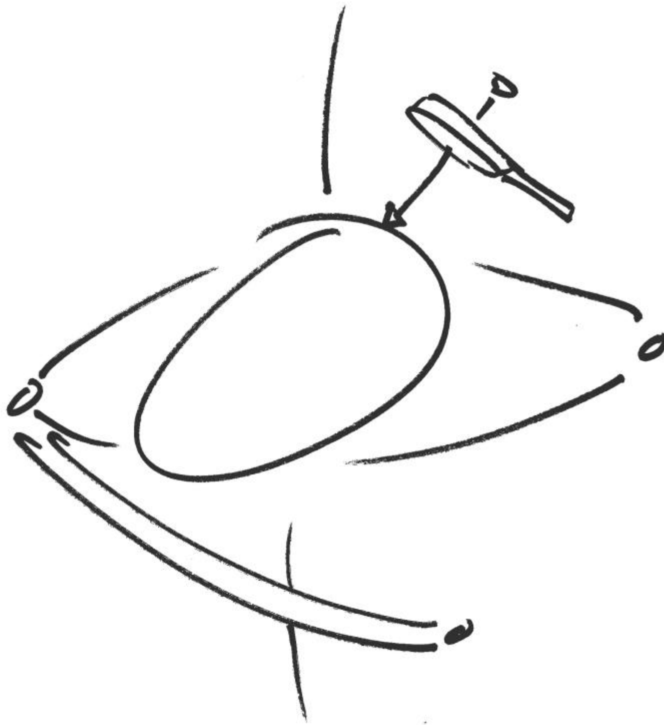
Academic Writing



Jeffrey R. Wilson

Academic Writing

"Writing" is usually understood as the expression of thought. This book redefines "writing" as the thought process itself. Writing is not what you do with thought. Writing is thinking.

Better living through interpretation: that's the promise of academic writing, which is a foundational course in most schools because it's a foundational skill in life. Our world is full of things that need to be questioned, from ancient myths and historical events to current politics and the weird details of everyday life.

Based on his courses in the Writing Program at Harvard University, Jeffrey R. Wilson's *Academic Writing* is a no-nonsense guide to the long and complex writing process. Packed with concrete examples, helpful visuals, and practical tips, the book is an essential guide for academic writing at the highest level. Empowering writers to be creators—not just consumers—of knowledge, Wilson shows how to develop perspective, ask questions, build ideas, and craft arguments that reveal new truths that the world needs to hear. Writers learn different strategies for articulating the implications of an argument—why it matters—and putting ideas in conversation with others by finding, reading, and incorporating scholarship. There are models for different ways to organize an essay and tips to make sentences snap with style. Emphasis is placed on developing ideas in constant conversation with others and on strengthening papers through multiple rounds of revision.

Jeffrey R. Wilson is a teacher-scholar at Harvard University. He is the author of three books: *Richard III's Bodies from Medieval England to Modernity: Shakespeare and Disability History* (2022), *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones* (2021), and *Shakespeare and Trump* (2020). As an Instructional Design Lead in the Office of the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning, he creates courses and events for Harvard Online. From 2014-22, he taught the "Why Shakespeare?" course in the Harvard College Writing Program. He has taught in the Departments of English and Religious Studies at University of California, Irvine; in the Department of Criminal Justice at California State University, Long Beach; and in the Museum Studies Program at the Harvard Extension School. His writing has appeared in journals such as *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Genre*, and *College Literature*, and his research has been featured on *CNN, MSNBC, NPR,* and *New York Times*. On Twitter @DrJeffreyWilson.

Academic Writing

Jeffrey R. Wilson

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This book is being made available in draft form. Readers are warmly invited to make suggestions for revision.

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Acknowledgements

This book is a no-nonsense guide to the academic writing process—no fluff and no frills. It's not about grammar, punctuation, MLA Style, or personal essays—not that kind of writing. It's a how-to manual for high-quality arguments.

There are four main components:

- *Chapters:* Each provides guidance, not rules, because there are always exceptions to the rules in academic writing.

- *Practicums:* These boxes give step-by-step instructions to help you build ideas and write papers.

- *The Writing Process:* These features show all the steps taken to write a paper, allowing you to follow it from initial idea to published article.

- *Into the Essay:* Excerpts from actual papers show the ideas from the chapters in action because you learn to write best by getting examples rather than instructions.

Much of my approach to academic writing developed during my time in the Harvard College Writing Program. I am especially grateful to Tom Jehn, Karen Heath, Jane Rosensweig, Pat Bellanca, Jonah Johnson, Jim Herron, and Gordon Harvey, the originator of the Elements of Academic Writing. I refined this approach while teaching writing courses in museum studies at the Harvard Extension School (Katherine Burton Jones), in criminal justice at CSU Long Beach (thanks to Hank Fradella), and in disability studies at UC Irvine (thanks to Jonathan Alexander, Daniel Gross, Lynda Haas, Julia

Reinhard Lupton, Tira Palmquist, and Victoria Silver), as well as courses for middle- and high-school students at Phillips Academy Andover (thanks Beth Friedman and Erin McCloskey).

The *Into the Essay* examples come from papers on Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. I'm a Shakespeare nut, and one key to good writing is to write about what you care about. You don't need to know or like *Hamlet* to benefit from these examples, which provide models for your own passions and papers.

In my writing classes, every time I asked students to write an essay on *Hamlet*, I wrote one myself—to get a sense of the steps they were going through and to provide examples of writing in action. These essays aimed to be more rigorous than the puff pieces in mainstream media yet more accessible than the scholarship in academic journals—precisely the kind of writing students often do.

First came "'It Started Like a Guilty Thing': The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics' in the political magazine *CounterPunch* in 2015. Next was "What Shakespeare Says about Sending Our Children Off to College" for *Academe*. I teamed with criminologist Hank Fradella to theorize "The Hamlet Syndrome" in the journal *Law, Culture, and the Humanities*. "Shakespeare on the Classics, Shakespeare as a Classic: A Reading of Aeneas's Tale to Dido" appeared at the 2016 British Shakespeare Association Conference in Hull.

2017 brought "'To be, or not to be': Shakespeare Against Philosophy" in the journal *Shakespeare*. In 2018, I wrote "As a stranger give it welcome": Shakespeare's Advice for First-Year College Students" for *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*.

Four essays appeared in 2019. First was "Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy" in the collection *Hamlet and Emotions*. "Tragic Foundationalism" appeared in *Mosaic*. An essay humbly titled "The Meaning of Death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" appeared in *ANQ*. And "Tragic Excess in *Hamlet*" appeared in *Literary Imagination*. In 2019, I also presented "Ophelia's Songs: Moral Agency, Manipulation, and the Metaphor of Music in *Hamlet*" at the European Shakespeare Research Association Conference in Rome.

In 2020, "The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism" appeared in *Midwest Quarterly*. "*Hamlet* is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach it Like One" appeared in *Zocalo Public Square*. "What's Love Got to Do with *Hamlet*?" appeared in *Shakespeare Magazine*.

In early corona-times, I couldn't write anything, so I dove into some reading. Out came the first truly historicist thing I'd written in a long time, which is also deeply personal: "Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" in *English Language Notes*. Father's Day 2022 also brought an essay called "In Defense of Polonius" for *JSTOR Daily*—which is the article tracked from initial idea to published piece in *The Writing Process* segments of this book.

I am grateful to students, colleagues, editors, readers, audiences, and interlocutors for comments and conversations about these ideas.

One

Academic Writing

1

Academic Writing

Better living through interpretation: that's the promise of academic writing, which is one of the foundational courses in most schools and colleges because it's one of the foundational skills in life. Our world is full of things that need to be questioned, from ancient myths and historical events to current politics and the weird details of everyday life.

Interpreting things makes us happy. Humans love to discover and debate meanings. What did Maria mean when she said I "looked good today"? Why is every movie now a remake, reboot, sequel, or prequel? What's up with this Vladimir Putin guy? The human brain hates when it's confused, when there's something complex that it doesn't understand, whether it's a strange story like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or the reason America loves guns. Interpretation offers pathways to understanding, and knowledge is power over confusion.

Writing is also practical. Regardless of the direction you see your life going, you'll be writing your way there. Let's say you want to cure cancer. You don't need to know how to write, you say to yourself. You just need to know the science of abnormal cell growth. You enroll in all the science courses you can—math, physics, statistics, cellular biology, organic chemistry. You ace your classes, graduate with honors, slaughter the MCAT, and enroll in the top molecular biology graduate program in the country, where you conduct groundbreaking research with leaders in the field. You get your Ph.D., and you're ready to open your own lab. That takes money, so you've got to write a funding application. Then you've got to be able to write up your research in academic articles that can be published to the scientific community that needs to know about your work. You've got to be able to write.

The Pillars of Academic Writing

Academic writing is built upon three truths that aren't self-evident:

- *Writing is Thinking*: While "writing" is traditionally understood as the expression of thought, we'll redefine "writing" as the thought process itself. Writing is not what you do with thought. Writing is thinking.

- *Writing is a Process*: Both the interpretation that forms the basis of an argument and the presentation of that argument in a paper need to be done in a sequence of steps, each phase building off the prior.

- *We Write Best in Conversation with Others*: In contrast to the image of the solitary writer sitting alone in their candle-lit study and solving all the world's problems, writing is best done with lots of input from others as ideas are developed, tested, and strengthened.

What is Academic Writing?

It's not creative writing like fiction and poetry, where the goal is to entertain. It's not the journalistic writing that you read in the news, where the goal is to inform. It's not transactional writing, as in an email to your boss, where the goal is to communicate.

The purpose of academic writing is to search for truth. That sounds fluffy and philosophical, but it simply means that academic writing is where we go to learn about the world we live in—about what is true, how things came to be, and how we know.

Academic writing is fundamentally analytical. Even academic writing that argues for the virtue of a certain public policy or individual action only does so because it makes a claim to a clear-sighted understanding of an issue. In academic writing, there are no politics and no ethics without analysis.

The purpose of any particular piece of academic writing is to tell us something about the world that we don't already know. Originality is the key to success. Asking you to produce academic writing is asking you to shift from being a receptor of knowledge to being a creator of knowledge. That's a big shift, but it's also exciting because it means you'll have an opportunity to teach us something that you know.

There are two ways to say something new: (1) tell your readers about the existence of something they don't already know about, or (2) give your readers a new interpretation of something that everyone already knows about. So you could (1) tell your readers about an unknown source for Shakespeare's

Hamlet that scholars haven't yet identified or (2) give your readers a new way of thinking about *Hamlet*, a play that everyone already knows about, but one that has some new meaning in your account of it.

Content is king in academic writing. You have to know something that others don't if you're going to have any success. All the tips and strategies for writing good papers are worthless if you don't have some knowledge that is worth communicating to others. So you'll want to start asking: *What am I an expert on?*

Writing is easy when you've got something to say. The hard part of writing isn't putting the words on the page. It's having an idea that's worth writing about.

Under our approach, you'll be surprised by how long it takes you to get to the actual putting-words-on-the-page part of writing papers. Much of our time early in the writing process will be spent building ideas. You'll definitely be writing as you brainstorm ideas, but we'll also be developing and revising ideas in conversation. During this process, your teacher and your classmates will serve as test audiences for you, allowing you to see which of your ideas are "clicking" with people and allowing others to offer suggestions for further development.

How Your Writing Will Change

Looking to the future, here are five ways you can expect your writing to change using our approach:

1. There will be a shift from focusing on the product (the paper you turn in) to focusing on the process (the development of ideas).

2. There will be a shift from understanding a "research paper" as a book report that synthesizes what other writers have said and "picks a side" to understanding it as an original argument that is situated in an ongoing academic conversation.

3. There will be a shift from the five-paragraph essay to more sophisticated organizational structures.

4. There will be a shift from thinking about revision as editing the language errors in a paper to thinking about it as improving an idea and then writing a new paper for that new idea.

5. There will be a shift from writing about literature to writing about everything.

2

Academic Integrity

Integrity is important in all academic work. It's extra-important in writing. Having academic integrity means that you're honest in your representation of your work. With respect to writing, there are two key areas.

First, there are the *ethical* aspects of academic integrity: your writing is your writing, meaning that you did it, didn't have someone else do it, and didn't steal it off the internet.

Because they involve willful attempts to deceive others, these ethical issues are fairly straight-forward: don't cheat and be extra-vigilant during high-stress times (on exams or when big assignments are due) because that is when temptations will arise. Know that, instead of doing something you'll regret, it's always better to go to a teacher, explain your situation, submit incomplete work, and create a plan for getting back on track.

Second, there are the *technical* aspects of academic integrity, which involve the responsible use of sources: your writing properly cites sources when working with other people's ideas and accurately represents data.

This area is what we'll focus on in our writing class because it is more challenging than the ethical issues. You can—because of a lack of technical skill or because you don't dedicate sufficient time—fail to properly credit other people's ideas even if there's no willful intent to deceive. In this case, you're not trying to cheat, but your work still lacks integrity. Plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional. If you misrepresent your use of sources, even if unintentionally—whether it's borrowing ideas off the internet without citing them or not citing a source correctly because you don't know how to—that's still plagiarism.

3

Writing Across the Curriculum

Certain strategies of interpretation and argument apply regardless of the academic discipline in which one is working. There are also always discipline-specific aspects of academic writing.

The movement known as "writing across the curriculum" cultivates an awareness of the features of academic writing that apply universally and of those that change depending upon the discipline in play.

Seven elements—*evidence*, *analysis*, *question/problem*, *method*, *argument*, *structure*, and *implications*—appear in all academic writing across the disciplines. Sometimes the same element appears differently in different disciplines, and sometimes different disciplines introduce new elements.

1. *Evidence:* Academic writing begins with evidence. That may sound obvious, but what, really, is evidence? The word comes from the Latin *video*, "to see": evidence is perceptible, able to be seen. In academic writing, it is not enough to have facts, information, logic, and so forth that supports one's position. That material must be visible, perceptible, able to be seen in the actual paper. Whether one is presenting facts and dates or quotations and summaries, evidence must be literally evident in academic writing regardless of the discipline—this in contrast to, say, some kinds of journalism in which sources are confidential or some kinds of editorials in which a position can be advocated without a thorough presentation of the evidence for it.

2. *Analysis:* Evidence always needs analysis. Evidence, in and of itself, does not make academic writing. Regardless of the discipline, academic writing involves the elucidation of evidence in ways that are informed by

the assumptions, motives, commitments, and conventions of a discipline. In other words, it is universally true that any instance of academic writing is situated within and committed to a discipline, but the disciplinary commitment of any given piece of writing changes. It is not a distinction that holds absolutely, but the humanities tend to deal in qualitative analysis while the sciences often deal in quantitative analysis, and the social sciences in both. Qualitative analysis is geared toward the description of things (of qualities), while quantitative analysis toward the measurement of things (of quantities). As such, the humanities attempt to explain the world primarily through the use of language, and the sciences attempt to explain the world primarily through the use of numbers. This is not to say that there are no concepts in the sciences or numbers in the humanities, but there is a significant and meaningful difference in the procedural foundation of these schools of thought. Why? Because the humanities are addressed to subjective experience with the world in which we live, the sciences to the objective reality of that world, and the social sciences to the objective reality of subjective experience.

3. *Question/Problem*: In theory, though certainly not in practice, any piece of academic writing needs to be written because it provides us with a better understanding of our world. All academic writing responds to a specific problem or question. The distinction (once more) isn't absolute, but the humanities tend to respond to "problems" on the order of *How should we understand X?*, while the sciences often deal in "questions" that boil down to *Is X true or not?* In other words, the humanities help us think about things with which we are already familiar while the sciences give us new information that we don't already have.

4. *Method:* In light of the different modes of analysis across the disciplines, all academic writing employs a deliberate method that is drawn from a distinct discipline or combination of disciplines. The methods of interpretation and argumentation can and do change from discipline to discipline, but a rigorous method must exist for writing to be properly academic.

5. *Structure:* Similarly, all academic writing has structure to it (admittedly, sometimes not as clear as it could be). Like method, structure depends upon the discipline in play: different disciplines use different structures. Yet again these conventions are not absolute, but often the humanities use an *Introduction-Body-Conclusion* structure, while the sciences use an *Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion* structure.

6. *Argument:* All academic writing also has an argument—a series of demonstrated claims that add up to a central idea—though not necessarily a thesis statement. A thesis is a proposition presented early in

an essay that is then supported with evidence and analysis throughout the rest of the essay. Papers in the humanities have theses, but papers in the sciences tend to have hypotheses. A hypothesis is a prediction in response to a question that requires research; that research may prove the hypothesis true (as expected) or untrue (leading to a different answer to the question at hand).

7. *Implications:* All academic writing has implications, or extractable knowledge that matters beyond the specifics of the argument. Implications could consist of additional questions that need to be asked, further research that needs to be done, theorizations, speculations, policy implications, or any other strategies that move a discussion beyond the interpretation of the specific issue at hand in an essay.

4

The Elements of Academic Writing

Our foundation will be a vocabulary we'll call the Elements of Academic Writing.

There are millions of academic books and articles out there. No one could possibly read them all. There are, however, only about fifteen or so kinds of information that appear in an academic book or article. In our course, we will introduce and discuss each element as we go. Some of the terms below may be confusing at first, but it will be helpful to have a glossary for the elements of academic writing.

Text: The thing being interpreted—the object, event, topic, or phenomenon being discussed, even if it's not a book.

Author: The person interpreting the *text*.

Question/Problem: Why the *text* needs interpretation.

Method: How the *text* is being interpreted.

Thesis/Argument: The central interpretation of the *text*.

Stakes/Implications: Why the *argument* matters.

Terminology: Key concepts in the *argument*.

Assertion: A point in the body of an essay that has not yet been substantiated with *evidence*. All the assertions should logically produce the *argument*.

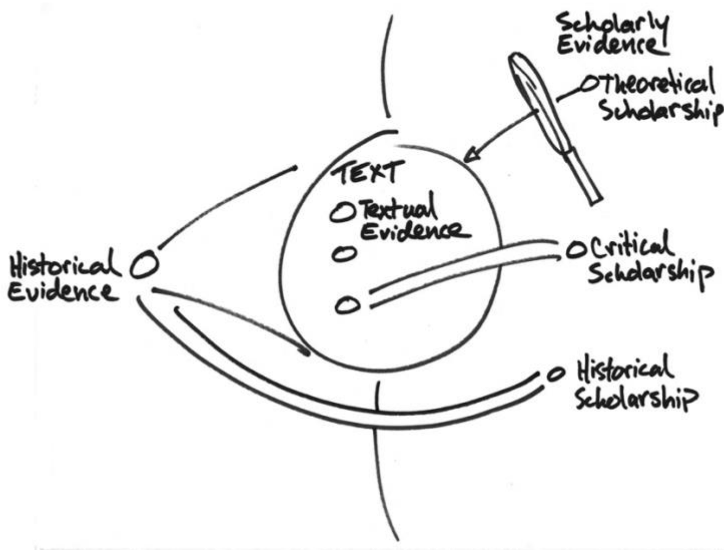

Figure 1: The Kinds of Evidence

Evidence: The information—facts, examples, quotations, details, experiments, data, statistics—presented in support of an *assertion*. There are three kinds of evidence—*textual*, *historical*, and *citational*—and evidence always receives *analysis*.

Textual Evidence: Facts, examples, details, quotes, etc. drawn from the *text*, often followed by *analysis*.

Historical Evidence: Facts, examples, details, quotes, etc. from outside the *text*; context that influenced or helps explain the text, often followed by *analysis*.

Scholarly Evidence: Scholars cited to help deliver an *argument*. There are three kinds of Scholarly Evidence: *critical*, *historical*, and *theoretical*.

Critical Scholarship: A scholar who has interpreted the same *text* as the author, often marshaled to support *analysis* or *argument*, or used as a *counter* that the author responds to.

Historical Scholarship: A scholar who has interpreted the *historical evidence* relevant to a *text*, usually cited to help contextualize evidence accurately.

Theoretical Scholarship: A scholar whose ideas (often abstract or philosophical) help an author deliver an argument, even though that scholar doesn't directly discuss the text or context in question.

Citation: References to the sources of *evidence*.

Analysis: The interpretation of *evidence*, whether it's *textual*, *historical*, or *scholarly*.

Counter/Response: Alternate *evidence*, *analysis*, or *argument* (real or imagined) that an author must account for to be fully persuasive.

The *text* is the centerpiece of this vocabulary. All other categories function in relation to what is defined as the *text*. Until you know what the *text* is, you cannot know what the *argument* is, since the *argument* is about the *text*. Until you know what the *text* is, you cannot know if certain piece of *evidence* is "inside" or "outside" the text—e.g., is *textual evidence* or *historical evidence*.

5

The Kinds of Academic Writing

There are many forms of academic writing—too many to list—but most fall into one of three large categories, which each have several sub-types.

1. The Single-Source Paper

An analysis of a single text (or idea, event, object, etc.) that identifies and discusses some interesting or problematic aspect of that text (or idea, event, object, etc.).

- *The Close Reading*: An interpretation that shows how a text was made and/or how it works.
    - An interpretation of Polonius's "To thine own self be true" speech in Shakespeare's Hamlet.
    - An interpretation of the advisability of the United States entering into the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- *The Theorization*: The presentation of an abstract statement through the discussion of a particular example.
    - A theory of "the self" based on Polonius's "To thine own self be true" speech in *Hamlet*.
    - A theory of the social causes of crime based on a case study of East Garfield Park in Chicago, IL.

- *The Archival Essay*: The presentation of new historical material not widely available.

  - A discussion of an eighteenth-century reader's marginal annotations on the "To thine own self be true" passage in a book archived in the Folger Shakespeare Library.
  - A presentation of skin diseases as drawn in ninetieth-century medical textbooks housed in the Yale Library.

- *The Empirical Report*: The presentation of new data gathered through controlled observation.

  - A discussion of the frequency of the word "self" in each of Shakespeare's works.
  - A report on how often medical personnel at the hospital in Salina, KS washed their hands during an observation period.

- *The Book Review*: A summary and discussion of someone else's book.

  - A review of Stephen Greenblatt's book Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980).
  - A review of Jordan Ellenberg's How Not to Be Wrong: The Power of Mathematical Thinking (2014).

2. The Multi-Source Paper

An essay that brings two or more texts (or events, ideas, objects, etc.) into conversation on the basis of some common ground.

- The Historicist Essay: A consideration of a text in light of historical circumstances relevant to the way it came into existence.

  - A discussion of Polonius's "To thine own self be true" speech in the context of the adages in William Lily's Latin grammar textbook, Rudimenta Grammatices, which Shakespeare would have studied as a student.
  - An argument that the Republican party has mobilized conservative social issues to get Kansas farmers to vote for conservative fiscal policies that aren't in their own best interests.

- The Comparative Essay: A consideration of similar texts, ideas, events that come from different contexts.

  - A discussion of the treatment of the self in the sixteenth-century English playwright William Shakespeare's Hamlet and the

nineteenth-century German philosopher's G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind.
- An illustration of how Thomas Hobbes and John Locke's different views of "nature" led them to support different forms of government.

– The Lens Essay: The use of one text or idea (usually philosophical or theoretical in nature) to unpack and explain a particular example or set of data.

  - A reading of Polonius's "To thine own self be true" speech from the perspective of the American sociologist Erving Goffman's book The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959).
  - An argument using Darwinian theories of evolutionary biology to explain dating in American high schools.

– The Test-a-Theory Essay: The use of an example or data set to evaluate (and potentially improve or disprove) a general philosophical or theoretical idea.

  - A consideration of whose theory of tragedy—Aristotle's, Hegel's, or Miller's—best explains Shakespeare's Hamlet.
  - An essay asking if the ISIS attacks in Paris in November 2015 support Martha Crenshaw's "rational choice theory" of terrorism.

– The Presentist Essay: The use of a historical text or idea to unpack and discuss a recent text or idea.

  - A reading of Polonius's "To thine own self be true" speech as a way to discuss the difficulties of parenting in the increasingly global world of the twenty-first century.
  - A discussion of the "classical style" of Roman writers like Cicero designed to convince academics to write essays with less bloated language.

– The Meta-Analysis: A collection and synthesis of several studies on a related topic in an effort to draw some more stable or general conclusions.

  - A synthesis of seven studies of the self in seven different US populations in an attempt to establish a general theory of the self.
  - A consideration of the past twenty years of research on the relationship between poverty and lottery ticket sales.

- The Review Essay: A discussion and critique of several recent studies on a related topic designed to ascertain the state of a field.

    - A critique of recent studies of the self in Shakespeare's drama by John Lee, Bridget Escolme, and Mustapha Fahmi.
    - A discussion of the status of race in higher education admissions based on the arguments in recent books by Franklin Tuitt and Julie Park.

3. The Research Paper

A special kind of essay—whether single-source or multi-source—that cites, discusses, and advances previous scholarship on a given topic. In other words, an original contribution to an on-going field of academic inquiry.

* * *

Note that none of the categories listed is something like "take a position," "choose a side," or "advocate a policy" because those are things that can be done in any kind of paper. Those are *kinds of arguments* rather than *kinds of essays.* Any of the kinds of essays listed here could be descriptive / analytical / philosophical (concerned with explanation) or normative / ethical / political (concerned with advocacy). This typology of academic writing is organized not by purpose but by the fields of evidence that come into play.

6

The Writing Process

Writing is best done in a sequence. Each step sets you up to take the next step. If you find that something isn't clicking in your paper, it's often because you tried to skip over or move too quickly through one of the steps. Go back and figure out which step you didn't take.

Below is a sequence of steps that provide a sense of what a good research project looks like. Note that about half of the sequence is about coming up with a good idea to write about, and about half is about actually writing that idea out in an effective paper.

> *Read a text:* And then read it again.
>
> *Identify a problem, ask a question*: Identify some quirks, quandaries, contradictions, gray areas, moments that run counter to expectation, etc. in your text—a problem that demands interpretation. The writing process begins not with a point that you want to make but with a question that you want to investigate.
>
> *Identify your topic*: Articulate what specifically you are going to interpret.
>
> *Identify, collect, and organize your evidence*: Identify the places in the text that you will need to look in order to answer that question. You don't need an interpretation; you just need a clear understanding of the information that needs interpretation: *Just the facts, ma'am.* Make a list of all of the relevant places in your text. Maybe make a timeline or chart of information related to your topic. Identify the passage that is the most-important place to look for answering your question.

Analyze your evidence: Start with your key passage. Do an explication, making as many observations about that key evidence as possible. How might an observation or set of observations about your key evidence unlock and elucidate the rest of the text? Consider making a conceptual map of your ideas about your evidence in which you visualize the structure of your idea about the material.

Write out an argument: If you make a conceptual map, writing it out in words should be fairly easy. Simply narrate the parts and progression of your analysis in, say, 300-600 words. We'll call this an "argument statement," which is different from a "thesis statement."

Draft a working thesis: The sequence of ideas that led you to an important insight about the text is your argument. Your thesis is the one- or two-sentence main claim about your text that you want your reader to accept because it is true. It is true, but it isn't obvious. If a thesis is obvious, then we don't need you to write a paper arguing it. A thesis that is obvious is just as bad as a thesis that isn't true (well, not quite as bad).

Develop your implications: Articulate the pay-off of your argument, which should illustrate its value. Do so by asking, *What can we do with the knowledge created by my argument?*

Identify, find, and collect your scholarship: Search for, find, and collect scholarship that has addressed your topic or similar topics. Download, print, or make copies or scans of all sources so that you will always have access to them.

Read the scholarship: Read through the scholarly books and articles you have collected. Create an annotated bibliography that summarizes each source you examine.

Analyze your scholarship: Consider the relationship between your understanding of your topic (i.e., your working thesis) and the scholarship, not to change your ideas to match those of the published scholars, but to mark out where you might make an original contribution to the academic conversation. Are there any gaps in the scholarship?

Reconsider your evidence and analyses: Based on your collection, reading, and analysis of the scholarship on your topic and text(s), revisit the information you have collected and the analyses you have conducted to make your interpretation as complete and accurate as possible.

Revise your thesis: Based on your revised information and analyses, revisit your working thesis, revising it so that it is as complete and accurate an account of your interpretation as possible.

NOTE: Everything up to this point has been about how to develop a good argument; everything that follows is about how to present that argument effectively in a paper.

Make a basic outline: You now know the thesis that your entire paper should be devoted to supporting. Draft an outline with (1) an introduction that describes a problem and responds to it with a thesis; (2) a body that supports your thesis by walking your reader through the evidence and analysis that illustrate your argument; and (3) a conclusion that includes a full argument statement, considers any counter-evidence or -arguments, and discusses the implications of your argument.

Write a draft: Turn your outline into prose. Writing is the easy part of writing: putting words together in sentences to produce compelling claims is easy if you have done the work of interpretation that generates an argument worth presenting. It is only when you don't have a quality argument that the actual writing is difficult.

Revise your argument: In the course of writing your draft, your argument may change. You may, while articulating your evidence and analyses, have landed upon some new insights that improve your argument or lead to a completely different argument. Write out a new "argument statement" that represents your most up-to-date understanding of your topic.

Revise your thesis: If you revised your argument statement, you also need to revise your thesis statement. Once you've updated your thesis to reflect your most current thinking on your topic, you've got a finished draft.

NOTE: What follows is the first step in the "cycle of revision"; revision is not something that happens just once, but over and over to make the paper better and better.

Solicit feedback: The first part of the revision process is to ask for comments from peers, teachers, random people on the street, anyone who will give it.

Create a plan for revision: Some of the comments you receive will simply be edits to your language; those are quick fixes. More importantly, carefully read their comments on your ideas, and rather than just diving into a

revision, consider what it is you need to accomplish in your revision, and create a plan for doing so.

Create a new detailed outline: Revision is not about fixing your earlier draft; it's about writing a new paper. Based on the comments you've received, and your continuing thoughts on your project, create a new outline—not a revision of your previous outline, but a new outline based on what the completely new paper you would write today would look like. Create first a basic outline (which covers the ideas you're addressing and the order in which you're addressing them), and then a detailed outline (which adds the substantive claims you're making about those ideas).

Reread and incorporate the scholarship: Having developed your ideas, your argument, and your paper into a fairly mature form, go back and revisit some of the key sources from the scholarship regarding your topic; you'll find that your enhanced understanding of the issue allows you to judge more effectively which critics get things right and which get things wrong. Incorporate your new insights on the scholarship into your detailed outline. Acknowledge and compliment those who have gotten the issue right; take down those who have gotten it wrong.

Revise your paper: The process of revision involves the cycle between updating your evidence and analysis, and then updating your argument and thesis to reflect your updated analyses. The most successful paper will be the one that is constantly updated—sometimes even rewritten from scratch—to reflect your must current understanding of your topic.

Edit your draft: Read through your paper, from start to finish, several times, to fix any language errors, to increase the clarity and concision of your language, and to ensure that your style and formatting are correct.

Repeat the cycle of revision as needed: Go back to the first step in the "cycle of revision," having your peers and professors read your paper, and repeat the cycle as much as necessary until you arrive at a paper you're happy with.

— Practicum —

Scheduling Your Writing

Sometimes, writing a great paper isn't about how brilliant you are. It's about project management: knowing what to do, the order in which to do it, and keeping to schedule.

Once you've got a due date for a paper, create a schedule that includes these major checkpoints:

- *Read my text*
- *Identify my question/problem*
- *Identify my topic*
- *Identify, collect, organize my evidence*
- *Analyze my evidence*
- *Write out an argument*
- *Draft a working thesis*
- *Develop my implications*
- *Identify, find, collect my scholarship*
- *Read the scholarship*
- *Analyze my scholarship*
- *Reconsider evidence and analyses*
- *Revise my thesis*
- *Make a basic outline*
- *Write a draft*
- *Revise my argument*
- *Revise my thesis*
- *Solicit feedback*
- *Create a plan for revision*
- *Create a new detailed outline*
- *Reread and incorporate the scholarship*
- *Revise my paper*
- *Edit my draft*

Two

Theory

7

Textuality

You're reading *text*, words on a page (or screen). You're also reading *a* text, understood as a particular document filled with words. In your backpack you have other texts, the kind stacked in the bookstore, what your teacher means when he tells you to bring your text to class everyday.

Immediately let's expand our definition of what a *text* is. The term comes from a Latin word, *texere*, "to weave," as in a textile, woven maybe for warmth, maybe for decoration. For any number of reasons, authors create or compose or write "texts" by weaving instincts, impulses, habits, and desires into a material object. It broadens our definition to think of a *text* as something, anything, deliberately made by human hands in a certain way in order to accomplish a certain goal.

Trying to discover how and why someone made something in that way that it was made is called *interpretation*. In other words, interpretation is the search for the intent of the author of a text.

These words, this document, those books in your bag are still texts, but much else is too: nutritional info on the back of your cereal box, an e-mail from your mom about coming home for the weekend, billboard signs as you drive on the highway, advertisements on TV, text messages from your bff, a syllabus from your Math professor, rottentomatoes.com film reviews of a movie you might go see this weekend, an editorial about recycling on campus, instructions on how to use your newest iPhone app, ads flashing on the edges of your Facebook page. Books are still texts, but speeches, songs, conversations, art, plays, films, TV shows, video games, presentations, buildings, and events—all things created to accomplish a goal—are texts too.

Even people are texts: we compose ourselves to others. Whether ratty or classy, your classmate's shirt sends a message for you to read, a message about how she views herself, how she wants you to view her, and how she views your shared social situation. When you ask for an extension on an assignment, your professor's facial expression is a composition for you to interpret. From this perspective, even social events, social institutions, social structures, and—yes—societies are texts: all are deliberately made by humans to accomplish some goal.

That tree you pass as you walk across campus—is that a text? If it was planned and planted to accomplish a goal, then yes. What would your interpretation (account of the author's intent) be? Maybe photosynthesis, maybe beauty, maybe shade.

What about the tree that grows naturally in a forest, untouched by human hands, the one no one would hear if it fell: is that a text? There are two ways to argue that it is: a theological way and a philosophical way.

First, some theologies will say that it, like everything, was created to accomplish a goal, by a higher power; this is one version of "everything happens for a reason." The inaccessibility of God's intent does not mean that no intent exists.

Second, some philosophies will point out that the tree may not be a human creation, but any experience with that tree (perceiving it, describing it, using it as an example as I am doing now) is going to involve some sort of human invention (turning a retinal impression into a mental perception, using language to communicate an idea, making a point about textuality). The tree is not a text, but any experience with it is a human creation. From this perspective, everything is a text: it is not material objects that we interpret but our subjective experience with them, which is one way to read the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's famous pronouncement, *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, "There is nothing outside the text" or "There is no outside-of-the-text." The idea that we ourselves create the objects of our interpretation, so no interpretation is "objective," is fairly mundane when applied to a tree, but what about applying this idea to things like reality, truth, and virtue?

While keeping both the theological and the philosophical positions in mind, let's come back down to earth. Let's draw the line in our definition of a *text* at "something (whether material object or immaterial event) made by someone (or a group of people) in an attempt to accomplish a certain goal."

As such, the idea of *textuality* is that our world is full of texts, full of things we humans have made, and we can interpret those "texts" in the same way that we interpret "texts" more traditionally understood (as in works of literature). Just as you can interpret the structure, genre, characters, and

themes of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, you can interpret the structure, genre, characters, and themes of Abraham Lincoln's assassination. The notion that we can view our world as filled with texts is the basis of both humanism (and, by extension, the academic fields called "the humanities") and rhetorical theory (and, by extension, the academic field called "cultural studies").

8

The Humanities

Institutionally speaking, the humanities is an umbrella term that refers to a set of academic disciplines usually including (more or less) Classics, History, Philosophy, Religion, Law, Literature, Linguistics, the Visual Arts (such as Painting, Photography, and Film) and the Performing Arts (such as Music, Theatre, and Dance).

Conceptually speaking, the humanities study the things humans make—our art, writings, thoughts, religions, governments, histories, technologies, and societies—helping us understand who we are, what we do, how we do it, why, and with what consequences.

(The sciences study naturally occurring phenomena, the things that humans didn't invent: rocks, stars, molecules, animals, gravity, chemical reactions, the circulation of blood, and so forth.)

The humanities help us understand the experience of being human by asking the big questions that individuals and societies face day after day, year after year, generation after generation, and century after century: *What is true? Why do we do what we do? How should we lead our lives?*

The humanities try to get to the bottom of things when the best way to understand something is unclear, asking and answering questions that aren't easily accounted for with common sense.

They usually treat answers as provisional and open to revision. Thus, we come to reckon with the relationship between the past and the present.

The humanities identify historical objects, events, and traditions that deserve to be known and thought about today, raising questions about how we exercise judgment and how we determine value.

Forcing us to articulate what we think is true and good, and why, the humanities train our mental capabilities: our ability to interpret and our ability to explain. Thus, we develop the skills needed to think about and talk about why we do what we do.

A premium is placed on both reflection (bringing about the possibility of changing one's own mind) and justification (bringing about the possibility of changing someone else's mind).

The humanities provide neither rules for living (as church does), nor training for a certain job (as vocational schools do). Instead, they provide the skills that equip people with the ability to do other things better.

That's why it's equally mistaken to believe (1) that the humanities are a self-contained end in themselves that can remain cozily insulated in academia, and (2) that people don't need the humanities if they're going to pursue a vocation outside academia.

The humanities are based in the notion of *textuality*—the idea that the world is full of texts, or things we humans have created (whether material objects like a poem or immaterial events like a war), and that we can interpret those "texts" in the same ways that we interpret "texts" more traditionally understood (as in works of literature).

9

Rhetoric

Rhetoric is a prerequisite for the successful pursuit of knowledge. Understood as the study of modes of interpretation and argument, rhetoric is needed regardless of the discipline or field you plan to pursue because rhetoric equips you with the forms and strategies of thought and speech that you'll use to investigate and discuss material specific to your academic endeavors, whatever they may be.

One of the seven classical liberal arts, rhetoric—from the Greek *rhetor*, "speaker"—is the art of speaking. Traditionally, rhetoric was addressed as "the art of speaking" in a limited sense, as in the art of delivering a persuasive public oration. More recently, rhetoric has come to be seen as "the art of speaking" in the more general sense of "communication," including the skills of thinking, reading, and writing.

Broadly conceived, therefore, there are two branches of rhetoric—the practical (which is classical) and the theoretical (which is modern). Practical rhetoric is about persuasion; rhetorical theory is about interpretation. Practical rhetoric is about writing texts, while rhetorical theory is about reading texts. Practical rhetoric is about writing your own text, structuring it, communicating an idea. Rhetorical theory is about reading someone else's text, making sense of it, interpreting it.

Practical Rhetoric

In the tradition of Aristotle, practical rhetoric is largely about strategies for effective argumentation. There are three modes of persuasion:

- *Logos* refers to the appeal of an argument based on its logical consistency.
- *Ethos* refers to the speaker's ability to present him- or herself as a credible authority.
- *Pathos* refers to the speaker's ability to rouse emotions in his audience that influence their willingness to accept his or her argument.

Logos relates to the argument itself, *ethos* to the speaker and *pathos* to the audience. Aristotle said that one's *ethos* is achieved by what one says, not by the attitude of the audience before one's speech begins. In other words, you establish credibility not by being a recognized expert but by conducting yourself in a way that grants you authority.

For Aristotle, there are three kinds of oratory:

- A *forensic* argument is legal.
- A *deliberative* argument is political.
- An *epideictic* argument is ethical.

For each kind of oratory, Aristotle attached (1) a binary of themes, (2) a time period, and (3) an end:

- A forensic argument is (1) about accusation and defense, (2) with reference to the past, and (3) in the service of justice.
- A deliberative argument is (1) about exhortation and dehortation, (2) with reference to the future, and (3) about expediency.
- An epideictic argument is (1) about praise and blame, (2) with reference to the present, and (3) in the service of honor.

According to Aristotle, there are four parts of oratory:

(1) the *prooemium* or introduction;
(2) the *prosthesis*, which is a statement of the proposition to be argued;
(3) the *pistis*, which is the proof of the statement;
(4) the *epilogue* or conclusion.

These parts of oratory are roughly analogous to the commonly taught three-part structure of the modern essay: Introduction (which includes a thesis), Body, and Conclusion.

Rhetorical Theory

Rhetorical theory can be thought of as the philosophy of communication. It involves the study and mastery of interpretation and argumentation. It attends not to *what* we think and say but to *how* we think and speak.

Where practical rhetoric addresses the steps one can take to create a persuasive argument, rhetorical theory focuses more on interpretation of something that someone else has created. It identifies and explains the various factors that played a part in the creation of a thing, its emergence in the world.

As such, rhetorical theory is about the situatedness of things. Every idea and every event emerges in contexts that condition its coming-into-existence. Stated as such, this notion is obvious and benign, but, if true, then all meaning is circumstantial. Both acts of textual creation and acts of textual interpretation—both writing and reading—are situated among circumstances that condition those actions. It is those circumstantial aspects of action that rhetorical theory addresses.

If practical rhetoric is prescriptive, detailing (as it does) the means of effective persuasion, rhetorical theory is descriptive, attending to the forms of communication, whether persuasive or not.

Rhetorical theory does not belong to any one discipline. It is an "interdiscipline," because all disciplines use rhetoric to package the truths of that discipline.

10

Interpretation

Interpretation is the search for meaning and significance.

Meaning is an account of what an author wanted to communicate, what the author was trying to accomplish.

Significance is an explanation of how and why something came into existence (what the text points to) or its importance (why it matters).

Meaning as Intent

A text means what its author intended it to mean. This is the "intentionalist thesis." While clearly circular, the intentionalist thesis can be useful once its keywords—*text, meaning, author, intent*—are unpacked.

If a *text* is anything (whether that "thing" is a material object or an immaterial event) created by a human or group of humans in some deliberate way in order to accomplish some purpose, there must exist someone or some group who did the creating.

There are no texts without authors. The existence of a text implies the existence of an *author*, a word we take from the Latin *augere*, "to increase," and its cognate *auctor*, "one who causes to grow." The *author* is the agent of the actions that result in the text. Simply put, the author is who made the text.

If the existence of a text implies the existence of an author, the existence of an author implies the existence of *intent*. Our word *intent* comes from the

Latin *tenere*, “to hold,” and its cognate *intendere*, “to stretch out,” as in an archer’s bow that is held and stretched out to fire an arrow at a target. The author’s intent is the direction the author hopes his or her text will travel, what the author wants the text to do, and the actions the author performs in order to ensure the text does what he or she wants it to do. Intent is what an author does to ensure his or her text travels in a certain direction, like an archer carving, feathering, knocking, drawing, aiming, and firing an arrow.

The existence of a text implies the existence of an author implies the existence of intent implies the existence of meaning.

As a gerund (a verbal that functions as a noun), *meaning* expresses an action (“to mean”) but also a thing (“the meaning”): meaning is something that *is done* that becomes something that *is*. Meaning *is* what *is done*, or *was done*, including how it is or was done and why it is or was done. The *meaning* of a text is what is or was done to produce that text, including how and why.

Thus, a text means what its author intended it to mean.

Significance as What is Pointed To

Yet there can be forces working upon a text beyond an author’s conscious, deliberate goals. There can be social or historical events and values that shape how a text came into existence in the way that it did. Those forces are what the text signifies.

Consider what the literary theorist M.H. Abrams called ”the total situation of a work of art,” which is comprised of four “elements”: the Work, the Artist, the Audience, and the Universe.

> *The Work* (OE *weorc*, “something done”) is the material oboject created through an orderly set of operations.
>
> *The Artist* (L. *ars*, “skill, craft”) is the person whose orderly set of operations creates a material object.
>
> *The Audience* (L. *audire*, “to hear”) is the group who experiences the material object.
>
> *The Universe* (L. *unus*, “one” + *vertere* ”to turn”) is the whole of existence that conditions both the artist and the audience.

In our vocabulary, attention to how the artist created the work would involve questions of meaning.

Questions of significance would ask how the universe affected the author, the work, and its ongoing audiences, or how the work has affected audiences and the universe.

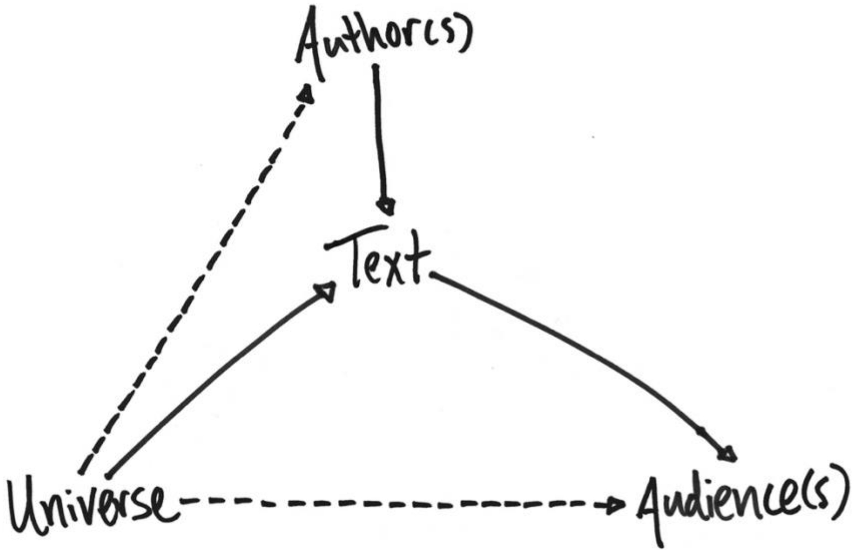

Figure 2: The Total Situation of the Text

Three

Interpretation

11

Close Reading

Close reading is the foundation of academic writing because the purpose of academic writing is to make an original contribution to a field of knowledge. Close reading is how you get to originality.

"Close reading" isn't just "reading." Close reading focuses on what is not obvious, on what requires "close" as opposed to "surface" attention.

An argument may be true yet still not good because it's obvious: good arguments deliver truths that go beyond the obvious.

Close reading is a practice often associated with literary studies, but you can do close readings of historical events and social phenomena. You can do close readings of quantitative data.

Let's say you have some data showing that arrests in New York City have steadily decreased over the past three months. A surface reading might assume that crime has gone down, but a close reading could reveal that police have not been making arrests to protest the mayor's lack of funding for the police. Crime has not gone down, only arrests. If that fact is widely known, it could be that crime has gone up because arrests have gone down.

Close reading is about how evidence doesn't interpret itself. Evidence needs analysis. And evidence can sometimes seem to support one position while the careful analysis of that evidence leads to a different understanding.

Strategies for Close Reading

Some possible approaches to close reading include:

- Contrast or complicate a "surface reading" with a "close reading."

- Select a topic or text that isn't well known and show how it challenges or complicates common assumptions.

- Select a topic or text that is widely known and produce a reading that is new and surprising.

- Offer a close reading that is only available due to your perspective, using your own experiences, identities, attitudes, and beliefs as a prompt for insight.

- Offer an outsider's understanding of a topic or text, one that upends how experts tend to think about it.

- Generate a theory, extrapolating outward from an analysis of a specific topic or text to propose a generalizable idea that might explain other things.

Not Using Sources

When close reading, don't consult sources beyond your text(s). When working with something that is new or confusing, there is a natural instinct to seek out someone that can explain it. Resist that urge because you want to become the expert who can explain it.

There is a virtue in *not* using sources in a close reading, especially internet sources such as Sparknotes and Wikipedia. These sources do not give *the* interpretation of a text but *an* interpretation and sometimes a *bad* interpretation.

Relying upon these sources is inimical to academic writing, the point of which is to say something new—not to be "right" when your ideas are compared with your professor's ideas or published scholarship, but to add something new to an ongoing academic conversation. If you bring in outside sources, whether from the internet or the library, your writing will be derivative. You will find yourself reduced to agreeing and disagreeing with the ideas of others as opposed to generating an original idea of your own.

12

Perspective

The only reason to write an essay—ever—is because you know something your audience doesn't. Sometimes, that knowledge comes from knowing your situation in life better than anyone else. Maybe others share that situation, and you're able to speak to it. Maybe folks who aren't in that situation could benefit from seeing an issue from that perspective.

Perspective is one of your greatest resources as a writer. Having a well-developed perspective is what keeps readers coming back for more.

Your perspective is the way you see the world from your unique position in it—the sustained point-of-view on life you have developed over time, as conditioned by your experiences, values, and goals.

Use your perspective to help you decide which texts and topics to write about. Don't write about something you don't care about. When you're writing a paper, ask how you can "find yourself" in the material—your concerns and interests—because you've already thought a lot about those issues. You have expertise. You might have something to teach us. So what's your perspective?

Perspective is closely bound up with experiences and identities. The best way to develop your perspective is to think about what matters to you most in life. You don't need to discuss those experiences and identities in your paper. Sometimes you can: being vulnerable is one way to build trust with your reader. Even if you don't make it explicit in the actual essay, you should still use your perspective to inform what you write about and the arguments you make.

Having perspective doesn't necessarily mean you've been through some traumatic hardship. Sometimes you have, and that can be a part of your perspective. We always learn something when we live through difficulty. But perspective is really just about the specifics of your situation in the world, and how your worldview might provide important insight on texts that need interpretation.

Don't try to be objective. Objectivity is a myth. Embrace your perspective as a human and a writer. Allow that perspective to influence and play a part in your argument. When people tell you to "be objective," what they really want is for you to be rigorous in your analysis of evidence; they don't want you to pretend like you're not who you are.

— Practicum —

Establishing Your Perspective

The questions below are designed to help you discover and formalize your perspective. Aim for honesty and consequentiality.

1. *Identities:* List two identities you hold that give your life meaning. These could be biographical (e.g., middle child, father deceased, star athlete, military, etc.), geographical (city kid, Southerner, American), cultural (wealthy, Hispanic, atheist), political (radical, conservative, independent), sexual (in love, transsexual, virgin), or anything else that comes to mind.

2. *Concentrations:* List the two academic fields you are most fascinated by (i.e., possible majors or concentrations).

3. *Extracurriculars:* Write down two extracurriculars you partake in (formally or informally).

4. *Classes:* List the college classes you've taken, and any particularly memorable ones from high school.

5. *Expertise:* Identify a specific topic you know a lot about (e.g., some people, for whatever reason, know a lot about the French revolution, or soil density, or what have you).

6. *Languages:* Do you speak any languages other than English?

7. *Social Challenges:* What do you think is the single greatest problem facing society today?

8. *Your Life:* What has been the single most influential event on your development as a human being?

9. *Your Times:* What has been the most important historical event of your lifetime?

Into the Essay

From ***Hamlet*** **is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

I once tried to commit suicide. Twenty years later, it's still hard to talk about. I didn't want to die. Self-esteem issues, depression, alcoholism. I was signaling, in an unhealthy way, that I was in pain and needed help. A better way would have been to call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (https:/suicidepreventionlifeline.org/) at 1-800-273-8255. It was the age of Nirvana. Depression and suicide were in the air in U.S. teen culture. A close friend had moved away from our small Midwestern town. Beforehand, he started acting out. A few times he lost it, had some public meltdowns. Yelling. Crying. It rattled us all. High drama. Huge audience. I didn't consciously recognize that his performances garnered him massive attention, and I might do the same, but it was classic modeling behavior.

A paragraph using personal experience to introduce a topic.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determination**

This critique of fate, written in the twenty-first century by me, an atheist, could just as easily have been written by a sixteenth-century Christian like Shakespeare.

A sentence using personal positionality for analysis.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in Shakespeare's *Hamlet***

Hi, my name is Jeff, and I'm a Shakespeare scholar. The first step was admitting I had a problem. I spend a lot of time making amends. I'm also a recovering alcoholic, which is why I flinch at gimmicks like Shit-Faced Shakespeare, where actors see how far into their benders they can remember their lines. Good fun, but Shakespeare thought alcohol was a major social problem. Many examples support this argument—Christopher Sly, Falstaff, Bardolph, Claudius, Cassio, the Porter in Macbeth, Barnadine, Lepidus, Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban—and not many stand against it ("Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" [*Twelfth Night*, 2.3.106-07]).

A paragraph using personal experience to establish expertise on a topic.

13

Questions and Problems

Most people know that an argumentative paper needs a "thesis statement." A paper also needs a good "problem statement." A *question/problem* statement maps out a challenging, contested, or difficult-to-understand issue that needs interpretation.

Don't allow your argument to be free-floating intelligence. Having an amazing argument isn't good enough. A good *question/problem* statement gives your reader a reason to care by showing why an argument needs to be made.

Identifying Problems and Asking Questions

To develop a good *question/problem*, do some reading and thinking first. A *question/problem* is not something you ask before interpreting a text or topic but after. It's what needs more interpretation beyond the initial pass.

Sometimes we read something, have an idea, and then write a paper about it. Don't do that. Instead, ask a question that you currently can't answer. Identify a problem that you currently can't solve. That's a *question/problem* worthy of a paper.

A good *question/problem*:

- Speaks to a genuine dilemma. It should grow from a confusion, ambiguity, or grey area of a text, an aspect about which readers will have different reactions, opinions, or interpretations.
- Is answerable given the available evidence. You must have access to the source(s) needed to respond to the question.

- Yields an answer that is not obvious. Your *question/problem* should call for interpretation, not facts.

Here are some additional tips to keep in mind:

- How and why questions are better than who, what, when, or where questions.
- Good questions can highlight patterns and connections or contradictions and disconnections.
- Good questions should suggest the implications or consequences of an analysis.

Problems and questions might develop from:

- *Assumption*: a gap between expectation and experience; something *is* different than you thought it *would be*.
- *Perception*: a gap between appearance and reality; something *seems* different than it actually *is*.
- *Ethics*: a gap between the ideal and the real; something *ought to be* different than it *is*.

Some other strategies that you might consider for identifying problems and asking questions include:

- *A Situated Perspective*: Your concerns, experiences, identity, specialized knowledge, or point-of-view open up an insight about a text that isn't obvious.
- *A Presentist Reading*: Some new historical event or perspective has emerged that allows us to reread and rethink an older text or topic.
- *A New Phenomenon*: Something new has emerged in the world—or a new version of something old—that demands interpretation.

Question/Problem$_1$ and Question/Problem$_2$

Your *question/problem* articulates why your paper needs to be written. In the early stages of the writing process, that need for interpretation grows directly out of the materials you're looking at—your *text*. After a writer has formulated a *question/problem*, the next step is often to go do some research to see how others have answered that question or solved that problem. Don't do that!

Because originality is the key to success in academic writing, try to answer your driving *question/problem* first—by yourself—before reading what other people think about it. You'll read that scholarship later in the writing process but, first, try to develop your own original interpretation. Ignore the scholarship for now and go straight to the materials that need interpretation.

If you do, you'll later be able to read that scholarship and determine how your *argument* makes an original contribution to an ongoing academic conversation (which is the goal of a research paper).

At this point, we need to draw a distinction between two kinds of *question/problem* statements:

- *Question/Problem*$_1$: The issue in the text that needs interpretation.
- *Question/Problem*$_2$: The shortcoming in previous scholarship on the topic.

If you're writing a single-source or multi-source essay—papers that don't include scholarly research—you'll only have a *question/problem*$_1$. If you're writing a research paper, you'll want to include a second statement—*question/problem*$_2$—which involves what is called a "literature review." For a literature review, a writer researches, narrates, and cites the various interpretations that have previously been published, and then justifies the need for additional interpretation.

Broadly speaking, therefore, *question/problems* can come from two realms:

(1) from a text itself because there is some question, confusion, ambiguity, contradiction, etc. that needs interpretation;
(2) from the scholarship related to a text because there is some gap, misconception, or undeveloped line of thought in an academic field.

Toward the Paper

One thing that can happen during the writing process is that you realize you've developed an answer to a question that you weren't really asking. A paper on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that began with the problem that Horatio isn't a very good friend to Hamlet could end up with an argument that answers the question, "How did Shakespeare see himself as an artist?" When something like this happens, make sure that the *question/problem* presented in your paper is the one that your *thesis* resolves rather than the one that inaugurated your investigation. (Your initial *question/problem*, however, will still probably have a place somewhere in your paper, maybe near the beginning of the body of the essay.)

When you get to the actual essay, you'll need to think about the best way to structure your presentation of your *question/problem* alongside the other Elements of Academic Writing.

Let's say you're writing a short single-source analysis. You might develop a *question/problem* in the first paragraph, and then answer it with a *thesis* in the second paragraph. This sort of introduction is called *The Q&A*:

Paragraph 1: *Question/Problem Statement*

- *Orientation*
- *Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem$_1$*

Paragraph 2: *Thesis Statement*

- *Text*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

If you're writing a research paper, you'll want to include a literature review that cites and analyzes previous scholarship on your topic or a related field. To do so, you'll need to include a second *question/problem* statement (related to the criticism—*question/problem$_2$*) in between the first *question/problem* statement and the *thesis*:

Paragraph 1: *Question/Problem Statement*

- *Orientation*
- *Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem$_1$*

Paragraph 2: *Literature Review*

- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Question/Problem$_2$*

Paragraph 3: *Thesis Statement*

- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

— Practicum —

Writing an Analytical Question

Practically speaking, a question/problem statement can be articulated in a three-part structure:

(1) *Make a Reference:* through quotation, paraphrase, and/or summary, provide some *evidence* from the text you're looking at;

(2) *Make a Claim:* unpack that *evidence* with *analysis*;

(3) Ask a Question: open up a field of inquiry by discussing the *question/problem* that emerges from your *analysis* of that *evidence*.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Questions and Problems

1. According to the Penguin edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, there are 3,834 lines in the play. 325 of them are spoken by women, Ophelia (170 lines) and Gertrude (155 lines), the only two women in the play out of the more than 30 characters listed in the *dramatic personae*. In other words, although roughly half of the human population is made up of women, they make up roughly 7 percent of the characters in *Hamlet* and speak roughly 8 percent of the lines in the play. Why is the role of women so diminished in *Hamlet*? Is this evidence of sexism on Shakespeare's part? Of sexism in Shakespeare's society? What do we do with the fact that the most famous play in the history of English literature systematically ignores half of humankind?

2. Polonius, the character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is most memorable for being a bumbling old fool, an overbearing father, and the guy who gets accidentally stabbed while spying on Prince Hamlet. It's easy to look down on Polonius, or to roll your eyes at him, as Queen Gertrude does after one of his long-winded rants, when she asks for "more matter with less art" (2.2.95). Yet Polonius finds himself in a number of situations that, speaking as a father, are difficult to navigate. He's a single father doing his best to raise two rebellious teenagers while working a high-demand job in government. His son has gone off to college in another country—that's nerve-wracking. The prince wants to marry his daughter—that's even more terrifying. And while Shakespeare's play is filled with examples of very bad parenting—King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, King Hamlet—Polonius holds it all together without murdering his brother, marrying his dead husband's brother, or returning from the grave to tell his son to go kill someone. What happens if we view Polonius not through the eyes of his enemy, Prince Hamlet—which is the point of view Shakespeare's play asks audiences to adopt—but by way of analogy to modern single parents doing their best to juggle home life and work life? How does Shakespeare's play read differently when Polonius is seen as a sympathetic figure rather than as an easy target for laughter?

3. According to Horatio, King Hamlet once slaughtered some Pollocks while in "parle" (1.1.62), or peaceful negotiations. Horatio also describes how King Hamlet entered into a duel with Old Fortinbras, a Norwegian lord, each king placing his claim to a piece of land on the line such that the victor would gain control over it, a duel King Hamlet partook in, Horatio says, because he was "pricked on by a most emulate pride" (1.1.83). These two passages, coming in the first scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, provide an unflattering initial image of King Hamlet (an image that Prince Hamlet would surely dispute). Old King Hamlet did not observe the rules of war, and he was willing to jeopardize a piece of his country in order to satisfy his personal pride. If we can consider the possibility (with apologies to young Prince Hamlet) that old King Hamlet was not a very good king, is it also possible to conceive of Claudius as a republican revolutionary? That is, can we think of Claudius as someone who believes (and is willing to fight for the belief) that nations should be governed by those who are most fit to run them as opposed to those who are born into royalty and a line of succession? Can we think of Claudius as a virtuous political revolutionary? Can we conceive of his marriage to Gertrude not as a perverse and illicit sexual union but as a political marriage designed to stabilize the teetering state of Denmark in the eves of its enemies?

Into the Essay

From **What Shakespeare Says about Sending Our Children Off to College**

Every fall, millions of parents send millions of children off to college for the first time, and those parents must find something ceremonious to say. What do we say to the sons and daughters we've been able to mold, mentor, guide, and indeed save (often from themselves) as they step out of our control and into a world that—quite frankly—they don't understand, couldn't possibly understand?

William Shakespeare actually wrote a scene about this event. It appears in his most famous play, *Hamlet*, and it gives us one of his most quoted lines: "To thine own self be true." This line has inspired countless valedictorian addresses and blog posts. Films such as *The Last Days of Disco* and *Clueless* have riffed on it. People tattoo it on their bodies. A friend of mine went to a school where students were asked to sign every letter with their names and "To thine own self be true," even though none of them knew where the line was from or what it meant.

What does "To thine own self be true" actually mean? *Be yourself? Don't change who you are? Follow your own convictions? Don't lie to yourself?* Determining the meaning of this line—and Shakespeare's advice for young people on their way to college— depends to some extent upon the meaning of "self," the meaning of "true," and perhaps even the meaning of "meaning."

The opening of an essay using evidence and analysis to establish the question/problem.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

As first argued by Juliet Dusinberre in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), Shakespeare seems to have been attentive and opposed to the systematic mistreatment of women during his age yet, whenever I think about gender in Hamlet, something just feels wrong.[1] According to the Penguin edition, there are 3,834 lines in the play.[2] Only 325 of them are spoken by women, Ophelia (170 lines) and Gertrude (155 lines), the only two women in the play out of the more than 30 characters listed in the dramatic personae. Although roughly half of the human population is made up of women, they make up roughly 7 percent of the characters in Hamlet and speak roughly 8 percent of the lines in the play.

This present absence of women has led modern writers like John Updike, Lisa Klein, and Alice Birch to reimagine the story of Hamlet from Gertrude's or Ophelia's perspective.[3] It has led feminist critics to ask why the role of women is so diminished in the play. Is this evidence of sexism on Shakespeare's part?[4] Of sexism in Shakespeare's society?[5] And what do we do with the fact that the most celebrated play in the history of English literature systematically ignores half of humankind?[6]

The opening of an essay using evidence, analysis, and critical scholarship to establish the question/problem.

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Texts

Your *text* is the thing you're interpreting, whether that "thing" is a book, idea, action, situation, event, trend, topic, or some other social phenomenon. A *text* is what's being interpreted, and an *argument* is the interpretation of that thing.

It doesn't matter if it's a work of art or an argumentative article, it's still just the thing you're interpreting.

Use the versatility of textuality to your advantage. Focus in on exactly what you want to interpret. This is called "defining your text."

For example, "the television show Mad Men" is a text, as is "the character Peggy Olson in Mad Men," and "Peggy's haircut in the episode 'The Jet Set' during season two of Mad Men," and "the gender politics symbolized in Peggy's haircut in the episode 'The Jet Set' during season two of Mad Men."

Or "stigma" is a text, as is "the causes and effects of stigma," and "the social and psychological causes and effects of the 'ex-con' stigma," and "the social and psychological causes and effects of the 'ex-con' stigma during the hiring process in the southern United States."

In the above examples, each articulation identifies something different to address, something more specific, and thus something more likely to be interpreted fully. The more precisely you can identify the *text* you're interpreting, the more fully you'll be able to fulfill the promise of all interpretation: to explain how and why something is the way that it is.

If you're writing a five-page paper, your *text* can't be something like "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." Why not? Because scholars have been writing about "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" for four centuries, and we haven't figured it out yet. Sorry to break the news to you, but you're not going to interpret the entirety of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a five-page paper.

A five-page paper might be able to offer an interpretation of something like "the parallels in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* among Hamlet, Laertes, Ophelia, and Fortinbras after each experiences the death of a father." When you scale back the size of your promise to your reader (by narrowing your definition of your *text*), you ramp up the likelihood of fulfilling that promise (by allowing yourself to explore your *text* in the depth required).

— Practicum —

Writing a Text Statement

Define your text as clearly as possible by identifying the *general* and the *specific* things you'll be interpreting.

- The *general* sense of your text refers to the topic(s) or document(s) under consideration.
- The specific sense is the particular examples of the topic(s) or the particular places in the document(s).

For example, instead of saying, "This paper addresses stigma in Shakespeare's plays," you might write, "Focusing on four characters—Richard III, Shylock, Falstaff, and Caliban—this paper explores stigma in Shakespeare's plays."

Or, instead of saying, "In this paper I address gun violence," try saying, "Focusing on the gunmen behind the tragedies in Aurora and Newtown, this paper explores the psychology of mass murderers in twenty-first-century America."

Shorter papers often don't need an explicit *text* statement: it suffices to identify a *question/problem* (as long as the specific *text*—the thing being interpreted—is clear in your statement of that *question/problem*). Even if the paper doesn't require a *text* statement, however, the interpretive process that leads up to that paper depends upon a clear understanding of what is being interpreted. Thus, you should always write a *text* statement, even if you eventually determine that it's unnecessary in your actual paper. Longer papers (especially those involving multiple kinds of *evidence*) always need an explicit *text* statement.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Text Statement

This essay addresses Polonius, the character in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and his experience as a father.

Source

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt. The Norton Shakespeare. Third edition. Norton, 2016.

Into the Essay

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

This essay considers the status of philosophy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, especially in the famous "To be, or not to be" speech, by attending to the tension between philosophy and drama.

A text statement.

From **Ophelia's Songs: Moral Agency, Manipulation, and the Metaphor of Music in Hamlet**

This essay reads Ophelia's songs in Act IV of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the context of the meaning of music established elsewhere in the play.

A text/method statement.

From **Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy**

This paper addresses Horatio's emotionlessness in light of his role as a narrator, using this discussion to think about Shakespeare's motives for writing tragedy in the wake of his son's death.

A text statement combined with what's at stake.

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Sources

There's a difference between a *text* and a source. If your *text* is "the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," your source might be:

> Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by A.R. Braunmiller. Penguin, 2016.

Your *text* is the thing you're interpreting. A source is a document that you're taking information—*textual evidence*—from.

Any kind of *evidence* you're working with—*textual*, *historical*, *scholarly*—will have a source that you're drawing it from.

When you write a paper, sources need to be reliable and cited correctly. Your reader should be able to track down your sources and see the information that you're working with.

For that reason, it is absolutely crucial that you develop a system for keeping track of your sources. Sometimes the excitement of exploration and interpretation leads us to shoddy records of our sources because we are so focused on the evidence in them. But you will regret it later if you've got information that you want to include in a paper and don't know its source.

You don't need to cite a source if your textual evidence comes from direct experience. If, for example, you visited the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon and wanted to write a paper analyzing it, you wouldn't need to cite that as a source.

Sources and Access

In a single-source paper, all evidence comes from just that one source (and all evidence is textual evidence). With a single-source paper, there is usually no problem with the relationship between text and source: your source, which you have access to, contains the evidence for your text.

Sometimes *textual evidence* comes from multiple sources. If your *text* were "ghosts in Elizabethan revenge tragedy," you might be using several sources:

> Marlowe, Christopher. *Doctor Faustus*.
> Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedie*.
> Marston, John. *Antonios Reuenge*.

Sometimes textual evidence comes from scholarship. If your *text* were "religion in the Elizabethan age," you might not know where to find your *textual evidence*. It might be necessary to go to some scholarship that addresses your topic, so your list of sources might look like this:

> Doran, Susan. *Elizabeth I and Religion 1558-1603*. Routledge, 2002.
> Huizinga, Johan. *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. Translated by Frederik Jan Hopman. Edward Arnold, 1924.
> Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Scribner, 1971.

Here Doran, Huizinga, and Thomas are your sources, but not your *texts*. You're not interpreting their books. Instead, you're interpreting the evidence that you have access to through their books. Your concern is the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of 1559, not Susan Doran's interpretation of it.

Thus, it's important to distinguish your *textual evidence* (the things you're interpreting) from your *critical scholarship* (other scholars who have interpreted the same thing as you) so that you can conduct your own *analysis* of the *evidence*.

Even if you're using a work of scholarship as a source for your evidence, you should try to isolate that evidence from the scholar's interpretation of it. There will definitely come a time in the writing process when you'll want to engage with that scholar's interpretations, but it's key—first of all—to identify and analyze the evidence yourself. Bracket that scholar's interpretation for now, so that you can develop your own original interpretation.

With a multi-source paper, sometimes the relationship between text and source is simple and straight-forward. For example, If you're doing a comparative paper, your textual evidence comes from two (or more) sources, and you just need to make sure you have access to them all. If you're doing a

lens essay or a test-a-theory essay, you'll have one source for your textual evidence and another for your theoretical scholarship. Just make sure you have access. If you're doing a historicist essay, you might have one source that provides your textual evidence and another that provides your historical evidence. Ensure access.

But sometimes the relationship between text and source in multi-source papers is more complicated. Sometimes your textual evidence comes not from a single source but from several, and you need to make sure you have access to all those sources. Sometimes your historical evidence comes from multiple sources. Here there's not a single book that provides the historical context you need but, instead, you have to pull together several sources to generate that context.

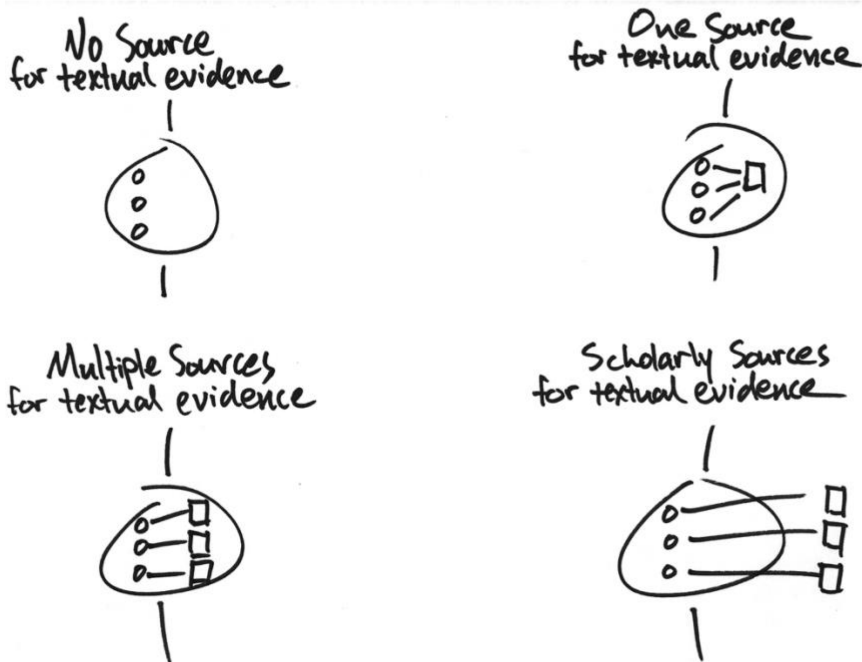

Figure 3: Possible Relationships Between Sources and Textual Evidence

— Practicum —

Identifying and Accessing Sources

One key to designing a successful paper project is properly conceptualizing what your text is, what kinds of evidence you'll need to interpret that text, and what sources you'll need to collect that evidence—then making sure you have access to your needed sources.

1. Define your text.
2. Determine if you're doing a single-source paper, a multi-source paper, or a research paper.
3. Identify the textual evidence you will need.
4. Determine the source(s) that will supply you with the textual evidence you need.
5. Collect that textual evidence from your source(s).
6. Avoid outside interpretations and analyze your textual evidence directly.

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Orientation

In ancient cultures, the rising sun—*orientem* is Latin for "rising sun"—was used to help with directions. The rising sun would let you know where you were and which direction you were going.

Orientation in academic writing is the little bits of framing information that help your reader understand what you're talking about.

The two places where you usually need some *orientation* are (1) at the beginning of a paper and (2) at the beginning of body paragraphs.

First, you usually need some *orientation* to a text, person, author, event, idea, or tradition near the beginning of a paper as you frame your topic and argument. Provide orientation when you are introducing an issue. Be sure to provide the journalistic information to your reader--who? what? where? when?

Second, you'll often need some little bits of *orientation* as you work your way through your argument, moving from one piece of evidence to another. Provide orientation when introducing evidence: offer the bits of background or framing information that situates the key evidence you pull out for in-depth analysis.

In your introduction, be sure to name and frame the texts and authors you're addressing. How you should do so will depend on your situation. If you're writing for *Renaissance Quarterly*, you don't need to tell your readers that John Milton was an English epic poet who lived in the seventeenth century because the readers of that journal all know that. If you're writing about Milton in an

essay for the *Journal of Modern Psychology*, however, that framing material would be helpful.

Use more orientation if you're working with a text that isn't accessible or familiar to your reader. Museum scholars don't need a description of the Louvre—they know what it is, so they just need orientation to the parts you're going to talk about. But those scholars would need more thorough description of a new #BlackLivesMatter pop-up museum that none of them has visited or knows about.

In general, you can assume you are writing for an "educated audience." Imagine someone who has been to college but has forgotten a lot of the details. They need to be reminded of the details of any text, event, or idea,

One way to think about your reader is to imagine that it's one of your professors, but not the professor for whom you're writing the paper. Imagine your reader as educated, intelligent, and familiar with general knowledge, but probably not the specific material that you're writing about.

When providing orientation, think of it as "reminding" (as opposed to "telling") your reader about your text. Your audience has read your text, but they need to be given some basic information when you begin your essay and as you proceed through it.

Into the Essay

From **Tragic Foundationalism**

This essay puts the modern philosopher Alain Badiou's theory of foundationalism into dialogue with the early-modern playwright William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*.

Orientation to who people are.

From **Ophelia's Songs: Moral Agency, Manipulation, and the Metaphor of Music in Hamlet**

Did Ophelia go to the water, or did the water come to her? That is the question asked in a scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* usually played for laughs—the clownish, malapropistic gravediggers debating what is and is not suicide: "Here lies the water—good. Here stands the man – good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life" (5.1.15-20).

Orientation to a quotation.

From ***Hamlet* is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach it Like One**

Suicide contagion evokes a classic debate in literary theory tinged with the rhetoric of infection. The Greek writer Gorgias thought language could be so powerful as to exert a drug-like control over an audience's actions. Who could blame Helen of Troy, he asked, when Paris's seductive words were so strong? That's one reason Plato banished literature from his ideal state—"poetry deforms its audience's minds, unless they have the antidote"—and one reason some sought to outlaw theater in Shakespeare's England. According to the first anti-theatrical work published in England, John Northbrooke's A *Treatise against Idlenes, Idle Pastimes, and Playes* (1577), "Satan hath not a more speedy way and fitter school to work and teach his desire, to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthy lusts of wicked whoredom, than those places and plays, and theaters are." In the language of epidemiology, Northbrooke concludes, "Beware of such contagiousness." Responding to charges that literature is "the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires," the most famous work of literary theory from Shakespeare's time, Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, acknowledged the force of literary contagion: "Poesie [can] infect the fancy with unworthy objects." But, Sidney continued, "whatsoever being abused, doth most harm, being rightly used ... doth most good." If literature can create suicide contagion, it can also, "being rightly used," dispel it. That shifts the ethical burden from the text to the teachers and critics who discuss it.

Orientation to historical evidence.

17

Evidence

Evidence is the documented information that supports your *argument*—facts, dates, examples, quotations, descriptions, documents, reports, statistics, data, charts, graphs—the basis upon which you are making your interpretive claims. *Evidence* is what makes an argument true.

Derived from the Latin *videre*, "to see," *evidence* is associated with visibility. It is the things you see that lead you to an interpretation, and the things you show to illustrate that interpretation to others. Faith may be "the evidence of things not seen," but no one will accept your *argument* on faith. *Evidence* must be visible. Your reader needs to be able to see your evidence in your essay. *Evidence* must be evident.

When working with *evidence*, a writer must be both a detective and a lawyer. As a detective, you must comb through the messiness of the situation to determine what happened. As a lawyer, you must figure out the best way to present the facts to convince an audience to accept her interpretation of an issue. A legal case can fall apart because *evidence* wasn't properly gathered or because it wasn't properly presented. As a writer, you'll need to develop good strategies for both gathering and presenting evidence.

Gathering Evidence

You can think of *evidence* as all the bits and pieces that make up your *text*—its component parts. After you've defined your *text*, but before you've started to interpret it, you must identify, collect, and organize all the *evidence* you plan to interpret. That's your goal at this stage in your writing process: identify, collect, and organize.

It is crucial that you identify, collect, and organize your *evidence* before you attempt to interpret it, but we humans have an alarming tendency to do our interpretations first, and then gather up the *evidence* that supports them later. Obviously this trajectory is backwards, and it usually results in a tunnel-visioned view that only attends to the *evidence* that supports the preconceived interpretation. It results in an argument that can make the *evidence* say whatever the preconceived interpretation wants it to say.

Don't hazard an interpretation until you've clearly mapped out the *evidence* you're planning to interpret. Along the way of writing your interpretation, you may (and will) discover new *evidence* that you did not know about at the start of your interpretation, which is fine, but you do need to begin an interpretation by clearly demarcating the *evidence* to be addressed. Insight, analysis, interpretation, and argument all depend on *evidence*.

The purpose of identifying, collecting, and organizing your *evidence* is that you need to know the facts of the situation as exactly and as clearly as possible. Amidst all the opinions and arguments that furiously swirl around us, you need facts: "Just the facts, ma'am." Your aim at this point in the process should be to break down your text into the most simple and specific units of *evidence* possible. The next step will be *analysis*, but for now forget about "why" and focus on "what": what is it that happened or happens? what are the facts? what is the *evidence* to be interpreted?

The best technique you can practice is to create a timeline for each example you're working with, collecting the information that needs to be explained, describing what happened, and the order in which things happened, in as much detail as possible. When creating a timeline, you should focus on who did what to whom when, where, and how; that is, focus on who the various parties involved in your example(s) are, what each of these parties did, when they did these things, where they did them, and also how they did them. Notice that there is no "why" in this list: why people did what they did is a matter of interpretation—*analysis* not *evidence*—and at this stage in your thinking process you don't want interpretation leaking into your *evidence*.

Another good technique for gathering *evidence* is to identify the most important moment, passage, example, etc. for the issue. What *evidence* should you plan to spend some time really digging into deeply?

Kinds of Evidence

There are three kinds of *evidence* that you might put into your essays:

Textual Evidence: The bits and pieces of your *text* that you plan to interpret, its component parts or specific instances or the facts that, when taken together, make up your *text*.

Historical Evidence: Material that comes from outside your narrowly defined *text* but is nonetheless relevant to an interpretation of that *text*.

Scholarly Evidence: Scholarship that helps you present your *argument*. Under the umbrella of *Scholarly Evidence*, there are three sub-types:

Critical Scholarship: A scholar who has interpreted the same *text* as you, often marshaled to support *analysis* or *argument*, or used as a *counter* to respond to.

Historical Scholarship: A scholar who has interpreted the *historical evidence* relevant to your *text*, usually cited to help contextualize *evidence* accurately.

Theoretical Scholarship: A scholar whose ideas (often abstract or philosophical) help you deliver an *argument*, even though that scholar doesn't directly discuss the *text* or context in question.

Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

Quantitative *evidence* consists of statistics and data, of numbers or "quantities" that represent *evidence* related to your *text*. These statistics may come from your own experiments, if you have conceived and conducted some sort of scientific study, or they may come from scholarly articles, reports, books, and so forth in which others publish the results of their scientific studies.

After the identification of relevant quantitative *evidence* comes collection and organization. You will need to establish some sort of mechanism for recording and displaying your statistics: usually a spreadsheet that can be displayed as a graph or chart is your best bet.

Qualitative *evidence* involves not numbers and data but specific events, examples, cases, and instances that show your *text* at work in the world. These examples may come from your own experiences and observations, or from literary sources (books, plays, poems, essays) or journalistic sources (newspapers, television, the internet, and other media sources that report to us behaviors and events that are in some way remarkable).

For qualitative *evidence*, identify, collect, and organize some examples of the issue you plan to interpret (exactly how many examples you'll need will depend on the kind of writing you're doing and its length).

Presenting Evidence

Working with *evidence* helps you figure out what you're going to argue. But then, once you know what you want to argue, you have to think about *evidence* again, in a different way, to determine the best way to present supporting documentation for your *argument*.

The best way to start a paper is with some concrete *evidence* that receives some quick *analysis* as you develop a *question/problem* that the essay will respond to.

The most frequent location for *textual evidence* is the body of a paper. Your introduction frames the discussion with a *question/problem*; the body delivers the substantive support for an *argument*; and the conclusion considers its *implications*. *Evidence* will be interwoven throughout these three sections but should be most focused in the body.

The basic progression of a body paragraph is:

- *Assertion*: Make an interpretive claim.
- *Evidence*: Present the evidence that supports your assertion.
- *Analysis*: Explain how your evidence supports your assertion, and how your assertion plays a part in your argument.

Most body paragraphs that you write will be more complicated than that. It would be weird to read a whole bunch of body paragraphs that just went *Assertion*, *Evidence*, *Analysis*; *Assertion*, *Evidence*, *Analysis*; *Assertion*, *Evidence*, *Analysis*. But that basic three-step sequence should inform the flow of your body paragraphs.

One special kind of *evidence* is *orientation*, the little bits and pieces of background or framing information your reader needs to understand the *evidence* you're dealing with in depth. *Orientation* often appears in the introduction of an essay to cover the journalistic questions—who? what? where? when? *Orientation* also appears in the body of an essay to remind your reader of generally known information that allows you to situate the less-common *evidence* you plan to analyze in depth.

Qualitative *evidence* can be presented in three ways. Quotation exactly reproduces what someone said. Paraphrase puts someone's statement in your own words. Summary concisely articulates someone's main point(s).

Sometimes, with paraphrase and summary, the line between evidence and analysis gets blurry. Even if you're putting something into your own words, if you're simply describing it, that's *evidence*. The moment you start to explain or infer from it, that becomes *analysis*.

There are many other ways to present *evidence*. A picture reproduced for an essay can be *evidence*—that is the visual equivalent of a quotation. Humans are visual creatures. You're welcome to include visual aids such as pictures and charts.

A description of a picture in your own words can also be *evidence*—akin to summary—provided that you are describing its features, not interpreting them. Being able to describe something in your own words is an especially important skill in fields that deal with non-linguistic texts, such as musicology and art history.

Tables of data are *evidence*. Charts and graphs visually representing data are also *evidence*. They are simply descriptions of some aspect of reality. You only shift over into *analysis* when you start to interpret the *evidence*.

As your essay starts filling up with all the various moves you need to make in academic writing, you may find that space becomes scarce. Often, you'll only have time to illustrate, not demonstrate, an *analysis*. To demonstrate is to prove exhaustively. In contrast, to illustrate is to provide a concrete example.

At the same time, your reader is going to keep you accountable to the *text*. If there's relevant *evidence* in your text that you don't address—whether it supports your *argument* or stands against it—your reader is going to be suspicious of your reliability as an interpreter. Representing evidence accurately is absolutely crucial. Make sure your text actually says what you're saying it says.

Citation ensures the integrity of your *evidence* and ensures that your evidence is coming from a reliable source.

There are different citational styles (e,g., MLA style, APA style, Chicago style). Each style is very detailed in its citational formats, so you must consult the appropriate style manual, but there is one basic aspect that applies to all: a quotation should indicate the source and the page number (if available). In your sentence, make the source you're using clear in your introduction of a quote. If you do so, you don't need to state the name of the reference in your citation, only the page number or numerical location.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Timeline

1.2.56: Polonius's name means "Of Poland." There are two possibilities: (1) Polonius is from Poland; (2) Polonius was given that name for conquering Poland.
3.2.91: Polonius went to university.
3.2.91: At university, Polonius was an actor—a "good actor," he claims. He played the title role in Julis Caesar.
1.1.61-62: King Hamlet slaughtered a group of Polish on a frozen lake "in an angry parle."
4.2.118: The play's only reference to Ophelia and Laertes's mother. Laertes says that he looks like his mother.
1.3.107-08: Polonius is learned and self-consciously artful in his language. He is unusually concerned with clever speech and turns of phrases.
1.2.47-49: Claudius says that Polonius is central to the government of Denmark.
1.3.1-50: Laertes and Ophelia have a playful, affectionate repartee. They knowingly mock their father's overbearingness.
1.3.10-43: Laertes is a little overbearing of a brother.
1.2.51: Laertes goes off to college in France.
1.3.98-99: Hamlet starts courting Ophelia.
1.3.109-13: Hamlet's declarations of love are sincere, according to Ophelia, who also says they have been talking about marriage.
1.3.90-93: Hamlet and Ophelia start spending a lot of time together alone.
1.3.90-93: Polonius has heard that Hamlet and Ophelia have been spending a lot of time together.
1.3.5-Prince Hamlet has expressed interest in Ophelia.
1..2.50-56: Laertes wishes to go back to France.
1.2.59: Laertes repeatedly petitions his father to go back to France.
1.2.58: Polonius grants Laertes's petition to return to France, but with reservations.
1.3.1: Laertes gathers up his belongings to return to France.
1.3.82: Polonius prepares a ship with servants to take Laertes back to school in France.
1.3.5-43: Laertes tells Ophelia not to reciprocate Hamlet's affection because he is the Prince of Denmark, thus he cannot choose his wife, and she needs to guard her chastity.
1.3.44-50: Ophelia mocks Laertes for telling her to be chaste while he goes off to the licentiousness of college in France.
1.3.54: Polonius arrives and the first thing he worries about is that Laertes will miss his ship (which is waiting on him).
1.3.54-80: Polonius gives Laertes an obnoxiously long speech of fatherly wisdom as Laertes heads off to set sail.
1.3.87: Polonius asks Ophelia what she and Laertes were talking about.
1.3.103: Ophelia doesn't know quite what to think of her and Hamlet's budding relationship, or at least that's what she tells her father.
1.3.104-08: Polonius comes down on Ophelia hard, telling her to stay away from Hamlet.
1.3.113: Ophelia tells Polonius that she and Hamlet have talked about getting married.
1.3.114-34: Polonius erupts on Ophelia, forbidding her to see Hamlet.
1.3.35: Ophelia tells Polonius she will stop see Hamlet.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Timeline

Larson, C., & Garrett, G. (1996). *Crime, justice, and society*. New York, NY: General Hall.

> Students of crime quickly learn that there are nearly as many definitions of criminology as there are criminologists. (p. 172)

Sellin, J. T. (1938). *Culture conflict and crime*. New York, NY: Social Science Research Council.

> The term 'criminology' should be used to designate only the body of scientific knowledge and the deliberate pursuit of such knowledge. What the technical use of knowledge in the treatment and prevention of crime might be called, I leave to the imagination of the reader. (p. 3)

Sutherland, E. H. (1939). *Principles of criminology* (3rd ed.). Chicago, IL: J. B. Lippincott Company.

> Criminology is the body of knowledge regarding crime as a social phenomenon. It includes within its scope the processes of making laws, and of breaking laws, and of reacting toward the breaking of laws. (p 1)

Elliott, M.A., & Merrill, F.E. (1941). *Social disorganization*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers.

> Criminology may be defined as the scientific study of crime and its treatment.

Taft, D.R. (1956). *Criminology*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

> Criminology is the study which includes all the subject matter necessary to the understanding and prevention of crimes together with the punishment and treatment of delinquents and criminals.

Wolfgang, M.E. (1963). Criminology and the criminologist. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology 54*(2), 155-62. Reprinted in Ferracuti, F., & Wolfgang, M. (1967). *The subculture of violence: Towards an integrated theory in criminology*. London, England: Tavistock Publications.

> The term 'criminology' should be used to designate a body of *scientific* knowledge about crime…. We are contending that criminology should be considered as an autonomous, separate discipline of knowledge because it has accumulated its own set of organized data and theoretical conceptualisms that use the scientific method, approach to understanding, and attitude in research. (p. 155-56)

Into the Essay

From **The Honor Code at Harvard and in *Hamlet***

Laertes is, in the clown Osric's words, an "absolute gentleman" (5.2.93) because he is absolutely obsessed with the honor that must be defended in the aristocratic culture of *Hamlet*.

Orientation leading to evidence in the form of quotation, followed by analysis.

From **Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy in *Hamlet***

Horatio tells three stories in *Hamlet*, two at the very beginning of the play and one at the very end. First he tells Marcellus and Bernardo (and us in the audience) the story of King Hamlet's duel with Old Fortinbras; then he tells Prince Hamlet the story of the appearance of his father's spirit; and then he tells Young Fortinbras the story of Prince Hamlet.

Evidence in the form of summary.

From **The Tragedy of Love in *Hamlet***

The word "love" appears 84 times in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. "Father" only appears 73 times, "play" 60, "think" 55, "mother" 46, "mad" 44, "soul" 40, "God" 39, "death" 38, "life" 34, "nothing" 28, "son" 26, "honor" 21, "spirit" 19, "kill" 18, "revenge" 14, and "action" 12.

Quantitative evidence.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

There just aren't many women around in *Hamlet*, and they don't say much when they are. Claudius has 552 lines in the play, Gertrude (the analogous female character) only 157. Horatio has 294 lines, Ophelia (the analogous female character) only 173. Looking at substantive speeches is even more telling: Claudius has 47 of his 102 speeches that run for three or more lines (46 percent), Gertrude only 16 of her 69 speeches (23 percent). Indeed, when Gertrude does speak, it is often for one-line affirmations of things male characters have already said: "Ay, amen" (2.2.39), "It may be, very like" (2.2.152), "So he does indeed" (2.2.161). As for Ophelia, her one-liners are so peppered with "my lord" (which she says more than half the times she speaks: 30 out of 58 speeches) that they are often only half-liners.

An assertion followed by evidence—some quantitative (statistics), some qualitative (quotation)—with analysis mixed in.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

Hamlet explains that, here at midnight, the king is awake, partying, binge drinking. He's pounding wine. Whenever he finishes a cup, the trumpets and drums clamor:

> The King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,
> Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring reels,
> And as he drains his drafts of Rhenish down
> The kettledrum and trumpet thus bray out
> The triumph of his pledge. (1.4.8-12)

The irony of Hamlet's word "wassail," from the Old English *wes hel*, meaning "be in good health," is that Claudius's wassailing, which comes from a place of merriment, signifies his poor health—his alcoholism—and contributes to his country's decline. The trumpets "bray[ing] out" his binge turn Claudius into a donkey, or jackass if you like. Imagine his court around him chanting, *Chug! Chug!*

Orientation followed by evidence in the form of a block quotation and then analysis.

From **Tragic Foundationalism**

In *Being and Event* (1988), Badiou wants to understand the ontology of the "truth process," rather than truth per se, leading him to focus on "the knowledge/truth dialectic" in which each constitutes the other (331). He begins with the *situation,* defined as a set comprised of what is known or thought to be true: what are acknowledged to be the elements of existence and the relationships between them? *Knowledge* is simply enough the discernment, classification, and naming of what's at hand in the situation, an encyclopedia of the situation, as it were, defining what exists, describing the properties of things, and explaining how they relate. This situation is static—inert, a state of being, the status quo—until something new and unexpected occurs (akin to the "anomaly" in Kuhn's system): a rupture, break, disruption involving an occurrence thought to be outside the bounds of the situation—what Badiou calls an *event*. Disturbing established and circulating knowledge, the event punches a hole in the situation and requires the formulation of a new truth identifying how the terms of the situation relate to the event. Pointing to that realm of reality not included in the situation as previously defined—Badiou calls that realm the *void*—the event creates a new way of being and conditions how we think about everything (what Kuhn calls a "revolution"). The event becomes a *foundation* of knowledge, something singular that, because of its singularity, forces us to re-organize previous knowledge to include it in our set of things that are real. Thus, the event is both the most particular thing that can be—a concrete happening in history—and the most universal. The truth of this event—its inclusion in the realm of the real—is affirmed through enthusiastic, even militant *fidelity* to it rather than other, ordinary, previous knowledge. This is how Badiou defines *subjectivity,* which involves not human interiority but remaining faithful to the event, bearing witness to it, deduction down from the truth of the event, and normalization of the new truth created by it. A new situation emerges constructed bit by bit through fidelity to the event, forging new knowledges and new languages. In theory, this new situation has its own void—its own blindness to certain elements of existence—which might someday break into the situation in another event, meaning the "truth process" is never-ending.

Evidence in the form of summary with very little quotation.

18

Quotation

When presenting *evidence*, know when to quote (exactly reproducing someone's words) and when to summarize (putting someone's ideas in your own words).

Quote sparingly. People read your writing to see what you have to say. There's often a tendency to over-quote because we want people to know that the things we're claiming really are supported by evidence. *Evidence* is important to have but, to avoid producing a paper that is a pastiche of quotations, you should quote sparingly and meaningfully.

Especially in shorter papers, aim to be representative as opposed to exhaustive in your quotations. Don't try to quote all the *evidence* for your *argument*: doing so would leave no room for your actual *argument*, which should be the focus of your paper. (Even though you might not be able to include all the *evidence* that supports your *argument*, that *argument* must be accountable to all of the *evidence* in your source, even if it isn't quoted.)

Exceptions to the guideline to quote sparingly include, for example, when you're quoting from a manuscript in an archive that others can't access, or when you've interviewed or surveyed people. Those (and many others) are clear cases where it's important to give readers quotations they otherwise wouldn't be able to access.

Quote only when the way in which something is said—the language as opposed to the idea—is important. If you are analyzing just the information, not the words, then paraphrase or summarize.

> In *The Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney claims that human being is defined by a dialectic of reason and desire (22).

> In *The Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney imagines a contest between the reason that makes humans like angels and the appetite that makes us like animals: "Our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected wil keepeth us from reaching unto it" (22).

When you quote, provide *orientation* to your reader that contextualizes the quotation. Also, when introducing a quote, direct your reader as to how you want him or her to read the quoted passage: tell your reader why the way in which the statement is made is important. Then, after you've given the quote, don't make the mistake of thinking that a quote will speak for itself. Be sure to analyze the quoted material. The only reason to quote something is because it needs *analysis*: if it doesn't need *analysis*, it doesn't need to be quoted. This is especially true with block quotations. If you're going to block quote, you've got to give a healthy dose of *analysis*. If it doesn't need all that *analysis*, then it doesn't need to be block quoted.

> A philosophical account of Sidney's *Defense* might point out that the notion of an "erected wit" is a humanist commonplace, while the notion of an "infected wil" is a Protestant commonplace. But a rhetorical account of the *Defense* would also recognize that Sidney *first* promises the salvation of "erected wit" and *then* reveals the reality of the "infected wil." After situating his reader in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, Sidney's says, "Our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected wil keepeth us from reaching unto it" (22). He leads the reader to the Mountaintop of Hope before cascading down into the Valley of Despair. Humankind's "erected wit" allows them to know perfection: just as Adam was capable of knowing perfection in the Garden of Eden, humans in the fallen world are capable of understanding "what perfection is." Sidney quickly closes off the possibility of perfection, however, by crystallizing the present reality of imperfection: humankind's "infected wil" prevents us from desiring what we know to be good. Sidney does not argue that an "erected wit" is the remedy for our "infected wil." He says just the opposite: an "infected wil" prevents us from following our "erected wit." The trajectory of this statement moves from a notion of perfection back to imperfection. By producing the promise of perfection, then making readers suffer the reality of imperfection, Sidney recreates the paradox of a traditionally Christian culture like England having to account for the emergent knowledge announced by Humanist thinkers in the sixteenth century.

Punctuate quotes correctly. Don't float quotations. Make all quotes a part of one of your own sentences by using a comma or a colon, or by making the quote a part of your own clause. Use a comma to introduce a shorter quotation, one that is a single sentence or less. Use a colon to introduce longer and multi-sentence quotations, including block quotes. If a quotation is more than one clause, it should be the last part of your sentence. Don't divide a sentence with a long quotation; use a colon, then let the quote end your sentence. That is, if your quote must be set off by a comma or a colon, it should probably end your sentence. If the quotation is more than one sentence, you must introduce it with a colon, not a comma.

> After juxtaposing our "wit" and our "wil," Sidney proceeds to claim that this juxtaposition "will by few be understood, and by fewer graunted" (23).

> As Philip Sidney writes, "Our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected wil keepeth us from reaching unto it" (22).

> In *The Defence of Poesy*, Philip Sidney does not expect his insight on the battle between will and wit to be accepted by his audience: "Our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected wil keepeth us from reaching unto it. But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer graunted" (22-23).

Even if it violates usage rules, reproduce the exact wording, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of the original; however, a capital or lower-case letter at the beginning of a quotation, or punctuation at the end, can be changed, if needed, to suit the needs of your own sentence.

If the quotation is a question or an exclamation, the quotation should include the question mark or exclamation point.

> As Sidney asks in *The Defence of Poesy*, "What childe is there, that comming to a play, and seeing Thebes written in great letters upon an old Doore, doth beleeve that it is Thebes?" (103).

For a quotation within a quotation, uses single quotation marks (').

> According to Brain Cummings, "Calvin limited very precisely the claims which the 'erected wit' may make" (269).

Block-quote when the passage is four or more lines of verse or more than four lines of text on your page. It should be indented one inch with no quotation marks, and your citation should follow the punctuation of the text.

> Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress" opens in the subjunctive mood:
>
> > Had we but world enough, and time,
> > This coyness, lady, were no crime.
> > We would sit down and think which way
> > To walk, and pass our long love's day;
> > Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
> > Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
> > Of Humber would complain. (1-7)

When you are quoting less than three lines, put it in your paragraph and use slash lines to separate lines of verse (with a space on either side of the slash).

> Marvell begins by claiming, "Had we but world enough, and time, / This coyness, lady, were no crime" (1-2).

Use an ellipsis (…) to indicate an omission in a quotation. Never omit material from a quotation if the omission changes the meaning or tone of the quotation. To omit words within a quotation, use a three-period ellipsis with a space on both sides. To omit sentences, use a four-period ellipsis. Don't use ellipses at the beginning or end of a quotation.

> Marvell and his lady are on opposite sides of the world: "Thou by the Indian Ganges…. I by the … Humber" (5-7).

To substitute a word—a name for a pronoun, for example—or insert a comment mid-quotation, enclose it in square brackets ([…]). It is much better to adapt your sentence to the quote than to interpolate.

> It is perhaps ironic, if not cynical, that Marvell can write poetry to "pass [his] long love's day" (4).

You will and should find that as you do more revision on a paper you also do less quotation. The tighter and tighter your *argument* gets, the more focused the *evidence* to support that *argument* becomes. In the movement from draft(s) to revision, be prepared to reduce quotation as you find your footing in an *argument*.

Into the Essay

From ***Hamlet*** **is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach it Like One**

Suicide contagion is especially associated with adolescence because, as Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, "In the morn and liquid dew of youth, / Contagious blastments are most imminent." Teens are "contagious" because their actions exert great influence on one another. Shakespeare invented the word "blastments" from the earlier *blasting*, "withering or shriveling up caused by atmospheric, electric, or unseen agency." Blastments are dangerous because they are forceful yet ephemeral, and unavoidable in youth ("most imminent"). The same is true of the circulation of the idea of suicide in society today, making parents everywhere jittery, especially at night when, to quote *Hamlet*, "hell itself breaks out / Contagion to this world."

Evidence in the form of quotation with analysis mixed in.

From **Ophelia's Songs: Moral Agency, Manipulation, and the Metaphor of Music in Hamlet**

This metaphor of music as persuasion, manipulation, seduction—pleasant sounding but not substantive—then becomes a central symbol in the scene containing the play within the play. In the prelude to the performance, Hamlet in conversation with Horatio uses the musical instrument, specifically a pipe, as a metaphor for humans who allow their lives to be controlled by external circumstances. Here an allegorized Fortune becomes a musician playing upon a musical instrument—a human—and Hamlet measures virtue by how much we can resist becoming that lifeless, thoughtless, manipulable instrument which only does what some outside force makes it do:

> Blessed are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well commeddled
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please. (3.2.67-70)

Later in this scene, Shakespeare literally brought this metaphor on stage as the performers arrive with their trumpets and drums in hand (3.2.88sd). As they play their song, we in the audience, if we have been attentive to the meaning of music throughout the play, should be thinking about Prince Hamlet being bandied about from pillar to post by the external circumstances which have been hoisted upon him; fortune is the musician, and Hamlet is the instrument being manipulated.

An assertion, orientation, and analysis before a block quotation, followed by evidence in the form of summary and additional analysis.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

In the early-modern age, "addicted" and "addiction" did not have the medical meaning they do today, as Jose Murgatrod Cree and Lemon have illustrated. The concept was primarily religious, often with positive overtones. At the same time, Lemon elsewhere shows, it is hard to read Falstaff's famous ode to "sherris sack" as anything other than a Shakespearean acknowledgement of alcoholism as a disease.

Critical scholarship summarized rather than quoted.

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

This passage is so famous that the Shakespearean scholar Douglas Bruster recently wrote an entire book about just this one soliloquy, looking at its imagery, structure and meaning, but also at its "philosophical force" (31), its "philosophical insight" (31) and its "chilling philosophy" (102). Bruster concluded that the soliloquy is not about suicide, as many modern readers, such as John Dover Wilson, believe it to be ("a like expression of utter weariness is not to be found in the rest of human literature" [127]). On the contrary, Bruster argued (channeling Schlegel, Coleridge and Shelley) the speech "mocks human achievement and ability" insofar as Hamlet is trying to be philosophical but Shakespeare was critiquing him for, in Bruster's words, "thinking too much" (103). I do not want to wag my finger too harshly at Bruster because his book, published in the Shakespeare Now series, was written for a general audience, yet he did that audience a disservice when he presented Hamlet as a failed philosopher being mocked by Shakespeare. He did that audience an even greater disservice when, in an entire book about the "To be, or not to be" speech, he did not take seriously the dramatic context of the speech that, as Bruster knows, radically changes the meaning of its "chilling philosophy".

Critical scholarship quoted (because it's being disputed).

19

Analysis

People often think of writing as entering into debate with other writers. That's part of it, but the only reason to disagree with someone is because you have a different interpretation of the matter at hand. *Analysis* is how you get to your interpretation, and originality of analysis is key.

Evidence doesn't speak for itself. *Analysis* explains, narrates, and unpacks the meaning of those bits and pieces of *evidence*. From the Greek *ana*, "throughout," + *lyein*, "to unfasten," *analysis* is the act of dissecting or loosening up a topic into *evidence* and then describing, unpacking, and considering the implications of the very particular meanings of each of those very specific bits and pieces of *evidence*.

As with *evidence*, *analysis* appears in two stages of the writing process. Early in the process, you do *analysis* to form the basis on which to develop an *argument*. Later in the paper itself, you'll present *analysis* in the essay to communicate your *argument* to someone else.

Doing Analysis

The success of your *analysis* will be proportional to its specificity. The more concrete, particular, exact you can be, the better.

The quality of your *analysis* is all about its originality: you bringing fresh insight that you've come up with yourself.

Analysis should be technical if needed, using the vocabulary of the discipline you're working in. There is nothing more joyful than hearing someone with

a strong command of a technical vocabulary elucidate something non-specialists may notice but don't have the language to talk about.

Analysis makes explicit what is implicit in a piece of *evidence*—the hidden things going on behind the scenes. *Evidence* is evident, but *analysis* is about explaining what isn't apparent.

Analyses are the most basic building blocks of *arguments*. Think of argumentation as a pyramid. For each *argument*, there are multiple *assertions*; for each *assertion* there are multiple *analyses*; and for each *analysis* there are multiple pieces of *evidence* that support it. *Evidence* leads to *analyses*, *analyses* to *assertions*, and *assertions* to an *argument*.

If *evidence* tells us what is true (what happened or happens, what the facts are), *analysis* aims to explain why it is true (why something happened or happens in the way that it did or does, why certain facts come into existence).

Explication

Explication is a method of reading literature involving detailed commentary on each aspect of the *text* in question. But you can "explicate" things that aren't literature.

The key to explication is to attend to the formal features of a *text*. In literary studies, those might be things like characters, metaphors, and themes. In a discipline like, say, museum studies, those formal features would be things like architecture, landscaping, docents, objects, exhibits, guest behavior, executive board, funding, etc. To do explication, figure out the formal concerns of the discipline you're working in.

Makes note of surprises, patterns, parallels, and contrasts in your *evidence*.

If you try to make 10 observations on a key piece of evidence, it's usually around point number 7—after all the obvious or surface points have been made—that some *really* probing and provocative reading starts to take place.

Conceptual Maps

From your work with *evidence*, you should have the facts you plan to work with organized into graphs, charts, timelines, and so forth. There are different ways to *analyze* this *evidence*. One effective strategy is to create a conceptual map.

A conceptual map shows the relationships between facts and the concepts to which they relate. Practically speaking, it is a bubble-and-arrow flowchart of evidence, ideas about that evidence, and the relationships that exist between

evidence and ideas. A conceptual map weaves together facts and concepts in a sequence to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end, a story that relates not only what is true (in its use of facts), but also why something is true or how it came into existence (in its use of concepts).

Conceptual maps are about increasing the clarity and specificity of your thinking. Producing a conceptual map will allow you to see the complexity of the *evidence* you're addressing with clarity because it will require you to think about very particular points of *evidence* in very specific analytical terms.

To create your map, attempt to determine what causes a fact to occur and what a fact causes to occur. Remember that sometimes multiple facts or concepts combine to produce a single fact or concept, and sometimes a single fact or concept can cause multiple other facts or concepts to occur. Start piecing together your conceptual map by plotting facts into episodes that go together to form chapters, as it were, of the larger narrative you're trying to tell.

As you start plotting out your facts and concepts, be aware that you will have to draw and redraw your map many times because you are actually figuring out your *analysis* of the *evidence* as you map it out. You are not putting together a puzzle the completed version of which is printed on the box. You are putting together a puzzle but have no idea what the completed picture will look like. As you work to piece this puzzle together, you will have to scratch out sequences that you thought would work but don't; you will have to begin again from scratch when things aren't working; and you will have to do all of this until all the pieces in your puzzle finally click together and the facts and concepts form a coherent picture because you have placed them in cogent relationships with each other.

At the end of it all, a conceptual map should show the origin, structure, operation, and outcome of a set of *evidence*.

Because a conceptual map is an *argument* (or part of an argument) in its infancy, your conceptual map is usually not something that anyone other than you can make sense of just by looking at it. The best use of a conceptual map is to "talk someone through" an *analysis*. For this reason, it is helpful to include with a completed conceptual map a written statement that summarizes the idea.

Presenting Analysis

Let's say you go on vacation and take 250 pictures. When you get home, you want to make a photo album. You don't put all 250 of those pictures in the photo album. You pick the best 25. But here's the thing: you wouldn't have

those 25 really great pictures if you hadn't taken all 250. And you didn't know, when you were taking the pictures, which 25 would be the best.

Similarly, in the writing process, there will be a lot of *analysis* that you do along the way that may not make it into the final essay. Don't think of that as wasted work. You don't know, while you're in the interpretive process, which analyses are going to be the ones that best display your *argument*. And often the *analyses* that make it into an essay wouldn't have been possible without all of that earlier *analysis*. No one goes on vacation and takes only 25 pictures.

As mentioned in the section on *Evidence*, the standard flow of a body paragraph is:

- *Assertion*: Make an interpretive claim.
- *Evidence*: Present the information that supports your assertion.
- *Analysis*: Explain how your evidence supports your assertion, and how your assertion plays a part in your argument.

Note that *assertions* are really just *analysis* delivered before rather than after *evidence*.

Usually, the first half of the body of an essay is front-loaded with more *evidence*, less *analysis*. Then the second half shifts to less *evidence*, more *analysis*.

When revising a paper, you'll probably (hopefully) find that you're able to trim out extraneous *analysis* so that your essay moves as quickly and directly as possible to its central *argument*.

— Practicum —

Creativity for Analysis

Readers often ask a writer to "deepen the analysis," but what does that even mean? Usually, it means that the points in a paper should go beyond the obvious. But how do you get beyond the obvious?

If you're trying to brainstorm ideas for analysis, try doing something creative with your evolving interpretation.

- *Create Some Analogies*: Identify similar stories, people, and situations that you're familiar with—whether it's from your daily life or the news or your previous studies. Import your thoughts and feelings related to those familiar, accessible things into your attempt to find your footing in the text you're analyzing.

- *Cast Roles*: What actors would you cast to play the various roles involved in the text you're analyzing?

- *Personalize It*: Where do you see your own experiences, identities, interests, values, beliefs, fears, and obsessions showing up in your text?

- *Adapt the Text*: If you were to produce or adapt this material in a different setting, how would you do it?

- *Create Listicles*: What are the Top 3 Terrible Decisions in the material you're looking at? Five hilarious things about this text! The 10 most important words in the text.

- *Meme the Material*: "How it started / How it's going."

- *Create Some Art*: Do a drawing, painting, sculpture, or performance based on your developing ideas about this material.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Explication

QUEEN [restraining him] Calmly, good Laertes.
LAERTES That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries "Cuckold!" to my father, brands the harlot
Even here between the chaste unsmirchèd brow
Of my true mother. (4.2.114-18)

1. This is the only reference to Laertes and Ophelia's mother in the play.

2. It seems most likely that Laertes and Ophelia's mother is dead. That's not a complete certainty. She could be alive and just never present.

3. Ophelia's mother being absent creates a tough dynamic when Hamlet starts professing his love for her. Ophelia doesn't have a mom to talk to.

4. It seems that, when Laertes says, "Even here," he points to his forehead, between his two [eye]brow[s]."

5. When Laertes points to his forehead, however, he doesn't say "my brow." He refers to "the chaste unsmirchèd brow / Of my true mother." Laertes seems to be saying that his brow looks like his mother's brow.

6. If Laertes looks like his mother, that could create a certain bond between Polonius, who lost his wife, and Laertes, who looks like her.

7. Laertes is saying that, if he were to calm down, it would be an insult to his father and mother, whom he clearly holds in reverence.

8. The fact that Laertes's mom isn't around makes the loss of his father that he's dealing with in this scene even tougher.

9. The absence of Ophelia and Laertes's mother invites us to posit a series of hypothetical scenarios about what role she may have had in her family's lives. Was she from Poland, as Polonius seems to be, based on his name? Did she know Polonius when he was at university? Did she die giving birth to Ophelia? Or did she die later in life? If later, do her children remember her? How did they process their grief at such a young age?

10. Maybe Polonius processed the loss of his wife by throwing himself into his work, and that's why he's so well-liked by King Claudius.

Jeffrey Wilson
Writing for Success
1 January 2022

Polonius

Hostile Reading

Bumbling Fool
"More Matter with less art"

Misogynistic Patriarch
"think yourself a baby"

More Sympathetic Reading

Polish Immigrant

Danish General

University Actor

Widower

Single Father

Providing context for key scenes

Son going off to college in a different country

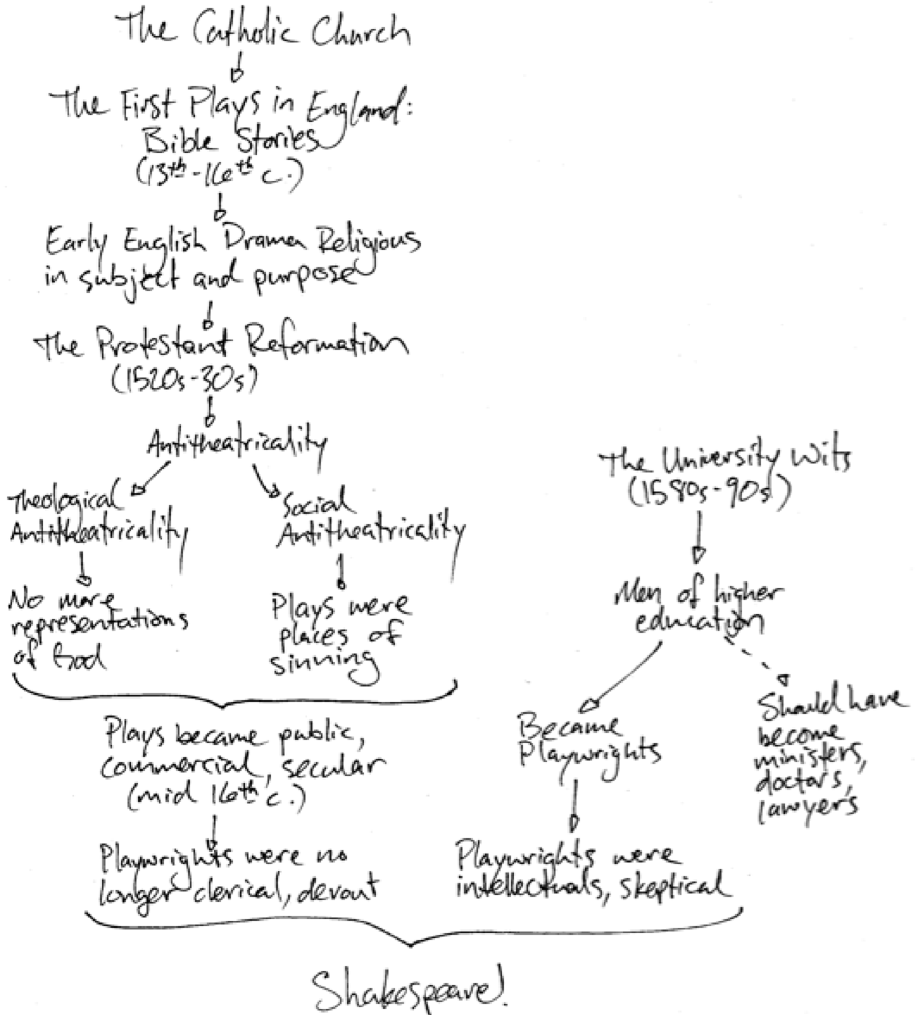
Daughter romantically involved with the Prince

His wordiness as dad jokes

Putting his job before his daughter is his central failing

Tries to save the queen

Victim of murder


Early English Drama
The Catholic Church
The First Plays in England: Bible Stories (13th-16th c.)
Early English Drama Religious in subject and purpose
The Protestant Reformation (1520s-30s)
Antitheatricality
Theological Antitheatricality
Social Antitheatricality
No more representations of God
Plays were places of sinning
Plays became public, commercial, secular (mid 16th c.)
Playwrights were no longer clerical, devout
The University Wits (1580s-90s)
Men of higher education
Became Playwrights
Should have become ministers, doctors, lawyers
Playwrights were intellectuals, skeptical
Shakespeare!

The Breakdown of Stigma

"The Normals"
Normative Expectations
Anticipations
Demands

Virtual Social Identities
Characteristics assumed to inhere in people of a certain type (e.g., the Normals, the Stigmatized)

Real Social Interaction

Actual Social Identities
Characteristics actually experienced, demonstrated in people

The VSIDs of the Normals and the Stigmatized rarely match their ASIDs.

The ASID of the Stigmatized is usually better than the VSID | The ASID of the Normal is usually worse than the VSID

And the ASIDs of the Normal and the Stigmatized are often similar even though their VSIDs are diametrically opposed.

The Normal is likely to be discreditable in certain ways. | The Stigmatized is clearly normal in many ways

"Normal" and "Stigmatized" are not essential aspects of the identities we hold.

"Normal" and "Stigmatized" are roles we play.
(See Presentation of Self)

Any individual can and does play either part depending on the circumstances of a situation

Goffman calls this the "self-other, normal-stigmatized unity" (132)

Cognitive Dissonance
We employ categories that don't fit

The normal treats the stigmatized as better than his VSID but worse than his ASID | The Stigmatized treats the Normal as worse than his VSID but better than his ASID

The Outcome of Stigma

"Joint Conversational Encounter" (13)
Abnormal trait obtrudes upon attention
Complicates and changes what would be a routine social interaction

Normal's Responses
- Staring
- Morbid Curiosity
- Offering Help (the Stigmatized may not want or need)
- Sympathy
- Charity
- "The Wise"

Stigmatized's Responses
- Anxiety
- Exposure
- Attempt to correct stigmatizable attribute
- Mastery or excluded area of activity
- Counter-interpretation
- Apply stigma conventions to self
- Shame
- Still feel "normal"
- Isolation/Alienation
- Forming In-Groups of Similar people
- Passing as unstigmatized
- Ambivalence about self

The causes and effects of stigma are confronted

AWKWARDNESS

For Normal | For Stigmatized

"infinite regress of mutual consideration" (18)

Acceptance?

The acceptance of the stigmatized by society? | The stigmatized person's acceptance of his or her abnormality? | The acceptance of the normal, the stigmatized and all society that stigma is a persistent and currently unsolvable problem that is not going away any time soon

The Definition of Stigma

Stigma as an Attribute
Ancient Greece
Stigma as a physical phenomenon
A brand or tattoo for slaves and criminals

The Modern Age
Stigma as a Moral Phenomenon
A Spoiled identity

The Post-Modern Perspective (i.e., Goffman)
Stigma as a Social Phenomenon
A relationship between "Normals" and "Abnormals"

Stigma as an Event, Not an Attribute

STIGMA IS CONSTRUCTED IN CULTURE, NOT GIVEN BY NATURE | A LANGUAGE OF RELATIONSHIPS, NOT ATTRIBUTES, IS NEEDED

The Origin of Stigma

"the structural preconditions of stigma" (2)
"It is not to the different that one should look for understanding our differentness, but to the ordinary" (127)

Society
History | Characteristics | Customs Laws

Norms:
Standards or patterns of behavior
Normalcy: the upholding of norms
Deviance: the violation of norms; not really a problem until…

The Assumption/Attribution of Identities/Essences
(See Presentation of Self)

A shift from focusing on what someone does to who someone is

The formation of "identity values" (129). Attributes of those who exhibit normalcy

The act of "identification" (51): determining whether or not someone is normal; what Goffman calls "cognitive recognition" (67)

"The Normals"
Difference
Especially but not always visible

Physical Difference | Ethical Difference | Racial Difference

"The Abnormal"

STIGMA TAKES ITS MEANING NOT FROM WHAT SOMEONE IS, BUT FROM WHAT SOMEONE IS NOT, NAMELY NORMAL

Into the Essay

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

In his very first scene, Hamlet is explicitly concerned with what he is, not what he seems to be. "I know not seems", he says to his mother after she asks why his father's death "seems" so "particular" with him:

> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good-mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief
> That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem',
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passeth show –
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.75–86)

This is a Hamlet who cannot act; or, rather, this is a Hamlet who acts exactly as he is. His semblance and his essence are exactly the same, he says, except that his internal state, "that within", is even more real, even more in existence than his considerable display or "show" of mourning. For this Hamlet, "action" is "play", Shakespeare using the language of drama here to distinguish Hamlet from an actor who pretends and to characterise Hamlet as a man who is, as a man who has "within" him something real and true – something more real and more true than the performance of grief, which is denigrated as "the trappings and the suits of woe". This Hamlet is not acting sad; he is sad. He is concerned with truth, with what "can denote [him] truly", with that which is in contrast to that which appears. Ham- let is not doing metaphysics in this speech, of course: in Heidegger's terms (Being and Time 31), he is being "ontical" (concerned with the essential attributes of things) but not "ontological" (concerned with being-qua-being).

An assertion, block quotation, and analysis of it.

From ***Hamlet*** **is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach it Like One**

One way Shakespeare conveyed suicide contagion was to fill Hamlet's suicidal thoughts with water and plant imagery that reappears in his girlfriend Ophelia's death by suicide. The first line of Hamlet's first soliloquy points forward to the last moments of Ophelia's life: "Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew." The soliloquy is filled with "tears," which water the "unweeded garden" that Hamlet compares his country to. Water imagery rushes back into Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," which flails in his "sea of troubles" and barrels toward suicide until "currents turn awry."

An assertion, orientation, evidence in the form of quotation, and analysis using the technical terms ("imagery") of the discipline at hand (literary studies).

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determination**

Hamlet is filled with fate, starting in the first scene. The Ghost is a "portentous figure" (1.1.108) who "bodes some strange eruption to our state" (1.1.68). Horatio compares it to omens preceding Julius Caesar's death, "precurse of feared events, / As harbingers preceding still the fates / And prologue to the omen coming on" (1.1.120-22), then asks the Ghost to foretell the future, "if thou art privy to thy country's fate" (1.1.132). These passages bookend the story of Young Fortinbras's campaign against Denmark, which culminates in the final scene of the play. Symbolically, the armored Ghost in the first scene points forward to the national, military tragedy of the last scene even if, more literally, the Ghost points backward to Claudius's crime against King Hamlet. Oddly, Shakespeare characterized the Ghost as Prince Hamlet's "fate": "My fate cries out" (1.4.81), he howls, following the Ghost into the unknown. What does that mean? How can a Ghost pointing to the past be "fate"? For starters, the revenge the Ghost assigns to Hamlet is a dooming of sorts. The catastrophe that ends the play is the outcome of the Ghost that begins it.

An assertion followed by evidence mixed with orientation and analysis.

From **The Meaning of Death in *Hamlet***

To test my hypothesis, I created a system for scoring the spectacularity of a death and the severity of a *hamartia*. First I scored the place of death according to its visibility: +1 for off-stage and +2 for on-stage. Then I scored the manner of death according to its brutality: +1 for suicide, +2 for poisoning, +3 for stabbing or any other weaponed assault. Then I combined the scores for visibility and brutality to generate a score for the spectacularity of a character's death. Next I scored each character's *hamartia* according to its severity: +1 for pride, +2 for incest, +3 for deceit, +4 for revenge, and +5 for ambition. The results of this analysis appear in Table 2 and are charted in Figure 1.

Table 2: Severity of *Hamartia* and Spectacularity of Death in *Hamlet*

Character	Severity of *Hamartia*	Spectacularity of Death
King Hamlet	1	2
Polonius	3	3.5
Ophelia	2	2
Gertrude	4	4
Laertes	7	7
Claudius	8	7
Hamlet	7	7
Ros and Guil	3	4

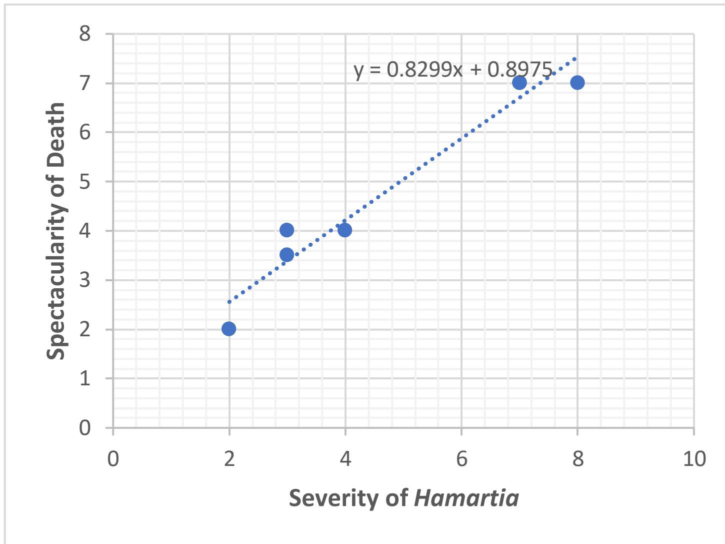


Figure 1: Severity of *Hamartia* and Spectacularity of Death in *Hamlet*

This analysis revealed that the spectacularity of a character's death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is proportionate to the severity of his or her *hamartia*. The greater a character's faults or errors are, the more visceral his or her death will be. What this means is that Shakespeare found a specifically dramatic way to symbolize character at the intersection between plot and spectacle. Beyond simply confirming that character is destiny in Shakespearean tragedy, this analysis suggests, more specifically, that *hamartia* is catastrophe. Here, instead of Aristotle's emphasis on the difference between the severity of the *hamartia* and that of the catastrophe, Shakespeare created a similarity between the severity of the *hamartia* and the spectacularity of the catastrophe. This argument suggests that, when Shakespeare asked himself the very practical artistic question of how he should write a character's death, he looked back upon the way he wrote that character's life. Or, perhaps even more plausibly, when Shakespeare knew how a character was going to die, he allowed it to inform the way he wrote out the character's actions.

Quantitative analysis.

Four

Argument

20

Method

The below painting, Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, is what is called an anamorphic image.

Figure 4: Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors (1533)

As you look around the image, it seems pretty standard, until you get to the strange oval object at the bottom-center of the painting. It seems to be an indecipherable blob. If, however, you place your eyes at the bottom of this oval, tilt the image away from you, and look diagonally across the oval, the oval object starts to take the shape of something we recognize. The image is called anamorphic because it changes when you look at it from a different angle. When you adjust your perspective, that blob is rendered comprehensible as a skull.

Sometimes, all you need in order to make sense of something that seems incoherent and meaningless is to look at it from the right angle.

In academic writing, the texts you interpret can be anamorphic as well. Documents and information that at first seem incoherent and meaningless can be rendered comprehensible if looked at from the right angle. The way in which you look at the object of your interpretation—the approach you take—is called your *method*.

From the Greek μετα, "after," + ὁδός, "path, way," your *method* is the path upon which you travelled (or plan to travel) to reach your destination, your destination being your *argument*.

There is a close relationship between *text*, *method*, and *argument*. If your *text* is the thing you're interpreting, and your *argument* is your interpretation of that thing, then your *method* is the way in which you went about your interpretation of your text in order to arrive at your argument.

Method is not a *what* but a *how*. *What* you want your reader to understand is your *argument*; *how* you have gone about your interpretation, or *how* you're going to persuade your reader to accept it, is your *method*.

Usually, your *method* stems from how many sources you're using and how the various fields of *evidence* in an essay are related. Some possible *methods* include:

- *A Close Reading Essay*: A single-source paper addressing the meaning and significance of one text.

- *A Theorization Essay*: A single-source paper that uses a discussion of a particular example to develop a generalizable theory.

- *A Historicist Essay*: A multi-source consideration of a text in light of historical circumstances relevant to the way it came into existence.

- *A Comparative Essay*: A multi-source consideration of similar texts, ideas, events that come from different contexts.

- *A Lens Essay*: The use of one text or idea (usually philosophical or theoretical in nature) to unpack and explain a particular example or set of data.

- *A Test-a-Theory Essay*: The use of an example or data set to evaluate (and potentially improve) a general philosophical or theoretical idea.

- *A Presentist Essay*: The use of a historical text or idea to unpack and discuss a recent text or idea.

Your discussion of your *method* is, most importantly, the place to acknowledge your theoretical community, which consists of any philosophers or theorists who have influenced the way you're interpreting your *text(s)*. Sometimes you can interpret a *text* on your own, by looking at evidence, analyzing that evidence, making inferences, and drawing conclusions; sometimes you have recourse—either during the act of interpretation (i.e., when reading a text), or in the course of articulating that interpretation (i.e., when writing a paper)—to abstract ideas, conceptual models that elucidate a certain kind of problem. A paper includes a significant theoretical component when it uses abstract ideas to make sense of particular facts.

— Practicum —

Diagramming Your Evidence

On a blank sheet of paper, draw a large circle in the middle.

Text: At the top of the circle, identify what you're interpreting.

Textual Evidence: Inside the circle, list your key pieces of evidence.

NOTE: All papers have a text and textual evidence. Not all papers have the below kinds of evidence. A single-source paper will only include textual evidence, while a multi-source paper has additional kinds.

NOTE ALSO: You may be able to include the specific sources you're planning to use but—especially early in the writing process—you may only be able to include "placeholder categories" that identify the topics you're planning to address.

Historical Evidence: To the left of the circle, note any information you're bringing into your project that falls outside the scope of your text yet influenced the way it came into the world or helps you explain it.

Historical Scholarship: To the bottom-right of the circle, note any scholarship you're bringing in to help you explain your historical evidence.

Theoretical Scholarship: To the top-right of the circle, note any theories or ideas serving as a lens for interpreting your text / textual evidence.

Critical Scholarship: To the center-right of the circle, note any scholarship you're bringing in that analyzes the same topic, text, or textual evidence that you're addressing (or something similar).

Looking at your diagram of evidence, determine your method. You may need to think about other elements, such as what you might do with your implications.

Write a *text/method* statement naming what you're interpreting and how.

Into the Essay

From **Tragic Foundationalism**

This essay puts the modern philosopher Alain Badiou's theory of foundationalism into dialogue with the early-modern playwright William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Doing so allows us to identify a new candidate for Hamlet's traditionally hard-to-define hamartia—his "tragic mistake"—but it also allows us to consider the possibility of foundationalism as hamartia.

…

Foundationalism is tragic in *Hamlet* because it produces that key element in *hamartia*: ignorance. Hamlet's *hamartia* does not flow from ignorance, as Aristotle would have it. Hamlet has just learned the secret truth of his father's murder. Hamlet's *hamartia* flows from truth. But, just as Badiou argues that an event creates a subject, the revelation of the truth about his father's murder creates ignorance in Hamlet. By wiping his "table" of prior experience and belief clean, Hamlet's foundationalism creates a strategic ignorance to empirical, rational, philosophical, historical, and even emotional knowledge because the truth process has purportedly reached its goal and no longer needs to operate. In place of the small, portable, erasable, temporary device of the "table," Hamlet plans to write the Ghost's commandment in something larger, permanent, and enduring—a "book." It would be remarkably short. What it lacked in coverage, it would make up for in clarity. Imagine your entire library wiped out of existence and replaced with one book with one word: "Revenge."

Method statement from the introduction; analysis with theoretical scholarship from the body.

From **The Honor Code at Harvard and in *Hamlet***

Looking at *Hamlet* from our place at Harvard can bring us to see what a tangled knot honor can be, and we can start to theorize the difference between heroic and tragic honor.

Text / method statement with an indication of what's at stake.

21

Terms

Your *terms* are the concepts that are doing a lot of interpretive work in your *argument*.

Often, when we hear "terms," we think about words that need definition. In academic writing, however, it's usually about concepts that need discussion. Key *terms* don't have to be the big, important-sounding words. Your key *terms* are the ones that are central to the claims you're making in your *argument*.

Sometimes, it is necessary to define what you mean by a given *term*. There are four key strategies:

- *Self-Definition*: "By *irony*, I mean…"
- *Dictionary Definition*: "The Oxford English Dictionary gives 1566 as the first instance of *irony* meaning…"
- *Etymology*: "The English word *irony* comes from the Greek eiron, meaning…"
- *Theoretical Scholarship*: "Richard Rorty defines *irony* as…"

Your discussion of *terms* need not be a definition of *terms*. For example, if you were to address the question of *mimesis* in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, you would need to define what *mimesis* is, "the representation of reality," but you might also need to discuss the relationship between art and nature; you would not need to give definitions of art and nature because everyone knows what those are, but you would need to provide an overview of the conceptual situation, i.e. art is supposed to reflect nature, but it doesn't do so exactly, and so forth.

As much as possible, draw your *terms* from your *text*. Unless you can justify it, don't import *terms* from elsewhere to interpret a *text* that might not be operating in those terms.

At the same time, one of the justifications for doing a multi-source essay is that bringing in an additional source provides helpful *terms* for explaining what is going on in the initial source.

It's often effective to discuss *terms* before delivering a *thesis*. The idea is that those *terms* can then serve as shorthand: you can explain in detail what you mean by a given *term*, and then you can use that *term* whenever you need, especially in your *thesis*, without having to explain yourself every time.

Discussing key *terms* before delivering a *thesis* allows you to provide a *thesis* statement that is both brief and meaningful: brief because its use of *terms* already discussed makes it sharp, clear, and concise, thus crisp and memorable; and meaningful because the *thesis* points back to a nuanced discussion of *terms*.

Sometimes, your *thesis* is the suggestion of a new *term*. If so, then your discussion of *terms* should come after your *thesis*, not before.

But don't do a big download of *terms* all at once: *Ahem, here are the five key terms in play in my paper, and I'm going to identify every term and define it here because this is the section in which I'm defining my terms*. It feels too mechanical. Introduce and discuss key *terms* as they arise organically throughout the essay.

A common move to make in conclusions is to theorize your argument outward into an abstract idea. If you do so, be sure to come up with a good *term* or phrase to capture your theorization.

In a literature review, it is often helpful to narrate the previous scholarship on a topic by grouping arguments into "camps," and giving a *term* to each camp.

— Practicum —

Identifying Your Key Terms

The questions below are designed to help you figure out the terms that are doing a lot of interpretive work in your argument.

1. Read through your argument statement and list out the main *topics* (things you are making claims about) and *concepts* (ideas you're using to make claims).

2. From your list, select five key terms—these are basically just the words that you know will definitely need to be in your thesis.

3. Sometimes, writing a thesis is simply about figuring out the shortest way to articulate the relationships among your key terms. To do so, draw a quick conceptual map.

   - Aim to establish links of causality and chronology: who or what brings who or what into existence?
   - Note that, chronologically, motives for doing something come before strategies for doing it. And strategies come before the thing itself. Establish the order in which your key terms come into play and act upon each other.
   - You may find that you need to add new key terms to describe the nature of the relationships.

4. Using your conceptual map, write out a thesis. Shorter is better. Try doing it in one sentence.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Key Terms

Polonius

Shakespeare

Hamlet

Single Father

Work-Life Balance

Relatable

Thesis: In contrast to the image of a bumbling old fool that audiences love to hate, Polonius is surprisingly relatable and sympathetic in the twenty-first century as a single father struggling with work-life balance.

Into the Essay

From **The Meaning of Death in *Hamlet***

There exists in *Hamlet* a positive correlation between the severity of a character's *hamartia* and the "spectacularity" of his or her death—that is, the extent to which it is presented as a visible and visceral spectacle on-stage.

Key terms used in a thesis statement.

From **The Honor Code at Harvard and in *Hamlet***

The world of Hamlet is governed by neither fate nor fortune, nor even the Christianized version of fate called "providence." Yet there is a modern, secular, disenchanted form of fate at work in *Hamlet*—what is sometimes called "social determinism"—which calls into question the freedom of the individual will. As such, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* both commented on the transformation of pagan fate into Christian providence that happened in the centuries leading up to the play, and anticipated the further transformation of fate from a theological to a sociological idea, which occurred in the centuries following *Hamlet*.

Key terms used in a thesis statement and the stakes.

From **The Honor Code at Harvard and in *Hamlet***

Every semester at the start of my first-year writing class, called *Why Shakespeare?*, students affirm the Harvard honor code. I must admit to feeling slightly awkward when they do because, in stark contrast to life at Harvard, a code of honor is quite problematic in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Honor in *Hamlet* works like its Latin etymon, *honor*, "esteem, respect," a sense which is all about the opinions of others, something external, not any "integrity" that belongs to the individual. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both senses of *honor* were in circulation in Shakespeare's England, the external sense of "great respect, esteem" coming into usage around 1225, and the internal sense of "a fine sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered to be morally right or just" around 1300. But instead of "the foundation of our community" that it is at Harvard, honor is tragic in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation.

Question/problem leading into a discussion of terms (using etymology) that are then used for a thesis.

From ***Hamlet*** **is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

Suicide contagion is the term social scientists use to describe exposure to suicide or suicidal thoughts resulting in an increase of suicidal behavior. While media coverage has recently heightened concern about the phenomenon, it has been observed for centuries. One term for suicide contagion is the Werther Effect, named after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774), a Romantic German novel about a lovesick young artist who takes his own life. An international bestseller partly based on Shakespeare's Hamlet, the book's fame led to a rise in young people imitating Werther's suicide, dressing in his trademark outfit or holding Goethe's book for their fateful act.

Suicide contagion is a special case of the general phenomenon of social modeling or social learning, where humans follow examples more than rules. The initial exposure can come either directly (someone you know dies by suicide) or indirectly (media reports on suicide). Sometimes suicide is glamorized through its association with a successful, attractive, larger- than-life celebrity, like Robin Williams, Kate Spade, or Anthony Bourdain. Such exposure, especially with an emphasis on the cause and manner of death, makes suicide real, creating new ideas about suicide or triggering pre-existing thoughts, modifying a person's understanding of typical social behavior, making it seem like an acceptable method of responding to stress, and loosening the restraint we usually exercise with harmful acts.

Extended discussion of a key term.

From **How *Hamlet* Works**

There exists an economic relationship of supply-and-demand that explains Hamlet's popularity. But what does *Hamlet* offer, and what market demand does that offering satisfy? The three most compelling possibilities are what I call the thematic answer, the theatrical answer, and the philosophical answer. The thematic answer is that, as the English language's best artwork about death—one of the very few universal human experiences in a modern world increasingly marked by cultural differences—Hamlet is always timely and therefore timeless. The theatrical answer is that, with its mixture of tragedy and comedy, the role of Hamlet requires an extremely good actor—often the best actor of each age—and the play's popularity derives from the celebrity of its stars. The philosophical answer is that Hamlet invites, encourages, facilitates, and sustains philosophical introspection and conversation from people who do not usually do such things, who find themselves doing those things with Hamlet, who sometimes feel embarrassed about doing those things, but who ultimately find the experience of having done them rewarding.

Key terms used to structure an argument statement.

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

What was Shakespeare saying about philosophy? I address this question by attending to the differences between philosophy and drama. On the most basic level, philosophy is about knowing while drama is about doing: these words come from the Greek σοφία, "wisdom", and δρᾶν, "to do". More specifically, the start of Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be, or not to be", invokes the form of philosophy called *ontology*, derived from the Greek όντο-, "being". Ontology is, in Martin Heidegger's definition, "that theoretical inquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities" (Being and Time 32): the study of being-qua-being. Incidentally, the word *ontology* (or rather, *ontologia*) was coined by Shakespeare's German contemporary Jacob Lorhard in 1606, just a few years after Hamlet was first staged. Lorhard used the term ontology interchange- ably with the term metaphysics, and Shakespeare would have thought about the concerns of ontology in terms of Aristotlean metaphysics, the study of first and supreme causes and principles, superna- tural and supersensible substance and structure, that which does not change, which remains true in all times in all places. Metaphysics was set off against both natural philosophy, with its theoretical attention to sublunary matters, and ethical philosophy, with its practical concern for virtuous action. With these distinctions in mind, we can note that what Critchley and Webster called Hamlet's "onto- logical question" (11) is really an ethical question veiled in the language of ontology, as registered in Heidegger's retort to Hamlet: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question" (Introduction to Metaphysics 1). Thus, Hamlet's soliloquy invokes both metaphysical philosophy (in its language of "being") and ethical philosophy (in its concern with "action").

Like ethics, drama is about action, but drama is also about acting. Hamlet draws much of its energy from the tension between the ethical action the protagonist wants to take and the theatrical acting he does instead. As James Calderwood emphasised in his reading of Hamlet, drama allows an actor "to be and not to be" a character; a play operates simultaneously as dramatic illusion and thea- trical reality in ways quite foreign to the quest for the fundamental nature of reality in metaphysics. Thus, the basic dramatic phenomenon of acting has historically been a spur in the side of philosophy, going back to Plato, as Jonas Barish discussed in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*: "The key terms are those of order, stability, constancy, and integrity, as against a more existentialist emphasis that prizes growth, process, exploration, flexibility, variety and versatility of response. In one case we seem to have an ideal of stasis, in the other an ideal of movement" (117). Philosophy and drama are by no means antithetical, but the "ideal of stasis" in metaphysics and the "ideal of movement" in drama generate "fundamentally different types of endeavour" with different assumptions and motives, as Martin Puchner argued when unpacking "the anti-theatrical prejudice in philosophy and the anti-philosophical prejudice in theatre" (541).

I want to suggest that Shakespeare did not care about the questions of metaphysical philosophy, and that he satirised metaphysics in Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" speech because he thought acting was more important than being. That is, Shakespeare valued human action and interaction, including the social roles we perform like actors playing characters on a stage, over abstract knowledge about existence generated through theoretical reasoning.

Extended discussion of terms that are then used in a thesis statement.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

Unconscious bias – the notion that we can harbor and practice prejudice and discrimination which we are unaware of, even if we despise and resist bigotry – has emerged as a prominent concern in recent social scientific research, led by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald.[1] This field of inquiry originates in the observation that much of human history involves claims that one tribe, one religion, one race, one nation, one gender, one sexual orientation, and so forth – in short, one identity – is better than another. Of course, *mine* is always better than *yours*: narcissism (love of the self) easily spills over into bigotry (hatred of the other). In highly developed nations such as the twenty-first-century United States, however, overt bigotry is declining because (in philosophical terms) we lack any sort of universal criteria by which we might evaluate the intrinsic worth of one identity over another, and (in more practical terms) prejudice and discrimination are now widely frowned upon if not railed against in public. Admittedly, the resurgence of openly racist, sexist, ableist, and classist rhetoric in the Trump era leaves us uncertain about future directions of this trend. In most quarters, however, explicitly bigoted groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Westborough Baptist Church are seen as fringe movements full of loonies. Thus, in the United States today, the problems of prejudice and discrimination are largely unspoken; they are to be found in the way American society is structured and operates. Women make less money than men who do the same jobs. Black men get longer prison sentences than white men who commit the same crimes. Why do these social injustices persist? It's not because of a widespread belief in the superiority of men over women and whites over blacks, as was once the case. Instead, that history of prejudice and discrimination, even though it has been widely disavowed, has resulted in the social empowerment of men and whites over women and blacks. Those in power, even if they abhor bigotry, hold unconscious biases in favor of their own, resulting in a tension, Banaji and Greenwald write, "between our intentions and ideals, on one hand, and our behavior and actions, on the other." Structural inequality engenders unconscious bias; unconscious bias fosters structural inequality.

Unconscious bias is different from the misogyny and patriarchy more easily identifiable in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's overt misogyny – "Frailty, thy name is woman," he fumes in his first soliloquy (1.2.147), projecting his anger over his mother's hasty remarriage into an indictment of all womankind – serves Shakespeare's characterization of Hamlet's mental and emotional disturbance at the start of the play. Polonius's patriarchal parenting – the double standard which turns Laertes loose to be true to his own self in France but domineers every aspect of Ophelia's life in Denmark in an effort to maintain her honor – is part of Polonius's characterization as a buffoon. In *Hamlet*, misogynists are mentally disturbed, patriarchs are fools, and misogyny and patriarchy are configured together with tragedy. Hamlet's pain, suffering, and sorrow upon his father's death and his confusion, disappointment, and anger about his mother's remarriage trigger his madness, while Polonius's oppression of Ophelia sows the seeds of her madness and death: she is dominated and directed by men her whole life so, when she loses all the men in her life (Laertes goes off to France, Hamlet rejects her, Polonius dies), she goes mad. She literally loses her mind insofar as she loses access to the men who had done all her thinking for her (as epitomized in her heartbreaking line, "I think nothing, my lord" [3.2.113]). Both the perpetrators and the victims of sexism die in *Hamlet* because sexism is part and parcel of the ideology Shakespeare critiqued, rejected, and suggested leads to tragedy. The cultural prestige of male warriors in medieval feudalism spawned the patriarchal culture of honor symbolized by King Hamlet and his machismo: patriarchy and misogyny are local manifestations of the culture of honor that, in Shakespeare's dramatic vision, ends in tragedy.

Extended discussion of a key term that is then used for analysis in a body paragraph.

From **Tragic Foundationalism**

Tragic foundationalism is the notion that fidelity to a single and substantive truth at the expense of an openness to evidence, reason, and change is an acute mistake which can lead to miscalculations of fact and virtue that create conflict and can end up in catastrophic destruction and the downfall of otherwise strong and noble people.

Theorizing a new term in the implications.

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Logic

From the Greek *logos*, "reason," logic is the study of our methods for evaluating whether the premises of an argument adequately support its conclusion.

In formal logic, both premises and conclusions are called *statements*. A statement is a sentence that is either true or false. For example, the statement "All men are mortal" is either true or false.

A *premise* is a statement on the basis of which a conclusion is affirmed. That is, premises lead to conclusions. For example, "*All men are mortal. Socrates is a man*. Therefore, Socrates is mortal."

A *conclusion* is a statement affirmed on the basis of some premises. That is, conclusions follow from premises. For example, "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. *Therefore, Socrates is mortal*."

In formal logic, an *argument* is a set of statements, one of which, the conclusion, is affirmed on the basis of the others, the premises.

All arguments have two basic properties: validity and soundness. *Validity* concerns the truth of the conclusion in relation to the premises. *Soundness* also concerns the truth of the premises in relation to the world.

An argument is valid when its premises support its conclusion: if the premises are true, then the conclusion is true. An argument is invalid when the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises: the premises may

be true, and the conclusion may be true, but the conclusion is not the necessary consequence of the premises.

> *Valid*: All biologists are scientists. John is not a scientist. So, John is not a biologist.
>
> *Invalid*: All biologists are scientists. John is not a biologist. So, John is not a scientist.

An argument is sound when its premises support its conclusions and those premises are true: evidence affirms the truth of the premises, and the premises affirm the truth of the conclusion. An argument is unsound when the premises are false. Note that an argument can be valid but not sound: it can be logical but not true; however an argument cannot be sound but not valid: validity implies soundness.

> *Sound*: All collies are dogs. All dogs are animals. So, all collies are animals.
>
> *Unsound*: All collies are cats. All cats are animals. So, all collies are animals.

Deductive logic is the part of logic that concerns validity. Deductive logic uses general statements to arrive at a specific statement. For example, "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal."

Inductive logic is that part of logic that concerns soundness. Inductive logic uses specific statements to construct or evaluate general statements. For example, "Socrates has a beard. Socrates stands when he pees. Socrates likes beer and football. Socrates won't ask for directions. Therefore, Socrates is a man."

Conditional statements describe cause and effect. They usually take the form of "if-then" statements. In a conditional, the if-clause is called the *antecedent*, and the then-clause is called the *consequent*.

If x is a *necessary cause* of y, then the presence of y necessarily implies the presence of x. The presence of x, however, does not imply that y will occur.

If x is a *sufficient cause* of y, then the presence of x necessarily implies the presence of y. However, another cause z may alternatively cause y. Thus, the presence of y does not imply the presence of x.

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Argument

You probably know that a paper is supposed to have a "thesis statement."

You may have been told to state your *thesis* in your introduction, and then to restate it in different words in your conclusion. Perhaps your reaction is something like: *Why didn't you just read my thesis the first time around when I said it exactly how I wanted to say it?*

The suggestion that you "restate your thesis in different words" comes from a failure to differentiate between a *thesis* and an *argument*.

A *thesis* statement is a short (one- or two-sentence) statement of the main point of a paper.

An *argument* statement is a longer (one- or two-paragraph) summary of the ideas at work behind a thesis statement, a synthesis of the evidence and analysis presented in an essay.

An *argument* is a detailed overview of the components, structure, and operation of an idea. A *thesis* is an easily accessible report of the main point of that idea.

Your *thesis* should make a single point. It is the one thing you want your reader to understand, even if that "one thing" has many moving parts. Your *argument* is a description of all of those parts.

Which comes first, the *thesis* or the *argument*? It depends. In terms of the sequence of your research process, your *argument* comes before your *thesis*.

You have to develop an understanding of the complex set of ideas that you wish to present (your *argument*) before you write a short statement of your central take-away (your *thesis*).

In terms of the structure of your paper, however, your *thesis* comes before your *argument*. You should give a short articulation of your main point (your *thesis*) early in your paper to serve as a guiding light for your reader, while the longer overview of all the ideas behind your proposition (your *argument*) will come later in your paper to serve as a synthesis for your reader.

What makes an *argument* good? It brings clarity to complexity through specificity and intellectual riskiness.

The ideas you're writing about should be complex (if they're simple, we don't need an essay about them), but your *argument* should be crystal clear.

An *argument* should be bold, daring, risk-taking, not obvious or dispassionate. When writing a paper, take a moment to ask yourself, "Is this really what I want to argue?" Do you have an *argument* that you're passionate about, that you're invested in, or are you just going through the motions to fulfill an assignment?

Remember that intellectual breakthroughs only come when intellectual risks are taken.

Kinds of Arguments

The German writer Karl Marx famously said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." What is the point of academic writing: to interpret the world or to change it?

In academic writing, there are two kinds of *arguments*. On the one hand, there are *analytical arguments*, those that are descriptive, what could be called philosophical arguments. On the other hand, there are *ethical arguments*, those that are prescriptive or political arguments.

The analytical argument is descriptive because it is designed to describe what is true and why. This argument is philosophical, a Greek word that means "the love of knowledge." An analytical argument is about a love of knowledge for its own sake. This kind of argument is about the complete and accurate understanding of something.

The ethical argument is prescriptive, as in a doctor who prescribes medicine to cure a patient; the ethical argument seeks to provide a cure for the issue addressed. This argument is often political, insofar as it seeks to change an individual or a culture for the better. In theory, ideas for change should be

based on a writer's clear understanding of the problem at hand; in practice, this superior understanding does not always grace those who want to fix the world.

Toward the Paper

It is often effective to launch a conclusion by dealing with the trickiest *counter(s)* to your *argument*, or by reviewing several *counter-arguments*.

There are two ways to deliver your *argument*. The most common way is to put it in a robust paragraph at the start of your conclusion, synthesizing together all the *assertions*, *evidence*, and *analysis* dealt with in detail in the body of the essay.

Thus, the most basic structure for a conclusion is to start it with an argument statement that then leads to the implications of the argument:

Paragraph 1: *Argument Statement*

- *Counter*
- *Response*
- *Argument*

Paragraph 2 and Forward: *Implications*

- *Implications*

Or you can deliver the *argument* in chunks as you move through the body of your paper. At the end of each body section, elevate your discussion up to the level of the *argument*, summarizing it up to this point. Then dive back down to the level of *evidence* and *analysis* as you move into the next body section. If you do so, you don't need to summarize your entire *argument* when you get to your conclusion: you only need to summarize the aspects of your *argument* that you've put forth since your last summary, and then you can shift into your concluding discussion.

— Practicum —

Developing Your Argument

This activity is designed to help you develop your main argument—to see how far you can push it while adhering to the key criterion, *I believe this to be true*.

1. Using the argument you've developed, ask yourself, *What is the truth that I've discovered?* What is the claim you can make about the text that satisfies the criterion, *I believe this to be true*?
2. You've probably described an aspect of the text. Let's see if you can push your interpretation a little further (sometimes you can; sometimes you can't). Start by asking how that thing you just described about your text got there. Specifically, do you think someone deliberately did it?

   [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] I Don't Know

   If you said *yes*, answer Question 3 (a and b). If *no* or *I don't know*, answer 4 (a and b).
3. Questions of meaning (what did the author intend? how did [s]he do it? why?):
   3a. How did the author create the quality of the text that you've described (as best as you can reconstruct that process while adhering to *I believe this to be true*)?
   3b. The previous question (3a) was a *how* question: *how did he do it?* Now ask the *why* question: why did the author create the quality of the text that you've described (as best as you can imagine what their motives might have been while adhering to *I believe this to be true*)?
4. Questions of significance (what does the text point to? where does it come from? why is it important?)
   4a. Where did the quality of the text you're describing come from? What forces brought it into existence? (You're speculating, yes, but adhere to *I believe this to be true*.)
   4b. Describe the process through which that force / those forces resulted in the quality of the text that you're describing. (How far can you push things while maintaining, *I believe this to be true*?)

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Argument Statement

It's easy to be hard on Polonius, the bumbling counselor to the king in Shakespeare's Hamlet whose overlong speeches, filled with pretension and digression, lead the queen to ask for "more matter with less art." He's not just an overbearing father to Ophelia; he's a repugnant patriarch who domineers her will and strangles her verve for life. Polonius is also a single father doing his best to balance his career in a high-power government position with life at home as his two rebellious children become young adults. Shakespeare's play includes traces—only the slightest of hints that must be imaginatively flushed out—of a more complex life for Polonius. The very name "Polonius" suggests two possible backstories—one as an a Polish immigrant whose assimilation into Danish society surely came with many complexities, the other as a military man involved with Denmark's conquest of Poland. Polonius was an actor who played the part of Julius Caesar at university. When and how he met his wife, Ophelia and Laertes's mother, is unclear but it seems likely that she is dead (otherwise, she's shockingly absent from her children's lives). Did she die giving birth to Ophelia? Or were her children older? Do they remember her? How has her death—surely traumatic for all involved—affected her family? Perhaps a grieving Polonius threw himself into his job, and that's how he climbed the ranks of King Hamlet's council to become a leading advisor to Denmark's royal family. Or maybe Polonius had a hand in Claudius's assassination of the king, and that's why Claudius praises Polonius so effusively in public. These hidden hypotheticals are only possibilities, but they humanize Polonius enough to complicate the common antipathy to the character, which stems in part from the fact that audiences experience the play from the point of view of Prince Hamlet, who wants to marry Polonius's daughter and murder Polonius's boss. Audiences sympathetic to Hamlet inevitably accept his characterization of Polonius as a fool, a nuisance, and an enemy. What happens if we change our point-of-view to look at Polonius from the perspective of modern single parents struggling to balance work and life? Any father would struggle sending a son with a penchant for youthful rebellion off to college in another country. Any father would be thrown off if the heir to the crown in his country started saying he was deeply in love with his daughter. Let's hope most fathers wouldn't, like Polonius, put their job ahead of the well-being of their daughter, though we still see that situation all the time. Ultimately, Polonius literally gives his life for his job. He comes out of hiding to protect the queen and becomes a victim of murder by an unhinged aristocrat who then callously plays games with the dead body. Polonius's death utterly breaks his children. Ophelia deteriorates into a mental health crisis and eventually suicide. Anger drives Laertes to violence that completely backfires, resulting in his death. Where do our sympathies lie now? Polonius actually emerges as the most relatable parent in Hamlet—not an admirable father, but one that modern audiences might identify with—when set beside the very bad parenting seen elsewhere in the play. King Hamlet is a father who asks his son to go murder someone, which ends up destroying the child's life. Queen Gertrude is a mother who marries her dead husband's brother and then is baffled that her son is struggling. King Claudius is a stepfather only because he murdered his stepson's actual father. Ultimately, my defense of Polonius is not that he's a good father but that he's a good character, much more complex and compelling than the cliché of the bumbling patriarch allows.

Into the Essay

From **The Working Class in *Hamlet***

There's a lot for working-class folks to hate about *Hamlet*—not just because it's old, dusty, difficult to understand, crammed down our throats in school, and filled with frills, tights, and those weird lace neck thingies that are just socially awkward to think about. Peak Renaissance weirdness. Claustrophobically cloistered inside the castle of Elsinore, quaintly angsty over royal family problems, *Hamlet* feels like the literary epitome of elitism. "Lawless resolutes" is how the Wittenberg scholar Horatio describes the soldiers who join Fortinbras's army in exchange "for food." The Prince Hamlet who has never worked a day in his life denigrates Polonius as a "fishmonger": quite the insult for a royal advisor to be called a working man. And King Claudius complains of the simplicity of "the distracted multitude." But, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare juxtaposed the nobles' denigrations of the working class as readily available metaphors for all-things-awful with the rather valuable behavior of working-class characters themselves. When allowed to represent themselves, the working class in *Hamlet* are characterized as makers of things—of material goods and services like ships, graves, and plays, but also of ethical and political virtues like security, education, justice, and democracy. Meanwhile, Elsinore has a bad case of affluenza, the make-believe disease invented by an American lawyer who argued that his client's social privilege was so great that it created an obliviousness to law. While social elites rot society through the twin corrosives of political corruption and scholarly detachment, the working class keeps the machine running. They build the ships, plays, and graves society needs to function, and monitor the nuts-and-bolts of the ideals—like education and justice—that we aspire to uphold.

Argument statement.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

I have argued that the presence of a critique of misogyny and patriarchy as tragic suggests progressive impulses in Shakespeare, relative to his time and place, operating simultaneously with unconscious bias. Of all the terms we might apply to the various manifestations of gender issues in Shakespeare's plays—misogyny, patriarchy, sexism, feminism—implicit bias is the most satisfying. On the one hand, it acquits Shakespeare from charges of bigotry and hostility that are difficult to defend after closely reading his works. On the other hand, it holds Shakespeare accountable for the diminished status of women in his plays. It acknowledges Shakespeare's visions of misogyny and patriarchy as sources of tragedy, as well as acts of misogyny and patriarchy in Shakespeare's own writing practices. Because the sexism of *Hamlet* is structural rather than polemical, it is more subtle than we are accustomed to observing in Renaissance texts. Shakespeare's sexism "metamorphosed," as Banaji and Greenwald describe racism in America, "into harder-to-see forms."

Argument statement.

From **The Tragedy of Love in *Hamlet***

Love is tragic in *Hamlet* because the governmental system in place forces family dynamics to spill over into politics: in a dynastic monarchy, small-scale family drama has large-scale social consequences. Dynastic monarchy brings the emotion that usually characterizes family drama into government, which is supposed to run on reason rather than emotion. That's because love personalizes and makes passionate decisions that social institutions try to render impersonal and objective. When governments are administered by families, the emotions that infuse family dynamics seep into political dynamics. Dynastic governments make political systems just as volatile as familial systems. Governmental institutions are built to be impersonal decision-making machines that operate purely on the basis of logic and reason. *Hamlet* shows what happens when the dynamics that govern our private lives come to have consequences for public policy.

Argument statement.

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Counters and Responses

One of the most ancient strategies of *argument* is to acknowledge and account for the *counter-arguments* to your position. Dealing with *counters* shows that you have examined an issue from multiple perspectives, that you have taken a careful and considered approach to your interpretation, and—having done so—you have decided that the position for which you are arguing is the most satisfactory position.

Counters are not about disagreement with people. They are about acknowledging the complexity of an issue which, if it's problematic enough for you to need to write a paper about, is by definition open to multiple possible interpretations.

Counters build trust. They show that you have about your argument in sufficient depth.

Counters need *responses*. It is not enough to acknowledge the existence of a *counter-argument* (e.g., "I am aware that such-and-such position exists"). You must acknowledge a *counter-argument* and respond to it.

Sometimes writers feel that they must make their position look strong by denying and rejecting any position that isn't theirs. It is a sign of intellectual strength, not weakness, to qualify your position to accommodate new evidence and other perspectives. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you must bat down violently and absolutely any position that is different from your own, of thinking that it is a weakness to qualify your argument.

If a *counter-argument* isn't working, don't force it just because you think you need to have one in your paper. A forced counter is usually transparently bad and the tracks from—rather than enhances—the quality of an argument.

Don't straw-man *counter-arguments*. Don't prop up a position that no one would ever seriously adopt just so you can knock it down for the sake of having gone through a *counter-argument* and your *response* to it. "Some might say that the yellow bottle on the table is ketchup; I have argued, however, that it is better to view it as mustard." That tactic is transparent, and it detracts from your scholarly authority (when one of the points of doing *counters* and *responses* is to enhance your authority). Instead, engage with ideas you find difficult and challenging to your own.

Be specific with *counters*. The notion that something "is open to interpretation," and therefore yours may not be the be-all, end-all interpretation, is not a *counter-argument*. It is a fact of the interpretive enterprise. All sorts of things are open to interpretation but saying so doesn't get us anywhere. Instead, describe the specific interpretive options available to us, where they can co-exist and where they conflict, and why the position you're arguing for is ultimately the most satisfactory.

The Levels of Counters and Responses

Include *counters* and *responses* at both the paragraph-level and the paper-level; that is, address the counter-claims to your *argument* as well as the counter-claims to your *assertions*. Include small-scale *counters* and *responses* in terms of the *analyses* of *evidence* that you perform in your body paragraphs, and large-scale *counters* and *responses* for the overall *argument* that is the center of your paper.

Counters come on three levels:

- *Counter-argument*, probably the most commonly employed form of *counter*, is probably the weakest and least important. It involves someone who, looking at the totality of evidence and analysis you have offered, could come down to a different conclusion.

- *Counter-analysis* involves someone who has or could look at the same *evidence* as you and generate a different interpretation.

- *Counter-evidence* is additional facts, data, examples, etc. that could lead someone to a different position than the one you're arguing. It can come on any of the three levels of *evidence*.

    - There can be *counter textual evidence*: drawn from your text—maybe a line in a play or a date that you haven't focused on

much—that doesn't transparently fit the argument you're delivering.

- There can be *counter historical evidence*: drawn from outside your text—maybe a different play from the period you're considering or a contemporaneous social movement—that seems to suggest a different interpretation than the one you're offering.

- There can be *counter Scholarly Evidence*: previous scholarship that doesn't jive with your argument. Counters could come from any of the three kinds of Scholarly Evidence:

    - A *counter Critical Scholarship* would be a scholar who has read your text differently than you do.

    - A *counter Theoretical Scholarship* would be a scholar whose interpretive method would generate a different argument than the one you're delivering.

    - A *counter Historical Scholarship* would be a scholar who offers a different context than the one you've established.

Structuring Counters and Responses

Counter-arguments can be actual or hypothetical: actual claims that scholars have put forth in writing (which you present in your paper), or alternate possible positions on an issue that you can imagine a reasonable person adopting.

A frequent place to put a *counter-argument* is the start of the conclusion, setting up an *argument* statement.

If you have been dealing with *counter-evidence* and *counter-analysis* throughout the body of an essay, there probably isn't all that much work left to do on the level of *counter-argument*.

That's why it's sometimes best to deal with *counter-argument* in the introduction rather than the conclusion. Use *counter-arguments* in a literature review if you are writing a research paper or in a *question/problem* statement if you are writing an essay without scholarly engagement.

Especially if you are proposing an *argument* that you know to be provocative or objectionable, you might review and respond to the *counter-arguments* in your introduction, before you even get to the body of my paper, directly after having stated your *thesis*.

Into the Essay

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

> Such was the very armour he had on
> When he the ambitious Norway combated;
> So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
> He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
> 'Tis strange. (1.1.60-64)

There really is something "strange" about Horatio's story. A technical term of combat, "parle" means peaceful negotiations between the opposing sides of a conflict. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this line from *Hamlet* for its definition: "A debate or conference; discussion; negotiation; *spec*. a meeting between enemies or opposing parties to discuss the terms of an armistice." But the former king, if Horatio can be taken at his word, once slaughtered a slew of Polacks while in parlay. This is not the only possible reading of this line. Perhaps Horatio is trying to be metaphorical or glib – and there is some editorial dispute over the phrase "sledded Polacks" – but the most straightforward reading of the first substantive bit of information we get about King Hamlet is that he was a warrior king who did not respect the laws of war.

Evidence, analysis, counter-analysis, and response.

From **What Shakespeare Says about Sending Our Children Off to College**

To be clear, I am not saying that "the self" does not exist. I am saying that, from a Shakespearean perspective, "selves"—along with souls, minds, natures, identities, and essences—exist in a radically different and less impressive way than is usually assumed. The self exists as a function of discourse, as a concept invented by humans, not as a reality that is psychologically, philosophically, theologically, or existentially compelling.

Counter-argument and response.

From **Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy**

Any speculation about Shakespeare's life and attitudes toward art runs the risk of the biographical fallacy that scours and sometimes invents personal experience as a *roman a clef* for literary expression. We have better footing talking about the text than the author. Yet it would be absurd, given the scarcity of historical facts we know about Shakespeare, to act as if his artistic output weren't an important resource for knowledge about the man. It would also be absurd to act as if Shakespeare's personal experiences didn't influence his art simply because we don't and can't know what they were with much certainty. The most balanced approach is to weigh what little biographical information we have about Shakespeare against the massive corpus of literary output that we have to determine what might, plausibly, have been the case.

When we do so, there is reason to believe that Shakespeare wrote some of himself into Horatio. Like Horatio, Shakespeare found solace after the death of a loved one in the telling of tragedy. By rationalizing pain and suffering as tragedy, Horatio and Shakespeare were able to avoid the self-destruction entailed in Hamlet's emotional response to life's hardships and injustices. In this line of thought, the skeptical and stoic storytelling represented by Horatio may have been, for Shakespeare, a coping mechanism against the radical and eratic skepticism of a Hamlet who looks at the world and finds no fairness, certainty, stability, or joy. If, in the Aristotelian tradition, the social function of tragedy is to purge the emotions of pity and fear from audiences who see those emotions represented on stage, tragedy provides catharsis for an author too. Writing tragedy purifies a troubled mind by purging emotions of grief and anger. Writing tragedy allows us to go on living in the face of pain and injustice without killing ourselves or others.

Counter-argument and response flowing into an argument statement and implications.

From ***Hamlet* is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

Properly framed, *Hamlet* could be an introduction to the idea of suicide contagion, generating a self-consciousness that might counteract the danger of the phenomenon. When you know what suicide contagion is and how it works, you're less likely to succumb to it, or perpetuate it. Yet, if hearing Hamlet talk about suicide planted the seed in Ophelia's mind, could the same happen with *Hamlet* in our classrooms? Could the text be damaging to someone who has a pre-existing vulnerability?

Some months ago, I was going to invite my teenage niece to a performance of Romeo and Juliet, but decided against it. One of her friends had recently died by suicide. It shook the whole community. Parents were hyper-vigilant about the possibility of contagion. Better not to take any risks with Romeo and Juliet, I thought. It might be an opportunity for a healthy conversation, but I had absolutely no confidence that it would be a positive experience for her. The uncertainty froze me. I went to the play alone.

This is the equivalent of adopting media guidelines. Maybe a 10th-grade classroom doesn't need a close reading of Gertrude's speech about Ophelia's death. Emphasizing the location and manner of death can create contagion, as can visual representations of the location. Experts would advise using visuals from Ophelia's life, or the logo of the suicide prevention hotline, rather than John Everett Millais's famous 1852 painting of Ophelia. Avoid saying suicide is senseless or happens "without warning." Include up-to-date local and national resources to promote help-seeking behavior.

Argument statement, question/problem for the stakes, counter-evidence, response leading to implications.

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Thesis

A good *thesis* is hard to write. Even expert writers don't get it right every time.

Your *thesis* is the most important sentence(s) in your essay. That's why you should spend a lot of time working it until it's perfect.

Having a good *thesis* makes writing a paper easy. Everything else falls into place once you've got a well-thought-out, well-written *thesis*.

But what is a *thesis* statement? What is it supposed to accomplish? The word *thesis* comes from the Greek *tithenai*, "to place, put, set": a *thesis* is a setting down of yourself, a placing of yourself, a positioning of yourself on an important question or issue. Thus, the Greeks used the word *thesis* to refer to a proposition.

As a proposition, a *thesis* is either true or false, and it should be demonstrable as one or the other based on the evidence you have available to you.

A *thesis* should be interpretive, meaning that it requires interpretation to get there.

A *thesis* needs to be consequential, concise, and clear. Being all three is not easy.

It must be consequential, meaning that it makes a powerful and potentially transformative claim about the *text* at hand. But it must also be concise because detailing your *argument* in full in your introduction would confuse and alienate your reader. Being consequential (big and powerful) and concise

(short and punchy) at once is no easy task; the way to do so is to be clear. Clarity involves the use of key *terms* to synthesize and organize your major claims into logical systems of contrast and continuity.

There are two important logical paradigms to keep in mind when thinking about *theses*: contrast and continuity. The logic of contrast is that *this is true; that is not*. The logic of continuity is that *this leads to that*. Most *thesis* statements can be boiled down a version of one or both of these logical paradigms.

Your *thesis* statement is not a roadmap to your paper. Sometimes it can be helpful, especially in longer papers, to provide a roadmap to the *structure* of your paper—that is, to summarize your organization—somewhere near (before or after) your *thesis*, but your *thesis* statement should be detachable from your paper.

In other words, make your *thesis* statement quotable. Try to boil your argument down to a simple, clean proposition that uses big concepts to make a big claim.

Pretty much any issue that is difficult enough to need an academic paper to be written about it is going to require an *argument* that is complex and nuanced, but you can't allow all that complexity and nuance into your *thesis*. You can't argue your case in full in your *thesis*, but you should report a simple version of the position at which you'll arrive by the end of the paper.

It is perfectly fine to have a multi-sentence *thesis* statement. In fact, a good *thesis* statement can rarely be written in one simple sentence. When articulating your *thesis*, exploit the organizational tools of complex and compound sentences, semicolons, and multiple sentences.

State what is not true, not just what is.

A good *thesis* statement usually has two components: a truth-claim and an explanation. The truth-claim is an argument that *X is the case*; the explanation states that *X is the case because of Y and Z*.

The truth-claim of your *thesis* is demonstrated through inductive reasoning, the marshaling of *evidence* (facts, data, statistics, examples, cases, summaries, quotations, paraphrases, etc.) that, when taken together, allows a reasonable person to conclude that X is the case.

The explanation part of your *thesis* is demonstrated through deductive reasoning: the use of inference to suggest that A leads to B, B to C and D, C to E, F, and G and D to H, I, J, and K, etc.

Sometimes, when writing a *thesis*, we build up to our central claim because we want to have the logic in place that shows how we go there. Flip that around. In terms of how readers process information, it's much better to have the truth claim first, and the follow-up explanation second.

When writing your *theses*, try to answer the questions *what*, *how*, and *why*. A social science paper might have a *thesis* that articulates what is the case (a truth-claim) as well as how and why it came to be the case (the explanation). A literary studies paper might have a thesis that articulates what an author did in a text (a truth-claim), how the author did it (another truth-claim), and why the author did it that way (an explanation).

Consider answering how and why questions in your theses by using certain key prepositions: use the word "by" to articulate *how*, and the word "because" to articulate *why*. Using the word "by" requires you to establish procedural connections: "The author did A; the author did A by doing B, C, and D." Using the word "because" requires you to establish causal connections: "Z is the case; X led to Y, which led to Z."

When drafting a paper, write your *thesis* statement first and last. That is, write a *thesis* statement to guide the *analyses* you write in the body of your paper. Write those body paragraphs. And then write an *argument* statement that provides an overview of your ideas. But then, after you have written your *argument* statement, return to your *thesis* statement, revising it to reflect exactly what you argue in your paper (often you will discover your *argument* in the course of articulating its parts—you will better understand the point you're making—and you need to make sure your *thesis* reflects your best understanding of the topic under consideration).

Avoid multi-factorial *thesis* statements. Consider this example of a multi-factoral *thesis*: "Shakespeare and ballet work so well together because of their shared base in aristocracy and Shakespeare's unique and poignant use of imagery." Either write the aristocracy paper or write the imagery paper. It may be true that many different elements factor into an *argument*, but it's better to pick one line of thought and pursue it fully. Multi-factorial *thesis* statements result in a soft argument for a number of causes as opposed to a strong argument for a single, most-important cause.

What to Do and What Not to Do in a Thesis

A good thesis statement should be:

- True
- Clear
- Consequential
- Not obvious

- Quotable / Detachable
- Big and bold: pushed as far as possible while maintaining, *I believe this to be true*.
- Direct: no fluff.
- Strategic with key terms.
- Not too short, not too long.
- Analytical, not ethical or political.
- One (and only one) central claim, though it may have several parts.
- An answer the driving *question/problem* of the essay.
- An explanation of how and why something came into existence.

What Not to Do in a Thesis:

- Write something that's not true.
- Write a multi-factorial thesis.
- Write a moralistic thesis.
- Use thought-terminating clichés ("truth," "reality," "human nature")
- Be suggestive, coy, or vague.
- Be cute or clever.
- Be too short.
- Be too long.
- Ask a question instead of giving an answer.
- Rely on the surrounding writing for the thesis to make sense.
- Quote in the thesis.

Key Strategies

Some top strategies for thesis statements are:

1. Truth Claim / Explanation
2. Surface Reading / Closer Reading
3. Not X but Y
4. Use Key Terms
5. Less is More

Toward the Paper

Put your *thesis* early in your paper, and state it clearly. Don't save it until the end of the paper. You're not writing the great American novel: don't try to keep your reader in suspense.

That is, don't fall victim to "rabbit in the hat" argumentation. A magician, because he or she is trying to create suspense, shows you an empty hat, and then, after much trickery and sleight of hand—*voila!*—pulls out a rabbit at the end of the trick. When you're writing an academic paper, you're not a

magician. Don't try to create suspense; don't save your rabbit until the end of the trick. Just show us your rabbit at the start of the paper.

The most popular place to put a *thesis* statement is at the end of an introduction, though it is important to remember that the end of your introduction may not necessarily be the end of your first paragraph. Putting a *thesis* statement at the end of an introduction allows you to frame a *question/problem* in that introduction, to offer an answer or response in your *thesis* statement, and then to support that *thesis* with *evidence* and *analysis* in the body of your paper.

But you need not save your *thesis* statement until the end of your introduction. It could appear earlier in your introduction. It could even be the first sentence of your paper.

Keep in mind the difference between a *thesis* statement and an *argument* statement. Almost always, our *thesis* statements are too long—too much like *argument* statements. Revise them to tighten them up.

— Practicum —

Key-Terming a Thesis

Sometimes, a thesis is too long and unclear because the writer hasn't yet figured out the key terms of the argument. Consider these four versions of a thesis statement, in which the key terms for the topics, concepts, relationships, and claims become progressively clearer.

> *Draft Thesis*: As Shakespeare draws parallels between Hamlet and Ophelia in terms of their falls into madness and struggles with suicide, Ophelia's suicide and Hamlet's decision not to reflects the question Hamlet posed in his "To be, or not to be" speech. Her choice of suicide is not a demonstration of morality, but rather one of truth, revealing the sort of impact that grief and misery can have on certain people and their psyche.
>
> *Version 2*: In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as one's freedom increases, one's likelihood of committing suicide decreases.
>
> *Version 3:* In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare created an inverse relationship between freedom and suicide.
>
> *Final Thesis:* In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare created an inverse relationship between freedom and suicide. Where the male Hamlet has a great deal of freedom and successfully resists suicide, the female Ophelia feels severely constrained and does commit suicide.

Key-term your own thesis by asking:

1. *What terms accurately capture the things I'm making claims about?*
2. *What terms accurately capture the claims I'm making?*
3. *What's the shortest way to articulate the central point I'm making?*

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Thesis Statements

Not X but Y: Polonius is not a bumbling old fool but a single father struggling with work-life balance.

Truth Claim-Explanation: In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Polonius is a single father struggling with work-life balance. This quality not only distances him from the cliched image of a bumbling old fool that audiences love to hate but also makes Polonius surprisingly relatable and sympathetic to twenty-first century audiences.

Less is More: Polonius is a single father struggling with work-life balance.

Authorial Intent: In Hamlet, Shakespeare hid the tragedy of Polonius—a single father struggling with work-life balance—behind the more in-your-face suffering of Prince Hamlet.

Into the Essay

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

King Hamlet is a tyrant and King Claudius a traitor but, because Shakespeare asked us to experience the events in Hamlet from the perspective of the young Prince Hamlet, we are much more inclined to detect and detest King Claudius's political failings than King Hamlet's.

Thesis statement using key terms and contrasts for clarity.

From **Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy in *Hamlet***

Instead of the passionate Hamlet who repeatedly interrupts 'The Mousetrap,' the stoic Horatio is the best authorial avatar for a Shakespeare who strategically wrote himself and his own voice out of his works. By rationalizing pain and suffering as tragedy, both Horatio and Shakespeare were able to avoid the self-destruction entailed in Hamlet's emotional response to life's hardships and injustices.

Thesis statement using contrasts for clarity and a truth-claim/explanation model.

From **What Shakespeare Says about Sending Our Children Off to College**

If we understand meaning as intent, then "To thine own self be true" means, paradoxically, that "the self" does not exist. Or, more accurately, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* implies that "the self" exists only as a rhetorical, philosophical, and psychological construct that we use to make sense of our experiences and actions in the world, not as anything real.

Thesis statement using key terms and a truth-claim / explanation approach.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Denmark is a culture of drunkenness.

Thesis statement using a less-is-more approach.

From **Shakespeare on the Classics, Shakespeare as a Classic: A Reading of Aeneas's Tale to Dido**

Aeneas's tale to Dido supplied Shakespeare with all of the connections he sought to make at this crucial point in his play and his career—connections between himself and Marlowe, between the start of *Hamlet* and the end, between Prince Hamlet and King Claudius, between epic poetry and tragic drama, and between the classical literature Shakespeare was still reading hundreds of years later and his own potential as a classic who might (and would) be read hundreds of years into the future.

Thesis statement using a truth-claim / explanation approach.

From **"'To be, or not to be': Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

I want to suggest that Shakespeare did not care about the questions of metaphysical philosophy, and that he satirized metaphysics in Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" speech because he thought acting was more important than being. That is, Shakespeare valued human action and interaction, including the social roles we perform like actors playing characters on a stage, over abstract knowledge about existence generated through theoretical reasoning.

Thesis statement using key terms, not X but Y, and a truth-claim / explanation approach.

From ***Hamlet* is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

As in society today, suicide is contagious in *Hamlet*, at least in the example of Ophelia, the only death by suicide in the play, because she only becomes suicidal after hearing Hamlet talk about his own suicidal thoughts in "To be, or not to be."

Thesis statement using a truth-claim / explanation approach.

From **The Tragedy of Love in *Hamlet***

Love is tragic in *Hamlet*. The bloody catastrophe at the end of that play is principally driven not by hatred or a longing for revenge, but by love.

Thesis statement using less-is-more, truth-claim / explanation, and not X but Y approaches.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

As illustrated in this essay, *Hamlet* is not misogynistic in the sense that it promotes the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In fact, *Hamlet* critiques misogyny and patriarchy by configuring them with tragedy, yet the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* still held an unconscious bias against women. In other words, *Hamlet* exhibits a structural sexism that is different from and more difficult to discern than the overt sexism of misogyny and patriarchy.

Thesis statement using key terms, not X but Y, and a truth-claim / explanation approach.

From **Ophelia's Songs: Moral Agency, Manipulation, and the Metaphor of Music in *Hamlet***

Shakespeare answered the question of Ophelia's moral agency in an unexpected way: through the imagery of music in *Hamlet*, including the songs she sings just before her death.

Thesis statement using a less-is-more approach.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

The world of Hamlet is governed by neither fate nor fortune, nor even the Christianized version of fate called "providence." Yet there is a modern, secular, disenchanted form of fate at work in Hamlet—what is sometimes called "social determinism"—which calls into question the freedom of the individual will.

Thesis statement using key terms plus not X but Y and a truth-claim / explanation approaches.

From **The Working Class in *Hamlet***

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare juxtaposed the nobles' denigrations of the working class as readily available metaphors for all-things-awful with the rather valuable behavior of working-class characters themselves.

Thesis statement using a surface reading / closer reading approach.

From **The Honor Code at Harvard and in Hamlet**

Instead of “the foundation of our community” that it is at Harvard, honor is tragic in *Hamlet.* For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation.

Thesis statement using not X but Y and truth-claim / explanation approaches.

From **The Meaning of Death in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet***

By connecting the ways characters live their lives in *Hamlet* to the ways they die—on-stage or off, poisoned or stabbed, etc.—Shakespeare symbolized *hamartia* in catastrophe.

Thesis statement using key terms and a less-is-more approach.

From **Tragic Excess in *Hamlet***

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare paralleled the situations of Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras (the father of each is killed, and each then seeks revenge) to promote the virtue of moderation: Hamlet moves too slowly, Laertes too swiftly—and they both die at the end of the play—but Fortinbras represents a golden mean which marries the slowness of Hamlet with the swiftness of Laertes. Shakespeare endorsed the virtue of balance by allowing Fortinbras to be one of the very few survivors of the play.

Thesis statement using a truth-claim / explanation approach.

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Stakes

In addition to identifying a *question/problem* with respect to your *text(s)*, the introduction of an essay should establish why an argument matters, how it will be helpful. This is what we call setting the *stakes*.

Your statement of *what's at stake* essentially identifies the topic of your conclusion. That conclusion, when you get there, will fully discuss the *implications* of your *argument*. In your introduction, when setting the *stakes*, your reader doesn't need a full statement of the *implications* of your argument. Your reader simply needs to know that there will be *implications* and to know where your paper is going.

Your *stakes* are different than your *question/problem*. Your *question/problem* states why your *text* needs interpretation, while your *stakes* explain how your *argument* will contribute to an area of academic inquiry that is bigger than just your *text*.

Your *argument* should be transformative. It should reveal something new about your *text*, and that revelation will, in turn, reveal something new about some larger field of academic inquiry to which your text bears some relevance.

What's at stake is not the "life lesson" that you can take away from your argument. It is, instead, the "academic lesson."

Don't try to be all things to all people. Write to a specific academic audience.

Your statement of *what's at stake* should indicate the academic field to which your *argument* is making a contribution.

Don't overdo it with the *stakes* in the introduction: less is more. Prior to reading the body of your essay, your reader simply isn't ready to deal with your *implications* in depth yet, but he or she does need to know where your *argument* is going to end up (i.e., the topic of the conclusion). You can usually set up *what's at stake* in one sentence, a few, or a short paragraph.

Structuring What's at Stake

The below models for setting the *stakes* in the introduction are for single- and multi-source papers that don't have a research component to them. Structures including those research components are included in the section on Structure.

The two most common places to set the *stakes* of an *argument* are at the beginning and the end of the introduction.

Stakes-Last Introduction: One way to structure an introduction is to start with your text. Establish a driving *question/problem* related to that text, deliver your *thesis* statement, and then identify *what's at stake* in that argument at the end of the intro. So that introduction might look like this:

Paragraph 1: *Question/Problem Statement*

- *Orientation*
- *Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*[1]

Paragraph 2: *Thesis Statement*

- *Text*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Stakes-First Introduction: Another way to structure an introduction is to start with what's at stake in your argument. Establish a question/problem related to your stakes, propose to answer it by turning to your text, and then deliver your thesis statement at the end of the intro. So that introduction might look like this:

Paragraph 1: *What's at Stake*

- *Orientation to Stakes*
- *Evidence for Stakes*
- *Analysis for Stakes*
- *Stakes*

Paragraph 2: *Thesis Statement*

- *Method/Text*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*

— Practicum —

Brainstorming What's at Stake

Some questions to help develop *what's at stake* include:

- What are the policy implications that follow—i.e., how some institution should enact rules?
- Are there common misconceptions that your argument challenges?
- What are the lingering questions that need further thought or research?
- Are you able to theorize outward? To create a model for evidence you haven't analyzed in depth?
- Can you offer a concluding example that "brings it home" in a concrete way?
- Is there another turn of the screw in your argument that might surprise readers?
- Does your argument allow you to predict the future?

To brainstorm what's at stake in your argument, answer each of these questions. In the essay itself, however, don't try to do all or even more than one of these moves. Pick a single approach and develop it in depth.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Brainstorming Stakes

What are the policy implications that follow—i.e., how some institution should enact rules?

> I don't think there are policy implications, since the ethical "takeaway" is that a person should put their family before their job. I guess there could be a message in there that companies should ensure that workers have enough time to spend with family, but that's pretty boring and I'm not interested in taking the conclusion in that direction.

Are there common misconceptions that your argument challenges?

> My argument about Polonius challenges the surface reading of the character as simply a bumbling old fool.

What are the lingering questions that need further thought or research?

> (1) There's still some uncertainty about Polonius's name. (2) Did Shakespeare provide any models of good parenting in Hamlet? (3) How could Polonius be performed to capture the qualities I've described?

Are you able to theorize outward? To create a model for evidence you haven't analyzed in depth?

> Polonius provides an exemplar of bad parenting that puts a person's career before his family, resulting in the deterioration of the family. You could apply this logic to other parents in Hamlet: King Hamlet, Queen Gertrude, King Claudius.

Can you offer a concluding example that "brings it home" in a concrete way?

> It's probably that Polonius literally dies for doing his job. But I think I want this to be in the body of the essay, not the conclusion.

Is there another turn of the screw in your argument that might surprise readers?

> The idea that the "defense" of Polonius is not that he's a good father but that he's a good (i.e., interesting, complex) character. Maybe I could flip the critical reading of King Hamlet, Queen Gertrude, and King Claudius by pointing out that they too are relatable to modern audiences with stepfamilies.

Does your argument allow you to predict the future?

> It's not really that kind of argument.

Into the Essay

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

King Hamlet is a tyrant and King Claudius a traitor but, because Shakespeare asked us to experience the events in Hamlet from the perspective of the young Prince Hamlet, we are much more inclined to detect and detest King Claudius's political failings than King Hamlet's. If so, then Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, so often seen as the birth of modern psychology, might also tell us a little bit about the beginnings of modern politics as well.

Thesis statement leading into stakes.

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

"To be, or not to be" is not what it seems to be. It seems to be a representation of tragic angst, yet a consideration of the context of the speech reveals that "To be, or not to be" is actually a satire of philosophy and Shakespeare's representation of the theatricality of everyday life. In this essay, a close reading of the context and meaning of this passage leads into an attempt to formulate a Shakespearean image of philosophy.

Thesis statement leading into stakes.

From **Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy in *Hamlet***

By rationalizing pain and suffering as tragedy, both Horatio and Shakespeare were able to avoid the self-destruction entailed in Hamlet's emotional response to life's hardships and injustices. Thus, the stoic Horatio, rather than the passionate Hamlet who repeatedly interrupts 'The Mousetrap', is the best authorial avatar for a Shakespeare who strategically wrote himself and his own voice out of his works. This argument then expands into a theory of 'authorial catharsis' and the suggestion that we can conceive of Shakespeare as a 'poet of reason' in contrast to a 'poet of emotion'.

Thesis statement leading into stakes.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

The Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* exhibited an unconscious bias against women, I argue, even as he sought to critique the mistreatment of women in a patriarchal society. The evidence for this unconscious bias is not to be found in the misogynistic statements made by the characters in the play. It exists, instead, in the demonstrable preference Shakespeare showed for men over women when deciding where to deploy his literary talents. Thus, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a powerful literary example—one which speaks to, say, the modern corporation—showing that deliberate efforts for egalitarianism do not insulate one from the effects of structural inequalities that both stem from and create unconscious bias.

Thesis statement leading into stakes.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

The world of *Hamlet* is governed by neither fate nor fortune, nor even the Christianized version of fate called "providence." Yet there is a modern, secular, disenchanted form of fate at work in *Hamlet*—what is sometimes called "social determinism"—which calls into question the freedom of the individual will. As such, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* both commented on the transformation of pagan fate into Christian providence that happened in the centuries leading up to the play, and anticipated the further transformation of fate from a theological to a sociological idea, which occurred in the centuries following *Hamlet*.

Thesis statement leading into stakes.

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Implications

It is not enough to have an *argument*. A paper must state the *implications* of that argument. What's the pay-off? Who cares? So what? Why does it matter? What does this change?

The best way to think about *stakes* and *implications* is to ask: *What can we do with the knowledge generated in my argument?*

Thesis : Argument :: Stakes : Implications. Just as your introduction has a short *thesis* statement that serves as a snapshot of your *argument* (which is fully delivered in the conclusion), your introduction should have a short statement of *what's at stake* that serves as a snapshot of your *implications* (which are fully delivered in the conclusion).

Academic Implications

When articulating your *implications*, be aware of certain traps that are off-putting to most readers. Don't claim to have made the world a better place or to have made your reader a better person. Don't try to save the world.

Instead, explain how your ideas are useful to a specific audience whose professional goals are to understand fully and completely a certain field, issue, and/or text.

The most common error student writers make in their conclusions is to over-exaggerate the importance of their arguments. They do so by feeling as though their ideas must have "real world consequences" or "major policy implications."

Your conclusion should be addressed not too human beings but to academics who are working in a distinct scholarly field. Your conclusion should address what your argument changes, not for the entire world, but for the relatively small number of people who have devoted their professional lives to understanding and explaining a narrowly defined set of phenomena.

Argument-as-Lens

You can think of your conclusion as a mini-essay, specifically a "lens essay" that uses your *argument* as a lens for looking at material that, strictly speaking, falls outside your narrowly defined *text*.

This mini-essay includes its own Elements of Academic Writing (its own *text*, its own *question/problem*, its own *argument*, its own *evidence* and *analysis*). The elements in this new mini-essay are different than those in your whole essay.

Remember, this *argument for the implications* is different from the *argument* for the whole paper. The *argument for the implications* is the idea you come up with when you use the *argument* for the whole paper as a lens for looking at some other topic (that other topic is the *text for your implications*).

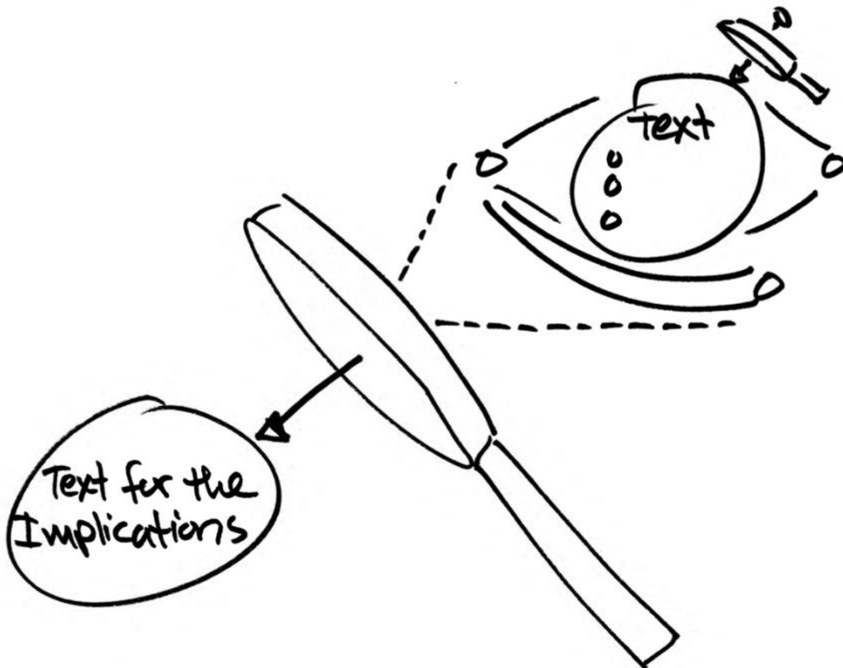

Figure 5: Argument as Lens for Implications

Close Reading and Theorization

Your *implications* are likely to take one of two forms—a *close reading* or a *theorization*.

> *A Close Reading*: A close reading unpacks some small aspect of your text in an effort to enhance our understanding of the totality of the document or phenomenon to which it belongs.
>
> *A Theorization*: A Theorization unpacks something about your text in an effort to comment on some idea or issue outside of the document or phenomenon to which it belongs.

Let's imagine you're arguing this thesis: "Honor is tragic in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation." A close reading could conclude: "The catastrophe in Hamlet does not come about due to some individual flaw or mistake, as happens in most classical tragedy. By making the culture of honor the cause of catastrophe in Hamlet, Shakespeare shifted the site of the tragic flaw from the individual to the culture." In contrast, a theorization could conclude: "Taken in the context of the Honor Code at Harvard, Shakespeare's treatment of honor as tragic in Hamlet allows us to theorize the difference between two different kinds of honor: heroic honor and tragic honor."

Structuring Implications

What follows is a model for a four-paragraph conclusion that develops substantive implications without bringing in additional research. A structure including that research component is included in the section on Structure.

Paragraph 1: *Argument Statement*

- *Counter-Argument*
- *Response*
- *Argument*

Paragraph 2: *What's at Stake*

- *Method / Text for the Stakes*
- *Orientation to Stakes*
- *Evidence for Stakes*
- *Analysis for Stakes*
- *Question/Problem1 for the Stakes*

Paragraph 3: *Implications, Part 1—The Idea*

- *Argument for the Implications*
- *Evidence for the Implications*

Paragraph 4: *Implications, Part 2—The Examples*

- *Analysis for the Implications*

— Practicum —

Developing Implications

The questions below are designed to help you develop a strong and substantive conclusion.

1. In just a few words, state your *text* (the thing you're interpreting) for your essay.

2. Write a short version of your *thesis*.

3. The goal for your conclusion is to use your *thesis* to interpret something else. What is that "something else"? Identify the *text for your implications* (the thing your conclusion is interpreting).

4. Articulate the *method for your implications* (how you're going to use your argument to interpret the text for your implications).

5. Write an *argument for the implications*, which is different from the argument for the whole paper. The *argument for the implications* is the idea you come up with when you use the *argument* for the whole paper as a lens for looking at some other topic (that other topic is the *text for your implications*).

6. Identify some key *evidence for the implications*—the information, facts, quotes, events, data, etc. that become clear when seen from the vantage of your argument for the implications.

7. Now that you know where you want to end up with your *implications*, write a *question / problem statement for your implications* laying out why that *text for your implications* needs interpretation.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Implications

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Polonius is a single father struggling with work-life balance who sadly choses his career over his daughter's well-being. Shakespeare's play includes traces—only the slightest of hints that must be imaginatively flushed out—of a more complex life for Polonius. The very name "Polonius" suggests two possible backstories—one as an a Polish immigrant whose assimilation into Danish society surely came with many complexities, the other as a military man involved with Denmark's conquest of Poland. Polonius was an actor who played the part of Julius Caesar at university. When and how he met his wife, Ophelia and Laertes's mother, is unclear but it seems likely that she is dead (otherwise, she's shockingly absent from her children's lives). Did she die giving birth to Ophelia? Or were her children older? Do they remember her? How has her death—surely traumatic for all involved—affected her family? Perhaps a grieving Polonius threw himself into his job, and that's how he climbed the ranks of King Hamlet's council to become a leading advisor to Denmark's royal family. Or maybe Polonius had a hand in Claudius's assassination of the king, and that's why Claudius praises Polonius so effusively in public. These hidden hypotheticals are only possibilities, but they humanize Polonius enough to complicate the common antipathy to the character, which stems in part from the fact that audiences experience the play from the point of view of Prince Hamlet, who wants to marry Polonius's daughter and murder Polonius's boss. Audiences sympathetic to Hamlet inevitably accept his characterization of Polonius as a fool, a nuisance, and an enemy. What happens if we change our point-of-view to look at Polonius from the perspective of modern single parents struggling to balance work and life?

Any father would struggle sending a son with a penchant for youthful rebellion off to college in another country. Any father would be thrown off if the heir to the crown in his country started saying he was deeply in love with his daughter. Let's hope most fathers wouldn't, like Polonius, put their job ahead of the well-being of their daughter, though we still see that situation all the time. Ultimately, Polonius literally gives his life for his job. He comes out of hiding to protect the queen and becomes a victim of murder by an unhinged aristocrat who then callously plays games with the dead body. Polonius's death utterly breaks his children. Ophelia deteriorates into a mental health crisis and eventually suicide. Anger drives Laertes to violence that completely backfires, resulting in his death. Where do our sympathies lie now?

Polonius's tragic mistake—putting his job before his family—brings clarity to Shakespeare's portrayal of other parents in *Hamlet*. King Hamlet is a father who asks his son to murder someone, which ends up destroying the child's life. Queen Gertrude is a mother who marries her dead husband's brother, then is baffled that her son is struggling. King Claudius is a stepfather only because he killed his stepson's actual father. Shakespeare filled the play with bad parents.

On the one hand, each parent, like Polonius, put their career before their kid, resulting in the deterioration of the family. On the other, the Hamlet family is, like the Poloniuses, weirdly relatable in modernity, where stepfamilies are common. If Polonius shows what can happen when a family loses a parent, the Hamlets are an example of separation, remarriage, and efforts to negotiate a new family dynamic—that's all there before the murder of King Hamlet comes to light. And each parent has enough traces in

The Writing Process

the text to suggest a backstory that contextualizes any easy judgment of their parenting.

King Hamlet is the divorced father who both hates seeing his ex-wife with a new man and uses his child as leverage in a power play against her. Queen Gertrude is the single mother who wants to feel romantic love for the first time in a while but fails to appreciate how her new romantic life affects her child's emotions. And King Claudius is the new step-father who just wants everyone to be happy and tries to relate to his step-son but finds himself in an emotionally combustable situation.

The impulse is to say, *Oh, Shakespeare's families are so modern*. It may be better to note that the term "non-traditional family" is absurd because history is filled with single parents and stepfamilies in which the challenges of work-life balance are heightened—and everyone's a critic.

Into the Essay

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ultimately reveals that political judgments and affinities are often developed for reasons that have nothing to do with politics. How political information comes to us may determine our political judgments more than the actual information at hand. And this is where modern politics begins.

I am not saying that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the first document of modern politics. That honor probably belongs to Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*, which pre-dated Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by some 20 years and quite possibly could have influenced Shakespeare's composition of this play. What I am suggesting is that modern political theory begins with the recognition that our commitments, affinities, and ideologies are bound up with mediated representations of our political options. From his very first soliloquy, Prince Hamlet is a political pundit who provides not facts but interpretations that are perspectival, simplified, and exaggerated, and he presents those ideas as if they were incontrovertible truths about the world. Modern political theory begins with the recognition that we apprehend the world perspectivally, and so the politician's goal is not only to promote and implement policies for the good of the people, but also to exploit and manipulate the media which control the flow of information from the governing class to the public. The politician's goal is to have media report positive interpretations of his or her policies as if those interpretations were facts, which is precisely what Prince Hamlet does when he speaks directly to us and tells us that his father and uncle couldn't be more different, and that his father is a hero and his uncle a villain.

In treating Prince Hamlet as a partisan politician, I am not merely analogizing him to the cable news pundits who look directly into a camera and offer shockingly simplistic moral outrage as the news of the day. I am also referring to the politicians themselves who (1) cannot help but develop policies from situated positions conditioned by personal fears and desires, and (2) understand that a vote can be won by having breakfast with someone – giving that person a story to tell, making him or her feel important – as often as by presenting good policies. Hamlet invented the diner campaign stop that wins over an audience through the simple mechanism of face-to-face contact. Having worked with the English chronicles and other sources that made no attempt to separate judgment from fact, and working in the age that invented culture-war polemics to dispute the questions of the Protestant Reformation, the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* exploited the resources of dramatic expression – namely the *soliloquy* – to represent a vision of politics ruled by perspectival polemic, not demonstrated truth. That is the world in which we still live.

Implications theorizing outward from the argument.

From **The Meaning of Death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet***

While this phenomenon has been shown to govern *Hamlet*, it would require further examination to see if the dissemination of tragic necessity and the spectacularity of death hold in other Shakespearean tragedies. Does it explain Romeo poisoning himself and Juliet stabbing herself? Julius Caesar stabbed 23 times? Cinna the Poet torn apart by a mob? The murder of the Macduffs? Cordelia hanged off-stage? Antigonus exiting pursued by a bear? What is the spectrality of Chiron and Demetrius baked into a pie, Othello smothering Desdemona with a pillow, or Cleopatra bitten by a snake?

Implications identifying directions for further research.

From **Hamlet is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

The National Institute of Mental Health's five steps for suicide prevention can be adapted for teaching suicide texts like *Hamlet*:

1. *Ask*: It's a difficult question, especially in a classroom, but when teaching Hamlet, ask students to come speak with you, and to speak with others, if they are having suicidal thoughts. Research suggests that asking about suicide does not increase suicidal thoughts. Ophelia didn't really have anyone to talk to.
2. *Keep Them Safe*: When teaching Hamlet, send a note home to parents, and ask any students who may be vulnerable to reduce access to lethal items or places. Ophelia shouldn't be climbing trees over the brook. Don't let Horatio have the cup.
3. *Be There*: When discussing Hamlet, listen to what students say about suicide, and acknowledge their feelings. Research suggests acknowledgement reduces rather than increases suicidal thoughts. Consider Hamlet acknowledging Horatio's suicidal thoughts, then keeping him safe.
4. *Help Them Connect*: Give students of Hamlet the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800- 273-TALK (8255), and the Crisis Text Line: 741-741. Have them save these numbers in their phones. Help any vulnerable students connect with a trusted individual like a family member, friend, or mental health professional. Train them to help others who are vulnerable connect to suicide prevention resources.
5. *Stay Connected*: Stay in touch after a crisis. Research shows a follow-up from a trusted individual reduces the chance of suicide. Horatio was assigned to keep Ophelia safe, but didn't stay connected. Take a moment to check in with students a few weeks after you've finished *Hamlet*.

Implications proposing policy.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

Two moments punctuate the tragedy of alcohol in the play. First, an overwhelmed Horatio reaches for the poisoned cup: "Here's yet some liquor left" (5.2.319). Symbolically, Horatio is poised to become the next victim of Denmark's culture of drunkenness—the alcoholic drinking to cope with loss and depression. As ever, Hamlet stands against alcohol: "Give me the cup" (5.2.321). With any alcoholic, there will be Horatios who survive the path of destruction and Hamlets, Ophelias, and Gertrudes taken down by it.

Second, the folio concludes with uncharacteristically precise stage directions, indicating the play's end on the early-modern stage. Just before Hamlet dies, the folio reads, "*March afar off, and shout within*" (5.2.294sd). Perhaps Shakespeare demanded these sound effects because he had woven together a thread of concepts throughout the play—alcohol, drums, cannons, and tragedy. "Go, bid the soldiers shoot," Fortinbras declares (5.2.381), entering the cluster of symbols surrounding binge drinking in *Hamlet*. The folio stage direction reads, "*Exeunt marching, after the which a peal of ordnance are shot off*" (5.2.350sd). Those cannon shots ringing out through the cold night air of the Elizabethan playhouse could only recall, for an early-modern audience, the cannons repeatedly shot as Claudius downed his drinks earlier in the play. Those cannons closing the play convey how much of this tragedy can be traced back to Claudius's alcoholism and the culture of drunkenness in Denmark.

Implications offering a final example that "brings it home."

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Mobile Composing

At the end of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, his epic account of Western literature, he says that his book was only possible because he, a German Jew, was exiled in Istanbol and away from his books. He still had access to his primary texts, the great works of Western literature—Homer, Dante, Virginia Woolfe—but he was separated from the academic libraries of Europe, and thus liberated from the influence and obligations of scholarship. He had nothing but himself and his texts.

One of the challenges of our digital age is that we are rarely "away from our books," not only our *Google Books*, but also the ideas of others that flood the internet and our research notes. This challenge is especially pointed given the purpose of academic writing: to make an original contribution to a scholarly conversation. Academic writing requires originality, but it can be elusive, especially in fields such as history, philosophy, and literary studies that interpret and reinterpret past ideas and scholarship. We necessarily read other academics, but there is a fine line between *responsive* and *derivative*. Articles and books are often rejected by publishers or reviewed negatively by readers because they are not sufficiently original. Sometimes, as in the case of Auerbach, the greatest contributions to an academic field come from those who are least enmeshed in it.

"Me thinks that the moment my legs begin to move," wrote Henry David Thoreau, "My thoughts begin to flow." Stand up, step away from your books, walk around, and write—that has become my answer to the problem of scholarly overexposure.

My path to this position was unconventional. When I was in graduate school, the plan was for me to finish my dissertation before my wife and I had children. We missed that mark by about six months, which meant I had to write the last 30 pages of my dissertation on my mobile phone, with a child, sometimes wailing, in my other hand. This "mobile composing" evolved as I began going for long walks with my son in his stroller (we lived in Southern California at the time, so the weather was accommodating, and there were miles and miles of paved walking trails). One of the virtues of this "mobile composing" was that it got me away from my books, made sure I was offering my own insights and original contributions to my research topic, as opposed to creating a pastiche of quotations and ideas from other critics, which is what much of my earlier writing had amounted to.

I'm an early riser, and I would wake up at around 4 AM—before the world, and my son, awoke, demanding my attention with emails and diapers (both usually filled with the same stuff: piss and shit). I would use this unfettered time to read over the literary works and passages I was writing about that day, as well as any relevant criticism I planned to consider. By 7 AM or so, my son would awake, and I would make him breakfast and send my wife off to work as the material I had read that morning rattled around in my mind, figuring itself out. At around 9 AM, I would head out for a long walk with my son. Inevitably, whatever was important from what I had read that morning would stick in my head, and I took the time on these long walks to organize my thoughts and plan a way to present them effectively. Then, when it came time to write my actual sentences, I would walk for four or five minutes, thinking about the sentence I was composing, and revising it several times in my head. Then I would dictate the sentence into my phone. The sentence might only be 10-15 words, but those words had behind them several minutes of thinking about how to sharpen both the quality of the idea and clarity of its expression. I usually wrote between two and four double-spaced pages per day.

I wouldn't always copy my mobile compositions over to a word processing program immediately. Often they sat on my phone and in my pocket for several days, which meant that they were available for revisions as I went about my life trying to be a teacher and a parent. Thus, any analytical residue that came to me in the course of a day, a week, or a month could easily be incorporated into the composition. Prior to mobile composing, that idea might have been victoriously nodded at and then forgotten about. Mobile composing allows one to live one's ideas, to develop them organically over time, not only when one has the luxury of sitting at one's desk.

When I was happy with my mobile composition, I wouldn't just email it to myself or copy-and-paste it into the paper I was working on. Instead, I would pull up my composition on my phone and manually retype it into my word processing program. Doing so meant that I was revising both my ideas and

my language as they cycled in through my eyes, back through my mind, and out through my fingers, revisions that probably wouldn't have occurred had I simply imported my mobile composition.

Mobile composing need not be done on an electronic device, of course. The core of the idea is walking and thinking that is periodically recorded in writing. But we now have the technology to write while we walk. Walking gets the mind warm, propels thought forward, encourages energy and movement in ideas through the same energy and movement in the body.

Thus, I think about "writing criticism" what the poet Edward Hirsh thinks about "writing poetry": "Writing poetry is such an intense experience that it helps to start the process in a casual or wayward frame of mind. Poetry is written from the body as well as the mind, and the rhythm and pace of a walk can get you going and keep you grounded. It's a kind of light meditation." Walking while composing allows for a free progression of thought, one that can be periodically stamped into one's mobile phone. Just as social media sites like Twitter and Instagram allow one to communicate thoughts and experiences with all the excitement that accompanies them "in the moment," mobile composing allows one to record, for example, the excitement of discovery in literary criticism. This process of discovery must, of course, be revised in due course, but mobile composing allows one to capture and replicate the process of the mind making sense of evidence, as one's reader will be doing when working through an academic essay. In general, I find myself revising my *arguments* and framing materials heavily, dozens of times, but I find that the first time I articulate my *analyses* of specific bits of information is usually my best articulation. There is an excitement and an attention to the detail and richness of that information that can be lost if I already know where I'm going. If I try to go back and re-create the specifics of that analysis, they never survive.

One virtue of using a mobile device is that walking and thinking and writing by speaking imitates the act of revising. Usually, we should write more like we talk. On the one hand, we should avoid inflated diction, which is why we often tell students to eschew jargon and write in plain language. On the other hand, we should try to imitate the rhythms of speech in our writing, which is why we tell students to read their prose aloud when they're editing. Mobile composing satisfies both demands, helping one write in plain yet elegant language.

As an aside, one fascinating thing that has occurred is that, when I go back and read a passage from the mobile composing period of my dissertation, I can remember exactly where I was on exactly which Southern California trail when I wrote it. (Living now in New England, this is often a warming memory in winter.) This is the mobile composing version of the "memory palace" in classical rhetoric. And because I would would write a paragraph

over the course of a two hour walk, reading that paragraph feels like a warp-speed journey over that trail.

I've also discovered that Siri, the "personal assistant" on iPhones, is narcissistic: she always hears "theory" as "Siri". She is also philosophically conservative: she hears "Nietzsche" as "shit."

Four

Research

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Academic Research

A research paper isn't a book report.

The goal is not to summarize what other people think. It's to advance the conversation. That's why originality in interpretation is so crucial.

Go to your texts, read them, interpret them, analyze them, build an argument about them, write the paper that presents and demonstrates that argument, and only then go the scholarship of others.

Your research into scholarship should be conducted relatively late in the writing process.

Researchers draw a distinction between *primary* and *secondary* sources. A primary source is an object, document, or piece of information that comes directly from the period or topic under consideration. Examples of primary sources would be ancient Aztec calendars, the Magna Carta (1215), William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599), the United States Constitution (1787), Anne Frank's diary (1947), the 2000 census for Saline County in Kansas, or Barack Obama's address to the Democratic National Convention (2004). A secondary source is a piece of scholarship, written by someone with some degree of authority on an issue, that offers an interpretation of the objects, documents, and pieces of information that we class as "primary sources." Examples of secondary sources would include an anthropologist's book about ancient Aztec astrology, a historian's article about the origins of modern civil rights in medieval England, a literary critic's reading of purgatory as a theme in *Hamlet*, a politician's claim that our second-amendment rights are in danger, a psychologist's speculations on the

adolescent mind under national socialism, a newspaper article in the *Salina Journal* lamenting the city's decreased population, or a public intellectual's interview on CNN about the rise of Obama's political star-power.

A primary source is something that needs to be interpreted; a secondary source is an interpretation. Or, in the terms of our Elements of Academic Writing, primary sources are *textual evidence* and *historical evidence*, and secondary sources are *scholarly evidence*.

Sometimes we take our *textual evidence* (statistics and examples) from scholarly books and articles—from secondary sources. Information from secondary sources comes prepackaged with interpretation. You as an analyst don't have the opportunity to examine the information in its pure form, from the ground up.

It is imperative to any research project that you address the published scholarship, but don't start with research. Start by generating some original insight, perspective, analysis, or argument that might add something to the conversation.

Thus, gather up your primary sources, analyze them, formulate your *argument*, even write an entire paper, and only then look into the scholarship that might help you develop your ideas and situate your interpretation among the ideas of others.

If, after doing all your research, you arrive at the opinion that a certain scholar is correct, then we don't need you to write a paper to tell us so. What we need you to do is to identify any gaps or misconceptions in a scholarly conversation, or to extend the scope and implications of the position that you're endorsing in some way.

— Practicum —

Conceptualizing Your Research

The below questions will help you identify the areas that you need to research and establish some keywords for conducting your research.

1. What is your research topic?
2. What are your main sources?
3. What are the names of the key people you're writing about?
4. What areas of historical context might you need to bring into your project (if any)?
5. What theory—terms, thinkers, or ideas—might you bring into your project (if any)?
6. What are some synonyms for each of your responses thus far?
7. Make a list of all of these research keywords. Enter each term on your list in each database you visit to ensure full coverage of the fields you need to research.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Research Plan

Research Topic: Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Synonyms:

Polonius: father, family, parent, parenting

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: Ophelia, Laertes, Hamlet

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Evaluating Scholarship

There are three categories of secondary sources: (1) low-quality public sources, (2) high-quality public sources, and (3) academic sources.

In academic writing, avoid low-quality public sources. These are the websites that might show up if you just do an internet search for your research topic. Often, these websites have no author listed, or the website looks amateurish. Who is responsible for this information? Who created it? How can we be sure the information is accurate? What are the mechanisms of quality control that have ensured accurate information? It could be some seventh-grader's class presentation, but that isn't a reliable source to rely upon for information. It could be a business or political organization that is misrepresenting things to serve an agenda. The information may be accurate, but you'd want to confirm it in a more reliable source. Don't put absolute faith in information taken from low-quality public sources. If you're writing an academic paper, you should cite more reliable sources.

Better information comes from high-quality public sources. These include newspapers, magazines, and media outlets that have mechanisms of quality control for their information. There's an author listed who is responsible for the information. The source comes from an established organization that has verifiable legitimacy. The organization includes an editorial team that is responsible for quality control.

The most reliable sources are academic sources. These include articles and books published by established presses (not self-published books). Academic sources are reliable because they go through a process known as "peer-review." If I want to write an article about *Hamlet*, I send my article into a

publication such as *Shakespeare Quarterly*. They send my *Hamlet* article off to three experts on *Hamlet*. Those three experts read my article and evaluate its quality. Has the writer considered the right evidence? Are their analyses convincing? Often, this process is done through what is called "double blind peer-review": they don't know whose article they're reading, and I don't know who's reading my article. That approach ensures that people are objectively evaluating the quality of information.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Evaluating Sources

Low-Quality Public Sources:

"Polonius." *Sparknotes*, https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/character/polonius/.

Rizza, Mary. "Parents And Children in Shakespeare — Polonius The Helicopter Parent." https://maryrizza.com/hats-off-to-shakespeares-parents-and-children-polonius-the-helicopter-parent/.

High-Quality Public Sources:

Butler, Catherine. "Hamlet is Shakespeare's Greatest Villain." *The Conversation*, 13 Oct. 2020, https://theconversation.com/hamlet-is-shakespeares-greatest-villain-147290.

Minton, Eric. "A Father's Love: Issues with Daddies in Shakespeare." *Shakespeareances*, 19 June 2015, http://www.shakespeareances.com/dialogues/commentary/Fathers-150615.html.

High-Quality Academic Sources:

Stimpson, Catharine R. "Polonius, Our Pundit." *The American Scholar*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2002, pp. 97-108.

Rosenberg, Marvin. "Polonius." The Masks of Hamlet. University of Delaware Press, 1992, pp. 257-64.

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Forms of Scholarship

There are many different forms of scholarship (and each one will be cited slightly differently in your paper), but these are the five most common:

> *Articles*: Peer-reviewed shorter works of scholarship (around 25 pages) that appear in periodicals addressed to general topics (e.g., *Shakespeare Quarterly*).
>
> *Chapters*: Peer-reviewed shorter works of scholarship (around 25 pages) that appear alongside other chapters in edited books addressed to specific topics (e.g., *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*, edited by Pascale Aebischer, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Laurie Osborne).
>
> *Books*: Peer-reviewed longer works of scholarship (usually 200-300 pages) with a single author (in contrast to edited books, where each chapter has a different author).
>
> *Essays*: Short public-facing (not peer-reviewed) works of scholarship written for general non-specialist audiences.
>
> *Reference Works*: Encyclopedias, handbooks, companions, and overviews that offer introductions, overviews, and key information (more fact-based introductions than interpretive arguments).

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Finding Scholarship

Before beginning your research, think carefully about how much criticism you want to bring into your paper: do you want to be the authoritative statement on this issue (which might mean 50-100 sources), or do you want to be one voice among many (maybe 5-10 sources)?

What follows is a sequence of actions for finding scholarship in any field or discipline. A big part of finding scholarship is knowing the discipline-specific academic resources available to you, but there are some things that can be generalized for research in all fields.

> *Identifying Keywords:* Before you do any searching, first identify some search keywords for your research project. The more specific you can be the better. Create a list of keywords and expand that list by adding synonyms for your keywords. For example, a research project on "Renaissance theology" could include synonyms for "Renaissance" such as "early-modern," "sixteenth century," and "Elizabethan" and for "theology" words like "religion" and "spirituality." As you perform your searches, you'll discover which keywords and synonyms work best together, and you'll probably discover new keywords that you didn't know applied.
>
> *Search Strategies:* After identifying your keywords for searching, familiarize yourself with advanced searching strategies such as Boolean connectors (AND, OR, and NOT), searching for phrases (e.g. "dumb cop stereotype"), truncated searches (e.g. psychopath* will return psychopath, psychopaths, psychopathy, psychopathic,

etc.), and wildcard searches (e.g. wom?n will return woman or women).

Mining References: Mine the references of the books and articles you read. When you find a work of scholarship that is closely related to the issue you're dealing with, look at the references and notes in that article closely because you'll be able to find other sources that are also very relevant.

Identifying Landmark Scholarship: Make note of the names and studies that continually arise as you search for your topic, since this constancy probably indicates a certain popularity and influence, which often (though not always) means it includes a quality argument to which you'll want to give special attention. What is the absolutely essential reading (1-3 sources) that everyone who writes on your topic needs to address? What names or works are repeatedly referenced in a wide number of studies?

Start a Working Bibliography: A bibliography is simply a list of sources. Once you've planned your research, start a working bibliography to fill with references that may be important for your research project (or you might use a research program such as Endnote). Exactly how many references to include in your bibliography will depend on the kind and length of the paper you're writing. Consult your assignment and your instructor, but usually one reference per assigned page is a good number to shoot for.

Public Resources

As in life, in academic research you get what you pay for. Ideas freely floating around the internet are free for a reason: they're usually low-quality. Don't Google your keywords and expect the first ten results to be the ten best sources for your research. The analyses found on a Wikipedia or a Sparknotes page are meant to be helpful to a vast number of people, but they're also surface level.

Public online databases like Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org/) are wonderful for the curious mind, but they aren't reliable enough to cite in an academic analysis. The same can likely be said of sites linked to from a Wikipedia page, which can be consulted to familiarize yourself with an issue, and possibly to help populate your working bibliography, but don't read or cite them as authoritative. It is not a crime to search around on the internet to familiarize yourself with a topic. All of us do it. This web-surfing should be thought of, however, as introductory research rather than advanced research, which is what you'll need to conduct in order to write a compelling academic paper.

Google News (https://news.google.com) can be helpful for recent and emerging topics. Keep in mind that the quality of articles will be mixed.

Google Books (https://www.books.google.com) is helpful because it allows you to search full texts in very specific terms, and it includes recent books that might not have made their way into databases, but it also offers only partial previews (20 pages or so), snippet views (3-5 lines), and no previews of many texts. If possible, search Google Books while physically at a library, where you can then seek out and access hard copies of any books needed for your research.

Google Scholar (https://www.scholar.google.com) is more academic and will provide higher-quality sources. Two features on Google Scholar are especially helpful.

> First, the "Cited By" feature will take you to more recent works that cite the older article you originally found. The "Cited By" system isn't perfect, but it often allows you to trace the descendants of important articles and to find (by intelligently repeating "Cited By" clicks) the most recent scholarship relevant to your research topic.
>
> Second, the "Related Articles" feature will take you to older articles that are cited by the original article you found. Clicking around with the "Cited By" and "Related Articles" features will help you build up your list of newer and older sources.

Academic Resources

After you've clicked around on the internet enough to familiarize yourself with a topic in general, begin your serious academic research by going to your academic library's homepage.

Textbooks, Encyclopedias, Handbooks: Start your academic research with some discipline-specific resources: textbooks, dictionaries, encyclopedias. These works are great for finding overviews of trends, topics, common ideas, and classic studies in a given field, and their references will provide a good place for you to begin or refine your working bibliography.

Bibliographies and Companions: Next, go to some slightly more involved discipline-specific resources: bibliographies and companions. These research aids are usually much more extensive than textbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias, which is good for finding sources that aren't widely known.

Discipline-Specific Resources: After you've reviewed these introductory and reference works, it's time to start searching for the scholarly articles and

books upon which those overviews are based. There are primarily four ways that you can discover and track down articles and books:

> *Discipline-Specific Research Directory:* Often, you can find (through the library or on the internet) a discipline-specific research directory that can point you to various resources.
>
> *Discipline-Specific Databases:* You'll want to make sure that you spend some serious time in some discipline-specific databases.
>
> *Discipline-Specific Journals:* You should also identify and explore some discipline-specific academic journals.
>
> *General Academic Databases:* Finally, look at some general academic databases such as Academic Search Complete and JSTOR.

At the Library: At the library, continue your research by looking for an annotated bibliography on your topic or text. Also search the library's catalog for any books that didn't appear in your other searches. Finally, go to the section of the library stacks devoted to your text or topic, and browse the shelves for any titles that might be relevant to your research.

Repetition and Confidence: If you search for your keywords in these resources, you're likely to get some duplicate results from your earlier database searches, but you may also get some important articles that may not have popped up in your earlier searches. Moreover, you'll start to gain a sense that you actually know what's out there. Sometimes it can be nerve-wracking to say, for example, that previous critics haven't addressed some issue that you want to address because you aren't entirely sure of everything that's out there. The more you search around, the more confident you will become that you've seen all that's out there.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Possible Sources

Baluk-Ulewiczowa, Teresa. "The Bad Quarto Hamlet and the Polish Connection." *Shakespeare in Europe: History and Memory*, edited by Marta Gibińska and Agnieszka Romanowska. Jagiellonian University-Jagiellonian University Press, 2008, pp. 35-43.

Bennett, Josephine Waters. "Characterization in Polonius' Advice to Laertes." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1953, pp. 3-9.

Broadus, E.K. "Polonius." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1935, pp. 337-355.

Budrewicz, Aleksandra. "The One Gentleman from Poland: Polonius and 19th Century Polish Translation." *Shakespeare: His Infinite Variety*, edited by Grzegorz Zinkiewicz and Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney. Jagiellonian University Press, 2019, pp. 87-100.

Eisendrath, Rachel. "Polonius as Anti-Close Reader: Toward a Poetics of the Putz." *The Work of Reading*, edited by Anirudh Sridhar, Derek Attridge, and Mir Ali Hosseini. Springer, 2021, pp 153–172.

Erlich, Avi. *Hamlet's Absent Father*. Princeton UP, 1977.

Falk, Doris V. "Proverbs and the Polonius Destiny." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1967, pp. 23-36.

Hartwig, Joan. "Parodic Polonius." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1971, pp. 215-225.

Paul, Joanne. "The Best Counsellors are the Dead: Counsel and Shakespeare's Hamlet." *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 30, no. 5, 2016, p. 646-665.

Stimpson, Catharine R. "Polonius, Our Pundit." *The American Scholar*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2002, pp. 97-108.

Taylor, Myron. "Tragic Justice and the House of Polonius." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1968, pp. 273-281.

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Reference Works

Use reference works when you need to contextualize your *analyses*.

Use Wikipedia to familiarize yourself with a topic, fine, but don't cite it. It's a resource, not a source.

Reference works—encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, companions, study guides, and so forth—are a nice alternative when you need contextual information for a paper but are faced with, on the one hand, the unreliability of Wikipedia and, on the other, the overwhelming sea of scholarship in academic books and articles. Reference works provide readers with knowledge that is both authoritative (because it was written by a specialist and peer-reviewed) and accessible (because it was written as an introduction to a topic).

There are general reference works—something like *Encyclopedia Britannica*—but every academic field has field-specific reference works, things like *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* or *The Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. These discipline-specific reference works are the best place to find reliable contextualizing information on a topic.

When writing a paper, don't quote reference works. You can better provide that information—more concisely and in a way that is tailored to your own argument—through summary and paraphrase.

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Accessing Scholarship

With the rise of online education, not everyone can just walk across campus to a library. There are four main resources available for accessing scholarship.

> *Public Libraries:* If you're looking for a popular book or periodical, a local library might have it.
>
> *Bookstores:* It's OK to pull a book off the shelf, take a seat in the aisle, and read through it enough to determine if you need to bring it into your research project.
>
> *Academic Libraries:* Libraries on university campuses usually have more holdings—especially scholarly books and articles—than public libraries.
>
> *The Internet:* It will be hit-and-miss. Sometimes a scholarly source you're looking for is freely available online. Usually, however, there will be some sort of paywall or login required.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Key Quotations

Stubbes, George (attributed). *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet*. W. Wilkins, 1736.

> It is evident by the whole Tenour of Polonius's Behaviour in this Play, that he is intended to represent some Buffoonish Statesman, not too much fraught with Honesty. (23)

Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.* C.H. Reynell for R. Hunter and C. and J. Ollier, 1817.

> It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. (86)

Jusserand, Jean Jules. *A Literary History of the English People.* Putnam, 1909.

> The Polonius family is first shown as a family of honest people, virtuous and upright. They trust each other. The question of the young prince, evidently in love with Ophelia, causes them all anxiety. Laertes gives his sister sound advice. Polonius acts toward his son as a prudent and affectionate father ; the precepts with which he provisions the young man on his going abroad have been laughed at by critics, but only to make his character at the beginning of the play fit in with his character at the end. The old courtier is hard on poor Ophelia, which is quite comprehensible: he is a man of the court, he is advanced in years, he naturally understands better the chances of disfavour than he does a young girl's love troubles. (3.320-21)

Dreher, Diane. *Domination And Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare*. University Press of Kentucky, 1986.

> By far the most reprehensible father is Polonius. (52)

Stimpson, Catharine R. "Polonius, Our Pundit." *The American Scholar*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2002, pp. 97-108.

> Polonius's domains have expanded from literature to life, where he has become a label, a social category. Since my experiences of Polonius in literature and life, I have wondered who and what a Polonius in a modern state might be. He is, I have decided, a powerful figure in a large institution, preferably the executive branch of the federal government. However, he moves easily among institutions. He can work in the private sector or a think tank or a public policy school in an affluent private university. When he is not in the government, and is instead rusticating in the private sector, he likes being a pundit. In that role, he enjoys writing op-ed pieces and going on television.

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Citation

Remember to cite your sources, whether you are quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or utilizing ideas or information someone else has published.

Academic writing employs formal styles for citation, but different disciplines use different styles. The three most popular academic styles are MLA style, APA style, and Chicago style.

Regardless of the style being used, there are two parts to any citation: an in-text citation and a bibliographic reference. The format of the citation and the reference will differ depending on the style in use.

MLA style uses a Works Cited page. APA style uses a References page. Chicago style uses endnotes.

Regardless of the citational style you're using, it will cite different kinds of sources slightly differently. It's important to have a reliable manual to provide guidance on all the details.

MLA Style

MLA style does not use footnotes or endnotes for citations (though those notes can be used for other purposes). Instead, MLA style uses parenthetical citations. As such, MLA documentation consists of two parts: (1) parenthetical citations in the text that refer readers to a Works Cited page, and (2) a Works Cited page filled with entries that include complete bibliographic information.

MLA In-Text Citation: An in-text citation in MLA style usually includes two key pieces of information: the author's last name and a page number. When you quote or paraphrase, include a page number, since you're quoting or paraphrasing a specific page. When you summarize, don't include a page number, since you're summarizing the entire source. When a source has no known author, your in-text citation should use a shortened title of the work instead of an author's name. When a source has no known page numbers (such as a film or website), simply omit that element of your in-text citation. There are a few different ways to format an MLA in-text citation. The author's last name and the page number can both appear in parentheses after a quote or paraphrase, as in this example: "There are different ways to format an MLA in-text citation" (Wilson 2). Whenever possible, however, you should make the author or title you're referring to clear in your introduction of the quote or information; if you do so, you don't need to state the author/title in your citation, only the page number. For example, according to Jeffrey Wilson, "Make the author or title you're referring to clear in your introduction of the quote" (2). The one exception to this rule is when citing reference works: because the information is probably not controversial, keep the focus on that information and identify your source in a parenthetical citation rather than in your sentence. Note that, in the quotes in this paragraph, the end punctuation comes after the parenthetical citation. If a quotation is three lines or fewer, incorporate it in your text and enclose it in double quotation marks, as in the quotes above. If a quotation is four lines or more, it should be block-quoted, meaning that it is displayed in a freestanding block of text, indented one inch, without quotation marks. Note that, in a block quote, the end punctuation comes before the parenthetical citation.

MLA Works Cited: After the last paragraph in an MLA-style paper, force the document to begin a new page for the Works Cited page. The Works Cited page should still have the one-inch margins all the way around and have the heading of last name and page number. Center the word "Works Cited" at the top of the page (but don't put it in quotes, make it bold, or otherwise stylize it), and keep the page double-spaced throughout, with no extra space between entries. Items in a Works Cited page will be alphabetized by the first word of each entry (author's last name or title of work). Each entry will use a hanging indent, meaning that lines after the first should be indented half an inch. Because the URLs in a Works Cited page are not underlined, remove the hyperlinks so that URLs will be formatted correctly. MLA guidelines for citations are extremely detailed. Each citation must follow the format specified in the most recent edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, which at the time of this writing is the ninth edition, published in 2021. Be very cautious of information about MLA style that is available on the internet, as it is often outdated, incomplete, sloppy, or just wrong.

APA Style

APA style does not use footnotes or endnotes for citations. Instead, the APA documentation system consists of two parts: (1) parenthetical citations in the text that refer readers to a list of references, and (2) entries in the list of references that include complete bibliographic information.

APA In-Text Citation: In APA style, you must include two bits of information about a source: the author's last name and the date of publication. There are multiple ways to do so, but remember that it is always best to include the author in your own sentence. In APA style, article titles and book titles are not commonly used in the text of a paper. Instead, the author and year are the important elements of an in-text citation. Articles and books are cited the same way in the text (note that they are cited differently in your References):

- was challenged by Lewissohn in 1999.
- Freedman (2006) postulates that individuals …
- According to Rockett & McMinn (1990), traffic fines over the time period reflect "the local magistrate's bias against minorities as well as anyone living in Osage County" (p.278).
- Peterson et al. (2009) claimed that the majority of these convictions were obtained "through the most fraudulent of courtroom practices" (para. 2).

APA References: Your references should be listed on their own page. Center the word "References" at the top of the page. APA guidelines for references are extremely detailed. Each reference must follow the format specified in the sixth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

Chicago Style

Chicago style cites sources using footnotes or endnotes (it doesn't matter which you use: different journals and different teachers prefer different formants). As such, Chicago-style documentation consists of two parts: (1) a numerical note in the text that refers readers to a footnote or endnote, and (2) a note that includes complete bibliographic information and commentary if needed.

Chicago Style Notes: To create a footnote or endnote, use your word processing program's note function (in Microsoft Word, this is found under Insert, and then Footnote…). If you do so, your notes will remain tied to the place in the text to which they apply (e.g., if you add a new footnote at the start of the paper, note #1 will automatically become note #2). When using a source, you should make the author or title you're referring to clear in your

introduction of the quote or information. Once you've cited a text with a note that gives the full bibliographic information, subsequent references to that work can be cited in-text as long as it's clear which work you're referring to. For example, let's say you wanted to quote Jeff Wilson on Chicago style. The first reference would require a note: "This paper is formatted in Chicago style, which is a style often used in the Humanities."[1] Subsequent references to Wilson could be cited in-text "as long as it's clear," Wilson says, "which work you're referring to" (4). Note that, in footnoted quotes, punctuation comes inside the quote, but in subsequent in-text citations the punctuation comes after the parenthetical citation.

[1] Jeffrey R. Wilson, "A Sample Chicago-Style Paper," in This is How to Write (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 235. As you can see in this note, Chicago-style conveys bibliographic information in footnotes and endnotes (as in the previous sentence), but it also allows for commentary in these notes (as in the current sentence).

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Annotated Bibliographies

An annotated bibliography is a list of sources that you have read and plan to include in a research project. An annotated bibliography is made up of a series of annotations, or brief notes about each of the sources. The design and length of an annotation vary based on its purpose and the discipline you're working in. Sometimes you will see annotations that are only one or two sentences, but usually a good annotation runs between 200-400 words.

Some annotated bibliographies include headnotes, brief paragraphs that summarize and give an overview on the general topic of the annotated bibliography. To write a headnote, you should return, after writing your annotations, to the beginning of your document to write an introduction that summarizes the key issues that are covered in the annotations. This introduction will help you see how your texts are "talking" to one another, which will allow you finally to revise your annotations to include points of agreement and disagreement (i.e., where the essays complement each other and where they contradict each other).

Kinds of Annotations

Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of annotations: descriptive, evaluative, and prospective:

- *Descriptive Annotations*: As the name implies, a *descriptive* annotation describes, summarizes, or analyzes an article or book—especially its evidence and argument—without rendering a judgment about it.
- *Evaluative Annotations:* An *evaluative* annotation not only describes but also evaluates the source, identifying its strong and/or weak points.

- *Prospective Annotations:* What I call a *prospective* annotation describes and evaluates a source but also explains how you the writer will be using this source in the paper or project you're working on.

In my courses, I usually ask for *descriptive* annotations because I like for students to view annotations as part of the reading process. As always, *writing* helps you understand what you're *reading*. I encourage students to hold off on evaluation for a bit because it's best to collect all of your information first (or at least as much of it as possible) before you start making claims about it—but be aware that in other classes you may be asked to do other kinds of annotations. As always, the key is to be aware of the situation so that you can ask your instructor what the requirements and expectations are.

Structure for Annotations

For a quick and clean structure for a 300-word descriptive annotation, you might include the following elements of academic argument:

Citation: Your citational style will depend upon the discipline in which you're writing. Make sure you get it right!

Author: Not even a sentence: just give a clause about someone's academic specialty *en route* to your statement of that writer's text. No one cares where someone is a professor nor even the fact that someone is a professor (so don't say, "Peter C. Herman, Professor of English at San Diego State University, addresses …"); what people care about is someone's academic specialization (e.g. "Peter C. Herman, a scholar of sixteenth-century literature and culture, addresses …"). One way to provide some information about the author is to mention a book or article he or she has written that's relevant to the topic at hand.

Text: One sentence (or the rest of a sentence) detailing the topic under consideration. Try to mention the material as well as the conceptual aspects of the text—e.g., "Shakespeare scholar Julia Lupton addresses the imagery of circumcision in *The Merchant of Venice*."

Problem: One sentence articulating the critical conversation or debate entered into by the author (only if applicable).
If, for example, a writer is disputing or extending an earlier study, this is where you would describe that maneuver.

Method: One sentence articulating the interpretive approach or theoretical position used to unpack the text (only if that approach or

position is noteworthy, sophisticated, or specialized). You don't need to say, for example, that someone gathers a great deal of fascinating evidence and analyzes it in compelling ways that really support his or her thesis. In theory, that's what all academic writing does. But you would want to note if, say, an author used Wittgenstein's philosophy to unpack Milton's poetry.

Argument: One or two sentences providing a summary of the main idea. If you're going to quote in an annotation, this is the place to do it. If you're aiming for a shorter annotation, you can skip the text statement, and even the problem and method statements, and go straight into the argument (e.g., an annotation could begin, "Literary critic Martin Harries argues that …").

Evidence: One to three sentences summarizing the information presented in support of the argument. Try to give an overview and synthesis of the evidence as well as one particularly poignant example, if possible.

Implications: One sentence describing what's at stake in the argument, either according to the author or according to yourself: why does it matter? who cares? how did/will it impact an academic field?

A good annotation will not necessarily include all of the above information; the best annotations draw out the aspects that make a book or article unique and develop quality accounts of these points.

Nor does an effective annotation need to work sequentially through this information; often a writer will use the organization of the book/article to structure the annotation, touching upon relevant points from above as they appear in the course of the source.

Moreover, in annotations, it is often possible to combine categories of academic information into single sentences, such as a single sentence that covers both *text* and *method*, or a single sentence that covers both *method* and *argument*.

Process for Annotations

Here's a four-step process for writing annotations:

- *Marginalia*: Start out by reading a source and making marginal notes on the elements of academic argument (question/problem, method, thesis, evidence, analysis, counter, etc.) as I come across them. That will help me understand the totality of a source on its own terms.

- *Diagram of Evidence*: Create a diagram of the kinds of evidence used in the source (textual, historical, citational).
- *Quotes for Major Elements*: Pull out quotations for the major elements of academic argument associated with the introduction (question/problem, method, thesis, stakes), as well as the main assertions for each major section in the body of the essay.
- *Write it Out*: Synthesize and summarize all this information into a 300-word paragraph that follows the below structure.

— Practicum —

Building an Annotated Bibliography

The below steps will help you build an annotated bibliography of at least five scholarly sources that are relevant to the issue you're examining in your research project.

1. Create a Preliminary Bibliography that includes:

   - A Text Statement
   - Your Primary Source(s)—i.e., *textual evidence*
   - At least 10 possible Secondary Sources—i.e., *Critical Scholarship*

     Note that your Secondary Sources should all be *Critical Scholarship*. You very well may be using *Historical Scholarship* or *Theoretical Scholarship* in your research project, but the best use of an Annotated Bibliography is to collect up scholarly interpretations of the text or topic you're addressing.

     What if there's no scholarship out there on your topic? That's, in fact, a good position to be in because it means that there is a need for scholarship on your topic. For the purposes of this bibliography, conceptualize your topic in broad enough terms that you're tapping into an existing scholarly conversation.

2. Create an Annotated Bibliography that includes five 300-word descriptive annotations.

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Plagiarism

From the Latin *plagiarius*, "kidnapper, seducer, plunderer," plagiarism is the use of another person's words, ideas, or efforts as if they were your own, without giving credit to the source. Don't be a plunderer.

Ignorance is not a valid excuse. Sometimes, writers truly do not understand what plagiarism is, and plagiarize unwittingly or unintentionally. But ignorance is not an excuse for unethical academic conduct.

A long list of examples—Jayson Blair, John Walsh, Jonah Lehrer, Melania Trump, Monica Crowley—shows that plagiarism can come back to haunt you. Plagiarism done when you're 20 years old and don't think it matters can return when you're 40 to derail the career you made for yourself.

In that sense, plagiarism can be seen as tragic: the thing you do to make yourself great can be the very thing that brings that greatness crashing down.

With respect to writing, questions of plagiarism can be divided into the ethical issues associated with passing someone else's words off as you own and the technical issues associated with the misuse of sources.

To avoid the ethical issues of plagiarism, you just need to be honest and vigilant. The technical issues of misuse of sources—plagiarism done through negligence or lack of knowledge or skill—are much more difficult. You need to know when and how to cite things. You need to have the technical skills to avoid things like "mosaic plagiarism," where someone changes around some words (because they know they shouldn't directly copy someone else's

words) but doesn't significantly change the order of ideas—resulting in a case of plagiarism.

The Five Kinds of Plagiarism

There are five specific kinds of plagiarism. Let's look at each, using this source and passage as an example:

> Grady, Hugh. "Shakespeare Criticism, 1600-1900." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Edited by Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells. Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 265-78.
>
> During his lifetime Shakespeare was virtually unknown outside his island nation. If he was recognized by some in England as a pre-eminent poet and dramatist, he was also occasionally eclipsed by his rivals, and his reputation was always undercut by the controversial status of London's public theatres. The godlike esteem he has achieved today around the world would have been incomprehensible in his own time, both to him and to his peers. (265)

Verbatim Plagiarism: Directly copying someone's words without attribution.

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is surprising because during his lifetime Shakespeare was virtually unknown outside his island nation.

Mosaic Plagiarism: Not copying someone's words exactly, but just swapping in synonyms or slight changes to phrasing—without identifying your source.

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is surprising because he was virtually unknown outside his island nation in his own day. In the seventeenth century, Ben Jonson was more highly regarded than Shakespeare, whose reputation was always undercut by the controversial status of London's public theatres. Shakespeare has grown into a demi-god, but the esteem he has achieved today around the world would have been incomprehensible in his own time, both to him and to his peers.

Inadequate Paraphrase: Identifying your source, but not fully transforming its ideas into your own words.

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is especially surprising because, as Hugh Grady has illustrated, in his own age Shakespeare was not well known outside England. Some may have seen him as a powerful author, but at times he was overshadowed by his contemporaries, and his status was hampered

> by the low esteem of the public theatres in London. His popularity today would be surprising to both him and his contemporaries.

Uncited Paraphrase: Fully transforming your source's ideas into your own words but forgetting to identify your source.

> Shakespeare was celebrated by some critics, denigrated by others, but his massive popularity today would have been unfathomable to anyone in the seventeenth century.

Uncited Quotation: Directly quoting your source but forgetting to identify it and/or give the page number that the quote comes from.

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is especially surprising in light of his relative of security in his own age: "The godlike esteem he has achieved today around the world would have been incomprehensible in his own time, both to him and to his peers."

Acceptable Versions

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is surprising because "during his lifetime Shakespeare was virtually unknown outside his island nation" (Grady 265).

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is surprising because, as Hugh Grady has discussed, "during his lifetime Shakespeare was virtually unknown outside his island nation" (265).

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is surprising because he was not well known outside England in his own day (Grady 265).

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is surprising because, as Hugh Grady has discussed, he was not well known outside England in his own day (265).

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is especially surprising in light of his relative of security in his own age: "The godlike esteem he has achieved today around the world would have been incomprehensible in his own time, both to him and to his peers" (Grady 265).

> Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is especially surprising in light of his relative of security in his own

age. As Hugh Grady put it, "The godlike esteem he has achieved today around the world would have been incomprehensible in his own time, both to him and to his peers" (265).

Shakespeare's status as a global superstar in the twenty-first century is especially surprising in light of his relative of security in his own age. As Hugh Grady has illustrated, he was celebrated by some critics and denigrated by others, but his massive popularity today would have been unfathomable to anyone in the seventeenth century (265).

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Literature Reviews

A literature review summarizes the previous scholarship on a topic. It's where you show that you've done your homework, where you celebrate the good work that has come before you, and where you identify the shortcomings of earlier scholarship.

We humans love to watch conflict: it's what explains the popularity of professional wrestling, reality television, and US politics. In your papers, exploit your reader's desire to see conflict by staging your argument as part of a heated debate.

But don't manufacture conflict. That's obviously unethical. If you get to the end of a research project, and you decide, "Yep, Robin Stewart nailed it; he's right; he said everything that I wanted to say, and he said it better than I would have said it," then you shouldn't try to drum up some imaginary insufficiency in the criticism. But you should also know that, if this ends up being the case, we don't need your paper to tell us that someone has already gotten it right.

Represent people's ideas accurately. Most scholars are quite happy to be disagreed with if their positions have been accurately represented. Imagine the people you're critiquing reading your critique of them: would they be happy with the way you've represented their ideas?

A single-source or multi-source paper has a *question/problem* that grows out of the *text(s)*: some discrepancy, difficulty, ambiguity, or gray area that demands interpretation. That's *question/problem*$_1$. A research paper that includes scholarly sources must have two kinds of *question/problem*: it has that initial

discrepancy, difficulty, ambiguity, etc. in the *text*, but it also identifies some insufficiency in the scholarly conversation devoted to that *text*. That's *question/problem*$_2$.

That is the point of a literature review: to identify an insufficiency in a scholarly conversation.

When you write a literature review, don't simply provide a list of who said what. Your literature review needs to tell a story. It should be an analysis of the analyses, a critique of the critics. There needs to be an argument to your literature review, that argument being your justification for your paper. Why, given the existing scholarship related to an issue, does your paper need to be written?

Group the scholars who have written on the subject into camps—maybe based on time period, maybe on theoretical approach, maybe on argument. Narrate the history of these different camps to demonstrate how and why this critical conversation does not ultimately account for the text under discussion.

Try to adopt a "latest and greatest" approach to literature reviews: try to include the most recent, cutting-edge scholarship, as well as the older, foundational works in the field.

Citation is the coin of the realm in academia. Jobs and promotions hinge on it. Use citations to support the work of scholars who face systematic bias in academia.

Strategies for Literature Reviews

When writing a literature review, there are two broad strategies you might use to justify the need for an additional interpretation: the "all wrong" way and the "all right" way.

> *All Wrong*: The "all wrong" way to justify the need for additional interpretation is to collect all the available interpretations of a text, present them, put them into camps, and then suggest that they've all gotten the interpretation of the text under consideration dead wrong (or, more softly, that these interpretations haven't gotten the text quite right). In this model, the scholarly conversation is insufficient because it displays mistakes, misunderstandings, misconceptions, misrepresentations, etc. In your paper, you're going to offer the right way of looking at the issue as a corrective to this deficient scholarly conversation.

All Right: The "all right" way to justify the need for interpretation is to collect all the available interpretations of a text, present them and affirm their accuracy and value, but then claim that additional interpretation is needed on top of what is currently available because what is currently available doesn't get to the real issue, which is what you'll be addressing in your paper. In this model, the scholarly conversation is insufficient because it has gaps, blind spots, unaddressed phenomena, etc. In your paper, you're going to fill in this gap in the scholarly conversation by giving attention to what has been overlooked by previous writers.

You can combine these approaches, the "all wrong" way and the "all right" way. Your research project may involves one handful of critics who address an issue related to yet not focused on your particular focus (you're not going to dispute them; you're just talking about something different than what they're talking about) and another handful of critics who have addressed the issue you're addressing, but they've gotten it wrong (so you're going to provide a different, better reading).

Here are some more specific strategies that may be useful to have in your repertoire for literature reviews:

- *The Redirect:* The field has focused on a certain line of thought—and that's wonderful—but there exists an unadresssed question or problem that you're going to take on.

- *The Further Development:* A certain scholar has suggested an idea that you're going to develop more fully.

- *The New Phenomenon:* Something new has emerged into the world and, simply because it is so new, it hasn't been addressed in the existing scholarship.

- *The Mistaken Interpretation:* A commonly accepted idea about a topic is simply wrong, and you're here to correct the record.

- *The Giant Killer:* Rather than engaging with the totality of a field of scholarship, you're going to engage deeply with a certain foundational scholar or argument that has been especially influential.

- *The Methodological Intervention:* A change of theoretical approach will enable a change of analytical argument.

Quote sparingly especially when dealing with secondary criticism (as opposed to your primary *text[s]*, which you should quote from more liberally). Usually, you should quote other critics only when (1) they provide key *terms* or ideas

for your *argument*, (2) you couldn't summarize or paraphrase them more succinctly, or (3) you're arguing against them. If you're going to take issue with someone's ideas, it's best to let them speak for themselves (and that helps prevent you from misrepresenting their position, which often happens in critical disputes). Otherwise, summarize and paraphrase their ideas in your own words.

Structuring Literature Reviews

Structure your literature review into your introduction. Introduce your *text*, explain the driving question (*question/problem*$_1$), present your literature review, then explain what the insufficiency in the scholarly literature is (*question/problem*$_2$), all to justify the existence of your paper.

Thus, the structure of an introduction for a research paper (on the model of *The Q&A* but with a literature review added) might look like this:

Paragraph 1: *Question/Problem Statement*

- *Orientation*
- *Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$

Paragraph 2: *Literature Review*

- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Paragraph 3: *Thesis Statement*

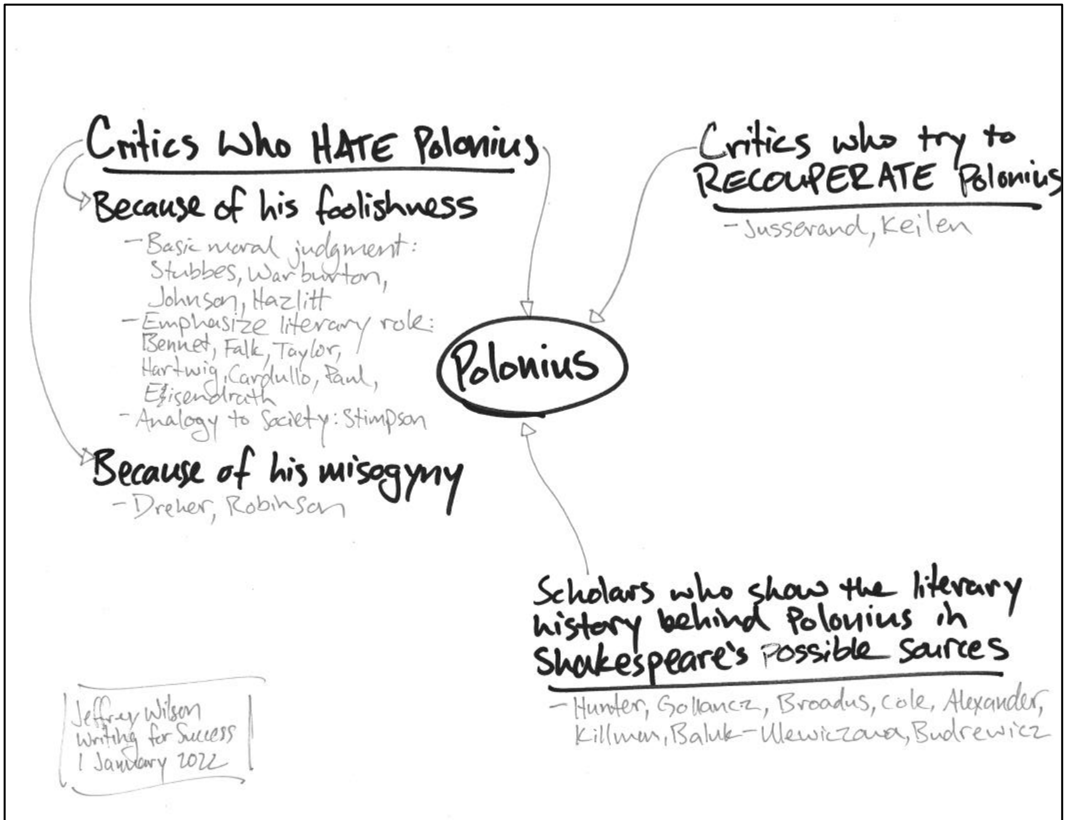
- *Text*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Putting Critics in Conversation

Stubbes (1736): Polonius is the worst. He's an idiot politician.
Warburton (1747): Totally. Can't stand that guy. So annoying. He just talks and talks and talks but says nothing.
Johnson (1765): Maybe he was once decent, but now he's just old.
Hazlitt (1821): I mean, I like the things he says but hate the things he does.
Hunter (1845): Shakespeare was probably making fun of one of the politicians of his time.
Jusserand (1909): I don't know folks. I don't think Polonius is so bad.
Everyone Else: Shut up. Get lost.
Gollancz (1904): Isn't it weird that Polonius's name suggests he's from Poland, but the play is set in Denmark?
Stubbes: You're a huge dork.
Broadus (1935): Buckle up people. I'm about to tell you the history of all the sources Shakespeare used to create Polonius.
Hazlitt: I hate everything about you.
Bennett (1953): I think Shakespeare was making fun of Polonius.
Falk (1967): Have you ever noticed that Ophelia also starts talking in proverbs when she goes mad at the end of the play?
Taylor (1968): Polonius is pure evil, and I'm glad Hamlet murdered him.
Johnson: Whoa, dude, a bit harsh.
Hartwig (1971): Shakespeare wasn't just making fun of Polonius. He used Polonius to make fun of the other characters.
Dreher (1986): You are all totally missing the point. Polonius is a reprehensible patriarch and misogynist who does his daughter so wrong.
Stimpson (2002): I feel like there are so many Poloniuses today: those rich politicians who mansplain everything on cable news.
Robinson (2009): I think Shakespeare having Polonius get murdered was a critique of the patriarchy Polonius represents.
Paul (2016): That's why, in Shakespeare's day, they used to say, "The best counsellor is a dead counsellor."
Taylor: YES! Murder Polonius! Dude is Satan.
Eisendrath: There's a word for what Polonius is. He's a "putz."
Stubbs: Total putz.
Johnson: An old putz.
Gollancz: A Polish putz.
Broadus: A putz from many sources.
Taylor: An evil putz.
Dreher: A patriarchal putz.
Robinson: A dead patriarchal putz.



Critics who HATE Polonius
Because of his foolishness
- Basic moral judgment: Stubbes, Warburton, Johnson, Hazlitt
- Emphasize literary role: Bennet, Falk, Taylor, Hartwig, Cardullo, Paul, Eisendrath
- Analogy to Society: Stimpson
Because of his misogyny
- Dreher, Robinson
Critics who try to RECOUPERATE Polonius
- Jusserand, Keilen
Polonius
Scholars who show the literary history behind Polonius in Shakespeare's possible sources
- Hunter, Gollancz, Broadus, Cole, Alexander, Killman, Baluk-Ulewiczowa, Budrewicz
Jeffrey Wilson
Writing for Success
1 January 2022

Into the Essay

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in Shakespeare's *Hamlet***

Studies of Shakespeare and alcohol filter into two lines of thought. The first—older and more prominent—is about individuals and the morality of excessive consumption. Shakespeare presented moderate drinking as "a sign of hospitality or friendship," Trawick wrote, but "excessive drinking often leads to unhappiness, disaster, even death," and "alcohol is associated with murder in a significant number of instances." Stephen Greenblatt worked Shakespeare's frequently tragic scenes of alcohol up into the observation that he "depicted heavy drinkers from close-up—he noted the unsteadiness of their legs, the broken veins in their nose and cheeks, their slurred speech," and then into the conjecture that Shakespeare's father, John, may have fallen from grace as an alcoholic. Alcohol suggestively surfaced in Shakespeare's own life, at least in apocryphal recollections. One story from John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* (1669-96)—though disputed—gives an abstemious Shakespeare avoiding the party scene: he was not a "company keeper … wouldn't be debauched, and if invited to, writ: he was in pain." Another story—also dubious—from the diary of John Ward, vicar of Stratford from 1662-81, offers the counter-image of Shakespeare drinking himself to death: "Shakespeare, Drayton, and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted." Scholars looking at Shakespeare's texts and times have shown that his antipathy to alcohol was consistent with and influenced by contemporary moral entrepreneurs, from religious homilies and prose satires to King James and contemporary dramatists. Breakthroughs in this line of thought came in 2009 when David Houston Wood argued that Shakespeare represented excessive drinking as "a disabling disease that should properly be termed alcoholism," and in 2013 when Rebecca Lemon identified challenges to English law in Shakespeare's depiction of alcoholic criminals. Since then, critics have emphasized the sympathetic, rather than judgmental, aspects of Shakespearean characters associated with alcohol, like Falstaff and Mistress Quickly.

The second line of thought—newer and less developed—shifts attention from the individual to the cultural aspects of alcohol in Shakespeare's plays. Nations came to be associated with their alcohols and drinking habits. "The characterization of the Englishman as a beer-drinker reflects a growing sense of national identity and racial stereotyping," Charlotte McBride wrote in 2004. Alcohol imported from foreign countries signified an emergent globalization, and the alcohol trade brought opportunities to exchange cultural traditions of alcoholism, as illustrated in the 2016 collection Culinary Shakespeare. "Every time wine appears in Shakespeare's plays," Karen Raber argues, "it activates 'England' and 'Englishness' as concepts—at once newly revivified yet still fluid—that rely on a body/state analogy."

Mixing these two lines yields a new question. What does the tragedy of alcoholism look like when identified not in an individual but in an entire culture? Shakespeare's emphasis on culture contrasts with the focus on an individual's thirsty adventures and psychological despair in the modern literature and film of alcoholism. Yet our question is not only one Shakespeare asked in Hamlet; it is also one sociologists ask about American teenagers.

Literature review.

Six

Structure

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Organization

Having a good idea is not the same as having a good paper: an idea is an interpretation, a paper an articulation. Don't allow your good ideas to be murdered by bad papers.

Structure is the secret to success in advanced academic writing. It's all about structure.

To be effective, a paper must be properly organized, a word we take from the Greek *organon*, which means "that with which one works." Consider the organs in your body: there are individual organs (the heart, the lungs, the liver), and there are organ systems (the circulatory system, the respiratory system, the digestive system). For your body to function, each organ system must perform a general task for which it is responsible, and within each system each individual organ must perform a specific task for that system to work. Your body only works if each of its internal parts does the task it is responsible for, and the same is true of your papers.

At some point, you may have been taught "the five-paragraph essay," an approach to organization commonly used in high-school writing and standardized tests. Forget everything you know about the five-paragraph essay, but also don't. Forget the idea that all arguments can be made in five paragraphs—one that is an introduction, three that give examples, and one that offers a conclusion. Forget that your opening paragraph must end with your thesis, which specifies three important points, one for each of your three body paragraphs, after which you recap those points in a conclusion.

Don't forget, however, that argumentative essays almost always follow the general outline of introduction, body, conclusion: first introduce an issue and make a claim about it, then support your claim with detailed discussion, and finally conclude by considering the implications of your claim. Any argument that you ever make for the rest of your life will be more complex than this, but it is important to understand this general movement.

Having a good structure will eliminate repetition. Academic papers, especially shorter papers (up to 10 pages), are so short that you only have time to say something once, so you have to say it (1) in the right place and (2) in a way that your reader is going to remember.

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Outlines

One way to start writing a paper is to start writing it. That's the worst way to start a paper.

To avoid sprawling writing with no direction, write out your entire paper in outline form. Don't just make an outline—though that's a good idea too. Actually write out the paper, full sentences and all, in outline form.

Doing so will ensure that you're putting in all the right information in all the right places because it makes it easy to see the function that a sentence is performing (not the content of the sentence, but the Element of Academic Writing it presents).

Writing in outline form makes it easier to consider the structure of your ideas, which is a key aspect of revision.

Create your outline using the terminology from our Elements of Academic Writing.

There are two kinds of outlines to consider—a basic outline and a detailed outline.

A basic outline is the sort that you are probably familiar with already. It offers, in short phrases and notes, a quick overview of the paper you plan to write: the topics to be addressed and the order in which you plan to address them.

In a basic outline, you'll need to specify all the information pertinent to the major parts of the paper (introduction, body, and conclusion), as well as the sections and, if needed, the paragraphs within each sections of the body of the paper. A basic outline should include a working thesis statement written out in one or two sentences. Apart from that thesis, keep your labels to five

words or fewer. You're not making points here, just marking down the points that need to be made.

A detailed outline is probably less familiar to you. It comes later in the writing process, and it is something that you will return to and recreate several times along the way to a finished paper. If a basic outline covers the ideas you're addressing and the order in which you're addressing them, a detailed outline adds the claims you're making about those ideas using complete sentences.

That's right—your detailed outline will use complete sentences, but your complete sentences will be structured in outline form so that you can see and manipulate the structure of the paper, its parts, sections, paragraphs, and sentences.

To start a detailed outline, create a basic outline. Then, using complete sentences, and tagging your information with the appropriate Element of Academic Writing, outline your proposed paper.

In a detailed outline, for introductory and concluding material, tag your information and write out full sentences. For body paragraphs, write out the key assertion for each body section and, if needed, each body paragraph; then just use a bulleted list to note your evidence (all the various kinds: textual, historical, and scholarly).

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Basic Outline

Introduction

Paragraph 1: Critics Who Hate Polonius
- Hate Polonius Because of His Foolishness: Stubbes, Warburton, Johnson, Hazlitt
- Hate Polonius Because of His Misogyny: Dreher, Robinson

Paragraph 2: Thesis Paragraph
- Text/Method
- Thesis
- Stakes

Body

Section 1: Polonius's Possible Prehistories
- Paragraph 1.1: Polonius as a Polish Immigrant
- Paragraph 1.2: Polonius as a Danish War Hero
- Paragraph 1.3: Polonius as a University Actor
- Paragraph 1.4: Polonius as a Widower
- Paragraph 1.5: Polonius as a Danish Government Official

Section 2: Polonius as a Single Father
- Paragraph 2.1: His Wordiness as Dad Jokes
- Paragraph 2.2: Sending His Son Off to College in a Different Country
- Paragraph 2.3: His Daughter Romantically Involved with the Prince
- Paragraph 2.4: His Decision to Put His Career Before His Family
- Paragraph 2.5: His Attempt to Save the Queen
- Paragraph 2.6: The Effect of His Death on His Family

Conclusion

Paragraph 1: Argument Statement
- Counter: Stimpson on Poloniuses in Society
- Response:
- Argument

Paragraph 2: What's at Stake
- Parenting in Hamlet

Paragraph 3: The Idea
- Hamlets as a Step-Family

Paragraph 4: The Examples
- King Hamlet, Queen Gertrude, King Claudius

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Detailed Outline

Introduction

Paragraph 1: Problem Statement

- Question/Problem1: Your wife dies. You raise two children on your own. You build a successful career to provide for your family. You send your son off to college in another country, even though he's not ready, and it rattles you. Apparently now the prince wants to marry your daughter—that's not an easy situation to navigate. Then—*get this*—the prince murders you while you're trying to save the queen's life. Your death destroys both of your kids. They die tragically. And what do you get for your troubles? Centuries of Shakespeare scholars dumping on you.

Paragraph 2: Literature Review

- Text.Ev: Many echo Hamlet's characterization of Polonius as a "tedious old fool" and "foolish prating knave."
- Crit.Cit: In 1736, the first essay ever written on Hamlet called Polonius a "Buffoonish Statesman." Samuel Johnson saw an old man "declining into dotage." William Hazlitt thought Polonius "talks very sensibly" but "acts very foolishly." Closer to our time, Diane Dreher also hated Polonius—"by far the most reprehensible father" in Shakespeare's plays—but for a different reason. He's a patriarch, a misogynist, an authoritarian who dominates Ophelia's will and decimates her zest for life. "The death of Polonius," Elaine Robinson argues, "is a symbol of Shakespeare's attack on patriarchy."

Paragraph 2: Thesis Statement

- Counter: Polonius isn't a good father.
- Response: Good fathers don't make good drama.
- Question/Problem2: His failings are central to my argument that Polonius is a good character, more complex and sympathetic than critics usually recognize.
- Text/Method: This defense grows from viewing Polonius not through the eyes of his enemy, Prince Hamlet—the point of view Shakespeare's play asks audiences to adopt—but through the lens of the common challenges of twenty-first-century parenting.
- Thesis: For Polonius is a single father struggling with work-life balance who sadly choses his career over his daughter's well-being.
- Stakes: And that perspective opens up other modern resonances of the family dynamics in Shakespeare's plays, such as the rocky stepfamily that Prince Hamlet, Queen Gertrude, and King Claudius find themselves in.

Body

Section 1: Shakespeare's play includes traces—only hints that must be imaginatively fleshed out—of Polonius's possible prehistories.

The Writing Process

Paragraph 1.1: His name points to Poland, one of Denmark's foreign enemies, a quality highlighted by the change of the character's name in the first quarto, Corimbus.

- Text.Ev: "Corimbus" / "Polonius" (1.2.56)
- Text.Ev: "So frowned he once, when in an angry parle / He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice" (1.1.61-62).

    Paragraph 1.1: Perhaps Polonius is an immigrant from Poland.

    - Crit.Cit: Hunter, Gollancz, Broadus, Cole, Alexander, Kilman, Baluk-Ulewiczowa, Budrewicz

    Paragraph 1.2: Or Polonius could be an agnomen, like "Coriolanus," an honorary name bestowed upon him for his military service.

    - Crit.Cit: Weiss

Paragraph 1.3: The only clear bit of backstory that Shakespeare gives about Polonius is that he was an actor at university.

- Text.Ev: 3.2.91
- [HAMLET] You played once i'th' university, you say?
POLONIUS That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.
HAMLET What did you enact?
POLONIUS I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th' Capitol— Brutus killed me.
HAMLET It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.
- "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men." (2.2.324-28)
- "well spoken, with good accent and good discretion" (2.2.388-89)
- "This is too long" (2.2.420)
- "That's good" (2.2.426)

Paragraph 1.4: When and how Polonius met his wife, Ophelia and Laertes's mother, is unclear, but she seems to have died.

- That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries "Cuckold!" to my father, brands the harlot
Even here between the chaste unsmirchèd brow
Of my true mother. (4.2.118-19)

Paragraph 1.5: Perhaps a grieving Polonius threw himself into his job, climbing the ranks of King Hamlet's council to become a leading advisor to Denmark's royal family.

- "The head is not more native to the heart, / The hand more instrumental to the mouth, / Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father" (1.2.47-49)

Section 2: The hints of Polonius's prehistory provides context for the scenes where we actually meet the man.

The Writing Process

Paragraph 2.1: I read Polonius's verbosity as dad jokes.

- "Tender yourself more dearly / Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase / Wronging it thus—you'll tender me a fool" (1.3.106-08)
- "brevity is the soul of wit / And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes. / I will be brief" (2.2.90-92)

Paragraph 2.2: Any father would struggle sending a son with a penchant for youthful rebellion off to college in another country.

- 1.2.51-59
- 1.3.54-82
- 2.1-71

Paragraph 2.3: Frankly, as a father, I don't know what I would do if I heard the heir to the crown in my country had declared he was deeply in love with my daughter: that's a very challenging parenting situation, to say the least.

- 1.3.87-135
- 2.1.71-116

Paragraph 2.4: Let's hope most fathers wouldn't, like Polonius, put their job ahead of the well-being of their daughter, although we sadly see that situation all the time.

- 3.1.42-184

Paragraph 2.5: Ultimately, Polonius gives his life for his job: he comes out of hiding to protect the queen, and becomes a victim of murder by and unhinged aristocrat who then callously plays games with the dead body.

- 3.4.21-33

Paragraph 2.6: Polonius's death breaks his children.

- 4.2

Conclusion

Paragraph 1: Argument Statement

- Counter: In 2002, Catharine R. Stimpson suggested that there are many Poloniuses in society today, those rich politicians who mansplain everything on cable news:

  > He is, I have decided, a powerful figure in a large institution, preferably the executive branch of the federal government. However, he moves easily among institutions. He can work in the private sector or a think tank or a public policy school in an affluent private university. When he is not in the government, and is instead rusticating in the private sector, he likes being a pundit. In that role, he enjoys writing op-ed pieces and going on television.

- Response: There are the public Poloniuses that Stimpson describes and the private Poloniuses I have sought to recover.
- Argument: Behind the bumbling pundits are many working fathers who have made questionable decisions about their work-life balance. He's not a good father. I hate his patriarchal parenting. I would also say that, if push came to shove, and I had to pick which of the parents in Hamlet I would want as my own, it would be Polonius.

The Writing Process

Paragraph 2: What's at Stake

- His complexity brings clarity to the other parents in Hamlet. King Hamlet is a father who asks his son to murder someone, which ends up destroying the child's life. Queen Gertrude is a mother who marries her dead husband's brother, then is baffled that her son is struggling. King Claudius is a stepfather only because he killed his stepson's actual father. Shakespeare filled the play with bad parents.

Paragraph 3: The Idea

- On the one hand, each parent, like Polonius, put their career before their kid, resulting in the deterioration of the family. On the other, the Hamlet family is, like the Poloniuses, weirdly relatable in modernity, where stepfamilies are common. If Polonius shows what can happen when a family loses a parent, the Hamlets are an example of separation, remarriage, and efforts to negotiate a new family dynamic—that's all there before the murder of King Hamlet comes to light. And each parent has enough traces in the text to suggest a backstory that contextualizes any easy judgment of their parenting.

Paragraph 4: The Examples

- King Hamlet is the divorced father who both hates seeing his ex-wife with a new man and uses his child as leverage in a power play against her. Queen Gertrude is the single mother who wants to feel romantic love for the first time in a while but fails to appreciate how her new romantic life affects her child's emotions. And King Claudius is the new step-father who just wants everyone to be happy and tries to relate to his step-son but finds himself in an emotionally combustable situation.

Paragraph 5: Another Turn of the Screw

- The impulse is to say, *Oh, Shakespeare's families are so modern.* It may be better to note that the term "non-traditional family" is absurd because history is filled with single parents and stepfamilies in which the challenges of work-life balance are heightened—and everyone's a critic

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Introductions

Don’t start with any version of the statement, “Humankind has always ... ,” or, “Since ancient times … ”.

Don’t begin with some random quote from a Socrates or a Machiavelli.

And don’t start with a definition from Webster’s Dictionary.

In your introduction, get straight into the text you're interpreting, or at least the conceptual tension that you'll be exploring in that text.

The key elements associated with the introduction are:

- *Text:* The thing being interpreted. The text is the work, object, event, or topic being discussed, even if that work, object, event, or topic is not a book.
- *Author:* Information a paper tells its readers about the biography of the person who wrote it; this information may help explain why this person is making the *argument* that he or she is making.
- *Question/Problem:* The author’s motive for writing a paper, often framed as a difficult question that demands interpretation or an unresolved or incorrectly resolved question. In short, *why* a paper needs to be written.
- *Critical Scholarship:* A reference to another writer who has interpreted the same *text* as the *author*; such writers will often be marshaled to support an *analysis* or *argument* or used as a *counter* that the author responds to.

- *Method:* The interpretive strategy used by the *author* to interpret his or her *text*. Often where *terminology* is defined.
- *Theoretical Scholarship:* A reference to a writer whose ideas (often abstract or philosophical) are relevant to the interpretation of a *text*, even though that writer doesn't directly discuss this particular text or its historical context.
- *Terminology:* A word or phrase, often crucial to the author's *argument*, that he or she takes special care to define or discuss.
- *Thesis:* The basic proposition of an interpretation. A snapshot of the *Argument*.
- *Stakes:* The larger conversations an *argument* is contributing to. The pay-off. The bigger picture. Actionable knowledge. A snapshot of the *Implications*.

Your introduction doesn't need to be just one paragraph. Having a longer introduction is perfectly fine, even encouraged, as you move toward more sophisticated writing.

There are many ways to structure an introduction. It helps to have a clear sense of your *method* and to know what you're planning to say when you get to your conclusion. Below are some possible models to work with.

Note that these models are for research papers that include scholarly citations. If you're doing a single-source paper or a multi-source paper, you can adapt these models by eliminating the literature reviews.

Into the Essay

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

As first argued by Juliet Dusinberre in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), Shakespeare seems to have been attentive and opposed to the systematic mistreatment of women during his age yet, whenever I think about gender in *Hamlet*, something just feels wrong.[1] According to the Penguin edition, there are 3,834 lines in the play.[1] Only 325 of them are spoken by women, Ophelia (170 lines) and Gertrude (155 lines), the only two women in the play out of the more than 30 characters listed in the *dramatic personae*. Although roughly half of the human population is made up of women, they make up roughly 7 percent of the characters in *Hamlet* and speak roughly 8 percent of the lines in the play.

This present absence of women has led modern writers like John Updike, Lisa Klein, and Alice Birch to reimagine the story of *Hamlet* from Gertrude's or Ophelia's perspective.[1] It has led feminist critics to ask why the role of women is so diminished in the play. Is this evidence of sexism on Shakespeare's part?[1] Of sexism in Shakespeare's society?[1] And what do we do with the fact that the most celebrated play in the history of English literature systematically ignores half of humankind?[1]

These were the questions Lisa Jardine posed at the start of her foundational feminist study *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (1983).[1] Identifying "two main lines of approach to Shakespeare's drama within a feminist perspective" (1), Jardine mapped out, first, the view of a proto-feminist Shakespeare who "transcend[ed] the limits of his time and sex" (2); and second, the view of an "oppressively chauvinistic" early-modern English society (3). Within this second approach, Jardine noted, "one may identify, as it were, an aggressive and a non-aggressive strand" (3). The aggressive strand "sees Shakespeare's work as out-and-out sexist, and sets out to uncover his prejudices to the reader" (4), while the non-aggressive strand "takes it that Shakespeare did his best … but that contemporary society's limited understanding of women combined with his own male viewpoint have skewed the resulting picture" (3).

After rather fearlessly dissecting the discourse on Shakespeare and gender in these terms, Jardine flinched. She abandoned the question of Shakespeare's attitude toward the feminine for a reason that is not, to me, very compelling. Seeking shelter behind one of the clichés of new criticism (famously formulated in Shakespeare studies when L.C. Knights asked "How many Children Hath Lady Macbeth?"[1]), Jardine wrote, "Whether the critic decides that Shakespeare's plays contain inspired insights or warped fantasies of womanhood, the two schools seem to agree in their assumption that Shakespeare's characters are susceptible of analysis as *people*" (6). It then becomes clear that Jardine's resistance to seeing Shakespeare's characters as people – something which I, like Michael Bristol, see as not only permissible and philosophically coherent but also the whole point[1] – is bound up with a resistance to seeing Shakespeare as a person. Shifting from the truisms of new criticism to those of new historicism, she presented Shakespeare as a being without much agency who was formed by the powers that be, unthinkingly reflecting "the patriarchy's unexpressed worry about the great social changes which characterize the period" (6). Here early-modern English society was just as conflicted about the feminine as Shakespeare, which may be true, but which does not satisfy our desire to know how he as a living, breathing, thinking artist represented women. To me, that remains the pressing and pertinent question even after we have acknowledged Shakespeare's situatedness in society: How did he represent women?

The position that Shakespeare was an unthinking conduit of Elizabethan misogyny is as unsatisfying as the position that *Hamlet* is a full-throated feminist manifesto. As Dusinberre would say, the "social conduit" reading takes away from Shakespeare an individual intellectual and artistic agency that is impossible to deny – he was clearly a thoughtful man and a deliberate playwright. As Jardine would point out, the "proto-feminist" reading, with its deliberately anachronistic language, takes away from Shakespeare the Elizabethan culture that clearly exerted a deep influence upon him – he was clearly a man of his time. Moreover, these efforts to identify Shakespeare as a friend or enemy to the modern feminist cause obscure the more complicated reality that he is probably both.

Yet such questions have not been pursued in recent feminist Shakespeare studies. In the twenty-first century, feminist Shakespeareans such as Ann Thompson, R.S. White, Cristiane Busato Smith, Sujata Iyengar, and Jess Carniel have turned – with good reason – to performance, adaptations, appropriations, and other modern receptions of *Hamlet*.[1] That turn centers Ophelia, who is finally given space to shine as a character in modern refractions that speak back to Shakespeare, who is decentered in these readings. And feminist Shakespeare studies such as Ania Loomba and Melissa Sanchez's *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies* (2016) and Valerie Traub's *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment* (2016) have focused – with good reason – on overlapping identity categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, ability, age, and the intersectionalities among them.[1] That focus still emphasizes character over author, as in Tobin Seibers's account of Ophelia's gendered mental illness from the angle of Disability Studies, or Emily C. Bartels's reading of gender and race in "Hamlet the Dane."[1] Significantly, Traub's account of Dusinberre, Jardine, and the first wave of feminist Shakespeare studies ends without answers: "Fairly soon, however, such postures of defence and attack faded to the background."[1] Marianne Novy's *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (2017) concurs: "It is now hard to find new scholarship debating whether Shakespeare was a feminist."[1] Did feminist Shakespeareans silently agree that Shakespeare was – or wasn't – sexist, and move on? Have feminist Shakespeare scholars satisfactorily responded to the pressing question that students and fans of *Hamlet* persistently ask: is it a sexist play? Is this a question worthy of further debate—was Shakespeare, relative to his time and place, progressive on gender issues? Often our scholarship—far beyond feminist studies, far beyond Shakespeare studies—does a deep dive into history and theory (thank goodness: that's what scholarship is designed to do) but then avoids the return to the big ethical and political questions that prompt our interest in literature in the first place.

Identifications of someone or something as sexist can be uncomfrotable. In literary studies, we are told to avoid an intentional fallacy that projects authorial intent backward from textual evidence. Yet in our daily lives we regularly identify sexism based on people's words and actions. I shudder to image a world where we couldn't identify sexism when we see it. Why treat Shakespeare any differently, especially in an era of #MeToo and #TimesUp where frank and open discussion of the pervasiveness of gendered inequality and violence has increased social power for women. That, as Dympna C. Callaghan reminds us, is the goal: "That welfare remains the impetus of feminist critical analysis, and as such it behooves us to examine the gap between the apparent assimilation of feminism into the critical mainstream and the still secondary status of women in the world."[1]

Unconscious bias – the notion that we can harbor and practice prejudice and discrimination which we are unaware of, even if we purposefully and valiantly despise and resist bigotry – has emerged as a prominent concern in recent social scientific research, led by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald.[1] This field of inquiry originates in the observation that much of human history involves claims that one tribe, one religion, one race, one nation, one gender, one sexual orientation, and so forth – in short, one identity – is better than another. Of course, *mine* is always better than *yours*: narcissism (love of the self) easily spills over into bigotry (hatred of the other). In highly developed nations such as the twenty-first-century United States, however, overt bigotry is declining because (in philosophical terms) we lack any sort of universal criteria by which we might evaluate the intrinsic worth of one identity over another, and (in more practical terms) prejudice and discrimination are now widely frowned upon if not railed against in public. Admittedly, the resurgence of openly racist, sexist, ableist, and classist rhetoric in the Trump era leaves us uncertain about future directions of this trend.[1] In most quarters, however, explicitly bigoted groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Westborough Baptist Church are seen as fringe movements full of loonies. Thus, in the United States today, the problems of prejudice and discrimination are largely unspoken; they are to be found in the way American society is structured and operates. Women make less money than men who do the same jobs. Black men get longer prison sentences than white men who commit the same crimes. Why do these social injustices persist? It's not because of a widespread belief in the superiority of men over women and whites over blacks, as was once the case. Instead, that history of prejudice and discrimination, even though it has been widely disavowed, has resulted in the social empowerment of men and whites over women and blacks. Those in power, even if they abhor bigotry, hold unconscious biases in favor of their own, resulting in a tension, Banaji and Greenwald write, "between our intentions and ideals, on one hand, and our behavior and actions, on the other."[1] Structural inequality engenders unconscious bias, and in turn unconscious bias fosters structural inequality.

Attending to a comparable gap in Shakespeare's text, this essay argues that *Hamlet* is not misogynistic in the sense that it promotes the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In fact, *Hamlet* critiques misogyny and patriarchy by configuring them with tragedy, yet the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* still held an unconscious bias against women. In other words, *Hamlet* exhibits a structural sexism that is different from and more difficult to discern than the overt sexism of misogyny and patriarchy. *Hamlet* is therefore a powerful literary example of the way that, even when someone is trying to be ethically progressive on gender issues, unconscious bias can remain.

A full introduction from a research paper.

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The Q&A

This is the gold standard for structuring an introduction. Use it when your essay is built around analyzing a single text or topic.

Section 1: The Question
- *Orientation*
- *Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$

Section 2: The Literature Review
- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Section 3: The Answer
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Notes:
- Create a section break after the first paragraph.
- Your literature review may need to be more than one paragraph.
- After the end of the introduction, create a section break, and start the body of the essay.

Into the Essay

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

For a dramatic work, Shakespeare's Hamlet has made a remarkable splash in Western philosophy. As detailed in Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster's *Stay, Illusion!: The Hamlet Doctrine* (2013) and Andrew Cutrofello's *All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity* (2014), the play has inspired reflection from major philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Derrida, and the play prompts philosophical introspection and conversation in us every time we read or see it. We are thus highly attuned to Hamlet's place in philosophy, but what is the status of philosophy in Hamlet? That is the question of this essay.

The definition of philosophy here will be somewhat wiggly because the definition of philosophy in Shakespeare's texts is vague and inconsistent. Sometimes it refers to metaphysical philosophy (about being-qua-being), sometimes to natural philosophy (what we now call science), sometimes to ethical philosophy (about virtuous action), and sometimes to any high-minded thought at all. There are two instances of the word "philosophy" in *Hamlet* (1.5.169 and 2.2.368), both toying with the line between natural and metaphysical philosophy, but many more passages sound vaguely philosophical, such as those containing the lines: "I know not 'seems'" (1.2.76–86); "To thine own self be true" (1.3.58–81); "The dram of evil" (Appendix B); "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.251–52); "A king of infinite space" (2.2.256–57); "What a piece of work is a man" (2.2.305–10); "Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own" (3.2.202–04); "May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?" (3.3.36–72); "Use almost can change the stamp of nature" (Appendix G); "What is a man" (Appendix J.24– 26); "We know what we are, but not what we may be" (4.5.42–43); "Alas, poor Yorick" (5.1.180–90); "There's a divinity that shapes our ends" (5.2.8–11); "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.165–68); and – of course – "To be, or not to be" (3.1.57–91), which is probably the most famous line in the most famous passage in the most famous play by the most famous artist in Western history.

. . .

This passage is so famous that the Shakespearean scholar Douglas Bruster recently wrote an entire book about just this one soliloquy, looking at its imagery, structure and meaning, but also at its "philosophical force" (31), its "philosophical insight" (31) and its "chilling philosophy" (102). Bruster concluded that the soliloquy is not about suicide, as many modern readers, such as John Dover Wilson, believe it to be ("a like expression of utter weariness is not to be found in the rest of human literature" [127]). On the contrary, Bruster argued (channelling Schlegel, Coleridge and Shel- ley) the speech "mocks human achievement and ability" insofar as Hamlet is trying to be philosophical but Shakespeare was critiquing him for, in Bruster's words, "thinking too much" (103). I do not want to wag my finger too harshly at Bruster because his book, published in the Shakespeare Now series, was written for a general audience, yet he did that audience a disservice when he presented Hamlet as a failed philosopher being mocked by Shakespeare. He did that audience an even greater disservice when, in an entire book about the "To be, or not to be" speech, he did not take seriously the dramatic context of the speech that, as Bruster knows, radically changes the meaning of its "chilling philosophy".

A full introduction in the Q&A model.

Consider when Hamlet cowers at the finality of death, of the afterlife, of "The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (3.1.81–82). This line is acutely problematic – as one of Shakespeare's earliest editors, Lewis Theobald (8.165), first noted in 1733 – because Hamlet has recently seen his father's ghost return from the grave. Has Hamlet "in a moment of deep despon- dency" forgotten about his father's ghost and his final words, "Remember me" (1.5.91), after just two short months (this was Dover Wilson's reading [74])? That is unlikely because Hamlet's whole world has revolved around the ghost's appearance for that entire time. Perhaps Hamlet is now convinced, as both he and Horatio have considered, that the spirit was not his father's ghost after all but a "goblin" (1.4.21) or a "devil" (2.2.601). This solution is also unlikely, because the scene prior to "To be, or not to be" concludes with Hamlet stating that he does not know what the spirit was and that he is going to stage "The Mousetrap" to determine the truth of the spirit's charge against his uncle (2.2.590–607). Maybe there is no contradiction here at all because King Hamlet's spirit is returning from purgatory, which is only halfway to "the undiscovered country", and travellers can come back from there (this was Theobald's answer; his account of the theology involved was as water-tight as it was newly invented for this specific case). Maybe, technically speaking, King Hamlet didn't return (only his spirit returned), so there is again no contradiction. Or maybe it wasn't Hamlet but Shakespeare who forgot about King Hamlet's ghost. Maybe, while in the throes of writing what would become the most famous passage in his most famous play, Shakespeare forgot about or, even more radically, just ignored the plot of Hamlet in order to write a poetic speech that could be plucked from the play and stand alone as a poignant philosophical statement on human suffering.

Or maybe Hamlet doesn't mean what he says. This suggestion has the virtue of retaining the unity and coherence of Hamlet, even within the scene in question. For shortly after Hamlet's famous soli- loquy, he turns to Ophelia, who has been standing off to the side, and asks, "Are you honest?" (3.1.105), and then moments later, "Where's your father?" (3.1.132). In this scene, Ophelia is indeed acting as her father's agent: Polonius has sent her to see if Hamlet is really mad. As Hamlet's ques- tions to Ophelia indicate, he knows that she is working for Polonius and that he is being watched. "Are you honest?" No. "Where's your father?" Behind the curtain. But when does Hamlet know that he is being watched? In most productions, Hamlet hears Claudius and Polonius shuffle or sneeze behind the curtain while he is speaking with Ophelia, then becomes suspicious, and then starts berating her. However, Shakespeare's text does not require this reading. In fact, the quarto editions of Hamlet all place the stage direction "Enter Hamlet" before Claudius and Polonius hide, and there is no stage direction indicating that those two exit the scene. It was only in the later folio edition that there is an "Exeunt" for Claudius and Polonius followed by "Enter Hamlet", the arrangement adopted by most modern editions. It is at least possible that Hamlet sees and is aware of Claudius,

Polonius and Ophelia. It is possible that Shakespeare intended for Hamlet to deliver his "To be, or not to be" speech knowing that he was being watched. If so, then "To be, or not to be" may not be the profoundly philosophical moment it has been taken to be by centuries of readers. It may be, instead, what someone says when he wants others to think he is crazy.

. . .

The idea that Hamlet knows he is being watched has been most forcefully illustrated by the Shakes- pearean scholar James Hirsh. He has argued on several occasions that "substantial, conspicuous, and varied pieces of evidence demonstrate that Shakespeare designed the 'To be, or not to be' speech to be perceived by experienced playgoers of his time as a feigned soliloquy" ("The 'To be, or not to be' Speech", 34). Hirsh's evidence –

which is convincing – goes beyond a close reading of the scene and its context in Hamlet to include additional Shakespearean examples of feigned soliloquies (such as Edmund's "O, these eclipses do portend these divisions" in King Lear [1.2.131–32]), overheard soliloquies (such as Juliet's "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" in Romeo and Juliet [2.1.75]), and eavesdroppers being deceived and eavesdropped upon (such as Benedick in Much Ado and Malvolio in Twelfth Night). Hirsh also points to two non-Shakespearean feigned soliloquies which allude specifically to "To be, or not to be": La Fin's in Chapman's The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron (3.1) and Orgilus's in Ford's The Broken Heart (1.3). And Hirsh narrates the historical shift from Renaissance drama, where soliloquies were understood as words spoken out loud by a character, to modern drama, which reconceived soliloquies as a character's innermost thoughts only expressed in words for the benefit of the audience. At one point Hirsh exclaims, with exasper- ation, that seeing "To be, or not to be" as a glimpse into Hamlet's mind because that is how it is usually played in modern performances is like believing that Ophelia was played by a woman in the Elizabethan theatre because that is how she is usually played today. And Hirsh dismantles, with palpable frustration, the argumentative gymnastics that editors (Harold Jenkins, Burton Raffel and Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor), critics (S.T. Coleridge, E.E. Stoll and Robert Speaight) and actors (Henry Irving) have proposed in an attempt to erase the problems presented by "To be, or not to be" and to salvage the sincerity and philosophical power of the soliloquy.

In the acknowledgments for his To Be or Not To Be book, Bruster wrote that he "benefitted" from Hirsh's studies (105), but clearly Bruster was not convinced. Consider Bruster's chapter titled "The Speech in Context", which addresses the basis of Hirsh's argument. "The presence of a perceived audience onstage would change our sense (as well as Hamlet's) of the direction and function of his words", Bruster wrote, before turning to wilful ignorance in a surprising way: "It may be permiss- ible to think that the soliloquy has enough thought in and around it – prompts so much thinking and interpretation on its own – that we are allowed, with Hamlet, momentarily to forget that he may be overheard at his most intimate moment" (74–75). Impressionistic aesthetic judgement does not strike me as solid ground for selective forgetfulness.

Our situation at present, therefore, is that Bruster's philosophically oriented interpretation hastily dismisses the dramatic context of "To be, or not to be", while Hirsh's contextually oriented interpret- ation does not consider an important implication of that reading, specifically what it says about Shakespeare's attitude toward the kind of philosophical introspection represented in the "To be, or not to be" speech. In an effort to mend this gap, this essay is a philosophically oriented reading of "To be, or not to be" which takes seriously the dramatic context of the speech. I ask why, if Hamlet knows he is being watched, Shakespeare would choose philosophy as the language Hamlet uses to feign mad- ness. What was Shakespeare saying about philosophy?

. . .

I address this question by attending to the differences between philosophy and drama. On the most basic level, philosophy is about knowing while drama is about doing: these words come from the Greek σοφία, "wisdom", and δρᾶν, "to do". More specifically, the start of Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be, or not to be", invokes the form of philosophy called ontology, derived from the Greek ὀντο-, "being". Ontology is, in Martin Heidegger's definition, "that theoretical inquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities" (Being and Time 32): the study of being-qua-being. Incidently, the word ontology (or rather, ontologia) was coined by Shakespeare's German contemporary Jacob Lorhard in 1606, just a few years after Hamlet was first staged. Lorhard used the term ontology interchange- ably with the term metaphysics, and Shakespeare would have thought about the concerns of ontology in terms of Aristotlean metaphysics, the study of first and supreme causes and principles, supernatural and supersensible substance and

structure, that which does not change, which remains true in all times in all places. Metaphysics was set off against both natural philosophy, with its theoretical attention to sublunary matters, and ethical philosophy, with its practical concern for virtuous action. With these distinctions in mind, we can note that what Critchley and Webster called Hamlet's "ontological question" (11) is really an ethical question veiled in the language of ontology, as registered in Heidegger's retort to Hamlet: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question" (Introduction to Metaphysics 1). Thus, Hamlet's soliloquy invokes both metaphysical philosophy (in its language of "being") and ethical philosophy (in its concern with "action").

Like ethics, drama is about action, but drama is also about acting. Hamlet draws much of its energy from the tension between the ethical action the protagonist wants to take and the theatrical acting he does instead. As James Calderwood emphasised in his reading of Hamlet, drama allows an actor "to be and not to be" a character; a play operates simultaneously as dramatic illusion and theatrical reality in ways quite foreign to the quest for the fundamental nature of reality in metaphysics. Thus, the basic dramatic phenomenon of acting has historically been a spur in the side of philosophy, going back to Plato, as Jonas Barish discussed in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*: "The key terms are those of order, stability, constancy, and integrity, as against a more existentialist emphasis that prizes growth, process, exploration, flexibility, variety and versatility of response. In one case we seem to have an ideal of stasis, in the other an ideal of movement" (117). Philosophy and drama are by no means antithetical, but the "ideal of stasis" in metaphysics and the "ideal of movement" in drama generate "fundamentally different types of endeavour" with different assumptions and motives, as Martin Puchner argued when unpacking "the anti-theatrical prejudice in philosophy and the anti-philosophical prejudice in theatre" (541).

I want to suggest that Shakespeare did not care about the questions of metaphysical philosophy, and that he satirised metaphysics in Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" speech because he thought acting was more important than being. That is, Shakespeare valued human action and interaction, including the social roles we perform like actors playing characters on a stage, over abstract knowledge about existence generated through theoretical reasoning. Stated as such, this thesis is perhaps obvious but, if it can be shown to underwrite Shakespeare's composition of Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, then the popularity of that passage seems to rest upon a fundamental misreading. While it seems to be a suffering man's account of the battle between action and contemplation, and thus Shakespeare's representation of tragic angst, a consideration of the dramatic context of the speech reveals that "To be, or not to be" is actually Shakespeare's representation of the theatricality of everyday life. "To be, or not to be" is a clever deception the cleverness of which can be measured by how often it is taken as profound philosophy. If so, then a close reading of this passage might help us locate Shakespeare in the history of Western philosophy, as I attempt to do toward the end of this essay.

To be clear, I am not searching here for the philosophy "behind" Shakespeare's plays. Nor am I looking at appropriations of Shakespeare in modern philosophy. Nor am I trying to use modern philosophy to read Shakespeare. These approaches are quite lively in Shakespeare studies at the moment, but I am instead interested in revisiting an older question asked by Sidney Lee in 1899 and by Rolf Soellner in 1962: What was Shakespeare's attitude toward philosophy? At the same time, just as the Shakespeare described in this essay used philosophy to do drama, I am interested in the possibility of using Shakespeare to do philosophy – specifically, to philosophise about philosophy.

From **What Shakespeare Says about Sending Our Children Off to College**

Every fall, millions of parents send millions of children off to college for the first time and must find something ceremonious to say to the sons and daughters we've been able to mold, mentor, guide, and save (from themselves) as they step out of our control into a world that—frankly—they don't understand, couldn't possibly understand.

William Shakespeare wrote a scene about this event. It comes in his most famous play, *Hamlet*, and has one of his most quoted lines: "To thine own self be true." This line has inspired countless valedictorian addresses. Films such as *The Last Days of Disco* and *Clueless* riff on it. People tattoo it on their bodies. A friend of mine went to a school where students were asked to sign every letter with their names and "To thine own self be true," even though none of them knew where the line was from or what it meant.

Indeed, what does "To thine own self be true" actually mean? *Be yourself? Don't change who you are? Follow your own convictions? Don't lie to yourself?* Determining the meaning of this line—and thus Shakespeare's advice for young men and women on their way to college— depends to some extent upon the meaning of "self," the meaning of "true," and perhaps even the meaning of "meaning."

Grammatically speaking, the word *self* usually appears as part of a reflexive pronoun ("myself," "yourself"), but it has emerged as a noun ("the self") because it does useful psychological work. What is "the self"? What is it that you are true to when you are "true to yourself"? A "self" usually refers to who a person *really* is, an internal condition or reality that might be hidden behind the exterior or visible aspects of a person. *The self* is a term that—like *soul*, *mind*, *spirit*, and *nature* —refers to someone's essence, to what someone really is as opposed to what someone only appears to be.

Like *self*, the word *true* has several senses. A person can be true, as in faithful, in contrast to being disloyal. Or true, as in honest, in contrast to being deceitful. Or true as opposed to false; a thing can be actual and real, not imaginary, counterfeit, or only apparent. As such, we can ask, one should be true to oneself as opposed to being what? "Disloyal" to oneself? "Dishonest" to oneself? "False" to oneself?

There is also the pragmatic question: *How does one go about being true to oneself?* And the ethical question: *Should one be true to oneself?* But I want to remain with the semantic question that is both more basic and more difficult: *What does "To thine own self be true" mean?*

To answer this question, we must consider the metaquestion posed earlier, *What is the meaning of "meaning"?* What do we mean when we ask, *What is the meaning of "To thine own self be true"?* Meaning usually relates to the significance or sense of something and is often understood as intent. Thus, our question can be restated as, *What was Shakespeare's intent when he wrote, "To thine own self be true"?* What was he trying to accomplish? What were his goals? What did he intend to communicate? What did he want us to understand when we heard, "To thine own self be true"?

If we understand meaning as intent, then "To thine own self be true" means, paradoxically, that "the self" does not exist. Or, more accurately, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* implies that "the self" exists only as a rhetorical, philosophical, and psychological construct that we use to make sense of our experiences and actions in the world, not as anything real. If this is so, then this passage may offer us a way of thinking about Shakespeare as not just a playwright but also a moral philosopher, one who did his ethics in drama.

A Q&A introduction without the research component—i.e., without a literature review.

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The Surface Reading / Closer Reading

This is a good structure when there's a commonly accepted interpretation that you're going to oppose/complicate/develop or when you don't have any fancy methodology (it's just a straightforward close reading).

Section 1: The Literature Review

- *Orientation*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem$_2$*

Section 2: The Closer Reading

- *Question/Problem$_1$*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Notes:

- Here the *Question/Problem$_2$* is simply that previous critics haven't satisfactorily answered your *Question/Problem$_1$*
- After the end of the introduction, create a section break, and start the body of the essay.

Into the Essay

From **The Working Class in *Hamlet***

Claustrophobically cloistered inside the castle of Elsinore, quaintly angsty over royal family problems, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* feels like the literary epitome of elitism. "Lawless resolutes" (1.2) is how the Wittenberg scholar Horatio describes the soldiers who join Fortinbras's army in exchange "for food" (1.2). Hand-of-the-king Polonius tarnishes his son's reputation by spreading rumors that Laertes visits sex workers (1.3). Hamlet derides himself as a "whore" because he talks too much (2.1). The Prince who never worked a day in his life denigrates Polonius as a "fishmonger" (2.2): quite the insult for a royal advisor to be called a working man. The royals repeatedly use "beggars" as metaphors for badness: not the most magnanimous gesture from rich folks. Hamlet spurns both himself and Claudius as "slave[s]" (2.2): working people are ready-made metaphors for insufficiency. And King Claudius complains of the simplicity of "the distracted multitude, / Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes" (4.3). How would this classism have played to the groundlings in Shakespeare's earliest audiences? How should it be understood in light of Shakespeare's own working-class background? What does *Hamlet* tell us about Shakespeare's views on class?

Those who take the central theme of *Hamlet* to be the tension voiced in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy—between "action" and "contemplation" (3.1)—are missing the third term in Aristotle's taxonomy of human behavior. He said there's *doing*, *knowing*, and *making*. We see *knowing* in Hamlet's struggle to confirm the Ghost's claim that Claudius killed King Hamlet and *doing* in Hamlet's efforts to act on that knowledge, but the *making* in *Hamlet* is harder to find. The place of craft and creativity in *Hamlet* becomes more evident when considered in light of the Rude Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the technical trade workers who are also theater-makers.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare juxtaposed the nobles' denigrations of the working class as readily available metaphors for all-things-awful with the rather valuable behavior of working-class characters themselves. When allowed to represent themselves, the working class in *Hamlet* are characterized as makers of things—of material goods and services like ships, graves, and plays, but also of ethical and political virtues like security, education, justice, and democracy.

An introduction in the Surface Reading / Closer Reading model (with no literature review).

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The New Phenomenon

Use this structure when the text(s) and/or topic you're addressing is so new that there hasn't been any scholarly work on it yet.

Paragraph 1: Question/Problem Statement
- *Orientation*
- *Textual Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem$_1$*

Paragraphs 2-?: The Literature Review
- *Text*
- *Historical Evidence*
- *Historical Scholarship*
- *Question/Problem$_2$*

Paragraph 3: The Thesis Statement
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Notes:
- Your first paragraph should identify the *text(s)* you're looking at and the *question(s)/problem(s)* you're addressing.
- Create a section break after the first paragraph.
- Since there hasn't been any scholarship on your *text(s)*, your literature review should address the tradition your topic grows out of or is the latest example of.

- In your literature review, the presentation of *Historical Evidence* (the tradition your *text* grows out of) and *Historical Scholarship* (scholars interpreting that tradition) should be interwoven.
- Structure the literature review chronologically based on the *Historical Evidence*, peppering in *Historical Scholarship* as relevant.
- It's likely that this literature review will be longer than one paragraph, since there's so much content to cover. Treat it like a body section.
- Your *Question/Problem$_2$* should address how this new phenomenon you're addressing is different or may alter the conversations scholars are having about this tradition.
- After the end of the introduction, create a section break, and start the body of the essay.

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The Abstract

This is a good introduction for when you're using lots of quantitative analysis (data, statistics, charts, etc.), or when adopting a scientific rather than humanistic voice.

Paragraph 1: Argument Statement
- *Text*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$
- *Critical Scholarship(s)*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$
- *Method*
- *Thesis*

Paragraph 2: The Roadmap
- *Structure*
- *Stakes*

Notes:
- For this introduction, write one sentence per Element, except…
  - Maybe two sentences for the *Thesis*.
  - Maybe two-to-four sentences for the *Structure*.
- In the Roadmap, provide a very brief overview of the sections in the paper to come.
- After the Roadmap paragraph, create a section break and start the body of the essay.
- Since there's not a full literature review in the introduction, make one of your body sections (early in the essay) a literature review.

46

The Exemplar

This structure starts with a perfect, easy-to-understand example that illustrates your argument and can be covered in one paragraph.

Paragraph 1: An Exemplar
- *Orientation*
- *Textual Evidence*
- *Analysis*

Paragraph 2: Thesis Statement
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Paragraph 3: The Literature Review
- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship(s)*
- *Question/Problem$_2$*

Notes:
- In the opening paragraph, instead of developing a *question/problem*, make a point.
- That point can then be extrapolated into your *thesis*.
- Include a section break after the Thesis Paragraph.
- Because you've already delivered your *Thesis*, your literature review should state at the beginning how your argument advances the scholarly conversation.
- After the Literature Review, create a section break and start the body of the essay.

- Because this introduction doesn't identify the driving *Question/Problem* of the essay, make the first paragraph of the body a Question/Problem Paragraph: *Orientation*, *Textual Evidence*, *Analysis*, *Question/Problem₁*

Into the Essay

From **Tragic Excess in *Hamlet***

"Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar," the aging Polonius councils his son Laertes in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1.3.60). Polonius proceeds with several additional "precepts" (1.3.57) which similarly promote the Aristotelian ideal of the golden mean, a cultural commonplace of the early-moden age which valorized the perfect middle ground between two extremes:

> Beware
> Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
> Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee....
> Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
> But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy. (1.3.64-70)

Polonius goes on (and on), but the principle is clear. Don't be too hot, but don't be too cold. Don't be too hard, but don't be too soft. Don't be too fast, but don't be too slow. In each of these formulations, there is no substantive ethical good other than moderation. Virtue is thus fundamentally relational, determined by the extent to which one is able to find the balance between two extremes which, as extremes, are definitionally unethical. "It is no mean happiness, therefore, to be seated in the mean," as Shakespeare wrote in The Merchant of Venice (1.2.6-7).

More generally in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare paralleled the situations of Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras (the father of each is killed, and each then seeks revenge) to promote the virtue of moderation: Hamlet moves too slowly, Laertes too swiftly – and they both die at the end of the play – but Fortinbras represents a golden mean which marries the slowness of Hamlet with the swiftness of Laertes. As argued in this essay, Shakespeare endorsed the virtue of balance by allowing Fortinbras to be one of the very few survivors of the play. In other words, excess is tragic in Hamlet.

. . .

The parallels between Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras have been recognized by critics at least since A.C. Bradley noted that, among the secondary characters in *Hamlet*, there are "two, Laertes and Fortinbras, who are evidently designed to throw the character of the hero into relief. Even in the situations there is a curious parallelism," Bradley continued, "for Fortinbras, like Hamlet, is the son of a king, lately dead, and succeeded by his brother; and Laertes, like Hamlet, has a father slain, and feels bound to avenge him" (90). My reading of this "dramatic triad" is something of a corrective to O.B. Hardison, Jr.'s treatment of *Hamlet* as a thinly veiled morality play, Hamlet an Everyman

placed before three competing options, Ophelia standing for suicide, Laertes standing for revenge, and Fortinbras standing for forbearance. That arrangement makes a certain bit of sense, but it runs into several problems. First, while Hardison gave examples of Shakespearean "dramatic triads" in the Hal-Falstaff-Henry IV relationship and the Prospero-Caliban-Ariel relationship, the math doesn't add up when we look at the four characters involved in the Hamlet-Laertes-Fortinbras-Ophelia relationship. It's not a "triad" at all: there's something else going on here. Second, whereas Hardison associated Fortinbras with "inaction" (158), and thus with Prince Hamlet, Shakespeare presented Fortinbras as a man of action both at the beginning and the end of the play. Third, *Hamlet* is not a moral comedy (in the vein of the Tudor morality plays that ushered their protagonists through adversity to a happy ending); the play is a tragedy in which the protagonist dies. It is, at the very least, conceptually dissonant to have Hamlet and Fortinbras both represent the space between action and inaction, and yet Hamlet dies while Fortinbras lives.

Based on this ending, I want to put Fortinbras, not Hamlet, at the center of the triad – not in the sense that Fortinbras is the main character who receives most of our attention, but in the sense that Fortinbras is the virtuous character who does the right thing. Thus, instead of asking, like Bradley, Hardison, and nearly every other critic who writes about the parallel (excepting only Margaret de Grazia's brilliant reading in *Hamlet without Hamlet*), how Fortinbras and Laertes illuminate Hamlet, I want to ask how Hamlet and Laertes illuminate Fortinbras.

An introduction in the Exemplar model.

47

The Cannonball

This introduction doesn't mess around. Your first sentence is your thesis statement. Use this approach when you know that it's going to take you multiple paragraphs to cover your *question/problem*, literature review, and/or *method*.

Paragraph 1: Thesis Statement

- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Section 2: Question/Problem Statement

- *Orientation*
- *Textual Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$

Section 3: The Literature Review

- *Text Statement*
- *Critical Scholarship(s)*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Section 4: The Method

- *Method*
- *Theoretical Scholarship(s)*
- *Terms*

Notes:

- Your first sentence is your *thesis*.

- Create a section break after the first paragraph.
- Since you immediately stated your *thesis*, you've got more space to develop the framing material in multiple paragraphs: your readers will stick with you because they know where it's all going.
- Note that Sections 2, 3, and 4 are sections not paragraphs. Each of those sections is likely to be multiple paragraphs. Those paragraphs may feel more like body paragraphs than introduction paragraphs.
- Because you've already delivered your *thesis*, your *Question/Problem* section can state at the beginning how your *argument* resolves the driving *question/problem*.
- Similarly, your Literature Review can state at the beginning how your *argument* advances the scholarly conversation.
- In your essay, create a section break between each of these four sections.

Into the Essay

From **Tragic Excess in *Hamlet***

King Hamlet is a tyrant and King Claudius a traitor but, because Shakespeare asked us to experience the events in Hamlet from the perspective of the young Prince Hamlet, we are much more inclined to detect and detest King Claudius's political failings than King Hamlet's. If so, then Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, so often seen as the birth of modern psychology, might also tell us a little bit about the beginnings of modern politics as well.

An introduction in the Cannonball model (with no literature review).

48

The Stakes First

Sometimes you want to put what's at stake at the start of the introduction rather than the end. Use this approach when you want to emphasize the *implications* of your *argument*, or when writing a presentist essay.

Paragraph 1: What's at Stake
- *Orientation* to *Stakes*
- *Evidence* for *Stakes*
- *Analysis* for *Stakes*
- *Question/Problem* for *Stakes*

Paragraphs 2-?: Literature Review for the Stakes
- *Critical Scholarship(s)*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Paragraph 3: Thesis Statement
- *Method / Text*
- *Thesis*

Paragraph 4: Question/Problem
- *Orientation*
- *Textual Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$

Paragraph 5: Literature Review for the Text
- *Critical Scholarship(s)*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Notes:

- Start by laying out the *question/problem* that your *thesis* is the answer to: not the *question/problem* in your *text* that needs interpretation, but a bigger-picture *question/problem*. That's *what's at stake* in this essay.
- That topic just introduced in the first paragraph then receives a literature review in the second: what previous scholarship has been done on that big-picture topic?
- Note that this introduction will have two literature reviews—one for the level of the *stakes*, and one for the level of the *text*.
- The key moment is the *method / text* sentence at the start of Paragraph 3. This is where you explain that the *question/problem* for the *stakes* can be resolved by turning to your *text* and *argument*.
- Then deliver your *thesis*.
- Create a section break after your *thesis*.
- Next, establish your *question/problem*$_1$ (why your *text* needs interpretation), since you haven't yet done that.
- Now provide a Literature Review of previous scholarship related to that *question/problem*$_1$.
- Then create a section break and begin the body of the essay.

Into the Essay

From **Tragic Excess in *Hamlet***

Did Ophelia go to the water, or did the water come to her? That is the question asked in a scene in Shakespeare's Hamlet usually played for laughs – the clownish, malapropistic gravediggers debating what is and is not suicide: "Here lies the water – good. Here stands the man – good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life." What's at stake for the gravediggers is the legitimacy of Ophelia's funeral. Since Christian doctrine prohibited suicide, someone killing herself was not allowed a Christian burial. What's at stake for us in the audience is the understanding of a concept that is central to the play Hamlet: moral agency. To what extent are we as individuals responsible for the things we do, and to what extent does circumstance determine our actions? Did Hamlet go to death, or did death come to Hamlet? Did Denmark go to its downfall, or did downfall come to Denmark? Are catastrophes in tragedies the result of the conscious choices of characters (a view in keeping with Aristotle's notion of hamartia), or do catastrophes come about "will he, nill he" with a turn of Fortune's wheel (a view of tragedy reminiscent of the medieval de casibus tradition)?

I think Shakespeare answered the question of Ophelia's moral agency in an unexpected way: through the imagery of music in Hamlet, including the songs she sings just before her death.

An introduction in the Stakes First model (with no literature review).

49

The Comparative Essay

Use this structure when using some shared feature of two texts to discuss some larger similarity or difference in context.

Paragraph 1: The Situation

- *Orientation* to *Text* 1
- *Orientation* to Context 1
- *Orientation* to Context 2
- *Orientation* to *Text* 2

Paragraph 2: The Question

- *Evidence* from *Text* 1
- *Evidence* from *Text* 2
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$

Paragraph 3: The Literature Review

- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Paragraph 4: Thesis Statement

- *Method*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*

Notes:

- Create a section break after the second paragraph, and another after the *thesis*.
- A comparative essay usually gives equal weight to both texts.
- In the body of the essay, don't jump back and forth between your two texts in a single paragraph. Introducing new *evidence* and new *analysis* from two different *texts* all at once is too disorienting for your reader.
- Instead, cover your first *text* in full in a large section; then shift over to cover your second *text* in full in its own large section. That second large section can and should refer back to the *analyses* you did earlier.

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The Lens Essay

This is the structure for when you want to use one source (usually philosophical or theoretical) to explain what's going on in another *text* (usually historical or artistic).

Paragraph 1: The Question

- *Orientation* Related to Target *Text*
- *Evidence* Related to Target *Text*
- *Analysis* Related to Target *Text*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$ Related to Target *Text*

Paragraph 2: The Literature Review

- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Paragraph 3: The Lens

- *Method*
- *Theoretical Scholarship*
- *Terms*

Paragraph 4: The Thesis

- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Notes:

- You can think of one of your main *texts* as the "target text"—the thing being interpreted—and the other as a "helper text" that's allowing you to do your interpretation.
- In all likelihood, the two *texts* involved in the essay will not receive equal weight. The target *text* will receive more attention, the helper source less.
- Create a section break after the first paragraph, and another after the *thesis* paragraph.
- If it will take you more than one paragraph to provide an overview of your "helper text," shift that material down to the start of the body of the essay. Still give a sentence or two to your *method* in the introduction, but then go straight into your *thesis*, saving the full summary of your "helper text" for the body.
- In the body of the essay, as you unpack your "target *text*," you can and should return to specific ideas and quotations from your "helper text" to enhance your *analysis*.

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The Test-a-Theory Essay

Take this approach when you want to use a new example or data set to challenge an older, established theory—when you want to develop a new, better theory.

Paragraph 1: The Prevailing Theory
- *Orientation* Related to the Theory
- *Evidence* Related to the Theory
- *Analysis* Related to the Theory
- *Question/Problem* Related to the Theory

Paragraph 2: The Literature Review
- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem$_2$*

Paragraph 3: The New Data Set
- *Method*
- *Orientation* to the Data Set

Paragraph 4: The New Theory
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Notes:
- If you fully endorse the theory at hand, don't write a Test-a-Theory Essay; write a Lens Essay that uses that theory to unpack evidence.

- A Test-a-Theory Essay is for when you want to challenge an idea and develop a better one.

Into the Essay

From **Tragic Excess in *Hamlet***

This essay reads Alain Badiou's theory of foundationalism in conversation with William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Doing so reveals a new candidate for Hamlet's traditionally hard-to-define hamartia—his "tragic mistake"—while suggesting that foundationalism is hamartia. So Badiou clarifies Hamlet, while Hamlet's hamartia, and the genre of tragedy invoked, helps further develop Badiou's theory. Badiou addresses the origin and operation of foundationalism—how and why we affirm one single belief as an unshakeable truth grounding other questions like What is real? and What should I do?—but Hamlet suggests an ethical turn. Foundationalism is perilous in the play, prompting the concept of tragic foundation- alism: the decision to affirm one single idea as the basis of all knowledge and experi- ence involves ignorance and confusion and can lead to catastrophe.

My goal is not just to re-read a famous literary text, and not just to re-think a promi- nent philosopher; it is to re-theorize a philosophical concept through a Shakespearean intervention. Beyond the specifics of my argument about tragic foundationalism, I hope to uphold a kind of criticism where literature is not merely the recipient of philosophical ideas in the service of exegesis. Instead, the creative risks of literature provide exemplars to be theorized outward to help us understand on-going issues in life today. Beyond an occasion for the demonstration of existing theory, literature is a source for the creation of new theory.

An introduction in the Test-a-Theory model (with no literature review).

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The Historicist Essay

This is a good approach if contextualizing a *text* in the circumstances that produced it will reveal a new understanding not available when simply looking at that *text* in isolation.

Paragraph 1: The Question
- *Orientation* Related to Target *Text*
- *Evidence* Related to Target *Text*
- *Analysis* Related to Target *Text*
- *Question/Problem*$_1$ Related to Target *Text*

Paragraph 2: The Literature Review
- *Text*
- *Critical Scholarship*
- *Analysis*
- *Question/Problem*$_2$

Paragraph 3: The Context
- *Method*
- *Orientation* to Historical *Text(s)*
- *Terms*

Paragraph 4: The Answer
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Notes:

- Be sure to identify your "target *text*"—the thing being interpreted—and the "helper *text(s)*" being used to enhance your interpretation.

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Bodies

The key Elements of Academic Writing associated with the body of an essay are:

- *Assertion:* A claim that has not yet been substantiated with evidence. The collection of an author's assertions should logically produce his or her *argument*.
- *Evidence:* The information—facts, examples, quotations, details, experiments, data, statistics—presented in support of an assertion. There are three kinds of evidence: textual, historical, and citational.
  - *Textual Evidence:* Facts, examples, details, quotes, etc. drawn from the text, often followed by analysis.
  - *Historical Evidence:* Quotations and examples drawn from things that occurred prior to or roughly contemporaneously with the composition of the text. Like textual evidence, historical evidence is often followed by analysis.
  - *Scholarly Evidence:* The writers referred to by the author of an interpretation in order to aid his or her argument. There are three kinds of Scholarly Evidence: critical, historical, and theoretical.
    - *Critical Scholarship:* A reference to another writer who has interpreted the same *text* as the *author*; such writers will often be marshaled to support an *analysis* or *argument* or used as a *counter* that the author responds to.
    - *Historical Scholarship:* A reference to a writer who has interpreted the historical evidence relevant to the composition of a text. This group is often raised to

demonstrate how a text is either paradigmatic or anomalous for its time.
    - *Theoretical Scholarship:* A reference to a writer whose ideas (often abstract or philosophical) are relevant to the interpretation of a *text*, even though that writer doesn't directly discuss this particular text or its historical context.
- *Analysis:* The interpretation of *evidence*, whether it's *textual*, *historical*, or *citational*.
- *Counter/Response:* Alternate *evidence*, *analysis*, or *argument* (real or imagined) that an author must account for.

Go Chronologically

Tell a story from start to finish. That's the most important thing to remember for the body of the essay.

There are exceptions—if, for example, you're working with quantitative statistics. But the key to structuring the body of an essay is to figure out what story you're trying to tell: what comes first, who did what, what are the key moments in this story, how does one event lead to another, etc.

Allow your *text(s)* to do your organization for you. If you are making an argument about history, allow the chronological sequence of events to structure your presentation. If you are advancing some abstract theory, work sequentially through your logic, from start to finish. If you are close reading a work of literature, move sequentially through that *text*, unless there is some significant benefit to a different organization.

The story you're telling in the body of your essay should have a beginning, middle, and end.

Don't repeat yourself. If you said something in the introduction, don't say it again in the body of the essay. Repetition is a sign that you need to restructure. (If you write something like, "As noted earlier…" that's a sign that you need to restructure.)

The structure of the body depends upon the structure you've chosen for your introduction. Most especially, some introductions don't include the driving *question/problem* of the essay, so it's important to put that at the start of the body.

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Assertions

Body paragraphs are like rocket ships: they need to be launched with a blast of fire.

An *assertion* is the thesis statement for a paragraph or section.

Every body paragraph should begin with an *assertion*.

Don't write "topic sentences"; write *assertions.* A topic sentence identifies the topic to be discussed in a paragraph, but readers don't want to know the topic under consideration: they want to know your claim about that topic. Don't just give a topic; give an *assertion* about that topic.

If each body paragraph has an *assertion* that can be thought of as the thesis statement of that paragraph, each body paragraph also has a *question/problem* that it's responding to (i.e., a reason that it needs to exist), just as every paper has a *question/problem* that it's responding to. You can start a body paragraph by asking a *question/problem* instead of making an *assertion*. If you do, just be sure that the next sentence is an *assertion* that answers the question.

Posing a *question/problem* is often an effective way to transition from one section of the body to another. At the end of the previous section, you summarized your *analyses* up to that point; now, at the start of a new section, you pose a *question/problem* that segues from that previous part of your *argument* to the next part.

When writing a paragraph, you should know and be able to tell someone in about five to ten words what the point of the paragraph is. Make sure that

point is clearly expressed, usually in the first sentence of the paragraph (i.e. the *assertion*).

Think of your *argument* as a pyramid: your *argument* rests upon your *assertions*, your *assertions* rest upon your *analyses*, and your *analyses* rest upon your *evidence*.

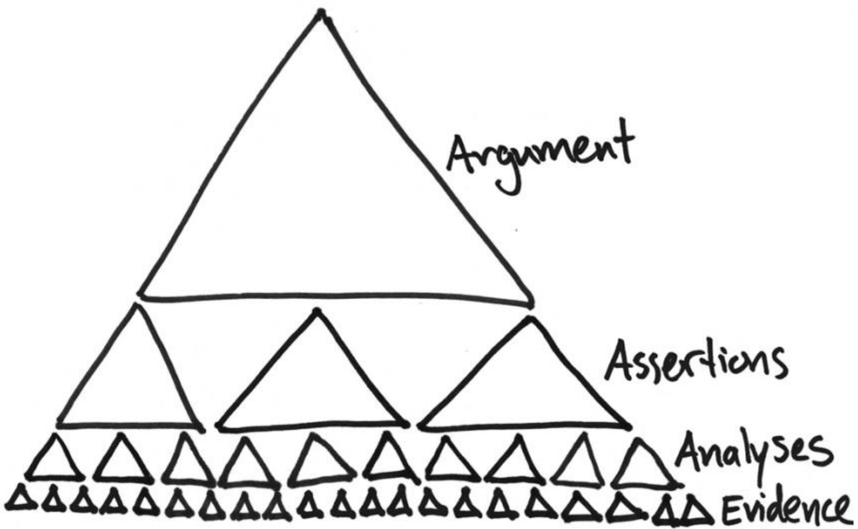

Figure 6: The Pyramid of Argumentation

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Assertions

Section 1: Shakespeare's play includes traces—only hints that must be imaginatively fleshed out—of Polonius's possible prehistories.

Paragraph 1.1: His name points to Poland, one of Denmark's foreign enemies, a quality highlighted by the change of the character's name in the first quarto, Corimbus.

Paragraph 1.1: Perhaps Polonius is an immigrant from Poland.

Paragraph 1.2: Or Polonius could be an agnomen, like "Coriolanus," an honorary name bestowed upon him for his military service.

Paragraph 1.3: The only clear bit of backstory that Shakespeare gives about Polonius is that he was an actor at university.

Paragraph 1.4: When and how Polonius met his wife, Ophelia and Laertes's mother, is unclear, but she seems to have died.

Paragraph 1.5: Perhaps a grieving Polonius threw himself into his job, climbing the ranks of King Hamlet's council to become a leading advisor to Denmark's royal family.

Section 2: The hints of Polonius's prehistory provides context for the scenes where we actually meet the man.

Paragraph 2.1: I read Polonius's verbosity as dad jokes.

Paragraph 2.2: Any father would struggle sending a son with a penchant for youthful rebellion off to college in another country.

Paragraph 2.3: Frankly, as a father, I don't know what I would do if I heard the heir to the crown in my country had declared he was deeply in love with my daughter: that's a very challenging parenting situation, to say the least.

Paragraph 2.4: Let's hope most fathers wouldn't, like Polonius, put their job ahead of the well-being of their daughter, although we sadly see that situation all the time.

Paragraph 2.5: Ultimately, Polonius gives his life for his job: he comes out of hiding to protect the queen, and becomes a victim of murder by and unhinged aristocrat who then callously plays games with the dead body.

Paragraph 2.6: Polonius's death breaks his children.

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Body Sections

A body paragraph should address one idea. If a paragraph addresses more than one idea, it should be split into two paragraphs—effectively becoming a section with two or maybe more paragraphs.

When organizing a section, start the first paragraph with the *assertion* that states the point of that section, and then include a second sentence that offers the *assertion* for the current paragraph. The second paragraph of that section should begin with an *assertion* about the *evidence* analyzed in that paragraph and—if necessary—a third paragraph with an *assertion* about the *evidence* analyzed in that paragraph, and so on.

The operative unit of the body of a paper is the point, as in the point you're making, which operates on three different levels: the point of a sentence, the point of a paragraph, and the point of a section. Each level—section, paragraph, sentence—should have a single point. For each section, paragraph, and sentence you write, ask yourself, "What's the point?"

Body Paragraphs

Just as every paper has an introduction, body, and conclusion, every body paragraph has an introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction is called an *assertion*, the body is called *evidence*, and the conclusion is called *analysis*.

Every body paragraph is different, yet every body paragraph is the same. The content of a body paragraph (the information that you present and discuss) is infinite, yet the form of a body paragraph is fairly standard. That's because

every body paragraph works in roughly the same way: make an *assertion*, give the *evidence* that supports that *assertion*, provide *analysis* of how that *evidence* supports that *assertion*, and provide *analysis* of how that *assertion* supports your *argument*.

In theory, therefore, the logic of a paragraph is as follows:

Assertion: Make a claim.
- *Evidence*: Present the evidence that supports your assertion.
- *Analysis$_1$*: Explain how your evidence supports your assertion.
- *Analysis$_2$*: Explain how your assertion plays a part in your argument.

In practice, a paragraph will rarely, if ever, work this cleanly. If you wrote a series of paragraphs each rigidly following the above structure, your paper would feel very mechanical. Moreover, there are different kinds of *evidence*. There is *textual evidence*, which consists of examples, facts, statistics, etc. There is *historical evidence*, which offers context. And there is *Scholarly Evidence*, which itself has three kinds: *critical*, *historical*, and *theoretical*.

In practice, therefore, a body paragraph is more likely to look something like this (with each bullet point representing a sentence):

Assertion: Make a claim.
- *Orientation*: Provide framing/background for the evidence you're about to present.
- *Evidence*: Present the evidence that supports your assertion (maybe quotation).
- *Evidence*: Present some more evidence (maybe summary).
- *Analysis$_1$*: Explain how your evidence supports your assertion.
- *Evidence*: Present some more evidence (maybe quantitative).
- *Analysis$_2$*: Explain how your assertion plays a part in your argument.

Furthermore, there are some different strategies you can use to move from evidence to analysis, such as asking questions and offering counters.

First, you can pose a *question/problem* about the *evidence* just provided and then follow that it with *analysis*.

Second, you can provide a *counter* showing that you've considered the *evidence* at hand in depth as you move toward your *analysis* (i.e., the best interpretation in your view).

Third, it can be effective to use a *question/problem* or *counter* to shift from one paragraph or section to the next.

As paragraphs start to function as parts of sections, you will find that sections of your paper start to look more complicated, as in the following example:

Assertion for Section 1
- Assertion for Paragraph 1.1
  - Evidence
  - Analysis_1
- Assertion for Paragraph 1.2
  - Evidence
  - Analysis_1
  - Analysis_2

Kinds of Body Sections

There are an infinite number of things you can do in the body of your paper to support your argument. Three key maneuvers to consider are situation, demonstration, and explanation.

Situation is the presentation and analysis of *historical evidence* (and, by extension, *Historical Scholarship*): context, relevant social histories, and so forth. Usually it is best to do this sort of situation near the beginning of the body of your paper.

Demonstration is the presentation and analysis of *textual evidence* (and, by extension, *Critical Scholarship*): examples, case studies, and the like. Usually paragraphs of demonstration that come near the beginning of the body of a paper will focus more on *evidence* than *analysis*, and those that come closer to the end of the body will be more oriented toward deepening your *analyses* than introducing new *evidence*.

Explanation is analysis, detailed discussion of the logic that informs your *argument* (and, potentially, *Theoretical Scholarship*). Usually it is wise to locate these passages of explanation at the very beginning or the very end of the body of your paper.

Sometimes these maneuvers will require entire sections to address, sometimes just paragraphs, and sometimes simply a sentence or two. Moreover, passages of situation, demonstration, and explanation will not always cleanly separate into sections or even paragraphs. In reality, these kinds of passages are likely to be interwoven as needed by the specific topic and argument at hand.

Toward the Paper

To give you a sense of how the structure of a body section might look in its final form, here's an outline of a body section from an actual paper:

- *Question/Problem* for Section 2
- *Assertion* for Section 2
    - *Assertion* for Paragraph 2.1
        - *Textual Evidence*
        - *Textual Evidence*
        - *Analysis$_1$*
        - *Counter*
        - *Response*
    - *Assertion* for Paragraph 2.2
        - *Textual Evidence*
        - *Question/Problem*
        - *Analysis$_1$*
        - *Analysis$_2$*
    - *Question/Problem* for Paragraph 2.3
    - *Assertion* for Paragraph 2.3
        - *Theoretical Scholarship*
        - *Textual Evidence*
        - *Analysis$_1$*
        - *Textual Evidence*
        - *Counter*
        - *Response*
        - *Analysis$_2$*

Into the Essay

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

Let's read *Hamlet* as if we've never read it before. It begins with a king who has died. A figure looking like the dead king has appeared to some soldiers sent to guard the castle of Elsinore – they don't know why, nor do we in the audience. This figure was armored up, suggesting something of a warrior king, and this intimation of a warrior king is immediately confirmed by a man named Horatio, the only one around who has any idea what's going on:

> Such was the very armour he had on
> When he the ambitious Norway combated;
> So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
> He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
> 'Tis strange. (1.1.60-64)

There really is something "strange" about Horatio's story. A technical term of combat, "parle" means peaceful negotiations between the opposing sides of a conflict. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this line from *Hamlet* for its definition: "A debate or conference; discussion; negotiation; *spec*. a meeting between enemies or opposing parties to discuss the terms of an armistice." But the former king, if Horatio can be taken at his word, once slaughtered a slew of Polacks while in parlay. This is not the only possible reading of this line. Perhaps Horatio is trying to be metaphorical or glib – and there is some editorial dispute over the phrase "sledded Polacks" – but the most straightforward reading of the first substantive bit of information we get about King Hamlet is that he was a warrior king who did not respect the laws of war.

A body paragraph moving from orientation and assertion to evidence, analysis, counter, and response.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

When speaking about the crime that launches the play – the murder of King Hamlet – both the Ghost of King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet exhibit unconscious, unintentional bias against Gertrude. First, when the Ghost comments on Gertrude's remarriage to Claudius, she is initially acquitted of any wrongdoing. The Ghost clearly blames and despises Claudius – characterizing the usurper as a perverse but powerful, even magical seducer – but then, in a surprising twist, the Ghost also impugns the integrity of Gertrude:

> Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts –
> O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
> So to seduce! – won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen. (1.5.42-46)

If Claudius really is the powerful villain the Ghost describes, then why is Gertrude only "*seeming*-virtuous"? The passage prepares us to imagine an evil yet irresistible Claudius who deceives and captures a morally pure yet weak-willed Gertrude. When the Ghost characterizes Gertrude as "*seeming*-virtuous," however, it implies that she is actually *not* virtuous (she only appears to be). In contrast to the Ghost's earlier characterization of Gertrude as merely weak, "seeming-virtuous" implies that, in acquiescing to Claudius's seduction, Gertrude actually does hold some moral agency for her actions – that she is at fault. Although the Ghost seems to want to assign blame entirely to Claudius – that is why the Ghost later tells Hamlet to leave Gertrude alone – his unconscious biases surface in the way he unintentionally indicts Gertrude.

That may be simply because there is already a latent sexism at work in the Ghost's conception of "virtue," a word coming from the Latin *vir*, "man."[1] The modern sense of *virtuous* as "ethical" or "upstanding" was certainly in circulation in Elizabethan England, but it had to compete with the classical, gendered sense. To be virtuous in classical literature was to be "manly," and perhaps Gertrude is only "seeming-virtuous" because she is quite obviously not a man. Etymologically, the very idea of virtue is inherently biased against women.

The pattern present in the Ghost's initial comment on Gertrude's remarriage – an intimation of her innocence followed by the implication of her guilt – occurs again when the Ghost tells Hamlet to focus on Claudius rather than Gertrude:

> But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
> Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven
> And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
> To prick and sting her. (1.4.84-88)

At first, the Ghost seems to be saying, *Go after Claudius, not Gertrude, because he's guilty and she's innocent*. By the end of the passage, however, it becomes clear that the Ghost does indeed see Gertrude as guilty, but her punishment should be dispensed by God and her own guilty conscience. There is even a perverse sense of relish in the Ghost's desire to see a guilt-stricken Gertrude tormenting herself.

A body section with multiple paragraphs in it.

In light of the Ghost's contradictory claims about Gertrude's moral rectitude and responsibility, it is no surprise that, after the Ghost vanishes, Prince Hamlet, even though he has explicitly been told to leave his mother alone, expresses moral outrage toward her before saying a word about Claudius: "O most pernicious woman! / O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!" (1.5.105-07). Although Claudius is guilty of murdering the King of Denmark – a political crime of the highest order – Prince Hamlet focuses in these two lines first on his righteous indignation toward Gertrude, who is at most immoral in an ethical sense (as opposed to guilty in a legal sense) with respect to her remarriage. Some would say this is not misogyny. It is not the hatred of women. Kate Manne calls this "the naïve conception of misogyny," redefining the concept as a political and systematic (rather than personal) phenomenon: "Misogyny is primarily a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds *because they are women in a man's world* (i.e., a patriarchy), who are held to be failing to live up to patriarchal standards."[1] To Manne, Hamlet's misogyny stem from Gertrude failing to live up to his expectation that women be his attentive, loving subordinates. Manne helps us see that Hamlet's (or is it Shakespeare's?) initial focus on Gertrude rather than the more obvious Claudius— seeing a woman who has committed a lesser offense as more outrageous than a man whose offense is greater—is unconscious bias that stems from structural inequality. Compare the way Hamlet earlier assigned agency for the marriage he clearly despises to Gertrude, not Claudius. *He* didn't marry *her*: "*she* married" (1.2.156, emphasis mine). It wasn't his king's or his uncle's wedding; it was "my mother's wedding" (1.2.178). When they deliberately and explicitly address who is at fault, both King and Prince Hamlet blame Claudius, but when their attention is focused elsewhere, their language suggests unacknowledged resentment and hostility toward Gertrude. The Ghost and Prince Hamlet exhibit what psychologists like Banaji and Greenwald call "dissociation," or "the occurrence, in one and the same mind, of mutually inconsistent ideas that remain isolated from one another."[1]

The most obvious example of this unconscious, unintentional bias against Gertrude comes when Hamlet directly accuses her of killing her husband. In her bedchamber, after Gertrude laments Hamlet's accidental killing of Polonius, Hamlet says it is "almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (3.4.28-29). Has Hamlet broken with reality when he says these lines? Does he actually believe his mother had a hand in his father's murder? Is there some hidden backstory (as many adaptations have sought to suggest)? Is Hamlet testing her to see if, *Mousetrap*-like, she proclaims her malefactions when confronted? Or, as I think more likely to be the case, has Hamlet's distress and anger over his mother's hasty remarriage been transformed – in the panic of the murder of Polonius – into an accusation that registers more symbolically than literally. When Hamlet says to Gertrude, *You killed my father*, what he means is that her remarriage to his uncle has offended Hamlet as much as if she had killed her husband herself.

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Conclusions

The key elements associated with the conclusion of an essay are:

- *Counter/Response*: Alternate *evidence*, *analysis*, or *argument* (real or imagined) that an author must account for.
- *Argument:* The main idea in an interpretation; its central claim about the *text*. The argument unpacks the thinking behind the *thesis*; it is also the logical conclusion of all the *assertions*. Sometimes an author will recap or summarize his or her argument (either the full argument or the argument up to that point) in brief.
- *Implications:* Portable knowledge. The author's statements of how his or her argument is useful or helpful for concerns beyond the narrowly defined *text*.

What follows is a framework for a four-paragraph conclusion. You may need to add or subtract material based on what you did I your introduction.

Argument Paragraph

- *Counter*
- *Response*
- *Argument*

What's at Stake Paragraph

- *Method/Text* for the *Implications*
- *Orientation* for the *Implications*
- *Evidence* for the *Implications*
- *Analysis* for the *Implications*
- *Question/Problem* for the *Implications*

Implications, Part I: The Idea Paragraph

- The *Argument* of the *Implications*

Implications, Part II: The Illustration Paragraph

- *Evidence* and *Analysis* supporting the *Argument* of the *Implications*

Notes:

- Consider transitioning from the end of the body into the start of the conclusion by addressing the most compelling *counter-argument* to your *thesis*.
- Responding to that *counter* sets you up to synthesize together the totality of your main *argument*. Remember that an *argument* statement is different from a *thesis* statement: The *thesis* is a short, accessible, easy to understand, one or two sentence statement of your central idea; the *argument* is a summary of all the thinking and evidence that support your thesis, written out in a full paragraph.
- Transition from your *argument* to your *implications* by describing how the ideas presented in your *argument* bring with them the power to elucidate other things. That's what you describe in the key sentence on your *method/text* for the *implications*.
- Your *text* for the *implications* is the topic thing being interpreted in your conclusion, which should be different from the *text*—the thing being interpreted—in the overall essay.
- Your *method* for the *implications* is your description of how you're using your *argument* to interpret that new *text* for the *implications*.
- Note that, if you spent significant time in the introduction developing *what's at stake*, you don't need to rehash that material in the conclusion.
- After explaining how you're going to use your *argument* to interpret your *text* for the *implications*, write a short *question/problem* statement for the *implications*. Provide a little *orientation*, a little *evidence*, a little *analysis*, and then the *question/problem* that will be resolved by looking through the lens of your *argument*.
- Next comes Part I of your *implications*—the Idea. This is where you theorize your *argument* into abstract terms that are not bound to the specifics of the *text* from which it came.
- Part II of your implications—the Illustration—returns to some concrete examples to show your idea in action.

Into the Essay

From **The Working Class in *Hamlet***

While the majority of *Hamlet* shows people acting without thinking or thinking without acting, the scenes of working class people show folks with technical know-how and the attention to detail getting things done—doing the work of maintaining a successful society. That work stands in sharp contrast to the good-for-nothing social elites in *Hamlet* whose actions directly and unambiguously lead to massive social downfall. The working class is the seat of virtue in *Hamlet*. Being invited to see the story from the perspective of the ultra-elite for most of the play short-circuits the everyday ethics we bring to moral judgments about proper behavior. While the play's audiences frequently find themselves searching for a sliver of virtue amidst the play's main characters, almost all of us would prefer to have dinner with the shipbuilders, playwrights, and gravediggers than with the royals and nobles. We only sympathize with Hamlet because, in the context of Elsinore, he seems thoughtful and victimized. But Hamlet's a disaster of a person. It's hard to argue with the conclusion Shakespeare came to when asking what to do with Elsinore: burn it down.

Hamlet's embrace of the working class does not insulate the text from critique. Even if the play is about all the awful things social elites do, it's still about social elites. Working-class characters speak only X percent of the lines in the play. From Dante's *Inferno* and *Pride and Prejudice* to *Citizen Kane* and *Game of Thrones*, stories sharply critical of upper-class excess still center the social elites they seek to expose. Working-class characters may appear in the service of that take-down—often they are the moral barometer against which upper class assholes are judged to be insufficient—but that dynamic reifies the working class as an ancillary appendage of the upper class. Here Hamlet is the progressive politician who espouses egalitarian economics to his posh friends at a fancy gala. For-the-people statements, even when sincere and honest-to-goodness, do not carry the weight of actual—fully present and authentic—representation of working class people. As readers, we can choose to spend our time with the texts that choose to spend their time with us.

Yet Hamlet's simple proposition often holds true in life today: virtue resides in the makers of things, in contrast to those who think without doing anything (scholars) and those who act without thinking (politicians). From factory workers to activists, the makers of the world are the ones who manage the success of our societies. They are the ones who serve with a smile, whistle while they work, and create the material conditions in which society can thrive. The makers are the seat of virtue. They do not use their social privilege to avoid responsibility for their actions, and their sense of responsibility informs their commitment to concrete goals and practical steps to achieve them. While social elites rot society through the twin corrosives of political corruption and scholarly detachment, the working class keeps the machine running. They build the ships, plays, and graves society needs to function, and monitor the nuts-and-bolts of the ideals—like education and justice—that we aspire to uphold.

There's a lot for working-class folks to hate about *Hamlet*—not just because it's old, dusty, difficult to understand, and filled with frills, tights, and those weird lace neck thingies that are just socially awkward to think about. Peak Euro weirdness. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* feels like the epitome of elitism but, read closely and with feeling, it provides a conceptual foundation for a more egalitarian society that recognizes the virtue and prioritizes the value of the working class. It's up to us to make that vision a reality. Let's get to work.

A full conclusion.

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Empirical Papers

In academic writing, one distinction to draw is between argumentative papers and empirical papers. Argumentative papers tend to come from the humanities, while empirical papers usually appear in the sciences. (The social sciences display a mix of argumentative and empirical papers, and sometimes include single papers that display both argumentative and empirical elements.)

An argumentative paper takes a position on an issue and supports that position with evidence and analysis. An empirical paper reports research based on observations or experiments. In other words, an argumentative paper is often about the proper interpretation of evidence (facts, data, information) that is already known about, while an empirical paper is usually about the collection of new evidence that then needs to be interpreted.

Thus, an empirical paper (1) poses a question that can only be answered by gathering information not currently available to the researcher, (2) gathers that information in some controlled way, and then (3) interprets that information.

Cosmetically, one difference between argumentative and empirical papers is the style in which each is written. Argumentative papers can come in MLA, Chicago, or APA style. Empirical papers usually appear in APA style.

More substantially, perhaps the biggest difference between an argumentative and an empirical paper comes in the organization of each. An argumentative paper is usually structured according to introduction, body, and conclusion—an introduction that states a thesis, a body that supports the thesis, and a

conclusion that considers the implications of the thesis. In contrast, an empirical paper is usually structured according to introduction, method, results, and discussion.

In other words, empirical papers follow the so-called scientific method. Observations are made; a hypothesis is developed based on those observations; experiments are conducted to test the hypothesis; and those experiments are interpreted to consider the truth of the hypothesis.

As such, an empirical paper is a record of the research process: research and writing occur at the same time. You make an observation, and you write down what that observation is. You generate a hypothesis, and you write down what that hypothesis is. You conceive an experiment, and you write down what that experiment is. You conduct that experiment, and you write down what the results were. And you interpret those results, and you write down what your interpretations are.

In contrast, when writing an argumentative paper, research and interpretation all occur before the first word of the paper is written. An argumentative paper is not about discovery, as an empirical paper is; an argumentative paper is about persuasion.

The only thing that needs to occur before you start writing an empirical paper is to make an observation of something that is peculiar or needs to be explained. Once this observation has been made, you can start writing your paper, beginning with your introduction.

Empirical papers may use quantitative analysis or qualitative analysis. Quantitative research generates numerical data and seeks to establish causal relationships between two or more variables. Qualitative research objectively and critically analyzes behaviors, beliefs, feelings, or values with few or no numerical data available for analysis.

Structuring Empirical Papers

Introduction: The goal of your introduction is to frame and justify your study. Your introduction needs to explain why your study needs to exist. In order to do so, include three sections:

> *Question or Problem*: Describe the observation or situation that gave rise to your interest in the subject you're going to consider. Clearly state the research question(s) that you want to ask in your study.
>
> *Literature Review*: Having stated one or more research questions, next describe the existing scholarly research relevant to your question(s)? Have other researchers already asked your question(s)? Have others

asked similar questions? Is there debate or consensus in the field regarding your topic? Through citation, quotation, paraphrase, and summary, review and analyze these previous scholarly interpretations, narrating the various camps or perspectives that exist in this academic conversation, identifying any classic or landmark scholars or works, and explaining which interpretations are the least satisfactory and which are the most illuminating. Then, justify the need for your paper to exist by identifying any gaps in the scholarship, any unresolved issues regarding your topic, and/or any issues that are wrongfully thought to be resolved.

Hypotheses: Based on your observations, your knowledge of the scholarship, and your common sense, state what you expect the answer(s) to your research question(s) to be. Also, note any specific predictions that follow from your hypothesis.

Method: Your hypothesis is your "sense of things" based on your current knowledge of the situation at hand, but you need to determine whether or not your sense of things actually matches up with the facts of the matter. That is, you need to determine whether or not your hypothesis is true. Therefore, you need to conceive and conduct a data-gathering study that will collect the information needed to determine confidently whether or not your hypothesis is correct. The section on your method is where you describe the study that you've conceived. The method section is a detailed breakdown of your study, including your subjects, equipment, design, and procedure. Based on your method section, your reader should be able to replicate your study—that is, should be able to recreate your study in an attempt to confirm or disconfirm your results.

Subjects: If your study involved human or animal participants, explain who they are, how they came to be involved, any relevant information about their identities, etc.

Equipment: Note any materials or tools you used to collect data.

Design: Explain the logic behind your study: how will your study generate reliable results? This is also the place to explain, if necessary, what your independent and dependent variables were. In a scientific study, an independent variable is the variable that is changed to test the effects on the dependent variable. The dependent variable "depends" upon the independent variable. As the researcher changes the independent variable, the change in the dependent variable is observed and recorded.

Procedure: Describe in sequence the steps you took to administer your study.

Results: If your section on method is where you describe how you're going about your research, your section on results is where you report the findings of that research. At this point, you're not yet interpreting your findings (that comes next in the "discussion" section). Right now, you're simply reporting the findings that need to be interpreted: "Just the facts, ma'am." Report the information, statistics, data, etc. gathered from your study. Consider using tables and figures: they often represent results more clearly and concisely than text does. If you use tables and figures, however, be sure to direct your reader to them in your text, and use your text to draw your reader's attention to the most significant findings.

Discussion: Your results are a *what*: they are *what* is true. But your discussion is a *why*: it is the place to explain how the facts, data, information, etc. reported in your results came to be. Why did what happened happen (or, why does what happens happen)? Interpret your findings by considering your hypotheses in the context of your results. Did your results support your hypotheses? How do your results relate to your research question(s) in general? Discuss possible explanations for your results, especially unexpected results. Discuss the implications of your findings. Identify any follow-up studies that might need to be conducted. Discuss limitations of the experiment that could be remedied in future experiments. Avoid overstating the importance of your findings. Be modest rather than expansive. Avoid speculating beyond the data.

Into the Essay

From **Shakespeare's Early Footprint**

Elizabethan playwright; author of *Hamlet*; greatest tragedian of all time: these are some of the ways we remember Shakespeare today, but how was he thought of in his own time? What was Shakespeare's most popular work in his own day? These questions might be answered by counting the number of editions of his works, but that tally would leave out performances. We could add recorded performances, but that tally would still leave out critical commentary on Shakespeare's works, which are obviously an important index to their popularity. Fortunately, a new database has emerged: the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Shakespeare Documented* website, "the largest and most authoritative collection of primary-source materials documenting the life of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), bringing together all known manuscript and print references to Shakespeare, his works, and additional references to his family, in his lifetime and shortly thereafter."

I. Method

To gauge Shakespeare's early modern "footprint" – *which of his texts were most popular? when was he most popular?* – I gathered some data from *Shakespeare Documented*. The database allows users to filter the results by work (the "Plays & Poetry" tab) and by date (the "Decade" tab). By combining these filters, I was able to track which works were popular at which times, as well as totals for each work and each decade.

II. Results

Table 7: Shakespeare's Early Footprint

Text	**1590s**	**1600s**	**1610s**	**1620s**	**1630s**	**Total**
All's Well That Ends	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
Antony and Cleopatra	0	1	1	1	0	**3**
As You Like It	0	2	0	1	0	**3**
The Comedy of Errors	2	2	0	1	0	**5**
Coriolanus	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
Cymbeline	0	0	1	1	0	**2**
Hamlet	2	12	1	2	1	**18**
1 Henry IV	4	8	1	3	0	**16**
2 Henry IV	0	5	0	2	0	**7**
Henry V	0	6	1	0	0	**7**
1 Henry VI	2	1	0	0	0	**3**
2 Henry VI	2	2	1	0	0	**5**
3 Henry VI	2	1	1	1	0	**5**
Henry VIII	0	0	3	1	0	**4**
Julius Caesar	0	1	1	1	1	**4**
King John	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
King Lear	0	3	1	0	0	**4**
Love's Labor's Lost	3	11	1	0	0	**15**
Lucrece	12	12	2	0	0	**26**

Macbeth	0	0	1	2	0	**3**
Measure for Measure	0	1	0	1	0	**2**
The Merchant of Venice	1	6	2	0	0	**9**
The Merry Wives of Windsor	0	4	1	0	0	**5**
A Midsummer Night's Dream	0	5	1	0	0	**6**
Much Ado About Nothing	0	5	1	0	0	**6**
Othello	0	2	3	5	1	**11**
Pericles	0	8	3	1	0	**12**
The Phoenix and the Turtle	0	1	1	0	0	**2**
Richard II	7	11	1	1	0	**20**
Richard III	6	9	1	2	0	**18**
Romeo and Juliet	4	9	0	3	0	**16**
Sonnets	3	4	2	0	0	**9**
The Taming of the Shrew	1	2	0	0	0	**3**
The Tempest	0	0	2	1	1	**4**
Timon of Athens	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
Titus Andronicus	4	3	1	0	1	**9**
Troilus and Cressida	0	4	0	1	0	**5**
Twelfth Night	0	3	0	1	0	**4**
Two Gentlemen of Verona	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
Two Noble Kinsmen	0	0	0	0	2	**2**
The Winter's Tale	0	0	3	2	1	**6**
Venus and Adonis	18	14	3	1	1	**37**
Total	**73**	**158**	**42**	**39**	**9**	**321**

III. Discussion

This research suggests that, in his own day, Shakespeare was primarily known as a poet and a writer of history plays. As Figure 1 shows, his most popular works were his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. After his poetry, his most popular works were his history plays: three of his top four plays were histories (*Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *1 Henry IV*).

Looking more closely at Shakespeare's most popular plays confirms some expectations but also reveals some surprises. First, as Figure 2 shows, it is somewhat surprising that *Hamlet* was not Shakespeare's most prominent play in the early-modern era: that honor goes to *Richard II*, with *Hamlet* coming in second. More generally, the top five plays (*Richard II, Hamlet, Richard III, 1 Henry IV,* and *Romeo and Juliet*) are rather predictable, but Shakespeare's sixth most-popular play, *Love's Labor's Lost*, and his seventh, *Pericles*, are surprising because neither is particularly popular in the modern era.

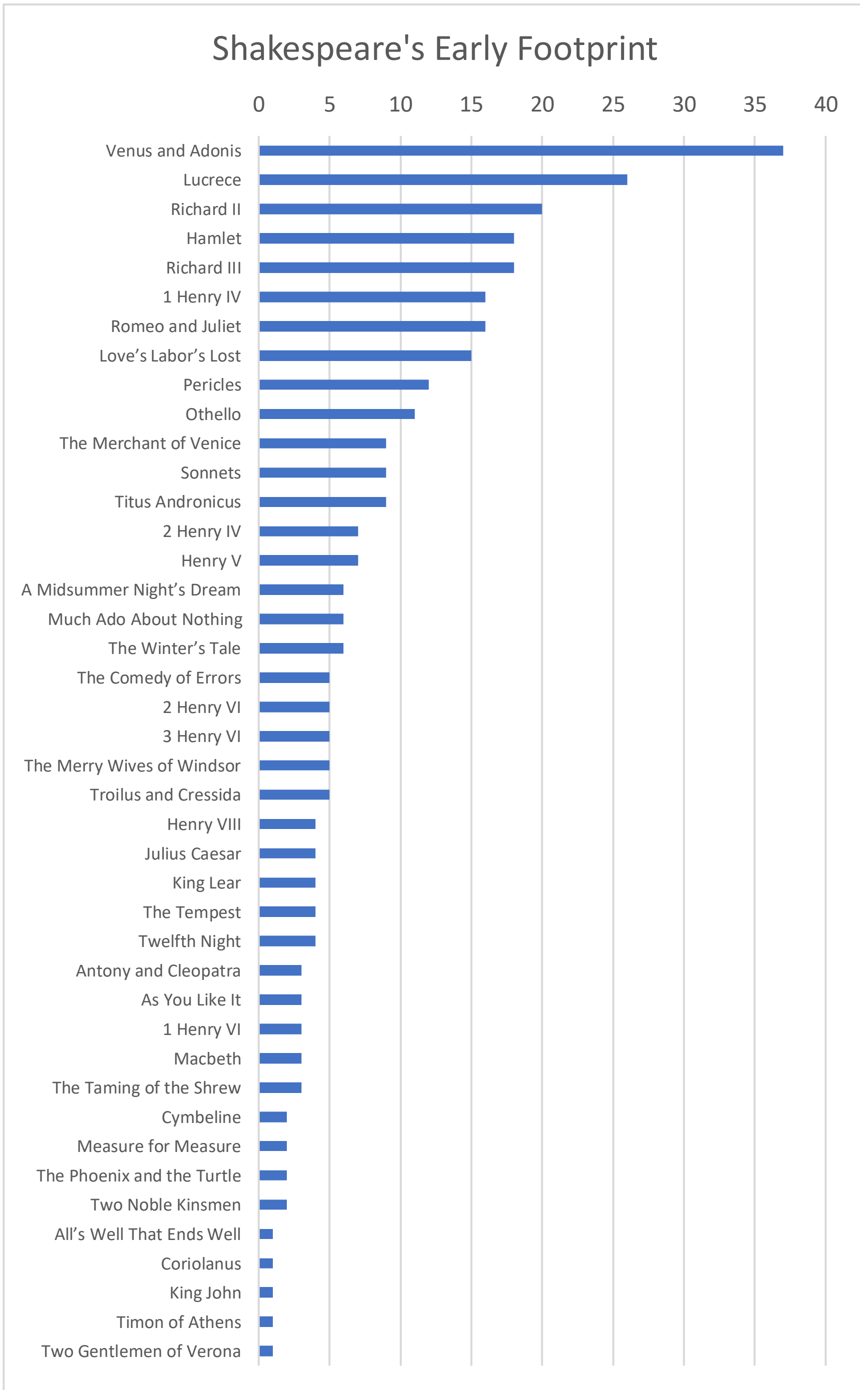

Figure 8: Shakespeare's Early Footprint According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

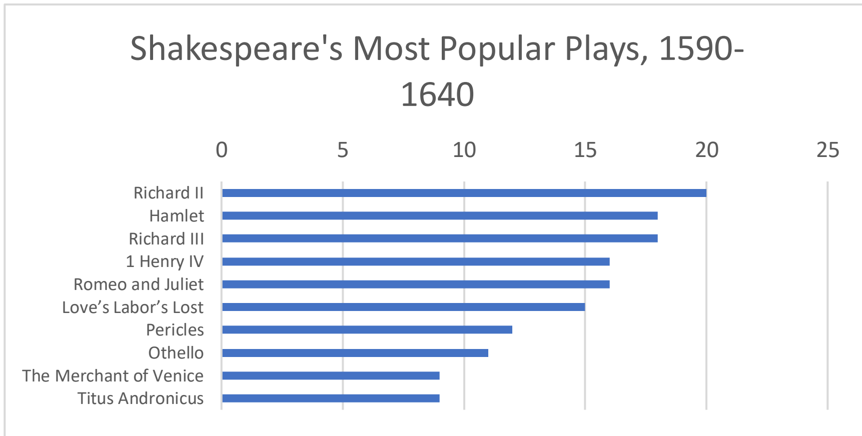

Figure 9: Shakespeare's Most Popular Plays, 1590-1640, According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

Looking more closely at Shakespeare's active decades, we can re-affirm that Shakespeare's early artistic identity was centered upon his history plays: the top three plays in the 1590s were histories, and six of the top eleven were histories, as Figure 3 shows.

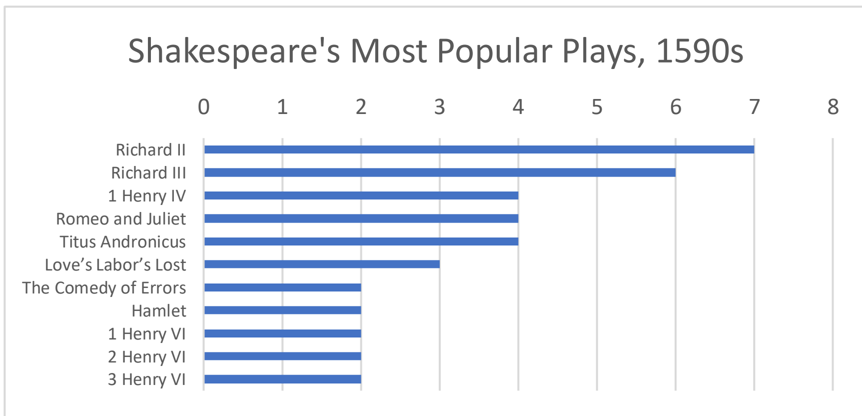

Figure 10: Shakespeare's Most Popular Plays, 1590s, According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

IV. Questions for Further Research

Shakespeare's earliest artistic identity seems to be that of a poet and of a writer of history plays, which leads to several questions:

1. Why were Shakespeare's poems popular among his earliest audiences?
2. How and why did Shakespeare's history plays resonate with early-modern English culture?
3. Why was *Richard II* Shakespeare's most popular play in the early-modern age?

Seven

Language

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Academic Language

Write for others as you would have them write for you. It's the golden rule (of writing). Think about the sentences that you like to read, that you like to quote, that you consider effective—then write sentences like that.

The final phase of the writing process involves writing out your ideas in sentences that are easy for your reader to understand.

The actual writing out of sentences in paragraphs comes late in the writing process because "writing" is really about the process of building an idea that's worth writing an essay about. Once you've got a good idea, writing a good paper is easy.

Be quotable. Every sentence in every paper should be quotable. If you read a sentence and say to yourself, *No one would ever quote that*, then you need to revise it. Even in sentences that are doing routine work, such as introducing a quotation, you should be adding enough of your own framing and voice that it could be quoted by someone else.

Do you quote long passages of plot summary? Nope. Do you read every word in a long block quotation? Nope. Do you quote clear and punchy argumentative statements? Yep.

Writing captivating sentences is what turns a good idea into a great paper, but remember that great sentences can't save an undeveloped *argument*.

Have fun with your sentences. If you're having fun in your writing, your reader will be able to tell, and your enthusiasm will be infectious.

When thinking about your language in your paper—your sentences—there are two levels to consider.

The first is *Being Correct*, meaning that your sentences are free of language errors. If a paper is filled with language errors, it immediately undercuts the authority of the writer. No one will take your argument on tax policy seriously if you don't know how to use a comma.

The second level is *Being Powerful*, meaning that your sentences are clear, gripping, and fun to read. The writing in a paper can *Be Correct*—can be free of language errors—but still not *Be Powerful*. If *Being Incorrect* drains your authority as a writer, *Being Powerful* boosts it.

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Editing

A revision of an essay should be shorter and tighter than the draft. Or maybe they are the same length, but the writing in the revision is tighter, opening up space to add more substance. You can do both macro-editing and micro-editing for concision.

Proofreading is key. Forgetting to fix silly little errors, or failing to recognize them, offends your reader disproportionately to the actual transgression. Language errors torpedo your writerly authority because they lead your reader to believe you either (1) don't know what you're doing or (2) don't care enough to get the details right. The more time your readers spend thinking about your language, the less time they have to focus on your argument.

Spelling: Run a spell-check, sure, but don't expect spell-check to catch everything. Know the words you know how to spell and look up words you're not sure about.

Paragraphing: A paragraph break signals to your reader the end of one idea and the beginning of another. Err on the side of too many paragraphs, rather than too few.

Formatting: Papers should be typed double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. Your last name and the page number should be in the header in the upper right-hand corner. Margins should be one inch; paragraphs are to be indented one-half inch. Spaces should not be skipped between paragraphs. Bibliography and/or notes should follow MLA or Chicago Style unless otherwise directed.

Read out loud: One of the best things to do when editing a paper is to read it out loud. Certain sentences will just sound goofy, and you'll know that you

need to revise them. If you've got a roommate or significant other, have them read the paper to you while you note the moments that need editing.

— Practicum —

Editing for Concision

Macro-editing: On the level of the paragraph:

- Reduce the number of quotations: *summarize or just cite instead*.
- Reduce the length of quotations: *just include the key parts*.
- Reduce the amount of analysis: *cut the thinking-out-loud to get to the take-away*.
- Eliminate repetition: *cut sentences that say the same thing in different ways*.
- Remove tangents and digressions: *they may be interesting, but aren't needed*.
- Remove ancillary ideas and information: *interesting, not needed*.

Micro-editing: On the level of the sentence:

- Make long, flowery sentences with lots of phrases and clauses into simple snappy statements.
- Change word forms to reduce word count: ~~*It was a terrible tragedy*~~. *It was tragic*.
- Reduce nominalizations: ~~*The use of verbs should be done as an indication of action*~~. *Use verbs to indicate action.*
- Remove adverbs, adjectives, and qualifying phrases: ~~*Indeed*~~, *that is* ~~*precisely*~~ *how Shakespeare's Richard III works* ~~*as a literary text*~~.
- Cut meta-discourse: ~~*For example,*~~ *Shakespeare…*; ~~*Looking at Shakespeare's sources alongside his own texts, we can see how*~~ *the simple transmission of an author's knowledge…*
- Trim transitions: ~~*Something very similar happened in the case of* Romeo *and Juliet*~~.

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Grammar

Grammar is the set of standards that govern how we should combine and order words, punctuation, phrases, and clauses to communicate with each other in recognizable ways.

Subject-Verb Agreement: The subject and its verb must agree in number: both must be singular (e.g., *He/She/It agrees*), or both must be plural (e.g., *They agree*). Most often subject-verb disagreement emerges when modifying information comes between the subject and the verb (e.g., *Each of the characters in Shakespeare's plays are complex* should be *is complex*). Read the sentence without the modifying information, and the proper agreement will be clear (e.g., *Each … is complex*).

Fragments: All sentences must have a subject and a verb. Fragments usually appear when you think the verb from the previous sentence still governs the current sentence (which it doesn't, because of the period). Either supply the missing component (usually a main verb) or subordinate the fragment as a clause in another sentence.

Run-on Sentences: When two independent clauses are not connected by a conjunction, you must place a semi-colon or a period between them. The most frequent kind of run-on sentence is the comma splice, in which the writer uses a comma where there should be a period (e.g. *Spenser wrote The Faerie Queene, he also wrote several shorter poems*.).

Conjunctions: Pay attention to the logical relationship between your clauses, sentences, and paragraphs; then use the correct conjunction to communicate the course of your logic.

Post-Positive Conjunctions: Some words cannot logically start a sentence because they depend upon something prior. The words *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so* (remember the acronym "FANBOYS"), as well as "however" cannot start a sentence. Place post-positives after a comma or an introductory phrase (e.g., *Robert Herrick spent his life as a courtier. He is most remembered, however, as a poet*.).

Pronoun Agreement: First, make sure pronouns agree in number with their antecedents. Second, just as there is subject-verb agreement, there is also pronoun-verb agreement. They must agree in number: both must be singular, or both must be plural. Most indefinite pronouns (e.g. *each, everybody, anyone, nothing, something*) take singular verbs (e.g. *everybody is*…), but some (e.g. *both, few, many, others*) take plural (e.g., *few are*…).

Prepositions: Prepositions have a precise sense, usually determined by the verb you choose (e.g., you center *on* not *around* something). A dictionary will tell you the idiomatic preposition to attach to a word.

Split Infinitives: An adverb (e.g., *boldly*) usually shouldn't interrupt an infinitive (e.g., *to go*). Revise *to boldly go where no man has gone before* so it reads *to go boldly where no man has gone before.*

Relative Pronouns: Who is the correct pronoun for persons or any word that refers to people; *that* is used for things, objects, events, and non-persons (e.g., *people that commit crimes* should read *people who commit crimes*).

Who and Whom: Who is subjective, meaning it performs actions (e.g., it is *people who do things*), but whom is objective, meaning it receives action (e.g., it is *people to whom things are done*).

Don't End Sentences with Prepositions: A sentence that ends *regardless of the class an individual belongs to.* should read *regardless of the class to which an individual belongs*.

Dangling Modifiers: Put the modifying word or phrase next to the word or phrase it's modifying, lest you be the butt of Groucho Marx's joke: "One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in my pajamas, I don' t know."

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Punctuation

Punctuation is the set of non-alphabetical markings—including commas, colons, semi-colons, dashes, hyphens, apostrophes, quotation marks, and so forth—that aid grammar.

Commas: Not as a rule, but often commas should come in the places you stop to breathe when you read your prose aloud.

> When the theatres were closed [pause], Shakespeare turned from drama to verse.

More importantly, you must learn and follow the rules of comma usage, which also means knowing when not to use commas.

Commas for Compound Sentences: Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses. Use commas for compound sentences, but not for complex sentences.

> Spenser was a poet of manners, but Milton was a poet of God.

> Spenser and Milton were both great poets.

Commas for Introductory Phrases: Use a comma to set off introductory phrases (usually prepositional, participial, or infinitive phrases), except when the introductory phrase is three words or less.

> Of all the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, the Monk is my favorite.

In the *Tales* Chaucer created a microcosm of English society.

Commas for Non-Restrictive Clauses: For a non-restrictive clause, one (like this one) that clarifies meaning but can be dropped without disrupting the main sense of the sentence, use a pair of commas on either side (e.g., it would be possible to read, *For a non-restrictive clause … use a pair of commas on either side*). The first comma indicates the beginning of the modification, and the second indicates the end.

> Shakespeare, who did not receive a rigorous university training, surpassed all the "university wits."

Commas for Lists: Use a comma to separate three or more items in a simple series, including the last two items.

> Ben Jonson was a poet, playwright, critic, and courtier.

No Commas: Never use only one comma between a subject and its verb. Don't put a comma between the two nouns in a compound subject, or between the two verbs in a compound predicate, or between the two nouns in a compound object. Do not use commas to set off a restrictive clause that is essential for meaning (e.g., there is no comma in the current sentence after *clause* because *that is needed for the sentence to make sense* is a dependent clause). Usually there should not be a comma before the word "because."

Semi-colons: Semi-colons should separate two independent clauses. Either side of the semi-colon could be a complete sentence. Using a semicolon instead of a period signals a close relationship between the two complete but connected clauses. It is not correct to use a semicolon to separate an independent and dependent clause.

> Spenser's career is modeled on Virgil's; both moved from pastoral to epic.

Semi-Colons for Lists within Lists: Use semi-colons to separate lists within lists. Make sure all items in a series are of the same kind.

> John Milton wrote works of poetry, like *Lycidas*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regain'd*; works of drama, like *Comus* and *Samson Agonistes*; and works of prose, like *Of Education*, *Eikonoklastes*, and *The Readie and Easie Way*.

Colons: Colons separate an independent clause from another clause that illustrates, extends, or amplifies the independent clause. What comes before the colon should always be a complete sentence; what comes after the colon can be a fragment.

> The English canon is centered on four authors: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton.

Dashes: A dash can be used as a hard comma, to subordinate a series of clauses or a complete sentence. It is best to use dashes in pairs, the first dash marking a break in the sentence—for digression, clarification, or amplification—the second marking the resumption of the sentence.

> Shakespeare's plays—whether comedy, tragedy, history, or romance—are all funny.

Hyphens: Hyphenate adjectival compounds. If the word "and" can be inserted between the adjectives in a compound, do not hyphenate; use a comma to separate them.

> Marlowe's atheism is a well-known aspect of his biography.

> Marlowe's atheism is well known.

> Marlowe's atheism is an old, cherished aspect of his biography.

Apostrophes for Possession: To form the possessive of a *singular noun*, add *'s*.

> Hamlet sees his father's ghost.

To form the possessive of a *plural noun ending in s*, add only an apostrophe.

> Hamlet does not foresee his actions' consequences.

To form the possessive of an *irregular plural noun that does not end in s*, add *'s*.

> Polonius dominates his children's lives.

To form the possessive of any *singular proper noun (a name),* add *'s* even if the name ends in *s*.

> Fortinbras's army marches to Denmark.

To form the possessive of a *plural proper noun (a name)*, add only an apostrophe.

> Shakespeare bookends the play with the Hamlets' deaths.

Don't use apostrophes on possessive pronouns.

> The English crown is greater than ~~it's~~ its owner.

Capitalization: Don't capitalize willy-nilly just because a concept is important (e.g., don't capitalize words like *truth* or phrases like *the modern age*).

Italics: Italics and underlining mean the same thing, but most styles now prefer italics.

Italics for Titles: Use Italics for titles.

> Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It* before *The Tempest*.

Italics for Foreign Words: Use italics for foreign words.

> Milton's verse is revered for a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

Italics for Terminology: Use italics to signal the introduction of a new term (which should then probably be defined). Once a term is defined, it is not placed in italics anymore.

> Spenser composed *The Faerie Qveene* with what I shall call a *poetics of imperfection*.

Italics for Emphasis: It is now somewhat passé, but you can use italics to indicate importance.

> Perhaps we should recognize that *there are no normals*.

Reverse Italics: In titles, words that would usually be italicized should be unitalicized.

> See *Shakespeare's* Hamlet *and Modern Culture*.

Quotes for Shorter Titles: Use quotes for a short poem, such as one not printed in a separate volume (George Herbert's poem "Mortification" is in his collection *The Temple*); a short story (Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find"); an article or essay (Stanley Fish's essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*" is in his book *Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*); a song title (Bob Dylan's "Desolation Row" is on his album *Highway 61 Revisited*); and an episode of a television or radio show (the episode of *The Simpsons* titled "Bart the Daredevil").

Scare Quotes: Use quotation marks to indicate that someone is using a term inappropriately or that a term is up for debate.

> Who exactly is included in "us normals," to use Gofman's term?

Contractions: To maintain your academic tone, it is usually best to spell out words instead of using contractions (*did not* for *didn't*). There are times, however, when contractions can be used effectively to make a common-sense point that contrasts with your academic tone.

Acronyms and Abbreviations: All acronyms and abbreviations must be written out the first time you discuss that organization or term, giving the acronym or abbreviation afterward—e.g., *General Strain Theory (GST).* After that first mention, the acronym or abbreviation may be used—e.g., a later sentence could read, *GST.*

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Concision

One definition of "good writing" is: being able to communicate a lot of information in as few words as possible. Never use seven words when five words will do; never five when three will do; never three when one.

Another definition of "good writing" is: bringing clarity to complexity. This idea is two-pronged. First, good writing does not address simple matters; it addresses matters complex enough that they need explanation. Second, in good writing, complexity does not manifest in confusion; it manifests in clarity, which requires that a writer articulate specific concepts and put them into well-defined relationships (e.g., sequence, cause-and-effect, identity, similarity, contrast, opposition).

Make words, sentences, and paragraphs matter. Every paragraph and every sentence should accomplish something. As you outline a paper, ask what paragraphs need to exist for your argument to be successful. Once you know why a paragraph needs to exist, ask what sentences need to exist for that paragraph to be successful.

Try shortening the length of your paper by 20%, which will require you to focus your argument and select your evidence more carefully. If you have a 400-word paragraph, try to get through it in 300 words without losing any meaning.

Less is more: Write concisely, not wordily. Make every word count.

~~Write with concision, instead of with wordiness~~. Write concisely, not wordily.

Clarity for complexity: Good writing is clear, not because it presents simple ideas, but because it presents ideas in the simplest form the subject permits. Say everything relevant in as few words as possible. Study each of your sentences to see what can be deleted without a loss of meaning or emphasis. Be sure to leave in the concrete and specific details and examples that support your ideas.

> *~~In order to be good, writing must always be clear. It should not be simplistic, but the writer should try to present complex ideas in a simple way~~. Good writing is clear, not because it presents simple ideas, but because it presents ideas in the simplest form the subject permits.*

Be specific: Instead of vague generalities, use simpler, more specific language to articulate your point. Be as precise as possible. No teacher has ever written "Too Specific" on a paper; we write "Too General" or "Too Vague" all the time.

> ~~Always write clearly~~. Use simple, specific language to make your point.

Use verbs to indicate action: Don't nominalize them, which means turning them into nouns. Nominalizing adds boring words and takes excitement away from your prose.

> *~~Verb use should indicate action~~. ~~The use of verbs should be done as an indication of action~~. Use verbs to indicate action.*

Use plain language: Most of us need to write more like we talk. Avoid inflated diction. The likelihood of misusing a word you don't fully understand is much greater than the likelihood of impressing your reader with your pretend sophistication. Whenever you can, even among specialists, use plain English. Avoid jargon.

> *~~The punctilious writer must abstain from aggrandized intonation~~. Avoid inflated diction.*

Eliminate redundancies: Take out intensifiers and modifiers that are unnecessary because they are implied in the word they're modifying.

> *~~It was a terrible tragedy~~. It was a tragedy.*

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Clarity

Avoid Thought-Terminating Clichés: There are some topics that it should be illegal to write about unless you have multiple advanced degrees. These topics include "truth," "reality," and "human nature." These words are "thought-terminating clichés"—they halt the deep and specific thinking that is the particular province of academic writing.

Use the active voice: Write in the active voice, not the passive. Writing in the active voice gives more information to your reader by stating *who* is doing *what* to *whom/what* (subject, verb, and object). In the passive voice, the subject receives the action of the verb (e.g., *The ball was thrown*). In the active voice, the subject performs the action of the verb (e.g., *Wilson threw the ball*). The active voice explains who (subject) is doing what (verb) to whom (object). There are some telltale signs that you're in the passive voice: (1) the noun follows the verb, (2) the preposition "by" is used, and (3) a "to be" verb (e.g., *is, am, are, was, were*) is used as an auxiliary verb (e.g., *The claim is being made by Wilson that one should write in the active voice*). Only use the passive voice when it is logical to do so—e.g., when the agent of the action performed is unknown or impossible to define.

> ~~*Writing in the active voice should be done by everyone*~~. *You should write in the active voice, not the passive.*

Use the right verb tense: When analyzing a literary text, write in the present tense, not the past. This tense fills your prose with immediacy. When making historical comments, use the simple past tense. Avoid compound tenses.

> ~~*Donne presented his speaker as a rogue*~~. *Donne makes his speaker a rogue.*

> *~~After Elizabeth had died in 1603, James took the crown~~. After Elizabeth died in 1603, James took the crown.*

Keep a consistent verb tense: If you need to shift tenses, start a new paragraph.

Make pronoun antecedents clear: Eliminate any ambiguity about the antecedent of your pronouns.

> When Hamlet stabs Laertes, ~~he knows the sword is poisoned~~ the prince knows the sword is poisoned.

Modify demonstrative pronouns: Demonstrative pronouns—words like *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*—rely upon an antecedent, but what exactly that antecedent is can be ambiguous, especially if the antecedent is a complex idea in the previous sentence or paragraph. Modify all demonstratives by finding one word to summarize the antecedent

> Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system. If you've got a business, you didn't build ~~that~~ that system.

Use parallel structures: Clarity increases geometrically with the use of parallel structures. Shape and sharpen the sense of similarity (or difference) between ideas, actions, objects, attributes, and the like by using similar constructions to describe them. Put parallel thoughts in parallel constructions. Use parallel constructions to clarify relationships—to emphasize similarities or to define differences. Using parallel structures is especially important when you're writing a long sentence.

> *~~Use parallel constructions to clarify relationships, whether one wants to emphasize similarities or you are defining differences~~. Use parallel constructions to clarify relationships—to emphasize similarities or to define differences.*

Structure sentences based on the ideas behind them: Make the structure of your sentence reflect the structure of your thought. Put your main idea in your main clause, subordinating the less important elements in the sentence to the more important.

> *~~Subordinate the less important elements in a sentence to the more important, so that your main idea is in your main clause~~. Put your main idea in your main clause, subordinating the less important elements in the sentence to the more important.*

Vary sentence length and construction: To alert your readers to important ideas, put them in very short or very long sentences; the same is true for paragraphs.

> *~~You should vary sentence length for rhythm. You should also vary sentence construction for rhythm. You should alert your readers to important ideas by putting them in very short or very long sentences~~. Vary sentence length and construction for rhythm. To alert your readers to important ideas, put them in very short or very long sentences.*

Edit for flow: Use pronouns and transitions to link the ideas in successive sentences together.

> *~~Wilson often saw fragmented language in the students' papers. Wilson told the class to use pronouns and transitions~~. Since he often saw fragmented language in his students' papers, Wilson told them to use pronouns and transitions.*

Bury dull but necessary qualifiers in the middle of a sentence: Doing so keeps attention on your main ideas.

> *~~Though they may be necessary at times, dull qualifiers should go in the middle of a sentence~~. Bury dull but necessary qualifiers in the middle of a sentence.*

Write to an unknown reader: Don't write to your teacher, who might "know what you mean" or understand a point you're trying to make because it was discussed in class. You can assume your reader has read the texts you're writing about, but don't assume readers are privy to the analytical vocabulary and methodology you're using.

> *~~As mentioned in class, we should write to an unknown reader~~. Write to an unknown reader.*

Be Inclusive: Don't use stereotypes, obviously, but also be aware that some common phrases are secretly exclusive. Be sure to include everyone in your pronouns.

> *~~A writer must be inclusive if he wants to address all mankind~~. A writer must be inclusive if he or she wants to address all humankind.*

The Royal We: Be careful with the royal "we." It is usually a bad idea to assume that you and your reader act in the same way and believe the same things.

> *~~We use the royal "we" when we probably shouldn't~~. Beginning writers often use the royal "we" when they shouldn't.*

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Style

Every paragraph you write should include at least one "memorable moment."

Style makes ideas memorable.

Style includes what we often think of as "creative writing"—writing that is imaginative, playful, purposeful, poetic, emotional, and (*gasp!*) fun.

It might an unexpected piece of evidence, a sentence that runs for 80 words, one that runs for three, a commonsense question, a break in tone, a joke, a list of six possible readings of one line, a confession, a plot twist, a neologism, an analogy, a parenthetical, what have you. Fill your paper with creativity and sentences that snap.

These memorable moments, however, are seasoning, not substance. Only include them if they make your substantive argument more clear, more emphatic, or more powerful. Use style *in the service of* analysis and argument.

That's why it is best to consider style only near the end of the writing process. Add in creative moments only after you have written a full essay. Ask yourself, *How can I make this sentence cooler? How can I make this paragraph more memorable? Where are there opportunities for stylistic flourish?* Doing so near the end of the writing process will ensure that you're using creativity in the service of substance.

You may have heard that you should open a paper with a "hook" that grabs your reader's attention. Those hooks are almost always nauseating and

obnoxious. You know what hooks an academic's attention? *Evidence* and *analysis* that leads up to a really compelling *question/problem*.

Put your creative moments—jokes, curveballs, anecdotes, metaphors, and so forth— in the body of your paper, where no one sees them coming, not the introduction or conclusion, where everyone expects them to be. Use creative writing to wake up your reader in the middle of your discussion, while your introduction and conclusion remain in an academic tone focused on your argument and its implications.

Even more important than the effective use of creative writing is the development of a writerly perspective—something that is a part of the writing process all the way back in the selection of a topic. If you happen to be a recovering alcoholic and former juvenile delinquent who has attempted suicide, experiences bouts of depression, and is an atheist, you can and should use those experiences to select the topics you write about and the arguments you develop. And you can (but don't need to) thematize your experiences, identities, and relationship with your argument in your essay. Being vulnerable is one way to earn the trust of your reader.

Some techniques of figurative language to consider are:

Anecdotes
Analogies
Jokes
Imagery
Statistics
Ventriloquism
Colloquialism
Rhetorical Questions
Enumerations
Personal Revelations
Sentence Length

Into the Essay

From **The Honor Code at Harvard and in *Hamlet***

Every semester, students in my Shakespeare class affirm an academic honor code, but I feel a bit awkward when they do because, in stark contrast to life in our classroom, a code of honor is problematic and in fact tragic in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

An anecdote.

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

It all began, Horatio explains, when Fortinbras of Norway challenged King Hamlet to a duel. According to the conventions of heraldry, the winner of this duel would receive the land under dispute (so here we are, effectively, in a Jerusalem being claimed by both Israel and Palestine).

An analogy.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

This Gertrude is an Elizabeth Taylor: extraordinarily powerful and talented, the woman who has everything, including an addiction that creates a chasm between the public image and the private struggle.

An analogy.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

"Heaven will direct it," Horatio says as his best friend follows a spirit into the dark (1.5.91). Friends don't let friends follow ghosts in the middle of the night.

A joke.

From **The Tragedy of Love in *Hamlet***

Love is a many-splendored thing. It is blind. It is patient and kind, does not envy or boast, etc. Love conquers all. But, baby, sometimes love just ain't enough. To quote another 90s jam—what is love? (Hamlet, don't hurt me, don't hurt me, no more). Or from the 80s—I want to know what love is; I want Hamlet to show me.

An joke.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

Claims for divine providence in *Hamlet* run into a problem with the pirates. Typical of pirates: always causing problems.

A joke.

From ***Macbeth* and Criminology**

This passage establishes the existence of at least one child for Lady Macbeth, and it establishes her maternal femininity before pivoting from the intensely intimate bond between mother and child formed during nursing to the gruesome, horrendous, and chilling image of Lady Macbeth brutally beating a baby to death. The pinnacle of domesticity is slaughtered on the cold altar of politics.

Imagery.

From **The Tragedy of Love in *Hamlet***

The word "love" appears 84 times in the Folger edition of *Hamlet*. By comparison, "Father" only appears 73 times, "play" 60, "think" 55, "mother" 46, "mad" 44, "soul" 40, "God" 39, "death" 38, "act" 35, "life" 34, "nothing" 28, "son" 26, "act" 23, "honor" 21, "spirit" 19, "kill" 18, "revenge" 14, "doubt" 14, and "action" 12. Love isn't the first theme that comes to mind when we think about Hamlet, but is surprisingly prominent. *Hamlet* is a play about love.

Statistics.

From **The Meaning of Death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet***

As Figure 1 shows, there is a linearity between the severity of one's *hamartia* and the spectacularity of one's death in *Hamlet*. Mathematically speaking, there is a strong linear correlation coefficient. This constant, denoted as "r", describes how perfectly two sets of data can be modeled with a linear relationship. Completely random data would yield r=0. The closer the value of r to 1, the better the linear model can describe the system. The relationship between severity of hamartia and spectacularity of death in *Hamlet* yields an r value of 0.9522, a very strong correlation.

Statistics.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

We can easily imagine Gertrude flinching at Claudius's "unmanly grief" line. *That's a rude thing to say*, she might be thinking. *What does manly and unmanly have to do with anything? We are talking about grief, not gender. Keep your gendered conceptions of morality to yourself, Claudius.*

Ventrioloquism.

From **Shakespeare on the Classics, Shakespeare as a Classic: A Reading of Aeneas's Tale to Dido**

Hamlet asks specifically for "a passionate speech" (2.2.373) and, at some point in his compositional process, Shakespeare must have said, I *need some story for the players to perform that shows an actor exhibiting passion toward an event in which he has no personal investment.*

Ventriloquism.

From ***Hamlet* is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

Imagine Ophelia hearing Hamlet—"To be or not to be—that is the question"—and what she might be thinking: *Never thought of that. Suicide. A new option. Ending it all. Hamlet's thinking about it, though Lord knows he's got plenty going for him. Rich, powerful, male. What about my sea of troubles? God, don't even think about it. But it's too late. Can't unthink suicide as a possibility. It burrows in your mind.*

Ventriloquism.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

A pack of drunk assholes stumbles on stage—Danish royalty looking like American frat boys. The alpha, King Claudius, just married, slurs through the affairs of state:

> No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
> But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
> And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
> Re-speaking earthly thunder. (1.2.125-29)

They're going to get drunk and shoot off their guns. What could go wrong?

Colloquialism.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

"Even in that was heaven ordinant," Hamlet replies (5.2.44). Which is more likely: that God put King Hamlet's ring (with its royal Danish seal) on Hamlet's finger, as he believes, or that that Hamlet himself chose to wear the ring to honor and commemorate the dearly departed father with whom he has been obsessed?

A rhetorical question.

From **The Tragedy of Love in *Hamlet***

Three kinds of love appear in *Hamlet*. First, there is what the ancient Greeks called *philia*—friendship—in the service Prince Hamlet and his friends offer each other, which they repeatedly call "love." Hamlet's first love, as it were, is Horatio, along with Marcellus and Barnardo, but Hamlet also refers to his relationship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as "love."

Second, we see romantic love—what the Greeks called *eros*—in the "hot love" of Hamlet and Ophelia (yes, that's an actual phrase from the play). *Eros* also appears in Gertrude's marriages—first to King Hamlet, then to Claudius—which are reflected upon in the extended discourse on love between the Player King and Player Queen during the play-within-the-play.

Third, we encounter familial love, which the Greeks called *storge*. "If thou didst ever thy dear father love," the Ghost tells Prince Hamlet, "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." This form of love also appears in the Fortinbras family and the Polonius family. Hamlet even pits his *eros* for Ophelia against Laertes's *storge*: "I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum." Similarly, Gertrude and Claudius's *eros* challenges Gertrude and Prince Hamlet's *storge*.

An enumeration.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in *Hamlet***

Hi, my name is Jeff, and I'm a Shakespeare scholar. The first step was admitting I had a problem. I spend a lot of time making amends. I'm also a recovering alcoholic, which is why I flinch at gimmicks like Shit-Faced Shakespeare, where actors see how far into their benders they can remember their lines. Good fun, but Shakespeare thought alcohol was a major social problem.

A personal revelation.

From ***Hamlet* is a Suicide Text—It's Time to Teach It Like One**

The power of suicide contagion, and my experience with it, is one reason I hesitate to assign *Hamlet*, a play so obsessed with suicide that it's hard to believe it's one of the most commonly assigned texts in American high schools.

A personal revelation.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

In this reading, King Hamlet killed Old Fortinbras, which led to King Hamlet's expanded power, which led to Claudius's expanded ambition, which led to the murder of King Hamlet, which led to two separate series of events. First and most obviously, it led the spirit of King Hamlet to purgatory, which led to the reappearance of that spirit in Denmark, which led Prince Hamlet to search it out, which led the Ghost to task Hamlet with revenge, which led Hamlet—after all the business with the feigned madness, the royal surveillance, the existential waffling, and the Mousetrap—to kill Polonius thinking it was Claudius, which then further split this thread of the plot into two sub-threads: first the death of Polonius, combined with the break-up with Hamlet, led Ophelia to go mad, which led her to commit suicide; second, the death of Polonius, combined with the loss of Ophelia, led Laertes to vow revenge against Hamlet, which led Claudius to exploit Laertes's revenge and conceive of the rigged duel, which led to the deaths of Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes. Meanwhile, in the second series of events caused by the murder of King Hamlet, the ensuing destabilization of Denmark led the state to be seen as vulnerable by its enemies, which led the latent Young Fortinbras to reawaken his quest to reclaim his father's land, which led to Claudius writing to Old Norway, which led to Old Norway reeling in Young Fortinbras, which led to Young Fortinbras redirecting his energies against Poland, which led his army across Denmark, which led Fortinbras to slip into the power vacuum created in Denmark when King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, and Prince Hamlet all die at once.

Long sentences.

From **The Fortunes of Fate in *Hamlet*: Divine Providence and Social Determinism**

Looked at in this way, fate is not a quaint historical relic from a less sophisticated time. Fate is very much with us today. Fate is real. Fate is reality. It is the massive amount of the material universe which exists independent of our attempts to make our way through it.

Short sentences.

From **"It Started Like a Guilty Thing": The Beginning of *Hamlet* and the Beginning of Modern Politics**

As such, we can think of King Hamlet's tyranny as the villainy unique to pre-modern politics, of King Claudius's treason as the villainy unique to early-modern politics, and of Prince Hamlet's emotionally charged presentation of his situated and simplistic viewpoint as if it were an unassailable truth as the villainy unique to modern politics.

Parallel structures.

From **Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy in *Hamlet***

Horatio does not tell of Claudius's murder of King Hamlet; he tells of "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts." Horatio does not tell of Prince Hamlet's unintended murder of Polonius; he tells of "accidental judgments." Horatio does not tell of Hamlet's death during his duel with Laertes; he tells of "deaths put on by cunning." Horatio does not tell of Ophelia's descent into madness and suicide; he tells of death by "forced cause." Horatio does not tell of Claudius and Laertes's deaths during their plot against Hamlet; he tells of "purposes mistook / Fall'n on the inventors' heads."

Parallel structures.

From **Is *Hamlet* a Sexist Text?**

Hamlet fails the Bechdal test. An invention of the modern pop culture critic and feminist Allison Bechdal, the Bechdal test provides a three-pronged measure for gender inequality in literature and film: for any given text, are there (1) at least two women who (2) talk to each other (3) about something other than a man. The number of famous works, especially films, which fail this test is astounding. The Star Wars and Lord of the Rings trilogies both fail, which is surprising because, even though powerful women are present in each – Princess Leah in Star Wars and Galandriel in Lord of the Rings – it becomes clear upon closer inspection that these characters remain subordinate in the central plot. Likewise, Shakespeare attended to neither the inner-life of Ophelia and Gertrude nor their lived experiences in the world beyond their relationships to the men who are the central concern of the text (whether fathers, husbands, or sons). The question isn't whether men or women are better, more ethical beings in Hamlet, but which are more developed as characters. In other words, Shakespeare's sexism manifested in a specifically literary way.

Contemporary allusions.

Seven

Publication

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Titles

Here are some titles from a round of student papers:

- The Insanity Defense
- What Should the Minimum Legal Drinking Age Be?
- Please, Somebody Just Kill Me

Here are some titles from some recent volumes of the journal *Criminology*:

- Foot Patrol in Violent Crime Hot Spots: The Longitudinal Impact of Deterrence and Posttreatment Effects of Displacement
- Policing Race: The Racial Stratification of Searches in Police Traffic Stops
- Transferred Juveniles in the Era of Sentencing Guidelines: Examining Judicial Departures for Juvenile Offenders in Adult Criminal Court

You can easily see the differences: student titles tend toward imprecision, uncertainty, and cuteness, whereas academic titles are specific, definite, and sincere.

Sometimes students completely forget to title a paper, or they make the title of a paper the title of the assignment (e.g. "Ten-Page Research Paper"), which is a terrible title for a paper, unless of course your instructor has specifically asked for it. Part of academic writing includes learning how to title your papers in professional ways.

Your title should be the best and last thing you write for your paper.

It is the first thing in your paper that your reader sees—and, in writing, first impressions are important—so your title should be the best piece of writing in your paper. Put your best foot forward.

Because it should reflect your most fully developed understanding of the argument presented in your paper, your title should be the last thing you write. It's the first thing your reader sees but the last thing you write.

Avoid asking questions in titles. They make your reader suspect that you haven't done enough reading, thinking, or researching to provide a clear argument about the material. If you haven't given any time to your paper, why should your reader?

Don't try to be clever, cute, or funny in a title for an academic paper. Doing so makes you look like an amateur. Also, when you're writing an academic paper, you're not writing a personal essay or the great American novel. "Shopping with Shakespeare," "Lost in L.A.," or "Under the Gun" are not viable academic titles.

When you're a famous writer and people will read your work simply because you wrote it, then you can title it whatever you like. Until then, your titles must give your readers a reason to read you papers, a reason to care about them. Given that anyone who reads an academic paper reads it for one reason and one reason only—to learn something—your titles need to advertise in specific terms the knowledge contained in the paper.

In order to advertise the knowledge contained in a paper, a title should include three elements: text(s), topic(s), and argument. A bad title will only identify one of these elements; it might only name the topic(s) or concept(s) under consideration without any specific details: e.g., "Too Much Delay." A reader has no idea what's going to happen in the paper that follows this title. It might be about how congressional procedures prohibit legislation, or it might be about the crisis in leadership under former Majority Leader Tom Delay. A better title would name the topic(s) as well as the text(s) involved, which is to say the specific documents or pieces of information in which the topic(s) appear(s)—e.g., "Delay in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." Here, at least a reader knows what the paper's going to be about. But the best title will identify the topic(s) and the text(s) under consideration and at least gesture toward the paper's argument about the topic(s) and the text(s)—e.g., "Delay as Due Process in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." With this title, a reader knows what the paper is about and even a little bit about what the argument is going to be.

Topic(s), text(s), and argument is a lot of information, so consider using a colon in your title to break it up—e.g., "Criminal Justice in Shakespeare's

Hamlet: Delay as Due Process." Sometimes you will need a colon just to get through these three elements.

Sometimes you can begin your title with a quote or a catchphrase, then use a colon, and then identify your topic(s), text(s), and argument after the colon—e.g. "'He is justly served': Delay as Due Process in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." It is far more important to be descriptive about your topic(s), text(s), and argument than to include a quote or catchphrase.

8-12 words is usually a good range to aim for in titles: doing so gives you enough space to represent the specificity and complexity of your paper without being self-indulgent.

MLA Style neither encourages nor discourages the use of headings throughout a paper. Avoid headings if your paper is less than 8 pages.

APA Style uses more headings than other styles tend to use. In APA style, the entire paper can be divided up into sections using primary headings. A section with a primary heading can in turn be divided up into subsections using secondary headings. And a subsection with a secondary heading can be divided up by tertiary headings, which sometimes cover only one or two paragraphs. Each of these levels of headings is formatted differently, so be sure to review APA style when using headings.

In APA-style qualitative papers, your headings should be specific to the content that follows. That is, do not use headings such as *Method*, *Results*, and *Discussion* unless you've actually conceived and conducted a study in which you've personally collected data through a rigorously controlled experiment.

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Abstracts

From the Latin *ab*, "away," + *trahere*, "to draw," an *abstract* is a short statement drawn out of a longer paper. An abstract is a brief summary of your paper written to allow others to determine if your paper contains information of sufficient interest for them to read.

Because an abstract is not a part of the paper proper, it's fine to copy-and-paste material from your paper into your abstract.

What follows suggests a structure for a 300-word abstract that provides the following information: *Text, Critical Scholarship, Problem, Methodology, Argument, Evidence,* and *Implications*. Plan to spend one sentence, and one sentence only, on each kind of information, except your *Evidence*, which might require two or even three sentences.

Note that not all abstracts are 300 words. Depending on the purpose or publication, they can range from 50 words to 500. If your abstract needs to be shorter than 200 words, the key categories of information to convey are your *Text, Problem,* and *Thesis.*

- *Text*: Write a single sentence that describes your *text*—what you're interpreting in your paper. Identify both the *specific* and the *gneral* aspects of your text—the documents, passages, people, events, ideas, etc. that you're interpreting as well as the topic, issue, problem, theme, etc.

- *Critical Scholarship*: In a single sentence, review your *critical community*—i.e., the previous scholars who have addressed the same

text you're addressing. You should aim to establish the dominant perspectives or "camps" in the criticism on your topic, potentially identifying which perspectives you plan to dispute and which you plan to develop.

- *Problem*: Write a sentence that describes your *problem*– i.e., why your text needs interpretation. You might state your problem by stating why the published criticism on your issue (i.e. your *Critical Scholarship*) is not completely satisfactory, and how your paper will fill a gap, correct a misconception, extend a line of thought, address new evidence, etc.

- *Methodology*: Pause for a moment to be explicit about your *methodology*—i.e., the way in which you're going about your interpretation of your text. On the heels of your problem statement, your method statement may imply or explicitly suggest that the critical community is not completely satisfactory because it has not had the best methodology.

- *Thesis*: Once you've given a text statement, a problem statement, and a method statement, give your *thesis statement*—i.e. your interpretation of your text. Remember that your thesis must be responsive to your text; you must actually be interpreting what you said you were going to interpret. Your thesis should also be responsive to your problem; how does your thesis resolve or explain the issue or question that you identified in your text and the criticism on it? Finally, your thesis should be responsive to your methodology; it should be the interpretation of your text that emerges when that text is looked at in the unique way in which you're looking at it.

- *Evidence*: In two or three sentences, provide an overview of the body of your paper, specifying what evidence and examples you use in the paper. Be as specific as possible.

- *Implications*: The final thing an abstract must do is to indicate why any of this matters. Explain the intellectual pay-off of your paper, but be aware of certain traps. Don't act as though you've saved the world, and don't try to make your reader a better person. Instead, explain how your interpretation produces transformative knowledge for a specific academic audience who has specific academic goals (usually a full and complete understanding of the subject upon which its discipline rests).

Into the Essay

From **"To be, or not to be": Shakespeare Against Philosophy**

This essay hazards a new reading of the most famous passage in Western literature: "To be, or not to be" from William Shakespeare's Hamlet. With this line, Hamlet poses his personal struggle, a question of life and death, as a metaphysical problem, as a question of existence and nothingness. However, "To be, or not to be" is not what it seems to be. It seems to be a representation of tragic angst, yet a consideration of the context of the speech reveals that "To be, or not to be" is actually a satire of philosophy and Shakespeare's representation of the theatricality of everyday life. In this essay, a close reading of the context and meaning of this passage leads into an attempt to formulate a Shakespearean image of philosophy.

An abstract.

From **Sigma Alpha Elsinore: The Culture of Drunkenness in Shakespeare's *Hamlet***

Claudius likes to party—a bit too much. He frequently binge drinks, is arguably an alcoholic, but not an aberration. Hamlet says Denmark is internationally known for heavy drinking. That's what Shakespeare would have heard in the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth, English writers feared Denmark had taught their nation its drinking habits. Synthesizing criticism on alcoholism as an individual problem in Shakespeare's texts and times with scholarship on national drinking habits in the early-modern age, this essay asks what the tragedy of alcoholism looks like when located not on the level of the individual, but on the level of a culture, as Shakespeare depicted in Hamlet. One window into these early-modern cultures of drunkenness is sociological studies of American college fraternities, especially the social-learning theories that explain how one person—one culture—teaches another its habits. For Claudius's alcoholism is both culturally learned and culturally significant. And, as in fraternities, alcoholism in Hamlet is bound up with wealth, privilege, toxic masculinity, and tragedy. Thus, alcohol imagistically reappears in the vial of "cursed hebona," Ophelia's liquid death, and the poisoned cup in the final scene—moments that stand out in recent performances and adaptations with alcoholic Claudiuses and Gertrudes.

An abstract.

From **Why Shakespeare? Irony and Liberalism in Canonization**

When scholars consider Shakespeare's rise and lasting popularity in modern culture, they usually tell us how he assumed his position at the head of the canon but not why. This essay contends that Shakespeare's elevation in the early nineteenth century resulted from the confluence of his strategy as an author and the political commitments of his canonizers. Specifically, Shakespeare's ironic mode made his drama uniquely appealing to the political liberals at the forefront of English culture. In their own ways, Shakespeare and his proponents were antiauthoritarian: the literary antiauthoritarianism in his drama (the irony granting audiences the freedom of interpretation) perfectly matched the political antiauthoritarianism (liberalism) advocated by the likes of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. Thus it is possible to speak of bardolatry as an allegorical intertext for liberal politics.

An abstract.

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Revision

Here is probably the most important advice you will ever hear about writing: Revision is not about going back to fix a paper. It's about developing an idea that was first formulated in a draft, and then writing a new paper for the new and improved idea.

There's a difference between *editing* and *revising*. An edit fixes the language and grammar errors in a paper. A revision is a much more serious affair. To revise—from the Latin *re*, "again" + *videre*, "to see"—is to see again, to re-envision the core ideas of a paper. Revision is a re-thinking of both the reading that went into an interpretation and the writing that went into a paper.

Because revision is about starting anew, start over on your paper with a blank page in your word processing program. Don't go back to the original document and try to adjust it. Instead, create an entirely new document and start from scratch, even if, at times, you're merely retyping from your previous draft. What you'll find is that you'll revise and improve both ideas and language as you re-enter them.

Perhaps the most crucial strategy for revision—it's really a mindset—is not to be tied to what's written in a paper just because you wrote it.

One thing that often happens in my revision process is that I'll find myself saying, "I can't get rid of that sentence," and, "I definitely need that paragraph." If I leave the paper, however, and come back to it a month later, when I'm not as deeply invested in every word that I've written, I'll find

myself looking at the same paper and saying, "I can get rid of that sentence," and, "I really don't need that paragraph."

Revision is often about making a paper better by making it shorter. If you can express in eight pages what it previously took you ten pages to express, then you've written a better paper.

When you receive comments back from readers, break them down into each individual suggestion. Make a list of these suggestions, and then write what you would do if you were to revise the paper on the basis of each suggestion. You won't always choose to include every revision, but it helps create options to choose between.

— Practicum —

Reflecting on a Paper

When you finish a paper, it's helpful to make some notes about it—reflecting on what's working, what's not, and future directions.

Reflections on drafts should describe your reading, thinking, and writing process and respond to some or all of the following questions:

- What is your problem—i.e., what analytical question are you trying to answer? (State it in a new way here—don't just quote your draft.) What makes your argument one that needs to be made?
- How did you come to your question/problem?
- What do you see as your thesis or main idea so far? (Again, don't just quote your draft.) If you had to write your thesis in 10 words, what would it be?
- How has your argument evolved throughout your response papers and draft writing?
- What kind of essay are you writing? What's the logic of how your evidence fits together to create an argument?
- What's at stake in your argument? How might it be transformative or revelatory for a standard or surface reading of your text?
- How does your essay relate to life today (if it does—not all essays need to or will)? If your argument has some current resonance, how do you indicate that in the essay?
- What point or idea do you feel you've conveyed most successfully in the draft?
- What are your lingering questions about the text and your argument?
- What are the biggest problems you're having at this point in the writing process? Which ideas or points are you still struggling to communicate?
- Are there ideas you haven't said as well as you'd like to in the draft, or that you haven't yet managed to include at all?
- How have you brought your experiences and perspective—your unique voice as a writer—to bear in this essay (either in the development of ideas or the presentation of the argument)?
- What intellectual risks have you taken in this piece?

Reflections on revisions should describe your reading, thinking, and writing process and respond to some or all of the following questions:

- What is your thesis? How has it changed from draft to revision?
- What are you happiest with in this revision?
- What was most challenging with this revision? How did you approach those challenges?
- What revision techniques did you use?
- What was new about the writing process for you this time around?
- What would you continue to work on in further revision?

In writing your cover letters for both drafts and revisions, avoid cutting-and-pasting from your draft. At the same time, my experience with reading cover letters leads me to say that students often state their ideas (problem, thesis, stakes, etc.) more clearly and more straightforwardly in their cover letters, where they've taken a step back from the paper (whether draft or revision) and formulated their sentences having fully worked through a paper. Please consider going back to your paper to revise it after writing your cover letter.

The Writing Process

Hayat

Writer's Letter

Dear Wilson,

First, I'd like to make clear that the question I'm really trying to answer is: Who is Horatio? A basic reading of Hamlet tells us that Horatio is Hamlet's friend who stands by him even when he has no others. But a close reading reveals that he may not actually be the best friend Hamlet needs. Furthermore, Horatio is a storyteller and a bit of a gossip; holding the role of a bard, he may serve Shakespeare's purpose as a vehicle for self-reflection. This is what is at stake□exploring the character of Horatio is actually an exploration of Shakespeare, a person whose writing and life we have studied for centuries. Perhaps his character reveals more about Shakespeare than we have realized in the past.

When I wrote this paper, I tried to order my ideas in a clear, logical way, and I would really like to know if the arguments that I put forward flow from one to the next in a way that makes sense to you. I think my strongest argument comes in paragraph 4; in my opinion, the short quotes that I chose to use there fit my analysis especially well, helping me get my point across.

Something I'm wondering about is whether I should find more quoted evidence to support my claims. I would really like feedback on that subject. Also, do you think that the text I chose to interpret (Horatio's words and actions from throughout the entire play) is narrow enough? I realize that changing the text would require an entire reworking of my paper, but I would like to know if you think that the subject I'm taking on, that is, Horatio's entire character, is too wide for a five-page paper.

Finally, what do you think of the title? Do you think that "Exploring Horatio" is too raunchy or provocative? It wasn't exactly my intention to give my title such an aspect, but I think that it sounds good and accurately foreshadows what the paper aims to do.

Thank you for reading my letter, and I look forward to hearing your comments on my paper.

Sincerely,

Hayat

— Practicum —

Reverse Outlining

This guided session will help you develop an idea discovered in a draft and work it into an effective structure for a revised paper. As such, this activity will prepare you to create a detailed outline for your revision.

1. Take five minutes and write out your *argument*, as it currently stands, off the top of your head.
2. Who is the audience for your essay? Who needs to know the knowledge that you have? Identify the discipline, field, topic, area of inquiry, line of thought, etc. to which your argument has a contribution to make. (This is related to your *stakes*.)
3. In a short paragraph, summarize the actual substance of your contribution—your *implications*.
4. Create a diagram of the kinds of evidence at work in your argument.
    - Based on the interpretation articulated in your argument statement, identify what your text is—i.e., what it is that you're interpreting in this paper.
    - Based on your text, identify your major categories of textual evidence—i.e., the bits and pieces of your text that you draw out for in-depth analysis.
    - Identify any major categories of historical evidence—i.e., the material that is not, strictly speaking, within your text but still holds some significance for your argument about the meaning of that text.
    - Identify any major categories of Historical Scholarship—i.e., the scholarship to which you refer for your understanding of your historical evidence.
    - Identify any major categories of Theoretical Scholarship—i.e., philosophies, theories, lenses, etc. through which you look to interpret your text.
    - Identify any major categories of Critical Scholarship—i.e., other scholars who have interpreted the same text or textual evidence that you're interpreting.

— Practicum —

5. Based on your diagram, write a *text* / *method* statement describing what you're interpreting and how.
6. Identify your key terms. (Less is more: one or two key concepts.)
7. Using these key terms, write a *thesis* statement—a clear and concise claim about your text that uses big concepts to make a claim that is true, consequential, quotable, and not obvious.
8. Based on your thesis, work backwards to write a *question/problem* statement—a description of the issue that your thesis resolves.
9. Note down any *orientation* that your reader needs to know to understand and appreciate your question/ problem.
10. Now cut out your various responses to these questions—these are many of the elements of your argument—and start to think about the important element of *structure*.

    The order in which you came to an idea and the order in which you answered these questions is probably not the most effective way to order your presentation of these ideas in a paper. With each of your elements on its own fragment of paper, start positioning them for an effective presentation of your argument. Figure out how to structure the framing material in the introduction; figure out the best order in which to work through all of your different kinds of evidence in the body of your paper; and ask how it's best to deal with "the bigger picture" in your conclusion. Create a linear progression of ideas.

11. Once your fragments of information are structured in an effective way, write out assertions for each section of the body and each paragraph within each section.
12. Your work in this activity will culminate in a detailed outline for your revision. A detailed outline presents all of the major elements of your argument, in complete sentences, with each element tagged so that it is clear how that information is operating in your argument. When I do a detailed outline, I include the totality of my introduction and conclusion, word for word, so that the only difference between outline and paper is that the information in the outline is tagged and it's in outline (not paragraph) form.

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Comments

The goal is to make the paper better.

Every paper ever written in the history of the world can be made better. There has never been a paper that can't be made better. The most celebrated writings all could have been better. Good writers know that their pieces can always be better. (Be cautious of writers who think their words can't be made better.)

Comments on papers are rarely a *To Do* list of corrections.

Whether you're giving or receiving comments on a paper, the best use of comments is for them to be preparation for a conversation.

Writing is an intensely personal thing and receiving comments on your writing is an emotionally complex event. As a commentator, you want to validate the considerable work that has been done to produce a paper, but you must also help the writer improve the paper.

My least favorite thing to hear when I ask someone for comments is: "This is good!" I know it's good: I wrote it. What I want to know is how to make it better.

But commentators should make positive comments about specific moments in a paper whenever possible, especially if the piece is not particularly strong. Praise good titles, good thesis statements, good evidence, good research, good sentences, and so forth.

There's nothing I hate more than hearing, "I know it needs revision," or, " I know I need to fix the errors." When I hear that kind of disclaimer, I have no idea what you already know you need to fix and what I need to tell you to fix. At the same time, however, it can be very helpful to alert your commentators—whether professors or peers—to any specific concerns you have about a paper (e.g., "Do I get the history of allegory right on pp. 17-19?") before they begin to comment on it. Doing so allows your commentator to direct his or her attention to the areas of most concern.

— Practicum —

Commenting on Papers

Before you start commenting on a paper, put yourself in the proper frame of mind. Don't think to yourself, "I'm going to fix this paper." Instead think, "I'm going to try to learn something." Then, as you read, take note of two obstacles to your leaning: (1) the moments when ineffective writing hampers the communication of ideas, and (2) the times when your understanding of the subject is incompatible with the paper's representation of that subject.

It's best to provide comments on a paper in two forms: (1) marginal comments on the actual paper itself and (2) a feedback letter that synthesizes together some key points-of-focus for revision. Below is a good structure for your feedback letter.

1. Start with the positive: identify the best aspect of the paper.

2. Articulate the writer's central argument in your own words. Often, it's easier to write a good thesis statement from the outside looking in.

3. Provide a list of three to five areas for the writer to focus on for revision. Give each area a name (e.g., *Implications, Missing Evidence, Structure of Introduction*, etc.) and a short explanation that gives some suggestions for revision.

4. If you're able to meet with the writer to have a conversation about the paper, provide one task for the writer to complete (e.g., "Create a list of additional possible examples" or "Draw a new conceptual map").

5. If you have minor notes to give to the writer, provide them in a marked copy of the paper or a list at the end of your letter back to the writer.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Feedback Letter

Dear Andrew,

I'm sending along my feedback on your draft, including my marginal comments to your text as well as this feedback letter.

Your thesis, if I were to put it in my own terms, is that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* suggests an irreconcilable tension between honor and truth. On the one hand, the feudalistic culture of honor in which Hamlet was raised (as symbolized by his warrior father) demands bravery in the face of injustice; on the other hand, the culture of truth which Hamlet was exposed to in school (as symbolized by his time at the University of Wittenberg) demands certainty in the face of doubt. Hamlet's tragedy results from the fact that, for Hamlet, bravery and certainty were not simultaneously achievable.

I must say that this argument is quite intriguing, but it's also very ambitious, which leaves some room for improvement.

Here are some points for us to focus on in our conference:

- *Thesis / Argument*: I'll push you to articulate things in terms of Shakespeare's intent. For me, the *real* question is: Why did Shakespeare establish the tension between contemplation (including concepts like certainty, truth, and cowardice) and action (including honor and bravery)? What was Shakespeare saying something about—something about contemplation? something about honor? And what, ultimately, was Shakespeare saying?

- *Analysis*: I'll encourage you to avoid formulations about Hamlet's true/real/innate character. Instead, there's the character we meet at the start of the play, and the one we come to know over the course of the play—different characters, neither one necessarily the true or real Hamlet.

- *Implications*: Your conclusion is about how, once a certain situation is in play, tragedy is inevitable. Let's talk about what you envision that situation to be.

Please let me know if you have any questions about my feedback. I look forward to our conference, where we can talk more about my marginal feedback, my feedback letter, and your ideas for revision. **It would be great if you were able to come to our conference with an updated *conceptual map* and an updated *basic outline*.**

Yours,

Wilson

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Conferences

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One-on-one conferences is where the real magic of revision happens.

All you have to do to have a good conference is just … talk about ideas.

One of the best ways to write a good thesis is for you to sit down with someone and describe your essay. Inevitably, you'll stream-of-conscience word vomit for about three minutes. Then ask them, What do you think my thesis is? They'll be able to give you a simplified version of your main point. It won't be exactly right. You'll have to re-write it for accuracy. But it'll be crisper than your long discursive slop.

Often conferences come down to the question, What are you really trying to argue here?

Conferences are great places for developing ideas because you can test out ideas to see which ones get a positive response from the person you're speaking with. Keep following the ideas that get energy and excitement in the conversation.

Another reason conferences work well for revising ideas is that they are conversational. When you're speaking conversationally with another human, you tend to avoid the inflated language that often appears in academic writing.

The best way to approach conferences is as two people trying to get to the bottom of something. Think of each other as partners-in-thought, and the two of you are together trying to build up an idea as big as it can go in the time available.

The key to a successful conference is for the writer to go into it as the leader with a clear agenda.

There's no better feeling than, 20 minutes into a conference, when one of you says, that's the argument this paper has to make.

Conferencing allows the writer to take ownership of the revision process.

— Practicum —

Conferencing Papers

Below are some notes to help you cultivate productive paper conferences.

- The reader should provide substantive feedback in advance, even if it's just some points-of-focus for the conversation.

- Plan to chat for about 25 minutes. That seems to be the golden time—long enough to allow for depth and digression, but short enough to keep conversation focused on the higher-order Elements of Academic Argument.

- Most conferences emphasize five of the Elements of Academic Writing:

    1. *Argument*: Talk about the ideas being argued, not about the paper. Just have a conversation—two people talking about interesting ideas.
    2. *Terms*: Figure out the key terms of the argument and make a conceptual map.
    3. *Thesis*: Once you've reached an argument that is compelling to all involved in the conversation, turn attention to writing a thesis.
    4. *Implications*: once you've got a thesis, you can think about implications. Have some fun brainstorming possible directions for the conclusion.
    5. *Structure*: You can only think about structure once you've formed up the thesis and implications. You have to know how the paper will end before you can think about how it should begin.

- Lower-order Elements—such as as *evidence*, *analysis*, and *counters*—often don't arise in as much depth in conferences, partly because they tend to come easily when the higher-order Elements are successful.

- Take a minute at the end of a conference to identify three priorities for revision.

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Workshop

A writing workshop is a group conversation about a work in progress.

Workshop isn't simply for the benefit of the writers whose work is being discussed. Workshops work best when we remember the goal in front of us: not to "fix" the particular paper being discussed but to use it as an example and opportunity for discussion. By reading, assessing, and thoughtfully discussing one person's paper, all can identify common risks and trouble spots, evaluate what works and what doesn't, and derive certain principles about successful approaches to a particular paper assignment.

A good workshop helps everyone present write or revise a better paper.

The principles that will help you read fellow students' papers carefully and thoughtfully (and that will ultimately benefit your writing most) fall into practical and philosophical categories:

Practical

Read the paper, making notes as you go along. Be sure to note in the margins where the essay works particularly well for you ("the analysis here is really convincing—great choice of material from the play"), as well as where you stop, ask questions, etc. ("I'm not following the transition to this paragraph" or "the main idea here seems to have changed—you're now contradicting the point you made in paragraph 2," etc.). (You'll give this annotated copy back to the writer.)

At the end, write a (typed) reader's report. This is a response to the draft as a whole, about a page in length, focusing on the overall issues that seem to you most important. Praise the strengths, point out the trouble spots, and make suggestions for revision (see the "Sample Reader's Reports" for examples of good and less good reader's reports).

On the whole, your stylistic comments should note patterns or habits. What does the writer seem to do consistently well? Is there a regular difficulty with unclear phrasing or choppy sentences? Mark those trouble spots (usually easiest to draw a squiggly line under them), but remember that this is a draft you're reading; minute stylistic comments on every sentence are less likely to help, since at least some of those sentences are likely to be cut. (The exception: it does make sense to note sentences or phrases that are particularly striking or successful: every writer likes to know what she or he did well!)

Philosophical

Specificity helps. In any essay there will be aspects you like and others you think don't work as well; the goal is to offer that feedback to the writer in a way that helps him or her make the best use of the information. "I liked it a lot" as the sum total of your comments isn't going to help the writer very much; neither is "this doesn't quite work." How can you make your comments specific enough so that the writer has some guidance during revision? What exactly works well and why? Which areas seem less successful and why? Keying your observations to the particular goals of that assignment, or to the Elements of Academic Argument, helps keep your comments more specific.

Put yourself in the writer's shoes. If you were receiving feedback on an essay, what kinds of comments would it help you to hear? What kinds of suggestions can you offer? Remember that you have a fresh perspective to bring to this piece of writing (a piece which the writer can undoubtedly see a lot less clearly at this point).

Think about the macro level instead of the micro. We're not editing; we're workshopping. Try stepping back from the essay and thinking about what would make the whole work better. Should paragraphs be moved? Sections cut? Rearranged? The writer should be able to leave the discussion with new ideas about how to approach the essay. (Former Expos Director Nancy Sommers noted that when experienced writers revise, they often make major changes in idea and organization; student writers tend to make changes in word choice or sentences but leave the essay essentially unaltered. How would an experienced writer approach a revision of this essay?)

Read for what's there as well as what's not. In what ways does the essay discover new ideas as it progresses? Do the introduction and the stated thesis "fit" the rest of the essay? How can the opening and the pages that follow be brought into better harmony with each other?

Relate your experience. Instead of saying, *The conclusion is weak*, say, *I was left wanting a little bit more at the end.*

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Presentations

News broadcasts are an excellent model for academic lectures—scripted to ensure accuracy of information, presented as a narrative (not an argument), rehearsed but not robotic, delivered with pace, often enlivened with images and videos that illustrate but don't replace the speaker's words, emphasizing concrete details and big-picture takeaways, and frequently bringing in multuiple voices.

Stick to time. If nothing else, stay within your time limit. It's a show of respect for your audience and fellow speakers and a sign of experience and expertise. Nothing loses an audience like going over time.

Reading from a script for a presentation is only a problem when the writing isn't good. Reading your remarks indicates that what you're saying matters, and it's important to get it right. Reading prioritizes substance over style.

But there are better and worse ways to read out loud. Record yourself and watch it back to see what looks good and what doesn't. Practice enough that you're familiar with your script and can look up as you read to make eye contact with your audience.

You can't just read from an academic paper that you wrote. You'll need to re-write certain aspects with a faster pace and simpler sentences. (And maybe you'll discover that you should have been wrting like that all along.)

The exact structure your presentation takes is up to you, but there are certain Elements of Academic Argument to try to cover:

Introduction
- *Orientation*
- *Question/Problem*
- *Literature Review*
- *Method*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes*

Body
- *Evidence*
- *Analysis*
- *Counters/Responses*

Conclusion
- *Argument*
- *Implications*

Don't run through this list in rote fashion. Emphasize what's most fascinating and enlightening about your project (e.g., for some it might be amazing evidence, for others a sophisticated method, for others compelling implications, etc.).

Include at least one memorable moment that does something creative to add energy to your talk.

Always have a question or two ready to ask the audience so that after the talk, when you ask if there are any questions, if no one says anything, you can avoid the awkward silence, or the flat ending that says, "Welp, I guess that's it." There's no worse way to end a presentation than "And that's all I've got."

In-Class Presentations

Whether you're a student or teacher, an in-class presentation should reflect the persona you're crafting as a scholar and professional. Some people adopt the persona of the existentialist philosopher, some of the community organizer, some of the chill dude, some of the authoritative expert, some of the activist, etc. Are you the type of thinker who launches hot takes and epic takedowns or the type who seeks to synthesize ideas into a unified vision? You can argue for or against readings or update them based on your own ideas. There's not a right or wrong approach as long as you're thinking carefully about the professional persona you want to craft and convey for yourself.

That presentation-of-self will occur in conjunction with a consideration of how to create a quality discussion. That usually involves some mixture of presentation, guided discussion, and open-ended conversation. Your discussion should be grounded in the readings (what's the best way to do so? quoting key passages? summarizing main arguments? looking at key examples?) but also alert to relevant material outside these readings (connections to previous readings, other studies you've done, life experiences, etc.). You'll need to find the right balance between the content you provide that gives your discussion direction, substance, and specificity, and the contributions from others in the room that create energy, new insight, and a sense of practicality through conversation.

Try to include something fun or creative. Try to include something newsy that helps us bring the conversation up-to-date.

You can use some sort of formal presentation (e.g., PowerPoint), but you don't need to.

Public Lectures

It's assumed that your ideas will be fascinating. If they weren't, you wouldn't have been invited to speak. Doing a successful academic event isnt about what you have to say; it's about project managing into existence a memorable educational experience for your audience.

Academics often feel awkward doing publicity. Don't. Instead of centering yourself and your feelings, center your audiences and their need to have access to knowledge.

"Free and open to the public" isn't good enough anymore. Do the work of organizing and facilitating to create the conditions in which people who might not have much background in academia can experience it.

Ask how you can use your institutional resources to create educational opportunities for the people beyond your campus.

Go mobile: Meet publics where they are.

Get off campus: Go out into grade-school classrooms, community centers, homeless shelters, correctional facilities.

Go current: Be responsive to the pressures of the moment.

Go practical: Address the implications of your scholarship for lived experience.

Go digital: Use technology to reach publics beyond your geography.

Stop, collaborate, and listen: Work with staff to elevate the nuts and bolts (e.g., snacks related to the ideas being discussed at the event).

Be active in promotion: Use those materials to communicate the atmosphere of your work.

Use the rhythm of the year: Plan events around annual holidays, anniversaries, and special events like elections and Olympics.

Use fun and festivity to cultivate an excitement for scholarship.

Family day: Design academic events where knowledge for the adults is paired with play for the kids.

De-preciousize: Don't be stuffy. Food trucks, outdoors, scholarship in shorts.

Be a community member: Go to other peoples' things, and they will come to yours.

Language matters: In planning conversations and materials, don't describe communities of people in ways they wouldn't describe themselves.

Six months before the event:

- Ask "Who do we know?" Work up from your existing community partnerships to build an audience.
- Partner with community venues, and ask them to bring their audiences in.
- Find the taste-makers of the community, and invite them to break bread with you. Tell them they can bring a friend.
- Go interdisciplinary: Program across the disciplines so that audiences get multiple perspectives on a shared theme.

Three months before the event:

- Prioritize what the public values in your promotional materials—it's free, come as you are, bring your kids—over what the academy values.
- Build energy in the audience by doing small informal meals and convos in the weeks leading up to the event. Arrange food and drinks for the event.

One month before the event:

- Finalize your program.
- Have speakers finalize their remarks, if possible. (That thing we academics do where we finish our remarks at 6 am in the hotel room the morning of our talk —that doesn't work for public events because there are so many collaborators involved and their contributions should be informed by the substance of the speaker[s].)
- Plan to prompt a conversation: Think; pair; share. Small group convos. Structure your event so that it asks people to make personalized meaning of the shared conversation. Build in ways for people to participate in the formal program.
- Plan to elongate the event: Create the conditions for conversation by inviting audiences to come early to enjoy food and fellowship with friends and families.
- Plan to take control of the layout of the room: Collapse the physical distance between speaker and audience. Put everyone on the same level. Decenter the podium. All the lights on. Turn off the spotlight.
- Secure people to serve as front-of-house greeters.
- Plan to have someone live stream the event: By collaborating with campus technology resources.
- Plan to have someone live tweet the event: But only with permission from speakers.

Day of your talk:

- Ensure accessibility for all. Either print out two copies of your remarks or post your paper and slides online.
- Get your audience thinking. Put a posterboard (or some digital equivalent) at the doorway asking a question about the topic of the lecture. Provide note cards for talking back to speakers.

At the event:

- When someone comes to your event, you're their host. Act as you act when you host someone in your house. Take the initiative to make sure they're comfortable and they know what to do.
- At the entrance, have front-of-house greeters welcome people and provide directions. If you don't have greeters, do it yourself.
- Have a screen displayed providing guidance for the audience:
    - Title of talk
    - Name of speaker
    - Contact information / social media handles
    - Where to find written remarks (e.g., printed at front or online at a website)

    - Social media guidance (e.g., is it ok to post speaker's comments online)
- Depreciousize the atmosphere: Make it clear that:
    - Food and drinks are welcome.
    - Audiences can come in and out: if you need to use the bathroom, for goodness's sake, do.
    - Pictures are fine: just please don't use your flash.
    - Texting is fine: though you might enjoy it more if you put your phone away.
    - Audiences can vocalize their feelings about ideas: mmm-hmm.
- If someone is doing an introduction, have them ask the audience about their thoughts on the themes of the event (rather than talk about the speaker's accomplishments).
- One thing folks can do to be supportive of precarious academics weathering an on-going employment crisis in higher education is to give someone's credentials based on articles, books, classes, projects they've created, rather than where they work.

During the speaker's remarks:

- Less is more: A tight 20 minutes of presentation paired with something active or conversational can be more effective than an hour lecture.
- Don't make an argument: Tell a story.
- Give your narrative of how you went from experiences in your life to questions you wanted to ask to research you conducted to the conclusions you drew and their implications for the way you live your life.
- Take audiences backstage: Show the process through which scholarship is made.
- Embrace contingency: Relish the moments when the unexpectancies of public engagement create opportunities for unique experiences.
- Leverage your passion to excite other people: Enthusiasm is contagious.
- Stand for something, not against something. Even if yo're doing the important work of critique, public audiences especially want to know what you're fighting for even more than who you're fighting against.
- Use a social media respondent to transition conversation from the room to online.

After the event:

- Record video of your event. Post it online. Ask established online venues if they would like to publish the recording.
- Build a relationship with a community through repeat engagements.

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Academic Publication

Academic writing comes in many different formatting styles—meaning the style guide followed for citations. These style guides are created by professional entities devoted to the disciplines which they serve. In the humanities, common styles include the Modern Language Association (MLA) style, Chicago style, and the Associated Press (AP) style. In the sciences (both social and natural sciences), the most common style is the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

The hallmark of academic writing is the peer-review process. For a piece of writing to be peer-reviewed is for it to have been, before its publication, read and approved of by multiple experts in the field to which it is addressed. Where non-academic publications are accepted or rejected for reasons relating to their marketability, academic publications must also pass the test of accuracy (or at least plausibility).

There are three main forms of academic writing--the journal article, the chapter in an edited collection, and the book monograph.

- A journal article is a relatively short piece (usually around 25 pages) that appears in a peer-reviewed academic journal devoted to a certain field of study. It appears alongside several other articles written by different people.
- A chapter in an edited collection is similar in length to a journal article, and it also appears alongside pieces from other writers, but

this book chapter appears in a volume more focused around a specific topic (in contrast to the general field addressed by a journal).

- A monograph is a single-authored argument sustained over a whole book (usually 150 pages or more).

Academic publication is usually a long process with several stages of revision. After an idea is arrived at and a paper is written, the academic will often present the paper at a conference and perhaps teach a course related to the idea. Based on feedback from these audiences, and continued thought on the matter, the writer will revise the idea, write an article , and submit it to a peer-reviewed journal. The editor of that journal will read the article, determine whether or not it's suitable for the journal, and (if it's suitable) send the article off for review by specialists on the subject. For an article to be "suitable," it must fit well with the concerns and priorities of the journal; many articles that are rejected by an editor before even being sent out for peer-review are rejected not because the paper is crap but because it does not fit exactly with the concerns of the journal. When a submission is sent along to reviewers, they read the article, comment on it, and recommend one of several courses of action for the editor: accept the article, accept the article with revisions, ask the writer to revise and resubmit the article, or reject the article. The editor will consider the readers' reports, come to a decision, and contact the writer to inform them about the decision, usually sending along the readers' reports as well. The process from article submission to decision can take anywhere from one month to two years, depending on the journal and the discipline (in general, science journals move more quickly than humanities journals). A "revise and resubmit" can extend the timeline another three to six months; a rejection will sometimes come with a recommendation of another journal where the article may be more suitable or may have better luck. Once accepted, an article will appear in print anywhere from four months to two years after its acceptance. If that article is part of a larger project that the writer is working on, it may reappear (perhaps revised again) as a chapter in a book, often alongside other previously published articles that have appeared in other peer-reviewed journals. If the writer has a book in mind, they will put together a book proposal and send it to publishers, who will often respond with comments and sometimes an offer to publish the book. If the proposal is accepted, the writer revises the various pieces into a cohesive manuscript, which, when finalized, is sent off to readers for peer review. Based on comments from those readers, the writer will revise the manuscript one final time, and then it will appear in print anywhere from four months to one year later.

Academics are not paid for journal articles, and they are not paid well for books. Compensation for academic publishing is somewhat circuitous: tenure and promotion are largely dependent on publication. Thus, the phrase "publish or perish" has become popular in academic parlance. Academics understand that it's part of their jobs to research and publish. In this sense,

students, alumni, and philanthropic groups (at private institutions), as well as tax dollars from the general population (at public institutions), subsidize academic research through the faculty salaries they pay for; those sources of university funding also pay the often exorbitant fees academic journals charge universities and colleges for subscriptions.

An ideal track for an academic is to publish one or two articles in respected journals while in graduate school, to gain employment (partly based on those articles) as a "tenure track" assistant professor, to turn their dissertation into a book, and then to earn a promotion to the rank of associate professor, at which point tenure is usually granted. The tenure process usually takes six to eight years, and then it can take another 6 to 10 years for the associate professor to be promoted to a full professor, which is again largely based on publications, often a second book.

While public writing is shorter and less specialized, it usually comes at the end of the research and writing process. It offers the key take-aways, packaged in easy-to-access writing for non-specialist audiences. Public writing is often compensated, but not well: a writer might get $100 for an article based on ten years of research.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Submission History
for "'To be, or not to be': Shakespeare Against Philosophy"

March 2015: First draft written.

Dec. 2015: Submitted to *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. Excerpts from reader's reports:

- "It simply failed to persuade this reader that a viable interpretative possibility worthy of contemplation is being offered."
- "What I think the author is genuinely picking out, is that Hamlet's philosophizing (and not just here) is more of an evasion of the personal than a full-blooded philosophical streak."
- "It doesn't contribute anything of real substance."
- "Smollett thought it, despite the admiration accorded it, 'a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argumentation, or the poetry'"

March 2016: Presented at *Shakespeare and the Risks of Philosophy* conference

July 2016: Presented at *Shakespeare the Philosopher* conference

Oct. 2016: Submitted to *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Excerpts from reader's reports:

- "Just does not really alter or advance our understanding of the play."

Nov. 2016: Submitted to *Renaissance Drama*. Excerpts from reader's reports:

- "Hard to follow even as an essay in the tradition of Montaigne or Barthes."
- "it is just too long."
- "For the relationship between philosophy and drama, see Martin Puchner."

April 2017: Submitted to *Shakespeare*. Excerpts from reader's reports:

- "I heard this paper presented at a conference, where it provoked profound skepticism on the part of the audience and convinced no one (including me)."
- "The author needs to take more seriously than he does just why his 'interpretation' has been missing from the tradition, by and large."
- "Posed significant questions in arresting ways."
- "I find myself in disagreement with what is fundamental to the argument."
- "I wonder whether an engagement with Calderwood's 'To Be And Not To Be' might be productive."

June 2017: Submitted to *Shakespeare*. Excerpt from editor's report:

- "I am now basically happy to accept it."

July 2017: Article published online.

Oct. 2018: Article appears in print.

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Public Writing

Stylistically, embrace the absurd; mix "high" culture and "low"; foreground the comical. Give the cool, quirky evidence. Keep quotation to a minimum. Make sentences snappy and short. It's OK to write in the first person. Ask how your own story and experiences relate to your material. Rain down fury on the forces of badness in the world, if needed. Call them out. Put them on blast. But be prepared for anyone you discuss to read your essay and, if they're unhappy, send a sharply worded letter. Don't cower from speaking the truth, but make sure you're accurately representing people and their ideas.

Write with joy. We're all desperate for happiness. How can your essay offer a little corner of delight in a weary world? Remember that public readers love a feel-good story, and your enthusiasm for the importance of your topic will be contagious. Make it jokey. But not hokey. Don't try to make jokes if you're not funny. Use lists, metaphors, analogies, memes, and other creative gestures. If there's something in your research that is wild and hilarious, get that in your public piece, even if it's not central to the issue. Humor is an important route into education for public audiences.

Your title should be short and punchy: no colons, and no more than eight words. Write with confidence. This is your research. You know it frontwards and backwards, and your audience doesn't. You don't need to argue a position (persuade someone to accept it). You simply need to educate someone (convey knowledge that you have that they don't). The standard length for op-eds and much other public writing is 800 to 1000 words, which is about three double-spaced pages. Your goal is to pack as much content as possible into that space. No wasted words, no repetition, no mercy in editing

your sentences to get to the point. Content is king. Without content, style is just fluff.

Also know what not to do in public writing. You won't have space for academic meta-discourse—e.g., a text statement ("This essay explores…") or a flag for the thesis ("In this essay, I argue that…"). You'll probably cut the literature review where you discuss previous scholarship in the field—though there are some exceptions, especially if you're making an intervention in a field. If so, you'll only have about four sentences to map the terrain of the field, provide key quotations, and carve out your intervention. Throughout the essay, you won't have much space for quotation, so select quotes wisely, and summarize the rest in your own words. There's also not much room for analysis. Keep the focus on your amazing evidence and the argument that holds it all together. Trim back the analysis. Thesis, evidence, and what's at stake—that's what matters most.

Structurally, plan to spend about 20 percent of your essay on the introduction, 70 percent on the body, and 10 percent on the conclusion. You can develop a cap-and-trade system (e.g., take 10 percent from the body for the conclusion). Keep in mind that your first paragraph(s) will be the most read, the last paragraph(s) the least. Structure where you put what's most important accordingly.

In the introduction, "peg" your argument to something happening now: an upcoming event, recent headlines, current controversies, anniversaries, the yearly holiday cycle, etc. It may be a smaller story that's made the rounds in the past week, a larger story that's been in the news for a month, or an ongoing issue that keeps showing up year after year. Start with something shocking or surprising: some amazing statistic(s), a cool quotation, or a funny anecdote. Or start with your thesis as the first sentence. You need a thesis within the first three paragraphs. And those should be very short paragraphs: two or three sentences each. Your thesis should be tweetable: that means 280 characters or less, which equals about 25 words. Our introductions tend to follow one of three possible structures:

1. *The Cannonball*
   - Paragraph 1 (3 Sentences): *Peg*, *Orientation*, and *Thesis*
   - Paragraph 2 (2 Sentences): *What's at Stake*

2. *The Exemplar*
   - Paragraph 1 (3 Sentences): *Peg*, some stunning *Evidence*
   - Paragraph 2 (3 Sentences): *Thesis* and *What's at Stake*

3. *The Q&A*
   - Paragraph 1 (4 Sentences): *Peg*, *Orientation*, *Evidence*, *Analysis*, *Question/Problem*

- Paragraph 2 (2 Sentences): *Thesis* and *What's at Stake*

Note that editors love *The Cannonball.*

Apart from your thesis, what matters most in public writing is evidence and what's at stake. Your piece will succeed or fail based on the quality of the evidence: the more specific the better. Amazing statistics, captivating stories, quotes that stop readers in their tracks to say "Wow." That's what public writing is all about. Don't make an argument; tell a story. The way you tell the story should make the argument for you. Illustrate, rather than argue, your points.

Plan out the body of your essay. First, identify five pieces of key evidence. These may be amazing statistics, great quotations, bizarre facts, unknown texts, etc. The more specific the better. Anything wild that will make their readers say, "Wow!" Second, they identify what story they're telling ("This is the story of …"). Who are the main characters in this story? What is the central conflict? They break their story down into parts. It may be into three parts: *Beginning*, *Middle*, and *End*. It may be into more, using, e.g., Freytag's Pyramid: *Exposition*, *Inciting Incident*, *Rising Action*, *Crisis*, *Climax*, *Falling Action*, Denouement. Third, they figure out where in this story—chronologically—each of key pieces of evidence appear. The goal is to use the key evidence to provide detail and texture to the overarching narrative. Finally, they write out the body of the essay—their story. Paragraphs are short (three to four sentences each). Many chunk out sections with short headings (no more than six words, no colons).

With respect to what's at stake, be ambitious in connecting the details of your argument up with life today. You can go political or ethical if you like, but that is not the only way to have big implications. It's possible to remain in an analytical register (I prefer it), asking how your argument brings us to understand our world differently, rather than the personal behavior or policy implications that would follow it.

Submission

Most public writing gets published because a writer has some sort of established relationship with a venue or editor. Do you have any relationships? If so, that's the first place to submit to.

Have you published multiple award-winning books and essays? Do you have 250,000 followers on Twitter? If not, then avoid major national venues like *New York Times* and *The Atlantic*. These venues publish people who bring an audience along with them.

Look for the tightest fit between what your essay is about and the topics a venue covers.

Seriously consider local venues: hometown newspapers, outlets at your college, etc.

Most venues have instructions for submissions on their websites. Look for a "Submissions" or "Contact" page.

Create a list of possible venues. Then order that list according to where you most want to see your essay appear. Submit your essay to your first choice. If they don't respond (which is what happens 85 percent of the time) or pass on your essay (10 percent of the time), then just move on to the next one on your list.

Be prepared for the response to be: "Great: it will be live on our website in an hour." Only send out writing you're confident in and would be proud to have your name attached to.

Remember that comments sections are not where good intellectual discussions happen: expect the worst, smile, ignore, and move on when it comes.

The Writing Process

Jeffrey R. Wilson

Public Writing Submission

Dear Editors,

I'd like to see if you're interested in an essay I've written called "In Defense of Polonius," which might be pegged to Father's Day on June 19. The piece argues that Polonius—the character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—is not a bumbling old fool but a single father struggling with work-life balance.

I'm attaching the piece, complete at around 2,300 words. I'm happy to work with you on edits, if needed. Since it's a timely piece, I'd appreciate an expression of interest within two days, if possible.

I'm a faculty member in the Writing Program at Harvard University, where I teach a course called "Why Shakespeare?" My research has been featured on *National Public Radio*, *New York Times*, *MSNBC*, and *Literary Hub*, and I've written for public venues including *CNN*, *Academe*, *Salon*, *Zócalo Public Square*, and *MarketWatch*. My first book, *Shakespeare and Trump*, was reviewed in venues such as *The Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Shakespeare Survey*. A second book, *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones*, was made into an online course called *Bard of Thrones* and featured on the Folger Shakespeare Library's podcast, *Shakespeare Unlimited*. My third book, *Richard III's Bodies from Medieval England to Modernity: Shakespeare and Disability History*, will arrive from Temple University Press in October 2022 and has been previewed on podcasts such as *The State of Shakespeare*.

This piece comes from a project called Essays on Hamlet, which asks big conceptual questions with the urgency of a Shakespeare lover, and answers them with the rigor of a Shakespeare scholar.

Thanks for your consideration.

Regards,

Jeff Wilson

—

Jeffrey R. Wilson, Ph.D.
Harvard College Writing Program

Appendix

Appendix I

The Elements of Academic Argument in Action

The Hamlet Syndrome

<u>*Text*</u> *(the thing I'm interpreting):*

Hamlet's madness in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*

Figure 11: The Kinds of Evidence (Text)

<u>*Textual Evidence*</u> *(details from my text):*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599):

> Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
> How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
> As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
> To put an antic disposition on,
> That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
> With arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake,
> Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
> As 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would,'
> Or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,'
> Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
> That you know aught of me. (1.5.172-82)

Figure 12: The Kinds of Evidence (Text, Textual Evidence)

<u>*Analysis*</u> *(interpretation of that textual evidence):*

The question is not *Is Hamlet mad or just pretending?* because he clearly says that he is going to fake it, "to put an antic disposition on."

<u>*Orientation*</u> *(helping my reader understand the evidence I'm about to present):*

Shakespeare took Hamlet's feigned madness from his source, the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus's *History of the Danes*.

<u>*Historical Evidence*</u> *(which came before my text and influenced it):*

Saxo Grammaticus, *Historiae Danicae* (12th c.):

> Amleth … feared lest too shrewd a behavior might make his uncle suspect him. So he chose to feign dulness, and pretend an utter lack of

> wits. This cunning worse not only concealed his intelligence but ensured his safety. (62)

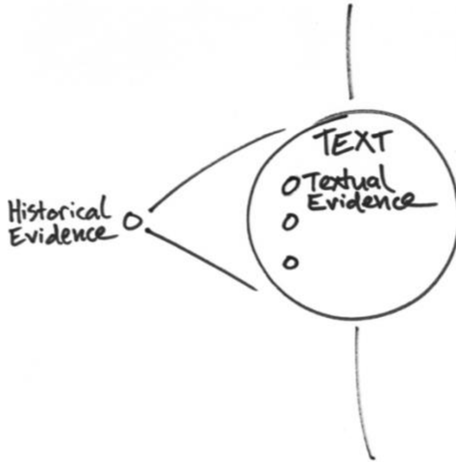

Figure 13: The Kinds of Evidence (Text, Textual Evidence, Historical Evidence)

Analysis (interpretation of that historical evidence):

> Saxo's Amleth feigns stupidity to conceal his knowledge of his uncle's misdeeds as he bides his time to mature.

Historical Scholarship (aiding interpretation of that historical evidence):

> Stephen Greenblatt, "The Death of Hamnet and the Making of *Hamlet*" (2004):
>
> > In order to grow to adulthood—to survive long enough to be able to exact revenge—Amleth feigned madness, persuading his uncle that he could never pose a danger.

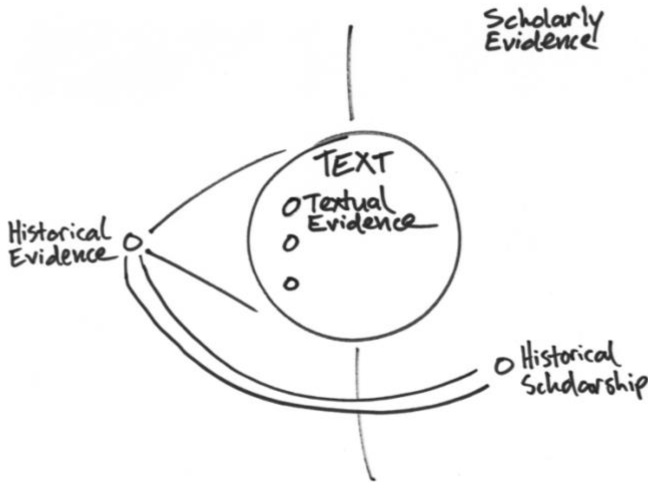

Figure 14: The Kinds of Evidence (Text, Textual Evidence, Historical Evidence, Historical Scholarship)

<u>Analysis</u> *(interpretation of my historical evidence aided by my Historical Scholarship):*

> Saxo's Amleth wanted to conceal his plans for revenge, but Shakespeare's Hamlet has no good reason to act mad. Hamlet's feigned madness does not make him an evil genius. It makes him deficient in judgement because it is irrational to think that feigning madness might help his plight in any way. It does not shield his intelligence, as it did for Amleth, nor does it lull his uncle into a false sense of security. Instead, it actually excites his uncle's suspicion.

<u>Question/Problem</u> *(why my text needs interpretation):*

> Why does Shakespeare's Hamlet pretend to be crazy.

<u>Thesis</u> *(my central claim about my text, the answer to my question):*

> Hamlet feigns madness because he is already mad.

<u>Terms</u> *(key concepts in my argument):*

> This argument hinges on a distinction between two kinds of "madness"—*insanity* and *mental illness.*

<u>Theoretical Scholarship</u> *(helping me interpret my text by providing abstract ideas):*

> Zachary D. Torry and Stephen B. Billick, "Overlapping Universe: Understanding Legal Insanity and Psychosis" (2010):
>
>> Insanity is a legal term rather than a psychiatric or scientific one. Black's Law Dictionary defines it as 'any mental disorder severe enough that it prevents a person from having legal capacity and excuses the person from criminal or civil responsibility. Insanity is a legal, not a medical, standard.' It is a disorder that impairs the human mind and prevents distinguishing

between actions that are right or wrong. Mental illnesses are disorders of the brain that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, moods, and ability to relate to others. They are brain disorders resulting in a diminished capacity for coping with the demands of life. (255)

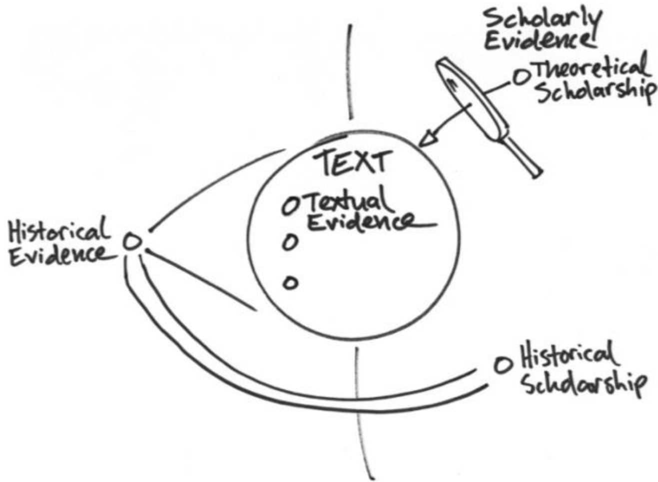

Figure 15: The Kinds of Evidence (Text, Textual Evidence, Historical Evidence, Historical Scholarship, Theoretical Scholarship)

<u>Stakes</u> *(what I plan to do with my argument in my conclusion):*

> Bringing these terms to Shakespeare's play allows us to theorize "the Hamlet Syndrome": someone can be sane – knowing right from wrong – but still mentally ill; the decision to commit a crime can emerge from a mind that is neither fully incapacitated nor fully functional.

<u>Textual Evidence</u> *(more details from my text):*

> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599):
>
> > O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
> > That, and resolve itself into a dew,
> > Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> > His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
> > How weary, stale, flatt, and unprofitable
> > Seem to me all the uses of this world! (1.2.129-34)

<u>Analysis</u> *(interpreting that textual evidence):*

> Hamlet is, in modern terms, mentally ill when we first meet him. His father's death two months ago and his mother's remarriage to his uncle one month later have so upset Hamlet that he soliloquizes in a manner that we today could easily associate with suicidal depression.

<u>Textual Evidence</u> *(another example drawn from my text):*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599):

> O fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me up stiffly. Remember thee!
> Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. (1.5.93-97)

Analysis (interpreting that textual evidence):

This passage is a clever allusion to the Globe theatre where Hamlet was first performed, but it is also an allusion to Hamlet's mental illness, to a mind ("globe") that has been overloaded, is preoccupied, is not able to attend to the events Hamlet is experiencing, and is not processing information rationally.

Critical Scholarship (a critic who has looked at the same text that I'm interpreting):

Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (1967):

> Hamlet is not mad. He never is…. [He] never loses touch with reality….
> He always knows what he is doing. (149)

Analysis (interpreting that scholarly evidence):

The problem with Prosser's statement is that it conflates the fact that Hamlet is not psychotic ("[He] never loses touch with reality") and the fact that he is legally sane ("He always knows what he is doing") with a claim for mental health ("Hamlet is not mad"). Someone can be "mad" and still be connected to reality; someone can be legally sane but still mentally ill.

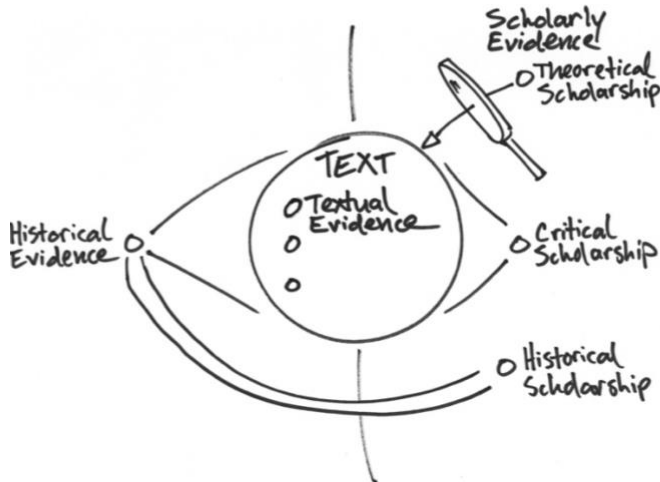

Figure 16: The Kinds of Evidence (Text, Textual Evidence, Historical Evidence, Historical Scholarship, Theoretical Scholarship, Critical Scholarship)

Critical Scholarship (another critic who has looked at the same text that I'm interpreting):

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shakespeare* (1853):

> Hamlet's wildness is but half false; he plays that subtle trick of pretending to act only when he is very near really being what he acts. (156)

Analysis (interpreting that scholarly evidence):

As Coleridge recognizes, one kind of madness manifests paradoxically as the feigning of another, more severe kind of madness.

Argument (synthesizing my points into a central claim):

The question of Hamlet's sanity can be distinguished from the ques- tion of his mental health: whether he is attached to reality or seeing things that are not there is one question, and whether or not he is able to think rationally and function in society is another. Insofar as the ghost is real, at least in Act I, Hamlet evidences neither delusions nor hallucinations, the hallmarks of any psychotic disorder. At the same time, he is clearly not mentally healthy. His mental illness leads him to respond to the revela- tion of his father's murder with the irrational decision to act completely psychotic. One kind of madness surfaces as the purposeful malingering of another, more severe kind of madness.

Implications (mobilizing the knowledge of my argument for material beyond my text):

The Hamlet Syndrome has implications for our understanding of failed insanity defenses. What the example of Hamlet suggests is that, when an insanity defense fails, onlookers tend to use their knowledge of a feigned madness as the basis for a belief that someone is mentally healthy when really he or she might be ill.

Appendix II

Sample Papers

In Defense of Polonius

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Jeffrey R. Wilson

In Defense of Polonius

Your wife dies. You raise two children by yourself. You build a great career to provide for your family. You send your son off to college in another country, though you know he's not ready. Now the prince wants to marry your daughter—that's not easy to navigate. Then—*get this*—while you're trying to save the queen's life, the prince murders you. Your death destroys your kids. They die tragically. And what do you get for your efforts? Centuries of Shakespeare scholars dumping on you.

Many echo Hamlet's characterization of Polonius as a "tedious old fool" (2.2.213) and "foolish prating knave" (3.4.216). In 1736, the first essay ever written on *Hamlet* (attributed to George Stubbes) called Polonius a "Buffoonish Statesman" (23). Samuel Johnson saw an old man "declining into dotage" (183). William Hazlitt thought Polonius "talks very sensibly" but "acts very foolishly" (86) Closer to our time, Diane Dreher also hated Polonius—"by far the most reprehensible father" in Shakespeare's plays (52)—but for a different reason. He's a patriarch, a misogynist, an authoritarian who dominates Ophelia's will and decimates her verve for life. "The death of Polonius," Elaine Robinson argues, "is a symbol of Shakespeare's attack on patriarchy" (67).

Polonius isn't a good father. Good fathers don't make good drama. His failings are central to my argument that Polonius is a good character, more complex than critics usually recognize. If we see Polonius not through the eyes of his enemy, Prince Hamlet—the point of view Shakespeare's play asks audiences to adopt—but in analogy to the common challenges of twenty-first-century parenting, Polonius is a single father struggling with work-life balance

who sadly choses his career over his daughter's well-being. And that approach opens other modern resonances of the family dynamics in Shakespeare's plays, such as the rocky stepfamily that Prince Hamlet, Queen Gertrude, and King Claudius find themselves in.

Hamlet includes traces—only hints—of Polonius's possible prehistories. His name points to Poland, Denmark's foreign enemy, especially in light of the change of the character's name from the "Corimbus" of the first quarto (Broadus). However and whyever that change occurred, Shakespeare must have realized that the second scene of his play introduces "Polonius" shortly after the first scene relates the story of how King Hamlet "in an angry parle … smote the sledded Polacks on the ice" (1.1.61-62). There are two possibilities.

Perhaps "Polonius" simply means "one from Poland," and he is an immigrant in Denmark. If so, whether he came before or after the affair on the ice, Polonius would have suffered xenophobic hostility from Danish nationalists. Maybe, like one of my childhood friends—an immigrant from a war-torn country—he cultivated a clownish persona that covered over some devastating trauma.

Or Polonius could be an honorary name bestowed for his military service, like "Coriolanus," the name given to Caius Marcius for conquering Corioli. This Polonius served the Danish side, may have switched from the Poles to the Danes, or perhaps engineered the bloody "parle." Such deviousness fits with Polonius's secret plotting in *Hamlet*.

The only clear backstory that Shakespeare is that Polonius was an actor at university (3.2.91). Drama attracts certain kinds of students: they tend to be soulful, gregarious, and eager for an audience. Polonius played the part of Julius Caesar, associating him not with the secret plotter—"Brutus killed me" (3.2.95)—but with a political leader. He still fancies himself a literary critic, and his try-hard erudition when commenting on the players (2.2.324-26) smacks of someone who wasn't raised in academia but is enamored with that world (we can recognize our own).

It's unclear when and how Polonius met his wife—Ophelia and Laertes's mother—but she seems to be dead. The only reference to her comes late in the play, when Claudius tells Laertes to calm down:

> That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
> Cries 'Cuckold!' to my father, brands the harlot
> Even here between the chaste unsmirchèd brow
> Of my true mother. (4.2.118-19)

When Laertes says "even here," he points to his forehead, between his two "[eye]brow[s]." His brow looks like his mother's brow. That could create a bond between Polonius, who lost his wife, and Laertes, who looks like her. Was she from Poland? Did she know Polonius at university? Was she an outsider in Denmark, maybe from southern Europe, and that's why their children have Greek and Roman names? Did she die giving birth to Ophelia? Or later in life? Do her children remember her? How did they process their grief at such a young age? Laertes and Ophelia have a close relationship, probably forged after the loss of their mother. There's a lot of trust there. They are playful and affectionate.

Perhaps a grieving Polonius threw himself into his job, climbing the ranks of King Hamlet's council to become the lead advisor to Denmark's royal family. The first thing the play tells us about Polonius comes from Claudius speaking to Laertes: "The head is not more native to the heart, / The hand more instrumental to the mouth, / Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father" (1.2.47-49). Claudius loves Polonius, listens to him, hangs on his words, follows his advice. That kind of trust must be earned. Maybe Polonius was in on the assassination.

The hints of Polonius's prehistory create context for the scenes where we meet the man. I read his verbosity as dad jokes. Filled with puns and wordplay, dad jokes are cheesy, corny, cringe, clean, not dangerous humor. *I'm hungry. Hi Hungry—I'm Polonius*. Dad jokes appeal to young children, who quickly outgrow them. This kind of humor makes people roll their eyes and shake their heads in embarrassment. It isn't funny in its own right. It's funny because there's a self-awareness that it's not funny. The comedy comes in the affected oafishness of the teller, who makes himself available to be the butt of the joke. "Tender yourself more dearly," Polonius says to Ophelia, "Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase / Wronging it thus—you'll tender me a fool" (1.3.106-08). Dad jokes aren't meant to be funny as much as they signal the presence of a caring, safe relationship. That's why, even though they're obnoxious, they're also endearing. "Brevity is the soul of wit," Polonius says in a long speech to Gertrude. "I will be brief" (2.2.90-92). Polonius is self-aware in these moments. He's not an incompetent fool. He's making fun of himself,

using self-deprecating humor strategically to build relationships. He's in on the joke.

Any father would struggle sending a son with a penchant for youthful rebellion off to college in another country. Polonius is paying for Laertes's education but knows that the boy has risk factors. He's a kid who lost his mother early, experienced some trauma, processed it by forming close bonds with his remaining family, is a bit of a hot head, and likes to party. It's time for Laertes to become his own person, but the freedom that comes with college in another country without any familial safeguards gives Polonius pause. Above all, Polonius wants Laertes to know that he's got a safe, caring, loving family back home. They've been through a lot together. They understand each other. The "to thine own self be true" speech (1.3.54-82) is one long dad joke.

Polonius sends money and letters to Laertes through their family friend Reynaldo—solid dad move—but it's also a chance to spy on Laertes because Polonius actually doesn't trust his son at all. The weird plan Polonius develops—before seeing Laertes, Reynaldo will ask around town about him, making up stories that make Laertes look bad to get people to share their own tales of the boy's exploits (2.1.6-71)—points forward to Polonius's tendency to overlook how his actions as a father can do real harm to the well-being of his children.

Frankly, I don't know what I would do if I heard the heir to the crown in my country had declared he was deeply in love with my daughter: that's a tough parenting situation. Ophelia is coming of age. She doesn't have a mom to talk to. Her brother has moved out. Her dad works all the time. That's how Ophelia started spending time with Hamlet. He himself lost a parent recently.

Ophelia knows what it's like. And now they're in love. But Hamlet's still processing. He's not in a good place.

Polonius is worried about his daughter—he doesn't want her to get hurt—but fathers have no idea what it's like to be a young woman. He wants to protect her. He also wants to protect himself. He fears the relationship with Hamlet will go south and complicate his career in the castle. He comes down hard on Ophelia—too hard. He's controlling, dismissive, degrading, telling her to think of herself as a baby: his baby (1.3.87-135). He knows she's becoming a woman, but he doesn't know that the power-shouting he used to keep Ophelia from playing on the castle walls when she was a girl comes across completely differently when it's young love. We are firmly in *Romeo and Juliet* territory here.

Polonius didn't invent the patriarchy. He just knows how to survive it. It's clearly a situation where a conversation with his daughter about her feelings and options would be best. Polonius is ill-equipped for that approach.

Hamlet ends up being a massive asshole to Ophelia. He uses her to convince everyone he's crazy, and it shakes Ophelia to her core. Polonius's response—"I am sorry" (2.1.103)—is surprisingly moving. He apologizes a second time: "I am sorry that with better heed and judgment / I had not quoted him" (2.1.108-09). Polonius should have seen it coming. And trying to dominate his daughter's will wasn't the best approach. Her mother would have known what to do.

Let's hope most fathers wouldn't, like Polonius, put their job ahead of the well-being of their daughters, although we see that all the time. Polonius needs his job to support his family. Tragically, that leads him to harm his family.

He puts his daughter in an unsafe situation, using her as bait to spy on Hamlet for Claudius. Hamlet berates her. It's traumatizing. Polonius just sits there and watches. What kind of father wouldn't intervene? Wouldn't comfort his daughter? He just talks with Claudius about matters of state (3.1.75-184).

Polonius ends up giving his life for his job. While hiding in the queen's bedchamber, he hears Hamlet attacking his mother. "What wilt thou do?" she cries. "Thou wilt not murder me? / Help, ho!" (3.4.21-22). Polonius tries to save her: "What ho! Help!" (3.4.22). He becomes a victim of murder by an unhinged aristocrat who then callously plays games with the dead body: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room" (3.4.213). Do the Shakespeare scholars who adopt Hamlet's view of Polonius realize that they're cozying up to an unhinged murderer?

Polonius's death breaks his children. Their mom not being around makes the loss of their father even tougher. Ophelia deteriorates into a mental health crisis and eventually suicide. Anger drives Laertes to violence that completely backfires, resulting in his death. Where do our sympathies lie now?

In 2002, Catharine R. Stimpson suggested that there are many Poloniuses in society today, those mansplaining pundits on cable news:

> He is, I have decided, a powerful figure in a large institution, preferably the executive branch of the federal government. However, he moves easily among institutions. He can work in the private sector or a think tank or a public policy school in an affluent private university. When he is not in the government, and is instead rusticating in the private sector, he

> likes being a pundit. In that role, he enjoys writing op-ed pieces and going on television. (98)

There are the public Poloniuses that Stimpson describes and the private Polonius I have sought to recover. He's not a good father. I hate his patriarchal parenting. Yet, if push came to shove, and I had to pick which of the parents in *Hamlet* I would want as my own, it would be Polonius.

King Hamlet is a father who asks his son to murder someone, which ends up destroying the child's life. Queen Gertrude is a mother who marries her dead husband's brother, then is baffled that her son is struggling. King Claudius is a stepfather only because he killed his stepson's actual father. Shakespeare filled the play with terrible parents.

On the one hand, each, like Polonius, puts their career before their kid, resulting in the deterioration of the family. On the other, the Hamlet family is also weirdly relatable in modernity, where stepfamilies are common. If Polonius shows what can happen when a family loses a parent, the Hamlets are an example of separation, remarriage, and efforts to negotiate a new family dynamic—that's all in play before the murder of King Hamlet comes to light. And each parent has enough traces in the text to suggest a backstory that contextualizes any easy judgment of their parenting.

King Hamlet is the divorced father who hates seeing his ex-wife with a new man and uses his child as leverage in a power play against her. Queen Gertrude is the single mother who wants to feel romantic love for the first time in a while but fails to appreciate how her new life affects her child's emotions. And King Claudius is the new stepfather who just wants everyone to be happy

and tries to relate to his stepson but finds himself in an emotionally combustible situation.

The impulse is to say, *Oh, Shakespeare's families are so modern.* It's better to note that the term "non-traditional family" is absurd because literature and history are filled with single parents and stepfamilies in which the challenges of work-life balance are heightened—and everyone's a critic.

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What the Viral Game *Among Us* Reveals About How Groups Fall Apart

What's the best way to run a company, a team, or a classroom? To keep a group alive and thriving, it helps to know why groups fall into dysfunction. And bosses, coaches, and teachers can learn how groups work—and don't work—in an unexpected place: the viral video game *Among Us*.

If you've got a teenager, they probably play it. *Among Us* is a game where 10-15 people are on a space ship and one to three of them are Imposters who sabotage the mission by killing off the crew. Everyone else is a crewmate tasked with maintaining the ship. The crewmates win if they finish all their tasks or vote out the Imposter(s). The Imposters win if they kill everyone or sabotage the ship. It seems to be just a fun game of sabotage and detection, but *Among Us* actually reveals how groups fall apart. And the game can help us "hack" the groups we need to build and maintain in our workplaces, locker rooms, and schools.

This makes *Among Us* the most recent example of a video game that cultivates valuable real-world knowledge. Studies have shown that *Mario Kart* makes better drivers (Li, Chen and Chen). *Sim City* teaches a person about urban infrastructure. *The Legend of Zelda* trains brains to solve puzzles. *Wolfenstein* immerses people in World War II history. *Portal* improves spatial awareness. *Dark Souls* teaches gritty determination through hardship. *Fallout* shows the instability of governing organizations. *Tetris* improves your reflexes. So what does *Among Us* teach us?

The game is most well-known for skyrocketing to success as the world went into lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic (see Winkie, Bauer, Epstein, Rodriguez, Baranowski, Farokhmanesh, Osteen, Khan, and Shinkle). The game was originally released in 2018 by Innersloth, and no one seems to have noticed. The creators made a Twitter account for the game. Their tweets got zero "likes." But then the creator of *Henry Stickman*, another popular indie game, retweeted *Among Us*, which gave it some popularity. It gained momentum in mid-2019 in Mexico, Brazil, and Korea after SR-JKaif, a popular Twitch streamer, played it and started promoting it. The popular gaming platform Steam saw this, and asked Innersloth to bring their game to Steam. They got three months of sales in two day. A staff game at Twitch soon had 30,000 viewers. And then the COVID pandemic hit in March 2020.

The viral success of *Among Us* is closely bound up with the fact that it offered community during a time when everyone was isolated. "Unlike many games where socialization is merely an option," says Andrew Borman, a digital games curator at The Strong, "it is required for *Among Us*, connecting players in a way many other games cannot" ("Play and Curation" 26).

Several commentators have identified real-world analogies for the group dynamics seen in *Among Us*. During peak pandemic times, *Vice* writer Sean Sands wrote, "*Among Us* is not just the game of 2020, its 2020 the game," suggesting that the game replicated the feeling we have when going to the grocery store. Writing for *Zocalo Public Square*, Joe Mathews observed his son playing the game and drew parallels with the unstableness of the group and the

perilous position of the California government: "*Among Us* reproduces the paranoia that's become rampant in our state and our society—our current sense that nothing is for real and no one is to be trusted." Building from specific analogies like these to a generalizable theory, we can ask what the game reveals about group dynamics.

Basically, *Among Us* shows how groups fall apart when pressure to succeed short-circuits communication and collaboration. *Among Us* shows what happens to a group when something isn't quite right, yet no one knows exactly what's wrong. Recognizing the presence of an unknown danger to the integrity of the group brings members to act frantically and illogically.

The group dynamics of *Among Us* are in full operation before the game play even begins. One person—*de facto*, a leader—makes a server. That organizer gives out the code. Others join in. Already, the organizer of the game has power and credibility.

The game assigns all players a role—either a crewmate or an imposter. Suddenly, you're in a spaceship and all hell breaks loose. Everyone scatters. The imposter's task is to kill all the crew mates without being detected. The crewmates must complete a series of menial but time-consuming tasks. Swipe your key card here. *Med Bay Scan!* Imposters sabotage the ship's electricity or oxygen. Crewmates rush to fix it. Don't fix the oxygen level soon enough, and you die. Only the imposter can move through vents. It's called "venting," and it's awesome. Then the imposer makes their move. They kill a crewmate. The

cold body lies there on the ground until someone discovers it and reports it. *Folks, it's time for an emergency meeting.*

The impostor sabotages the group, but also the group starts to sabotage itself. After someone finds a body, the group comes together with one goal: find the imposter among them. They have 90 seconds to either vote out someone whom they believe to be the imposter or skip voting if they're not sure. You can't trust anyone, and you don't have much time. The apprehension of one crewmate being an impostor is too much to handle, and the group breaks down into fear and uncertainty. People act on their paranoia. The voting room turns to chaos. *Yellow is "sus"*—*Among Us* lingo for "suspicious." People hurl accusations. People defend themselves. People get offended for being accused. Sometimes the one who yells the loudest wins. *Vote him out. If I'm wrong, vote me out.* The group gets agitated, can't remain calm, can't think logically. Chaos comes again. A splinter cell in the crew agrees to vote someone out. Others follow along because of peer-pressure. Often, that person isn't the imposter. We've voted out an innocent. Then we're back in the spaceship, and the process continues until the crewmates vote out the imposters, they complete their tasks, or the imposter kills everyone.

So playing *Among Us* kind of feels like being one of Jesus's disciples at the last supper. Judas was definitely sus. That group dynamic of the secret saboteur extends to frenemies in high school cliques and political teams like Donald Trump's administrations. When a senior official in Trump's government wrote an anonymous *New York Times* op-ed about the secret resistance in the White House—Melania, totally sus.

Yet, in the game, group dysfunction stems less from the impostors' sabotage and more from the frenzy of distrust and irrationality that emerges when groups come under intense pressure to solve problems quickly. A healthy group is defined by communication and collaboration. When problems external to the group arise, it bands together to solve them. When the problem that arises is internal to the group, however, as in *Among Us*, a team's bonds can start to fray. When that tension is aggravated by the pressure of a timeline to solve the internal problem, the group can exhibit two possible responses. It can respond with calm and reason, which then restarts the cycle of a healthy group—collaboration and communication. Or it can respond with stress. When that happens, emotion takes over from reason. People don't know whom to trust. They start yelling at each other. Some blindly follow the person who talks first. Others follow the person who talks loudest. The group deteriorates into dysfunction.

Students who have done group projects in school are familiar with the dynamics that emerge in *Among Us*. There is usually one person who doesn't do their work and sabotages the group. This saboteur is similar to the role of the imposter in *Among Us*. On the other end of the group one person shoulders the work that the imposter declines to do similar to the way a leader usually appears in the crewmates in *Among Us*.

Even in writing our essay, we—a group of nine high-school students who had to collaborate and communicate to write this piece—have seen *Among Us* among us. Leadership roles were accumulated, while our work on this essay was repeatedly derailed by Max's attempts to get us to pay attention to his geometry lessons. That's not venting and killing people, but it is a form of

sabotage to the group, and sometimes we devolved into chaos. While too much stress can cause groups to fall apart, too little pressure can also cause a group to deteriorate. The same holds for *Among Us*. When the crew is lazy and doesn't pay attention, the imposter wins easily.

Similarly, in team sports, the group must collaborate and communicate. There's no imposter, but the pressure to win can alter the team's dynamics. After loses, teammates can blame one another for mistakes, cause offense, and get defensive. Cliques emerge within the team. Team spirit frays—like on the 2011 Red Sox where, after slipping from a two-game divisional lead over the Yankees to third in the AL East, players started eating take-out chicken, drinking beer, and playing video games during games (Hohler).

Politicians may also feel that their professions are like living through *Among Us*. Amidst accusations of corruption and power abuse, ties to foreign countries, harassment, and betrayal, politics is a game of trust. They argue based on emotion, not reason. The difference is that, in politics, everyone's an imposter.

What *Among Us* reveals about how groups fall apart suggests some "best practices" for keeping groups together:

1. *To prevent isolation, create a space that fosters social interaction.* Innersloth found breakthrough success by offering community to people in an age of isolation.

2. *Create ways for people on the team to develop trust*. Almost every decision when playing *Among Us* comes down to the question, “Do I trust this person?”
3. *Get rid of a toxic person*. Sometimes there really is a saboteur. They may not be intentionally trying to destroy the group, but their actions have the same effects as the imposters in *Among Us*. They cause frenzy, create cliques, sew suspicion, and breed distrust among group members.
4. *Have a plan for when problems emerge*. You can actually hack *Among Us* pretty easily. Just pair up and then, if someone gets killed, there’s always someone around to see it; if no one saw anything, then the dead person’s partner is probably an impostor. But when the frenzy of gameplay begins, it often becomes a free-for-all without any direction. Make a plan for the team to solve the problem at hand, and stick to it.
5. *Promote calm when pressure becomes intense*. Pressure to solve a problem becomes group disfunction in *Among Us* when the ticking clock forces people to start making rash decisions born from emotion rather than reason. Avoid an atmosphere of group panic by developing strategies for responding to pressure with calm.
6. *Don’t sneak through vents and kill other people in the group*. It just doesn’t promote good teamwork.

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2021 Collaborative Student Essay

How COVID Will Make Us Stronger

Twelve Students from Around the World on the Virus and the Future

COVID has been *the worst*: wearing masks, less time with friends, no family for the holidays, isolation for older folks, extra social media silliness, stinking Zoom, constant anxiety ("Should we be wearing masks?"), higher stress, escalating mental health crises, less exercise, people unable to get groceries, unable to go to school, second-rate remote learning, students falling behind, closed national borders, people losing their jobs, people losing their homes, a failed medical system, sickness, suffering, and hundreds of thousands of deaths. Teenagers like us have been socially stunted: it's a big emotional developmental period in our lives, and we're stuck at home. This much time with your parents can't be healthy for anyone. Yet we—the authors of this article, a group of twelve teenagers from across the globe—as we look ahead to the lives we shall lead, also recognize that, while the difficulties of the pandemic have been real, COVID may be the kick in the ass our world needed to build a better future.

Where others we have studied this summer have looked backward—at how the disease affects the human body (Mukherjee), at how the US was unprepared for COVID (Yong)—we are looking forward. To many the future looks grim: COVID and its variants are unlikely to be completely suppressed (Skegg et al.); online courses leech joy out of education (Rothman and Feinberg); movie theaters may be a thing of the past (Morgan); and COVID will accentuate the long-term concentration of poverty in countries that are middle-income, fragile, and located in Africa, where governments had less fiscal space

for mitigating policy response measures (Kharas and Dooley). But we see a brighter future on the horizon.

While COVID-19 has created a number of individual difficulties in the past two years, it promises to create a number of long-term benefits to our various social systems--specifically in medicine, culture, and education. The mere existence of this essay—collaboratively written by students across the globe taking a course together online—points to some of the ways COVID will shape the future.

History shows several examples of events that, while extraordinarily difficult to live through, led to beneficial social changes. Smallpox were not spread in a large pandemic like COVID-19; instead, the disease continuously plagued the world from the sixth to the eighteenth centuries. Estimates are that smallpox killed 20-30 percent of the people infected (Gessler, p. 45). But smallpox brought vaccines. Edward Jenner developed the first vaccine by exposing his gardener's 9-year-old son to cowpox sores. Today, all vaccines are based on the original vaccine for smallpox. Vaccines have saved over 936,000 children’s lives and over $1.9 trillion (Whitney, et al, p. 352). Through society's battles against deadly diseases in the past, many illnesses were eradicated.

The Spanish flu and SARS outbreaks have shown that even the most threatening diseases can cause positive change. SARS is a viral respiratory disease caused by a SARS-associated coronavirus. It was first identified at the end of February 2003 during an outbreak that emerged in China and spread to four other countries (“CDC SARS Response Timeline”). SARS has many similarities compared with COVID-19. They are both infectious diseases, and they have similar symptoms. SARS brought China to pay more attention to

medicine and the hospital system. That earlier experience might be why the Chinese government can take strong policies to stop the spread the virus as soon as possible.

Post-COVID, our world will become healthier thanks to an influx of knowledge about disease—both from specialized researchers making medical breakthroughs, and from increased public awareness. In Turkey—where Defne, one of the authors of this paragraph, lives—funding for healthcare went up 32 percent from 2019 to 2020 ("TTB 2021"). Beyond healthcare, governments are increasing investment in medical research. In the United States—where Henry, the other author of this paragraph, lives—funding of the National Institute of Health (NIH) would increase by 20% to $51 billion if President Biden's budget proposal was enacted. $6.5 billion would go to the creation the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health, which would develop "transformative capabilities" in medicine ("FY22 Budget Request"). The NIH, along with pharmaceutical companies, contributed a lot in the development of the Coronavirus vaccines, along with other drugs. The power of those vaccines at controlling the pandemic demonstrates how much public investment could accelerate the invention of new drugs, and because of those results, more funding is being given to that development.

Sissi, one of the authors of this paragraph, didn't take the epidemic seriously when it started to spread in Wuhan, China. Only after dozens of people started dying from the virus and she learned that it was highly contagious did she realize the importance of the situation. She started wearing a mask wherever she went and used hand sanitizer to protect herself from the virus. As we move into the post-COVID era, the world will be more aware when it comes to more

common sicknesses, and how we deal with them in public. Pre-COVID, wearing a mask in public was seen as taboo in many places in the world. People would go to school and to work when sick. Going forward, it will be less taboo to wear a mask when sick, and more people will take sick days. For Everett, another author of this paragraph, 2020 was the first year he can remember during which he didn't catch a cold. The methods and campaigns for protecting human health established by COVID-19 will make people more serious and effective when facing health crises in the future.

Bringing us to think both locally and globally, COVID-19 will shift what we value, whom we interact with, and how we speak to each other. We used to take seeing our friends for granted: *I'll see him again tomorrow*. But many haven't seen their loved ones for almost eighteen months. We have grown apart from people we used to be close to. Now, thanks to the rollout of the vaccine, many of us are starting to see our friends and family more often. When we do, we are not taking time spent with them for granted anymore.

The use of digital and social media extraordinarily rose at the beginning of Covid-19. Studies from the University of Zurich show that over 46% of people increased their use of digital communication (Nguyen, p. 2). The most common types of communication were messaging, voice calls, and social media. Even though we have all learned how to navigate through the pandemic by checking up on people we care about through our technology, there is still a negative effect to this. Because of the increase in digital use, people may be more inclined to stick to these habits after the pandemic ends. In an article for BBC News, Rackham shines light on how different people are dealing with their social anxiety post-covid. One person who was interviewed is named Maria

Badmus. She says she "was always uncomfortable and awkward and I feel like it's going to be even worse." This statement is what millions of people around the world are also feeling ("Social Anxiety Disorder"). As Rackham points out, psychotherapist Charley Gavigan says that the best way to handle this social anxiety is to focus on the present as well as realizing that worrying is not going to solve any problems. This advice may help many people, but it is still going to be hard to get back into a normal non-mask wearing society after being at home for over a year.

As a result of COVID-19, education will become more accessible—available to more people in more ways, especially digitally. More than 290 million students could not go to school at one point, caused by the pandemic. As a result, many schools started teaching children online. Technical devices are needed to attend online classes; however, according to USA facts, about 4.4 million households do not have devices, and 3.7 million lack internet access, only in the United States. Many more students do not have any access to online learning worldwide. Many students were forced to take temporary absence from school. Some students—like us—are lucky enough to be able to take online classes, but sometimes the teaching sucks compared to face-to-face classes. The pandemic popped these problems out into the open. In some areas, internet became available, and apps that schools use for online classes were updated. It is still difficult to say that students are learning as much as they normally do when they are taught face-to-face. Most children are losing hope, feeling uncomfortable with limitations to ask questions frequently, constant technical problems, and not able to learn freely. It would be very important to increase student's motivation in order not to feel discouragement within learning.

Education is an important factor in ensuring kids have a successful future, but that education isn't worth much if students don't have access to it. The pandemic forced schools worldwide to shut down and find ways of teaching remotely. This has allowed teachers to discover unconventional ways of teaching, ways that are better than the previous in-person classes. Students can now access courses across the globe from their own home. This means there is no more financial travel cost and schools don't have to provide housing and meals. One of the best benefits has been recorded classes. If someone misses a class, they don't have to do hours of studying or just hope for the best to make up the lost time. Lessons can be rewatched as many times as needed to get the necessary information and to check notes. But the best development is less discrimination against certain disabilities. Students with different learning abilities can now have a calm environment without peers triggering them or teachers targeting their struggles. Online courses do not make the issues vanish, but they do allow students to find their own, comfortable time and space to work.

Our article—and the course it grew from-–wouldn't have existed if not for the pandemic. The authors never would have met. Our course would have been held on a physical campus. Most of us wouldn't have been able to attend because of travel restrictions or financial barriers. The pandemic pushed our course online. Instead of meeting all together all of the time, we have a mix of synchronous group meetings, asynchronous individual meetings with our teacher, and self-directed work. The course is highly flexible and highly adaptable. The materials are individualized, as are our meetings with our teachers.

We have certainly felt the drawbacks of digital learning. Internet connections fail. Students' attention falters. We miss our friends. Physical presence matters, as noted above. But we don't miss the one-size-fits-all classroom. And we value opportunities to meet new people from new places that we will never visit in person—or maybe now we will.

All of us are in unique circumstances, yet COVID is one of the only things that all of us, no matter where we come from, have experienced. Where we used to have common ground with others from our hometowns, we now have a shared experience with everyone in the world. Our class this summer is what we can expect from the future of education—more global, more digital, more individualized, more affordable, and more accessible.

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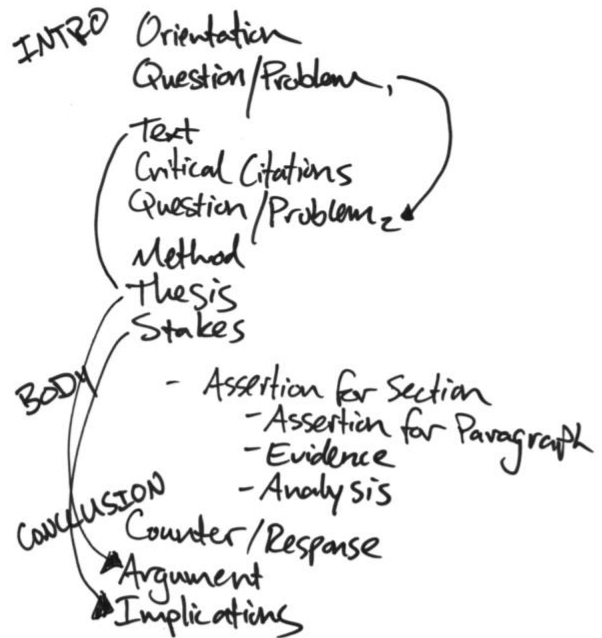
ACADEMIC WRITING

"Writing" is usually understood as the expression of thought. This book redefines "writing" as the thought process itself. Writing is not what you do with thought. Writing is thinking.

Better living through interpretation: that's the promise of academic writing, which is a foundational course in most schools because it's a foundational skill in life. Our world is full of things that need to be questioned, from ancient myths and historical events to current politics and the weird details of everyday life.

Based on his courses in the Writing Program at Harvard University, Jeffrey R. Wilson's *Academic Writing* is a no-nonsense guide to the long and complex writing process. Packed with concrete examples, helpful visuals, and practical tips, the book is an essential guide for academic writing at the highest level. Empowering writers to be creators—not just consumers—of knowledge, Wilson shows how to develop perspective, ask questions, build ideas, and craft arguments that reveal new truths that the world needs to hear. Writers learn different strategies for articulating the implications of an argument—why it matters—and putting ideas in conversation with others by finding, reading, and incorporating scholarship. There are models for different ways to organize an essay and tips to make sentences snap with style. Emphasis is placed on developing ideas in constant conversation with others and on strengthening papers through multiple rounds of revision.



Jeffrey R. Wilson is a teacher-scholar at Harvard University. He is the author of three books: *Richard III's Bodies from Medieval England to Modernity: Shakespeare and Disability History* (2022), *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones* (2021), and *Shakespeare and Trump* (2020). As an Instructional Design Lead in the Office of the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning, he creates courses and events for Harvard Online. From 2014-22, he taught the "Why Shakespeare?" course in the Harvard College Writing Program. He has taught in the Departments of English and Religious Studies at University of California, Irvine; in the Department of Criminal Justice at California State University, Long Beach; and in the Museum Studies Program at the Harvard Extension School.