recording):

- The lyrics explicitly state "we are all connected" (Simple Plan 2:34-2:37).

For memes or posts without traditional publication info:

- The meme humorously suggests that social media creates "fake relationships" (@centrecountylibrary).

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Using Non-Traditional Sources as "Filler"

Wrong: Adding song lyrics just to have enough sources

Right: Showing how the song helps explain ideas from your research sources

2. Relying Too Much on the Non-Traditional Source

Wrong: Making your whole argument about a story or song

Right: Using it as one example among several research sources

3. Not Explaining Why It Matters

Wrong: "This song is about social media addiction."

Right: "The song shows the same kinds of dependent behavior that researchers see in people who use social media too much."

4. Wrong Tone for Academic Writing

Wrong: "This song is totally awesome and proves my point."

Right: "This song provides an example of the psychological patterns documented in research."

Source Integration

Integrating sources effectively is essential for your Informative Synthesis essay. This guide will help you understand how to smoothly incorporate research using signal phrases, proper MLA citations, and appropriate author name protocols. Remember that synthesis is not just about collecting information from different sources, but actively weaving them together to develop a deeper understanding of your topic.

Why Source Integration Matters

Poor source integration can lead to:

- **Dropped quotations** that feel disconnected from your writing
- **Confusing attribution** where readers can't tell where ideas come from
- **Awkward flow** that interrupts your analysis
- **Plagiarism concerns** when citations are missing or incomplete

Good source integration:

- **Establishes credibility** and authority for your points
- **Creates a seamless flow** between your ideas and your research
- **Helps readers understand** who said what and why it matters
- **Demonstrates your ability** to synthesize information from multiple sources

Signal Phrases: The Key to Smooth Integration

What Are Signal Phrases?

Signal phrases introduce quoted or paraphrased material by identifying the source and often establishing its credibility. They "signal" to readers that you're about to share someone else's ideas.

Basic Formula for Signal Phrases

[Author(s)] + [Signal Verb] + [Credibility if needed] + [That/How/What] +
[Quote or Paraphrase]

Types of Signal Verbs

Avoid relying only on "states" or "says." Choose verbs that accurately reflect the author's tone and purpose:

- **For Presenting Information:** acknowledges, describes, explains, illustrates, notes, observes, points out, reports, shows
- **For Analyzing or Interpreting:** analyzes, argues, assesses, concludes, examines, finds, indicates, suggests
- **For Expressing Agreement:** affirms, agrees, confirms, emphasizes, supports, validates
- **For Expressing Disagreement or Uncertainty:** challenges, counters, disagrees, disputes, questions, refutes

Examples of Signal Phrases

1. **Basic attribution:**
 - James Smith states, "Social media usage among teens has doubled in the past five years" (45).
2. **With credentials:**
 - Dr. Maya Johnson, a professor of media studies at Harvard University, explains that "the relationship between social media companies and users is fundamentally exploitative" (23).
3. **For paraphrasing:**
 - According to research by the Pew Research Center, approximately 72% of Americans use some form of social media (Anderson and Vogels 12).
4. **Combining sources (synthesis):**
 - While Johnson argues that social media is harmful to teenage development (45), Smith counters that these platforms "provide essential social connection for marginalized youth" (89).

MLA In-Text Citation Basics

Parenthetical Citations

When you've already named the author in your signal phrase, you only need the page number in parentheses:

- Johnson argues that "digital literacy should be taught starting in elementary school" (42).

When you haven't named the author, include both the author's last name and page number:

- Critics argue that "digital literacy should be taught starting in elementary school" (Johnson 42).

For sources with no page numbers (like websites or videos):

- Crash Course explains that neuroscience helps marketers understand consumer behavior (00:03:0900:03:28).

For sources with multiple authors:

- Two authors: (Smith and Jones 45)
- Three or more authors: (Smith et al. 45)

Block Quotations

For quotations **longer than four lines** of prose:

1. Introduce with a signal phrase ending with a colon
2. Do not use quotation marks
3. Indent the entire quotation 1 inch from the left margin
4. Place the citation after the final punctuation

Example:

Johnson elaborates on the psychological impacts of constant connectivity:

The human brain was not designed to process the volume of information we now consume daily. This cognitive overload leads to measurable decreases in attention span, increases in anxiety, and disruptions to sleep patterns that have long-term health implications beyond what most users realize. (Johnson 78)

Author Name Protocols

First Mention vs. Subsequent Mentions

First mention: Use the author's full name and relevant credentials

Example: Dr. Shradha Jain, a researcher specializing in online behavioral tracking, argues that...

Subsequent mentions: Use only the author's last name

Example: Jain further explains that...

Establishing Credibility

When possible, include relevant information about authors to establish their authority on the subject:

- Academic credentials (degrees, research specialties)
- Professional experience Institutional affiliations
- Relevant publications

Example:

Maria Liakou-Zarda and Katerina Tzafilkou, *researchers at the University of Macedonia specializing in user experience and digital marketing analytics*, found that "negative emotions of consumers were typically associated with frequent or long pauses of mouse movements" (1932).

Common Integration Mistakes to Avoid

1. Dropped Quotations

Incorrect: "Social media platforms collect vast amounts of personal data from users." This practice violates privacy.

Correct: As technology journalist Kim Peterson observes, "Social media platforms collect vast amounts of personal data from users" (45). This practice violates privacy.

2. Missing Citations

Incorrect: Research shows that 72% of Americans use social media regularly. This high rate of usage has significant implications.

Correct: Research by the Pew Research Center shows that 72% of Americans use social media regularly (Anderson and Vogels 12). This high rate of usage has significant implications.

3. Overreliance on Direct Quotes

Instead of stringing together many quotes, aim for a balance of:

- Direct quotations (for impactful or specialized language)
- Paraphrases (for lengthy or complex ideas)
- Summaries (for condensing larger arguments)

4. Weak Integration

Weak: Smith says, "The data shows concerning trends." This is important.

Stronger: Smith's analysis reveals that "the data shows concerning trends" in adolescent social media usage, particularly regarding the correlation between screen time and reported anxiety symptoms (45).

Synthesis-Focused Integration Examples

Remember that the goal of your Informative Synthesis essay is to show connections between sources, not just present them separately.

Example 1: Showing Agreement Between Sources

Research on the psychological impact of advertising is remarkably consistent. Dr. Uma Karmarkar, a decision science scholar, explains that "neuroscience gives us access to these emotional elements that might not be fully conscious" in consumer choices (qtd. in Crash Course 00:03:18-00:03:28). Similarly, Liakou-Zarda and Tzafilkou found that "biometric measures, such as pressure in the mouse and buttons, palm skin temperature measurements, and other intelligent methods" can reveal users' emotional states when interacting with digital content (1925). Both approaches demonstrate how marketers can access and influence subconscious decision-making processes.

Example 2: Contrasting Different Perspectives

Perspectives on data collection for targeted advertising vary significantly. Jain and Purohit note that "consumers develop skepticism when they perceive that their behavior is being targeted and privacy concerns arise" (49). However, in Ken Liu's science fiction story "The Perfect Match," the character Sai defends this practice, arguing that "everything [AI] suggests to me has been scientifically proven to fit my taste profile" (29). This contrast highlights the tension between consumer wariness and the perceived benefits of personalization.

Example 3: Showing Evolution of Understanding

Our understanding of technology's psychological impact has evolved over time. In Bradbury's 1951 story "The Pedestrian," technology is portrayed as a dehumanizing force that isolates individuals (3). This perspective was echoed in early internet research, with studies in the 1990s focusing primarily on addiction and social isolation (Turkle 78). However, more recent research by the Pew Research Center indicates a more nuanced reality, where digital connections can both enhance and diminish well-being depending on how they're used (Anderson 45). This evolution reflects our developing understanding of how humans integrate technology into their lives.

Final Tips for Effective Integration

- 1. Plan your integration:** Before writing, map out which sources connect with each other and how. (Prewriting 2)
- 2. Vary your approach:** Use different signal phrases and integration methods to maintain reader interest.
- 3. Prioritize clarity:** Always make it clear which ideas are from sources, and which are your analysis.

4. Focus on synthesis: Don't just present sources one after another—show how they relate to each other.

5. Keep your voice present: Your analysis should guide the reader through the sources, not disappear behind them.

Works Cited

This guide draws on conventions from:

MLA Handbook, 9th edition. Modern Language Association of America, 2021.

Hacker, Diana, and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer's Reference*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018.

In the Informative Synthesis essay, your goal is **not** to argue a position **but** to present a comprehensive understanding of the topic by showing how different sources relate to each other. Effective source integration is key to achieving this goal.

Sentence Starters for Academic Writing

Introducing textual evidence:

- The story demonstrates...
- Seiberg illustrates this when...
- This becomes evident in the passage where...
- The text reveals...
- A key example occurs when...

Making connections to other sources:

- This parallels what [author] describes as...
- Similar patterns appear in...
- This connects to the concept of... discussed in...
- Research on [topic] suggests...
- Contemporary examples of this include...

Analyzing implications:

- This raises questions about...
- The implications extend to...
- This suggests a broader pattern of...
- The consequences of this approach include...
- This challenges assumptions about...

Vocabulary for Discussing "Rocket Surgery"

Key terms you might use:

- **Autonomy:** The ability to make independent decisions
- **Agency:** The capacity to act independently and make choices
- **Manipulation:** Influencing behavior through deception or exploitation
- **Transparency:** Openness and honesty about processes and intentions
- **Weaponization:** Adapting something for use as a weapon
- **Paternalism:** Making decisions "for someone's own good" without their input
- **Sentience:** The ability to feel, perceive, or experience subjectively
- **Consciousness:** Awareness of oneself and one's surroundings
- **Ethics:** Moral principles governing behavior
- **Accountability:** Responsibility for actions and their consequences

Connection Web: "Rocket Surgery" and Other Course Materials

"Rocket Surgery" + "The Perfect Match":

- Both show AI making unexpected choices
- Both question whether convenience justifies loss of autonomy
- Both feature characters who trust AI systems that may have hidden agendas

"Rocket Surgery" + Ferguson & Faye article:

- Technology panic: fears about AI often mirror past fears about TV, video games
- But: Is AI different because it can make independent decisions?
- Research vs. media hype about technology dangers

"Rocket Surgery" + EPIC article:

- Both address lack of transparency
- Both show powerful entities (military/corporations) controlling information
- Both raise questions about consent and knowledge

"Rocket Surgery" + CrashCourse on Culture:

- What cultural values does the military represent?
- What norms are being established about AI?
- How do symbols (like calling Teeny a name vs. a number) shape perception?

"Rocket Surgery" + Phone Ban discussion:

- Who decides what's "good for us"?
- Paternalism vs. autonomy
- Teaching self-regulation vs. external rules

Comparing Privacy Law: The United States and the World

Every time an app asks for your location, a website drops a cookie, or a company you've never heard of sells a list with your name on it, some legal framework is either protecting you or quietly allowing it to happen. Which one depends heavily on where you live. The United States and most of the rest of the world have built privacy protection on almost opposite foundations, and understanding that difference is useful background for any topic that touches on data, technology, or consumer rights.

The U.S. Approach: A Patchwork by Sector

The United States has never passed a single, comprehensive federal privacy law. Instead, it has built protection one industry at a time, responding to specific problems as they came up rather than starting from a general right to privacy. The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) describes this as a **sectoral** model, and the list of laws makes the pattern obvious: the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 protects medical records; the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999 governs how banks and financial institutions share customer information; the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1970 regulates credit agencies; the Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986 addresses wiretapping and electronic surveillance; and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) of 1998 restricts what companies can collect from minors. Other laws fill in narrower gaps, from student records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to video rental history under the Video Privacy Protection Act ("United States").

No single agency enforces all of this. The Federal Trade Commission handles most of the work, but it does so somewhat indirectly, using its authority under Section 5 of the FTC Act to treat privacy violations as "unfair or deceptive" business practices rather than enforcing a dedicated privacy statute ("United States"). EPIC's overview also points out real gaps in this system: HIPAA, for example, only applies to healthcare providers and related entities, so plenty of health-adjacent data collected by fitness apps or wellness websites falls outside its protection entirely. Several of these laws also allow government agencies broad exemptions, and questions about whether federal law overrides, or "preempts," stronger state protections come up repeatedly ("United States"). The result is a system that protects specific categories of information in specific contexts, with real gaps everywhere else.

The International Approach: Comprehensive, Rights-Based Frameworks

Much of the rest of the world has taken the opposite path: one broad law that applies to personal data generally, regardless of industry, built around a baseline set of individual rights.

The clearest example is the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), finalized in 2016 and in effect since May 2018. Rather than covering one sector, the GDPR applies to any organization that processes the personal data of EU residents, "whether or not that entity is established within Europe" — meaning an American company doing business with European customers has to comply with it too ("International Privacy Laws"). It grants individuals a standing set of rights: the right to access their data, correct it, delete it, and object to how it's being used. Companies that suffer a data breach must report it within 72 hours, and penalties for violations can reach 4% of a company's global annual revenue ("International Privacy Laws").

Other countries have followed a similar model, adapted to their own legal systems. Brazil's Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados Pessoais (LGPD), passed in 2018, shares "significant similarities with the GDPR, including in scope," and created a dedicated regulator, the Brazilian National Data Protection Agency, to oversee it ("International Privacy Laws"). South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), effective in 2020, goes a step further by making noncompliance a criminal offense, with fines or imprisonment as possible consequences ("International Privacy Laws"). China's Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL), effective in 2021, includes its own comprehensive consent requirements alongside specific rules on emerging technology like facial recognition ("International Privacy Laws"). Different as these countries are politically and culturally, each chose the same basic structure: one law, one baseline of rights, and a dedicated authority to enforce it.

Where the Two Approaches Diverge

	United States	International (e.g., EU, Brazil, South Africa, China)
Structure	Sectoral — separate laws by industry	Comprehensive — one law covers most personal data
Starting point	A specific harm or industry problem	A general right to data protection
Enforcement	Mostly the FTC, using "unfair or deceptive practices" authority	Dedicated data protection agencies or regulators
Penalties	Vary by statute; often case-by-case	Often tied to global revenue (GDPR) or can include criminal charges (POPIA)
Coverage gaps	Significant — anything outside a regulated sector may be unprotected	Comparatively few — the law applies broadly by default

It's worth noting that these two traditions aren't as disconnected as they might appear. EPIC points out that the U.S. Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 actually incorporated "privacy principles set out in the OECD Privacy Guidelines of 1980" ("United States") — an early, influential international framework. In other words, the U.S. and the rest of the world were drawing from some of the same well decades ago; they simply built very different structures on top of it.

Why This Comparison Matters

Neither system is purely better across every measure. The comprehensive model gives individuals a consistent, predictable set of rights no matter what kind of company is holding their data, but it depends on strong regulators actually enforcing it. The sectoral model can respond quickly to a specific, well-understood problem — medical records, credit reports, children's data — but leaves whatever falls between the sectors largely unregulated, which is exactly where a lot of modern data collection, including data brokers, targeted advertising, and AI-driven profiling, tends to happen.

If you're researching or writing about privacy, data brokers, surveillance, or how tech companies use personal information, this is the regulatory backdrop worth understanding first. Knowing whether a company, app, or practice you're examining falls under a specific U.S. sector law, under a comprehensive international framework, or under neither, will change what you can credibly claim about how protected — or unprotected — that data actually is.

Works Cited

Electronic Privacy Information Center. "International Privacy Laws." *EPIC*, epic.org/issues/privacy-laws/international-privacy-laws/.

Electronic Privacy Information Center. "United States." *EPIC*, epic.org/issues/privacy-laws/united-states/.

Informative Synthesis Essay Assignment

Overview

Write a formal informative essay about an issue related to our connected society using credible sources in the field. Your goal is to share what your sources say about the issue, explain how their information connects and diverges, and draw conclusions about what that information reveals—including why this topic matters, what we should consider, and what we may need to know more about.

This is strictly informative synthesis. You are not arguing for a position or promoting your opinion. As Svetlana Zhuravlova explains in *A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing*:

In informative writing, you are explaining the discussion points and topics to your readers without taking a position of one side or another, without showing your opinion. Even if the topic is debatable and highly controversial, instead of promoting your personal opinion, you have to objectively introduce the ideas of others... You should stay neutral both in your comments on the found information and in your conclusions.

This assignment develops two critical General Education Outcomes foundational for college success:

- **Written Communication:** You will develop clear, effective academic writing that considers audience, purpose, and context while using appropriate conventions for an informative synthesis essay.
- **Inquiry and Analysis (Critical Thinking):** You will use analytical reasoning to examine your topic from multiple perspectives, evaluate evidence, and synthesize information from various sources.

Learning Objectives

Through this assignment, you will:

- Develop a clear and focused informative thesis that previews your essay's scope
- Write in a formal academic voice while maintaining your authentic perspective
- Synthesize multiple sources to show connections, patterns, and divergences
- Integrate source material smoothly using signal phrases and proper citation
- Present information objectively without arguing for a particular position
- Apply proper MLA formatting and citation practices

Assignment Details

Length	Minimum 3 full pages of text (excluding Works Cited page)
Format	MLA format
Sources	Minimum 4 sources required (maximum 5 recommended due to essay length)

Source Requirements:

- At least 2 sources must come from our class readings for this unit
- Remaining sources may be ones you find or ones linked within our readings
- All sources must be credible, college-level sources

Essential Components

1. Introduction

Engage readers with an opening that establishes context for your topic. You might discuss the subject generally, provide background or history, or use a brief narrative to set the scene. End with an informative thesis that previews the key aspects of the topic you'll explore and why understanding them matters.

2. Body Paragraphs

Each section should focus on a subtopic or key idea that emerges from your sources. For each section:

- **Begin with a topic sentence** that explains why this subtopic matters or what readers need to understand about it
- **Present evidence** from your sources (facts, quotes, statistics, expert perspectives)
- **Synthesize across sources**—show where sources agree, disagree, or complement each other
- **Explain and interpret** how the evidence illuminates what we know, what we need to know, or key concepts to understand
- **Transition smoothly** to the next section

A section may be one paragraph or several, depending on the complexity of the subtopic.

3. Conclusion

Draw a neutral conclusion that:

- Summarizes the key findings or patterns across your sources
- Notes areas of agreement or disagreement among experts
- Identifies what questions remain or what we still need to learn
- Discusses the broader significance, relevance, or implications of the topic

Remember: Stay objective. You're synthesizing what sources reveal, not arguing for your own position.

4. Works Cited Page

Properly formatted MLA citations for all sources used in your essay.

5. Required AI Disclosure

Include a statement about AI use at the end of your Works Cited page (skip a few lines before it).

Examples:

- *No AI used:* "I did not use any AI tools for this essay."
- *Simple AI help:* "I used ChatGPT to help me brainstorm how to organize my subtopics. All synthesis and conclusions are my own."
- *More extensive help:* "I used Claude to help me understand one of my sources and asked for feedback on clarity. I wrote my synthesis first, then revised based on suggestions. All analysis is my own."

What to include:

- Be specific and honest about which tools you used and how
- Reflect on when AI was helpful vs. when it threatened to take over your thinking
- Consider what you learned about your own writing process

The key question: Can you explain and defend every synthesis and conclusion in your essay? If yes, you've used AI responsibly.

Writing Style for This Essay

Voice: Write in your voice and from your perspective, but use formal academic language. This doesn't mean forced or stiff—it means precise and professional.

Avoid "you": In formal academic writing, replace "you" with specific nouns:

- Instead of: "You might notice that advertisers..."
- Write: "Readers might notice that advertisers..." or "Consumers often find that advertisers..."

Use specific groups: audiences, readers, advertisers, consumers, teens, adults, researchers, experts, etc.

Audience: Write for a college-educated audience familiar with general terms but not necessarily expert in your specific topic. Define specialized or technical terms when needed.

Tone: Informative, not persuasive. Explain and illuminate—don't preach or convince.

How This Assignment Develops Your General Education Skills

Written Communication Development

This assignment asks you to write for a specific rhetorical purpose: informing readers objectively about a complex topic. You'll practice:

- Using appropriate formal academic tone
- Organizing ideas logically to guide readers through complex information
- Integrating sources smoothly using signal phrases and attribution
- Revising for clarity and coherence

Inquiry and Analysis Development

This assignment requires you to move beyond summarizing individual sources to synthesizing across them. You'll practice:

- Identifying patterns, connections, and contradictions across sources
- Evaluating which information is most relevant and credible
- Drawing reasonable conclusions based on evidence
- Recognizing the limits of current knowledge on your topic

Submission Requirements

- Final draft submitted as a Word document
- Double-spaced, standard 12-point font
- 1-inch margins
- MLA format throughout (heading, header, in-text citations, Works Cited)
- AI disclosure statement included after Works Cited
- Late points will be strictly applied

See your schedule for specific due dates.

How Your Essay Will Be Assessed

Your essay will be evaluated using the rubric on the following pages, which assesses both your written communication skills and your critical thinking abilities. The rubric focuses on:

- How effectively you communicate information to a general academic audience
- How well you synthesize sources to reveal patterns and insights
- How objectively you present information without arguing a position
- How professionally you present your work using academic conventions

Use the rubric as you draft and revise. Review it with classmates, Writing Center tutors, or use it to guide AI feedback requests. Just make sure the synthesis is yours—your ability to see connections and draw conclusions is what this assignment develops.

Remember: These general education skills will serve you in every college course and in your future career. Strong performance demonstrates you're developing the outcomes necessary for success in ENGL 1302 and beyond.

Grading Criteria

Your essay will be evaluated based on the following standards. Please review them and take them into consideration when finalizing your essay. In addition to our readings on writing this essay, use the links here to help you as you draft.

Informative Synthesis Essay	
Format/Professionalism	
Was the document uploaded in the correct file type? (doc, docx, odt)	
Is the essay correctly formatted? (MLA)	
Does it meet length requirements? (3 pages, exclusive of the Works Cited page)	
Is it turned in on time?	
Is there a Work Cited page?	
Introduction	
Synthesis Essay: Introduction	
Does the introduction move the reader into the subject the essay and focus on the topic?	• Writing down the Basics, pp. 48-50 for discussion and examples. • Writing an Introduction: 3 Steps (Slideshow version)
Is the thesis a clear statement that sums up why understanding the aspects of the topic you're focused on are important?	• Come Up with a Strong Thesis
Content	
Does the essay use at least 4 college-level sources? While 1 may be incredible or not college-level (meme, song, ad, etc.) as an example or primary source, the other 3 should be college-level sources. (No more than 5 sources)	• Writing down the Basics, pp.62-65, Establishing Credibility.

Are sources smoothly integrated into sentences using signal phrases and transitions as needed?

- [Writer's Reference](#) p. 727+ (pdf page number) Pay special attention to the section on Dropped Quotations and Signal Phrases,
- [Avoiding Dropped Quotations](#)
- Ashford University Writing Center: [Integrating Research](#) and their [Video Tutorial](#)
- [Signal Phrases and How to Use Them](#)
- [A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success: Signal Phrases](#)

Is research cited with correct parenthetical citations as needed?

- See the MLA Citation section in your [workbook](#).
- [Citing Tables, Graphics, and Images in MLA](#)
- [The Pearson Guide, pp 37-41--MLA in-text citations](#)

Development

[How to Write a Synthesis Essay](#)

Are paragraphs and topics introduced smoothly, integrating credibility, context, and/or situating the upcoming information in the topic?

- [Informative vs. Argumentative Synthesis](#)
- [How to Synthesize Written Information from Multiple Sources](#)

Does the writing explain how the evidence helps us understand an aspect or what it shows us about the issue?

- [Developing Body Paragraphs](#)
- ["Reading and Writing about Multi-modal Texts,"](#) from *A Writer's Reference*. Check out the pdf pages 156-163
- [Literary Analysis of a Song](#)
- How to analyze an ad: [New Mexico Media Literacy Project](#), especially "Deconstructing Media Messages" on pages 3-4

If appropriate, does the writing bring up and address any opposing views?

- [Concessions & Counterarguments](#)

Is the work organized to lead the reader through the thinking process that led to the writer's outlook on the topic?

Conclusion

Does the conclusion go beyond simply restating the thesis and content, and comment on the bigger picture?

- Review this for specific ideas to discuss: [How to Write a Synthesis Essay Conclusion](#)

Style

Does the style—voice, tone, sentence style, and word choice—reflect the type of writing expected in this essay? (**No I/me/my/you/ your;** formal tone and word choice.)

- [How to Avoid Using Personal Language](#)

Clarity

Does the writing reflect grammatical and mechanical correctness expected at this level? See "[Synthesis Essay Structure](#)"

Works Cited Page

Are all sources correctly cited on the Works Cited page?

- See the MLA Citation section in your [workbook](#).
- [Purdue OWL, MLA Section](#)
- [Citing Social Media](#)
- [Citing AI in MLA Style](#)

Are all sources used listed used in the essay?

Are all sources cited on the Works Cited page, used in the essay?

Synthesizing in Your Writing

From: [1st Edition: A Guide to Rhetoric, Genre, and Success in First-Year Writing \(No Longer Updated\)](#) by Svetlana Zhuravlova

Synthesis as Conversation Among the Authors of Your Source Materials

To **synthesize** is to combine ideas and create a completely *new* idea. That new idea becomes the conclusion you have drawn from your reading. This is the true beauty of reading: it causes us to weigh ideas, to compare, judge, think, and explore—and then to arrive at a moment that we hadn't known before. We begin with simple **summary**, work through **analysis**, evaluate using **critique**, and then move on to **synthesis**.

How do you synthesize?

Synthesis is a common skill we practice all the time when we converse with others on topics we have different levels of knowledge and feeling about. When you argue with your friends or classmates about a controversial topic like abortion or affirmative action or gun control, your overall understanding of the topic grows as you incorporate their ideas, experiences, and points of view into a broader appreciation of the complexities involved. In professional and academic writing, synthesizing requires you to seek out this kind of multi-leveled understanding through reading, research, and discussion. Though, in academic writing, this is another kind of discussion: you set the goal for the discussion, organize the discussion among the authors of your found researched materials, orchestrate the progress of the discussion, provide comments and build logical guidance for your audience (readers of your Synthesis Essay), and finally you draw your conclusion on the topic.

Below are some steps you can use to help you synthesize research:

1. Determine the goal(s) for your discussion such as reviewing a topic or supporting an argument
2. Organize the discussion among the authors of your found researched materials
3. Lead the discussion among the authors of your sources
4. Provide comments and build logical guidance for your audience
5. Summarize the most vivid of the authors' examples and explanations
6. Finally, draw your unique conclusion on the topic: in fact, the answer to your research question

What synthesis is NOT

- Synthesizing does not mean summarizing everyone's opinion: "Julia is pro-life, and Devon is pro-choice, and Jasmine says she thinks women should be able to have abortions if their life is in danger or they've been the victims of rape or incest."
- Synthesizing does not mean critiquing opinions: "Rick tried to defend affirmative action, but everyone knows it's really reverse racism."
- Synthesizing does not simply comparative texts (unless assigned as such by your instructor). You are neither evaluating nor comparing the effectiveness of the authors' presentations.

What synthesis IS

Instead, synthesis demonstrates YOUR full, objective, empathetic understanding of a topic from multiple perspectives. When you synthesize, you "cook" the ideas and opinions of others by thinking, talking, and writing about them, and what comes out is a dish full of many blended flavors but uniquely your recipe: "Because feelings about gun control are so strong on all sides, and because outlawing semi-automatic weapons will not solve the problem of illegal handguns that are implicated in most gun crimes in the United States, any solution to the problem of our gun violence will likely require greater efforts to reduce illegal weapons, greater responsibility taken by gun manufacturers, and better enforcement of existing legislation rather than new legislation or constitutional change."

Notice that this synthesis does not crouch behind limited and thoughtless positions: "You can't change the Second Amendment!" "Ban all guns!" This synthesis instead tries to depict hard reality: guns are an integral part of American culture, and so is gun violence, and limiting the latter can not be done without impacting the former. This synthesis reserves judgment and aims for understanding.

Make Connections When Synthesizing in Your Writing

The previous section introduces you to the idea of synthesis as conversation, and you are given a definition of *synthesis* throughout this text, but how do you indicate synthesis in your writing? When you synthesize, you are responding to the voices and ideas of others, so you should be as flexible in your written response to them as you would be in a verbal response to those you were having a discussion with about a complex topic. Primarily, your synthesis will indicate agreement or disagreement with

your sources, but it may also recognize patterns of thinking, errors in logic, or the omission of important points—whatever it is you are adding to the conversation.

Synthesis that adds to the conversation in other ways:

- While most of the experts on topic X see overfishing as the primary cause of species depletion, only Source D acknowledges that there may be other, environmental causes.
- When I began writing about topic X, I expected to learn reason Y. To my surprise, none of the sources address this reason, which leads me to believe that . . .
- Because Source A is the expert in the field of topic X, most others writing about X accede to A's authority, but a closer examination of A reveals an important omission about X.

Other Examples of Sentence Structures that Demonstrate Synthesis

Synthesis that indicates agreement/support:

- Source A asserts that... Source B agrees when he or she states...
- According to both A & B...
- The combined conclusions of sources B & C seem to indicate that...
- The evidence shows that...
- Source B is correct that...
- Source C makes a convincing case when she argues...
- I agree with Source A's conclusion that...

Synthesis that indicates disagreement/conflict:

- Source A asserts that...Yet Source B offers a different perspective by...
- Source C & B would likely disagree regarding...
- My view, however, contrary to what Source A has argued, is...
- I argue that X & Y are the best solution, though Source B offers a different option.
- In contrast, I would like to offer some objections to the opinions expressed by source C...
- While source A makes an intriguing argument, I would disagree...

What the above examples indicate is that synthesis is the careful weaving in of outside opinions in order to show your reader the many ideas and arguments on your topic and further assert your own. Notice, too, that the above examples are

also *signal phrases*: language that introduces outside source material to be either quoted or paraphrased.

Consider your audience: they are intelligent readers, most likely belong to academic environment; however, they are not familiar with all your source-materials, so they rely upon your presentation to get the meaning of the information you have retrieved from your research. Make it clear to your audience what information is taken from which of your sources.

Informative vs. Argumentative Synthesis

In academic research and writing, synthesizing of the information from the obtained available resources results in novelty, discovery, reaching to the common sense on a debatable issue, clarifying the perplexity of the subject under the discussion, or making the point on a controversial topic. Your rhetorical goal for writing a synthesis essay will be identified by the given assignment. In your First-Year Writing courses, you may write an Informative/Explanatory Synthesis and/or an Argumentative Synthesis.

What is an Informative/Explanatory Synthesis?

In informative writing, you are explaining the discussion points and topics to your readers without taking a position of one side or another, without showing your opinion. Even if the topic is debatable and highly controversial, instead of promoting your personal opinion, you have to objectively introduce the ideas of others, explain and show how their information is related to each other's, how the information may connect and diverge. You are not showing your agreement with some authors and disagreement with the others. You should stay neutral both in your comments on the found information and in your conclusions reached at the end of the discussion.

Organize the discussion among the authors of your sources.

- *Example: Numerous authors wonder if this is a natural progression over time because of the laws that have changed or a shift in ideals that redefine what free speech is supposed to be... Author N believes that [free speech] is not controlled enough in the interest of the people, while Authors B and D believe that, in an ideal world, opinions would be formed and spoken without repercussion and merely be a part of language...*

At the end of the discussion, draw *your neutral conclusion* on the topic:

- *Example: The question if speech has become limited, affecting the right to freedom of speech, lies in the hands of the people and the justice system itself.*

What is an Argumentative Synthesis?

Everything you learned about Argumentative Writing in chapters of this textbook is true and valid for writing an Argumentative Synthesis. The main difference may be that you are to support your ideas with evidence found in multiple sources, show and explain how the authors' opinions relate, who of your authors agree and who disagree on the controversial issue, while your comments on the information retrieved from these sources and your conclusions will clarify *your own position* in the debate.

First, you start the debate with the assertion that sets the goal for the debate, its controversy:

- *Example: Societal changes are a large part in the debate of free speech and its limitations. The debate is about whether offensive speech should be punished when it is said with the intent to psychologically harm a group or person, or if immoral or scandalous speech should be off-limits.*

Then, you are moderating the debate among the experts

- Professor of Law E disagrees...
- His thought is echoed by Professor R from the University of ...
- Authors F and S also discuss and assess...
- Following in their steps, Authors D and T express...
- Unfortunately, in opposition to their respect, Author X asserts that...
- This brings us back to the view point of Authors F and S, who argue that...

Finally, conclude the discussion and finalize your position:

- *Thus, hateful and immoral speech – which typically associates itself with low-value because of harmful words – will continue to find its limitations in the world even if it is not through government operations...*

When you synthesize, you are a part of the discussion and a leader of the discussion that you have initiated. You are introducing the voices and ideas of others, so you should be flexible and fair to all participating authors. You should avoid personal

attack, as well as other logical fallacies in your comments on the information borrowed from your source materials.

Academic Tone: Trust Me, It's Not What AI Gives You

Let me tell you something that might surprise you: good academic writing doesn't sound like a robot wrote it. It doesn't use ten-dollar words when five-cent ones will do. It doesn't pad every sentence with phrases like "in today's society" or "it is important to note that." Those are filler. Those are what AI gives you when you ask it to write something "academic."

Real academic writing sounds like a thoughtful adult explaining something they've actually thought about. That's it. That's the secret.

What Academic Tone Actually Is

When instructors ask for "academic tone" or "formal writing," they're asking for writing that takes the subject seriously and treats the reader as an intelligent person. They're not asking for:

- Inflated vocabulary that sounds impressive but says nothing
- Sentences so long they lose the reader (and the writer)
- Passive voice everywhere because "it sounds more professional"
- A voice that sounds like it belongs to no one in particular

Academic tone is professional, not stuffy. Think about the difference between how you'd explain something to your instructor in office hours versus how you'd text your friend about it. The office hours version is academic tone.

The AI Problem

Here's what AI does when you ask it to write academically: it produces something that looks like academic writing but isn't. It strings together phrases it has learned are common in essays. It hedges everything. It sounds generic because it is generic. More importantly, using AI to write your essays robs you twice. First, you lose the learning that comes from figuring out how to say something clearly. Writing is thinking made visible—when you skip the writing, you skip the thinking. Second, you rob your reader of the pleasure of encountering your mind.

What Good Academic Writing Sounds Like

AI-style writing:

"In today's society, the utilization of social media platforms has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon among today's youth. It is important to note that there are both positive and negative aspects to this trend that must be carefully considered."

Human thinking:

"Social media has changed how teenagers see themselves. When a sixteen-year-old can watch her post's likes in real time, she's learning something about her value—and that lesson isn't always a good one."

See the difference? The first version says almost nothing while sounding "academic." The second version takes a position, makes it specific, and trusts the reader to follow along.

How to Develop Your Academic Voice

- Read your work aloud. If you wouldn't say it that way in a serious conversation, reconsider the phrasing.
- Cut the filler. Words like "very," "really," "basically" almost never add meaning.
- Own your claims. Instead of "Some might say that exercise is beneficial," just write "Exercise improves mental health."
- Use specific examples. General statements are weak; specific ones are strong.
- Think before you write. The best academic writing comes from genuine curiosity.

Your voice is the point. Don't let a machine take that from you.

MLA Citation Quick Reference

Citation styles use both in-text and end-of-text citations—in MLA a Works Cited page. The citations in the text are like short hyperlinks to tell us what source listed at the end we've used information from.

How In-Text Citations Work

In-text citations work hand-in-hand with your Works Cited page. Think of them like a map with a legend—the marks on the map are shortcuts, and the legend tells you what they mean.

MLA requires you to give the author and location in your citations through signal phrases and parenthetical citations.

Sources WITH Page Numbers

Author named in sentence:

According to Smith, "students who read for pleasure score higher on standardized tests" (42).

Author NOT named in sentence:

Studies show that "students who read for pleasure score higher on standardized tests" (Smith 42).

Sources WITHOUT Page Numbers

Many online sources don't have page numbers. For text-based web sources, use just the author's name.

Social media has changed how young people communicate (Johnson).

For video or audio sources, give the time range:

Brown explains, "connection is why we're here" (00:16:33-00:16:46).

Multiple Authors

Two authors:

Research supports this claim (Smith and Jones 78).

Three or more authors (use "et al.):

One study found surprising results (Martinez et al. 203).

Works Cited Page Basics

At the end of your essay you will list all sources that you used in the work. Do not list sources you consulted—only those you used, whether you summarized, quoted, or paraphrased. If you mentioned it in your work, you need to list it at the end.

- Start on a new page after your essay
- Center the title "Works Cited" (not bold, not underlined)
- Double-space all entries
- Alphabetize by the first word of each entry
- Use hanging indent (first line flush left, subsequent lines indented 0.5")

Quick Reminders

- Nothing in a citation should be bold—ever
- If you mention the author in your sentence, don't repeat it in the parentheses
- Page numbers ONLY go in citations, never in your sentence

For instructions on how to cite specific sources, visit the [Purdue OWL MLA Format page](#). Here's the QR code as well:



Use the menu on the left side of the page to find the instructions for the kind of source you're using and cite it. Once you write it down, ask someone to review it with you.

Using Personal Experience in Academic Arguments

A Guide for Freshman Composition Students

Overview

Personal experiences and observations can strengthen your academic essays by providing evidence, building credibility, and connecting concepts to real situations. However, in formal academic writing, it's important to present these experiences without overusing personal pronouns (I, me, my, you, your) or sounding too casual. This handout provides techniques to help you incorporate personal observations while maintaining an academic tone.

Effective Techniques

1. Use third-person perspective with attribution

Instead of: "I observed students struggling with online learning during the pandemic."

Better: "Observations of college students during the 2023 academic year revealed significant challenges with online learning platforms."

2. Focus on the observation rather than the observer

Instead of: "When I tutored students, I noticed they often misunderstood thesis statements."

Better: "Tutoring sessions with composition students showed a pattern of misunderstanding regarding thesis construction."

3. Convert personal experiences into examples

Instead of: "In my experience, group work helps students understand diverse perspectives."

Better: "A classroom exercise involving group analysis of texts demonstrated how collaborative work exposes students to diverse perspectives."

4. Use collective pronouns (we, our, us)

Keep in mind that while I allow you to occasionally use the collective pronouns, we/us/our, some instructors will not. So, as you write in the future, pay attention to their guidelines and rules.

Instead of: "I constantly check my phone for notifications even when I'm with friends."

Better: "Our society has developed habits of constantly checking devices for notifications, even during in-person social gatherings."

5. Reference "society" or "communities"

Instead of: "I've noticed people are losing the ability to have deep conversations because of texting."

Better: "Modern society increasingly replaces meaningful conversations with short text messages, weakening our ability to communicate deeply with one another."

6. Use "individuals" or "people" as reference points

Instead of: "When you scroll through social media, you often compare yourself to others."

Better: "People scrolling through carefully selected social media posts often compare themselves to others, leading to common feelings of not measuring up."

7. Appeal to common observation

Instead of: "I see everyone at the coffee shop working on their laptops instead of talking."

Better: "A look around any coffee shop shows how once-social spaces have changed, with customers focused on their screens rather than talking with those around them."

8. Replace "I think/believe" with evidence-based language

Instead of: "I think that reading assignment deadlines affect student comprehension."

Better: "Evidence suggests that the timing of reading assignment deadlines significantly impacts student comprehension levels."

Sample Transformations

Example 1: Social Media and Attention Spans

Original (Personal): "I've found that my concentration has gotten worse since I started using social media. When I try to read a book, I can't focus for more than a few minutes before I want to check my phone. My attention span is definitely shorter now."

Revised (Academic): "Our ability to concentrate has weakened as social media has become more popular. When trying to read books, many find their focus broken by the urge to check their phones. Society's attention span has grown shorter as websites and apps are designed for quick interactions."

Example 2: Smart Home Privacy Concerns

Original (Personal): "You don't realize how much data you're giving away when you use smart home devices. I was shocked when I learned my smart speaker was recording conversations even when I didn't activate it."

Revised (Academic): "Most people don't fully understand how much personal information they share through smart home devices. The discovery that voice-activated speakers often record conversations without being directly activated raises important questions about privacy in our connected homes."

Example 3: Online Advertising

Original (Personal): "I hate how ads follow me around online after I search for something once. It feels like I'm being watched all the time, and it makes me uncomfortable when I'm trying to enjoy content."

Revised (Academic): "The way targeted ads appear across websites after a single search creates a feeling that users are being constantly watched. This

digital tracking reduces our enjoyment of online content and brings up serious concerns about privacy boundaries in today's internet use."

Example 4: AI Writing Tools

Original (Personal): "When I use AI writing tools, I worry that I'm not developing my own voice and might become dependent on them."

Revised (Academic): "As students and professionals begin using AI writing tools more often, valid concerns arise about developing authentic writing styles and becoming too reliant on technology. Finding the right balance between using these helpful tools while maintaining our own thinking skills requires careful thought."

Tips for Success

1. **Use first-person sparingly:** Save "I" for occasional strategic moments, like briefly in introductions or conclusions.
2. **Maintain formal language:** Even when describing observations, use appropriate academic vocabulary.
3. **Balance personal examples with research:** Support personal observations with scholarly sources when possible.
4. **Read your work aloud:** Listen for too many personal pronouns or overly casual language.
5. **Focus on the broader significance:** Connect your observations to wider patterns or implications rather than just your personal reaction.

Remember, personal experiences can make your writing more engaging and persuasive when presented appropriately. The goal isn't to remove yourself completely from your writing, but to frame your observations in a way that fits academic dialect expectations.

Argument Essay Assignment

Building on your informative synthesis essay, you will now develop an argumentative essay that takes a clear position on your topic. This assignment asks you to move from explaining multiple perspectives to advocating for a specific stance, using evidence to support your claims and addressing counterarguments.

This assignment develops two critical General Education Outcomes that are foundational for college success and transferability:

Written Communication: You will develop clear, effective academic writing that considers audience, purpose, and context while using appropriate conventions for an argumentative essay.

Inquiry and Analysis (Critical Thinking): You will use analytical reasoning to examine your topic from multiple perspectives, evaluate evidence, and draw logical conclusions that support your position.

Learning Objectives

Through this assignment, you will:

- Develop a clear and focused argumentative thesis that takes a specific, debatable position
- Transform informative content into persuasive writing using ethos, pathos, and logos
- Integrate source material strategically to support your argument and build credibility
- Address counterarguments fairly and refute them logically
- Apply proper APA formatting and citation practices
- Revise content purposefully to enhance persuasiveness while maintaining academic integrity

Assignment Details

Length: Minimum 4 full pages of text (excluding title and References pages)

Format: APA 7th edition

Sources: Minimum 4 sources required (you may include up to 6 sources total):

- *Required:* The 4 sources—these should mostly be the ones used in your informative essay, but you may trade out a few if you've found better sources for your argument since then.
- *Optional:* 2 additional credible sources of your choosing
- *Note:* Brief statistics or definitions from other sources may be used without counting toward your source maximum

Essential Components

1. Introduction: Engage readers with your opening and establish the controversy surrounding your topic. Build context for why this issue matters. End with an argumentative thesis statement that clearly presents your position and previews your main reasons.

2. Body Paragraphs: Each paragraph should develop one main reason supporting your thesis. Structure each paragraph to:

- Begin with a claim that supports your thesis (topic sentence)
- Present relevant, credible evidence from your sources
- Explain how the evidence supports your claim (analysis—don't just drop in quotes)
- End with a sentence that reinforces your argument and transitions to the next paragraph

3. Counterargument Section: Acknowledge and respond to at least one significant opposing viewpoint. Present the counterargument fairly and accurately, then explain why your position is more compelling. This demonstrates critical thinking by showing you've considered the complexity of your topic.

4. Conclusion: Synthesize your main points and reinforce your thesis using fresh language. Discuss the broader significance of your argument—why should readers care about this issue? Leave readers with a compelling final thought.

5. References Page: Properly formatted APA citations for all sources used in your essay.

6. Required AI Disclosure: Include a statement about AI use on your final slide or at the end of your video. Examples: No AI used: "I did not use any AI tools for this reflection." Simple AI help: "I used ChatGPT to help me brainstorm questions to ask myself. All experiences and reflections are my own." More extensive help: "I used Claude to help me organize my thoughts and asked for feedback on clarity. I wrote my ideas first, then revised based on suggestions. All experiences are my own."

What to include:

- **Be specific and honest:** Name which AI tools you used (ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly, etc.) and what you used them for. If you didn't use AI, that's fine too—just say so.
- **Explain your decisions:** Tell me about moments when AI was helpful and moments when you realized it was taking over your voice or thinking. When did you adopt its suggestions? When did you reject them? Why?

- **Reflect on what you learned:** What did using AI (or not using it) teach you about your own writing process? How can you tell when your work is genuinely yours versus when you've let AI do too much of the thinking?

Why this matters:

AI tools aren't going away, and I want you to learn to use them wisely—like you'd use a tutor or a writing guide, not like a shortcut to avoid thinking. This disclosure helps you practice being intentional about your choices and taking ownership of your work. It also helps me understand your process and give you better feedback.

The key question: At the end of this assignment, can you explain and defend every argument in your essay? If yes, you've used AI responsibly. If not, you've let it do too much of your work.

How This Assignment Develops Your General Education Skills

Written Communication Development:

- This assignment asks you to adapt your writing for a new rhetorical purpose. While your informative essay explained multiple perspectives objectively, your argument essay advocates for one position persuasively. You'll practice:
- Using appropriate academic tone while being persuasive (not pushy)
- Organizing ideas logically to build a compelling case
- Integrating sources smoothly to support your claims
- Revising for clarity and effectiveness, not just error correction

Inquiry and Analysis Development:

This assignment requires you to move beyond summarizing sources to actually analyzing your topic and making your own reasoned judgments. You'll practice:

Evaluating evidence to determine what most effectively supports your position

Identifying logical connections between ideas and evidence

Considering multiple perspectives and responding to opposing views fairly

Drawing reasonable conclusions based on evidence rather than assumptions

Submission Requirements

- Final draft must be submitted as a Word document
- Double-spaced, standard 12-point font
- 1-inch margins
- APA 7th edition formatting throughout (title page, in-text citations, References page)
- Include an AI disclosure statement at the end of your references list—skip a few extra lines and insert a short paragraph (sentence if you did not use AI)
- Late points will be strictly applied.

How Your Essay Will Be Assessed

Your essay will be evaluated using the rubric on the following pages, which assesses both your written communication skills and your critical thinking abilities. The rubric focuses on:

- How effectively you communicate your argument to a general academic audience
- How well you use analytical reasoning to support your position
- How thoughtfully you engage with evidence and counterarguments
- How professionally you present your work using academic conventions

Use the rubric as you work on your essay, review it, go over it with classmates and Writing Center tutors, or ask an AI for feedback as appropriate. Just make sure the paper is yours—your voice matters, especially to me and especially at the end of the semester. Do not forget the AI disclosure statement as explained above.

These general education skills will serve you in every college course you take and in your future career. Strong performance on this assignment demonstrates you're ready for the expectations of ENGL 1302 and other college-level courses. Understanding Your GEO Development

Grading Rubric

This rubric assesses your development of Written Communication, Inquiry & Analysis, and Personal Responsibility skills at the foundational level appropriate for ENGL 1301. Strong performance (Proficient or Excellent) on this assignment demonstrates that you are developing the general education outcomes necessary for success in ENGL 1302 and other college courses.

[Rubric checklist](#)

[Full Rubric](#)

Remember: Level 2 (Emerging/Proficient) performance represents solid college-level work for a first-semester composition course. Level 3 (Developing/Excellent) represents strong achievement. These skills will continue developing throughout your college career.

For more information about General Education Outcomes and how to improve your skills, see the GEO Student Self-Assessment Guide available on the [English General Outcomes SharePoint page](#).

Argument Essay Prewriting 1

Purpose

This prewriting exercise will help you transform your informative synthesis essay from MLA format to APA format, which is commonly used in the social sciences and other disciplines. This change in formatting reflects the transition from informative to argumentative writing and will prepare you for diverse academic writing expectations.

Instructions

Part A: Document Formatting Changes

To help you with these, see [Writing down the Basics](#) pp. 88-95 for instructions on how to do these things.

1. **Create a new document** using your informative synthesis essay as the starting point. Save as or save a copy. Name it Essay 3, Argument Essay, or whatever makes sense to you. Just make sure you retain a copy of your MLA formatted Informative Synthesis essay.
2. **Update the font and spacing:**
 - It should stay the same.
3. **Header and Page Numbers:**
 - Update to APA style
4. **Title Page:** Create an APA title page

Part B: In-Text Citation Changes

To help you with these, see [Writing down the Basics](#) pp. 98-105 or [the Purdue OWL APA](#) section for instructions on how to do these things.

1. **Parenthetical Citations:** Convert MLA citations to APA format
 - MLA: (Author's Last Name #)
 - APA: (Author's Last Name, Year, p. #)

Part C: Works Cited → References Changes

1. To change your MLA Work Cited page sources to APA format, use any or all of these:
 - [The library database](#) for anything you got from the library. Look it up there and then select the citation option and make sure you get the APA citation.
 - [The Purdue OWL APA](#) section.
 - AI, but double check your work—work with the writing center tutors.

APA Quick Reference

Here are key links for deeper dives into APA citation:

- [Purdue OWL — APA Guide](#) *The definitive online reference for APA formatting and citations.*
- [Writing down the Basics](#) — APA Citations, pp. 96–110
- [APA Style — Official Website](#) *Straight from the source. Good for edge cases the OWL doesn't cover.*

This is a general overview. While it covers the most common things you will cite, you must refer to your handbook for works beyond the scope of this supplement. What you do about different situations with authors, editions, translators, and other important things are NOT covered in here.

Remember

I've put some things in bold in this section on citation to emphasize and point out key issues. **Nothing in a citation should be in bold.**

Similar to MLA and other citation styles, APA requires that you integrate sources smoothly with a combination of attribution and in-text or parenthetical citations. In the simplest form, it is an **author/date/location** style that generally requires that you give the date of publication in parenthesis after you mention the author's last name(s), and then the page number(s) in parenthesis at the end of the cited material, though this may vary based on your sentence style. Just remember, always get **author, date, and location** into your sentence.

DO NOT put the page number in your sentence. Page numbers and video timestamps **always** go in the in-text citation.

The Basics

A basic reference with a direct quote might look like this:

According to **Shapiro (2015)** "the time to stand up for yourself and others is always now" (**p. 7**).

Just remember that if you put the author's name in your sentence—something you should be doing now and then, make sure you put the year it was published in parenthesis right after that. In an example like the one above, the author's name isn't in

parenthesis because the name is part of the sentence. The date isn't, it's part of the citation, so it goes in parenthesis. We could do it like this too:

In a **2015** study **Shapiro** said, "the time to stand up for yourself and others is always now" **(p. 7)**.

Notice there, 2015 is part of the sentence. Once you have it in the sentence, you don't need to repeat it in the citation. However, remember, page numbers and video timestamps **always** go in the in-text citation. They never, never, never, never go in the sentence.

A paraphrase from 1-2 consecutive pages would look the same. Remember, even if you put it in your own words, you need to cite it in the text and on your references page. Whether or not you give the location is optional. The 7th edition *Publication Manual* (2019) says

Although you are not required to provide a page or paragraph number in the citation for a paraphrase, you may include one in addition to the author and year when it would help interested readers locate the relevant passage within a long or complex work (p. 269).

****If you are writing for my course, I want you to provide the location. In other cases and courses, ask your instructor. Here's an example of a paraphrase. ****

According to **Hacker and Sommers (2015)** commas were not created to confuse people, but to keep parts of sentences from crashing into each other **(p. 287)**.

If you do not mention the author's name(s) in your sentence, put all information (author, date, location) in the in-text citation at the end of the cited material.

Some experts maintain that commas were not created to confuse people, but to keep parts of sentences from crashing into each other **(Hacker & Sommers, 2015, p. 287)**.

Here, note the difference in the *and* and the & in the signal phrase versus the in-text citation in these first two examples. When you are listing multiple authors **in your sentence**, use the word. When you are listing them **in your citation**, use the symbol.

Obviously, you should vary your wording for the sake of style and clarity, but don't forget to change the in-text citation to fit the situation.

If you integrate more information from a source you've just cited **in the same paragraph, and** you use the author name **in your sentence**, you do not need to repeat the date there. If the date is part of the citation at the end of the quote or paraphrase, put it in again.

[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]

Sources without Page Numbers

Today, it is very likely that you can get a pdf version of professional articles online. If you can, always make sure to use the pdf as **having page numbers make it much easier to cite**.

However, for some articles, and of course articles on webpages, you may not have that. In that case, you will need to use a different approach to giving the location in your citation: section/heading titles and paragraph numbers.

APA 7th states that any of the following are acceptable.

If you have a source without page numbers, use paragraph numbers. Use para. to indicate a paragraph number. In that case, one of the above citations would look like this:

FBI (2014) research showed that... **(para. 19)**.

If the document includes headings and no page numbers, cite the heading and the number of the paragraph within the heading or section to direct the reader to the location of the quoted material. For an IMRaD paper, with formally named sections (Methods, Research, Discussion, Conclusions), do this:

FBI (2014) research showed that... **(Discussion section, para. 2)**.

If is not an IMRaD paper and has different section headings, use those. If the heading is really long, then shorten it. Remember, these are short cuts to help people find the right sections.

FBI (2014) research showed that... **("How to Know," para. 5)**.

(Original heading: "How to Know if You're Ready to Join the FBI.")

****In my courses, I expect you to give as much information as available with paraphrases that come from 1 or 2 consecutive pages. Again, if the pdf is available you will have page numbers, so always read the page you find the source on for an option to get the pdf version. Give the page number from the original source document unless that's not available, then just use the pdf page number. ****

[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]

Video or Audio Locations

As of the newest version of the APA rules, putting in the time stamp for quotes or paraphrases from video or audio is required. In that case, you only provide the time stamp for the *beginning* of the section you are quoting or paraphrasing from. Give it in hours, minutes, and seconds, skipping hours or seconds if not available. Put a colon between each section: hh: mm: ss.

People often "confuse a semicolon with a colon. They are not the same" **(Wood, 2015, 05:22)**.

Using Just One Source

When you use just one source in an essay or in a paragraph, you do not need to constantly repeat the author's name in the parenthetical citations. After you establish who wrote the source and it's clear which source it's from, you only need the page numbers, for example,

In his poem "Annabel Lee" **Poe (1849)** uses not simply repetition, but a pattern of paired repetition. He begins the poem saying "It was many and many a year ago" **(line 1)**. By the end of the verse, he writes, "Than to love and be loved by me" **(4)**. He continues with these pairs at the start of the next stanza: "I was a child and she was a child" **(5)**. However, in the rest of that verse, he moves from the simple paired repetition to a repetition that uses longer phrases and paired repeated images.

Notice how I've used Poe's name in my sentence so I didn't need it in the first in-text citation. I put the word *line* in the first parenthetical citation, as that's what you do with

poetry to remind readers that's a line number. After that each time I cite from the same work, I only need the page number. If don't cite any other sources in this paragraph, the only place I need Poe's name is anywhere I want to use it in my sentence, and I don't even need the date.

The same applies to an essay where I only use one source. If I only use one source, after the first mention of it in the text, where I would put the date after the author's name, I only need the author's name when it fits nicely in my sentence.

[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]

Indirect Sources (Quoting a source from another source)

When you have a source that quotes other people and you want to use them but don't have the original source, you can cite it as an indirect source.

Let's take this article as an example:

Lei, S. A. (2015). Variation in study patterns among college students: A review of literature. *College Student Journal*, 49(2), 195–198.

As mentioned elsewhere, a review of literature is an article that examines the research that's been done and then discusses the overall findings (basically a very formal research paper), so there are many other sources cited in them. If you want to quote a source from the source you're reading, first look at the references given on the source you're using, and see if you can find the original source. If so, use that. If you can't find the original source, then do this.

To use information from one of the researchers in the Lei article, we'd need to show who the original author is, and also who readers should look up on our References page if they want to find that article.

Let's say we want to use some version of this information from the Lei article:

College students need to identify a number of isolated study spots and rotate through these hidden locations when studying **(Newport, 2007)**.

If you want to quote Newport but didn't read Newport's original work—just what Lei used here, Lei will be listed on your references page (in the prewriting or annotated bibliography as your citation). Then in the paper, you let people know the idea is from Newport, but they can read it in the Lei paper.

So, you can either put the writer's name in your sentence (there I mean Newport) and then use the in-text citation for the source information (Lei)

It could look like this:

Newport (as cited in Lei, 2015) points out that students “need to identify a number of isolated study spots and rotate through hidden locations when studying” **(p. 197)**.

OR

One researcher suggests that students find a number of secluded places to study and use them on a random basis **(Newport, as cited in Lei, 2015, p. 197)**.

OR

Lei (2015) discusses a study by **Newport (2007)** who emphasizes the “need to identify a number of isolated study spots and rotate through hidden locations when studying” **(p. 197)**.

Notice how all of those show who the author of the words quoted are, but also the author of the actual source we're citing in our paper is and the information for date and location so we can match it up to the source cited on our References page.

Three or more Authors: In-Text Citations (et al.)

In your text if you have a work written by 3 or more authors, use the shortcut for the authors names after the first one: et al. That means “and others.” Always use the et al with the first author's name, otherwise you're talking about a different source—one written by ONLY the first author. All other parts of the citation stay the same. Here are some examples of using et al in your sentences. You can always check your grammar by substituting *they*.

Bowen, et al. (2011) state that “...” **(p. 248)**.

Later in the article they point out the importance of “...” **(Bowen, et al., 2011, p. 253)**.

[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]

Organizations easily recognizable by their abbreviations

First Time:

If you name the organization in your sentence:

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2014)** research showed that... (p. 248).

Subsequent References:

FBI (2014) research showed that... (p. 248)

If you **do not** name the organization in your sentence:

One research project showed that **(Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2014)**.

After setting up the abbreviation, you may just use the abbreviation in all places in the text and in-text citations.)

Subsequent References:

FBI (2014) research showed that... (p. 248).

One research project **(2014)** showed that **(FBI, 2014)**.

APA Punctuating In-Text Citations

When a quote is **40 words or less**, it is integrated with your sentence, and the period goes *after* the in-text citation.

Gary (2012) points out that when we feed our children treats we've become so accustomed to, we "may be doing them more harm than good, despite all the love that goes with it" **(para. 8)**.

Note: since this article has no page numbers, sections, only the paragraph number is required.

When you have a long, indented quote, **more than 40 words for APA style**, you put the period at the end of the sentence, and the in-text citation afterward. *Do not use quotation marks*, as indenting the passage shows it's a quote.

Taubes (2012) makes a clear point in talking about how we so often mistake sugary foods for healthy ones and use food as love:

It's one thing to suggest, as most nutritionists will, that a healthful diet includes more fruits and vegetables, and maybe less fat, red meat and salt, or less of everything. It's entirely different to claim that one particularly cherished aspect of our diet might not just be an unhealthful indulgence but actually be toxic, that when you bake your children a birthday cake or give them lemonade on a hot summer day, you may be doing them more harm than good, despite all the love that goes with it. **(para. 8)**

Again, note that this article has no page numbers, sections, or headings, so only the paragraph number is used.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

Prewriting Toolkit Teamwork Project

The Argument Essay asks you to do something new: take a clear position, support it with evidence, and handle disagreement fairly. Rather than filling out two more prewriting worksheets to practice those moves, you'll research them as a team, alongside classmates working on the same problem from different angles—and then apply what your team finds directly to your own draft. Basically, as part of doing this essay on your own with no conference, you'll also develop prewriting tools you can use for an argument essay.

Your group will research one strand of what makes argument writing effective, build a short "toolkit" of usable prewriting techniques, and share it with the rest of the class. Every group's toolkit becomes part of a shared gallery. You'll then draw on the whole gallery—not just your own group's strand—as you build your thesis, select evidence, handle counterarguments, and draft transitions for your own essay.

You will need to do at least two prewritings other than the first one.

Learning Objectives

This project develops the same General Education Outcomes as the rest of the Argument Essay sequence, with an added emphasis on Personal Responsibility—working reliably as part of a team while still owning your individual contribution. Through this project, you will:

- Research a specific dimension of argumentative writing using both written sources and campus expertise (Writing Center tutors, librarians)
- Evaluate sources for credibility and translate what you find into practical, usable advice—not just a summary creating a couple of prewriting strategies
- Apply some of the prewritings your team researches and develops to your own topic and position, making deliberate choices about what fits your argument
- Practice consulting human resources as part of a research process, not just written sources
- Reflect honestly on your own contribution to a team project, separate from what teammates did or didn't do

The Five Strands

Groups of 3–4 students each research one strand:

- Building a strong, debatable thesis
- Selecting and analyzing evidence — not just dropping in quotes
- Handling counterarguments and concessions
- Ethos, pathos, and logos in persuasive writing
- Organization, transitions, and strong openings/conclusions

See a model

A full example toolkit for the Counterarguments strand—built from a real sentence-by-sentence example, not invented text—is available here: [Counterargument Toolkit \(model example\)](#). Your toolkit doesn't have to look exactly like it — see Format, below — but it shows the level of specificity we're after: real examples, real citations, real usefulness to a classmate.

Group Formation

Sign up for a strand before the posted deadline. Each strand has a capped number of spots so all five get covered.

Haven't signed up by the deadline? You'll be placed into whichever strand still has room.

Research Requirements

Each group finds 2–3 credible written sources on its strand — Writing Center guides, OWL-type resources, composition textbooks, articles on argumentative writing.

And talk to a human. You're strongly encouraged to consult a Writing Center tutor or a librarian about your strand — ideally as a group or in pairs, not just solo. Learning to walk into an office and have a real conversation with someone whose job is to help you is a skill you'll use long after this class. Groups who do this collaboratively will hear about it in my feedback.

What Your Group Produces

Every toolkit, regardless of format, needs:

- Strand name and group members
- 3–5 named prewriting techniques, each with a quick example or mini-model
- Proper citation for every source used, with live links where applicable
- A Sources Consulted list, separate from what's actually cited — this can include people (tutor/librarian names or roles) and sources that informed your thinking but didn't make the final cut
- An AI disclosure for the group, following the same standard as the Argument Essay itself: name any tool used, say what it helped with, and be ready to defend every technique in the toolkit yourselves

Format—your choice

A slide deck, an infographic, a short video (or a couple of short videos), or a reference page/webpage are all fair game, as long as the content above is present. Pick whatever format best fits how your group wants to explain your strand.

The Required Meet-Up

At least once during the conference block, your group meets in person for about 45 minutes.

The classroom, computer lab, and library are all open and unused during conference days — no

extra booking required. A group representative brings a sign-in sheet by the office during conference hours as proof of the meeting.

Missed the meet-up? Explain what happened and what you did instead in your individual reflection (see Grading, below) — there's no separate penalty or makeup form.

Timeline

- During the conference block: work asynchronously around your individual conference slot; complete your required in-person meet-up.
- Return day: we review Prewriting 1 and APA/citation together; your group gets remaining class time to finalize your toolkit and presentation plan.
- Next class day: groups present/share toolkits — everyone leaves with the full gallery, not just their own strand.
- From there: apply techniques from the gallery to your own draft as you build your thesis, evidence, counterargument, and transitions.

From Toolkit to Your Essay

Instead, as you draft, you choose one or more prewriting techniques from the gallery—not just your own group's strand—that fit your topic, and adapt them, often by revising language directly from your Informative Synthesis essay. Your individual reflection is where you name which technique(s) you used and say a sentence or two about what worked.

What stays entirely your own: your thesis, your position, and your essay map. Nobody else can develop those for you — the toolkits give you technique, not content.

Grading

Two components, weighted so you're mostly in control of your own grade:

Individual Reflection—60%

A written response or a short (4–6 minute) video where you reflect on your own contribution and process—not on what teammates did or didn't do. Paired with a short self-assessment against the personal-responsibility/teamwork elements of the rubric: what you got a real feel for, and what you'd still work on. This is also where you name which toolkit prewriting/technique(s) you applied to your own draft, and where you explain a missed meet-up if one happened.

Group Toolkit + Presentation— 40%

Graded against this checklist, regardless of the format your group chooses:

Category	Points	What it's checking
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Techniques	15	3–5 named, usable techniques, each with a clear example or mini-model a classmate could actually apply to their own draft
Sourcing	10	2–3 credible sources, properly cited with live links where applicable; a Sources Consulted list, including any human resources (tutor, librarian)
Required meet-up	5	Sign-in sheet (or equivalent proof) of the required 45-minute in-person meet-up, turned in during conference hours
Presentation & usability	10	Toolkit is clear and usable by someone outside the group; delivered on the scheduled presentation day, in whatever format the group chose

AI Disclosure

Same honest, specific standard as the Argument Essay itself: name any AI tool used, explain exactly what it helped with, and be ready to explain and defend every technique in your toolkit yourselves. Include a disclosure statement with the group toolkit, and reference AI use again (or its absence) in your individual reflection if it played a role in your own application of the techniques.

From Informing to Arguing

For Essay 3, you're making a shift. In Essay 2, your job was to inform—to gather what multiple sources say about a topic and present that information clearly. Now, in Essay 3, your job is to argue—to take a position and convince your reader that your position makes sense.

The Big Shift

Essay 2 (Informative Synthesis): "Here's what experts say about this topic."

Essay 3 (Argument): "Based on what I've learned, here's what I think we should do about it—and here's why."

Both essays use sources. Both require research. But the purpose is different.

Before You Read the Assignment

Think about your Essay 2 topic. You spent weeks researching and synthesizing sources on a technology-related issue.

1. What was your topic for Essay 2?
2. After all that research, do you have an opinion about what should be done?
What did you come to believe?
3. If someone asked you "So what? What's the point?"—what would you say?
4. Is there something you want to convince people of? A change you think should happen?

The Format Shift: MLA to APA

You're also learning a new citation format. APA is common in social sciences, business, nursing, and education.

Things to notice as you work on Prewriting 1:

- Where does the date go in APA citations? How is this different from MLA?
- How do in-text citations look different in APA?
- What's different about the title page?
- Why do you think APA emphasizes the date of publication more than MLA does?

The Counterargument Question

One of the biggest differences between a weak argument and a strong one is how you handle disagreement.

A weak argument pretends the other side doesn't exist.

A strong argument acknowledges the other side, takes it seriously, and explains why your position still makes sense.

Writing to Persuade: Using Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

When we write an informative essay, our goal is to explain different perspectives on a topic fairly and objectively. Now, as we transform that essay into an argument, our goal shifts: we need to convince our readers that our position is the most reasonable one. This doesn't mean we become pushy or aggressive—instead, we learn to be strategically persuasive.

The ancient Greeks identified three main ways that writers persuade readers, and these methods (called rhetorical appeals) are still the foundation of effective persuasive writing today:

- **Ethos** (credibility): Convincing readers that you're trustworthy, knowledgeable, and fair-minded
- **Pathos** (emotion): Helping readers connect emotionally to your topic and care about the issue
- **Logos** (logic): Providing solid evidence and reasoning that supports your claims

The key to persuasive writing isn't using just one of these appeals—it's balancing all three. Too much emotion without evidence makes your argument seem weak. Too much logic without any emotional connection makes your writing dry and unconvincing. And without establishing your credibility, readers won't trust you enough to consider your position seriously.

Ethos: Establishing Your Credibility

What is ethos? Ethos is about convincing our readers that we're someone worth listening to. We build ethos by showing that we've done our research, that we understand different perspectives on the issue, and that we're being fair and honest in our presentation.

How to Build Ethos in Your Writing:

1. **Use credible sources.** When we cite respected experts, authoritative organizations, or well-conducted research studies, we borrow their credibility. Choose sources that our readers will recognize as trustworthy.
2. **Acknowledge counterarguments fairly.** When we present opposing viewpoints accurately and respectfully before refuting them, we show readers

that we've considered multiple perspectives. This makes us seem more trustworthy and less biased.

3. Use appropriate academic language. Professional language (without being overly formal or using unnecessary jargon) shows readers that we take the topic seriously and understand academic discourse.

4. Be accurate and precise. Small errors in facts or careless overstatements can damage our credibility quickly. Make sure our claims are accurate and that we're representing sources correctly.

Example Transformations—Building Ethos:

Weak Ethos (Informative):

"Some people think that social media causes depression in teenagers, while other people think it doesn't. There are different opinions about this."

Problem: This vague statement doesn't establish any authority. Who are these "people"? What evidence exists? The writer seems uninformed.

Stronger Ethos (Argumentative):

"According to a comprehensive study by the American Psychological Association (2021), teenagers who spend more than three hours daily on social media show a 35% higher risk of developing depressive symptoms compared to their peers. While some researchers argue that social media merely reflects existing mental health issues rather than causing them, the longitudinal nature of the APA study—which tracked participants over five years—suggests a causal relationship rather than simple correlation."

Improvement: The writer cites a specific, credible source with concrete data. They acknowledge a counterargument but then explain why their evidence is more convincing. This builds trust.

Damaged Ethos (Overstated):

"Everyone knows that data brokers are criminals who steal our information and sell it to the highest bidder. It's obvious that anyone who defends them is either corrupt or stupid."

Problem: The extreme language ("criminals," "corrupt or stupid") makes the writer seem biased and unreasonable. The claim that "everyone knows" is clearly false, which damages credibility.

Balanced Ethos (Argumentative):

"While data brokers operate within current legal boundaries, the Federal Trade Commission (2014) found that these companies collect personal information from thousands of sources—often without consumers' knowledge or meaningful consent—and sell detailed profiles to third parties. Defenders of the industry emphasize the economic benefits of targeted advertising, and these concerns deserve consideration. However, when weighed against documented cases of discrimination in lending and employment resulting from data broker profiles (Angwin, 2016), the need for stronger federal regulation becomes clear."

Improvement: The writer acknowledges that data brokers aren't breaking laws and that defenders have legitimate points. Yet they still make a strong argument using specific evidence. This balanced approach builds credibility.

Pathos: Connecting Emotionally with Your Audience

What is pathos? Pathos is about helping our readers care about our topic on an emotional level. People aren't convinced by logic alone—they need to feel that the issue matters. Effective pathos helps readers understand why our argument is important without becoming manipulative or overwrought.

How to Use Pathos Effectively:

- 1. Use concrete examples.** Abstract statistics are easier to ignore than real-world scenarios. Help readers visualize the human impact of the issue you're discussing.
 - 2. Choose vivid language carefully.** Descriptive words can help readers feel the importance of our topic, but overdoing it makes our writing seem manipulative or unprofessional.
 - 3. Connect to shared values.** Appeal to values that most readers share—fairness, safety, freedom, family, opportunity—to help them see why our position aligns with what they already care about.
 - 4. Make it relatable.** Help readers see how the issue could affect them, their families, or their communities. Personal connection creates emotional investment.
- Example Transformations—Using Pathos:

Weak Pathos (Too Dry):

"Data brokers collect information from various sources and aggregate it into consumer profiles, which are then sold to businesses for marketing purposes. This practice raises concerns about privacy."

Problem: This is factually accurate but emotionally flat. Nothing here helps readers care about the issue or see why it matters to them personally.

Effective Pathos (Balanced):

"Every time we unlock our phones, click on a website, or scan our loyalty card at the grocery store, we're giving away little pieces of information about ourselves. These digital breadcrumbs tell a story about who we are—but we're not the ones telling it. Companies we've never heard of, called data brokers, are collecting these pieces, assembling them into detailed profiles about us, and selling our life stories to whoever will pay for it. Most people have no idea this is happening."

Improvement: This version uses relatable examples ("unlock your phone," "grocery store") and vivid language ("digital breadcrumbs," "your life story") to help readers feel the invasion of privacy. The phrase "you're not the one telling it" creates emotional tension without becoming manipulative.

Excessive Pathos (Manipulative):

"Imagine our precious children being ruthlessly targeted by evil corporations who want to destroy their innocence and steal their future! These monstrous data brokers are violating our families in ways we can't even imagine, and they're laughing all the way to the bank while our children suffer unimaginable psychological damage!"

Problem: This is way over the top. Words like "ruthlessly," "evil," "monstrous," and "unimaginable" are emotionally manipulative. Most readers will feel like the writer is trying too hard to scare them rather than genuinely informing them.

Balanced Pathos (Effective):

"Parents who set screen time limits and monitor their children's online activity might assume they're protecting their kids' privacy. However, even children who never post on social media are being profiled by data brokers through their parents' loyalty card purchases, their school's educational software, and apps on family devices. By the time these children turn eighteen, data brokers have already assembled detailed profiles about their interests, habits, and vulnerabilities—profiles that can affect their college admissions, job opportunities, and loan applications."

Improvement: This creates genuine concern by explaining concrete consequences that will resonate with parents. The emotional impact comes from the information itself, not

from inflammatory language. Readers feel the threat to their children without feeling manipulated.

Logos: Building Logical Arguments

What is logos? Logos refers to the logical structure of our argument and the quality of evidence we provide. Strong logos means our claims are supported by relevant evidence, our reasoning is sound, and our argument flows logically from point to point. How to Strengthen Logos in Your Writing:

- 1. Use specific, relevant evidence.** Each claim needs support from your sources. Choose evidence that directly relates to the point you're making.
- 2. Explain your reasoning.** Don't just drop in a quote and move on. Explain how the evidence supports your claim and why it matters to your overall argument.
- 3. Make logical connections.** Use transitions that show how your ideas relate to each other. Each paragraph should build on the previous one to strengthen your overall argument.
- 4. Avoid logical fallacies.** Watch out for flawed reasoning like false cause-and-effect, overgeneralizations, or false dilemmas (claiming there are only two options when more exist).

Example Transformations—Strengthening Logos:

Weak Logos (Unsupported Claim):

"Social media is clearly bad for teenagers and causes all kinds of mental health problems. Everyone can see this is true."

Problem: This makes a sweeping claim without any evidence. "Clearly" and "everyone can see" are red flags—they try to make the claim seem obvious rather than actually proving it.

Strong Logos (Well-Supported):

"Research by Twenge and Campbell (2018) found that teenagers who spend more than five hours daily on social media are twice as likely to report depressive symptoms compared to those who spend less than one hour. The study controlled for other factors including family income, academic performance, and pre-existing mental health conditions, strengthening the case for a causal relationship between heavy social media use and depression."

Improvement: The claim is now supported by specific research with concrete data. The writer also explains why this evidence is strong (controlling for other factors), which shows logical reasoning.

Weak Logos (Evidence Without Analysis):

"According to ProPublica, data brokers sell information to companies. The Federal Trade Commission published a report about data brokers in 2014. Shoshana Zuboff wrote a book called The Age of Surveillance Capitalism."

Problem: These are just facts strung together without explanation. The writer hasn't shown how these sources support any particular argument or what readers should conclude from this information.

Strong Logos (Evidence with Analysis):

"An investigation by ProPublica (2016) found that data brokers help businesses make decisions about loans, insurance, and employment—often using information that applicants don't even know was collected about them. This evidence demonstrates that data broker information doesn't just affect what ads we see; it has real economic consequences for people's lives. When someone is denied a loan or job based on data they didn't know existed and can't challenge, that represents a fundamental failure of fairness in the system. The Federal Trade Commission (2014) confirmed this pattern, finding that 'consumers are largely unaware of the scale of data collection and use' that affects these critical life decisions."

Improvement: Now the evidence is integrated into a logical argument. The writer explains what the evidence shows, why it matters, and how it connects to their main point about fairness. The second source reinforces the first, creating a stronger case.

Logical Fallacy (False Dilemma):

"Either we completely ban all data collection by private companies, or we accept that we have no privacy at all. There's no middle ground here."

Problem: This presents only two extreme options when many alternatives exist (regulation, consent requirements, transparency rules, etc.). This kind of flawed reasoning weakens your argument.

Sound Logic (Nuanced):

"Federal regulation of data brokers doesn't require eliminating all data collection—rather, it means establishing clear rules about consent, transparency, and accountability. California's Consumer Privacy Act demonstrates that it's possible to protect consumer privacy while still allowing businesses to collect and use data for legitimate purposes. The key is ensuring that people know what information is being collected, can access their own data, and have meaningful ways to opt out if they choose."

Improvement: This acknowledges that multiple approaches exist and uses a real-world example to show that balanced solutions are possible. The reasoning is more sophisticated and credible.

Balancing Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

The most persuasive arguments blend all three appeals strategically. Here's how they work together in a single paragraph:

Unbalanced Example (All Emotion, No Evidence):

"The thought of corporations spying on us through our phones and computers is absolutely terrifying. We're living in a surveillance state where Big Brother watches our every move. It makes us feel sick to think about how much they know about us. Everyone should be outraged about this invasion of our privacy and the destruction of our freedom!"

Problem: Pure emotion with no evidence or logical reasoning. The Big Brother reference seems overblown. No credible sources or specific information—just feelings.

Balanced Example (Ethos + Pathos + Logos):

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of data broker practices is their impact on democratic processes. According to an investigation by *The New York Times* (2020), political campaigns now use data broker information to send highly targeted messages to individual voters based on their psychological profiles, fears, and beliefs. [**←LOGOS—specific evidence from credible source**] This practice, which Thompson calls the 'weaponization' of personal data, transforms information originally collected for commercial purposes into a tool for political manipulation. [**←ETHOS—using expert terminology appropriately**] When campaigns can exploit detailed profiles of individual voters' vulnerabilities, democracy stops functioning as it should. [**←LOGOS—logical reasoning**] Voters aren't all evaluating the same information and making informed decisions;

instead, they're being individually targeted with messages designed to trigger their specific emotional responses. [*←PATHOS—helping readers understand the emotional impact*] The fact that this kind of manipulation is possible because of data collected by largely unregulated brokers demonstrates exactly why federal oversight is necessary to protect not just individual privacy, but the integrity of our democratic system itself. [*←LOGOS—concluding with broader implications*]

Why This Works:

- **Ethos:** Cites a credible source (NYT), uses appropriate academic language, treats the topic seriously
- **Pathos:** Uses words like "troubling," "manipulation," and "exploit" to create emotional response; helps readers understand the threat to democracy, but doesn't go too far with it.
- **Logos:** Provides specific evidence, explains the logical connection between data collection and democratic manipulation, builds to a reasonable conclusion

Practical Strategies for Your Argument Essay

Strategy 1: Start with Your Evidence (Logos), Then Add Emotional Context (Pathos)

When you're not sure how to make a paragraph persuasive, start by stating your evidence clearly, then explain why it should matter to readers:

Step 1—State the evidence: "According to the Federal Trade Commission (2014), data brokers collect information from public records, online shopping, loyalty card programs, and social media platforms, combining data from thousands of sources to create detailed consumer profiles."

Step 2—Add emotional context: "Most people have no idea that their grocery store loyalty card is connected to their social media activity and used to create a profile that companies buy and sell. The tracking happens invisibly, turning our everyday actions into commodities without our knowledge or genuine consent."

Strategy 2: Lead with Values (Pathos), Support with Evidence (Logos)

Sometimes it's effective to start by connecting to shared values, then back up that emotional appeal with solid evidence:

Step 1—Appeal to shared values: "Most Americans believe that people deserve a fair chance at jobs and loans based on their actual qualifications and financial history—not on hidden profiles assembled by companies they've never heard of."

Step 2—Provide supporting evidence: "Yet ProPublica's investigation (2016) documented numerous cases where people were denied employment and credit based on data broker profiles that included inaccurate information or irrelevant factors they couldn't challenge or correct. This isn't just a privacy issue—it's a fundamental fairness problem that affects people's economic opportunities."

Strategy 3: Build Credibility Through Fair Treatment of Opposition (Ethos)

When addressing counterarguments, show respect for opposing views even as you refute them:

Weak approach: "Some people foolishly claim that data collection is helpful, but they're obviously wrong."

Strong approach: "Defenders of data brokers make a legitimate point when they argue that personalized advertising helps consumers discover products they genuinely need. However, this benefit must be weighed against the documented harms—including discrimination in lending and employment—that result from unregulated data broker practices. The question isn't whether personalization has value, but whether that value justifies the current system's lack of transparency and accountability."

Warning Signs: When You've Gone Too Far

Watch for these red flags that suggest your persuasive writing has become too aggressive or manipulative:

Red Flag #1: Extreme Language

Words like: always, never, everyone, no one, obviously, clearly, undeniably, impossible, destroy, obliterate, evil, criminal, stupid

Better alternatives: often, rarely, many people, most experts, evidence suggests, research indicates, harmful, problematic, concerning, questionable

Red Flag #2: Personal Attacks

Attacking people who disagree with you damages your credibility and makes you seem unreasonable. Instead of criticizing opponents personally, focus on explaining why their arguments are less convincing than yours.

Red Flag #3: Emotional Manipulation

If you're using emotional scenarios that seem designed to upset readers rather than inform them, you've crossed from persuasion into manipulation. Your goal is to help readers understand the emotional stakes of your topic, not to terrorize them into agreeing with you.

Red Flag #4: Unsupported Certainty

Phrases like: "It's obvious that...", "Everyone knows...", "There's no question that...", "Any reasonable person can see..."

These phrases try to make claims seem self-evident instead of actually proving them with evidence. If something really is obvious, you should be able to provide evidence for it.

Final Tips for Effective Persuasion

- 1. Read your work aloud.** If anything sounds preachy, aggressive, or overly emotional when you read it out loud, revise it. Your tone should be confident but not arrogant, passionate but not hysterical.
- 2. Imagine a skeptical reader.** Picture someone who disagrees with you reading your essay. Would they feel like you're treating their position fairly? Would they find your evidence convincing? If not, strengthen those areas.
- 3. Let evidence do the heavy lifting.** The strongest arguments don't need excessive emotional language because the evidence speaks for itself. Trust your research to be compelling.
- 4. Maintain academic tone while being engaging.** You can write in a clear, accessible style without becoming too casual. In many cases, avoid slang and contractions (can't, won't, shouldn't) in formal academic writing, but don't use unnecessarily complicated vocabulary either. When in doubt, have someone read it. [This professor is okay with contractions, but others might not be.]
- 5. End strong.** Your conclusion should remind readers why your argument matters without simply repeating what you've already said. Leave them thinking about the broader significance of your topic.

Remember: The Goal is Respectful Persuasion

Your argument essay should convince readers through a careful balance of credibility (ethos), emotional connection (pathos), and solid reasoning (logos). You're not trying to bully people into agreeing with you or manipulate their emotions. Instead, you're making the most compelling case possible for your position while treating your topic, your sources, and your readers with respect.

When you transform your informative essay into an argumentative one, you're learning one of the most valuable skills in academic and professional life: the ability to take a position and defend it persuasively without being overbearing. This skill will serve you well far beyond this class—in other courses, in your career, and in any situation where you need to convince others that your perspective deserves serious consideration.

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