

## Strategies for Conducting Literary Research, 2e

# Strategies for Conducting Literary Research, 2e

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# Introduction to Strategies for Conducting Literary Research

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



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- [The Complexity of Literary Study](#)
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## Introduction

**Welcome to Strategies for Conducting Literary Research!** This book walks you through the process of conducting literary research while helping to refine your library skills. Along the way, we draw from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) [Information Literacy Framework](#). According to the ACRL, “Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers lead to additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.” Here, the word “iterative” means we repeat the process, refining and improving our work. We discuss the research process in-depth throughout the book. The book also focuses on a research project created by Jada, an English major who conducted a literary study of [James Baldwin’s](#) classic short story, [“Sonny’s Blues.”](#)

Though we describe research into “Sonny’s Blues” throughout this book, we also discuss ways you can transfer these lessons to your own research about literature. Start by reading [“Sonny’s Blues”](#) in its original context: the Summer 1957 issues of *Partisan Review*. The story begins on page 327 and ends on page 358.



## Meet Jada



Jada Reyes graduated from UCF with a bachelor’s degree in English/Creative Writing. She is currently in the Elementary Education MA program at UCF. When she’s not teaching she can be found reading, writing, drawing, or catching up on sleep. We will follow her through the research process to see how her project about Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” evolved as she conducted an in-depth literature review while mastering the use of library resources. As you read these chapters, you should extrapolate from Jada’s example and apply it to your own research.





## Scaffolding and Transference

Before we begin this course, let's review two important and interconnected concepts that we'll reinforce throughout these chapters: Scaffolding and Transference.

**Scaffolding:** This refers to the way in which researchers build increasingly complex and sophisticated skills atop a solid foundation or framework of basic principles and work up from there. In other words, each idea or skill presented in this course should not be viewed as an isolated or standalone concept. We've designed this course to begin with basic or core principles, such as understanding an assignment, before moving into more complex concepts, such as writing and evaluating a research question.

Think of each chapter as one step in a scaffold designed to elevate your research skills. Also note this process won't be strictly linear. It will be gradual and will require you to pause at various steps to reflect on what you've learned, how all the pieces fit together, and where you're going next. Ideally, you will build confidence and become more self-directed and intentional as you move through the course and higher up the scaffold.

Once you have a solid foundation in place, you can apply your foundational knowledge to new concepts, which leads us to our next point.

**Transference:** We've noticed in previous classes that students often understand the concepts presented here, and even the scaffolding approach, but not the all-important next step: to apply their skills to the assignment, which is what educators call transference.

Much like scaffolding, transference is a form of structural learning that promotes cognitive growth by teaching students to apply, or transfer, knowledge and skills from one context to another. In "[Transference of Learning](#)," Paul Main states that this is a form of active learning that requires "careful orchestration." He likens it to "the art of connecting dots that seem unrelated but form a beautiful pattern when aligned."

He further adds that transference is "transference of learning is not just a concept but a symphony of cognitive skills, understanding, and adaptability." So, what does this mean for us?

While you work through this course, and you focus on building and scaffolding your skills, keep in mind that the next step will be the application of those skills to an actual research project... and that research project may serve as the foundation for future research projects.

Remember that the skills we present throughout this course do not exist in silos, they are part of a holistic learning environment in which we are always building new and increasingly complex skills that can be transferred from one context to another.



## ***The Complexity of Literary Studies Research***

In a research-based course, your instructor might require you to write a research paper of 5-6 or 10-12 pages, but the knowledge you need to perform this task can fill up hundreds of pages. Writing about literature is a complicated, often messy process; it needs to meet high standards while incorporating knowledge from other fields such as psychology, history, science, and other arts. It entails knowledge about language, genre, structures, styles, and more. To produce good research about literature, we need to know a lot of things about a lot of things!

Although we discuss the research process in a linear fashion throughout these chapters, you'll find that in practice literary research is a highly recursive process. We're constantly circling back through the process as we write. Because writing instructors – even those who wrote this book – are locked into presenting the writing process in a linear way, we tend to discuss it in terms of stages such as preliminary research, drafting, revising, and so on. But writing a research paper requires us to rethink and redo our work at any stage. It's not uncommon for researchers to be in the middle of proofreading – one of the final stages – and realize they need to go back and gather more materials. Though this book focuses on research about literature, the skills and knowledge in these chapters apply to many other areas and topics, especially in the humanities.





## Course Learning Objectives

- Understand the assignment
- Identify a research problem
- Develop audience awareness
- Enter a scholarly conversation
- Understand theory's integral role within humanities research
- Understand how theory relates to particular research methodologies and methods for gathering evidence
- Learn to use online library catalogs, database search strategies, library services, citation management, and search alerts
- Evaluate source credibility
- Posit a research question
- Posit a thesis statement
- Compose a title
- Define your key terms
- Write persuasively
- Write academic prose
- Steer clear of plagiarism
- Finish your research project

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Analysis



Exploration



Application



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- In Canvas, access contents through the “Modules” navigation tab on the left.
- In Pressbooks, access contents through the “Contents” menu on the top left.



# CHAPTER 1: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

# Chapter 1 Objectives

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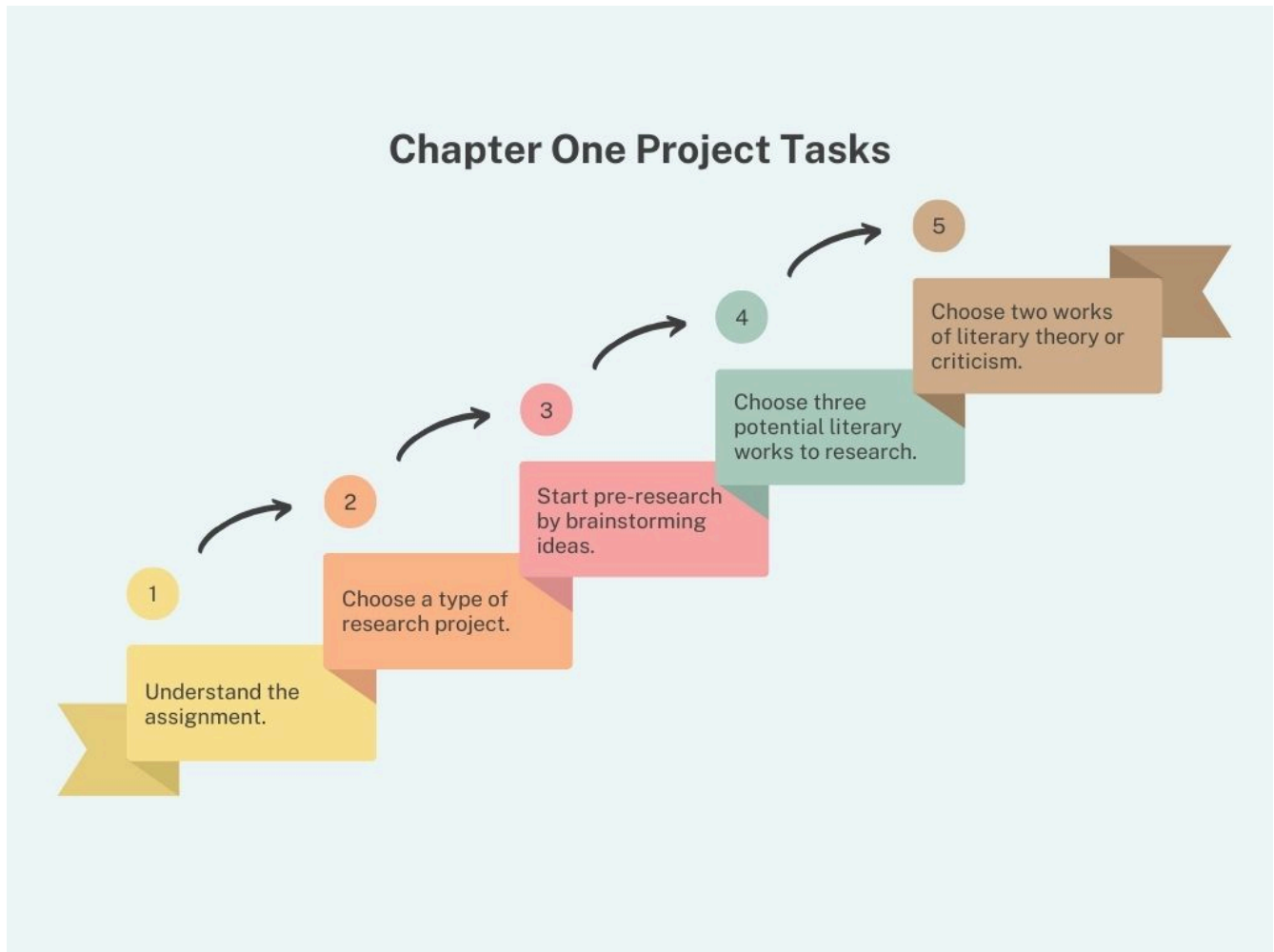
This chapter introduces key aspects of the research process: understanding the assignment, types of research projects, and conducting preliminary research. While understanding the assignment may seem simple, it is frequently overlooked by students who often jump into research without a full understanding of the parameters of the project. This chapter will help you understand assignment prompts, guidelines, and expectations as well as types of literary research papers, intended audience, and the purpose of the project.

In Conducting Preliminary Research, we discuss all that goes into this early inventive stage of the research process. Topics include how to conduct “pre-research” to investigate possible topics, why it’s a good idea to talk with experts, how to understand what types of resources you will need and where to find them, time management, setting benchmarks, and more. Preliminary research sets the foundation for more in-depth research.



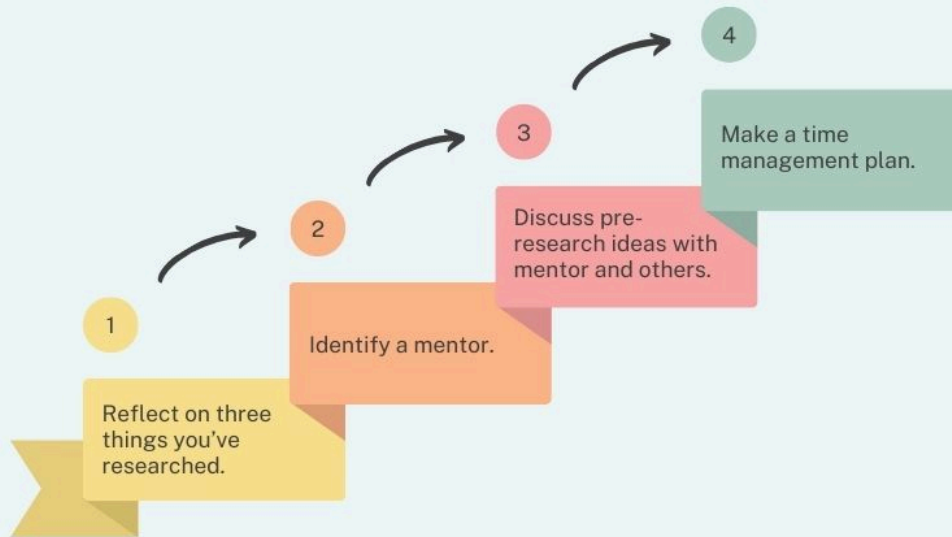
Our research projects start with a series of tasks. Each chapter will introduce a new task or set of tasks that – when completed – will provide you with most of the materials for your final research project. In this chapter, we have two sets of tasks: project tasks and organization tasks. The flow chart below provides you with pre-research project steps. Keep track of

what you have done for each step and look back at the whole thing to see how the tasks relate to one another.



In addition to project tasks, you also should complete the following *organization* tasks; these tasks help you to organize yourself and your work and will set you up for success!

## Chapter One Organization Tasks





## Learning Objectives

Focus on the most basic aspects of the research process. By reading this chapter and responding to the related discussion prompts, you will learn to

- understand the assignment before you start researching.
- focus on problems and relevance rather than on general topics.
- talk with experts in your field and with your subject librarian.
- set benchmarks and take lots of notes.

Being diligent about this early stage will save you time later and decrease your stress throughout the rest of your research project.

# Understanding the Assignment

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## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Intended Audience for the Project](#)
- [Purpose of the Project](#)
- [Understanding the Assignment Prompts, Guidelines, and Expectations](#)
- [The Role of Analysis in Research Projects](#)

We also provide the following:

- [Key Takeaways](#)
- [Understanding the Assignment \[Refresher\]](#)



## Introduction

Be sure you fully understand your instructor's assignment before you begin your research. If there are terms in the assignment you don't understand or methods you don't yet know how to do, you will need to obtain this knowledge as soon as possible. The best source for information about your assignment is the person who gave the assignment (usually your instructor). For additional help understanding the assignment, visit the [UCF Writing Center](#) and/or the [Student Academic Resource Center \(SARC\)](#).

Jada's assignment was to write a 10-12 page paper that analyzed a work of literature (she

chose James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues") while employing two schools of criticism and citing five scholarly sources using the MLA format. This is a fairly common but deceptively complex literary studies research assignment. Instructors might also stipulate that your research includes biographical or historical information about your chosen subject. Other kinds of research can include textual analysis, comparative readings, genre studies, or theory-based approaches. We discuss various theories and methods in future chapters. For now, we will discuss four major types of research projects: interpretive, critical, historical, and creative.



## •Intended Audience for the Project

Audience awareness is an important aspect of good writing (and one we will discuss many times throughout this course). If your instructor does not stipulate an intended audience, assume you are writing for a journal of literary studies and that your classmates, or other students and literary scholars, are your imagined audience. It can be tempting to think of your instructor as your audience since they will be reading and grading your paper. However, you should avoid doing so, unless told otherwise. Rather, think of your instructor as an editor who gives an assignment and evaluates your work for publication. The true "audience" in this case would be the readers of your real or imagined journal.

Different journals and conferences favor certain kinds of research over others and you should explore a few journals to see what kinds of research they publish. It is useful to review the submission guidelines for various literary journals and conferences to find out what kinds of research they prefer. Many journals publish articles with very specific formatting and methodology requirements, and learning about them can provide insight to beginning researchers. By studying the field, you can also be more prepared if, or when, you're considering graduate school or thinking about writing beyond class assignments. Publishing and presenting on a more professional level awaits!



## • Purpose of the Project

Most literary research projects aim to persuade an audience to accept the conclusion you've reached. Thus, you want to make a well-supported argument to convince your reader to adopt your understanding, and not some other understanding. The research methods you choose (and your effectiveness in using them) will determine whether you succeed. We discuss research goals and methods further in [Chapter 4](#). For now, reread the assignment you've been given for your research project. Sometimes your instructor will be explicit about your research purpose and other times they will leave it up to you. Be sure you understand what your parameters are, and ask for clarification if you're not sure.



## • Understanding the Assignment Prompts, Guidelines, and Expectations

It's common to begin a research project with a broad topic that you refine and focus throughout your research. Jada's journey started with a general interest in James Baldwin's short story, "Sonny's Blues," but became a more clear, complex, and focused question that drove her research.

First, Jada needed to know the parameters of the assignment. Instructors may provide a specific prompt focused on a particular literary work, an author, a literary form, a historical period, a theme, a theory, a method, or some other aspect of literary studies. *Or*, the instructor may offer a choice of prompts. The instructor may require that your project argue for or against a certain proposition. Alternatively, the instructor may leave the assignment open-ended, requiring students to identify their own topic and produce their own prompt (otherwise known as a research question).



In addition, the instructor may list other requirements for your research project such as page length, number and type of sources, citation format, style guidelines, etc. Be sure to familiarize yourself with all these requirements before you begin your project; you don't want to get to the deadline only to realize you needed five more citations, your paper is five pages too short, and you don't know the difference between MLA and APA formats. The best source for information about the research project guidelines is your instructor. If you have questions about the assignment or just want to go over the requirements before you begin your work, please ask your instructor for help. They are there to help you!

**For more advice on How to Read an Assignment, consider the following from Harvard College Writing Center:<sup>1</sup>**

- **Beware of straying.** Especially in the draft stage, “discussion” and “analysis” can lead you from one intrinsically interesting problem to another, then another, and then ... You may wind up following a garden of forking paths and lose your way. To prevent this, stop periodically while drafting your essay and reread the assignment. Its purposes are likely to become clearer.
- **Consider the assignment in relation to previous and upcoming assignments.** Ask yourself what is new about the task you're setting out to do. Instructors often design assignments to build in complexity. Knowing where an assignment falls in this progression can help you concentrate on the specific, fresh challenges at hand.

1. Rice, William C. “How to Read an Assignment.” *Writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu*, 2022, <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-read-assignment>.



## •The Role of Analysis in Research Projects

Research projects should make an **argument**, which should not be confused with an **analysis**. An analysis does not necessarily pose any arguments. Any research project must include some analysis, but this analysis must be used to support an interpretive, critical, or historical claim/argument (or to give a creative work some rhetorical function).

Analytical work will help you better understand a literary text. The goal of analysis is to describe what *type* a text is, how it *functions*, what its *parts* or *elements* are, and how it achieves its *effects*. You must do an analysis, but you should not stop there; an analysis is a necessary part of creating an argument. Later in this course, we will discuss how you use analysis to build your arguments.





## Key Takeaways

### *Do*

Understand all key terms and instructions in your assignment.

Communicate first with your instructor to get clarification and advice about the assignment.

Determine the type of research project you will be conducting: Interpretive, critical, historical, or creative.

Imagine your audience as readers of a journal in which your research article will appear.

Write to convince/to persuade.

Determine if the assignment is limited in terms of subject or topic, or open-ended.

Familiarize yourself with requirements such as page length, citation format, and style guidelines.

### *Don't*

Start work without a clear idea of what the assignment requires you to do.

Begin by asking other people (not the instructor) to help you understand the assignment.

Write a purely analytical or descriptive paper that lacks an argument.

Imagine your audience as your instructor; the instructor is more like an editor than an audience member.

Write to (merely) inform.

Assume that the assignment is open-ended, unless clearly specified.

Wait to figure out things like page length, citation format, and style guidelines.

The following pages will include more details about types of research projects and Jada's project, including short videos of her discussing her approach to finding resources, establishing relevance, refining and evaluating her research question, and managing her research.



## Understanding the Assignment [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

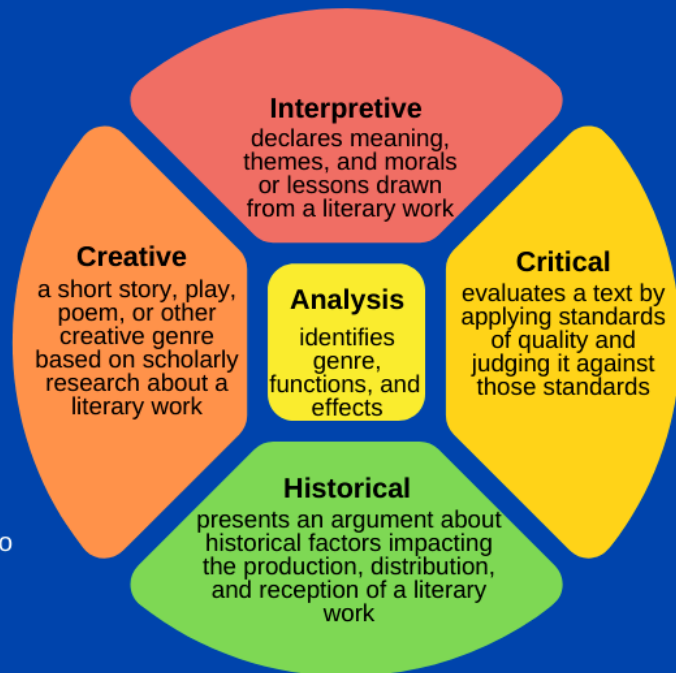
<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=38#h5p-1>

# Types of Research Projects

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## Types of Research Projects

Researchers need to be able to clearly articulate a statement of purpose and specific research questions and claims. They also establish need (pertinence): What contributions does your study make to the field?  
Analysis is necessary for any research but is not sufficient to create a claim and establish need.



## CONTENTS

We describe four types of research projects on this page:

- [Interpretive](#)
- [Critical](#)
- [Historical](#)
- [Creative](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Types of Research Projects \[Refresher\]](#)

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Your instructor may ask you to produce only one specific type, or allow you to choose among several. Please consult with your instructor if you are unsure what kind of project is acceptable.



## Introduction

**Researchers begin each project by considering the following questions:**

- What is the purpose of my research?
- What are the specific hypotheses (claims) or research questions that my work explores?
- What pertinence does my research have for others? Another way of posing the question is to ask: what contributions does my proposed study make to the field? This question is often answered by providing a review of existing scholarly literature and then demonstrating how your work fills a gap or in other ways clarifies or extends the work of others.

**Research projects also include the following elements:**

1. A specific description of the problem or topic being studied, and a summary of the argument and its supporting elements, including any necessary definitions.
2. A statement of the significance of the problem or topic.
3. A review of the scholarly literature on the topic.
4. An explanation of the methodology and theoretical approach of the study, describing what information is used, how it is applied to the topic of study, and why the methodology and theoretical approach were chosen.
5. A list of works cited and annotated (annotated bibliography) that provides complete information for each reference mentioned in the literature review.

Research projects are **interrogative**, meaning that they develop out of questions. The researcher engages with the materials (the literary text, primary and secondary sources, etc.) and asks questions about them such as whether X is true, what X means, whether X

is good or relevant, etc. The answers lead to another set of questions and so on and on. Research projects are also imaginative, meaning that the researcher wishes to make a certain kind of project and labors to develop it. Imaginative thinking requires “what if” questions. What if we perceive a literary text from another perspective? What if we focus on a secondary character? What if we use a new research method?



## • Interpretive Research Projects

An **interpretive** research project declares:

- what a text *means*,
- what its major *themes* are, and
- what *morals* or *lessons* the reader should draw from it.



### Example [Interpretive]

An example of an *interpretive* claim is found in Frank Kermode’s interpretation of Jesus’ parable about the Sower of Seeds:

“For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” To divine the true, the latent sense, you need to be of the elect, of the institution. Outsiders must content themselves with the manifest, and pay a supreme penalty for doing so. Only

those who already know the mysteries—what the stories really mean—can discover what the stories really mean. (2-3)

Note that Kermode's interpretation of Jesus' parable is in conflict with other potential interpretations such as the claim that Jesus meant for his message to be heard and understood by everyone.<sup>1</sup>

For more information about interpretive research projects, read "[Interpreting Literary Works](#)" in Chapter 5.



## •Critical Research Projects

A **critical** research project:

- *evaluates* a text by applying *standards of quality* to the work, and
- *judges* it against those standards.

1. Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979.





## Example [Critical]

An example of a *critical* research project is found in Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. In Said's reading of the novel *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad, he sees Conrad as criticizing imperialism, but failing to call for its end. Said writes:

But Marlow and Kurtz are also creatures of their time and cannot take the next step, which would be to recognise that what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European 'darkness' was in fact a non-European world *resisting* imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence, and not, as Conrad reductively says, to reestablish the darkness. Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that 'natives' could lead lives free from European domination. As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them. (30)<sup>2</sup>

Though Said recognizes that Conrad was a product of his time (the novel was published in 1899), he praises Conrad for his insights while criticizing him for his limitations. Said's criticism depends on a series of propositions about what counts as "good" literature about imperialism. We might summarize Said's propositions this way:

1. Literature about imperialism should identify imperialism as domination, violence, and slavery.
2. Literature about imperialism should recognize that native efforts to preserve their identities is resistance.

3. Literature about imperialism should call for an end to imperialism.

*Heart of Darkness* meets the first criteria but not the last two. We might disagree with Said's criteria, but if so, we should be prepared to say what other criteria should be used. Note that Said is not criticizing the quality of the prose (he praises it). His primary concern is whether the literature supports or opposes imperialism.

For more information about critical research projects, read "[Critiquing Literary Works](#)" in Chapter 5.



## • Historical Research Projects

A **historical** research project presents an argument about:

- *historical factors* impacting the *production, distribution, and reception* of a literary work, and
- defining an object of study and a purpose, then collecting, reading, and analyzing your source materials.

The reading should be both wide-ranging and intensive, and your critical judgment is required in the process. The way to maintain focus is to keep in mind the purpose of your study and the questions that you seek to answer. Your bibliography should include all the works referenced in your thesis.



## Example [Historical]

An example of a *historical* research project can be found below in a paper by Madison McGann, who argues that serialization — the publication of novels in installments in periodicals — changed the relationship among authors, readers, and critics.

The fact that critics like Poe were writing and publishing ‘alternative endings’ at the same time as they were reading the novel suggests that reading a serial novel in the mid-nineteenth century was neither a predetermined nor a passive experience; rather, it was a “choose your own adventure” game that allowed for unspoken collaboration to take place between authors and readers. The serial novel (and its subsequent shift in reviewing) enabled readers to become creators as well as consumers, thus changing the way that novels were read and received in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. (79)<sup>3</sup>

McGann’s research explores the real historical events upon which Dickens based his novel, Dickens’ production of the novel in serial form, and its reception by literary critics of his time such as the scathing reviews of Dickens’ work penned by Edgar Allen Poe.



## •Creative Research Projects

The idea for a **creative** research project, such as a short story, play, poem, or other creative text based on scholarly research about a literary work, must be determined in consultation with the professor. However, for acceptance, a creative project must include at least the following elements:

- An explanation of why the specific form and genre were selected.
- A bibliography of all references used in the development of the creative thesis.
- A clear description of the nature, scope, and substance of the final creative product. For example, a dramatic adaptation that takes an alternate view of events.
- A discussion of the major elements of the craft used and how they will achieve certain aims or effects.

A creative research project has interrogatory components, which means that the researcher still asks critical questions and pursues answers to them, but creative research projects privilege invention over critique. In other words, the researcher must craft a response that goes beyond the traditional essay and does more “showing” than “telling.”



### Example [Creative]

An example of a *creative* research project is Connie Porter’s “Rapunzel across Time and Space.”

Maybe, once upon a time, the moon did show her other face, proudly, boldly,

for just one night. It shone down on Earth below just as the other side does, bathed in silver light, brilliant in its fullness. But this face was dismissed for being what it was not—just like the other side. Since that night the moon turned that face forevermore into the darkness of space refusing to let anyone on Earth see it and was called fickle. She was hurt by being made fun of, for being called fickle and sang out her sorrow from the dark side of her face. People hear her voice on windless nights. Part of a chorus people used to call the music of the spheres. Its beauty haunts us, draws us to look up into the sky at night.

We want to hear her voice more clearly, but the moon will never turn its other face to us again. We will have to cross time and space to pull ourselves into her life, make a ladder of our own hair. Nappy. Curly. Straight. Braided. Dreaded. We will have to shave our own heads, all of us become baldheaded and beautiful, weaving a ladder that stretches to her to hear the full beauty of her voice, to see the beauty of the face cloaked in darkness. We will feel the power of her tears as they fall into our eyes. Though not blind, we will see that she was never the one who was fickle. We were. Then we will all live happily ever after. End of story. (282)<sup>4</sup>

In her work, Porter — a black female author — writes about an event in which she heard one of her readers use the word “baldheaded” to insult one of Porter’s fictional characters, a young black girl with short hair. The insult inspired Porter to rethink the familiar Rapunzel tale to see what it teaches us about hair, beauty, gender, and race. In re-reading “Rapunzel,” Porter discovered that the prince is attracted not to Rapunzel’s hair but to her voice. Her hair is merely a means to an end: a rope for him to climb. Porter’s work is a creative hybrid; she reworks the “Rapunzel” story into something that is part personal essay, part literary research, and part polemic. She argues that we should encourage black girls to speak and that we should listen to them and appreciate their voices. By retelling the story, Porter does more than just *tell* us an argument about “Rapunzel”; she *shows* us what she learned about it and what it means to her.

### Suggested guidelines when doing a creative research project:

1. The introduction should discuss the literary theory or theories you are using, how you used them to read the literary work, and what your creative project is in relation to your research question.
2. The creative project is part of your research method in that it helps you answer your research question. For instance, let's say we were wondering what impact gender has in the "Sleeping Beauty" stories by the Brothers Grimm. One way to find out might be to switch the genders of the main characters and see what results.
3. The conclusion explains what you discovered or what resulted from the creative work.

Read [Chapter 4](#) for more information about literary theories and methods.



## Types of Research Projects [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of*

the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=45#h5p-2>



## Exercises [Discussion]

1. Does your assignment allow you to choose the type of research project you're creating? Get clarification if necessary.
2. Which type of research project most appeals to you and why?
3. What are your thoughts about using analysis and going beyond it to make a claim and establish need?
4. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# Conducting Preliminary Research

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Preliminary Research Strategies](#)
- [Finding Scholars](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Conducting Preliminary Research \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Finding Scholars \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Introduction

Sometimes called “pre-research,” preliminary research is an inventive stage in which you investigate possible topics of interest. For example, once you fully understand your assignment, the next step might be to conduct some background research online, or talk to friends and classmates. However, while it’s a good idea to try out your ideas with non-experts, the real test is to try them out with experts. If your ideas are not fully formed yet, you can ask experts to help guide you in the right direction. Undergraduate students often overlook this strategy, but it can be incredibly effective and it can lead to good research topics and resources. Let’s take a closer look at some more preliminary research strategies.





## • Preliminary Research Strategies

Consider using some of the ideas below:

- **Explore Literary Studies Journals:** Scholars share their work through many venues, but the most important is peer-reviewed scholarly journals in their field. Princeton keeps [a list of some of the most important literary studies journals](#). Imagine yourself as a future contributor to one of these journals!
- **Work with a Mentor:** A mentor is someone who can help and guide you as a scholar during the research process. Mentorship can take many forms; UCF offers many mentorship programs such as the [Research And Mentoring Program \(RAMP\)](#), [McNair Scholars Program](#), [Honors Undergraduate Thesis \(HUT\)](#), and the [Office of Undergraduate Research \(OUR\)](#). Many of these offer financial and logistical support to students.
- **Delve into the Invention Stage:** This can be a messy process, so keep a notebook to jot down ideas and questions as they occur to you. You'll need to develop a research question, so those notes may come in handy later. Also, think about what types of sources you'll need to complete your project. The assignment may specify certain types, such as scholarly **monographs** and journal articles, but what else might you need? What about media and other primary sources? Where would you find them? Should you explore digital archives or make an appointment with an archivist?
- **Manage your Time:** Think about time-management and set milestones. Even though pulling all-nighters is a rite of passage for college students, your stress will be greatly reduced (and the quality of your research enhanced) if you're not racing to finish everything at the last minute. Be sure to keep those milestones simple and achievable so you don't get overwhelmed by unrealistic goals. We encourage you to use a planner!

- **Investigate Professional Organizations:** Many famous authors have organizations dedicated to their legacy. One of these is [The William Faulkner Society](#), which assembles lists of scholarly journals, conferences and conventions, research centers and information sources, and interdisciplinary university institutes. Many such organizations also provide scholarships for students. Look through the contents of author societies' websites, as well as recent journals and conference proceedings, to help you generate ideas for your own research.
- **Talk to Experts:** Finally, ask for help! You're attending a large university where you're surrounded by highly educated people. Don't be afraid to schedule appointments and conduct interviews with them. Also, consider meeting with the subject librarian in your major to get an overview of key resources and tools available at the library.

Taking time to work through the preliminary research process will set the foundation for everything that comes after, and it will make your job easier.

**A word about mentorship:** having a mentor (whether faculty or peer) will vastly improve your experience as a researcher. Even many experienced researchers have their own mentors because they understand the value that comes with being a mentee. If you plan to work with a mentor, keep in mind a few points:

- If you are having difficulty with the research, put in some work on your own to address the problem before going to your mentor. The mentor's job is to help you, not to do the work for you.
- Ask your mentor about their own research process so you can better understand the tasks and skills involved.
- Keep a positive attitude; even if you feel like you do not yet have the necessary knowledge or skills, tell yourself that you are in the learning stage and that you are doing your best.
- Recognize that a mentor is there to help but may not be able to meet all your needs. Take ownership of your own learning and research.
- It is okay to seek mentorship from more than one person.

## Background Research [1 min 20 sec] <sup>1</sup>



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=50#oembed-1>

### For more advice on Conducting Preliminary Research, consider the following from WritingCommons.org: <sup>2</sup>

The goal of Preliminary Research is not necessarily to become an authority on a specific topic so much as to identify conversation chatter: across disciplines, what are experts talking about? And, ultimately, if given a choice, what interests you the most? Preliminary Research could involve

- discussions with friends about ideas.
- interviews with experts, bosses, clients, and teachers.
- scanning a wikipedia page or Google search
- skimming over documents to learn about the genres and research methods of particular discourse communities/community of practice.



1. NKU, Steely Library, director. *Background Research*. YouTube, YouTube, 13 Dec. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gXGMJAXSU4&t=74s>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2022.

2. Writing Commons. "Preliminary Research." *Writing Commons*, 11 Aug. 2020, <https://writingcommons.org/section/invention/preliminary-research/>.

## Conducting Preliminary Research [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=50#h5p-3>



## Finding Scholars

Throughout these chapters we have been emphasizing the idea of scholarship as conversation. This notion extends beyond the written paper to the entire research process, and nowhere is it more important than during your literature review! Just to reiterate this point, here are a few ideas to consider:

- **Talk To Your Instructor:** Don't be afraid to talk to your instructor at different stages of your research. This is a good way to stay on track, make sure the scope and purpose of your project are on target, and to make sure you're finding the right types of sources. Your instructor may also know about important books or articles you haven't discovered yet as well as key researchers or theorists who work in your area:
- **Meet with a Librarian:** University and college libraries usually offer a research consultation service. It is recommended to schedule an appointment as early in the process as possible. Consultations generally focus on the same search strategies discussed throughout this course, but they will be tailored to your individual needs/project.
- **Interview an Expert:** Whether at your university or someone you've discovered during your literature review, consider setting up an informational interview. To get started, introduce yourself, briefly describe your research project, explain why you're contacting them, and request an interview or assistance with a specific research problem. You might not get a response from everyone, but you'll be surprised how willing established researchers are to talk to student scholars who show initiative.

The best way to find scholars to talk to about your work is to look through the scholarly literature and identify the authors of the work you like. You can also look through the citations in their works to identify other authors. Then you can look up those people online. Most researchers are affiliated with institutions like universities and they have email addresses you can find on their faculty webpage. You can write to them at their institution, share your interest in their work, and ask for a consultation. Another approach is to contact experts through commercial websites like [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu) and [Researchgate.com](https://www.researchgate.com). You can search for experts by topic and contact them through the site. Not all scholars check their mes-

sages through the site, however, so sometimes you have to search for an alternate email address or keep looking for other scholars.



## Finding Scholars [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=50#h5p-21>



## Exercises

1. List three things you have researched (they don't have to be related to school projects). Discuss your experiences with any of the research you listed. Which parts did you enjoy the most? Where did you have the most difficulty? Did you find what you were looking for? How valuable was the information and the experience?
2. Capture some basic facts and considerations about **three** literary works (an academic literary anthology is a good place to look). The purpose of this assignment is to choose a literary work (or works) that you might wish to research for your final research project. The three works don't have to have any relation to one another, and you are not committing to any of them for your final project. You can decide to choose something else or change your mind later.

Title of literary work	Author	Publication date	Literary genre / theme	Nation or region of author	Brief description	Initial thoughts

Feel free to use a grid format, as above, or just make a list of these items under each entry.

- Sometimes the **publication date** is tricky – a work might have remained unpublished for a long period of time. If so, note when it was written (approximately) and then published. Sometimes a work may have been revised and republished. If so, indicate the publication date of the version you read (its original publication date, and not the publication date of the anthology).
- **Literary genre** refers to whether a work is a novel, short story, drama, poem, parable, allegory, non-fiction, essay, folk or fairy tale, sacred text, children's literature, or memoir. Additionally, **literary themes** can be part of genres as in comedy, tragedy, lyric, epic, detective or crime stories, science fiction, supernatural, historical, etc. These are not strict categories and a work may combine more than one.
- **Nation or region of author** can be tricky as well. For instance, an author may write in a country far from where they were born and/or raised. Or they may be born in a country that is divided by region. Note anything significant about the author's place(s).
- The **brief description** is just a sentence or a few sentences to indicate what the literature is about. It does not need to include a plot summary or a complete list of characters and themes. For example, we could say that Homer's *Odyssey* is the

story of a hero and the obstacles he faces on his journey home from war.

- **Initial thoughts** are just that: thoughts upon a first reading. These could be about things you notice, things you like or dislike, things that intrigue you, things that are confusing, things that are mysteries, things that are easy or difficult, elements of the texts such as style, voice, meter, diction, etc. The idea is to identify some things you might want to research.

3. Capture some basic facts and considerations about **two** works of literary theory or criticism. Select two works of literary criticism or theory (from any anthologies or stand alone works). The purpose of this assignment is to get a sense of how and why such works are written.

Title of work	Author(s)	Publication date	Major theory or type of criticism	Nation or region of author(s)	Brief description	Initial thoughts

Feel free to use a grid format, as above, or just make a list of these items under each entry.

- Sometimes the **publication date** is tricky – a work might have remained unpublished for a long period of time. If so, note when it was written (approximately) and then published. Sometimes a work may have been revised and republished. If so, indicate the publication date of the version you read (its original publication date, and not the publication date of the anthology).
- **Major theory or type of criticism** refers to the major literary theories (Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, formal, historical, linguistic, audience studies, structuralist, post-structuralist, etc.) or the themes or issues being addressed. These are not strict categories and a work may combine more than one.
- **Nation or region of author** can be tricky as well. For instance, an author may write in a country far from where they were born and/or raised. Or they may be born in a country that is divided by region. Note anything significant about the author's place(s).
- The **brief description** is just a sentences or a few sentences to indicate what the literary criticism or theory is about. It does not need to include a summary of the whole argument, but should include the major claim(s).
- **Initial thoughts** are just that: thoughts upon a first reading. These could be about things you notice, things you like or dislike, things that intrigue you, things that are confusing, things that are mysteries, things that are easy or difficult, elements



of the texts such as style, voice, diction, etc.

4. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
5. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# Calls for Papers

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Calls for Papers](#)
- [Sample Call for Papers \(CFP\)](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Calls for Papers Refresher](#)



## •Calls for Papers

A “call for papers” (or CFP) is a request from a professional journal, conference, or other forum asking scholars to submit research, usually about a particular theme or subject. The CFP from a particular journal or other entity may pose a research question or series of questions that scholars should address in their work. Along with the theme and research question, the CFP usually stipulates the length of the project (typically in word count or length of presentation), and other guidelines such as style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.).

As a scholar in literary studies, you can respond to a CFP, meaning you aim to get your research published in a literary studies journal. Addressing your paper to a CFP goes a long way to helping you solve the problems of audience (you are writing to the audience that reads the literary studies journal), of purpose (you are addressing the purpose put forth by the CFP), and form (the CFP will specify things like length, style, etc.).

Most CFPs in literary studies ask for proposals or abstract submissions before consideration of complete papers. An abstract is a brief overview of the work. A typical request is for an abstract of 300-500 words. If the abstract is approved, you will receive an invitation requesting a completed work by a particular deadline.

Beginning and intermediate scholars who wish to continue in the field should familiarize themselves with a variety of CFPs. Doing so allows you to see what topics are currently being discussed, what kinds of guidelines researchers must follow for their work to be published, and what journals and professional platforms are available.

Below are some sites that host CFPs.

### **Web Resources**

- [UPenn \[https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/\]](https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/)
- [HNet \[https://networks.h-net.org\]](https://networks.h-net.org)
- [WikiCFP \[http://www.wikicfp.com/cfp/call?conference=humanities\]](http://www.wikicfp.com/cfp/call?conference=humanities)
- [CFPList \[https://www.cfplist.com/\]](https://www.cfplist.com/)
- [Commlist \[http://commlist.org/\]](http://commlist.org/)

The people creating CFPs want to host a discussion, either in a live forum or in media such as print. They are inviting scholars – like you – to join that discussion. Note that conferences commonly charge registration fees for presenters (some costing hundreds of dollars), and some scholarly journals – particularly Open Access ones (open Access means they do not charge their readers) – require steep fees to publish. Such fees cover costs associated with hosting and publishing. Discounts are often available for students, and many educational institutions will subsidize student authors and presenters. If you want to present or publish your research but costs seem prohibitive, ask your institution if financial help is available. Many institutions are proud to support the work of their students researchers and they get to bask in the glow of your reflected glory.



Let's look at a sample CFP.

[Special Issue of Steinbeck Review: Steinbeck, Race, and Ethnicity](#)

*This CFP is for a special issue and asks for research that addresses themes of race and ethnicity in relation to Steinbeck. Not all CFPs are for special issues and some do not specify themes, which means they are open to a greater variety of proposals. If you were to submit a proposal in response to this CFP, you would need to highlight the ways in which your research addresses the themes.*

**Categories:** American, Interdisciplinary, Popular Culture, African-American, Colonial, Revolution & Early National, Transcendentalists, 1865-1914, 20th & 21st Century, Aesthetics, Anthropology/ Sociology, Classical Studies, Cultural Studies, Environmental Studies, Film, TV, & Media, Food Studies, History, Philosophy

*"Categories" refers to the places on a CFP webpage in which the CFP is being listed. Not all the categories listed above, such as Classical Studies, fit the theme since Steinbeck was a 20th century American author.*

Event Date: 2024-09-01 Abstract Due: 2024-04-01

*Here “event date” means complete drafts are due by September 1, 2024. “Abstract due” means you first submit an abstract (a brief description of the proposed study) by April 1, 2024. You must get approval for your abstract before submitting a complete draft.*

#### Call for Papers: Steinbeck, Race, and Ethnicity

##### A Special Issue of Steinbeck Review

Like many American authors who rose to prominence in the first half of the twentieth century, John Steinbeck came from an economically privileged Protestant family of European descent and grew up in a socially and religiously conservative environment. Like many of his contemporaries, he distanced himself from his upbringing in his fiction, rejecting the authority of government, of institutions, and of received cultural wisdom. He sided with the poor and dispossessed, he stood with the underdog, and he tried to give the downtrodden a voice through his fiction. His writing indicates that he aligned himself with the ideology of mid-century liberalism and considered himself liberal, progressive, and open minded.

Much of his work, however, now appears problematic to contemporary scholars, particularly those concerned with representation and social justice. How could a writer who wrote two novels about strikes in the California agricultural industry not mention migrant workers of Latinx and Asian diasporic backgrounds? Although Steinbeck clearly intended them to be positive characters, Lee Chong in *Cannery Row* and Lee in *East of Eden* reflect stereotypical thinking about Chinese and Chinese-American people. Few African-American characters are mentioned in Steinbeck's fiction, and the few who are, such as Crooks in *Of Mice and Men*, reflect simplistic and paternalistic perceptions about race.

Questions such as these (and many others) need to be more fully explored in John Steinbeck's works. And some of these queries may best be explored by scholars from underrepresented backgrounds whose perspectives have not

often been seen in Steinbeck circles, but whose voices could open new vistas for important, rich new discussions of his work.

The editorial staff at Steinbeck Review invites submissions on the topic of “Steinbeck, Race, and Ethnicity.” Discussions of any Steinbeck work or works are welcome. Of particular interest are discussions such as

- Asian American and Trans-Pacific Studies perspectives on Steinbeck
- Latinx Studies and Borderlands Studies Perspectives on Steinbeck
- African-American Studies perspectives on Steinbeck
- Native/Indigenous Studies perspectives (including decolonial, postcolonial, and settler colonial approaches)
- Comparative Ethnic Studies approaches (including placing Steinbeck’s work in conversation with other writers and texts)
- Global and Transnational perspectives (including non-US ethnicities)

All critical and theoretical perspectives are welcomed. Submissions should be from twelve to twenty double-spaced pages in length, should reflect an awareness of Steinbeck scholarship, and should follow current MLA style as reflected in the 9th MLA Handbook.

*Here the editors present the research “problems” they want researchers to address in their special issue. They break down the major theme into a list of sub-themes. In chapter four of this book, we discuss a variety of theoretical and critical approaches that will help you to address notes such as “All critical and theoretical perspectives are welcomed.” You would choose one or more approaches such as formalist, psychoanalytic, cultural studies, feminist, queer, etc.*

#### IMPORTANT DATES

- 500-word proposal submitted to editors (see below): April 1, 2024
- o Prospective contributors should prepare manuscripts in MLA with all identify-

ing references to the author(s) deleted. Submissions should include a cover page, giving the name, address, and institutional affiliation of the author(s) as well as a short bio not to exceed 300 words.

*MLA stands for Modern Language Association and also refers to the MLA's style guidelines. We discuss style guidelines in chapter 12 of this book. The "short bio" refers to your academic and scholarly history. If you are a student, you would include your academic institution, your major, your year of study (freshman to senior), and any previous scholarly work you've showcased such as published papers, awards, and conference presentations. Whether you have any of these things or not in your record, you can also state your research interests and how long you have been pursuing them. You can include one line at the end referring to your home and family life – where you live, who you live with, pets, and hobbies.*

- Decision deadline and invitation to submit full manuscript : May 1, 2024
- Full version: September 1, 2024, to be submitted to the Steinbeck Review online submission and review system at [www.editorialmanager.com/Steinbeck](http://www.editorialmanager.com/Steinbeck). Papers have the possibility for publication in a special issue in the Spring 2025 issue of Steinbeck Review. See note below for the journal's international recognition.

*"Papers have the possibility for publication in a special issue in the Spring 2025 issue of Steinbeck Review." Even if the editors approve of your abstract submission, they might still reject your manuscript (completed work).*

Also, submit manuscripts in digital format to both

- Charles “Chuck” Etheridge, Guest Editor [charles.etheridge@tamucc.edu](mailto:charles.etheridge@tamucc.edu), Professor of English
- Barbara A. Heavilin, Editor-in-Chief, [bachcwh@icloud.com](mailto:bachcwh@icloud.com)

If you have questions or concerns about the journal or the CFP, it is acceptable for you to reach out to the editors and ask for help. Make sure all your communication with editors adheres to standards of courtesy and professionalism.

Submissions should be accompanied by an abstract and key words.

*We discuss how to write an abstract in chapter 10 of this book. “Key words” refers to the kinds of terms that other researchers might use to search for and find your work. For instance, if you are discussing a particular work by Steinbeck, such as East of Eden, you would include that title in your key words. If you are discussing his work from an African-American Studies perspective, you would include “African-American Studies” as one of your key words.*

#### Note

Indexed by the international database SCOPUS and the European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Steinbeck Review is a peer-reviewed publication on the life and works of American novelist John Steinbeck. With other Penn State University Press journals, it partners with Duke University Press as part of the Scholarly Publishing Collective.

[https://www.psupress.org/journals/jnls\\_Steinbeck.html](https://www.psupress.org/journals/jnls_Steinbeck.html)



*The note above means that the journal is recognized by credible academic databases, that its work is accessible to other researchers through those databases, and that the scholarship that appears in their journal is peer-reviewed. To have your work peer-reviewed is to have it assessed by other experts in the field of study. The typical peer-review is "double blind," meaning that the reviewers don't know the name of the author whose work they are reviewing, and the author does not know the name of the reviewers. Double blind peer review helps to remove possible favoritism that might be shown to people based on their prior relationships or reputations. Peer reviewers are chosen by editors and may report three types of recommendations to editors:*

- 1. Accept*
- 2. Accept with revisions*
- 3. Reject*

*It is quite common for revisions to be requested. Usually the peer reviewers and editor will be quite specific in their requests for revisions. They may ask for additional research to be done, for changes in the structure of the essay, or for stylistic changes.*

Your instructor may ask you to aim your course project towards a particular CFP, even if you don't decide to submit your work. Doing so is a great way to learn professionalization skills as you develop your research skills. If your instructor does not ask you to aim your work for publication, it is still a good idea for you to aim for one as a potential target. Many published research papers begin as class projects.

The value of a professional publication for a student's career is immense. It shows you have the skills to make it in this highly competitive world. Also, don't be afraid of rejection. It happens to all scholars. You can practice being rejected by submitting your work to the Journal of Universal Rejection (see below).

# Journal of Universal Rejection



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## About the Journal

The founding principle of the Journal of Universal Rejection (JofUR) is rejection. Universal rejection. That is to say, all submissions, regardless of quality, will be rejected. Despite that apparent drawback, here are a number of reasons you may choose to submit to the JofUR:

- You can send your manuscript here without suffering waves of anxiety regarding the eventual fate of your submission. You know with 100% certainty that it will not be accepted for publication.
- There are no page-fees.
- You may claim to have submitted to the most prestigious journal (judged by acceptance rate).
- The JofUR is one-of-a-kind. Merely submitting work to it may be considered a badge of honor.
- You retain complete rights to your work, and are free to resubmit to other journals *even before our review process is complete*.
- Decisions are often (though not always) rendered within hours of submission.

## Editorial Board

### Founder and Editor-in-Chief

[Caleb Emmons](#), (Mathematics and Poetry).

The process for publishing in a journal varies, but typically involves several stages. You might begin with an informal inquiry, asking the editor if the journal is open to your idea for a project. If so, you may be asked to submit a formal proposal or a full manuscript. The editor will then review the submission and reply with a provisional acceptance, a request for revisions, or a rejection. Upon complete submission, the work will go to reviewers (typically two or three readers) who will write reports about your work and recommend one of the following: publication, revision, or rejection. Reader reports provide valuable feedback to scholars. Keep in mind that rejection does not necessarily mean that the work is bad; it could mean that it is not a good fit for the journal and its mission. Sometimes, finding the right fit requires several attempts. One rule: do not make simultaneous submissions to multiple journals. If more than one journal accepts your work then you are wasting the precious time of a poor overworked editor.





## Calls for Papers [Refresher]

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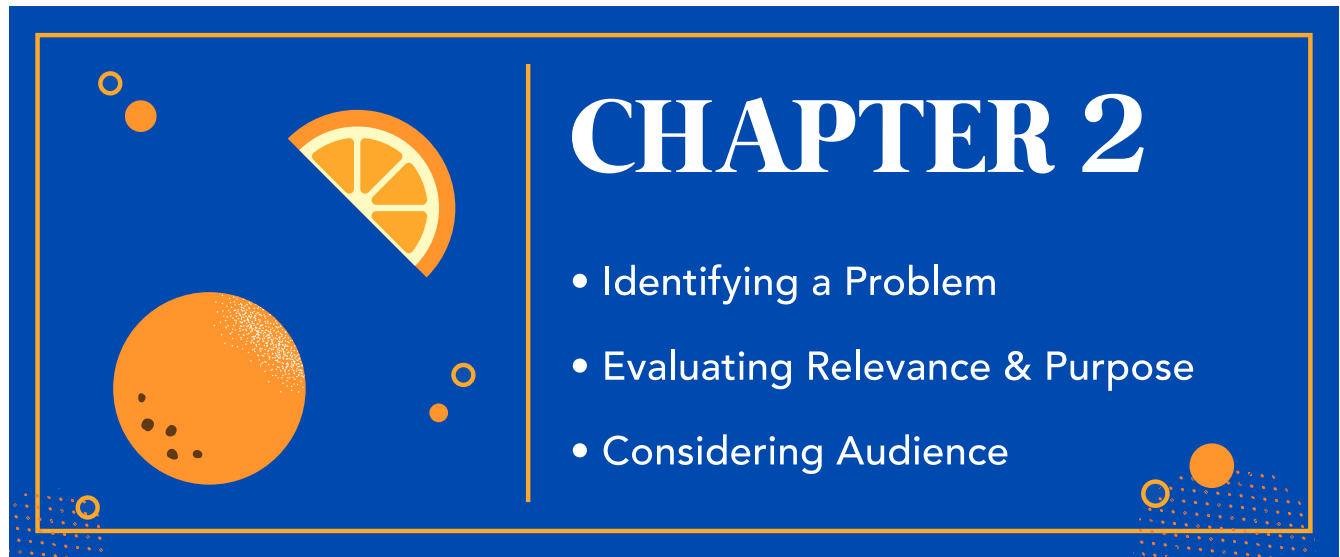
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# CHAPTER 2: IDENTIFYING A PROBLEM AND CONSIDERING AUDIENCE

# Chapter 2 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

This chapter deals with three related issues:

- identifying a problem
- evaluating relevance and purpose
- considering audience

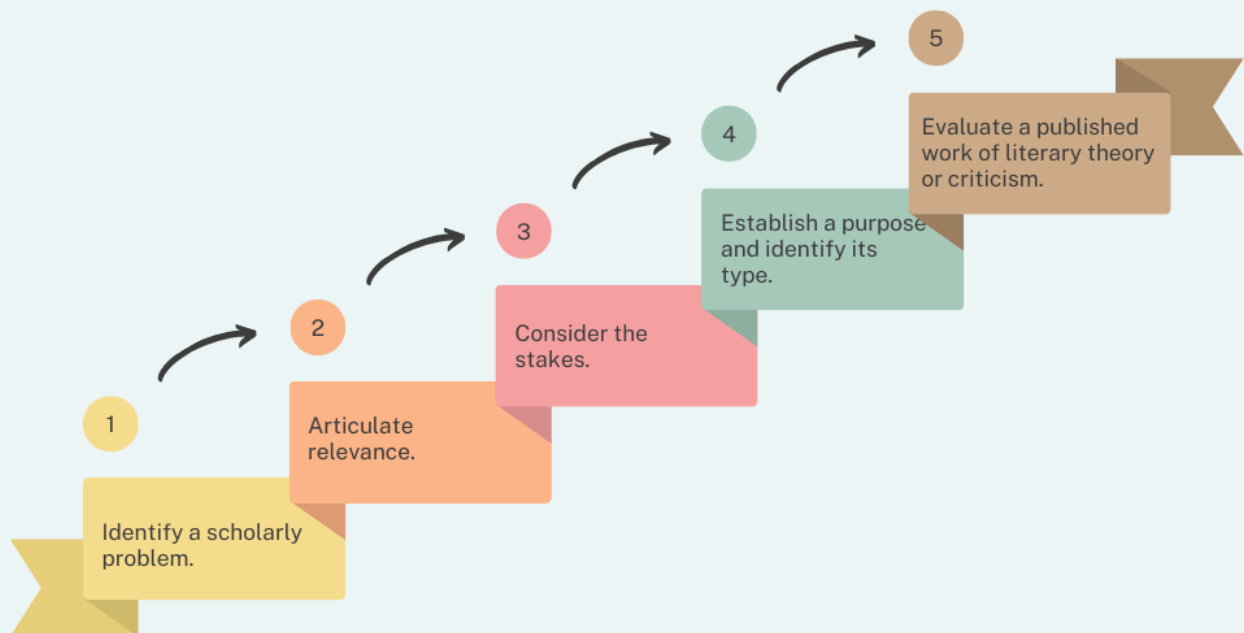
In literary studies, a problem can be a new issue or an old issue. When searching for a relevant research problem, you should first determine that there is an informed audience that will consider the issue significant, which means it is worthy of further discussion.

In the following pages, we explore relevance & purpose as they relate to possible research problems in James Baldwin's story, "Sonny's Blues." We use literary scholar Ann Dobie's work to show how to measure relevance using specific criteria such as materials, purpose, and method. This section also sets up Jada's forthcoming discussion about how she connected "Sonny's Blues" to her background and how she used her personal experiences to add a new perspective to this classic story.



As you read Chapter Two, complete the project tasks listed below and keep a record of them. Review your work here in relation to the work you did for Chapter One.

## Chapter Two Project Tasks





## Learning Objectives

You should come away from this chapter knowing how to:

- identify a research problem and evaluate relevance using specific criteria.
- understand what makes a good research question.
- develop audience awareness early in the research process.

These concepts relate to the ideas of scholarship as conversation and searching as strategic exploration, which we will discuss in later chapters.

# Identifying a Problem

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Strategies for Generating Scholarly Problems](#)
- [Addressing Problems](#)
- [Relation of Problem to Audience](#)
- [Do Problems Need to Be “Original”?](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Identifying a Problem \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Introduction

“When you don’t know what you’re looking for, your chances of finding it are excellent.” –  
Levin Becker

Many instructors and textbooks tell students to “identify a problem” for their research. When students learn they have to find a “problem,” they often think about an affliction, disaster, or catastrophe. But in the language researchers use, a problem is just something unknown or not understood, similar to the way math gives us problems. When facing a math problem, we ask “What is X?” The “problem” in math – X – is neither good nor bad. In



order to get started on a research project, you need a desire for knowledge or understanding about something; that *something* is your problem. Then, with the research materials you discover, you will try to help your audience better understand that something by making a claim about it. To help you learn how to identify the problem, we include the following passages from Aaron Ritzenberg and Sue Mendelsohn:

## Strategies for Generating Scholarly Problems

Notice that each problem requires two parts. Like a rubber band that can only be stretched when you pull each end in opposite directions, a scholarly tension requires two elements to be at odds. For instance, merely noticing that something seems strange doesn't constitute a scholarly problem until the researcher places it in tension with a second element: what we think of as typical. As you read the highlighted passages, you'll notice that we have underlined language that indicates the kind of tension the author is calling attention to. As they research, scholars generate problems to drive their research by looking for tensions or dissonances between . . .

## Common Understanding and Complication

*Begin by observing a tension* between the way others have understood the text and some aspect of the text that appears to diverge from that understanding.

*Example:* In this excerpt from his essay "The Trouble with Wilderness," William Cronon complicates our common understanding of the idea of "wilderness" as a realm separated from civilization (passage highlighted in green). Cronon observes that, in fact, wilderness is a product of civilization (passage highlighted in yellow):

The common understanding of wilderness

For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth. It is an island in the polluted sea of urban-industrial modernity, the one place we can turn for escape from our own too-muchness. Seen in this way, wilderness presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the planet. As Henry David Thoreau once famously declared, "In Wilderness is the preservation of the World."

A complication: reasons to rethink the common understanding of wilderness

But is it? The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history. (7)

*Locate this type of problem by first researching the common understanding.*

*Then look for elements that this understanding can't account for.*

*Consider the stakes by asking how this new complication might challenge the common understanding of the text.*<sup>1</sup>

A problem is something that is either not properly understood or is misunderstood. With this definition in mind, a problem is not necessarily a bad thing to have. In fact, it can be a great thing to have! We advance our understanding of the world when we address significant problems.

Problems come in different types, such as *technical* (making a bridge that will withstand wind and water), *philosophical* (defining what "being" is); *economic* (stretching our resources); *political* (protecting human rights); *ethical* (why an action is or isn't good); or *historical* (understanding how Hitler came to power in Germany). The best researchers identify research problems that are rich and rewarding so that they can work on them throughout their careers and leave more work for future generations of researchers. Marie

1. Aaron Ritzenberg and Sue Mendelsohn. *How Scholars Write*. Oxford University Press. 2020, 22.

Curie's research problem was to understand radioactivity. Sigmund Freud's research problem was to understand how the mind worked. Zora Neal Hurston's research problem was to preserve and promote African-American culture. Though all three researchers died long ago, other researchers have continued their work. When we "plow the fields" of research established by others, we owe them a debt of gratitude, which we pay by continuing the tradition and passing it on to the next generation of researchers.

In the Humanities, we tend to look for problems that relate to human beings. We seek to understand human qualities in terms of capacities and blind spots. What are humans capable of achieving? Where do they get stuck in foolishness, ignorance, and blindness? These are age-old questions that motivated the ancient Greek philosophers and playwrights. They still motivate us today. In general, if your research aims at extending human capacities and addressing human blind spots, you are on a worthy path.

Such discussions find a ready audience and help us join the scholarly conversation. If we think about "Sonny's Blues," for example, we can read it as a story about blind spots (Sonny's self-destructiveness, the narrator's failure to really know his brother, the society's blindness about the damage caused by racism), and about human capacities (Sonny's genius at embodying his personal struggles – and the social situation – in his music, the narrator's genius at coming to an epiphany and relating it to his audience).

How do we find a good problem? The best way is to follow your curiosity as you read literary works as well as the "secondary literature," which is the scholarly writing about literary works. If there is something *you* want to know, there is a good chance that someone else will want to know the same thing. In addition to your natural curiosity, there is another approach to finding a problem; the discipline of literary studies has developed a readymade set of problems that we can use in relation to almost any literary work. These include problems such as how the work was made, what its formal properties are, what its social functions are, and how it presents/represents people and their desires and struggles.

One more idea for finding good problems is to use the Feynman method, which is to rethink the assumptions about what is known. Richard Feynman became one of the most famous physicists of the past hundred years. But before he was famous, when he was a student, he hit on his famous "notebook method." James Gleick describes it as follows;

[He] opened a fresh notebook. On the title page he wrote: NOTEBOOK OF THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT. For the first but not last time he reorganized his knowledge. He worked for weeks at disassembling each branch of physics, oiling the parts, and putting them back together, looking all the while for the raw edges and inconsistencies. He tried to find the essential kernels of each subject.

While you don't need to attempt the huge scope of Feynman's work – going through each branch of a discipline (in our case, literary studies) – you could apply his method to a single branch of the discipline. Maybe you are interested in narratology, poetics, audience studies, or intertextuality. You could take apart one of these branches to get to “the essential kernels” of the subject.



## Addressing Problems<sup>2</sup>

“Solutions are nearly always disappointing.” – Harry Matthews

When working with math problems, we can say we *solved* the problem. However, in literary studies, not all problems can be solved definitively. Sometimes, as in the problem of interpreting a literary text, we get an answer that is *better* than one we had before. We often use the word “address” instead of “solve” in these cases. Thus, we might say that Joseph Campbell *addressed* the problem posed by the structure of myths. He didn't *solve* the problem definitively, since other people have addressed this problem in different ways and have come up with different answers.

To address problems in literary studies, we do research. For example, to address the problem of interpreting an Emily Dickinson poem, we might look for critical texts. Even if you find well-known critical texts, perhaps you see these critical texts differently from how other people see them; your perspective and your insights into them help others better address the problem.

Sometimes, a problem is well studied, like the examples listed above. Sometimes, you discover a new problem and are introducing it for the first time. In literary studies, lots of unknown things are out there, but not all of them are significant or worth knowing. For a problem to be significant, it means that an audience somewhere might care about it. For instance, perhaps we don't know how many words are in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of*

2. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Identifying a Problem.

*Darkness*. Just because the answer is unknown, doesn't mean it is significant. Would the answer help us better understand the text or the author? Maybe not.

Also, consider whether the problem – the unknown something – is too easy or too difficult to answer; then avoid doing either. Using a computer and a text file of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, you could figure out how many words are in it quite easily, much faster than if you counted the words yourself. We should choose problems that are not this easy to answer. In any case, counting words in a novel makes little sense unless you can explain why doing so helps us to address another more significant problem, like whether audiences were consuming longer novels at the time, or whether the length of a novel was a major consideration for publishers. Even then, providing a page count is probably sufficient.

Set aside questions that are too difficult to answer, like the impact of Shakespeare's work on authors who came after him. Such a project would take an immense amount of research and require years of study, far more than you can do for a term paper. Just because a problem is too difficult for a smaller project, however, doesn't mean it is not worth pursuing. Measuring Shakespeare's impact on later authors is an important objective. What you can do in a term paper is manage a smaller part of such a big question. For instance, what impact did Shakespeare's work have on 20th century playwright August Wilson?

When you address a problem in literary studies, you should consider the history of the problem; have other people addressed it before? Weigh the significance of the problem; is it one that has relevance to a scholarly conversation? Finally, before exploring the problem in great detail, determine whether you can feasibly address the problem given your available time and other constraints.

Later in the book, we explain how to develop a thesis statement: an argumentative claim about the problem. By necessity, your claim should be different, even a little bit, from what scholars already think about a problem. You do not necessarily reject existing knowledge, but instead you extend it to make novel claims. Andy Norman explains that for your thesis to have an impact on your audience, you need to move people from presumptive knowledge to a nonpresumptive conclusion:

What currently passes for good critical thinking instruction leaves students confused: it makes them defensive and leaves them with a distinct impression that we apply our standards haphazardly. The concept of presumption, however, allows us to give them real clarity: more transparent guidance about how to

write a good persuasive essay, more insight into the process of building new understanding, and greater clarity about how to think critically. Adept critical thinkers understand this: *good argumentation is fundamentally a matter of marshaling presumptive premises to defend nonpresumptive conclusions*. Critical thinking is all about finding claims that happen to sit on the wrong side of the ledger, and showing why they need to be moved to the other side<sup>3</sup>

To paraphrase Norman, we are seeking to make and share conclusions that our audience does not already presume to be true or right. To a degree, that means we are seeking to be original, but this originality is built upon claims that are *not* original (in other words, claims that our audience presume to be right). We defend our claim by warding off objections or counter-claims, showing how these objections or counterclaims are weaker than our claim.



## •Relation of Problem to Audience

To get a sense of whether a problem is worth addressing, you need to imagine your audience. The audience for your research is **other literary critics and scholars**. The best way to get to know your audience is by reading what they write: **works of literary criticism and scholarship**. Your audience may range from novices (such as students) to experts (such as professors). In the writings of these literary scholars and critics, you will come to know what kinds of concerns they have and what problems they find relevant and significant. Your goal is to join the conversation by adding something of value.

But first you need to know which scholarly conversation you are joining. For instance, if you

3. Andy Norman. *Mental Immunity Infectious Ideas, Mind-Parasites, and the Search for a Better Way to Think*. Harper Wave, 2021.

are writing about a Jane Austen novel, such as *Mansfield Park*, you could consider joining conversations among scholars in Austen studies, Victorian literature studies, post-colonial studies, studies of the novel, women writers, etc. They overlap, for sure, but each group of scholars may have a different set of interests.



## Do Problems Need to Be “Original”?

Originality may or may not be the most important consideration for literary scholars and writers; we can be original by doing something strange or unexpected but that otherwise has no clear purpose or value. The most recognized works of literature, or criticism and theory, are often those that show startling originality and are valued by other scholars. Learning how to recognize value, in your own work and others, is the hallmark of excellence in our field. Typically, it involves acquiring a lot of knowledge about the field.

By reading works of literary criticism and scholarship, you will find many significant problems. Great scholars are great problem-finders, but they don't always have time to solve all the problems they discover. Sometimes, they leave them for other people – like you – to work on. For your research project, you don't necessarily need to come up with an “original” problem, unless your instructor asks you to do so, because literary criticism, unlike math, usually has more than only one possible answer. Literary criticism and scholarship are more like law; each legal case is a “problem,” and we may come to different interpretations of evidence and of the law itself. Let's say you find works of literary criticism discussing the problem of [the color line](#) in the work of Langston Hughes. You can still address this problem in your research project because you might have something new or different to say about it. You can add value by uncovering new information or by taking a different perspective on the problem.

We can share our understanding of a scholarly problem by writing a problem statement. The statement includes three steps:

1. Define the problem (use citations when needed)
2. Explain what the consequences are if we don't address the problem
3. Share your thoughts about the knowledge required to properly address the problem

To take one example, we can derive Zora Neal Hurston's problem statement by reading her work. Hurston noted that black folk culture in the United States was disappearing. Additionally, she noted a lack of interest in preserving black folk culture. The consequences for not addressing the problem would be that black people would lose a sense of their heritage and valuable cultural forms would be lost. The knowledge she believed was required to address the problem was a combination of things: an insider's understanding of the culture (which she had from growing up in the community), a willingness to demonstrate the power and creativity of black folk idioms in her own literary writing, and an anthropologist's understanding of how to engage in cultural preservation.

On the following pages, we will discuss how to evaluate the relevance and purpose of the problem you've identified.







## Key Takeaways

### *Good research problems:*

Address an unexplored problem or propose a new solution to an old problem.

Identify a tension between common understanding and complications.

Address the problem as a challenging yet manageable task.

Make audiences care about it.

Join a scholarly conversation in critical literature.

Might have something new or different to say about the problem.

### *Poor research problems:*

Propose a well known solution to a well known problem.

Propose unproven, common understandings.

Are too easy or too difficult to answer.

Make no one care about it.

Are unrelated to a scholarly conversation in critical literature.

Are unlikely to have anything new or different to say about the problem.



## Identifying a Problem [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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## Exercises

1. How does the discussion on this page change your understanding of the word “problem” as it pertains to literary research?
2. What is your plan for researching what problems your audience considers to be “significant” and “relevant”?
3. Identify a problem you wish to research. It must be a problem related to literature and must focus on a particular literary work (or works). Problem identification can be provisional (subject to change) for now. You should identify a journal or venue for your research so you can more precisely know your audience. The problem needs to be carefully defined; what is it you want to know about? How does it fit into the scholarly conversation?
4. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
5. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# Establishing Relevance and Evaluating Purpose

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Establishing Relevance](#)
- [Identifying Criteria](#)
- [Considering the Stakes](#)
- [Evaluating Purpose](#)
- [Kinds of Purposes](#)
- [Summary](#)

We also provide the following:

- [Establishing Relevance \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Evaluating a Purpose \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Establishing Relevance & Evaluating Purpose \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)
- [Exercises](#)





## Establishing Relevance<sup>1</sup>

Our goal as researchers is to enter the ongoing scholarly conversation – or to start a new one. We enter the scholarly conversation by establishing relevance; we ask, “how is this work of literature, or my research about it, relevant and significant to my audience?” For example, Jada might ask why James Baldwin and “Sonny’s Blues” are still relevant to audiences today. What lessons can contemporary audiences learn from a story written in 1957? Conversely, how can new perspectives that we bring to old stories keep them relevant? Relevance is established by explaining why something matters, and things matter to us now because we have problems today that we want to solve (or address). Such problems may have broader implications for literature, for society, or for a specific group of readers such as scholars of African-American literature. Scholars understand relevance more in terms of the discussion around the literary work than around the literary work itself. To understand whether a scholarly claim is relevant, we need to know more about the scholarly discussion.

We don’t want to propose overly simplistic answers to the question of relevance. For example, it is not enough to say that racism was a problem in 1957, and that it is still a problem today. The issue demands specificity. How is the past relevant to understanding the present? For example, do we see information or perspectives in “Sonny’s Blues” that could help us address how black people deal with black history and preserve and develop black culture? Conversely, does knowing about the current movement against systemic racism help us better understand what Baldwin was writing in 1957? Can we read the story as a message to future generations? Is there a problem related to scholarship about “Sonny’s Blues,” Baldwin, African-American literature, or literature of the 1950s that your work can help us better understand? For instance, what kinds of intergenerational trauma affect black families and can we learn from “Sonny’s Blues” how best to identify and mitigate it? Becoming familiar with the conversations among scholars and the general public can help you assess whether or not, and how much, your claims are relevant.

The scholarly conversation around a literary text is called a “para-text.” It is the discourse around a literary text. Think of the literary text as a traveler and of the scholarly conversation around it as fellow travelers. Scholars hope that when people read a work of literature, they will also read some of the para-text around it. Scholars aim to influence people’s understanding of a literary text by showing them the connection of the text to a set of ideas,

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Establishing Relevance.

events, and practices. For instance, Edgar Allen Poe’s story “Murders in the Rue Morgue” is the first detective story. A lot of the para-text around it is about what a detective story is, why its invention coincided with historical shifts such as the growth of cities and the invention of photography, and how the logic of the detective differed from that of the ordinary person. Your goal as a researcher is to become a fellow traveler, adding your ideas to the para-text that travels with the literary work.

Adding to the scholarly para-text is not so different than discussing the latest movie or tv show with friends. When you do so, you are creating a para-text around that movie or show. Usually we don’t preserve these conversations in writing and publish them for all to see, though many such discussions take place in social media. Scholarly para-text is a bit different from everyday conversations about literary works (or movies, etc.). It is based on concepts and methodologies that are developed for disciplinary use – the discipline being Literary Studies or, more broadly, the Humanities. In these discussions, we can’t be careless with facts or reasoning. The goal of the discipline is to uphold the highest standards for what counts as knowledge. These disciplinary standards are far higher than those that govern most casual conversations.

Don’t be intimidated, though. The goal of disciplinary knowledge is to help you gain greater insight into literary works, and into the connections between literature and life. The task is difficult, but the reward is worth it.



## Establishing Relevance [Refresher]

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## Identifying Criteria

Relevance and significance in literary studies are measured against established **criteria**. Every field of knowledge establishes criteria. For instance, medicine establishes criteria to determine what counts as health. Political science establishes criteria for what constitutes a democracy. Mathematics establishes criteria for what counts as a formal proof. We advance in our fields by learning these criteria and making use of them in strategic ways. People who are very advanced in their fields may introduce changes to these criteria or may even introduce new ones. When you make a claim in your writing, you should also convince your audience of the relevance and significance of your claim by referring to the ongoing scholarly conversation and the criteria in it.

In literary studies, scholars establish relevance in relation to particular areas of knowledge. For instance, we can read “Sonny’s Blues” in relation to narratology, the study of narratives. A major theorist in narratology is Gerard Genette, whose work discusses narratives in terms of *story* (the events in chronological order), *discourse* (the presentation of these events, which can be out of order), and the *narration* (the telling of the events, which can be long or short). We can assess the relevance of “Sonny’s Blues” in relation to these concepts. In the story, the narrator learns from his mother about how his uncle was killed long before

by a white driver. This event is recounted as part of a recollection the narrator has about his mother before she died. Why is it relevant that we learn of the mother's recollection taking place within the narrator's recollection?



### Example [Identifying Criteria]

In scholar Ann Dobie's chapter "More Cultural Studies: Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism,"<sup>2</sup> she discusses the Black Aesthetic, a concept that artists involved in the **Black Arts Movement**<sup>3</sup> established in the 1960s when James Baldwin was in his prime as a prominent author and activist. The Black Aesthetic established criteria for determining what counts as "good" literature (at least among literary works that addressed black experience) and what doesn't. In her text, Dobie discusses three key criteria for the Black Aesthetic: the materials its artists work with, the purpose of their work, and how they go about it.

- **Materials:** Black history is the source material, which Dobie says is unique because it creates a dual identity, "one that both partakes of America and doesn't, one that shares the American experience but is denied it."
- **Purpose:** Dobie says, "African American artists have a strong imperative to reclaim their culture by defining what is of value to them. Such a reclamation takes place by remembering history, defining identity, gaining recognition, and celebrating blackness."
- **Method:** Dobie notes that while African American artists may not go about

their work differently from others, they are unique in that they draw from “folk traditions that express their beliefs, values, and social mores.” She also cites Ron Karenga who states that the purpose of African-American art is “to make revolution. Its collective nature is evident in its presentation of real life and real people, and it is committed to permanent revolution.”

Dobie adds, “To approach a text from a multicultural perspective, a reader must look for more than material, purpose, and method.” Readers must also “anticipate specific characteristics that distinguish their work.” These characteristics could include issues such as voice and narration.

Thus, when reading “Sonny’s Blues,” we can read it with these specific criteria in mind and assess the story according to the criteria. Doing so is not the end of the research process for a critical paper, but it is a crucial part. Keep in mind that the Black Aesthetic is one set of criteria but it is far from the only one you could apply to “Sonny’s Blues.”

We assess things, like literary works, against a set of standards. Many literary theories establish criteria for evaluating literary works. Another set of criteria we could apply to Baldwin’s work comes from Cleanth Brooks and the formalist critics.

- **Organic unity:** all the parts of the literary work are interrelated and support its central idea.
- **Tensions:** paradoxes, ironies, and ambiguities that the literary work resolves into a thematic unity. In “Sonny’s Blues,” we might say that Sonny sought to destroy himself through drugs yet he also sought to express himself through music. The tension between self-destruction and self-expression is thematically unified in the blues.

In literary theories, which we discuss in another chapter, we find many sets of criteria that we can use in our literary criticism (notice the shared root of the word “criteria” and “criticism”). Your paper should explain and justify why you chose a set of criteria and excluded others.

Some critics introduce their own criteria, which can be a very valuable contribution to the field of literary studies. If you’d like to introduce new criteria for evaluating literary works, be sure to explain the need for it and explain how it differs from criteria that already exists.





## Considering the Stakes

Another way to establish relevance is by considering the stakes of an argument. The “stakes” means the consequences of an argument being accepted or rejected. What could be won or lost if the argument is accepted? For instance, could an argument about a particular literary work (or works) change the paradigm of how we study literature? If so, these are enormous stakes because it means established perspectives and methods might be abandoned and new perspectives and methods adopted.



### Example [Considering the Stakes]

1. [Henry Louis Gates' Study of “signifyin”](#) black tradition in literary works such as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*.
2. [Edward Said's study of “Orientalism”](#) in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.
3. [Mikhail Bakhtin's study of “dialogism”](#) in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels.
4. [Viktor Shklovsky's reading of “defamiliarization”](#) in Leo Tolstoy's novels.
5. [Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's identification of a “minor literature”](#) in the works of Franz Kafka.
6. [Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's study of the “Madwoman in the Attic”](#) in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.
7. [Marjorie Garber's study of “transvestite logic”](#) in the works of William Shakespeare.

These works are now anthologized in collections of literary theory and criticism but were once seen as radical shifts or groundbreaking new directions in literary studies research. They achieved their exalted position because they were recognized as highly relevant to the problems of their day. These literary researchers played for high stakes and won. But because the stakes of their work are high, it is not uncommon for other critics to challenge their work. For example, Gilbert and Gubar's work has been challenged by Judith Butler, Mary Daly, and Tori Moi, among others.

"Low stakes" problems are still important to address. The size of the stakes are determined by the possible outcome. Generally, we ask "if X is true, what are the consequences"? So, for instance, if we produce a new interpretation of a Shakespeare sonnet, is it the kind of interpretation that changes our mind about one poem, about Shakespeare's poetry, about poetry in general, about literature in general, or about life in general? A small stake would be an answer that revises our thinking about one poem but not so much beyond that.

Thomas Kuhn wrote a widely cited book titled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in which he argued that most scientific research is "normal science," meaning it doesn't change our fundamental understanding of the world but just elaborates on it or solves smaller problems. "Revolutionary science," by contrast, changes the way we see the world in fundamental ways. So, Darwin's theory of evolution is revolutionary, whereas a particular study within that paradigm – such as a study about the evolution of a fruit fly population – would be normal science. Normal science is still extremely important. Maybe it matters a great deal that we know how fruit flies evolve, but the answer probably does not involve a paradigm shift.

Basically, the higher the stakes, the greater the relevance. Darwin's theory of evolution was extremely high stakes and extremely relevant to all of science, particularly biology, as well as to almost all human thought. The "problem" Darwin was addressing seemed to be fairly low stakes at first; why do finches on one island have short beaks while finches on another island have longer beaks? Yet the answer – that species changed through natural selection – was enormously relevant to many other problems. Low stakes means the research has narrow implications and high stakes means the research has broad implications. Your assignment may not require you to aim for low or high stakes, but it is good for you to know where you are aiming.

We will discuss the importance of establishing relevance more in-depth once we get into the "Refining Your Research Question" portion of this book, but it is important to keep relevance in mind during your early research process.



## Evaluating Purpose<sup>4</sup>

Joining the scholarly conversation about literature involves more than just stating an interesting fact or making an appropriate observation here and there. The conversation moves along rhetorical lines (it aims to persuade); therefore, to join the conversation, we need to think rhetorically. The major purposes in rhetoric are:

1. *Docere*: teaching on an intellectual level.
2. *Movere*: touching the feelings.
3. *Delectare*: keeping interest alive.

Skilled literary theorists and critics treat these purposes as interrelated. Thus, to succeed at *docere*, we also need to succeed at *movere* and *delectare*. We need to know our audience: what pleases one audience may upset another, and what interests one audience may bore or annoy another. For example, humor may be useful to express feelings and keep an audience interested, but if the audience has strong feelings about a subject, you should know which kind of humor (i.e. ironic humor, parodic humor, witty humor) is most likely to work, or whether it's appropriate to use humor at all.

Beyond these general aims, you should have a specific purpose related to one of the three types of rhetoric, which are (according to Aristotle):

1. **Deliberative (or Political)**: future oriented, it persuades people into action or dissuades them from action.
2. **Judicial (or Forensic)**: past oriented, it persuades people to judge an action as justifiable or unjustifiable.
3. **Epideictic (or Ceremonial)**: present oriented, it persuades people to praise or blame a person or work.

4. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Evaluating Purpose

Let's look at an example of a work of literary theory and criticism – Victor Shklovsky's essay, "Art as Technique" – to understand its rhetorical practices. Shklovsky discusses Leo Tolstoy's novels. He praises Tolstoy's artfulness (epideictic/present) and persuades us to judge Tolstoy's work (judicial/past) in terms of its masterful techniques:

"Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects."

In terms of its effects, Shklovsky says they "[prick] the conscience." Overall, Shklovsky's main purpose seems to be deliberative (political/future oriented):

"There is 'order' in art, yet not a single column of a Greek temple stands exactly in its proper order; poetic rhythm is similarly disordered rhythm. Attempts to systematize the irregularities have been made, and such attempts are part of the current problem in the theory of rhythm. It is obvious that the systematization will not work, for in reality the problem is not one of complicating the rhythm but of disordering the rhythm – a disordering which cannot be predicted. Should the disordering of rhythm become a convention, it would be ineffective as a procedure for the roughening of language."

Shklovsky's purpose, in other words, is to persuade artists to keep inventing new techniques for "making things strange" and to dissuade theorists from attempting to systematize such efforts. We might take Shklovsky's essay and translate it into two columns: a set of things he tries to persuade us to do and a set of things he tries to persuade us *not* to do. His lessons apply not just to art but also to life itself.



## Example [Schklovsky's Dos and Dont's, generated from his essay]

### *Do These Things:*

Live consciously  
Value Perception  
Notice more detail in an object  
Recover sensation  
Make the familiar seem strange  
Make art that impedes perception  
Disorder the rhythm of art  
If any defamiliarization convention becomes conventional, stop using it

### *Don't Do These Things:*

Live unconsciously  
Value Knowledge  
Stop at recognizing an object  
Avoid sensation  
Keep perceiving the familiar as only familiar  
Make art that speeds up perception  
Order the rhythm of art  
If a defamiliarization technique becomes conventional, keep using it



## Kinds of Purposes

When you plan your research project, develop a statement of purpose that answers the

question “what is my goal?” until it is clear in your mind and makes sense to other people. In the discipline of literary studies, there are any number of purposes you can choose or develop. Among them are the following kinds:

1. **Historical:** improve our understanding and appreciation of the past. Here we might seek to
  - Elevate an overlooked figure or literary work
  - Better understand major shifts around new literary forms, genres, and movements
  - Understand the relationship of literature to historical realities such as colonialism, industrialism, and information technologies
2. **Theoretical:** improve our understanding of major principles used to study literature. Such goals might be to
  - Better understand narrative, metaphor, and argument
  - Explain the relationship of literature to other kinds of writing, to life, and to thought
  - Explore the relevance of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology to literature
3. **Pedagogical:** improve the ways we teach literature, literary research, and writing about literature. Here we might seek to
  - Argue about which literary works should be included or excluded from the literary canon
  - Understand the value of literature within education
  - Develop better teaching strategies
4. **Social:** improve the fortunes of society or of particular groups of people through literature and literary study. Our goals might be to
  - Reclaim identity for marginalized groups by celebrating their literature
  - Build a more just and equitable society by highlighting worthy traditions within literary cultures
  - Consider literary works as reflecting society, revealing its flaws and its potential
5. **Experimental:** improve our understanding and appreciation of literature as an art form and a way of knowing. Such goals might be to

- Discover and experiment with poetics (ways of making) found in literature
- Apply new practices to literature and literary studies: for example, by creating literary-critical hybrids
- Experiment with new information technologies (such as text-generating Artificial Intelligence) to test approaches to literary or critical prompt engineering.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, more possible purposes for work in literary studies. Your goal is to articulate your purpose clearly, concisely, and directly in such a way that it guides your work. Of course, you are allowed to change your purpose along the way since the research process is iterative and doesn't always go in a straight line, but you should work with an end in mind.

Michael Baxandall, an art historian, provided some terminology that can help us think constructively about developing our own purpose.<sup>5</sup> The key terms Baxandall uses are *charge*, *brief*, and *troc*.

- **Charge:** The *charge* is your primary purpose. Your *purpose* relates to a *problem* you choose to address. Baxandall discusses the relationship of these things to the bridge-builder Benjamin Baker, who designed the Forth Bridge in Scotland. The problem Baker faced was straightforward; the previous bridge, the Tay Bridge, had been destroyed in a storm and now there was no bridge. Baker's charge was to *span* a distance over a body of water (additionally, he had to span it in such a way that the new bridge would not collapse). The charge for a literary scholar might be similarly broad: *understand*, *elevate*, and *teach* come to mind.
- **Brief:** the specific local conditions, or the situation, that you found yourself in. The brief includes the *resources* available to you. Baxandall classifies these as "resources of medium, of models (both positive and negative), and of 'aesthetic'" (35). To grossly oversimplify, Baker's medium was structurally-deployed metal, his positive model was the Oriental cantilever system, his negative model (an example of what *not* to do) was the Tay Bridge, which was blown down by side winds, and his aesthetic was 'functional expressionism.' Your brief is to contribute something valuable to the discipline of literary studies, as it exists currently. Your resources include not just literary works but ideas about literature. These ideas can include both positive and negative models. The positive models are the works of literary scholars that you wish to emulate. The negative models are works you wish to push against. These negative models are not necessarily "bad"; they may simply constitute resources that don't fit your goal. For instance,

5. Baxandall, Michael. *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985.

you may wish to pursue historical ends and therefore push against formalist ideas about literature.

- **Troc:** Baxandall defines *troc* as “no more than the *form* of relation in which two classes of people, both within the same culture, are free to make choices in the course of an exchange, any choice affecting the universe of the exchange and so the other participants” (48). The *troc* is a market model, “a coming into contact of producers and consumers for the purpose of exchange” (47). In our field, literary scholars are like Baxandall’s producers and our readers are like his consumers. (In reality, scholarship usually involves a degree of co-creation between scholars, who are both readers and writers). Baxandall explains that, within a market, there is “a degree of competition among both producers and consumers” and “parties on either side can make statements with their feet, as it were, by participating or abstaining” (47). A *troc* includes the cultural resources available to a literary scholar (which, when selected, become elements of the scholar’s Brief), as well as the rewards a scholar may find for their work. Such rewards include belonging to a community of literary scholars, recognition, and career advancement.

When you think about your own purpose for the literary research project you are undertaking, consider charge, brief, and troc.



## Summary

Relevance and purpose are not fixed and stable categories. What is relevant one moment might be irrelevant the next (for instance, “what are we having for dinner?” is a relevant question but is irrelevant once we have eaten it). Our purpose is related to relevance, so it can change too. There’s no purpose to making dinner once it’s already eaten (unless you are making it for another evening).

When it comes to writing about literary works, it is a bit different: the potential audience is much bigger than a dinner party, and literature can be consumed more than once. We might consider the possibility, also, that some literature, like some food, is past its “expiration date” and would only be interesting to historians.

Relevance is a key question for scholars. We discover relevance and we make relevance. To



that end, our purpose is to be like a “relevance detective” or even a “relevance inventor.” What we are looking for is the “aha!” moment that tells us we are on to something that we want to share with others.

In terms of relevance changing, one issue that has appeared lately is text-generating AI technology, such as GPT-3. We can ask it to write something in the style of a particular author, but how close is it? Typically, the closest it can get is very superficial. The failures of such machinery to capture the brilliance of literary authors raises a relevant question – what is the gap between an author’s work and a machine’s imitation of it? What is missing?



## Evaluating a Purpose [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=65#h5p-7>





## Key Takeaways

### Establishing relevance:

#### ***Do:***

Make a case for why the research matters to audiences today.

Be specific about how it matters.

Recognize the “stakes” of your argument. Establish relevance in terms of recognized criteria such as the Black Aesthetic.

#### ***Don’t:***

Assume your audience will see the relevance without your help.

Leave things vague as in “racism still exists.”

Ignore the stakes of your argument. Argue relevance without referring to recognized criteria.

## Evaluating purpose:

### ***Do:***

Choose a primary purpose: deliberative, judicial, or epideictic.

Aim to persuade your audience.

Teach your audience while touching their feelings and keeping their interest. Know your audience, their thoughts, and their feelings about a subject before you attempt to persuade them.

### ***Don't:***

Write without choosing a primary purpose, or by leaving it vague.

Provide information to your audience without aiming to persuade.

Aim to teach without touching the feelings or keeping the audience's interest, or aim to amuse without teaching. Attempt to persuade your audience without knowing how they think and feel.



## Establishing Relevance & Evaluating Purpose [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

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## Exercises

1. How does the issue of relevance change your understanding of the research process?
2. Notice the ways that literary critics and theorists try to persuade their audiences. Choose one work of literary criticism or theory and discuss its rhetorical purpose. Evaluate the work and assess it using the rubric below.
3. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
4. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

	<b>Above Satisfactory (A/B)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (C)</b>	<b>Below Satisfactory (D/F)</b>
<b>Answers “So What?” Question</b>	Argues convincingly why the topic and claim should matter to the audience.	Argues somewhat convincingly why the topic and claim should matter to the audience.	Relevance was not established. It does not explain why the topic or claim should matter to the audience.
<b>Specificity</b>	Proposes specific answers to the question of relevance.	Proposes generic and/or generalized answers to the question of relevance.	Proposes overly simplistic answers (or no answers) to the question of relevance.
<b>Consideration of Audience</b>	Target audience was carefully considered.	Target audience was only somewhat considered.	The target audience was not considered.
<b>Grammar/Mechanics</b>	MLA or APA was used correctly while establishing relevance. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while establishing relevance; however, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	There are multiple incorrect sentence structures used while establishing relevance. It also lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.

# Considering Audience

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We provide the following topics on this page:

- [Considering Audience](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Considering Audience \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Considering Audience

When you write literary scholarship and criticism, you are writing *for* someone: your audience. The audience may be real or imagined; in other words, there may be a real group of people who will read your work, or you might just be writing a practice work. Whether your audience is real or imagined at this point, you need to consider your audience as you prepare to research and write your project. Advanced researchers prioritize the reader in their writing, which means they think about how the reader will benefit from their work. Their goal is to make the reader's experience as valuable as possible. Such writers think, "What does my reader need to know?" and then they ask "how do I write to meet the reader's needs?"

Scholarly disciplines measure the impact of research by gauging audience response. When

readers value their experience reading your work, they cite it, others read about your work and cite it, and so on. In other words, the reader's experience turns into impact (at least some of the time). Critics write reviews and commentary about your work in journals, providing qualitative feedback.

We have tools to learn about ways that other researchers re-use our scholarly work within their own; advanced researchers use tools such as the [h-index](#) to measure how often their work is referenced in other people's research. Sometimes, impact is subtle and may not be measurable in quantitative ways. For instance, when your readers gain insight from your work or consider a problem from a new perspective, they may not all respond in a measurable way.

One of your goals as a researcher – beyond finding and addressing problems – is to impact your audience, and you want that impact to be positive. In other words, you don't want your audience to hold up your research as an example of bad work! Your audience should appreciate your research for its wise choice of problem, its appropriate methodology, its skillful use of sources, its insightfulness, its airtight reasoning, its relevant conclusion, and its faultless presentation. You want to impact your audience's thinking about a problem just as an attorney wants to impact the jury's thinking about a case.

Your research should impact your audience rhetorically, which means your work convinces an audience to take your side in a (potential) dispute. Share your perspective with your readers so that they see things the way you see them. The Roman rhetor, Cicero, said that rhetoric was *Docere, Delectare, Movere*: to teach, to delight, and to move. To move someone, rhetorically, means to convince them to shift their beliefs. We are more likely to move our audience when we adopt the strategies of a good teacher, and to delight our audiences while doing so. Good literary research should convince your audience and be enjoyable for them at the same time.

In general, if you are writing literary criticism or theory, you are appealing to an audience of other literary scholars. These scholars may be beginners, experts, or some combination of both. Literary studies is a part of a knowledge apparatus that involves people fulfilling different functions. These functions include researchers, teachers, students, editors, publishers, librarians, conference attendees, and many others. They all work together to advance their discipline and its goal, which is to improve the understanding of literature and its impacts in the world.

Everything you do as a researcher – from selecting a problem to proofreading your final draft – should include consideration of your audience. For instance, each researcher must make the audience's experience as effortless as possible, but not so easy that it oversimplifies their research. If the subject is complicated, you need to explain the complications;

however, don't overly complicate the reader's experience by adding extraneous information, repeating points unnecessarily, using specialized terminology without offering definitions, or writing in a self-indulgent way. A good motto for writing research papers is "to deliver rather than to promise."

Also, always imagine your audience as being critical, not that they are evaluating *you* necessarily, but that they are evaluating your claims. Thus, avoid making unsubstantiated claims in your writing and don't create logical gaps by leaving out warrants, which link one proposition (claim) to another. For instance, Sonny, from James Baldwin's story "Sonny's Blues," is talking to his brother (who is the narrator) about the music of Charlie Parker. The narrator asks: "Who's this Parker character?"

"He's just one of the greatest jazz musicians alive," said Sonny, sullenly, his hands in his pockets, his back to me. "Maybe *the* greatest," he added, bitterly, "that's probably why *you* never heard of him."

The warrant would explain the link between these two statements – "[Parker is] *the* greatest" and "that's probably why *you* never heard of him." What is the glue that connects these two statements? The answer to that question is the warrant. Maybe Sonny is implying that his brother is uncool. In literary works, like "Sonny's Blues," it's sometimes ok to leave the warrant out because we are encountering the ways people speak and think in the real world. In your scholarly writing, you want to provide the warrant so your audience isn't wondering what the connection is between two propositions.

Be sure to address **counterclaims** that your audience may consider. You should always anticipate your audience's thoughts by imagining what questions they might ask, in which order, and by addressing these questions systematically in your work. This way of writing is called **interrogatory**, a back and forth as in a conversation. Since our reader isn't typically in front of us as we write, we imagine a person having this conversation with us. We list questions – ones that readers might pose – that our scholarly work then answers. The answer may raise additional questions, and so we then answer those too.

Expect that not everyone will like your work, approve of it, or agree with it, even if it's great. We need to have some thick skin in the face of criticism. We are writing for an audience we wish to persuade, and if they are not persuaded then we have failed. Failure is not the end of the world, though. It means we may need to rethink our argument, or try a more receptive audience, or wait until social/political conditions change. The scholarly conversation is an ongoing and iterative process that we all learn from.





## Key Takeaways

### *Imagining your audience effectively:*

You prioritize your audience in every step of the research process.

You write primarily for an audience of scholars and critics in your field.

You try to maximize the impact of your work.

You make the audience's experience as effortless as possible.

You imagine a critical audience and address their concerns in your work.

### *Imagining your audience ineffectively:*

You don't think about your audience, or only do so at the end of your research process.

You write primarily for your teacher or for people outside your field.

You don't consider the impact of your work.

You make the audience's experience unnecessarily difficult.

You imagine an uncritical audience or you don't address concerns that a critical audience might raise about your work.



## Considering Audience [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

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## Exercises [Identifying a Problem]



1. What is your understanding of the word “problem” as it relates to literary studies?
2. What steps will you need to take to better understand your audience?
3. What is your plan for researching what problems your audience considers to be “significant” and “relevant”?
4. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
5. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH AS INQUIRY AND SCHOLARSHIP AS CONVERSATION

# Chapter 3 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

This chapter focuses on three core components of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy:

- Research as Inquiry
- Searching as Strategic Exploration
- Scholarship as Conversation

The first of these, Research as Inquiry, sets the stage for the following two by establishing the importance of asking good questions throughout the research process and using questions as a means toward entering the scholarly conversation.

Students often plunge into their research without taking the time to reflect about the requirements of the assignment, the scope of the project, and what they want to gain from their research. Our assertion is that inquiry is a reflective and critical process that is essential for any successful research project. The ability to ask good questions is a crucial skill, even an art form, that researchers should cultivate in an intentional manner throughout the life-cycle of their project.

Note that we discuss refining and evaluating a research question in chapter ten. The types of questions discussed here will be more of a prelude to those later sections. This chapter focuses on the role of asking questions early in the research process to guide strategic exploration and to enter into the scholarly conversation around your topic.

How do we begin our research exploration? How do we join the scholarly conversation?

In *Searching as Strategic Exploration*, the ACRL emphasizes that, “Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.” In other words, research is a complex, recursive process that involves inquiry, discovery, audience awareness, and [serendipity](#).

Likewise, regarding *Scholarship as Conversation*, they note that, “Instead of seeking discrete answers to complex problems, experts understand that a given issue may be characterized by several competing perspectives as part of an ongoing conversation in which information users and creators come together and negotiate meaning.” Good research questions typically don’t have a single uncontested answer. Rather, they are designed to engage scholars in an ongoing conversation that adds to the discourse in their field.

This conversation often begins within your paper as you engage with the work of other scholars. Some research projects provide a literature review, which is a section that presents your overview of the existing research in relation to a topic or problem. If the assignment does not call for a literature review to be included with the project, you should still conduct one. Doing so will help you understand the work of other scholars and gather background information for your research.



This chapter presents you with one task: to reflect on your beliefs about research. Some of these beliefs might be blocking you from succeeding at research. We want to identify those blocking beliefs and develop positive beliefs about research and our abilities to do it.

## Chapter Three Reflection Task

1

Reflect on your beliefs about research.



### Learning Objectives

These concepts can be difficult for beginning researchers who may feel uncomfort-

able conversing with more experienced scholars. However, the goal with these two pages is

- to learn how to ask good questions as part of a research program
- to explain how to enter a scholarly conversation
- overcome the **anxiety of influence** (the fear that your work will be derivative)

You accomplish these goals by identifying gaps in research and establishing relevance. You're not an outsider merely stringing together other people's ideas, but part of an ongoing discussion. You're engaged with the research and you have something to contribute to the conversation, and you've chosen a topic that you are truly interested in (if you were allowed a choice).

# Research as Inquiry

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Inquiry & Curiosity](#)
- [The Art of Asking Good Questions](#)
- [Think Questions, Not Topics](#)
- [The Invention Process](#)



## Introduction

The ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy states that inquiry-based research is “a process that focuses on problems or questions in a discipline or between disciplines that are open or unresolved.” They add that “The spectrum of inquiry ranges from asking simple questions that depend upon basic recapitulation of knowledge to increasingly sophisticated abilities to refine research questions, use more advanced research methods, and explore more diverse disciplinary perspectives.” The goal is not to ask simple questions with easy answers but to focus on increasingly complex questions that generate discussion in the field or across disciplines.

The four concepts presented below are important precursors to the following sections of this chapter: Searching as Strategic Exploration and Scholarship as Conversation. However, they also set up a discussion we'll have in Chapter 9 about Refining and Evaluating your



Research Question. We're introducing them here to inspire students to think about these concepts before we take a deeper dive into inquiry, curiosity, and asking questions later in the course.

Note that this is an example of the **scaffolding** concept we discussed in the [Introduction to this course](#). We're presenting these concepts in a strategic way so you can build your skills as you work through these modules. Searching strategically for resources, entering the scholarly conversation, learning to ask increasingly complex questions will all lead you to developing a solid research question that drives your research.

To skip ahead and read more about that now, see [Chapter 9 on Developing Your Research Question](#).



## Inquiry & Curiosity

There is a direct correlation between inquiry and curiosity. Curious people ask questions, which drives inquiry. Think of how many times you've steered a conversation toward something you're curious about by asking questions and trying to make a personal connection to the discussion. This same principle applies to the research process. Inquiry-based research is a form of active learning and is a sign of an open mind. Embracing this idea can help cultivate a sense of investment and turn your research into a true passion project.

For example, in the video on [Scholarship as Conversation](#), Jada discusses how she connected to "Sonny's Blues" because she is from the same area the story was set in and that her father was a jazz fan. She also mentioned how she was fascinated by the different ways scholars approached Baldwin's story and how those approaches shed light on how she viewed her upbringing. In this way, her paper became a passion project because she was genuinely curious about the varying perspectives on the classic story that deepened her connection to her research. You may not always have such a strong personal connection to your topic, but this process of asking questions and probing can pique your curiosity and provide an entry into the scholarly conversation.



## The Art of Asking Good Questions

Asking good questions is not always intuitive. It's a skill that should be developed by anyone planning to do sustained research. It may even be helpful to think of it as an art. Thoughtful questions generate discussion in research just as they do in a social setting; the two feed into each other. Focus on formulating critical, open-ended questions while avoiding closed questions that provide a definitive answer or attempt to prove a preconceived claim. Closed questions are the opposite of inquiry, which requires an open-ended approach that sparks deeper questions that drive the discourse around a given problem.

For example, the ACRL Framework emphasizes that "Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field." Even though we often think about research linearly, it's helpful to keep this iterative model in mind as you begin your research and start looking for your entry into the scholarly conversation. You will no doubt find yourself circling back before you move forward. This iterative process is normal and even encouraged.



## Think Questions, not Topics

Topics tend to be broad and general. For example, you may start with topics such as James Baldwin or "Sonny's Blues" as starting points. However, once you begin your research in books, journals, and databases, realize that the authors you discover there are trying to engage with you as much as you are with them. As you review the literature, be aware of open questions and unexplored perspectives that may open doors for your research. Keep

a running list of questions as you read and continue refining them until one emerges as a fully-realized research question.

Literary theories, which we discuss in a following chapter, provide many of the open-ended questions that help us get into the inquiry process. Theorists are people who ask broad open-ended questions that spark discussion, and it is quite common for researchers to begin with one of these theory-based questions. For instance, a question common to Marxist theory is to ask why people behave in ways that seem to be contrary to their own interests.

We will return to these issues in [Chapter 9](#) when we discuss how to refine and evaluate a research question more in-depth. Try to have a few questions ready for that section so you can work through that process with us.



## The Invention Process

For your research project, you will need to make an argument: a claim with supporting evidence and logic. But how do you generate that “stuff”? Where does it come from? Fortunately for us, people who lived thousands of years ago figured it out! *Inventio* is the Latin term for the discovery of arguments. Most arguments – already exist (and we discover them). Sometimes we need to get creative and make a new argument (we invent them). The term *invention* covers both discovery and invention.

Imagine a warehouse full of ready-made arguments that you can visit and discover. That approach works a lot better and is a lot easier than making up the whole thing from scratch, and it is not cheating. The Roman lawyer Cicero used the term *stasis* for the process of using ready-made questions to clarify an issue and persuade an audience. He noted four types: conjectural (What are the facts?), definitional (What does it mean?), qualitative (How good or bad is it?), and translative (Was the matter handled appropriately?). Using Cicero’s *stasis*, we can discover the “stuff” we need for our research by asking the right questions and then answering them.

Dr. Kip Wheeler, of Carson-Newman University, has produced a [handy guide to \*invention\*](#) that includes many other types of *invention* such as narration, description, process, cause, effect, etc. If you get stuck figuring out what questions to ask, visit Dr. Wheeler's page and discover what's already available for you to use!

# Searching as Strategic Exploration

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Inquiry](#)
- [Discovery](#)
- [Serendipity](#)

We also provide the following:

- [Searching as Strategic Exploration \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)
- [More Resources](#)



## Introduction

Searching as Strategic Exploration is a cornerstone of the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy: "Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops." Further, "The act of searching often begins with a question that directs the act of finding needed information. Encompassing inquiry, dis-

covery, and serendipity, searching identifies... relevant sources as well as the means to access those sources.”



We introduced the importance of inquiry in the previous section where we linked it to curiosity and the art of asking good questions. Now let’s dig deeper into this idea to emphasize the role inquiry plays in establishing a successful search strategy. For example, before you begin your search, take some time to answer the following questions:

- What is the scope of your project and your information needs?
- What *types* of information might you need and how will you access that information? Your options might include scholarly books, journal articles, film/media, art, statistics, demographics, and primary sources;
- Do you know the core journals and subject databases in your field? If not, how can you learn about these? Spoiler alert: Meet with a librarian!
- Who is your target audience?
- Have you identified someone in your field you can talk to or email for recommendations or advice?

Answering these questions **early** will do a lot of work for you because the answers will help you to create a strategy that will shape and give direction to your research.

Once you begin searching journals, databases, and other resources, refine your strategy based on the quality and relevance of your results. An important point is to approach this process with an open mind and base your conclusions on the evidence you find. Generally speaking, you want your research to generate discussion, but the nature of that discussion will depend on how open or closed the questions you’re asking are. Is there a wealth of

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Searching as Strategic Exploration.

evidence supporting a particular claim or is there room for interpretation and counter evidence?

For a more detailed overview of this approach, let's watch Jada discussing the early stages of her research about the James Baldwin short story, "Sonny's Blues":

### Literature Research Strategies – Part 1 [6 min 26 sec]



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=77#oembed-1>

Key quotes from the video:

#### **Audience:**

"I'm communicating to others in the field. And so even if I'm just an undergrad writing a paper I try to frame the audience on a wider level of like 'this could possibly be published in a journal' or 'this could be a conference paper or a presentation.'"

#### **Discovery:**

"I also wish I would have made an appointment with the librarian for a research consultation, because I think that would have definitely guided my research a little bit more."

#### **Serendipity:**

"Serendipity is a really important part of the research process just because it's important to have an open view of what you can add to your paper."

Note how Jada began her study by conducting basic background research online. She specifically sought out interviews and videos with Baldwin so she could hear him discuss his motivations and influences in his own words. While this type of information is not considered scholarly per se, it adds context to the story, which helped Jada be more strategic

as she transitioned from online searching to the literature databases available through the UCF Libraries.

### **Avoid “Finding Quotes to Support Your Claim”**

Many novice researchers approach the task with the idea that they just need to find a few quotes to support their claim and their research is done. The sooner we get past this idea, the better. You *are* finding quotes, but you should be willing to include ones that *don't* support your claim. Advanced researchers think of “positioning” their claims in relationship to others. Positioning means that you discuss how your claims are closer to some and further from others. There may be a discernible pattern to the group of claims made by other researchers, such that you can divide them into sub-types and put yours into a category. Later in this book (Chapter 6), we discuss the process of organizing our research materials into an annotated bibliography and then a review of literature. These tools allow you to show your readers how your research relates to that of others.



## **Discovery**

Once you have a list of questions you'd like to explore in our journals and databases, the next step will be to break those questions into strategic keywords. Unlike popular search engines, databases don't respond well to long queries or phrases. They are designed around subject terms and keywords. Also note that the results you find in our databases will include a list or lists of keywords and subject terms within the article records. Those are there to guide your search and help you learn the language of the field. What types of ter-



minology or jargon do literature scholars use? Even a slight variation can make a significant difference in the quality of your results

As Jada began searching key literature databases such as [MLA](#) and [JSTOR](#), she broke her broad search into strategic keywords that yielded high-quality scholarly articles. Before searching the databases, you should take a few minutes to break your topic into keywords.

## Tips for Generating Keywords

- Brainstorm possible keywords about your topic and think of synonyms before you start searching.
- Avoid long phrases and queries. Databases are designed around keywords and subject terms. If you have a research question, break it into keywords before you start searching (watch the above video for guidance about how to do this).
- Begin searching in a database (such as MLA) by entering those key terms into the search field (notice that the database will provide possible alternatives). So, searching “Race” as a general keyword generates alternate terms such as Race AND gender, ethnicity, minority, discrimination, relations, education, and America.
- However, sometimes it helps to start with a broad search and use the database limiters to help you narrow and focus. For example, “race” generates 19,528 results in MLA. Open the subject limiter in the sidebar that extracts subject terms from the database’s records and breaks them down by which ones recur most often. That tool is designed to help researchers narrow and focus as they’re searching and there may be some new terms in there as well.
- Once you start finding some relevant result, dig deeper by mining the article record and noting the subject terms and author-supplied keywords (if any); then, read the abstract as well as the introduction and highlight any new terms you find there. Pay particular attention to the author-supplied keywords when they appear because those are there to attract like-minded scholars to that article, and they can provide clues as to what types of terms other researchers are using.

- Remember, this is an act of strategic exploration. It involves a lot of trial and error!

A brainstorming activity based on James Baldwin and “Sonny’s Blues” might look something like this:



### Example [Discovery]

#### *Key terms:*

- **Keyword A:** James Baldwin
- **Keyword B:** Sonny’s Blues
- **Keyword C:** African American literature/writers
- **Keyword D:** African American short stories
- **Keyword E:** Marxism
- **Keyword F:** Race/Racism
- **Keyword G:** Ethnic/black identity
- **Keyword H:** Masculinity/African American Men
- **Keyword I:** Autobiography
- **Keyword J:** Civil Rights
- **Keyword K:** Ethnomusicology
- **Keyword L:** Jazz/Harlem Renaissance
- **Keyword M:** Race relations
- **Keyword N:** Gender studies/sexuality
- **Keyword O:** Activism/social justice

This is just a preliminary list that will grow once we start searching, but it provides a sense of how to break Jada's broad topic into strategic keywords, each of which opens new possibilities. While creating your list, avoid using overly generic terms such as "short story" or "novel." You will get far too many results and the vast majority of them will not be helpful to you.

For more information about refining your search with subject terms, search limiters, and strategic keywords, please watch the following videos from the Libraries' [Research tips Thursdays](#) webinar series.

### **Subject Terms: Use Them To Your Advantage [1 min 38 sec]**



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### **Using Search Limiters [1 min 16 sec]**



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### **Keywords Pack-A-Punch [1 min 58 sec]**



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=77#oembed-4>*

Creating a successful search strategy involves some trial and error. Explore a variety of databases and alter your keywords. Eventually, you'll find the combination that yields the best results.

For more effective search strategies, see [Chapter 7](#) where we discuss database searching more in-depth.



## Serendipity

Researchers rarely go to the library for one book and come back with one book; they come back with an armful of books, and the serendipitous discoveries they make while browsing are often the most valuable.

Serendipity is an important part of the discovery process. While it's good to be strategic, it's also wise to be open to unexpected discoveries that may impact the scope of your research. Jada used the river and tributary analogy to account for the serendipity of her research process. The river is the main stream of books and articles in the library catalog and subject databases. The tributaries, however, are the unexpected discoveries and diversions you make that can have a profound impact on your research.

The unexpected discovery in Jada's case was an article entitled, "The Sociology of the Ghetto in James Baldwin's 'Sonny's Blues.'" She discovered this article by expanding her research beyond the key literature databases to bring a more interdisciplinary perspective into her paper. In doing so, she discovered that sociologists were interested in the same issues that influenced Baldwin's work, which in turn shed new light on her background and experiences with race and class.

While it's difficult to plan for a serendipitous discovery, you can enhance your chances by doing as Jada did: expanding the scope of your research to multiple perspectives and being open to unexpected discoveries.

**For more advice on Searching as Strategic Exploration, consider the following from WritingCommons.org:<sup>2</sup>**

Strategy is about being nimble and smart rather than worn down to the bone, and strategy also relies on self-reflection.

- **Scope, Rhetoric & Context:** The value of information, how it is used, is deeply rhetorical. When first examining your [rhetorical context](#), analyze whether your readers are receptive to personal observation. Alternatively, do they expect textual research or experimental study? Thus, it's essential that you evaluate what your readers know about your topic. What types of information would your audience find persuasive? How contentious or emotional is the topic? How much time do you have?
- **Serendipity & Flexibility:** Be open to exploring information resources you may be unfamiliar with, such as subject-specific databases, discussions with experts, or just browsing and tracing footnotes from article to article.
- **Knowledge of Different Search Tools and Search Techniques.** Are you cognizant of the limitations of a Google Scholar Search vs. a search on Web of Science or JSTOR? Do you know the difference between the Open Web, the Deep Web, and the TOR Network?



2. Writing Commons. "Searching as a Strategic Exploration." *Writing Commons*, 27 July 2021, <https://writingcommons.org/section/information-literacy/information-literacy-perspectives-practices/searching-as-a-strategic-exploration/>.



## Searching as Strategic Exploration [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=77#h5p-10>

## Exercises

1. See the rubric below, which provides assessment for your search plan. You are proposing a possible research project, one that you can change later if you'd like. The goal is to state a problem relevant to a field of literary scholars. You can build on previous assignments in this class. What is the literary work (or works) you are studying? Do you have a coherent plan for beginning your research into a literary work (or works)? What questions do you want to answer? What are your key search terms? Do you have a list of journals or databases to search? What parts of the plan need to be more clearly defined?
2. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
3. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand.

	<b>Above Satisfactory (A/B)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (C)</b>	<b>Below Satisfactory (D/F)</b>
<b>Inquiry</b>	Determined the scope of the project and information needs.	Somewhat determined the scope of the project and information needs.	Did not determine the scope of the project and information needs.
<b>Discovery</b>	Successfully divided a broad search into strategic keywords that yielded high-quality scholarly articles.	Divided a broad search into strategic keywords that yielded adequate scholarly articles.	Did not divide a broad search into strategic keywords and/or those keywords yielded low-quality scholarly articles.
<b>Serendipity</b>	Successfully expanded the scope of the research to include multiple perspectives and was open to unexpected discoveries.	Somewhat expanded the scope of the research to include multiple perspectives, but did not discover much new information.	Did not expand the scope of the research to include multiple perspectives and/or was not open to unexpected discoveries.

## More Resources

Click the following link for an [Annotated List of Open Access Resources](#) from WritingCommons.org.

Keep these concepts in mind as we move into entering the scholarly conversation, arguing for relevance, and establishing criteria.

# Scholarship as Conversation

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Entering the Conversation](#)
- [Overcoming the Anxiety of Influence, or Making a Convincing Argument with You as the Authority](#)
- [Identifying Gaps](#)
- [Establishing Relevance](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Scholarship as Conversation \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises \[Discussion\]](#)



## Introduction

Related to Searching as Strategic Exploration is the idea of Scholarship as Conversation. From the Framework for Information Literacy: “Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.” They further add that, “Instead of seeking discrete answers to complex problems, experts understand that a given



issue may be characterized by several competing perspectives as part of an ongoing conversation in which information users and creators come together and negotiate meaning.”



## •Entering the Conversation

The conversation analogy can help us grasp the meaning and purpose of audience awareness, a concept that is new to many students. Academic communities revolve around questions researchers ask that move the conversation about a specific topic or problem forward. They converse with each other through the research they present at conferences and publish in scholarly books and journals. They also converse by email, in the hallways, and through discussion boards hosted by [Humanities Commons](#), [H-Net](#), and others.

Joining a scholarly conversation for the first time can be both exciting and intimidating. We might look to the more established scholars and think that they “belong” in the conversation and that we don’t. These established scholars, like other people, may be welcoming to scholars hoping to join the conversation or they may not be. If you meet first with scholars who are not so welcoming, keep trying (but maybe with other scholars)! Joining the conversation is less about who you are and more about learning the guidelines. Scholarly conversation often follows the principles of dialogue. Some of them are:

1. Listen – a lot– before jumping in
2. Learn the key terms, the key questions, the key theories, the key figures, etc.
3. Be curious – ask questions
4. Be respectful
5. Offer information or perspectives that haven’t yet arisen in the conversation
6. Don’t be afraid to state a claim about a subject, but be prepared to defend the claim
7. Be willing to change your mind if challenges to your claims are warranted
8. Be open and receptive to feedback
9. Remember that the goal of scholarly conversation is to improve our shared understanding

One thing to know about established scholars is that they too have self-doubts. Many experience what is known as “the imposter syndrome,” the belief that they are a fraud and don’t belong in the conversation. Self-assessment is good and your level of expertise

should be counted as a factor. But we should strive to create an environment where everyone feels they belong. Necessarily, such an environment must put restrictions on behavior that would make others feel unwelcome or that would threaten the project of gaining real knowledge. Thus to sustain a welcoming environment, we should follow the guidelines listed above and encourage others to do so as well.

Being open to feedback is absolutely necessary. We all make mistakes. When we do, and someone points it out to us, we need to recognize the value of this feedback and take it to heart. Your instructors are doing you a favor when they point to weaknesses in your work. Advanced scholars have to accept critical feedback as well – from editors, reviewers, other scholars, etc. The better we become at accepting this feedback, the more likely we are to improve.

Before we discuss this concept more in-depth, let's watch Jada discuss her approach to entering the scholarly conversation pertaining to James Baldwin and "Sonny's Blues."

### Literature Research Strategies – Part 2 [8 min 26 sec]



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Key Quotes from the Video:

#### **Entering the Conversation:**

"The 'Conversation' really informed my research process because I knew that it's important to value what these scholars are saying and that it can really add texture to my paper and texture to what I'm thinking about."

#### **Overcoming the Anxiety of Influence:**

"Overcoming the Anxiety of Influence is really important when you're entering the scholarly conversation ... And I think the Anxiety of Influence really stops you from truly engaging [with] the text, [and with] what these scholars have to say."

### Identifying Gaps & Establishing Relevance:

"A gap in the research is really just like a hole that you find almost, where you don't really see there's a lot of people in the field talking about it ... the gap that I found in my research was: why aren't there scholars, literary scholars specifically, talking about the way that race and class function together in literature?"

Jada's experience growing up in the Bronx, and her father's interest in Jazz, gave her a natural connection to the themes in "Sonny's Blues", and served as her entry into the conversation about Baldwin, class, and **critical race theory**. Jada's background directed her to certain kinds of scholarship, which added texture and depth to her personal story as well as her reading of Baldwin.

### For more advice on Scholarship as Conversation, consider the following from WritingCommons.org:<sup>1</sup>

In order to easily [identify a conversation](#) between your sources, look at those sources (articles, websites, images, videos, books), and think of these questions:

- What kind of conversation can you see happening between your sources?
- How many sources are communicating with each other? How are they communicating?
- Why don't other sources join that conversation? Do they engage in another conversation? Can you link all conversations in one web?
- How are sources in your bibliography communicating with one another?

### Inform Your Thinking: Episode 1 – Research is a Conversation [8 min 26 sec]

1. Mina, Lilian. "Conversation Between Sources." *Writing Commons*, 23 Jan. 2020, <https://writingcommons.org/article/conversation-between-sources/>.



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2



## Overcoming the Anxiety Making a Convincing Argument of Influence, or with You as the Authority

Many beginning researchers suffer from “the anxiety of influence”: the fear of appearing as a mere imitator to a more established researcher. The anxiety of influence affects both creative writers and literary scholars, though for now we are concerned only with the scholars. The anxiety of influence often leads students to make the mistake of avoiding other scholarly texts because they believe it will influence them too much and thus will quash their original ideas. Nevertheless, original ideas don’t come from nowhere; they arise from our engagement with other scholarly texts.

“Influence” is a tricky word since it implies that the past is acting upon you; however, you, as the scholar, are in the driver’s seat. You select ideas from those around you and arrange them in ways that convincingly make the case you set out to make. Of course, you need to cite ideas that are not your own and give credit where it is due, but you are the one responsible for the finished product.

Think of this responsibility – of being the authority – as being similar to that of a museum curator. The curator is usually presenting other people’s work but is doing so to support a

2. OkStateLibrary, director. Inform Your Thinking: Episode 1 – Research Is a Conversation. YouTube, 18 May 2016, <https://youtu.be/DmbO3JX5xvU>. Accessed 3 Apr. 2022.

claim or share a point of view. The curator is responsible for knowing about the material and not misrepresenting it. The same is true for you as you write your paper.

Another analogy for positioning yourself as the authority is the tour guide. The tour guide uses the following methods to establish authority and a point of view:

- Tell people where you are going (introduction).
- Along the way, tell them about the significance of what they will see.
- While there, point to each item and explain its significance and its relationship to the other items.
- On the way back (the conclusion of your essay), summarize the main points.

The key here is to decide what the significance is. For example, if you are taking a group of people on a tour of the pyramids in Egypt, your focus might be on Egyptian mythology, and your point might be that it contributed to Judeo-Christian beliefs and culture. Then, everything you point out at the site will keep to that original point.

Instead, perhaps you want to focus on the significance of the division of labor in ancient Egypt. Then, you will discuss work, technology, and money, and you might point to evidence about how workers lived and about the tools they used. In other words, we must decide what significance we make of the materials. The most effective way to convey significance is by focusing on the consequences of the argument. Since X is true, then Y is a result.



### **Example [Scholarship as Conversation]**

Since ancient Egyptian society had skilled craftsmen and precise tools, they must have had a way to teach their technical skills to succeeding generations.

The anxiety of influence often leads students to the “hit and run” citation style: papers consisting of quotes strung together with little context or analysis. Always comment on quotes and incorporate them into your argument. Your readers want to know what you think and

how you think. Show readers how you think by leading them through a series of inferences. Imagine your work as a conversation with others in the field; be engaged as well as engaging and always keep in mind why your argument is important.

**For more advice on Overcoming Anxiety and You as the Authority, consider the following from [Harvard College Writing Center](#):**

As the writer of an essay, imagine yourself crossing a river, guiding a troop of avid readers. You bring an armful of stones to lay down and step on as you go; each stone is a sentence or paragraph that speaks to and develops the essay's thesis, or central question. If you find yourself in the middle of the river with another mile to shore but only a few more stones, you can't finesse such a situation. You can't ask your readers to follow you and jump too broad a span. In such a case, stop. Ask yourself if you need more stones—more sentences or paragraphs—or if perhaps you have already used ones that more properly belong ahead. On a second look, you may decide that the distance between stones is not that great, after all; perhaps your reader only needs a hand of assistance to get from one stone, or paragraph, to the next.

Originality may or may not be the most important consideration for literary scholars and writers; we can be original by doing something strange or unexpected but that otherwise has no clear purpose or value. The most recognized works of literature, or criticism and theory, are often those that show startling originality and have extremely high value. Learning how to recognize value, in your own work and others, is the hallmark of excellence in our field. Typically, it involves acquiring a lot of knowledge about the field.



## Identifying Gaps

Many researchers find productive problems by looking for gaps in the published research.

“Gaps” refers to areas of research that have yet to be fully explored. They may be neglected or overlooked areas but they can also be tensions and contradictions in the research. To go back to the conversation analogy, gaps, tensions, and contradictions are identified through the ongoing debate among scholars. Identifying gaps is accomplished by conducting a literature review and asking critical open-ended questions – such as who, what, when, where, why, and how – about your findings. Your goal is to contribute something unique that will generate new knowledge, help solve a problem, and keep the conversation going. Filling a gap in knowledge is often a “low stakes” exercise since it accepts the paradigm of knowledge – the big picture – and strives to fill in the margins. Imagine a large mosaic where the general outline and main features are done, but not all the areas are filled in. Think of these unfinished areas as the “gaps.”



## Establishing Relevance

We introduced the idea of relevance and purpose in Chapter 2 where we noted that relevance is an entry into the scholarly conversation, and that it can be evaluated against specific criteria. “Sonny’s Blues” raises questions about the impact of systemic racism on black individuals and families, and it celebrates the creativity and resilience of black culture, making the story relevant to a large audience many years later. The similarities between Jada’s experiences and Baldwin’s literary work and biography motivated her to conduct research, but Jada has to consider whether including her personal story in the writing will be relevant or necessary to her audience and research question.





## Scholarship as Conversation [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=79#h5p-11>

## Exercises [Discussion]

1. Have you ever worried about the need to be “original” in your writing? Explain.
2. Has the fear of being “influenced” by other writers held you back from reading them and studying their work? Explain.
3. Do you agree with the idea that scholarly writers who make original contributions tend to know more, not less, about other writers in their field? Explain.
4. If there are any elements of this assignment that need clarification, please list them
5. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?



# CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH GOALS, THEORY, METHODOLOGIES, METHODS, AND EVIDENCE

# Chapter 4 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

This chapter covers the following topics: *research goals*, *theory*, *methodology*, *method*, and *research skills*. Engagement with a specific *theory* can help guide your research. For example, Jada applied [Critical Race Theory](#) (CRT) to her interpretation of “Sonny’s Blues.” This choice helped Jada establish the parameters of her literature review and allowed her to be strategic when she was searching journals and databases. Having this theory helped Jada interpret Baldwin’s work and helped guide her research process as well.

Each theory comes with a set of *methodologies*, which are research positions and practices for specific subject areas. For instance, Critical Race Theory often entails an examination of [intersectionality](#) as a subject area; *intersectionality* refers to the ways that identity categories like race, class, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation combine and play out in various situations. To understand intersectionality, a researcher working with CRT can turn to the research practice of [standpoint epistemology](#) and [structural determinism](#). *Standpoint epistemology* takes the position that authority comes from personal experience in social and political contexts. Therefore, while black people may share some experiences, standpoint epistemology looks to the experiences and knowledge of particular people to better understand each person’s perspective. *Structural determinism* takes the position

that each person's subjectivity is determined to a large extent by structural systems, such as language, that they inhabit. A CRT researcher will look to larger structural systems, such as institutions, languages, and information technologies, to better understand the conditions in which people develop their perspectives. While standpoint epistemology looks to the particular, structural determinism looks to the general.

A CRT research project would require study of the theory and its associated methodologies before you begin your major research efforts into the literary work.

Once you've identified a problem you'd like to research and a theory (or theories), you'll need to choose research *methods* that are appropriate for your project and some knowledge about how to use them. Research methods are about where and how you search to get answers to your research questions. Are you conducting interviews? Visiting archives? Doing close readings? Reviewing scholarship? You will need to choose which methods are most appropriate to use in your research and you need to gain some knowledge about how to use these methods.

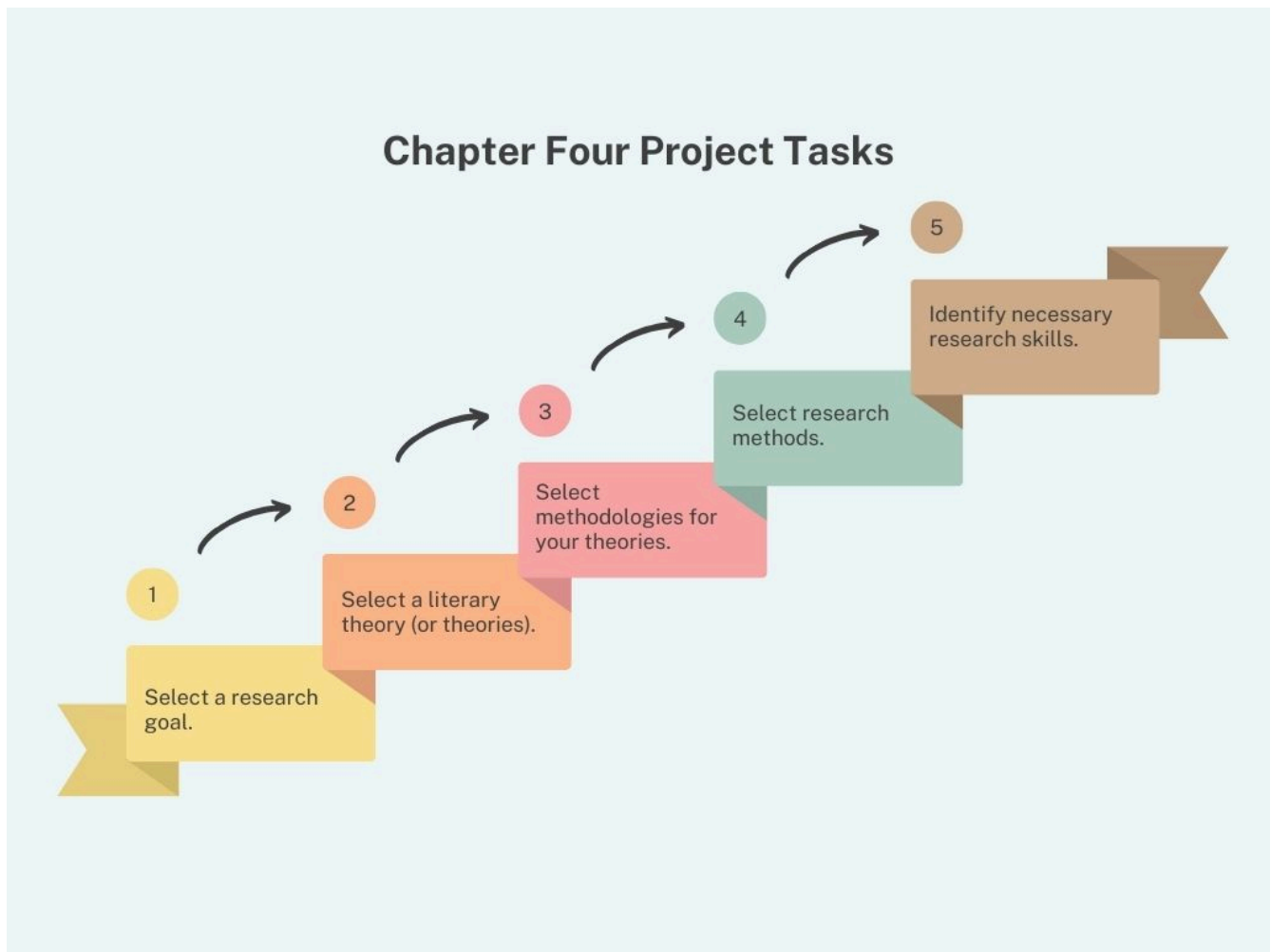
How do theory and method differ? A good rule of thumb is that a theory is an explanation and a method is a practice. Freudian theory, for example, is an explanation about human psychological development. Dream interpretation is an example of a Freudian method; it is a procedure for gathering information and understanding what is going on in someone's mind.

We use *research skills* to help us gather the right [evidence](#). This evidence, comprised of facts and reasoning, aims to convince your audience to accept your conclusions about a literary work. The most important piece of evidence in your research is the literary work itself, which is a "fact" that your audience can witness with you. Research means finding more facts about the literary work and tying them together with reasoning.

Theory is often understood as a lens through which we look at an object (such as a literary work). Each literary theory provides a different lens. Different lenses can make it seem like we are reading radically different literary works; however, they may just be different readings of the same work. A theory relates to particular research methods more strongly than others. As you explore theoretical approaches, methodologies, and methods, think about the effects of these various lenses and be aware that the theory lens you choose will determine which methods will most help you accomplish your research goals.



Chapter Four presents you with a series of tasks to do as you read. Please keep track of your work on these tasks and reflect on how they relate to the tasks in the previous chapters.



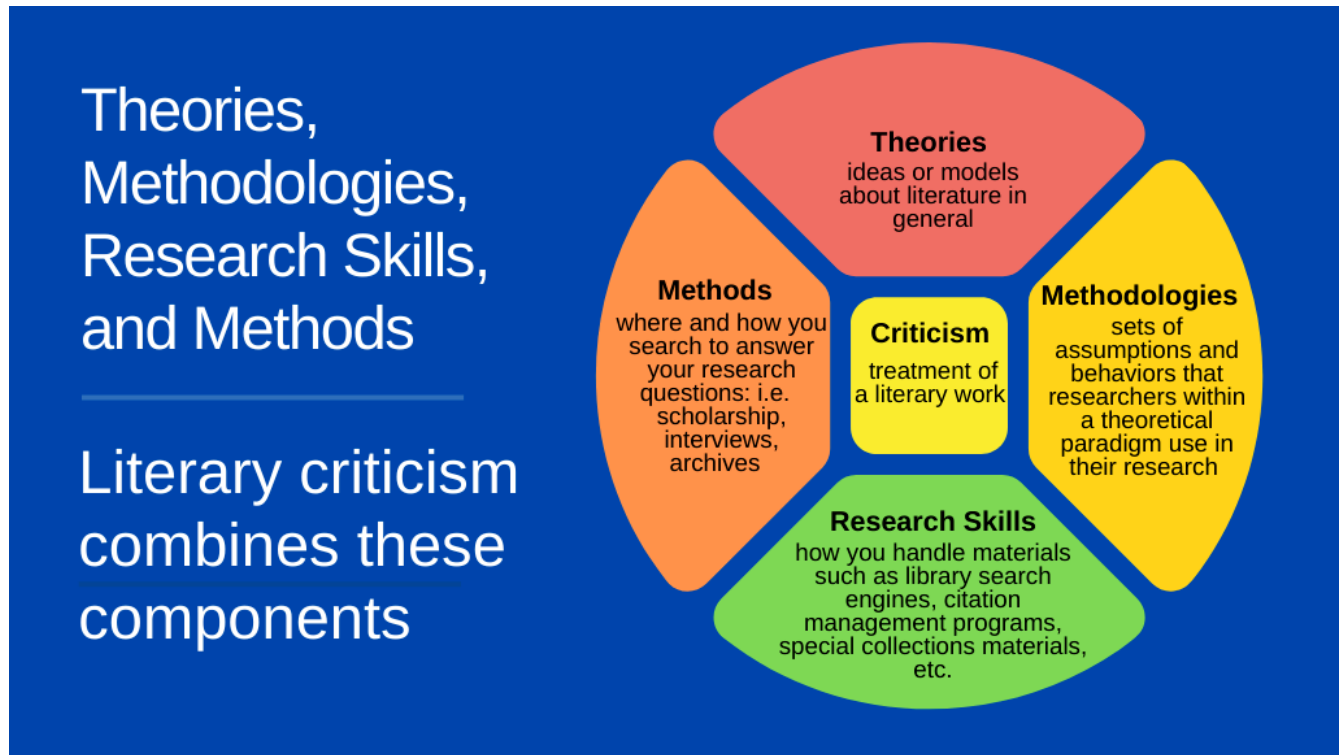


## Learning Objectives

- Gain a better understanding of theory's integral role within literary criticism.
- Learn how each theory relates to research methodologies and methods.
- Learn which research skills we need to gather the relevant evidence.

# Research Goals

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



Researchers work with a goal in mind. Common goals include

- Bringing readers closer to a text
- Connecting a text to a larger context
- Connecting a text with other knowledge frameworks such as science

Wendy Belcher, in *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks*, discusses the first two main approaches to understanding literary works: looking at a text by itself (associated with [New Criticism](#)) and looking at texts as they connect to society (associated with [Cultural Studies](#)). The goal of New Criticism is to bring the reader further into the text. The goal of Cultural Studies is to discuss the network of discourses that surround and pass through the text (its context). Other approaches, such as Ecocriticism, relate literary texts to the Sciences (as well as to the Humanities).

The New Critics, starting in the 1940s, focused on meaning within the text itself, using a method they called “[close reading](#).” The literary text itself becomes evidence for a particular reading. Using this approach, you should summarize the literary work briefly and quote

particularly meaningful passages, being sure to introduce quotes and then interpret them (never let them stand alone). Make connections within the work; ask “why” and “how” the various parts of the text relate to each other.

Cultural Studies critics see all texts as connected to society; the critic therefore has to connect a text to at least one political or social issue. The methodologies associated with cultural studies involve studies of power and studies of discourse (the language systems we use to make sense of the world). How and why does the text reproduce particular knowledge systems (known as discourses) and how do these knowledge systems relate to issues of power within the society? Who speaks and when? Answering these questions helps your reader understand the text in context. Cultural contexts can include the treatment of gender (Feminist, Queer), class (Marxist), nationality, race, religion, or any other area of human society.

Other approaches, such as [psychoanalytic literary criticism](#), look at literary texts to better understand human psychology. A psychoanalytic reading can focus on a character, the author, the reader, or on society in general. [Ecocriticism](#) look at human understandings of nature in literary texts.

Let’s look at how two related theories – American formalism and Russian Formalism – seek different goals, and note that each one has attendant beliefs and practices that are related to these goals:



## Example [American Formalism vs. Russian Formalism]



## ***American Formalism***

Goal: to understand a specific literary text independently by its own rules

Believes form and content are closely connected

Understands a literary text as a living organic being – greater than the sum of its parts

Literary works (those of high value) possess a thematic unity that holds together all the parts

Sought to professionalize the study of literature

Focuses on the text itself (rather than on author or reader psychology)

Understands form as literary devices (irony, paradox)

Privileges metaphor

Evaluates interpretations as better or worse

Believes that the poet is not writing to express personal feelings and the reader is not reading subjectively

Believes that the poet presents an “objective correlative” – a set of objects, situations, or events that illuminate our relationship to reality

Practices close reading of individual texts

Quasi-religious practice that borrows from the reading of sacred texts

Rejects outside information except in the case of allusions

## ***Russian Formalism***

Goal: to understand what makes literature “literary” (and different from ordinary language)

Believes form can be understood independently of content

Understands literature using organic models such as morphology

Literary language estranges or defamiliarizes ordinary language

Sought to professionalize the study of literature

Focuses on the text itself (rather than on author or reader psychology)

Understands form as linguistic and structural features (that work to slow down perception)

Privileges story and plot

Evaluates literary devices as better or worse

Believes that the poet makes use of literary language to defamiliarize language and the world

Believes that literary language defamiliarizes – which illuminates our relationship to reality

Identifies patterns across several texts

Scientific practice based on classification and division

Focuses on the text itself but may include the social situation in which the text makes sense

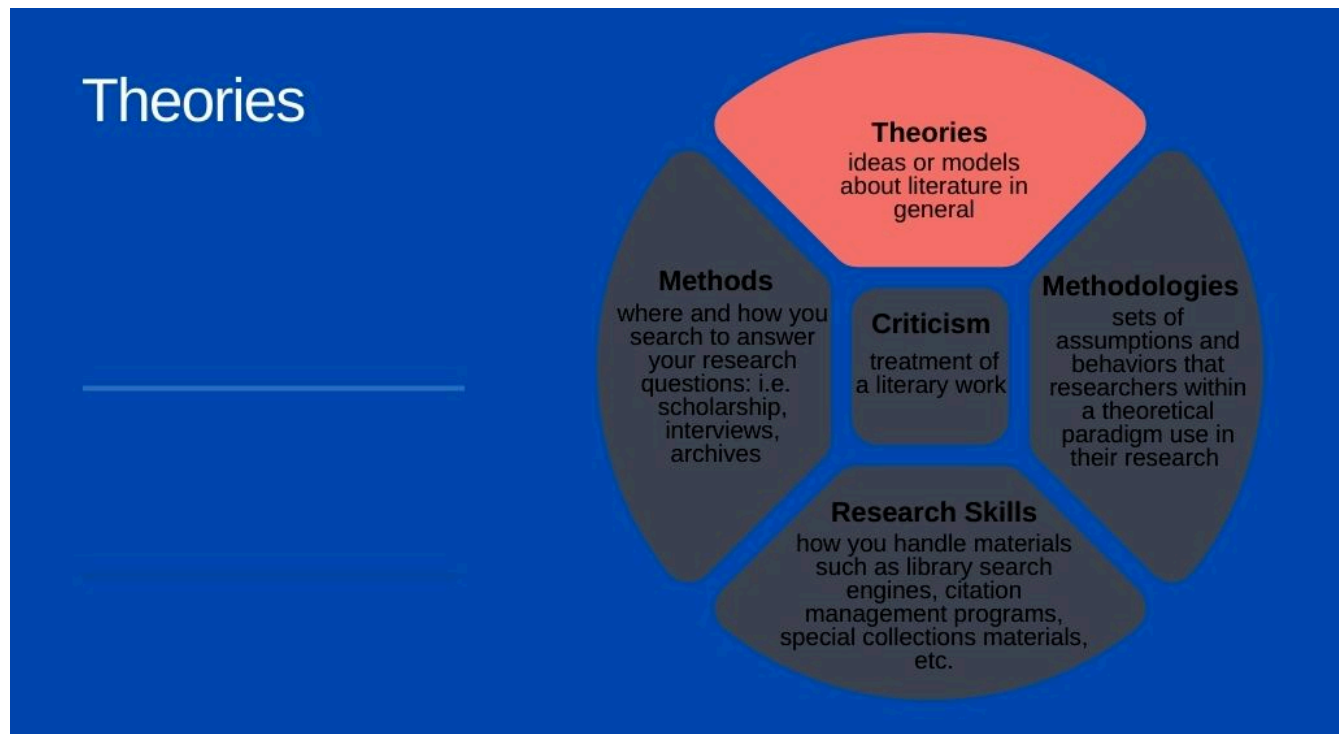
The theory you choose should be aligned with your research goals; do you wish to bring

your reader closer to the literary text, discuss its context, or relate it to other knowledge frameworks?

On the following pages, we discuss different types of theories, the methodologies those theories entail, and the methods and skills necessary to do research using your chosen theory.

# Theories

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## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Theory](#)
- [Methodologies](#)
- [Criticism](#)
- [Method](#)
- [Research Skills](#)
- [Exercises](#)

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- [Exercises \[Discussion\]](#)



## Theory

A **theory** is an idea or model about literature in general (rather than about a specific literary work). A theory can account for:

- *What* things are
- *Why* they are the way they are
- *How* and why they work

Theories can be about physical things, like people or books, or abstract concepts, like patriarchy, love, or being. The English word *theory* derives from an Ancient Greek word *theoria*, meaning “a looking at, viewing, beholding.” In contrast to practical ways of knowing (which are about how to do things), theory usually refers to contemplative and reflective ways of knowing (which are about what things are).

Theory is full of terminology, which often makes it challenging for beginning researchers. The terminology in theory is a kind of shorthand for concepts. These concepts are similar to those little capsule sponge critters that expand when you leave them in water. The theory *term* is the compressed critter in the capsule and the fully explained *concept* is the expanded sponge critter. Advanced theorists and critics often use just the terminology (or the capsule, in our ‘sponge critter’ analogy) as a kind of shorthand conversation with one another. However, researchers who are unfamiliar with a theorist’s terminology have to expand their knowledge of the terminology (the capsule) by conducting additional analysis. By completing this additional analysis, researchers can come to understand each concept’s relationships to other concepts (or the expanded sponge critter in our analogy). Once we have expanded the terminology (capsule) into the concepts (sponge critter), we can realize how valuable and significant these concepts are to our particular field of study.



## Example [Theory]

Below are a few terms (and their definitions) that start with the letter “A” selected from a single book by theorist Gregory Ulmer (who borrows terms from many theoretical discourses and even invents some of his own):

- Abductive reasoning – from thing to rule.
- Abject – a formless value, not yet recognized.
- Alienation – separation from one’s capacity to act; the basis of compassion fatigue.
- Allegory – like a parable, a story with a moral linked via metaphor to another story.
- Aporia – a blind spot, an impasse, a dilemma, an inability to move ahead, or conventionally, an inability to choose between sets of equally desirable (or undesirable) alternatives.
- Apparatus – technology, institutional practices, and subject formation.
- Arabesque – an ornamental design of interlaced patterns of repeated shapes (floral or geometric) said to be the most typical feature of Islamic aesthetics.
- Aspectuality – an image whose intelligibility is determined by the aspect of the viewer: the duck-rabbit, for example.
- ATH (até) – blindness or foolishness in an individual: calamity and disaster in a collective.
- Attraction and repulsion – two poles (the sublime and the excremental).
- Attunement (*stimmung*) – the feeling that this is how the world is; results from mapping discourses.
- Aura – a sign of recognition.<sup>1</sup>

We don't expect you to learn the terms in this list; we provide them to show how dense and complicated theory can be. Notice how the definitions for each theory term above contain even more terms – like “formless,” “compassion fatigue,” and “blind spot” – that need further unpacking. Theory tends to be very dense; it crams lots of ideas into every page. Entire dictionaries are devoted to literary theory terms (see for instance Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, Columbia University Press, 1995). There are entire dictionaries dedicated to the terms used by a single theorist (see for instance Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 2006).

Literary scholars use **theories** to frame their perspectives of literary works. Each theory is like a different “lens” through which to view a literary work and changing lenses gives us very different views of a work. Below are a few examples of major literary theories: (Note: this list is nowhere near complete.)

## Major Literary Theories

- **Audience studies** look at how a particular text was received in its day. Such studies might involve reading critical reviews from the period, looking at promotional materials, overall sales, and re-use of a text by other writers or artists. More recently, it could involve studying online communities and their uses and responses to a literary text.
- **Cultural studies** theories, such as New Historicism, Post-colonialism, or Multiculturalism, look at how texts use discourses to represent the world, social relations, and meanings. Cultural studies theories also examine the relationships of these discourses to power: how groups in power use particular discourses to justify their power and how those with less power negotiate these discourses and generate their own discourses.
- **Ecological studies** examine the ways that human and natural environments are represented in texts.
- **Feminist studies** examine the way gender and sexuality shape the production and distribution of texts, or they examine the representation of gender in texts.
- **Genre studies** explore what features constitute a literary genre and whether or how well a text meets these expectations, deviates from them (successfully or unsuccessfully), or establishes new genre expectations.

- **Linguistic studies** examine the specific uses of language within a text and can include regional dialect, novel use of terminology, the development of language over time, etc.
- **Marxist studies** examine the way historical and economic factors operate in the production and distribution of texts, or in the representation of social and economic relationships of people in texts.
- **Post-structuralist studies** make claims about instabilities within a text – particularly at how its binary structures, such as male-female, black-white, East-West, and living-dead, start to break down or take on one another's features.
- **Psychological studies** look at a text, its author, or the society in which it was produced in terms of psychological features and processes. These features and processes might include identity formation, healthy or unhealthy qualities of mind, dreams and symptoms, etc.
- **Queer studies** challenges heteronormativity in texts and focuses on sexual identity and desire.

Theorists find unanswered questions or return to key questions with different answers or different approaches. By and large these questions are about things in general (for instance, they ask about category systems). Theory is often counterintuitive, meaning that it does not align with common sense. For instance, it was common sense that the Earth was stationary and the sun moved across the sky, rising in the east and setting in the west. Copernicus theorized, counterintuitively, that the Earth rotated, which made it appear that the sun was moving. Theorists change our picture of how the world works. In your writing, you should clearly communicate how your chosen theorist(s) change our pictures of the world.

Before you write your research paper (or project), you should do some broad research into the theory you are assigned (or that you choose) as well as some deeper research into the specific concept(s) you will be using from that theory. Broad research can include Wikipedia entries or the various “For Beginners” or “Introducing” books, such as *Lacan for Beginners* by Philip Hill, (1999) or *Introducing Lacan* by Darian Leader and Judy Groves (1995). Once you have a good general understanding of a theory, then dive into a work written by the theorist. Most literary critics combine two or more theories. They choose their theories based on their interests, their audience, or their research question. Consult with

your professor or a more experienced researcher about which theory or theories to use for your research.

Each theory entails particular research questions, methodologies, and methods. For instance, Ecological theory, also called [Ecocriticism](#), entails questions about the representation of human culture and nature. How or where does a text draw a line between the two? What assumptions does a text make about culture and nature? What consequences do these assumptions produce in terms of moving us towards ecological destruction or sustainability? Ecological theory employs methodologies such as studies of the environment and historical research into ideas about nature and culture and how they have changed over time. It also entails particular research methods such as close readings of literary texts and research into the scholarship of literature and nature.

Note: in literary research, a theory is not an “unproven fact.” Rather, it is an explanation of how facts relate to one another. For instance, Marxism provides a theory of various values (such as labor value, sign value, exchange value, use value, and so on). These theories explain certain facts, like why a necklace made with diamonds and an identical-looking necklace made with costume jewels can have the same sign-value (in other words, the same power to impress) but different exchange values (one being much more expensive than another). The difference between sign values and exchange values plays out, for instance, in Guy de Maupassant’s short story titled [“The Diamond Necklace.”](#) Facts are things we can observe but also include the reasoned inferences we draw from those observations (i.e., that jewels are valuable); theories explain “the bigger picture” (like why humans came to value jewels).



## Methodologies

**Methodologies** (not to be confused with methods – more about that later) are positions and behaviors that researchers within a theoretical paradigm use in their research.





## Criticism

**Criticism** is a specific treatment of a literary work. It often uses theory to make a case about the work. For example, we might start a work of literary criticism by selecting a short story by William Faulkner and considering it in terms of one of the concepts from Gregory Ulmer's work such as abject, alienation, allegory, aporia, apparatus, aspectuality, assemblage, ATH, attraction and repulsion, attunement, or aura. Any of these ideas could make for a valuable and interesting approach to Faulkner's work. Trying to write a paper without such concepts is unlikely to yield valuable and interesting results. Theory concepts give us lots of great material! By using the concepts and terms common to our area of study, you connect your work to the ongoing conversation, making it relevant!



## Method

**Method** is the procedure that researchers use to answer their research question. For instance, a paper investigating Faulkner's use of allegory may involve methods of historical research that reveal how literary authors have understood allegory and used it over time. The project could also involve methods of close reading of a literary text to notice details other critics have missed. We will address both method and close reading more fully in the following pages.



## Research Skills

**Research Skills** are the knowledge and practices you need to gather the evidence to answer your research question and to support your argument. These skills can include things like how to use search engines and finding aids, how to use citation management software, and how to evaluate sources.



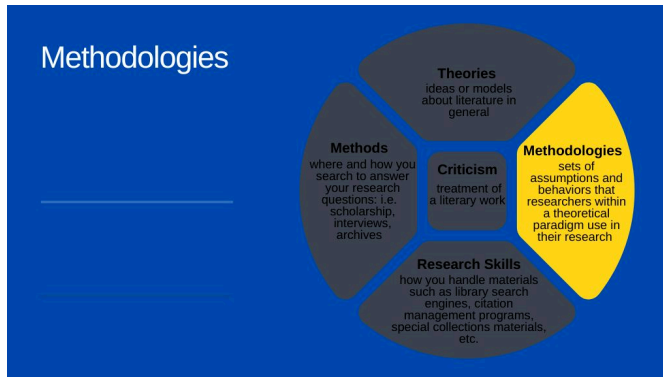
### Exercises [Discussion]

1. What theory or theories will you be using for your paper? Why did you make this theory selection over other theories? If you haven't made a selection yet, which theories are you considering?
2. What specific concepts from the theory/theories are you most interested in exploring in relation to your chosen literary work?
3. What is your plan for researching your theory and its major concepts?
4. When you do your assignments about theory and methodology, you should refer to your earlier work – the literature you chose, the problem, etc. We are in building mode.
5. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
6. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

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1. Barry J. Mauer. "Introduction, "A Glossary for Greg Ulmer's Avatar Emergency," and "A Glossary for Greg Ulmer's Electronic Monuments." *Text Shop Experiments*, Volume 1. 2016 <http://textshopexperiments.org/textshop01/ulmer-glossaries> ↵

# Methodologies

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We discuss the following topics on this page:

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- [Example \[Marxist Theory Methodologies\]](#)
- [Example \[Critical Race Theory Methodologies\]](#)

We also provide the following activity on this page:

- [Exercises \[Discussion\]](#)



## Methodologies

Methodologies (not to be confused with methods, which we discuss on the next page) are

linked to literary theories. Methodologies are necessary to working with theories. They serve as the interfaces between theory (purely conceptual) and praxis (practical application). Methodologies consist of tools and lines of investigation: sets of practices and propositions about texts and the world. Researchers using [Marxist literary criticism](#) adopt methodologies that seek to understand literature and its relationship to the world by looking to material forces like labor, ownership, and technology. These researchers also seek to understand authors not as inspired geniuses but as people whose lives and work are shaped by social, economic, and historical forces. Daniel Hartley, in his [“Marxist Literary Criticism: An Introductory Reading Guide”](#) (2018) describes some areas of inquiry and methodologies used by Marxist literary critics.



## Example [Marxist Theory Methodologies]

Areas of inquiry:

- **Anthropological:** investigates the social functions of art
- **Political:** investigates the link between literature and the political fortunes of classes and political systems such as capitalism and socialism
- **Ideological:** investigates the link between literature and identity

Methodologies:

- **Genetic Structuralism:** “Lucien Goldmann . . . examined the structure of literary texts to discover the degree to which it embodied the ‘world vision’ of the class to which the writer belonged. For Goldmann literary works are the product, not of individuals, but of the ‘transindividual mental structures’ of specific social groups. These ‘mental structures’ or ‘world visions’ are themselves understood as ideological constructions produced by specific historical conjunctures.”
- **Dialectical criticism:** Emphasizes “reflexivity and totality: it stresses the way in which ‘the [critic’s] mind must deal with its own thought process just as much as with the material it works on’ (Fredric Jameson); it holds that literary

works internalise social forms, situations and structures, yet simultaneously refuse them (thereby generating a critical negativity that resists vulgar economic or political reductionism); and it takes the mediated (not external or abstract) social totality as its ultimate critical purview.”

Jada, in her research about James Baldwin’s story, “Sonny’s Blues,” uses both Marxist theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theorists seek to understand the world in terms of structural forces that lead to unequal outcomes for different groups. It posits that these unequal outcomes may persist even when no individual person in an institutional role holds racial animus. For instance, there may be a gap between the student achievements of one group and those of another. Rather than posit blame on the teachers or the students, a critical race theorist would seek to understand the structural forces leading to these unequal outcomes; housing insecurity, hunger, and other factors may be responsible. Below are some of the methodologies that CRT researchers use.



### Example [Critical Race Theory Methodologies]

Critical Race Theorists use a variety of methodologies, including

- **Interest convergence:** investigates whether marginalized groups only achieve progress when dominant groups benefit as well
- **Intersectional theory:** investigates how multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage around race, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. operate together in complex ways
- **Radical critique of the law:** investigates how the law has historically been used to marginalize particular groups, such as black people, while recognizing that legal efforts are important to achieve emancipation and civil rights
- **Social constructivism:** investigates how race is socially constructed (rather

than biologically grounded)

- **Standpoint epistemology:** investigates how knowledge relates to individual experience and social position
- **Structural determinism:** investigates how structures of thought and of organizations determine social outcomes

Wikipedia can help with finding methodologies. For instance, the page about [Cultural Studies](#) notes that the primary areas of study are about *power*, which consists of many other things (such as ideology, social relations, etc.) and *discourse* (the languages and world views found in and around texts). You can follow the citation links in wikipedia to research each methodology. Better still, use your library. Cultural Studies has subdivisions, which include New Historicism, Multiculturalism, and Postcolonialism. One methodology of Cultural Studies is radical contextualism, which “rejects universal accounts of cultural practices, meanings, and identities.”

Some psychological theories, such as Freudian and Lacanian, use a set of methodologies referred to as “symptomatic.” The analogy is to medicine and the ways in which doctors seek to diagnose a patient’s condition based on their presenting symptoms. Since many medical conditions can produce similar symptoms (for instance, chest congestion can be caused by a cold, the flu, COVID, and many other conditions), a doctor has to look closely at a set of symptoms, use their knowledge of various medical conditions and how they present, and reason abductively (from effects to causes) to figure out what the underlying condition is. Similarly, a Freudian or Lacanian reading of a literary text will look for clues related to the characters, narrator, author, or audience to determine what underlying conditions are present. These conditions may be cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings), or interpersonal (relationships). They also can be a combination of these things.

Theorists don’t always label their methodologies as such. You need to look into each theory to see what positions the theorists take, what they study, and why. The “methods” part is about how they study. Not every methodology will work with every theory. You will need to do some research to discover which methodologies are most appropriate for your project.



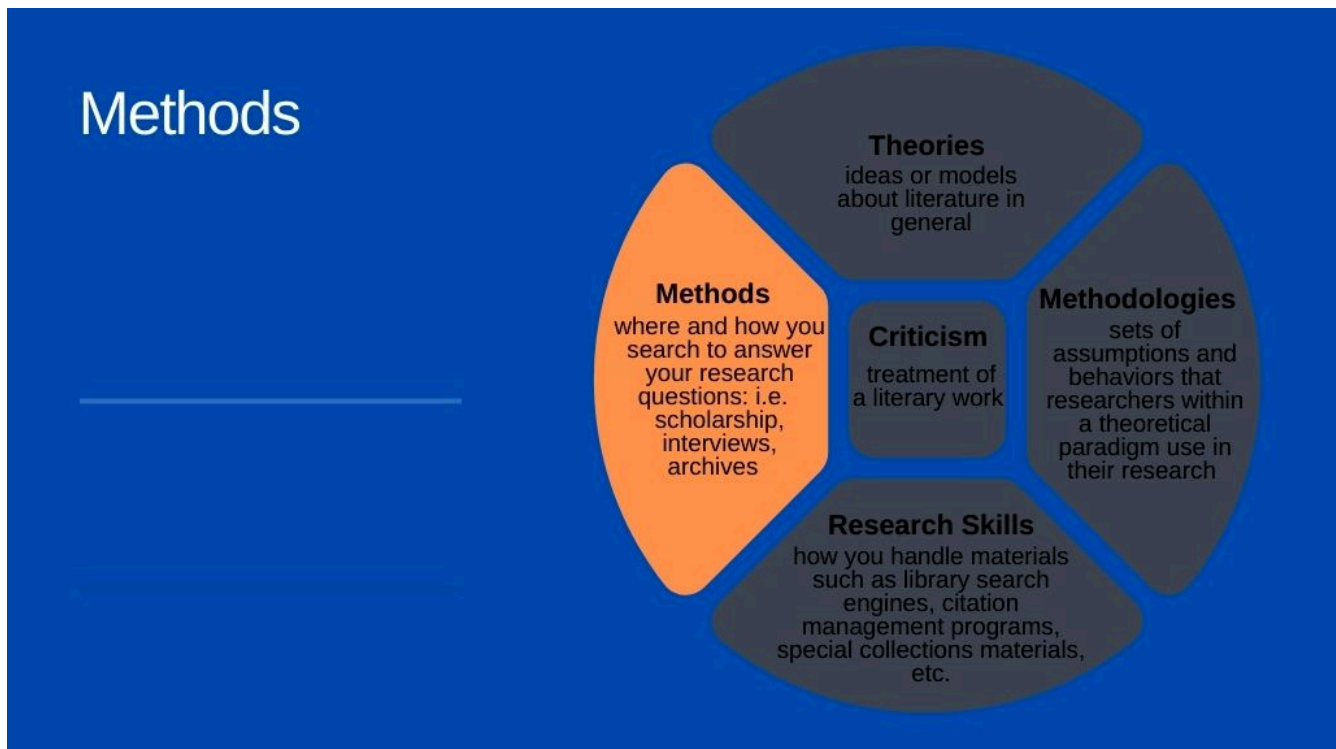


## Exercises [Discussion]

1. What methodologies will you be using for your paper? Why did you make this selection over others? If you haven't made a selection yet, which methodologies are you considering?
2. What specific concepts from the methodologies are you most interested in exploring in relation to your chosen literary work?
3. What is your plan for researching your methodologies?
4. When you do your assignments for this week about theory and methodology, you should refer to your earlier work – the literature you chose, the problem, etc. We are in building mode. Recall that the methodology relates directly to the theory. You may need to do some additional reading to identify methodologies and theories.
5. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
6. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# Research Methods

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We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Research Methods](#)
- [Research Method Types](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Exercises](#)





## Research Methods

Before discussing *research methods*, we need to distinguish them from *methodologies* and *research skills*.

- *Methodologies*, linked to literary theories, are tools and lines of investigation: sets of practices and propositions about texts and the world.
- *Research methods* are about where and how you get answers to your research questions. Are you conducting interviews? Visiting archives? Doing close readings? Reviewing scholarship? You will need to choose which methods are most appropriate to use in your research and you need to gain some knowledge about how to use these methods. In other words, you need to do some research into research methods!
- *Research skills* are about how you handle materials such as library search engines, citation management programs, special collections materials, and so on.



Your choice of research method depends on the kind of questions you are asking. For example, if you want to understand how an author progressed through several drafts to arrive at a final manuscript, you may need to use archival research methods. If you want to understand why a particular literary work became a bestseller, you may need to use audience studies research methods. If you want to know why a contemporary author wrote a particular work, you may need to interview the author. Usually literary research involves a combination of methods such as [archival research](#) and [discourse analysis](#).

Literary research methods tend to differ from research methods in the hard sciences (such as physics and chemistry). Science research must present results that are reproducible, while literary research rarely does (though it must still present evidence for its claims). Literary research often deals with questions of meaning, social conventions, representations of lived experience, and aesthetic effects; these are questions that reward dialogue

and different perspectives rather than one great experiment that settles the issue. In literary research, we might get many valuable answers even though they are quite different from one another. Also in literary research, we usually have some room to speculate about answers, but our claims have to be plausible (believable) and our argument comprehensive (meaning we don't overlook evidence that would alter our argument significantly if it were known).

A literary researcher might select the following set of theories and tools:

- Theory: Critical Race Theory (CRT)
- Methodology: Social Constructivism
- Method: Scholarly
- Skills: Search engines, citation management



## Research Method Types

We select our research methods based on the kinds of things we want to know. For example, we may be studying the relationship between literature and society, between author and text, or the status of a work in the literary canon. We may want to know about a work's form, genre, or thematics. We may want to know about the audience's reading and reception, or about methods for teaching literature in schools.

Below are a few research methods and their descriptions. You may need to consult with your instructor about which ones are most appropriate for your project. The first list covers methods most students use in their work. The second list covers methods more commonly used by advanced researchers. You can use them in your research project (though it's a good idea to ask your instructor first), and you are likely to encounter these research methods in some of the scholarship you find. Most scholars combine methods, though one may

be the primary and the others secondary. By understanding what your project requires, you will be able to determine which research methods you need.

Most commonly used undergraduate research methods:

1. **Scholarship Methods:** Studies the body of published scholarship written about a particular author, literary work, historical period, literary movement, genre, theme, theory, or method.
2. **Textual Analysis Methods:** Used for close readings of literary texts, these methods also rely on literary theory and background information to support the reading.
3. **Biographical Methods:** Used to study the life of the author to better understand their work and times, these methods involve reading biographies and autobiographies about the author, and may also include research into private papers, correspondence, and interviews.
4. **Discourse Analysis Methods:** Studies language patterns to reveal ideology and social relations of power. This research involves the study of institutions, social groups, and social movements to understand how people in various settings use language to represent the world to themselves and others. Literary works may present complex mixtures of discourses which the characters (and readers) have to navigate.
5. **Literary Methods:** A literary re-working of another literary text, making a literary text as research can be used to better understand a literary work by investigating its language, formal structures, composition methods, themes, and so on. For instance, a creative literary research project may retell a story from a minor character's perspective. To qualify as research, a creative research project is usually accompanied with a piece of scholarly writing that explains and justifies the work.

Methods used more often by advanced researchers:

1. **Archival Methods:** Usually involves trips to special collections where original papers are kept. In these archives are many unpublished materials such as diaries, letters, photographs, ledgers, and so on. These materials can offer us invaluable insight into the life of an author, the development of a literary work, or the society in which the author lived. There are at least three major archives of James Baldwin's papers: [The Smithsonian](#), [Yale](#), and [The New York Public Library](#). Descriptions of such materials are often available online, but the materials themselves are typically stored in boxes at the archive.
2. **Computational Methods:** Used for statistical analysis of texts such as studies of the popularity and meaning of particular words in literature over time.
3. **Ethnographic Methods:** Studies groups of people and their interactions with literary works, for instance in educational institutions, in reading groups (such as book clubs),

and in fan networks. This approach may involve interviews and visits to places (including online communities) where people interact with literary works. Note: before you begin such work, you must have [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#) approval “to protect the rights and welfare of human participants involved in research.”

4. **Visual Methods:** Studies the visual qualities of literary works. Some literary works, such as illuminated manuscripts, children’s literature, and graphic novels, present a complex interplay of text and image. Even works without illustrations can be studied for their use of typography, layout, and other visual features.
5. **Experimental Methods:** Investigates how literary practices can themselves generate knowledge. A key exemplar here is the experimental literary group OuLiPo. From the [Poetry Foundation](#): “OuLiPo . . . emphasizes systematic, self-restricting means of making texts. For example, the technique known as  $n + 7$  replaces every noun in an existing text with the noun that follows seven entries after it in the dictionary.” The goal is to see what results from such experiments and to determine whether they have literary and critical value.

Regardless of the method(s) you choose, you will need to learn how to apply them to your work and how to carry them out successfully. For example, you should know that many archives do not allow you to bring pens (you can use pencils) and you may not be allowed to bring bags into the archives. You will need to keep a record of which documents you consult and their location (box number, etc.) in the archives. If you are unsure how to use a particular method, please consult a book about it.<sup>1</sup> Also, ask for the advice of trained researchers such as your instructor or a research librarian.

1. A few sources on research methods:

- *Introduction to Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Anyone Undertaking a Research Project* by Catherine, Dr. Dawson
- *Practical Research Methods: A User-Friendly Guide to Mastering Research Techniques and Projects* by Catherine Dawson
- *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* by John W. Creswell Cheryl N. Poth
- *Qualitative Research Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* by Michael Quinn Patton
- *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* by John W. Creswell J. David Creswell
- *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners* by Ranjit Kumar
- *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* by C.R. Kothari

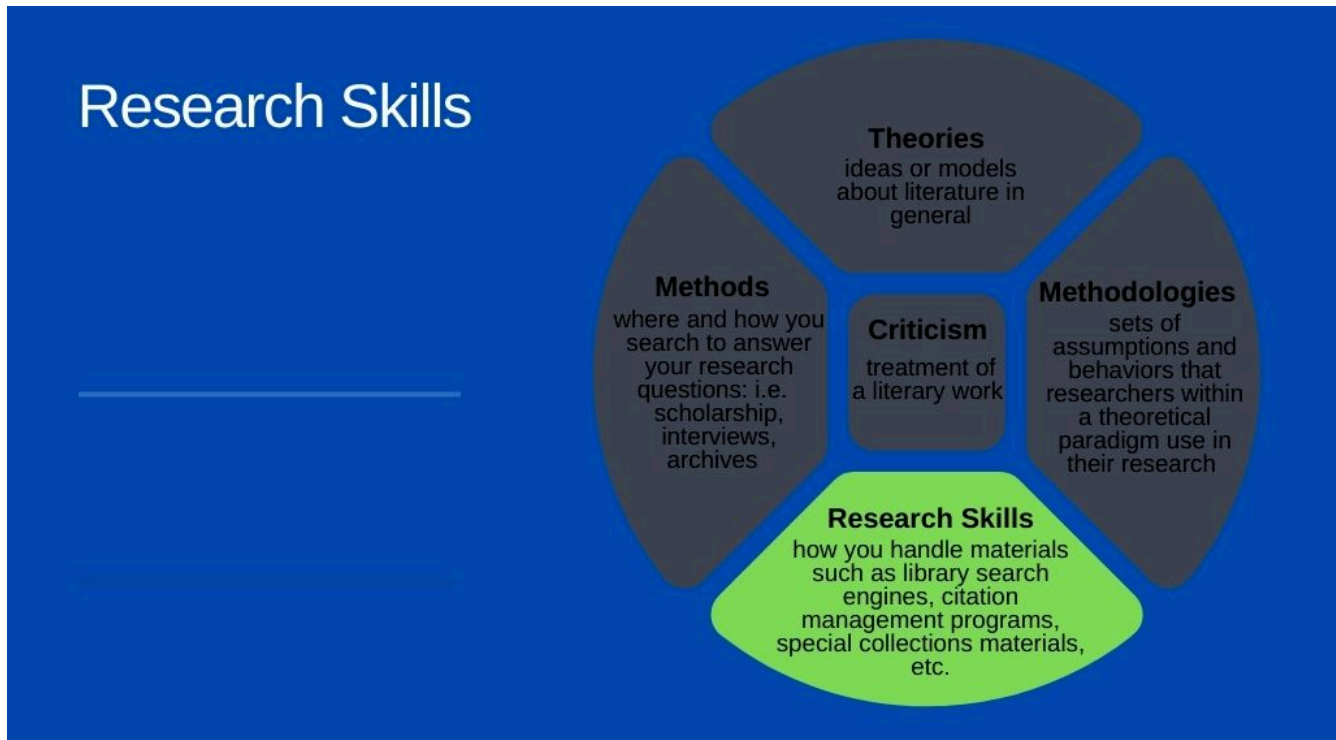


## Exercises

1. What research method(s) will you be using for your paper? Why did you make this method selection over other methods? If you haven't made a selection yet, which methods are you considering?
2. What specific methodological approaches are you most interested in exploring in relation to the chosen literary work?
3. What is your plan for researching your method(s) and its major approaches?
4. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
5. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# Research Skills

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We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Research Skills](#)

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- [Research Skills \[Refresher\]](#)



## Research Skills

Research skills are all about gathering evidence. This [evidence](#), composed of facts and the reasoning that connects them, aims to convince your audience to accept your conclusions about the literary work. The most important piece of evidence you need to discuss is the literary work itself, which is a “fact” that you and your audience can examine together. Research means finding additional facts about the literary work and tying them together with reasoning to reach a significant and convincing conclusion.



Literature often presents us with factual difficulties. Sometimes authors revised their works and multiple versions exist. [William Blake](#) printed his own works and often changed illustrations and words between each printing. If we are reading a translated work, there may be more than one translation. In other words, we first need to identify which literary “object” we are studying. Electronic databases, such as the [William Blake Archive](#), provide scholars with multiple versions of literary works, as well as plenty of reference sources. They are great places to begin a study!

The kind of evidence we need is directly related to the kind of claim we are making. If we want to claim that a literary work has seen a resurgence of public interest, we will look for historical evidence and quantitative evidence (statistics) to show that sales of the work (or database searches, or library checkouts, etc.) have increased. We may also seek qualitative evidence (such as interviews with booksellers and readers) to report on their impressions. We may look to see if there has been an increase in the number and kinds of adaptations. One example of such a work is Denis Perry’s and Carl Sederholm’s edited volume, *Adapting Poe: Re-imaginings in Popular Culture* (Spring 2012). If we are claiming that a literary work has a special relationship to a geographic region, we will look for textual evidence, geographic evidence, and historical evidence. See for example, Tom Conley’s *The Self-Made Map* (University of Minnesota Press 1996), which argues that geographic regions of France played a key role in Miguel de Montaigne’s *Essays*.

## Types of Evidence<sup>1</sup>

Your choice of problem, theory, methodology, and method impact the kinds of evidence you will be seeking. Wendy Belcher identifies the following types:

1. **Qualitative Evidence:** Data on human behavior collected through direct observation, interviews, documents, and basic ethnography (191). The *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005) is a helpful guide. This area also encompasses audience research. Examples include the journal *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*, the edited volume *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Suleiman, Crosman, eds. 1980), and *Media and Print Cultural Consumption in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Rooney and Gasperini, eds. 2016).
2. **Quantitative Evidence:** Data collected from standardized instruments and statistics, common to education, medicine, sociology, political sciences, psychology, and economics (191). Guides include *Best Practices in Quantitative Methods* (Osbourne 2007) and *Statistics for People Who (Think that They) Hate Statistics* (Salkind 2007).
3. **Historical Evidence:** Data collected from examinations of historical records to uncover the relationship of people to each other and to periods and events, common to all disciplines and collected from archives of primary materials (191). Guides include *Historical Evidence and Argument* (Henige 2006) and *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace, 2nd Edition* (Mills 2009).
4. **Geographic Evidence:** Data about people's relationship to places and environments in fields such as archaeology (191). Guides include *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography, 5th Edition* (Hay and Cope 2021) and *Creative Methods for Human Geographers* (Benzon, Holton, Wilkinson, eds. 2021).

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Using Evidence for a Research Project.



5. **Textual Evidence:** Data collected from texts about form (genre, plot, etc.), language (diction, rhetoric), purpose (message, function), meaning (symbolism, themes, etc.) and milieu (sources, culture, identity, etc.) (191). Guides include *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics* (Szondi 1995) and *The Hermeneutic Spiral and Interpretation in Literature and the Visual Arts* (O'Toole 2018).
6. **Artistic Evidence:** Data from images, live performances, etc., used to study physical properties of a work (size, material, form, etc.), purpose (message, function, etc.) meaning (symbolism, etc.), and milieu (sources, culture, etc.) (191). Guides include *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (Pearce 1994) and *Material Culture Studies in America* (Schlereth, ed. 1982).

In the following chapters, five through nine, we present instruction for numerous research skills including how to gather research from literary works and from scholarly literature, and other skills such as how to use library search engines, citation management, google scholar, and source evaluation. The main thing to keep in mind for now is that you are gathering quality evidence and putting it together to construct a convincing and compelling argument about a literary work (or works).

**For more advice on how to Reason with Evidence, consider the following from WritingCommons.org:<sup>2</sup>**

Once you've spent sufficient time researching a [topic](#)—once you're familiar with the ongoing scholarly conversation about a topic—then you're ready to begin thinking about how to reason with the evidence you've gathered.

- engage in [rhetorical analysis](#) of the outside source(s)
- evaluate the [currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, purpose](#) of the out-

2. Writing Commons. "Logos – Logos Definition." *Writing Commons*, 11 Mar. 2022, <https://writingcommons.org/article/logos/>.

side source(s)

- use evidence (e.g., [quoting](#), [paraphrasing](#), [summarizing](#)) to bolster claims
- introduce sources and clarifying their authority
- use an appropriate [citation style](#)

**For more advice on how to Connect Evidence to your Claims, consider the following from WritingCommons.org:**<sup>3</sup>

We can't, as writers, just stop at a quote, because our readers won't necessarily know the connection between the point of your project and the quote. As such, we must make the connection for our reader. Here are a few ways to make such a connection:

- Break down ideas
- Connect back to the thesis
- Connect back to the paragraph's main point
- Point to the author's purpose



3. Janecek, Jennifer, and Eir-Anne Edgar. "Connecting Evidence to Your Claims." *Writing Commons*, 15 May 2021, <https://writingcommons.org/section/citation/how-to-cite-sources-in-academic-and-professional-writing/citation-how-to-connect-evidence-to-your-claims/>.



## Research Skills [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



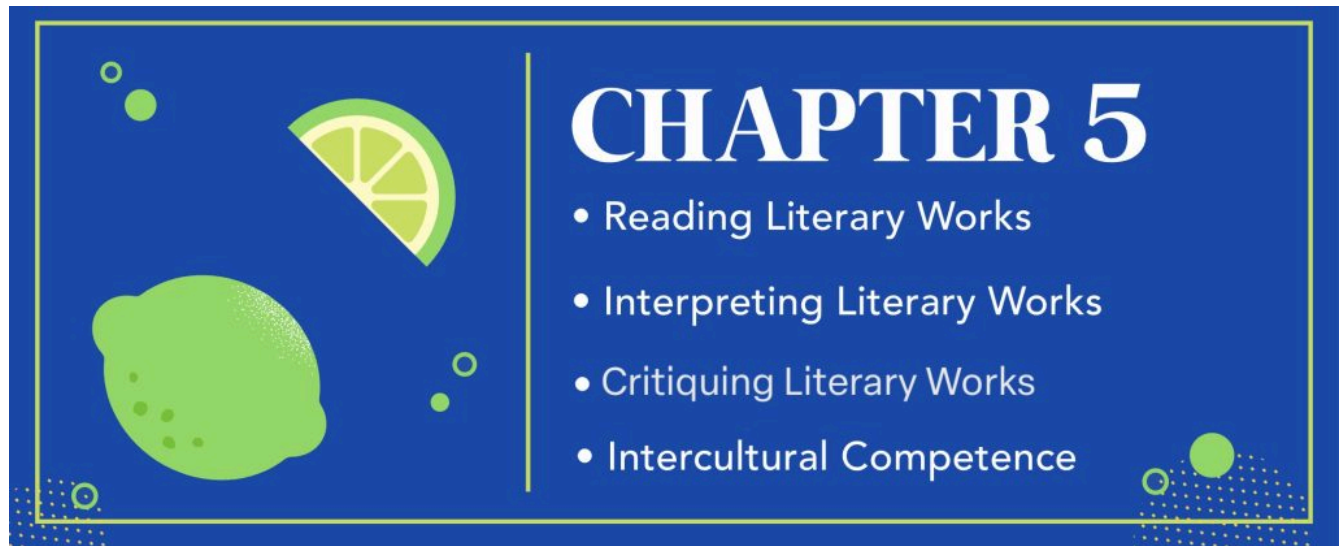
*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=100#h5p-12>

# CHAPTER 5: READING LITERARY WORKS

# Chapter 5 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

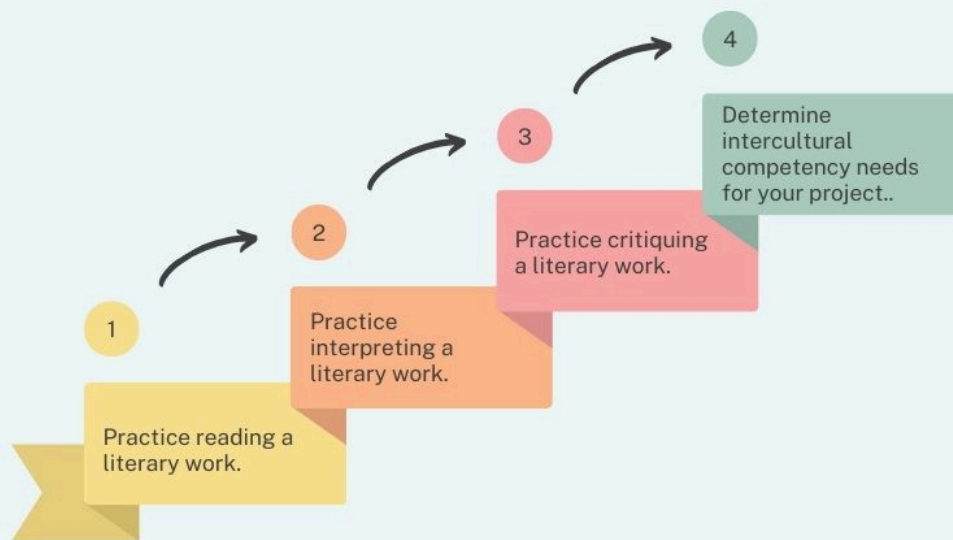
This chapter covers the ways that literary scholars read and interpret literary works. Before we can do research about a literary work, we need to have some understanding of the literary text. Literary scholars tend to re-read a text many times: before doing additional research, during research, and during the writing process. A literary text stands as the most valuable “evidence” that a literary scholar presents to readers. In “Reading Literary Works,” we introduce three strategies for reading a literary work, including explication, analysis, and comparison/contrast. Your research project should make use of at least one of each of these reading strategies. In “Interpreting Literary Works,” we introduce two major interpretive strategies: explicatory and symptomatic. You should choose at least one of the interpretation strategies (it’s ok to combine them too).



This chapter presents you with four tasks, three of which give you opportunities to practice

working with literary texts through reading, interpreting, and critiquing selected literary works. The fourth task is for you to determine what intercultural competency you need to develop for research on your chosen literary work.

## Chapter Five Project Tasks





## Learning Objectives

These pages provide practical advice on how to read literary works before beginning your research project. By learning these lessons, you will be able to use the following strategies in your reading of literary works:

- explication
- analysis
- comparison/contrast

Great critics learn to use many reading skills and to demonstrate to audiences how they read, understand, and critique a text. Interpretation requires great skill and is difficult to master. The two interpretive paradigms you will learn are:

- explicatory, which transforms implicit meaning into explicit meaning.
- symptomatic, which suggest a text's explicit message is betrayed by another message that the text has attempted to disguise.

Your research will benefit when you use these strategies before you formulate your research question and thesis statement.

# Reading Literary Works

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK

“The most fantastic thing you could film is people reading. I don’t see why no one’s done it... The movie you’d make would be a lot more interesting than most of them.”

— Jean-Luc Godard



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Reading Literary Works](#)
- [Beginning Your Reading](#)
- [Analysis](#)
- [Explication](#)
- [Comparison and Contrast](#)
- [Reading with and against the Grain](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Reading Literary Works \[Refresher\]](#)







## Reading Literary Works

Literary scholars care very much about how other people read texts. Reading is an activity that reveals a lot about how we think, feel, and respond to the world around us. A text is any artifact that can be seen as meaningful. Texts are not limited to written language – as this text is – but can include all kinds of things such as images, audio, video, computer code, games, and performances. We might argue that the natural world can also be read as a text. Reading should be appreciated as an exciting activity – one that is itself a text. When we are reading the works of scholars and critics, we are reading their reading of a literary text. Another scholar might read a critic's reading of a text and produce their own reading of that reading. The layers of reading are potentially endless!

Research into literature requires us to put more energy and attention into reading than we normally do for activities such as light reading or reading for enjoyment. Basically, we want to get a very good sense of what the literary work *is* before we start formally interpreting or critiquing it. Scholars know that before they can produce an interpretation or critique, they must first construct a conceptual “model” of the literary work. They pay attention to various features of literature such as narrative structure, character development, diction, time, space, and many other features. Only when a conceptual model of the literary work is somewhat in hand can we really begin the interpretation or critique. Researchers read literary works multiple times using a variety of reading strategies:

### Reading Strategies

- **Exploratory reading:** or pre-reading, looking for key phrases, words, and headings to get a general sense of what the work is about.
- **Skimming:** looking for main ideas, topic sentences and paragraphs, as well as abstracts.
- **Revision:** re-reading to test your recollection of the text and to check your understanding.
- **Search:** looking for specific information.
- **Mastery:** slow, careful reading and paying attention to details.

- **Critical:** assessing and reviewing ideas within the text as well as looking for examples of reasoning, irony, satire, sincerity, etc.

It may seem odd to put questions to a written text since, as Socrates once said, it “always gives one unvarying answer.” Yet, asking questions of a text, a practice called *interrogatory reading*, makes some sense because reading can be like a dialogue in which the reader brings important things to the interaction. All writing contains “gaps” that require us to fill in what’s missing. Charles Dickens begins his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* with the words, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . .” A reader might ask, “how can something be both the best and the worst when those words mean opposite things?” We then look for additional evidence in the text as well as in our own experiences, to help answer the question. For instance, maybe high school graduation comes to mind as a “best of times, worst of times”; it is a time to celebrate an achievement, but also a time when key friendships might come to an end. Graduation can produce a sense of freedom and a sense of terrible uncertainty. We can read Dickens with our understanding of high school graduation in mind, but we should also consider that Dickens’ text may be suggesting something quite different. Re-reading a text might bring us different answers if we have changed our framework for understanding.



## Beginning Your Reading

Your instructor may require a research project about a specific literary work, a body of work by a single author or authors, a comparative study of multiple literary works, or may leave the choice to you. To complete a successful literary research project, you will need to know how to read literature the way a researcher does. Reading for pleasure is good, but is not sufficient (because literary research goes beyond stating that you enjoyed – or didn’t enjoy – a text). Your goal is to understand a text. Understanding a text does not require you to like the text, agree with the text, or identify with the text. Some literary works, like Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “Notes from Underground,” may be quite unpleasant to read. But we need to

understand what a text is, what it does, and what it is telling us. To answer these questions, you should note the following:

## Features of Literary Works

- Genre (poem, short story, drama, novel, creative nonfiction, comic, [electronic literature](#), etc.)
- Major themes
- Primary structure (narrative, metaphor, argument, etc.)
- Cultural context (nationality, period, culture, etc.)
- Point of view (first person, second person, third person, omniscient, limited)
- Setting(s)
- Primary characters
- Intended audience (children, adults, students, workers, nobility, etc.)
- Style (playful, challenging, blunt, academic)
- Possible functions (to entertain, educate, persuade, criticize, etc.)

In literary studies, we do not grant authors the final word over what a piece of literature is, means, or does because authors may not be fully aware of their own assumptions, blind spots, cultural conditioning, and so on. Also, authors, like everyone else, may forget, distort, omit, and misrepresent their own work. Their comments on their work are important, though, and we shouldn't ignore them. Our goal as literary researchers is to capture and represent the intentions of a text, whether the author is aware of them or not. For instance, JK Rowling has disparaged transgendered people, but many readers of the *Harry Potter* series find that the text affirms transgender identities.





## Analysis

Literary critics practice various kinds of reading but one of the most important is analysis. Analysis involves selecting a passage of the text for a “close reading,” examining the details and nuances of the text to see how they fit together and achieve their effects. Generally, you will do a close reading on only a portion of a text, but it is possible to do a close reading of an entire text, especially if it is very brief. In general, you should do an analysis of at least one passage from a literary text in your research project.

Below is analytical close reading of a short poem. Poetry has many things going on at once: metaphor, theme, subject, form, elements, means, images, diction, syntax, alliteration and assonance, rhyme, meter, tone, genre, paradox, etc. Poetry also makes use of narrative and argument. All of these elements are important, but usually the metaphorical structure of poetry is critically important. Poetic metaphor is not as much about people and/or things as it is about the *relationships* between people and/or things. We make sense of relationships by comparing them to other relationships.

Let’s analyze a poem from the 9th century. We will see how complicated the central metaphor is.

Doesn’t he realize  
that I am not  
like the swaying kelp  
in the surf,  
where the seaweed gatherer  
can come as often as he wants.

— Ono no Komachi, Translated from Japanese by Rexroth and I. Atsumi

How to make sense of it? We first need to fill in the metaphorical algebra: A is to B as C is to D, or *He* (A) is to *Me* (B) as the *Seaweed Gatherer* (C) is to the *Swaying Kelp* (D). To understand the relationship between the speaker and the “he” of the poem, we first have to figure out the relationship of the seaweed gatherer to the swaying kelp. The most obvi-

ous thing about this relationship is that swaying kelp is *passive* while the seaweed gatherer is *active*. The kelp (which is a form of seaweed commonly used in Japanese cuisine) can't fight back or escape. It just sways in the surf and the seaweed gatherer can take it if he likes. The speaker seems to be saying that she is passive while he is active. Presumably, this means he can gather what he wants from her (which could be love, money, or sex) without her having any means to stop him.

People and seaweed differ in many other ways that are either less relevant or not relevant here. Seaweed is a plant while people are animals. People have legs and seaweed does not. There are probably millions of differences between people and seaweed, and many similarities too. For the sake of our reading of the poem, however, these similarities and differences are less relevant than the qualities *active* and *passive*.

But we have to change our view of the relationship between the man and the woman in the poem when we attend to the word “not.” The speaker says she is *not* like the swaying kelp. Her negation of the metaphor using the word “not” means we have to switch her position from *passive* to *active*, since being able to say no would make her different from the swaying kelp. In other words, she seems to be saying that she *can* stop him from taking what he wants from her.

But the structure of the poem makes us change our reading of the metaphor again. The speaker of the poem does not address the man directly (with “Don’t *you* realize . . .”), but addresses a third person. If she were truly able or willing to say “no” – to be active – she would tell the man directly, “I am not like the swaying kelp.” By asking, “doesn’t he realize?” she implies that he *doesn’t* realize. In the man’s mind, he is the seaweed gatherer and she is the swaying kelp and she won’t do anything to change the relationship. She will only complain to a *third* person, who might be herself, a friend, or you, the reader, about how she *wishes* she were active.

The poem is relatable because many people have been through times when they wish they could say “no” but don’t. We rehearse what we might say, knowing that we likely won’t say it to the right person at the right time. “Doesn’t he realize” does not authorize complacency. Rather, it draws our attention to the ways in which we try to convince ourselves we are standing up for ourselves without actually doing so.

Your research project should include analysis of at least one portion of a text.



## Explication

Explication expands our understanding of a text, elaborating on what the text gives us. It makes explicit that which is implied by a text. Explication means looking at the whole of a literary work as greater than the sum of its parts. “Parts” can refer to different characters, plot elements, themes, or other features of a literary text. For instance, we might read “Sonny’s Blues” in terms of the relationship between language and music as different forms of communication. The narrator, Sonny’s brother, tries to communicate with Sonny through language but repeatedly fails. Though he is extremely articulate, he can’t reach his brother. Only at the end does he realize that communication goes two ways and he has not really listened to his brother. His brother communicates through music more than through language. The story is more than just a story of two brothers, more, even, than a story about music. Here is the second-to-last paragraph in which the narrator finally hears and understands his brother through his music.

### Excerpt from James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues”

Then they all gathered around Sonny and Sonny played. Every now and again one of them seemed to say, amen. Sonny’s fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others. And Sonny went all the way back, he really began with the spare, flat statement of the opening phrase of the song. Then he began to make it his. It was very beautiful because it wasn’t hurried and it was no longer a lament. I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, with what burning we had yet to make it ours, how we could cease lamenting. Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did. Yet, there was no battle in his face now. I heard what he had gone through, and would continue to go through until he came to rest in earth. He had made it his: that

long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy. And he was giving it back, as every thing must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever. I saw my mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she had walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died. And it brought something else back to me, and carried me past it, I saw my little girl again and felt Isabel's tears again, and I felt my own tears begin to rise. And I was yet aware that this was only a moment, that the world waited outside, as hungry as a tiger, and that trouble stretched above us, longer than the sky.

The narrator comes to a better understanding of his brother – and even himself – through music rather than through language. Something kind of magic happens in this paragraph as well. Paradoxically, the narrator *is* able to transform Sonny's music into language and to share it with us, his readers. Thus, the text shows us that the gulf between language and music, just like the gulf between the narrator and his brother, *is* bridgeable. Here the text summarizes a lot of the materials we learned from earlier in the story, but puts them in context with Sonny's music. Typically, analysis and explication work together, with analysis going closer into the details and explication moving out to show us the bigger picture.

Your research project should include an explication that builds on some close reading analysis.



## Comparison and Contrast

Sometimes, a literary work comes into better focus when we read it alongside another work. The other work may be by the same author, or by a contemporary author of a similar genre or from another culture, etc. The point is that we don't really understand a literary work in a vacuum, but instead, we read it in relation to other works. In your research, you should decide whether it is necessary or valuable to compare and contrast your chosen work with another.

Below is a comparison and contrast between a Biblical parable and a modern parable.



*Jesus's "Sower of Seeds" Parable from The Gospel of Mark*

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Once again he began to teach beside the seashore. And the greatest multitude gathered to hear him, so that he went aboard the ship and was seated out to sea, and all the multitude was on shore facing the sea. He taught them a great deal in parables, and said to them in his discourse: Listen. Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened as he sowed that some of the grain fell beside the way, and birds came and ate it. Some fell on stony ground where there was not much soil, and it shot up quickly because there was no depth of soil; and when the sun came up it was parched and because it had no roots it dried away. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and stifled it, and it bore no fruit. But some fell upon the good soil, and it bore fruit, and shot up and increased, and yielded thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. And he said: He who has ears, let him hear. When they were alone, his followers along with the twelve asked him about the parables. He said to them: To you are given the secrets of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside all comes through parables, so that they may have sight but not see, and hear but not understand, lest they be converted and forgiven. And he said to them: You did not read this parable? Then how shall you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones beside the way where the word is sown, and as soon as they hear it Satan comes and snatches the word that has been sown among them. And there are some who are as if sown on stony ground, who when they hear the word accept it with joy; and they have no roots in themselves but are men of the moment, and when there comes affliction and persecution, because of the word, they do not stand fast. And others are those who were sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, and concern of the world and the beguilement of riches and desires for other things come upon them and stifle the word, and it bears no fruit. And the others are those who were sown upon sixtyfold and a hundredfold. Then he said to them: Surely the lamp is not brought in so as to be set under a basket or under the bed rather than to be set on a stand; for there is nothing hidden except to be shown, nor anything concealed except to be brought to light. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And he said to them: Consider what you hear. Your

*Franz Kafka's "Before the Law" parable from The Trial*

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Before the law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country and prays for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment. The man thinks it over and then asks if he will be allowed in later. "It is possible," says the doorkeeper, "but not at the moment." Since the gate stands open, as usual, and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man stoops to peer through the gateway into the interior. Observing that, the doorkeeper laughs and says: "If you are so drawn to it, just try to go in despite my veto. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the least of the doorkeepers. From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another, each more powerful than the last. The third doorkeeper is already so terrible that even I cannot bear to look at him." These are difficulties the man from the country has not expected; the Law, he thinks, should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone, but as he now takes a closer look at the doorkeeper in his fur coat, with his big sharp nose and long, thin, black Tartar beard, he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at one side of the door. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be admitted, and wearies the doorkeeper by his importunity. The doorkeeper frequently has little interviews with him, asking him questions about his home and many other things, but the questions are put indifferently, as great lords put them, and always finish with the statement that he cannot be let in yet. The man, who has furnished himself with many things for his journey, sacrifices all he has, however valuable, to bribe the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper accepts everything, but always with the remark: "I am only taking it to keep you from thinking you have omitted anything." During these many years the man fixes his attention almost continuously on the doorkeeper. He forgets the other doorkeepers, and this first one seems darker or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. Yet in his darkness he is now aware of a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the gateway of the Law. Now he has not very long to live. Before he dies, all his experiences in these long years gather themselves in his head to one point, a question he has not yet asked the doorkeeper. He waves him nearer, since he can no longer raise his stiff-

measure will be made by the measure by which you measure, and more shall be added for you. When a man has, he shall be given; when one has not, even what he has shall be taken away from him. And he said: The Kingdom of God is as when a man sows his seed in the ground, and sleeps and wakes night and day, and the seed grows and increases without his knowing it; for of itself the earth bears fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain gives its yield, he puts forth the sickle, for the time of harvesting is come. And he said: To what shall we liken the Kingdom of God, and in what parable shall we place it? It is like the seed of mustard, which when it is sown in the ground is smaller than all the seeds on earth, but when it has been sown, it shoots up and becomes greater than all the other greens, and puts forth great branches, so that the birds of the air may nest in its shadow. With many such parables he spoke the word to them, according to what they could comprehend; but he did not talk with them except in parables; but privately with his own disciples he expounded all.

— Mark 4.11-30, translated by Richmond Lattimore

ening body. The doorkeeper has to bend low toward him, for the difference in height between them has altered much to the man's disadvantage. "What do you want to know now?" asks the doorkeeper; "you are insatiable." "Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" The doorkeeper recognizes that the man has reached his end, and, to let his failing senses catch the words, roars in his ear: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it."

— Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir

Both Jesus' and Kafka's parables are about gateways. Jesus's parable is about the gateway separating foolishness from wisdom. Kafka's parable is about the gateway separating injustice from justice. In *The Trial*, Joseph K. has been accused of a crime, though the details of the supposed crime are never explained. Joseph K. is told that to be accused is also to be condemned (his guilt is already certain), but that he should review his life to understand what he might have done wrong. He seeks access to legal officials to whom he can plead his case. Here a priest, who is an employee of the court, introduces himself to Joseph K. and tells him this parable. Following the parable, Kafka provides a discussion between Joseph K. and the priest about its proper interpretation, just as Jesus and his disciples discuss the proper interpretation of the "Sower of Seeds" parable.

Each part of Jesus's parable has a single meaning that links elements of horticulture to spiritual teachings. By contrast, in Kafka's parable, the priest and Joseph K. discuss numerous possible interpretations of the parable. Unlike Jesus, the priest who presents "Before the Law" did not create the parable, and he is not an ultimate authority on its meaning. In fact, it's unclear if there is any ultimate authority on its proper interpretation.

By contrast, Jesus's parable offers a clear way to cross the gateway to wisdom, though it is highly contingent. If a man is given the seed (the divine word) and it lands in fertile soil (a receptive soul) it can grow and he can harvest the fruit (wisdom). Wisdom is contingent because certain people may not want wisdom or may have souls that are not prepared for

it or may be in an environment not conducive to it. Jesus even says that he doesn't want everyone to understand his message: "To you are given the secrets of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside all comes through parables, so that they may have sight but not see, and hear but not understand, lest they be converted and forgiven." The Kafka parable also shows us a gateway — to justice — but it is quite unclear whether it can be crossed at all or what justice will be on the other side. It is unclear whether the parable is meant for one person, for some people, or for everyone.

Jesus compares something less understood (how to spread wisdom) to something more understood (that plants grow from seeds). The complicating factor in Jesus' parable is that he presents different kinds of people with different kinds of souls to explain why wisdom grows in some but not in others. Kafka's parable is less straightforward because he is comparing something difficult to understand (access to justice) to something that is strange and only partially known – a guard at a door meant only for one person. We understand the parable as being relevant to Joseph K., who belongs to a category (the accused), but why is he in that category? What other choices did the petitioner have?

A major difference between the two parables is that Jesus limits interpretation while Kafka invites us to consider multiple interpretations and to continually speculate about what is unknown (and perhaps even unknowable).



## Reading with and against the Grain

In their textbook, *Ways of Reading*, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky,<sup>1</sup> discuss the differences between reading “with” and “against” the grain. The analogy here is to wood-working. Wood has fibers that align more in one direction than in another. If you cut the wood with the grain you tend to get a smooth surface, but if you cut it against the grain you tend to get splinters and a rough surface. To read a text *with* the grain is to follow the overt intentions of the author, the text, and the culture in which the text was produced. To read against the grain means to ask questions that push against the overt intentions of the

1. 3rd Edition, Boston, MA: St. Martins Press, 1993.

author, text, and culture in which the text was produced. Another way of framing the difference between reading with and against the grain is to think of *dominant* and *resistant* readings.

## Sample A: Dominant and resistant readings of Cinderella<sup>2</sup>

The dominant reading of Cinderella presents an ideal image of romantic love that survives against the odds. The prevailing message of this story encourages readers to believe that dreams can come true.

A resistant reading of Cinderella reveals the love interest to be a shallow man who judges women solely on the basis of physical attractiveness. A man who will marry a woman on the basis of a few hours of dancing is likely to leave Cinderella if someone with daintier feet comes along. The story also represents a woman's physical appearance as a commodity for her to use to gain social status and wealth. The prevailing message cautions readers against believing in romantic love.

A feminist reading of Cinderella sees the heroine as repressed and abused. To break free of this repression she is forced to enter into a world full of masculine power where she is appreciated for her ball gown and refinement. Further, her only hope to escape the shackles of domestic bondage relies on her ability to seduce and ensnare a man. The prevailing message points out the misogyny inherent in the societal structures surrounding Cinderella.

Sometimes reading against the grain can appear *hostile* towards the author, text, or culture. Other times it just moves in a different direction than the intended one; we can read a text against the grain by reading it for our own purposes and not for its intended message. For instance, it is possible to read a bank statement as a poem, a recipe as a historical document, and a personal letter as a literary work. Doing so is neither friendly nor hostile

2. "Reading against the Grain." SPLC Learning for Justice. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/close-and-critical-reading/reading-against-the-grain>

to the intended meaning; it is indifferent to it. This approach is called “creative misreading” and also “repurposing.” For instance, the French New Wave critics and filmmakers of the 1950s creatively misread American B movies (usually cheaply made gangster films) – which had been considered disposable trash – as high art. The act of placing a text in a new context is sufficient to produce such a creative misreading. Putting a movie poster in an art museum leads us to read the poster in a different way: not as an advertisement for a film but as a work of art in its own right. Shakespeare was considered mass entertainment and was performed across the United States in Vaudeville shows. When Vaudeville was eclipsed by movies, Shakespeare was repurposed as high art.

As we read literary texts, we should practice reading with and against the grain. When reading against the grain, we should practice reading both to resist and to repurpose.



## Reading Literary Works [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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# Interpreting Literary Works

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Interpretation Introduction](#)
- [Discourses](#)
- [How to Interpret Literary Texts Using Schemata](#)
- [Symptomatic and Explicatory Interpretations](#)
- [Steps to Interpretation](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Interpreting Literary Works \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Interpretation Introduction

Interpretation is the process of *making meaning* from a text. Literary theorists have different understandings of what meaning is, what constitutes a “good” interpretation, and

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Interpreting Literary Works Rubric.

whether we should even be interpreting literary texts at all. Frank Kermode, for example, claimed that the only people who are able to interpret stories properly are insiders, but even the most knowledgeable insiders – such as Jesus’ disciples – are prone to errors (Jesus had to explain his parables to the disciples because they needed his help). Susan Sontag argued that we should refrain from interpretation and confront the literary and artistic work “as is” so we can experience it on its own terms and not as a different thing (such as an explanation). Umberto Eco stated that literature allows for a range of interpretations but that some interpretations are better than others (though we need to establish standards to assess the quality of different interpretations).

Disagreements about interpretation focus mainly on the reader’s limits. Should the reader be able to make any meaning *whatsoever* from a text? Does the text resist interpretation and insist on being read on its own terms? What constrains the reader’s freedom to interpret? Do constraints arise from the author, from within the text itself, from within the reader, or from within the culture? *Whose* culture, we might also ask, should determine the proper interpretation: the reader’s, the author’s, or someone else’s?

Interpretation is a process of gathering evidence (from within the literary text) and making reasoned inferences from that evidence. Our goal when interpreting a text is to offer a better interpretation than the others available. A better interpretation is one that meets particular criteria, though we have to justify and explain why we chose those criteria and not others. Because it is possible to overlook evidence, misread evidence, etc., we can say that an interpretation that makes good use of evidence is likely better than one that does not. We can also say that a better interpretation will provide a coherent conceptual framework with which to understand a literary text. A better interpretation might account for possible counter-arguments and make a compelling case against each of them.

A better interpretation is also one that is free from reasoning errors. For example, if someone says  $2+3+4 = 5$ , we can say that their chain of reasoning is flawed. Since it is possible to make reasoning errors, we can likely conclude that an interpretation that includes fewer errors in reasoning is better than an interpretation that has serious errors in reasoning. A better interpretation is likely one that produces a greater quantity and quality of meaning than a competing interpretation. Therefore, some interpretations *are* better than others because they make better use of evidence and reasoning, provide clear conceptual frameworks, and demonstrate advantages over weaker interpretations. Good interpretations give us *insight*.





## Interpretation of a Literary Text

### “Departures”<sup>2</sup>

Storm Jameson

The September day we left for London was cold and cloudily sunny. In the few minutes as the train drew out past the harbour, I felt myself isolated by a barrier of ice from every living human being, including the husband facing me. Like a knot of adders uncoiling themselves one departure slid from another behind my eyes—journeys made feverish by unmanageable longings and ambitions, night journeys in wartime, the darkened corridors crammed with young men in clumsy khaki, smoking, falling asleep, journeys with a heavy baby in one arm. At last I come to the child sitting in a corner of a third-class carriage, waiting, silent, tense with anxiety, for the captain’s wife to return from the ticket office. A bearded gentleman in a frock coat—the stationmaster—saunters up to the open door and says, smiling, something she makes no attempt to hear. Her mother walks lightly across the platform. “Ah, there you are, Mrs. Jameson. Your little girl was afraid you weren’t coming,” he said amiably. Nothing less amiable than Mrs. Jameson’s coldly blue eyes turned on him, and cold voice.

“Nonsense. My child is never afraid.”

Not true . . .

Note contextual facts about the story before doing an interpretation. Scholes, Comley, and Ulmer<sup>3</sup> provide us with the following information:

This selection is the conclusion of a chapter from Margaret Storm Jameson's autobiography, *Journey from the North* [1969]. In it she begins to tell of a train journey from Yorkshire (in the north of England) to London made with her husband during World War I. But, in the telling, her mind moves back through memories of other departures to an anecdote of an earlier departure from Yorkshire, this one with her mother (the wife of a sea captain). Jameson was the author of many novels and other books. (15)

We build a conceptual model of the text by doing a close reading, drawing inferences from what we read, and relating the parts to the whole:

1. The author's current train journey is bringing up memories of a much earlier train journey and the author's mind is traveling through time – "one departure slid from another" – as her body travels through space.
2. This journey through time is deeply disturbing ("adders" are snakes).
3. The narrator's journey through time appears to be involuntary.
4. Being a passenger on a train is – like the narrator's memory – to be unable to control the trip.
5. The inability to control things might be frightening for the narrator.
6. The narrator's memory journey arrives "at last" to her first journey by train.
7. The author (an adult) sees herself when she was a child – "sitting in a corner of a third-class carriage, waiting, silent, tense with anxiety."
8. The child is afraid because her mother abandoned her in a strange place.
9. The stationmaster who comments to the mother – "Your little girl was afraid you weren't coming" – seems more concerned with the child's wellbeing than the child's mother is.
10. The mother is more concerned about her image as a responsible mother – "Nonsense. My child is never afraid." – than she is about her child.
11. The mother's comment is also a message to the child that showing fear is not acceptable.
12. If the child shows fear it might bring judgment upon the mother, which is also not acceptable.

13. The mother has a Stoic attitude – British people call it “Keeping a stiff upper lip”: a commitment to avoid showing fear.
14. This attitude has been dominant in England for hundreds of years (a bit of contextual knowledge about this English attitude is needed here).
15. This Stoic attitude prevents people from being known by others, leading to them feeling “isolated.”
16. The lessons learned by the child in this moment have affected her negatively until the present day (“I felt myself isolated by a barrier of ice from every living human being, including the husband facing me.”)
17. The story identifies the harm caused by the mother, her “lesson,” and the Stoic attitude in general.
18. There isn’t a clear resolution in this story, meaning that the narrator does not solve her problem of feeling isolated. Rather, she solves a different problem, which is figuring out when and where this feeling originated.
19. The coda, or aftermath of the events depicted, is her writing of the story.

The “meaning” of the story is that trauma can originate in socio-cultural conditions, in this case the Stoic attitudes of Britain as exemplified by the narrator’s mother.

Notice how this step-by-step reading does the following:

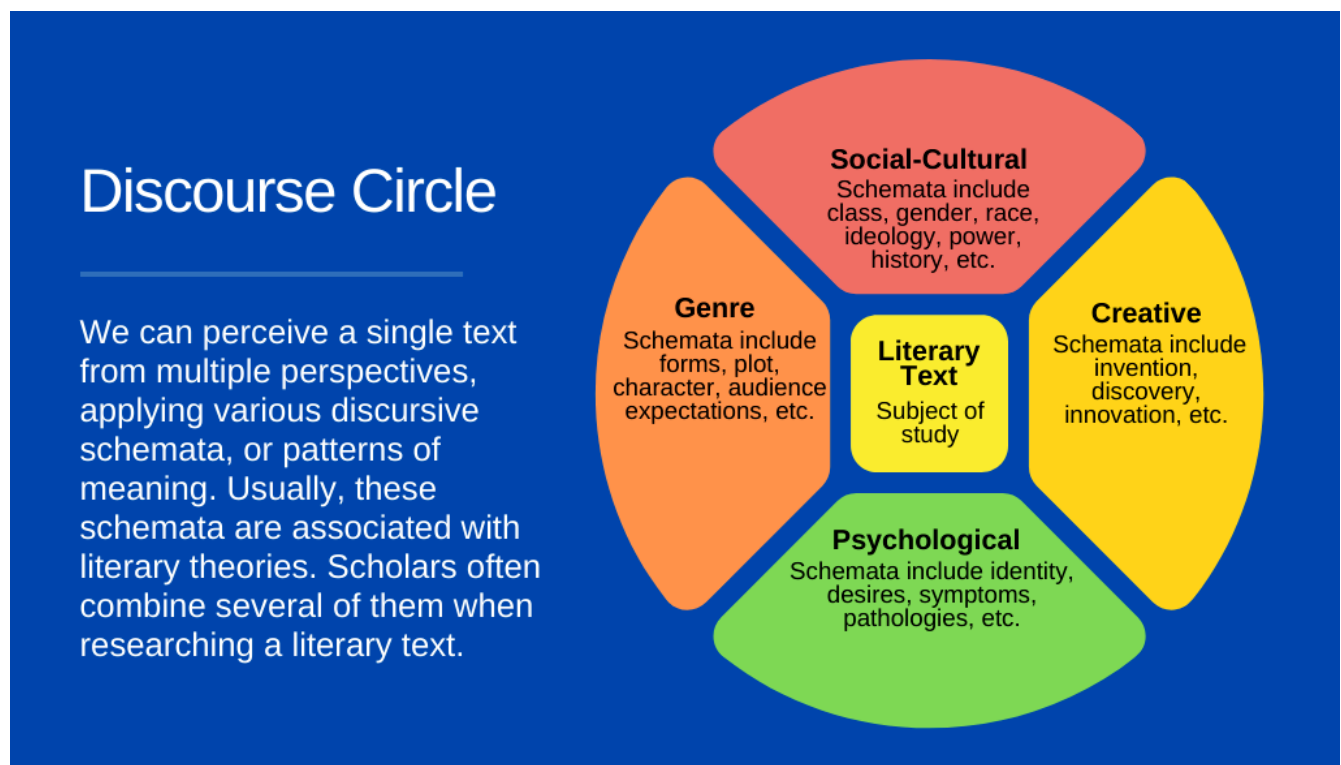
1. It uses evidence – in the form of quotes – from the literary text.
2. It creates a conceptual “model text” – in this case it explains that the author travels backward in her mind through time and sees herself as a child who learns a painful lesson.
3. It infers general statements – in this case about dominant attitudes – from specific observations of people, places, and events.
4. It makes explicit that which is implied in the text.
5. It argues that the literary text has a particular purpose or point – in this case to criticize the Stoic attitude in Britain.

The interpretive steps above are by no means the final word on this story and you should feel free to make your own interpretation of it. Note, however, that interpreters of literature make use of others’ work. If your interpretation goes further or in a different direction from the one above, you would make use of this example to explain how and why yours differs.



## Discourses

Scholars read literary works within a variety of discourses. Roughly, these discourses are grouped in four general types: social-cultural, creative, psychological, and genre:



Scholars apply discourses not only to literary texts but also to the *contexts* around those texts. Contexts can include the life of the author, the place and time of the writing, the audience, other literary works, critical reception of the work, etc. So, for example, a scholar may discuss the poetry of Ezra Pound using the discourse of genre, which the critic can apply both to Pound's poetry and to his context, which includes the poetry of other writers of his time.



## How to Interpret Literary Texts Using Schemata

There are numerous schools of interpretation, each with their own interpretive schema. A schema is a broad theoretical framework – a meta-story – for understanding the world. We discussed a variety of these theoretical frameworks in the previous chapter. To oversimplify: psychoanalysis uses the schema of personal development; Marxism uses the schema of class struggle; feminism uses the schema of gender inequality; Christianity uses the schema of sin and redemption; etc.

### Producing an Interpretation

1. Notice significant details in the literary text
2. Find a pattern in those details
3. Map the pattern found in the literary text to an interpretive schema
4. Claim that X in the literary text is really Y from the schema

When we write about a literary text, we are first creating a conceptual model – a critical description – of the text, seeing it as an author's attempt to address a problem (which can be aesthetic, technical, social, political, etc.). The model we construct is built from a set of details about the literary work and its context, organized into a pattern. Michael Baxandall, an art critic and historian, notes that we build conceptual models any time we think or write about an object – a literary text, a person, a natural phenomenon, a concept; when we encounter any of these things we are constructing/fabricating a model of it in our minds.

Baxandall describes this conceptualizing process as it relates to creating critical descriptions of paintings.<sup>4</sup>

If we wish to explain pictures, in the sense of expounding them in terms of their historical causes, what we actually explain seems likely to be not the unmediated picture but the picture as considered under a partially interpretative description. This description is an untidy and lively affair.

Firstly, the nature of language or serial conceptualization means that the description is less a representation of the picture, or even a representation of seeing the picture, than a representation of thinking about having seen the picture. To put it in another way, we address a relationship between picture and concepts.

Secondly, many of the more powerful terms in the description will be a little indirect, in that they refer first not to the physical picture itself but to the effect the picture has on us, or to other things that would have a comparable effect on us, or to inferred causes of an object that would have such an effect on us as the picture does. The last of these is particularly to the point. On the one hand, that such a process penetrates our language so deeply does suggest that causal explanation cannot be avoided and so bears thinking about. On the other, one may want to be alert to the fact that the description which, seen schematically, will be part of the object of explanation already embodies preemptively explanatory elements – such as the concept of ‘design’.

Thirdly, the description has only the most general independent meaning and depends for such precision as it has on the presence of the picture. It works demonstratively – we are pointing to interest – and ostensively, taking its meaning from reciprocal reference, a sharpening to-and-fro, between itself and the particular.

These are general facts of language that become prominent in art criticism, a heroically exposed use of language, and they have (it seems to me) radical implications for how one can explain pictures – or, rather, for what it is we are doing when we follow our instinct to attempt to explain pictures. (10-11)

4. Michael Baxandall: *Patterns of Intention—On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*. Yale University Press, 1981.



Below is an example of this kind of work by a famous critic, Walter Benjamin, writing about a picture by Paul Klee called *Angelus Novus* (1920):



From Benjamin:

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Notice that Benjamin creates a conceptual model of the picture by accounting for the details of the picture, but also by explaining what he makes up about the picture and its effect on himself. Benjamin's reading involves his imagination and he famously turned the picture into an allegory of modernity.

From Baxandall, we can learn the process of creating conceptual models of literary works by replacing the word "picture" with "text." In the example above in which we read Storm Jameson's "Departures," we built a conceptual model of the text by, in Baxandall's terms, creating "a representation of thinking about having [read the text]." We referred "to the effect the [text] has on us, or to other things that would have a comparable effect on us, or to inferred causes of an object that would have such an effect on us as the [text] does." Finally, "the description has only the most general independent meaning and depends for such precision as it has on the presence of the [text]."

The process of creating conceptual models often goes unrecognized. For instance, when we identify a person by their face, we are going through an enormous number of sensory and mental processes very quickly. Our brains take a bunch of shapes, lines, and colors, and construct a mental model, then compare it to an existing mental model and conclude, "Oh yeah, that's Jane." In working with literary texts we are more explicit about the process. For instance, in Cleanth Brooks' writing about "Canonization," he selects and organizes features of the text showing how they relate to one another and to his framing concept: paradox. Propp does the same thing around narrative actants and functions in folk tales.

Notice that interpretation moves from the specific to the general, from the details of the



literary work into more abstract conceptual terms. Most critics only use some, not all, of the details from a literary work in the interpretation. If you disagree with a critic, you can pose a contrary interpretation by claiming that the critic overlooked significant details from the literary work, formed a misleading pattern, and mapped those details to the wrong schema. Finally, you should offer your own interpretation, following the steps outlined above. Many critics combine interpretive schemas. Also, it is acceptable to be suspicious of schema and of overarching narratives, especially ones that supposedly “explain everything.”

In the sample interpretation above, the schemata used to interpret the Storm Jameson story “Departures” is social-cultural. The interpretation views the story through a lens of cultural critique that sees Jameson as criticizing the dominant Stoic attitude in British life.



## Symptomatic and Explicatory Interpretations

David Bordwell, in his book *Making Meaning* (which is primarily about film interpretation but works quite well for understanding literary interpretation), discusses two major interpretive traditions: *explicatory* and *symptomatic*. A *symptomatic* reading is one in which the critic treats the text with suspicion, as though it disguises its true intentions. Your goal, using this method, is to get the text to “confess” its meaning by pointing to “symptoms” in the text. Freud stated, “A symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance; it is a consequence of the process of repression” (“Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety” 20.91). The symptomatic critic is looking for signs that betray the real intention of the text or the author, just as Freud seized on forgotten names or slips of the tongue as symptoms that more accurately revealed the patient’s state of mind than did their explicit statements. In a symptomatic reading, a reader might argue that a text that seems anti-racist hides a racist intent or effect.

An *explicatory* reading is one in which the critic turns implied meaning into explicit meaning. An explicatory reading does not treat the literary text with suspicion. For instance, you might find a text that seems anti-racist, and your interpretation explains how it is, in fact, anti-racist.

Bordwell argues that critics often switch the way they read depending on the literary work. Some literary works — ones that critics believe are ideologically abusive — are read symptomatically, while other works — those critics believe are ideologically healthy — are read using explicatory methods.

Bordwell presents the following passage about *explicatory criticism*:

On a summer day, a suburban father looks out at the family lawn and says to his teen-aged son: “The grass is so tall I can hardly see the cat walking through it.” The son construes this to mean: “Mow the lawn.” This is an *implicit* meaning. In a similar way, the interpreter of a film may take referential or explicit meaning as only the point of departure for inferences about implicit meanings. That is, she or he *explicates* the film, just as the son might turn to his pal and explain, “That means Dad wants me to mow the lawn.” Explicatory criticism rests upon the belief that the principal goal of critical activity is to ascribe implicit meanings to films (Making 43).

The flip side of this paradigm is that critics tend to perform symptomatic criticism on texts they consider ideologically suspect. Bordwell explains *symptomatic criticism* in this passage:

On a summer day, a father looks out at the family lawn and says to his teen-aged son: “The grass is so tall I can hardly see the cat walking through it.” The son slopes off to mow the lawn, but the interchange has been witnessed by a team of live-in social scientists, and they interpret the father’s remarks in various ways. One sees it as typical of an American household’s rituals of power and negotiation. Another observer construes the remark as revealing a characteristic bourgeois concern for appearances and a pride in private property. Yet another, perhaps having had some training in the humanities, insists that the father envies the son’s sexual proficiency and that the feline image constitutes a fantasy that

unwittingly symbolizes (a) the father's identification with a predator; (b) his desire for liberation from his stifling life; his fears of castration (the cat in question has been neutered); or (d) all of the above. [...] Now if these observers were to propose their interpretations to the father, he might deny them with great vehemence, but this would not persuade the social scientists to repudiate their conclusions. They would reply that the meanings they ascribed to the remark were involuntary, concealed by a referential meaning (a report on the height of the grass) and an implicit meaning (the order to mow the lawn). The social scientists have constructed a set of *symptomatic* meanings, and these cannot be demolished by the father's protest. Whether the sources of meaning are intrapsychic or broadly cultural, they lie outside the conscious control of the individual who produces the utterance. We are now practicing a "hermeneutics of suspicion," a scholarly debunking, a strategy that sees apparently innocent interactions as masking unflattering impulses (Making 71–72).

Critics employing the symptomatic approach look for "incompatibility between the film's explicit moral and what emerges as a cultural symptom" (75). In other words, the symptomatic approach looks for instances that indicate a text's explicit message hides a less flattering message. Such symptomatic readings warn people not to be fooled by appearances; the true, yet disguised, intentions of a text — its "repressed meanings" — are apparent if you know how to look for them. Explicatory criticism, by contrast, urges the audience not to miss the text's implied messages.

The distinction between explicatory and symptomatic criticism is hinted at by their names. Both have to do with intentionality. An explicatory interpretation explains — it clarifies the author's overt intention (and is generally flattering), while a symptomatic interpretation points to a covert intention (and is generally unflattering); it claims that a literary work is a symptom of an unflattering impulse or state of affairs.

If we look at "Tell Me a Story" by Paul Auster (below), we might say that his overt intention is to explain how he became a writer by listening to his father's stories. His covert intention could be to reproduce his father's evasiveness by telling stories that distract from his vulnerabilities. We might go further and argue that storytelling is a form of manipulation and control used to fool people.

Note that both kinds of criticism still use conceptual frameworks.



## Steps to Interpretation

An interpretation, which translates the details of a literary work into the schemata of a discourse, requires that we go through a series of steps.

1. A **denotative** reading of a text provides an inventory of what is in it. It tells us things like setting, characters, action, point of view, etc.
2. A **connotative** reading of a text tells us what these things suggest or “mean” within their cultural context; it tells us what is *implicit*.
3. An **explicatory** reading argues that a text has an overt intention; it has a purpose and lesson(s) for the reader.
4. A **symptomatic** reading reveals that a text has a covert intention; it tries to conceal or disguise an unflattering truth.

At the very least, any interpretation must produce an explicatory reading, which is itself based upon solid denotative and connotative readings. A symptomatic reading must be based on denotative, connotative, and explicatory readings, and must show how the symptomatic reading differs from the explicatory one.

Here is [a video explaining the four levels of meaning](#).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=111#oembed-1>



## Example: Interpretation of excerpt from “Sonny’s Blues”

1. **Denotative:** The narrator’s mother tells him a family secret about an uncle who was killed by white men while his brother – the narrator’s father – watched.
2. **Connotative:** The mother wants her son – the narrator – to realize that, as was the case with the uncle, his brother Sonny is at risk even though Sonny is “good” and “smart.”
3. **Explicatory:** The narrator retells the story to his reader because he wants us to avoid making the same mistake that he did, which is that he “pretty well forgot my promise to Mama” and failed to let his brother know he was there for him. In other words, he forgot solidarity is required to resist racism. Read within a socio-cultural framework, the mother’s story reveals the sense of entitlement and impunity that defines whiteness – “They was having fun, they just wanted to scare him, the way they do sometimes, you know” – and the precarity that defines blackness in America – “I ain’t telling you all this,’ she said, ‘to make you scared or bitter or to make you hate nobody. I’m telling you this because you got a brother. And the world ain’t changed.’” The mother’s story to the narrator is a version of “the talk” that black parents give to their children about the dangers of living in a racist society.
4. **Symptomatic:** Typically, a literary work that reveals a social pathology (in this case, racism), doesn’t need to be subjected to a symptomatic reading because critics understand the work as already doing a symptomatic reading (of the society). We might argue, however, that the narrator is retelling this story because he feels the need to confess his guilt for failing to fulfill his promise to his mother. But the narrator admits that motive, so stating it more plainly in our interpretation is explicatory and not symptomatic.



## Reading Literary Works [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=111#h5p-14>



## Exercises

1. Practice your reading skills on the story below using explication, analysis, or compari-

son/contrast.

- Make sure you tell us what the story is *about*. At a literal or denotative level it is about a son remembering his father telling him stories. But we also need to know at a connotative level what the story is about. Is it about the power of stories? Is it about emotional connection/disconnection? Is it about how the author became an author? Ask yourself questions like these and answer them.
- Make sure you identify a schemata you are using – genre, social-cultural, creative, and/or psychological.
- Make sure you create a model text from the story. I provide an example of this with the Storm Jameson text on our Interpreting Literature page.
- Make sure you move from specific to general, showing how you made the connections. For instance, the son's request for a story (specific) means he wants emotional connection with his father (general). The father tells a story about himself that is not true (specific), therefore deflecting his son's request (general) but also satisfying the son's request through substitution (general) by telling a compelling story rather than a true one (specific).

### **Tell Me a Story**

---

I remember a day very like today. A drizzling Sunday, lethargy and quiet in the house: the world at half-speed. My father was taking a nap, or had just awoken from one, and somehow I was on the bed with him, the two of us alone in the room. Tell me a story. It must have begun like that. And because he was not doing anything, because he was still drowsing in the languor of the afternoon, he did just what I asked, launching into a story without missing a beat. I remember it all so clearly. It seems as if I have just walked out of that room, with its gray light and tangle of quilts on the bed, as if, simply by closing my eyes, I could walk back into it any time I want.

He told me of his prospecting days in South America. It was a tale of high adventure, fraught with mortal dangers, hair-raising escapes, and improbable twists of fortune: hacking his way through the jungle with a machete, fighting off bandits with his bare hands, shooting his donkey when it broke its leg. His language was flowery and convoluted, probably an echo of the books he himself had read as a boy. But it was precisely this literary style that enchanted me. Not only was

he telling me new things about himself, unveiling to me the world of his distant past, but he was telling it with new and strange words. This language was just as important as the story itself. It belonged to it, and in some sense was indistinguishable from it. Its very strangeness was proof of authenticity.

It did not occur to me to think this might have been a made-up story. For years afterward I went on believing it. Even when I had passed the point when I should have known better, I still felt there might have been some truth to it. It gave me something to hold on to about my father, and I was reluctant to let go. At last I had an explanation for his mysterious evasions, his indifference to me. He was a romantic figure, a man with a dark and exciting past, and his present life was only a kind of stopping place, a way of biding his time until he took off on his next adventure. He was working out his plan, figuring out how to retrieve the gold that lay buried deep in the heart of the Andes.

–Paul Auster<sup>5</sup>

1. Do an interpretation of the story above, using either an explicatory or symptomatic approach (see rubric below). Remember to first construct a conceptual model of the literary work, which accounts for its features.
2. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
3. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

## Interpretation Rubric

### Use of Schemata

Successfully used one or more patterns of meaning (genre, social-cultural, creative, and/or psychological) to interpret and/or critique a literary work.

### Moves from Specific to General

5. Paul Auster, "Tell Me a Story." From *The Invention of Solitude*, by Paul Auster.



Interpretation successfully moves from the specific to the general, from the details of the literary work into more conceptual terms.

**Grammar/Mechanics**

MLA or APA was used correctly while interpreting literary works. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.

# Critiquing Literary Works

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



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We discuss the following topics on this page:

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- [Critical Discourses](#)
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- [Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Exercise](#)



## Introduction

Critique is something we do all the time when we consume media like books, television shows, movies, or online content. Critique just means we explain why something is good or bad, or why we like it or dislike it. The key to critique is to supply reasons for our judgment. The better the reasons, and the more we connect them to the text or to our experience of the text, the better the critique.

Critics aim to improve literature and many critics believe literature, in certain circum-

stances, can improve society. Literature is certainly about pleasure and displeasure, but it is also about what is true and false, and what is right and wrong. The “stakes” of criticism, therefore, are usually much higher than promoting or demoting a particular literary work. The larger aim of critique is to set a high bar for what counts as quality literature; the word “quality” can refer to form or structure, features, originality, purpose, function, effects, or any other aspect of a literary work.

Literary scholars often engage in critique, meaning they evaluate the quality of a literary work. Critique is not just a matter of personal opinion, though scholars can and do have personal preferences, because critique requires research into evaluative criteria and the particulars of each literary work. In addition, critique is comparative; it claims that a literary work is superior, inferior, or equal to another literary work. Critique is not just *descriptive* (i.e., detailing the features of a literary work); it is also *prescriptive* (i.e., it tells us what good literary writing should be). Students sometimes imagine that “critique” means finding things wrong with a piece of literature. It doesn’t have to be that at all. You can praise a work too. You just have to explain why it’s praise or blameworthy.

Literature can be critiqued using a vast number of criteria. For instance, a poem can be critiqued for its choice of subject and theme, setting, speaker, addressee, imagery, word choice, rhythm, sounds, repetition, form, structure, tone, pace, title, flow, use of irony, metaphor, allusion, and hundreds of other factors. Each poem can be compared to others in terms of originality, significance, artfulness, insightfulness, and power. To be an effective critic, you have to keep asking yourself and the text questions. The more questions you produce, the better. Another point is that you can evaluate not just the literary work but also your experience of the work. You can discuss whether you find pleasure in reading the work (a lack of pleasure doesn’t necessarily mean you had a bad experience or that the work is bad), difficulty, or emotions like apprehension, suspense, or satisfaction.

Many students are reticent to critique literary works, believing that art, like literature, should not be judged, or that all art is more or less equal, or that it is unfair to judge a work of art or an artist because it might hurt someone’s feelings or sensibilities. But these excuses for avoiding critique don’t really stand up for the simple reason that literary authors are *themselves* critical of their work. They read other authors’ works and determine for themselves what counts as good and what doesn’t. Most authors want to produce something “good” or “better,” whatever those terms mean to them. So if authors use critique to evaluate literature, surely critics can too.





## Critical Discourses

Critics use a variety of critical discourses to evaluate literary works. These discourses contain values and sets of criteria that help us determine literary quality. Some critical discourses focus on social and political issues in and around the writing, while others focus on formal qualities of the writing itself: its structure, language, and themes. Many critics accept that literary form has political implications and that the two types of criticism – social and formal – can’t be easily separated.

We usually associate critical discourse with movements or theories. Movements include neoclassicism, romanticism, and modernism. Theories include New Criticism, reader response, and new historicism. Each movement and theory operates under a different set of principles and values about quality. A work that is “good” according to one theory may be bad in terms of another! To write criticism, you need to familiarize yourself with the concepts and criteria of a movement or theory and become adept at applying these concepts to literary works.

Just as critics evaluate literary works, critics also evaluate other works of criticism. One critic might say that another critic’s work is superficial, malicious, or just wrong. As a critic, you need to state your criteria explicitly. These criteria should apply not just to one work but to other works too – whether all literary works, works of the same genre, or works with similar purposes. For instance, you might claim that a good short story would be one that is relatable and has tension. Then you need to justify those criteria. Another critic might argue with the ones you provide and offer different ones. You need to be able to defend the criteria you provide.



## Case Study: Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro”

Let’s look at a famous poem by Ezra Pound that critics generally rate as extremely good and significant. The poem is very short – two lines (or three, if you include the title) – and Pound wrote his own piece of criticism about his work, explaining how the final version improved upon an earlier version.

## IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd :  
Petals on a wet, black bough .

*Ezra Pound*

On "In a Station of the Metro"

Ezra Pound (from *Gaudier-Brzeska*, 1916)

Three years ago in Paris I got out of a "metro" train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. And that evening, as I went home along the Rue Raynouard, I was still trying and I found, suddenly, the expression. I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation . . . not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. It was just that – a "pattern," or hardly a pattern, if by "pattern" you mean something with a "repeat" in it. But it was a word, the beginning, for me, of a language in colour. I do not mean that I was unfamiliar with the kindergarten stories about colours being like tones in music. I think that sort of thing is nonsense. If you try to make notes permanently correspond with particular colours, it is like tying narrow meanings to symbols.

That evening, in the Rue Raynouard, I realized quite vividly that if I were a painter, or if I had, often, *that kind* of emotion, of even if I had the energy to get

paints and brushes and keep at it, I might find a new school of painting that would speak only by arrangements in colour.

And so, when I came to read Kandinsky's chapter on the language of form and colour, I found little that was new to me. I only felt that someone else understood what I understood, and had written it out very clearly. It seems quite natural to me that an artist should have just as much pleasure in an arrangement of planes or in a pattern of figures, as in painting portraits of fine ladies, or in portraying the Mother of God as the symbolists bid us.

When I find people ridiculing the new arts, or making fun of the clumsy odd terms that we use in trying to talk of them amongst ourselves; when they laugh at our talking about the "ice-block quality" in Picasso, I think it is only because they do not know what thought is like, and they are familiar only with argument and gibe and opinion. That is to say, they can only enjoy what they have been brought up to consider enjoyable, or what some essayist has talked about in mellifluous phrases. They think only "the shells of thought," as de Gourmont calls them; the thoughts that have been already thought out by others.

Any mind that is worth calling a mind must have needs beyond the existing categories of language, just as a painter must have pigments or shades more numerous than the existing names of the colours.

Perhaps this is enough to explain the words in my "Vortex": —

"Every concept, every emotion, presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form. It belongs to the art of this form."

That is to say, my experience in Paris should have gone into paint. If instead of colour I had perceived sound or planes in relation, I should have expressed it in music or in sculpture. Colour was, in that instance, the "primary pigment"; I mean that it was the first adequate equation that came into consciousness. The Vorticist uses the "primary pigment." Vorticism is art before it has spread itself into flaccidity, into elaboration and secondary application.

What I have said of one vorticist art can be transposed for another vorticist art. But let me go on then with my own branch of vorticism, about which I can probably speak with greater clarity. All poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as orna-

ments. The point of Imagisme is that it does not use images *as ornaments*. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language.

I once saw a small child go to an electric light switch as say, “Mamma, can I *open* the light?” She was using the age-old language of exploration, the language of art. It was a sort of metaphor, but she was not using it as ornamentation.

One is tired of ornamentations, they are all a trick, and any sharp person can learn them.

The Japanese have had the sense of exploration. They have understood the beauty of this sort of knowing. A Chinaman [*sic*] said long ago that if a man can’t say what he has to say in twelve lines he had better keep quiet. The Japanese have evolved the still shorter form of the *hokku*.

“The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:

A butterfly.”

That is the substance of a very well-known *hokku*. Victor Plarr tells me that once, when he was walking over snow with a Japanese naval officer, they came to a place where a cat had crossed the path, and the officer said, “Stop, I am making a poem.” Which poem was, roughly, as follows: —

“The footsteps of the cat upon the snow:

(are like) plum-blossoms.”

The words “are like” would not occur in the original, but I add them for clarity.

The “one image poem” is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work “of second intensity.” Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence: —

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals, on a wet, black bough.”

I dare say it is meaningless unless one has drifted into a certain vein of thought. In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing

outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.

Notice that in Pound's commentary on his poem, he uses words that we typically use to evaluate things: words like "beautiful," "vividly," "pleasure," "adequate," and "bad." When he describes his first attempt to write a poem that captured the feeling he had in the Metro, he critiques it as being a work "of second intensity." It was Pound's dissatisfaction with his own efforts that led him to keep going until he was satisfied with his work. Only at that point of satisfaction did he consider his poem to be finished.

Notice too that Pound criticizes other people for what he considers to be their inability to adequately critique what is new in art.

When I find people ridiculing the new arts, or making fun of the clumsy odd terms that we use in trying to talk of them amongst ourselves; when they laugh at our talking about the "ice-block quality" in Picasso, I think it is only because they do not know what thought is like, and they are familiar only with argument and gibe and opinion. That is to say, they can only enjoy what they have been brought up to consider enjoyable, or what some essayist has talked about in mellifluous phrases. They think only "the shells of thought," as de Gourmont calls them; the thoughts that have been already thought out by others.

Here Pound is disagreeing with the critics who fault the art he likes; he basically says, "they don't get it – because they are stuck in their old habits."

Notice too that Pound is naming the kind of art he likes, referring to it as Imagism and Vorticism. By doing so, he is creating not just the categories of new art; he is also creating the language necessary to critique that art.

Pound is teaching us a valuable lesson here; the artist and the critic are partners working together to help audiences appreciate works of art. Sometimes this partnership exists within the same person (here, Pound assumes the roles of both poet and critic), and sometimes they are assumed by different people, as was the case with the critic Cleanth Brooks and the author William Faulkner.





## The Stakes of Criticism

Good critics are good teachers. They perform a valuable role by helping writers and readers distinguish between good and bad literature. We might consider some literature to be “bad” because it doesn’t have a clear purpose, or because it aims for a bad purpose (such as misleading people). It can be bad because it has a good purpose but doesn’t achieve its aim; we might say of such works that the idea is ok but the writer failed in the execution.

For much of its early history, criticism was taught as a set of universal standards. Aristotle, one of the earliest and most important literary theorists, wrote a book called *The Poetics*. “Poetics” means “making,” and what Aristotle was aiming for was an account of how literature was made. *The Poetics* consisted of four smaller books on different literary genres: tragedy, comedy, epic and lyric. Of the original four, only three remain (the book on the comic genre was lost sometime in the middle ages).

While Aristotle’s *Poetics* appears to be mostly *descriptive* – accounting for the forms and functions of the various genres – many of the literary writers and critics who followed him used his work *prescriptively*. In other words, they used it to determine what was good literature (i.e., whatever adhered to Aristotle’s theory) and what was bad literature (i.e., whatever deviated from it) and encouraged writers to stick to the formulas.

Shifting from theory to criticism – in which the descriptive becomes prescriptive – is common in the field of literary studies. While it has helped writers and readers better understand literary arts, a problem with this approach is that it can result in the rejection of new works that don’t fit the constraints set by the theory. The long history of criticism in recent centuries has led to innovations, such as the appreciation of genres – like novels, short stories, and essays – that hadn’t yet been invented in Aristotle’s time, and shifted from “universal principles” of criticism to more situated ones.

This shift away from universalism resulted from a recognition that literature was not produced and consumed solely by a monolithic dominant culture, but also by people who had been historically marginalized. The literary “canon” – what is assumed to be the “best/most important” literature – has been expanded to include works by women authors, LGBTQ+ authors, and non-European and non-white authors. Key to the expansion of the literary canon was the work of critics who argued passionately that the standards of literary quality

that had prevailed was, intentionally or not, excluding literature by these writers. New standards had to be articulated: ones that situated the writing of various cultures in their own terms.

The literary canon is a hotly contested subject because there is only so much room in it. The canon consists of works that are routinely included in anthologies and textbooks and in literature classes. A whole field of experts – scholars, critics, editors and publishers, teachers, and administrators – determines what is and isn't in the canon. They present their cases for what should be included, excluded, added, or subtracted.

The argument over the canon is a very high stakes one, but not all literary criticism is about the canon. Criticism aims to shift our valuation of a literary work: to appreciate its virtues or to be wary of its shortcomings. Good criticism opens our minds to new possibilities for literature in general, and not just for a particular literary work. It is a key part of the literary world.



## Steps to Criticism

The first thing a critic must do is establish criteria, which are standards of quality. Standards are words that denote particular qualities, which we put into columns that indicate good or bad – or better or worse. We can adopt critical standards from others, or we can make our own. Either way, we have to explain why we chose *those* standards and not others. Many critics begin their essays by contrasting their critical approach with those of another critic; they do so to establish that their critical approach has advantages over the other one. In other words, critics criticize other critics!

We might compare the work of the literary critic to that of a food critic. All food critics have standards about what is bad food (i.e., food that tastes so unpleasant that it is inedible) and what is good food (i.e., delicious!). Of course, food critics don't just say "unpleasant" or "delicious" and call it a day. They use lots of words to indicate *why* something tastes unpleasant or delicious. And they use different criteria for different things; for instance, they have different standards for desserts than for salads. We don't want to evaluate a salad by saying that it fails as a dessert (unless it was intended as a dessert).

Different cultures have their own standards for taste. For instance, in European cultures, insects are normally considered to be inedible. Yet 80% of the world's population eats insects and people have criteria for what counts as the most delicious insects and the most delicious ways of preparing them. We don't have to change our minds just because someone else likes something that we don't, but we can learn that standards vary – and that people may have excellent reasons for keeping those standards. In the next section of this chapter, we discuss intercultural competence, which is how we learn to shift perspectives and understand the values held by people with different cultural experiences.

The late 19th century English critic Matthew Arnold championed literary works that had “sweetness and light,” by which he meant beauty and intelligence. Such writing is likely to please most people. But one thing to know about literary criticism is that lots of “unpleasant” writing has earned praise from one literary critic or another. For example, the 20th century critic and author, Georges Bataille, praised writing that he called “heterogenous,” which he defined as non-productive, excessive, and “unassimilable” (which means something like “inedible”). His point was that such writing presented us with important knowledge about the world and about life. His own writing strikes most readers as scandalous and morbid, but his criticism explains and justifies his choices. Again, we don't have to like it, but it helps to understand the claims he is making.

The second thing a critic needs to do is apply the critical standards to a case study: a particular literary work (or works). Criticism is often comparative, meaning that the critic will evaluate two or more works and discuss important qualitative differences between them. The critic will explain what a text does well and what it doesn't do well, according to the critical standards.

Ultimately, the critic reminds the reader why they chose or invented the critical standards and why other critics should adopt them. It also explains why literature in general would improve if writers followed these criteria and why it would deteriorate if they don't.



## Sample Criticism

### r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r

who  
a)s w(e loo)k  
upnowgath  
PPEGORHRASS  
eringint(o-  
aThe):l  
eA  
!p:  
S  
(r  
rIvInG .gRrEaPsPhOs)  
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly  
,grasshopper;

E. E. Cummings

a  
to

How do we critique a poem like “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”? At first glance it looks like an incomprehensible mess. Maybe we should give it an “F” and say it is a bad poem because it makes no sense. But doing so would be a mistake. What if we assume the poem does make sense, but not in the ways that are familiar to us? Let’s assume, for now, that Cummings is challenging the way we make sense of poems (and maybe of the world). We can use the criteria from Victor Shklovsky then, who argued that literature should defamiliarize the world by slowing down our perception. In Shklovsky’s view, a “good” literary work

is one that increases our awareness of perception. I will argue that “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” does that and is thus a good poem.

We still need to know *what* Cummings is defamiliarizing and how he is doing it. It seems he is doing two things at once:

1. Defamiliarizing poetry itself and how we read it.
2. Defamiliarizing an experience that the poet had and sharing it with his readers.

On the first point, we are used to poems that we can read out loud. Perhaps we can read “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” out loud, but it presents numerous difficulties. For the title, do we read each letter separately or try to pronounce it as a word? What do we do with all the blank spaces? Do we pause our reading when we come to them? What do we do with “!p.”; do we say “exclamation point, p, colon”? What do we do with “rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly”? Two words are mingled here: “rearrangingly” (which is not a common adverb) and “become.” Should we speak them as one word or as two separate words? The last line of the poem is “,grasshopper;” – it seems to ground the poem because we can now identify a subject (or at least a provisional one). The title of the poem now makes sense – “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” is grasshopper with the letters rearranged. Now the word “rearrangingly” makes some sense. Cummings is rearranging the spelling of the word grasshopper for the title. But why?

To answer that question we need to turn to the second point, about Cummings’ experiences. The poet (along with at least one other person) had an experience in which a grasshopper leapt near him. At first he was surprised by its movement and didn’t know what it was. There was a brief moment before he was able to identify it as a grasshopper. The interim – the moment where he experienced it without knowing what it was – is the experience of defamiliarization that he wished to capture and communicate in his poem. The poem is not about the grasshopper leaping. It is about the poet experiencing a variety of sense experiences before identifying what it is or what it means. The apparent disorder of the poem simulates the experience of surprise followed by recognition.

Because Cummings’ poem successfully combines two kinds of defamiliarization – of the world and of poetry – it stands as a lesson in the power of poetry and the need for poets to continue to innovate and find new ways to defamiliarize both our experiences of the world and of poetry itself.





## Takeaways: Key Points about Literary Criticism

1. Critics go beyond telling us *about* a literary work. They make arguments about the *quality* of a literary work using evaluative terms.
2. To do criticism requires that we establish *criteria*: the standards by which we evaluate literary works. Critics must also justify their choice of criteria, arguing why it is preferable over another choice.
3. Criteria relate to particular literary theories or movements within literary arts.
4. Criteria may vary depending on the kind of the literary work being evaluated.
5. Criticism can be high stakes (for example, about what should be included in the literary canon) or low stakes.
6. Criticism must apply the criteria rigorously to a case study (a work of literature) or do a comparative study of two or more works of literature.
7. The critic should remind readers why their chosen criteria has advantages for other critics and for literary authors.



## Exercise

1. Make a critique of the literary work below, a literary anecdote by Walter Benjamin, who was an early 20th century German-Jewish writer. What critical standards will you use? What do you need to know about Benjamin's writing to adequately critique it?

- Brief note: The Benjamin story seems to conceal as much as it reveals. There was an actual historical context for the story; Benjamin had gone to Riga, Latvia to meet Asja Lacis (who directed a children's theater), but didn't let her know he was coming. Both Walter and Asja were married to other people. Also, there had been actual shooting in Riga recently. Notice that the main "action" of the story – the narrator seeing the woman or she seeing him – is in the conditional verb tense, meaning it *might* happen but has not actually happened.

### **"Ordnance" Walter Benjamin**

I had arrived in Riga to visit a woman friend. Her house, the town, the language were unfamiliar to me. Nobody was expecting me, no one knew me. For two hours I walked the streets in solitude. Never again have I seen them so. From every gate a flame darted, each cornerstone sprayed sparks, and every streetcar came toward me like a fire engine. For she might have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar. But of the two of us I had to be, at any price, the first to see the other. For had she touched me with the match of her eyes, I should have gone up like a magazine.

# Intercultural Competence

BARRY MAUER; JOHN VENECEK; AND ERIKA HEREDIA



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## Introduction

Until a few decades ago, academic programs focused almost exclusively on literature by DWM (Dead White Men). Then social movements such as civil rights, feminism, LGBTQ+ equality, and anti-colonialism drew attention to writing by women, nonwhite, nonwestern, queer, and contemporary authors, leading to more variety in the literature we study. The group of researchers studying literature has become more varied too as educational opportunities grew for marginalized groups, and networked media created more global connec-



tions. Entering the scholarly conversation about literature is more complicated in some ways now; we need intercultural competence to participate in it effectively and respectfully.

Intercultural competence does not just mean knowledge of different religious, nations, ethnic groups, linguistic communities, genders, etc. It also means learning to perceive one's own culture differently and to examine its rules, values, styles, beliefs, and practices, understanding them as historically contingent (i.e., invented by people in relation to their specific historical circumstances), rather than as unproblematically "natural" or "eternal."



## Discussion of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"

James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" offers a complex set of challenges requiring intercultural competence. Set mostly in Harlem, New York City, in the 1940s and 1950s, the story opens with news of Sonny's arrest on drug charges, and it closes with the narrator, who is Sonny's brother, hearing Sonny play jazz at a nightclub in Greenwich Village (also in New York City). When the narrator hears his brother play, he understands something fundamental about Sonny, and about himself, for the first time (we will discuss what that understanding is further below).

"Sonny's Blues" asks readers to learn about the blues, which is at the root of the jazz music that Sonny plays. Even though black musicians were central to the development of jazz music, not all black Americans liked or even understood the music. Jazz was a subculture with its own rules, values, styles, beliefs, and practices, and Baldwin illustrates how misunderstood it was even in black communities. In the following scene, the narrator, and his brother Sonny, have just been to their mother's funeral. Before she died, the mother told the narrator to take care of his younger brother, Sonny. In this scene, the narrator tries to find out who Sonny is as a person.

## Excerpt from Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"

And, after the funeral, with just Sonny and me alone in the empty kitchen, I tried to find out something about him.

"What do you want to do?" I asked him.

"I'm going to be a musician," he said.

For he had graduated, in the time I had been away, from dancing to the juke box to finding out who was playing what, and what they were doing with it, and he had bought himself a set of drums.

"You mean, you want to be a drummer?" I somehow had the feeling that being a drummer might be all right for other people but not for my brother Sonny.

"I don't think," he said, looking at me very gravely, "that I'll ever be a good drummer. But I think I can play a piano."

I frowned. I'd never played the role of the older brother quite so seriously before, had scarcely ever, in fact, asked Sonny a damn thing. I sensed myself in the presence of something I didn't really know how to handle, didn't understand. So I made my frown a little deeper as I asked: "What kind of musician do you want to be?"

He grinned. "How many kinds do you think there are?"

"Be serious," I said.

He laughed, throwing his head back, and then looked at me. "I am serious."

"Well, then, for Christ's sake, stop kidding around and answer a serious question. I mean, do you want to be a concert pianist, you want to play classical music and all that, or – or what?" Long before I finished he was laughing again. "For Christ's sake, Sonny!"

He sobered, but with difficulty. "I'm sorry. But you sound so – scared!" and he was off again.

"Well, you may think it's funny now, baby, but it's not going to be so funny when

you have to make your living at it, let me tell you that.” I was furious because I knew he was laughing at me and I didn’t know why. “No,” he said, very sober now, and afraid, perhaps, that he’d hurt me, “I don’t want to be a classical pianist. That isn’t what interests me. I mean” – he paused, looking hard at me, as though his eyes would help me to understand, and then gestured helplessly, as though perhaps his hand would help – “I mean, I’ll have a lot of studying to do, and I’ll have to study everything, but, I mean, I want to play jazz,” he [Sonny] said.

Well, the word had never before sounded as heavy, as real, as it sounded that afternoon in Sonny’s mouth, I just looked at him and I was probably frowning a real frown by this time. I simply couldn’t see why on earth he’d want to spend his time hanging around nightclubs, clowning around on bandstands, while people pushed each other around a dance floor. It seemed – beneath him, somehow. I had never thought about it before, had never been forced to, but I suppose I had always put jazz musicians in a class with what Daddy called “good-time people.”

“Are you *serious*?”

“Hell, yes, I’m serious.”

He looked more helpless than ever, and annoyed, and deeply hurt. I suggested, helpfully: “You mean – like Louis Armstrong?”

His face closed as though I’d struck him. “No. I’m not talking about none of that old-time, down home crap.”

“Well, look, Sonny, I’m sorry, don’t get mad. I just don’t altogether get it, that’s all. Name somebody – you know, a jazz musician you admire.”

“Bird.”

“Who?”

“Bird! Charlie Parker! Don’t they teach you nothing in the goddamn army?”

I lit a cigarette. I was surprised and then a little amused to discover that I was trembling. “I’ve been out of touch,” I said. “You’ll have to be patient with me. Now. Who’s this Parker character?”

“He’s just one of the greatest jazz musicians alive,” said Sonny, sullenly, his hands in his pockets, his back to me. “Maybe *the* greatest,” he added, bitterly, “that’s probably why you never heard of him.”

"All right," I said, "I'm ignorant, I'm sorry. I'll go out and buy all the cat's records right away, all right?"

"It don't," said Sonny, with dignity, "make any difference to me. I don't care what you listen to. Don't do me no favors."



## Example [Discussion of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"]

Listen to a bit of Bird's playing from "Night in Tunisia."

**Charlie Parker on Night in Tunisia take 1 march '46 [0 min 34 sec]**



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=115#oembed-1>



## Framing

The way we approach other cultures is through a device called “**framing**”; a particular word or phrase evokes a frame that characterizes a subject in such a way that it leads automatically to a judgment. The narrator here recalls his father’s framing of jazz musicians as “good-time people.” This framing sets up an opposition between people who *work* (use their time productively) and people who *play* (waste their time profitlessly). Thus, using the term “good-time people” to characterize jazz musicians could make us judge them as useless or even dangerous. But being a good musician in any style of music takes serious effort and jazz music can have many purposes beyond just “good times.” It can bring communities together, pay homage, and showcase creativity. The narrator here lacks the intercultural competence necessary to understand his own brother!

Intercultural competence requires knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The list below summarizes The American Association of Colleges and Universities’ (AACU’s) rubric on Cultural Competence.



## Intercultural Competence Learning Objectives

- The knowledge of one’s own culture, its rules and biases, and how history has shaped these rules and biases.
- The knowledge of cultural frameworks (the way members of other cultures view “their history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices”).
- The skill of empathy (the ability to “interpret intercultural experience from the per-

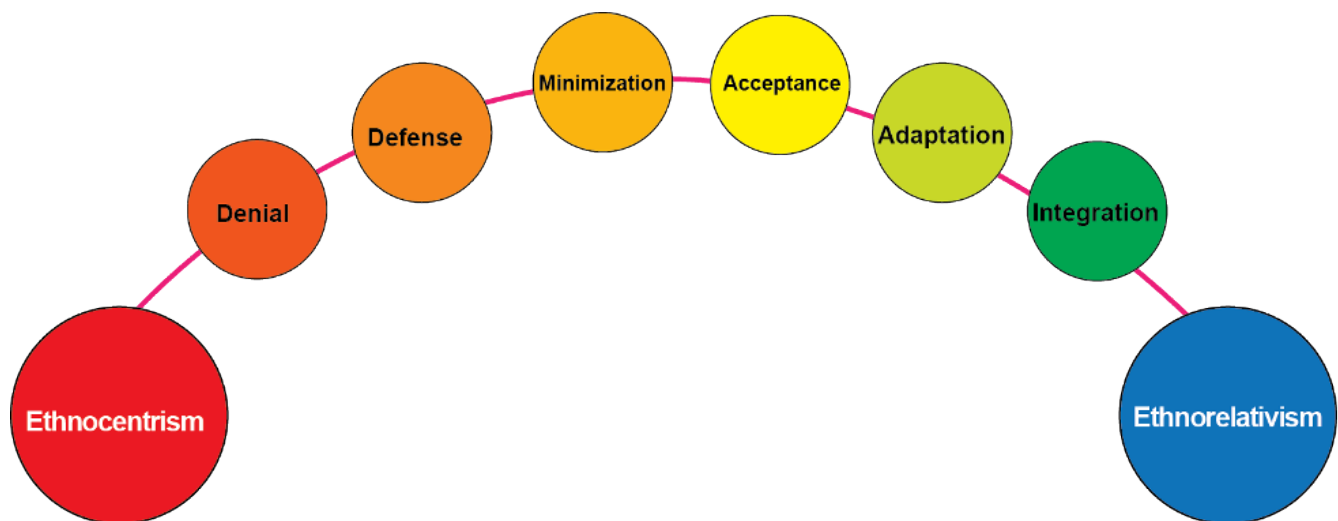
spectives of [one's] own and more than one worldview").

- The skill of understanding differences in verbal and nonverbal communication between cultures.
- The attitude of curiosity ("asks complex questions about other cultures, seeks out and articulates answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives").
- The attitude of openness ("Initiates and develops interactions with culturally different others").



## From Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism

"Sonny's Blues" is, in part, about the narrator's transformation from *ethnocentrism* (in which different perspectives are denied, or ignored, and one's own culture is the only thing taken into account) to *ethnorelativism* (where one's own culture is considered as one perspective among many more that propose alternative worldviews).



1

1. Graphic by Erika Maribel Heredia illustrating Milton Bennett's research on cultural awareness.

## Denial

When people are in cultural *denial*, they perceive another culture in a simplistic way, without recognizing particularities and often through stereotypes. For example, all jazz musicians are “good-time people.” Such denial denigrates others simply because they belong to a certain group.

## Defense

When people are in *defense* mode, they feel threatened by another culture and seek to defend their own culture. The narrator of “Sonny’s Blues,” Sonny’s brother, has a college degree and works as a teacher; he defends his culture (valuing family life and a career) by suggesting that Sonny, unlike himself, will be unable to earn money: “Well, you may think it’s funny now, baby, but it’s not going to be so funny when you have to make your living at it, let me tell you that.” The narrator seeks to curtail Sonny’s choices because Sonny’s culture is different – and seen as inferior – to the narrator’s.

## Minimization

When people use *minimization*, they deny cultural differences and make broad claims about the similarity of all human experiences. Thus, they avoid learning about other cultures and empathizing despite the differences. The narrator in “Sonny’s Blues” tries to bridge his differences with Sonny by arguing that everyone suffers; therefore, the two brothers are not really that different.

I said, “that there’s no way not to suffer. Isn’t it better, then, just to – take it?”

“But nobody just takes it,” Sonny cried, “that’s what I’m telling you! *Everybody* tries not to. You’re just hung up on the way some people try – it’s not *your* way!”

As the group *Organizing Engagement* points out:

By reframing cultural differences in terms of human sameness, minimization enables

people to avoid recognizing their own cultural biases, avoid the effort it would take to learn about other cultures, or avoid undertaking the difficult personal adaptations required to relate to or communicate more respectfully across cultural differences. [[Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity](#)]

## Acceptance

When people show *acceptance*, they identify cultural differences and accept that culture shapes personal beliefs, behaviors, and values in some ways. Acceptance does not mean agreement with another culture, but it does imply tolerance. The narrator of “Sonny’s Blues” shows some acceptance by recognizing that the world of the nightclub is truly different from the world he inhabits.

... it turned out that everyone at the bar knew Sonny, or almost everyone; some were musicians, working there, or nearby, or not working, some were simply hangers-on, and some were there to hear Sonny play. I was introduced to all of them and they were all very polite to me. Yet, it was clear that, for them, I was only Sonny’s brother. Here, I was in Sonny’s world. Or, rather: his kingdom. Here, it was not even a question that his veins bore royal blood.

## Adaptation

When people are in the process of *adaptation*, they can interact in another cultural environment in a relaxed and productive way. They are not seeking to assimilate the other culture to their culture, but rather come with the purpose of learning and developing empathy. While the narrator is listening to his brother begin his performance, he starts thinking about the differences between himself (the person who hears music) and his brother (the person who makes music) in more adaptive terms.



All I know about music is that not many people ever really hear it. And even then, on the rare occasions when something opens within, and the music enters, what we mainly hear, or hear corroborated, are personal, private, vanishing evocations. But the man who creates the music is hearing something else, is dealing with the roar rising from the void and imposing order on it as it hits the air. What is evoked in him, then, is of another order, more terrible because it has no words, and triumphant, too, for that same reason. And his triumph, when he triumphs, is ours.

## Integration

When people are in the process of *integration*, they integrate elements from other cultures into their own cultural experience. They not only accept other points of view but incorporate some of them authentically. As Bennett explains:

Integration of cultural difference is the state in which one's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews.... people are able to experience themselves as multicultural beings who are constantly choosing the most appropriate cultural context for their behavior.

The narrator, Sonny's brother, finally reaches this point when he recognizes that Sonny's music benefits both of them.

I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, with what burning we had yet to make it ours, how we could cease lamenting. Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did. Yet, there was no battle in his face now. I heard what he had gone through, and would continue to go through until he came to rest in earth. He had made it his: that long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy. And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back,

so that, passing through death, it can live forever. I saw my mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she had walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died. And it brought something else back to me, and carried me past it, I saw my little girl again and felt Isabel's tears again, and I felt my own tears begin to rise. And I was yet aware that this was only a moment, that the world waited outside, as hungry as a tiger, and that trouble stretched above us, longer than the sky.

Here the narrator is accepting the gift that Sonny is offering him: access to his world, the world of jazz. In this jazz world, there is meaning and value and the narrator is incorporating it in his own life and encouraging others to do the same.



## Cultures and Subcultures

Intercultural competence asks a lot of us. It requires, “knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks.” For instance, “Sonny’s Blues” discusses a split within the jazz world. Bebop, the music that the fictional Sonny played and that real life Charlie Parker pioneered in the early 1940s, was perceived as a distinct break from earlier forms of jazz. Unlike earlier forms, Bebop was aggressively avant-garde. Its leading practitioners did not aspire to make “popular” music as much as they sought to expand the expressive possibilities of music. For a while, there was animosity within the jazz community (mostly from some elder jazz musicians towards the younger bebop musicians). Louis Armstrong, a famous jazz innovator who had gained fame in the 1920s, said of bebop: “All them weird chords which don’t mean a thing . . . you got no melody to remember, and no beat to dance to.” Later, Armstrong befriended some of the Bebop jazz musicians, such as Dizzy Gillespie, and came to appreciate their work.



Gillespie and Armstrong

Learning about the styles of jazz, the people involved, the social and economic conditions, the historical changes, and other factors requires a good bit of research. Such research may be necessary to understand Sonny and his culture.





## Key Takeaways

### Do:

Examine your own culture's rules, values, styles, beliefs, and practices.

Understand culture as historically contingent (i.e., invented by people in relation to their specific historical circumstances).

Notice how you frame other cultures (framing characterizes a subject in such a way that it leads automatically to a judgment).

Develop an ability to perceive the world through the lens of another culture (even if you disagree with it).

Develop a complex understanding of cultural differences in terms of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Ask complex questions of other cultures and seek answers that include multiple perspectives.

Be open to interactions with people of other cultures, and even initiate such contact.

### Don't:

Ignore your own culture by focusing only on another culture.

Understand culture as unproblematically "natural" or "eternal."

Accept the way you frame other cultures without questioning that frame.

Refuse to see the world through another cultural lens because you disagree with it.

Use a simplistic understanding of cultural differences, or overlook cultural differences.

Ask simplistic questions of other cultures and/or seek answers that include only one perspective.

Be closed-off to people from other cultures.



## Intercultural Competence [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via

the QR code.



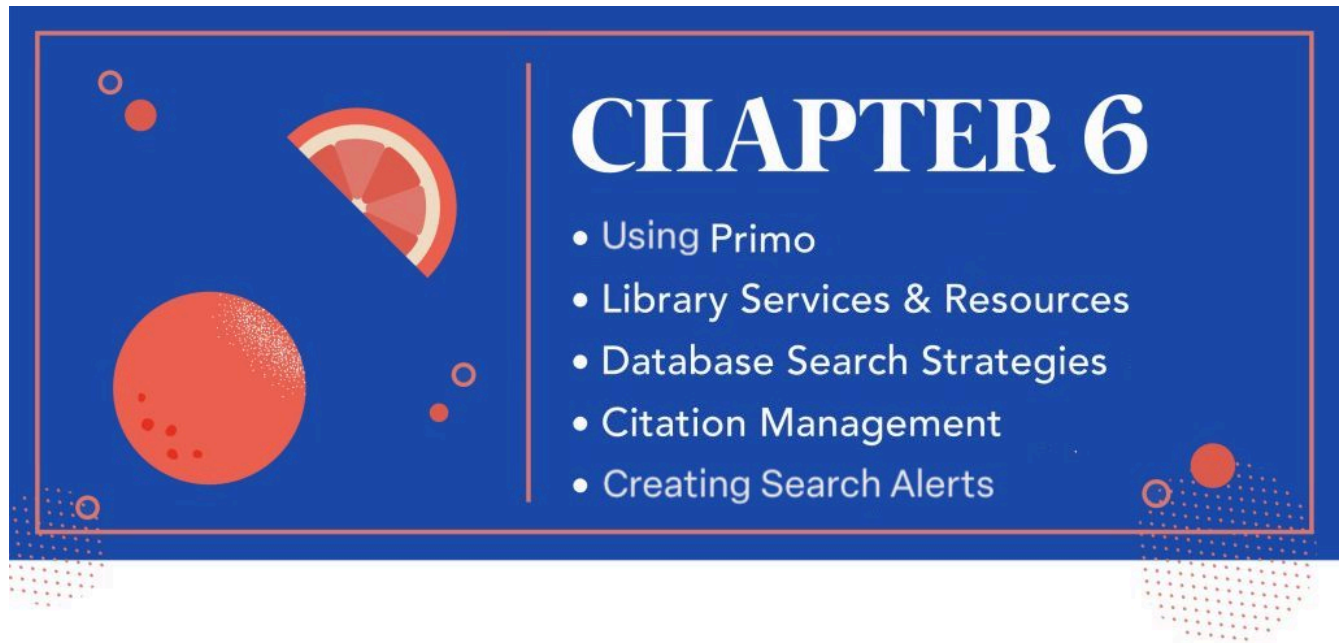
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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=115#h5p-15>

# CHAPTER 6: LIBRARY SERVICES & RESOURCES

# Chapter 6 Objectives

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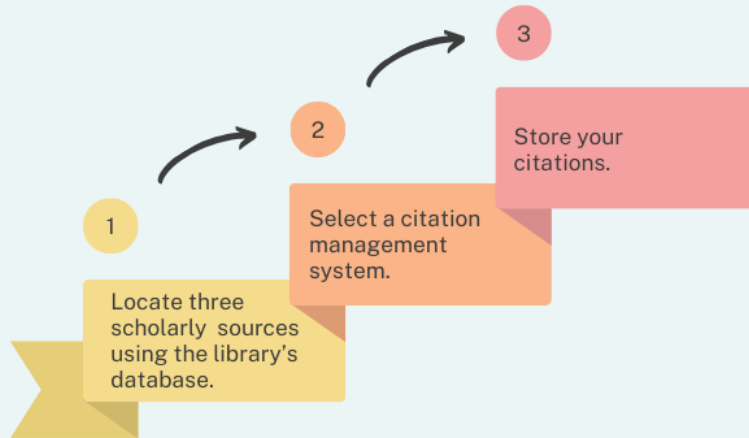


## Objectives

This portion of the course covers key library resources: literature databases, academic journals, scholarly monographs, and primary source collections. We also discuss key library services for undergraduates as well as connecting with librarians who specialize in English studies, and search tips that will help make your research more efficient. We also cover an often-overlooked skill: citation management, which enables you to compile, organize, and manage your resources efficiently. Managing citations as you go will reduce the stress of the research process

As you read through this chapter, your task is to practice locating and managing scholarly sources for your research project using the UCF library database.

## Chapter Six Project Task



### Learning Objectives

Understanding how to efficiently locate relevant literature will free up time for your reading and writing. You will learn about library services to help you with your



search. A key resource is your subject librarian, who is always available to help. In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Primo, the UCF Library's online catalog
- Database search strategies
- Key library services such as research consultations, Inter-Library Loan, the Research Tips Thursdays video series, and the office of Scholarly Communication.
- Citation management
- Creating search alerts

# Using Primo

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Primo is the name of the UCF libraries' online catalog. The key access point is located in the center of the UCF Libraries' homepage. Primo provides access to books, e-books, videos, journals, documents, and other resources owned by the UCF Libraries. For an overview of how to start searching Primo, let's watch this short video:



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=142#oembed-1>*

Now let's review some of the key points covered in the video:

**Introduction:** People often ask if you can search our subject databases in Primo. The answer is yes, but not all. For more comprehensive database searches, it's recommended that you access those databases individually and use Primo primarily as a catalog search for books, media, course reserves, and other material owned by the UCF Libraries.

**Basic Searching (0:27):** Covers the most basic aspects of Primo searching such as using the main search bar and limiting your results by format and type of material you want such as books, articles, and videos.

**Search Filters (0:56):** Once you run a simple search, you'll be taken to a results page where you have more search options and filters to help you refine your results by criteria such as date, language, and subject. You can use these filters to both include and exclude criteria to meet your needs. One important tool is the Subject Filter, which will break your search into more refined subcategories. For example, a basic search on "James Baldwin" yields 531 results:

The screenshot displays a Primo search interface. On the left, a sidebar titled 'New Records' contains a 'Language' dropdown and a 'Subject' filter. The 'Subject' filter lists various categories with their respective item counts, such as 'African Americans in literature' (76), 'criticism and interpretation' (74), 'United States' (73), '1950-1960' (34), 'American literature/African American authors History And Criticism' (32), 'Baldwin, James 1924-1987' (30), 'Sex' (30), 'American literature/African American authors' (28), 'Scholars' (24), 'African Americans' (23), 'African American intellectual life' (22), 'Baldwin, James 1924-1987 criticism and interpretation' (18), 'Electronic books' (17), 'History' (17), 'United States Race Relations' (12), 'Race Relations' (9), 'Literature' (7), 'American fiction 19th century History And Criticism' (6), 'American literature 19th century' (14), 'American literature 20th century History And Criticism' (26), 'African American intellectual life 20th century' (22), 'American fiction African American authors' (22), and 'American fiction African American authors History And Criticism' (20).

The main results area shows four records, all by James Baldwin. Each record includes a thumbnail image, the title, author, and a link to the full text. The records are:
 

- 1. *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. Topics: United States authors series ; FI543 D58. Available at UIC AUC MATH ABC General Collection (P10552.A45 D58) and Available Online.
- 2. *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin. Modern critical essays. Bloom, Harold, 1968. Available at UIC AUC MATH ABC General Collection (P10552.A45 D58 D586) and Available Online.
- 3. *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin. From the dark tower : African American writers (1800 to 1980). Davis, Arthur Paul, 1989-1998, author. 2014. Available at UIC AUC MATH ABC General Collection (P10552.A45 D58 D591) and Available Online.
- 4. *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin. Gay and lesbian writers. Ramsey, Randall, 1946-, comp. 2005. Available at UIC AUC MATH ABC General Collection (P10552.A45 D58 D592) and Available Online.

That’s a lot to wade through, but browsing the subject limiter will help you focus on the subcategories that most interest you. These could include “African Americans in literature” (76 titles) or “criticism and interpretation” (74 titles). Options will vary by your search criteria.

**My Account (1:45):** You can use the My Account feature to save books or articles you want to come back to, manage material you have checked out, and request items we don’t have.

**Primo Search Tools (2:07):** This part of the video covers some useful tools to help you manage your research. These appear in the tool bar next to each record that shows what you can do with that item. Options include pinning it to save it for later as well as a list of other sources that cite that book or article, sources cited *within* that item, a citation template, a permalink, email options, and more.



**Virtual Browse:** Another important Primo feature is virtual browse, which allows you to see books related to your search. This is like browsing physical book stacks online. Here's a short video explaining how this works:



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**Available Now: Online and On Shelf:** This is the new default setting in Primo. This will display books and other items that are immediately available to checkout or access online:

The screenshot shows the Primo search interface. At the top, there are two tabs: "SEARCH CRITERIA" (selected) and "BASIC SEARCH". Below the tabs, there's a "Search for:" section with four radio buttons: "Available Now Online and On Shelf" (selected), "Everything", "UCF Library Catalog", "Course Reserves", and "CMC Library Only". Below this, there are two search filters: "Search filter:" and "Material Type:". The "Search filter:" section has two rows, each with a dropdown menu for "Any field", a dropdown menu for "contains", and a text input field for "Enter a search term". The "Material Type:" section has a dropdown menu for "All items", a dropdown menu for "Language", a dropdown menu for "Any language", and two date pickers for "Start Date" and "End Date". At the bottom, there's a "SEARCH" button.

Note that there are two other settings available: Everything and UCF Library Catalog. Here's an overview of the difference between those options:

**UCF Library Catalog:** Select this option if you want to see books or other items we own that may be checked out or that are otherwise unavailable.

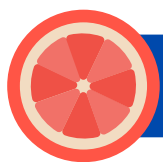
**Everything:** Select "Everything" and you'll see records for items that UCF doesn't own. In those cases, you'll want to request those items from Resource Sharing & Document Delivery (formerly Inter-Library Loan). To request an item, simply open the record, sign in with your NID, and follow the prompts to request the item: This is a fast and easy way to expand your search beyond what is owned by UCF, which will make your literature review more comprehensive. Any item we don't own may be requested in this way.

The screenshot shows a Primo record page for a book titled "Nonconformity's resentful generation : evangelical and liberal theologies in Victorian England". The record includes the author "Hapkins, Mark (Mark Thomas Eugene); Rowell, Geoffrey", the year "2006", and a note "If not available, may be eligible for interlibrary loan." Below the record, there's a "Send to:" section with icons for "Personal", "Station", "Mobile app", "Print", "Email", "Cite this", and "Export". Below that, there's a "How to get it:" section with a button "Click to request this item from interlibrary loan". At the bottom, there's a link "OTHER LIBRARIES THAT OWN THIS ITEM (2/1/2018)".



# Library Services & Resources

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Key Library Resources](#)
- [Literature Databases](#)
- [Related Databases](#)
- [Academic Journals](#)
- [Scholarly Monographs](#)
- [Reference Materials](#)
- [Other Library Services](#)



## Key Library Resources

The UCF Libraries provides access to many high-quality subject databases, academic journals, and scholarly monographs as well as reference materials and primary source collections. Knowing how to locate these high-quality resources efficiently will help make your research process a stress-free experience.

If you are unsure how to locate these resources, the best starting point will be the [English Database Page](#). The main literature database will be the [MLA International Database](#), which is developed and maintained by the Modern Language Association (MLA).

Before reviewing the different types of resources available to you, let's watch Jada discuss her research process at this stage:

## Literature Research Strategies – Part 3 [5 min 13 sec]



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Key Quotes from the Video:

### **Using Subject Databases:**

“A lot of times, I think we can just speed read and click all over the place and refresh the page and get frustrated. And honestly, like, I know, it can be hard, and it can take a lot of time, but that’s important. And it’s an exploratory process. It’s not a way to just answer your questions right away. That’s not the point. It’s supposed to be like a long process.”

### **Research Consultations:**

“Outside of talking to professors, I think it’s really important to talk to librarians and to your librarian specifically, because, the librarians, that’s like their special thing ... Their job is to show you how to research and how to connect your research question to your search process, or how to make your research question out of your search process.”

Jada began by reviewing the scholarship on James Baldwin in MLA, JSTOR, and several African American studies databases. In the discovery stage, Jada is taking snapshots of the scholarship in an attempt to identify recurring themes, concepts, and connections as well as gaps and tensions in the research that will be her entry into the scholarly conversation. There is a lot of trial and error at this stage. Many students get frustrated when they don’t immediately find what they’re looking for, but there’s a lot of exploration in the early stages of research. Be strategic with your keywords and don’t forget to explore multiple subject databases.

For example, Jada explored databases outside literature to incorporate varying per-



spectives on her topic. The most fruitful of these was an article entitled, “The Sociology of the Ghetto in James Baldwin’s ‘Sonny’s Blues.’”

Throughout this process, Jada discovered two themes she felt were worth exploring: Marxism and critical race theory. While still broad, these are narrow enough to get her started. As she continues with her literature review, she’ll want to sharpen these into a more focused research question, a process we will discuss in the next section.

## Literature Databases

- [Modern Language International](#) (MLA): The premier English/literature database. This should be your starting point as it indexes most of the key literature journals.
- [Academic Search Premier](#): Not exclusively an English/literature-specific database, but “ASP” will contain a good variety of literary scholarship and should be part of any literature review.
- [Dictionary of Literary Biography](#): The online version of the classic DLB contains critical essays on the lives, works, and careers of the world’s most influential literary figures from all eras and genres.
- [JSTOR](#): A multi-disciplinary full text database that provides access to more than 12 million academic journal articles, books, and primary sources in 75 disciplines.
- [Literature Criticism Online](#): Excerpts and full text of articles and essays providing a critical discussion of authors and their works.
- [Literature Resource Center](#): Information on literary figures from all time periods of writing in such genres as fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, history, journalism, and more. Includes the Dictionary of Literary Biography.
- [Oxford English Dictionary](#): The online version of the OED is widely regarded as the accepted authority on the English language. It is an unsurpassed guide to the meaning, history, and pronunciation of 600,000 words — past and present — from across the English-speaking world.
- [Project Muse](#): An extremely high-quality collection of scholarly journals

and e-books from many of the world's leading universities and scholarly societies.



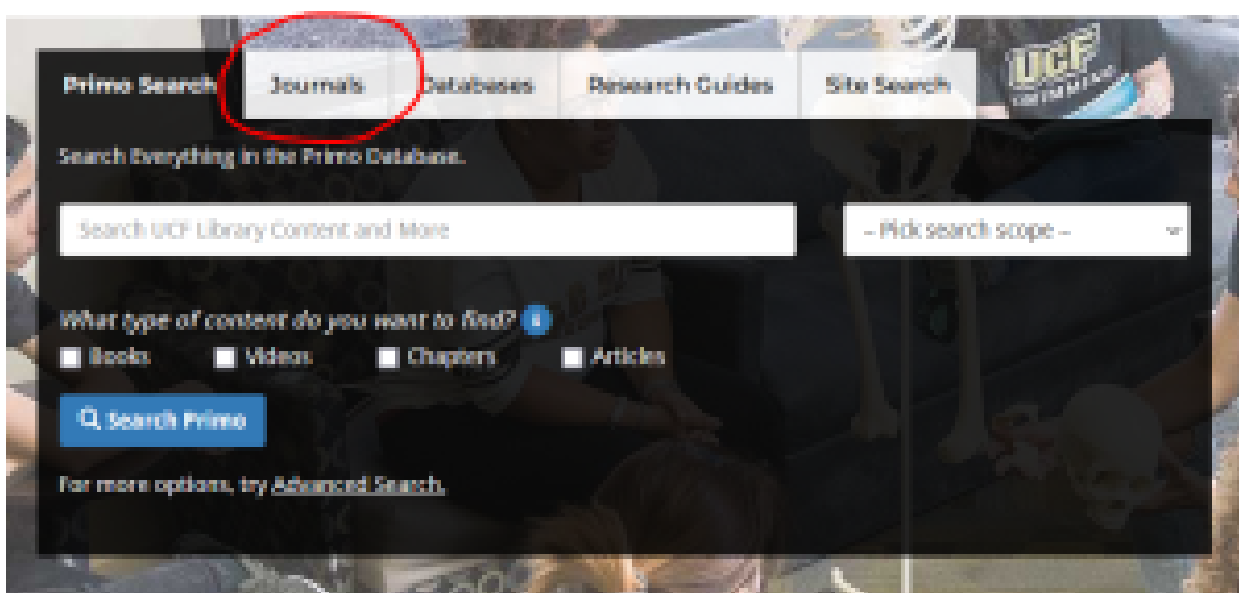
## Related Databases

As literary studies become increasingly multi-disciplinary, it is wise to search for scholarship in other subject databases such as Historical Abstracts, PsycInfo (Psychology), ERIC (education), Film and Television Literature Index, the Philosopher's Index, and others. You can access these and many more on our [main database page](#).



## Academic Journals

Searching core journals by title can be beneficial as well. This can be a smaller, more controlled search that will provide insight into current trends in your field and can also help you track down specific citations. To access journals individually, click on "Journals" next to the Primo Search bar on the Libraries' homepage:



From there, you can search journals by title, keyword, or browse by discipline. For example, typing “digital humanities” into the search bar will show you all the journals we have access to with that phrase in the subject or title. For more details about how to search and access specific journals, watch the following short video.

Note that the journals tab is now in a different location than when this video was created. The screenshot above shows the current location.

### Is This Journal Online? [1 min 49 sec]



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## Scholarly Monographs

Although much current scholarship can be accessed in online journals and databases, books are still common and invaluable resources. These can be accessed by conducting a [Primo search](#). When conducting your literature review, focus on books published by university presses and academic publishers. If a book is available electronically, there will be a direct link to that version in the catalog record where it can be read online and/or downloaded, depending on what kind of access we have to that title.



## Reference Materials

Reference materials include resources such as bibliographies, biographies, dictionaries, encyclopedia, guides, and handbooks. Reference materials can be located by doing a keyword search in [Primo](#); just add one of the terms above to your search. These reference materials can add much needed context to your research.

You can also run a general search in Primo and, once you have some results, use the “Library Section/Area” filter in the sidebar to isolate reference materials. This same strategy can be used to locate media, documents, and other specialized formats.

You can also use a database called [Reference Universe](#) to search our entire reference collection at once. This tool is useful in locating resources that are easily overlooked but useful for your research. The results will not only point you to specific books with information on your topic, but they'll provide the exact page number as well!

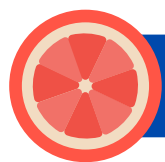


## Other Library Services

- **Research Consultations:** Subject librarians are available to meet with students to discuss their research strategies. You can schedule an appointment with the librarian in your major through their [profile page](#) or by completing the [consultation request form](#).
- **UCF Libraries Vimeo Page:** The UCF Libraries has created many short videos with tips about how to successfully search Primo, databases, citation management, and other topics. See the [Vimeo page](#) for a complete list of available videos.
- **Resource Sharing & Document Delivery:** The service formerly known as Inter-Library Loan, this is how you request books, articles, and other resources from other libraries by submitting a request through your [ILLiad account](#).
- **Scholarly Communications:** Offers useful information for all aspects of the research process including collaboration tools, data management plans, citation management, ethics & compliance, copyright, Creative Commons, grant planning, and more. See the full list here at [Scholarly Communications](#).

# Database Search Strategies

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Database Search Strategies Tips](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Database Search Strategies \[Refresher\]](#)



## Database Search Strategies Tips

This section covers several database search tips, including Boolean Operators, wildcards, and shortcuts, that will make your research more efficient.

**Quotation Marks:** To search for a phrase, use quotation marks around the words that make up the phrase. For example, instead of putting in Olympic and gymnast as separate terms, put them together like this: “Olympic gymnast.” Doing so helps narrow down your search.

**Boolean Operators:** Strategically incorporating **And**, **Or**, and **Not** into your searches will help you get better results by narrowing or expanding your search and by eliminating unnecessary terms from your results.



## Example

- **And:** You can narrow your results by adding AND to your search. If you combine “Shakespeare” AND “modern adaptations,” your results will contain both terms.
- **Or:** Conversely, searching social media OR digital literacy will expand your search by retrieving results with either one of those terms.
- **Not:** This will narrow your results by excluding a term that is irrelevant to you. For example, searching social media NOT digital literacy will eliminate a term that occurs frequently in James Baldwin searchers. If that’s not the focus of your research, excluding it from your results can help streamline the search process.

The Boolean operators will be located in the drop down menu within a database’s advanced search options. For example, this is what they look like in MLA:

Searching: [Academic Search Premier](#) [Choose Databases](#)  
☐ Suggest Subject Terms

graphic design	Select a Field (optional) ▼	Search	
AND = Copyright	Select a Field (optional) ▼		Clear
AND			
OR			
NOT			

[Advanced Search](#) [Search History](#)

**Truncation Symbols:** Including asterisks, question marks, and exclamation points can help streamline your searches by ensuring that you are capturing word variations and alternate spellings.



## Example

- **Asterisks:** Placing an \* at the point where the spelling of a word could change will search for every variation of that word. For example, when dealing with James Baldwin, race and racism will be a recurring theme. You can save time by searching for rac\* which will retrieve results for race, racism, racialized, racial, and raced.
- **Exclamation Points:** Used for searching variations of the same word with alternative spellings. For example, wom!n = women or woman.
- **Question Marks:** Useful for searching words and names with alternate spellings, such as British and American variants or words that are translated in slightly different ways. For example, colo?r = color and colour.

Now that you're adept at finding high-quality resources, the next step will be to think about how to organize and manage all that research.



## Database Search Strategies [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via



the QR code.

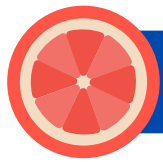


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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=146#h5p-22>

# Citation Management

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Citation Management Approaches](#)
- [More Resources](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Citation Management \[Refresher\]](#)



## Citation Management Approaches

Students often overlook the importance of managing and organizing their research. There are many free programs available online, such as [Zotero](#). It's important to have a system that works for you.

As you continue down your path to becoming a researcher, one of two things tends to happen. A) you have a closet full of printed journal articles that you are saving “just in case,” but you have no idea what’s in there, or why it was important; or B) you are constantly trying to remember what that one article was that you read that one time, but it wasn’t relevant at the time, so you threw it away.

Luckily there are citation management programs to help you wrangle and organize your

research. As a bonus, they will format your bibliography into the appropriate style at the click of a button.

## Literature Research Strategies – Part 6 [1 min 38 sec]



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=148#oembed-1>



## More Resources

### \*\*\*New Resource\*\*\*

The UCF community now has free access to the full version of **EndNote**. Accessing EndNote is free but requires a service request. For more information about how to get started, and for an overview of EndNote features, see the UCF Libraries [EndNote guide](#).

Note that you will lose access to the EndNote option available through UCF once you are no longer affiliated with the university. There are ways to transfer your citations to another service, but you may want to consider an online option to avoid this complication. The most popular freely available options are Mendeley and Zotero.

- [Mendeley](#)
- [Zotero](#)

For more information about each option, check out the UCF library's [guides to citation management](#).

Looking for an easy way to compare the different citation management system features? See [this chart](#) created and maintained by Penn Libraries.



## Citation Management [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.

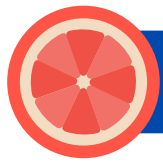


*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=148#h5p-23>

# Creating Search Alerts

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Creating Search Alerts](#)

We also provide the following:

- [Creating Search Alerts \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Creating Search Alerts

Databases, journals, and Google Scholar allow you to set up alerts based on author names or keywords to help researchers stay current in their subject areas. This is done by entering your email address along with your selected keywords to receive a notification any time a new article is published that matches your criteria. One word of caution: while search alerts are effective tools, they can be overwhelming if you create too many, so be selective.

Watch this short tutorial about search alerts:

**Creating Search Alerts [2 min 57 sec]**



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=150#oembed-1>



## Creating Search Alerts [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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## Exercises

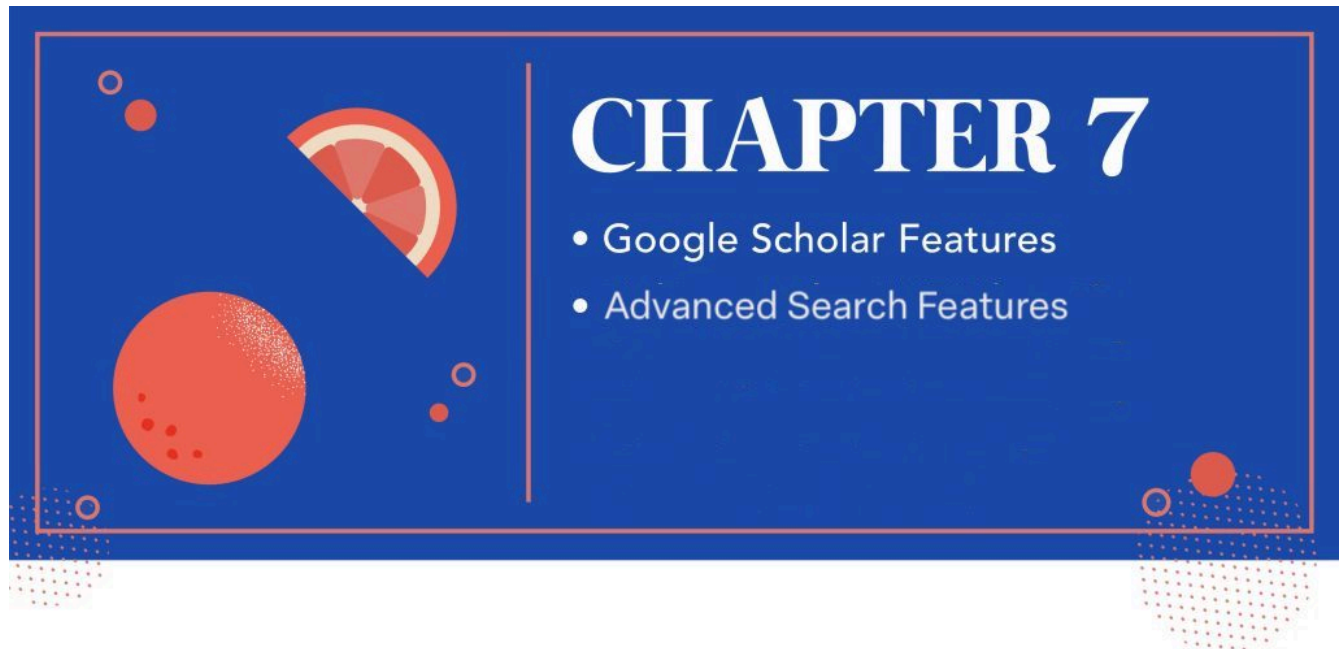
1. Using library databases, find three scholarly sources for your research project.
2. Choose a citation management system.
3. Store your citations.

# CHAPTER 7: USING GOOGLE SCHOLAR



# Chapter 7 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

This chapter focuses on a key companion to library resources: *Google Scholar*. Although we focused on subject databases in the previous unit, Google Scholar can be a helpful addition to your literature review. Not only does it capture resources not available directly through UCF, but it includes useful tools such as journal and author alerts, the “cited by” feature, journal metrics, author profiles, and more. We review these and other research tools and show you how to use Google Scholar in tandem with our subject databases.



As you read through this chapter, your tasks are to practice locating scholarly sources for your research project using Google Scholar and then storing your citations.

## Chapter Seven Project Task



### Learning Objectives

This chapter will help you to understand how Google Scholar works as a companion to the library system.

- Use Google Scholar and institutional databases to retrieve full texts or to request an article via inter library loan.
- Expand your search, do citation chaining, set up journal alerts, view author profiles, journal metrics, and more.
- Use Google Scholar to link directly to citation management programs such as Endnote, Mendeley, and Zotero.

# Getting the Most Out of Google Scholar

**BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK**

Google Scholar is an invaluable companion to our subject databases and should be part of any literature review. This chapter provides an overview of the most common Google Scholar features as well as some tips to make your searching more efficient and comprehensive. Some of these features are obvious and intuitive while others are more hidden. To get started, let's watch this short video that covers how to find full text by linking to the UCF Libraries, the cited by feature, locating related articles, the citation template, and author profiles.

**Getting the Most out of Google Scholar [2 min 5 sec]**



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=156#oembed-1>

Let's take a closer look at the features covered in the video.

**Linking to UCF Libraries Full Text Options (0:21):** You can link Google Scholar to any library by selecting the Library Links option in the settings menu. You can access the settings menu by clicking on the three bars in the upper left of the Google Scholar home page, then clicking on the gear icon at the bottom of the menu.

**Cited By / Citation Chaining (0:49):** Using the “Cited By” feature is also part of an effective search strategy called “citation chaining.” This helps you track the development of a topic backward and forward in time. For example, it is common to “mine the bibliography” of an article to see who the author(s) cited during their research. This provides insight into who influenced them, what theories and methods they used, and how they developed their argument.

The next link in the chain is to see who has cited a work of scholarship after publication and what they're saying about it. How often has it been cited? Who has cited it? What are other researchers saying about it? Google Scholar and Web of Science are the two resources that offer this feature. This was demoed in the video, but here's an overview of how this feature works:

Search any article, book, or book chapter title in Google Scholar. When the result pops up, you'll see “Cited by”:

### [The Biblical Foundation of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"](#)

[J Tackach - Renaissance, 2007 - pdcnsl.org](#)

... Considering Baldwin's personal experiences in the Christian church — which are ... critics have not discussed the biblical foundation of a key Baldwin text such as "Sonny's Blues." African ...

☆ Save 99 Cite **Cited by 10** Related articles All 8 versions Web of Science: 4

To access those articles, simply click on the link and you'll be given access to those results:

Any time

Since 2022

Since 2021

Since 2018

Custom range...

Sort by relevance

Sort by date

Create alert

The Biblical Foundation of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"

☐ Search within citing articles

2009

God's Mind in That Music: Theological Explorations through the Music of John Coltrane

J.Hobson - 2012 - books.google.com

As part of the growing literature on theology and the arts, God's Mind in That Music explores the substantial theological insight expressed in the music of jazz legend John Coltrane. ...

☆ Save ☐ Cite Cited by 16 Related articles All 2 versions ☐

2009

James Baldwin and the Heavenly City: Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Doubt

C.J.Hobson - 2018 - books.google.com

Behind James Baldwin's uncanny ability to evoke a nation's crisis and potential hope lies his use of religious language to describe social and sexual transformation. The first study of its ...

☆ Save ☐ Cite Cited by 4 Related articles All 4 versions ☐

Epistemic Addiction: Reading "Sonny's Blues" with Levinas, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche

T.J.Gelden - The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 2012 - JSTOR

Regardless of whether one accepts the historical accuracy of the fall of Adam and Eve, or views it as a Platonic "noble lie," a moral principle emerges from the biblical narrative of ...

☆ Save ☐ Cite Cited by 3 Related articles All 4 versions ☐

2009

"Real Gods Require Blood." The Religious Significance of Death in James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain and If Beale Street Could Talk

M.H.Lindsay - 2016 - search.proquest.com

This dissertation proposes that in Go Tell It on the Mountain and If Beale Street Could Talk, James Baldwin uses death as a religious experience that represents a spiritual reckoning for ...

☆ Save ☐ Cite Cited by 1 Related articles All 2 versions ☐

You can then expand the scope of those resources by mining their bibliographies to see who they cited, then go to Google scholar to see who cited them. Citation chaining can also give you some insight into where those authors fit within the scholarly conversation on their topics.

**Related Articles (1:05):** Similar to the above, the related articles link will retrieve a set of results based on your search criteria. These won't be directly cited in your original article; they will be related or similar to it in some way. This feature is located directly next to the Cited by link:

Google Scholar

The Biblical Foundation of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"

Articles

Any time

Since 2022

Since 2021

Since 2018

Custom range...

Sort by relevance

Sort by date

Any type

Review articles

☐ include patents

☒ include citations

The Biblical Foundation of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"

J.Tschach - Renaissance, 2007 - jstor.org

RENAISSANCE now knows: By the age of seventeen, however, Baldwin would become disillusioned with religion and leave the Church, as the Bible gave way to the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. But Campbell is correct when he states that "although he [Baldwin] left the church, the church never left him" (4). Indeed, religious and biblical themes and motifs are at the center of Baldwin's best literary efforts, including "Sonny's Blues." Considering Baldwin's personal experiences in the Christian Church—which are discussed in the ...

☆ Save ☐ Cite Cited by 16 Related articles All 4 versions Web of Science: 4

Showing the best result for this search. See all results

PDFs

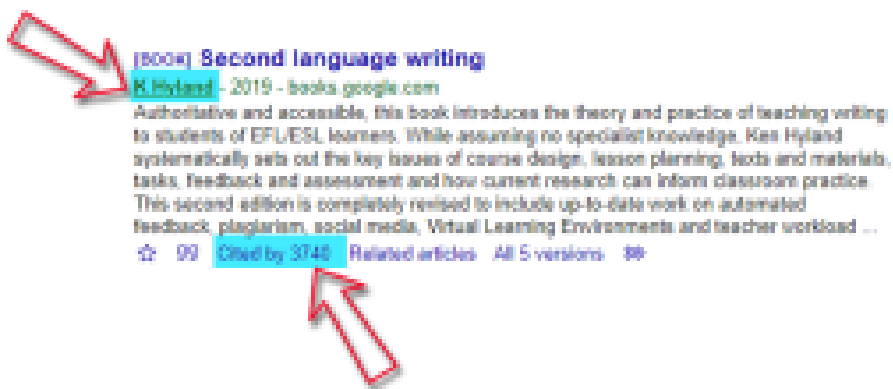
new.pdfs

UCF Primo Full Text

Related articles won't be direct citations; rather, they'll be suggestions that may or may not be relevant.

**Citation Template (1:22):** This feature will provide a template for the full citation in all the major citation styles. Note that this is just a template. . . be sure to check the citation against an official source, such as the MLA or APA styles guides, to make sure it's accurate.

**Author Profiles & Journal Metrics (1:37):** If an author's name is underlined in green, that indicates that they have a Google Scholar Account. For example, when searching "social media in writing classrooms," I noted that a recent book by Ken Hyland has a high citation count:




Clicking on his underlined name links to his profile page where you can get an overview of his research interests, publications, citation counts, and even a list of his co-authors. Google Scholar also ranks his publications by citation to illustrate which of his works are making the biggest impact in the field. If you find a scholar whose work is particularly relevant, you can create a search alert using their name.


## Journal Metrics

The Metrics link allows you to search for the highest-ranking journals by field. The rankings are determined by the "h5" index, which documents the number of articles published in a journal over the last five years that have been cited at least ten times. The first page shows the rankings for all scholarly journals, which include Nature, The New England Journal of Medicine, and Science as the top three. From there, you can click on the categories tab to view the results by discipline:

Google Scholar

Top publications

Categories: 

English: 

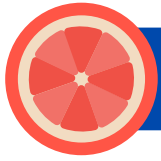
	Miles	Miles
Business, Economics, Finance, Accounting		
Chemical & Material Sciences		
Engineering & Computer Science	454	607
Health & Medical Sciences	455	704
Humanities, Literature & Arts	244	584
Life Sciences & Earth Sciences	386	683
Physics & Mathematics	286	600
Social Sciences	286	600
1. Advanced Materials	286	404
2. Cell	286	459
3. Nature Communications	287	389
4. Chemical Reviews	277	404
5. International Conference on Learning Representations	251	475
6. JAMA	230	449
7. Neural Information Processing Systems	230	400
8. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences	228	337
9. Journal of the American Chemical Society	228	300
10. Angewandte Chemie	228	274
11. Chemical Society Reviews	224	309
12. Models, Cells, Processes	220	372
13. Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews	220	284
14. Journal of Clinical Oncology	211	297
15. Physical Review Letters	209	297
16. Advanced Energy Materials	209	297
17. Nature Reviews	200	366

Now we will take a closer look at some other Google Scholar search features.



# Advanced Search Features

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We provide the following activity on this page:

- [Exercises](#)



Most of Google Scholar is straightforward. However, there are a few tips and tricks that will help make your searching more efficient and successful. To get started, let's watch this short video:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=167#oembed-1>

Now let's take a closer look at some of the key points raised in the video:

**Basic Searching (0:08):** One point presented in this video but not discussed in depth is the use of Boolean Operators. Even if you don't know what Boolean Operators are, you've likely used them in your personal searching at some point. Basically, they are commands that can be used in search engines, database, or online catalogues. The most popular commands are AND, OR, and NOT. Other commands include parentheses, truncation, and phrases. Here's how they work:

### AND/NOT/OR

- **AND:** Place “and” in between two words or phrases to run a combined search. If you search two short phrases such as “James Baldwin Sonny’s Blues” Google Scholar will assume AND is between two and do a combined search for you.
- **NOT:** Place a “not” before a word or phrase to exclude that from appearing in your search results. This is useful when there’s a particular word that’s cluttering your results.
- **OR:** This is useful when you want to search one thing OR another. This will also expand your results.

## ***Truncation Symbols & Stemming***

In chapter seven, we discussed the use of truncation symbols as a way to search for words with multiple variations. For example, placing an **asterisk** at the end of a word like German\* will retrieve german/german’s/germans/germany/germanic.

Google Scholar **does not** recognize truncation symbols. Rather it uses a stemming system that searches for variations of the word you searched without the use of symbols. For example, searching “German” in Google Scholar will retrieve “Germans” but not Germany or Germanic. The key difference between stemming and truncation symbols is that **stemming is based on whole words** and **truncation is based on partial or roots of words**.

## ***Quotation Marks***

If you don’t want synonyms cluttering your search results, **place quotation marks around a word or phrase** or use the “exact phrase” option in the advanced search section for a more controlled search. This also helps weed out unrelated results caused by common terms, which would be a potential problem when researching an author with two common names such as James Baldwin. For example, searching “James Baldwin” or “Sonny’s Blues” with quotes or using the exact phrase option will weed out unwanted results.



**Search Limiters (0:30):** Here the video discusses some other ways to refine your results

using the tools that appear in the sidebar. This includes creating a customised date range and changing how results are sorted.

**Search Alerts (0:45):** Related to the above, is creating search alerts so you can be notified when a new article is published that matches your search criteria. This is a great way to stay current when you're conducting a literature review. You'll need to be signed into your Google Scholar account or enter your email address to do this.

**Advanced Search Options (0:56):** We discussed these above in the Boolean Operator section. You can access these options by clicking on menu bar in the upper left.

**My Library (1:27):** If you have a Google Scholar account, you can create a personal library of resources. Use the folders option to separate the resources by project, create alerts, and share your sources with others.

**Citation Template (1:50):** We covered this on the previous page, but the video reviews this option again. Use this feature to generate a full citation in any style, but don't forget to check it against an authoritative style guide.

**Cited By & Related Articles (2:06):** Also covered on the previous page, but worth reviewing again here. Use the "Cited by" feature to locate articles that cited one you're using for your research. . . also called "citation chaining." This is a great way to get a sense of the scholarly conversation that's unfolding around the sources you're using, a concept we discuss more in-depth in the "Scholarship as Conversation" section of this book. "Related articles" is a similar idea based more on recommendation than direct citation, but it's still a useful way to locate relevant sources.

**Versions (2:19):** You'll often see a versions option below a record with a number of variants available. Sometimes these are the same versions available in multiple locations, or it can be a different version like an unpublished pre-print. In either case, this can be a useful feature when searching for full text. If the first version that pops up doesn't have a full text option, try the others.



**Other Search Tips:** Here are a couple other points not covered in the video but are worth knowing:

## Emphasize Keywords over full sentences or questions

As with subject databases, Google Scholar will yield the best results if you break a sentence or question into keywords or short phrases. See chapter three for a more in-depth discussion about the value of strategic keywords.

## Synonyms

One way Google Scholar differs from many academic databases is that it searches for synonyms of your keywords. Most academic databases are built on controlled vocabulary and won't search for synonyms. Be aware of this difference when using Google Scholar and refer to the following bullet points for tips on creating more controlled searches.

Now that we've talked in-depth about how to locate scholarly resources, let's discuss how to evaluate those sources.



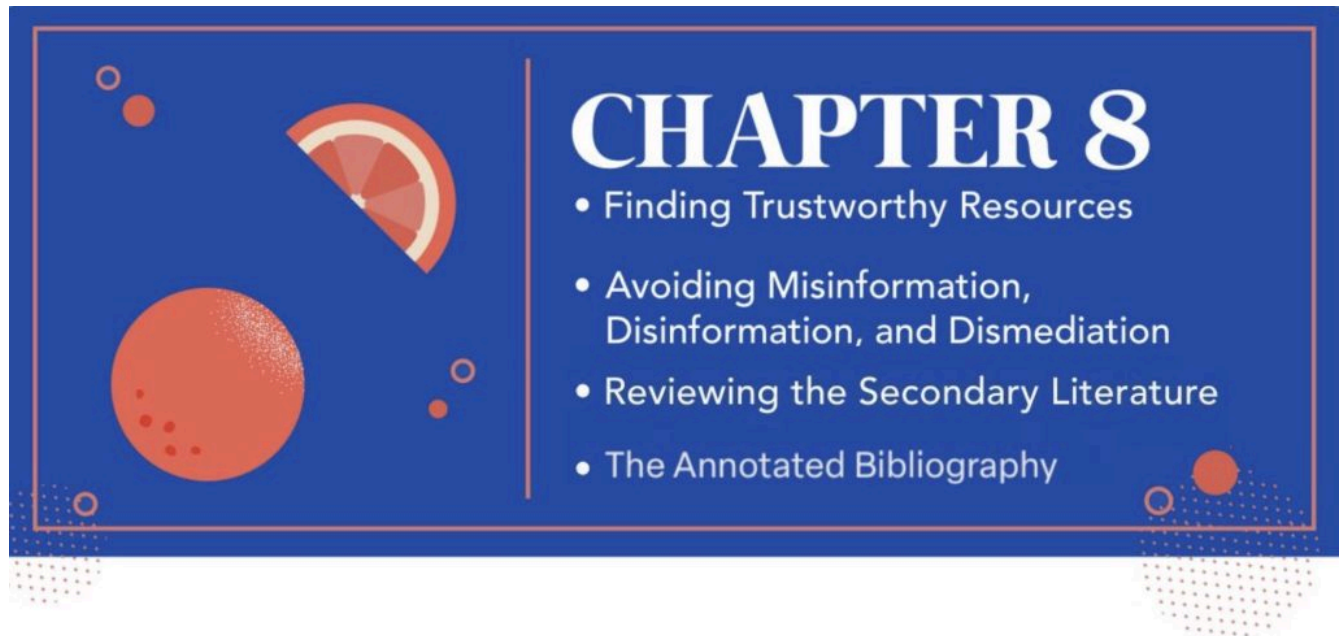
## Exercises

1. Using Google Scholar, find three scholarly sources for your research project.
2. Store your citations in your chosen citation management system.

# CHAPTER 8: EVALUATING SCHOLARLY RESOURCES

# Chapter 8 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

This chapter focuses on ways to select resources that are relevant, significant, and trustworthy. In other words, we need to address the issue of authority, which is the trust we grant to reliable sources of information. With so much misinformation and disinformation flooding our society, we need to be extremely careful. How do we handle the question of “bias”? Is it always a bad thing? How important is currency (the most recent information)?

Reviewing the Secondary Literature is an important section designed to demystify scholarly articles and books. Primary literature is a literary work or a report by someone with first-hand knowledge (such as the author of “Sonny’s Blues”). Secondary literature is any text that discusses the primary text. Secondary literature includes scholarly analyses, interpretations, criticisms, and other forms of commentary. Your research paper will include both primary and secondary sources. We focus on the concepts of thinking while reading, strategic skimming, active reading along with some valuable tips for note-taking.

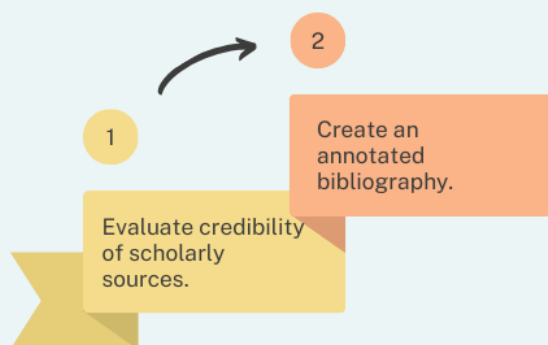
The Annotated Bibliography section explains the purpose as well as the scope of your annotated bibliography. The annotated bibliography serves as a resources as you assemble your

research project. Later you will synthesize these materials into a review of literature, which we will learn about in Chapter 10. The review of literature puts your research into a form that presents your argument clearly to your readers.



The project tasks for this chapter is to evaluate the credibility of the sources you found in the tasks for the previous two chapters and to write an annotated bibliography.

## Chapter Eight Project Tasks





## Learning Objectives

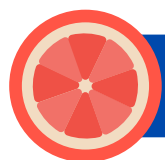
Use this chapter to help you

- Evaluate which sources are most credible and why.
- Learn to select the best sources to establish your authority on your subject.
- Join the fight against misinformation and disinformation.
- Understand the process of annotating your scholarly sources. Later you will synthesize these annotations into a review of literature, which is a structured presentation of your research and how it relates to your research problem. By reading this chapter and responding to the related discussion prompts, you will learn to:
  - understand the elements that go into an annotated bibliography and their relevance.
  - develop skills for reading strategically and efficiently.
  - identify current trends, niches, research gaps, and other opportunities to join the scholarly conversation to add your unique perspective.



# Finding Trustworthy Sources

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

**We discuss the following topics on this page:**

- [Authority is Constructed and Contextual](#)
- [Aristotle's Ethos](#)
- [A Note about Bias](#)

**We also provide the following activity:**

- [Finding Trustworthy Sources \[Refresher\]](#)

This page addresses several questions: How do we know which sources to trust? What sources will our audience find most relevant and significant? How important is currency (not money, but information that is the most recent)? Should we be concerned about whether a source is “biased”? How do we avoid repeating misinformation to our audience? At the heart of these questions is the issue of “authority,” which is the trust we grant to reliable sources of information.





## Authority is Constructed and Contextual<sup>1</sup>

Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility and are evaluated based on the information needed and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information needed may help to determine the level of authority required.<sup>2</sup>

Is there ever a good reason to use low quality sources in a research paper? If our goal is to show readers the difference between good and bad information, then reproducing the unreliable information is justified (because we are identifying it as such). Researchers can and should discuss the false and dangerous things people believe, or what they want others to believe, without falling into the trap of believing it themselves. Therefore, purposely looking for low sources of information might be justified. Problems occur, however, when researchers confuse low quality information with high quality information. We need to maintain a set of standards and use our critical judgment when evaluating sources to ensure that statements of fact are indeed true and that claims follow allowable inferences. It is our responsibility to make proper assessments of information sources and to point out flaws when we find them.

The usefulness of a resource will differ by discipline and the scope of your project. For example, currency, meaning the work was published more recently, is extremely important in the sciences but not always so in the humanities where scholars routinely work with classic texts. In the digital humanities, and in any field that deals with digital media, things will develop faster and, therefore, currency will be more relevant.

As you conduct your literature review, you should be aware of criteria such as currency, rel-

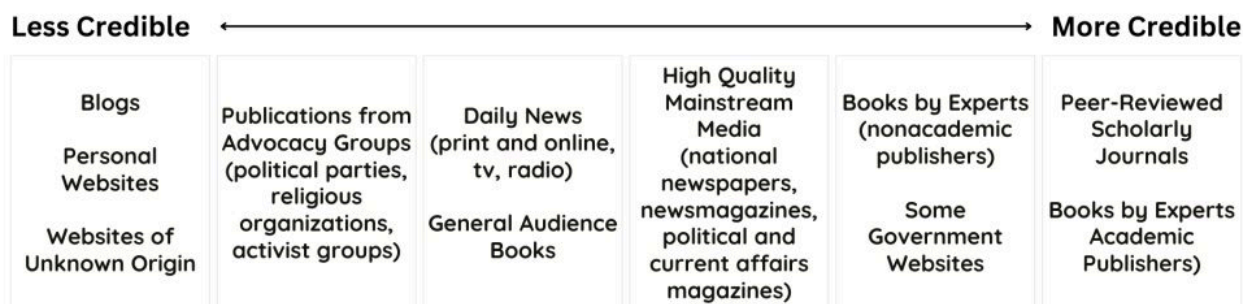
1. In the "Back Matter" of this book, you will find a page titled "Rubrics." On that page, we provide a rubric for Finding Trustworthy Sources

2. Association of College and Research Libraries. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." 2016. <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

evance, authority, and purpose, but do so with what the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) calls an “attitude of informed skepticism and an openness to new perspectives, additional voices, and changes in schools of thought.” Effective researchers “understand the need to determine the validity of the information created by different authorities and to acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others, especially in terms of others’ worldviews, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations.”

Many novice scholars make the mistake of doing a quick web search without going any further. The materials a scholar finds through this method can be extremely poor. The method most likely to produce credible materials is to search academic library databases for peer-reviewed scholarly sources (see the “Continuum of Credibility” below). Even within the scholarly sources, there are more and less credible sources.

# The Continuum of Credibility



3

The continuum above is just a guide and not a law. A blog – which is categorized as “less credible” here – may contain credible information. We need to exercise independent judgment. For a more complete overview of constructing authority, see the [ACRL Framework](https://libguides.uccs.edu/c.php?g=617840&p=4299162). In the meantime, open the chart below to see some criteria for evaluating the credibility of

3. Adapted from “Public Administration Research: Evaluate Sources.” UCCS. <https://libguides.uccs.edu/c.php?g=617840&p=4299162>

scholarly resources. Most of these focus on journals but can be applied to any type of academic resource.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=173#h5p-29>



## Aristotle's Ethos

Aristotle's term **ethos** evaluates expertise in these terms. Ethos has an ethical dimension and is separate from self-confidence or popularity since it is possible to be self-confident and popular without any ethical grounding. We can get a sense of whether an authority is ethical by investigating how others have evaluated their work. Over time, scholars get a reputation from other scholars who evaluate their knowledge, trustworthiness, and **disinterestedness**.

Aristotle was suspicious of people who argued for money. Cynically promoting views you don't agree with in order to profit personally constitutes a form of malpractice. Honest self-advocacy is fine, however. For instance, disabled scholars who advocate for better transportation for people with disabilities do not present ethical problems with their advocacy.



## A Note about Bias

We routinely hear that “bias” is bad; therefore, the reasoning goes, if we find a work of scholarship that shows “bias,” we should reject it. But not all bias is bad. If bias is towards the truth, then we should accept. If we hear two scholars arguing about what the moon is made from, and one says cheese and the other says rock, we should not discount the one who says “rock” because it appears they are biased. As scholars, we are called upon to act as referees, and it is up to us to take sides when necessary. In this example, claiming that both sides are right, or that the truth is in the middle, is a dereliction of our duty as scholars. It is warranted to be biased against the bad behavior or false claims of scholars, but it is not warranted to be biased against good evidence and arguments nor is it warranted to be biased against scholars based on their race, gender, or other identity categories. If we notice unwarranted bias in the work of other scholars, we have an obligation to point it out in our work.



## Finding Trustworthy Sources [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.

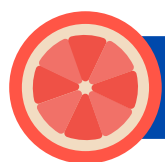


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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=173#h5p-30>

# Avoiding Misinformation, Disinformation, and Dismediation

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Avoiding Misinformation, Disinformation, and Dismediation](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Exercises](#)



## Avoiding Misinformation, Disinformation, and Dismediation

Good scholarship protects us from *misinformation* (wrong or misleading information), *disinformation* (intentionally deceptive information), and *dismediation* (intentionally deceptive efforts to discredit reliable channels of information).<sup>1</sup> Popular social media platforms in particular are rife with misleading, wrong, and deceitful claims. You should not rely on such sources for factual claims (unless you are a pro who can independently verify the informa-

1. Dismediation is a term coined by Maria Bustillos: <https://popula.com/2018/08/28/dismediation-revisited/>

tion you get from them – and even then, you will need to explain why you are using such sources instead of scholarly ones).

The institutions that support scholarship, such as granting agencies, peer-reviewed journals, libraries, and so on, rely on gatekeepers to keep bad information out and allow good information in. Of course, no such system is foolproof, so we need to maintain our own critical abilities. The scholarly system, when it works well, polices itself. When scholars see misinformation, disinformation, or dismediation in the work of other scholars, it is their professional responsibility to point it out and demand a correction.

We don't want to be too strict about information sources, however. Some scholars dismiss journals that are new, have a low rejection rate, don't have illustrious board members, publish infrequently, only publish online, etc. In other words, it might be snobbish to believe that nothing published in such journals can be taken seriously because the journal (the media channel) itself is suspect. While long-established journals with low acceptance rates and illustrious board members, etc. have earned their good reputations, they also can become stodgy and boring. Journals that are new or less well-known can be good sources of information because they might be in a better position to introduce new ideas to the field.

## ***Discernment***

As readers, we bring critical thinking to our research. Gullibility, or trusting too easily, is a problem because it means we are more likely to accept misinformation, disinformation, or dismediation. But we can go too far in the other direction and end up in cynicism – not trusting at all – which leads us to reject reliable sources. For instance, the internet has enormous amounts of information that is true and useful. Refusing to accept it because it's on the internet is as problematic as accepting everything that's on the internet. Our struggle is to practice discernment: when to trust and when not to trust. Discernment requires care and effort.

Our blind spots – gaps in our knowledge – present obstacles to discernment. These gaps make us vulnerable to the Dunning-Kruger effect: “people suffering the most among their peers from ignorance or incompetence fail to recognize just how much they suffer from it.”<sup>2</sup> Researchers need to catch their own assumptions by seeing what others are saying about

2. James M. Olson, Mark P. Zanna. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Netherlands, Elsevier Science, 2011, 251.



a source, identifying the unknowns: “gaps in knowledge may go unrecognized in everyday life because people fail to have outside agents hovering over them” (254).

Click on the following link for [a tutorial on SIFT \(Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace\)](#) from Wayne State University, which helps you overcome your blind spots and distinguish good sources from problematic sources.



## Key Takeaways

### Do

Understand what constitutes useful information in your discipline and for your project

Use ACRL standards to determine the credibility of journals in your field

Ask whether bias in your source material is warranted or unwarranted

Point out unwarranted bias in the scholarly work we find

Additional research to determine whether your source contains disinformation, misinformation, or dismediation

Understand the system of gatekeeping within your discipline

### Don't

Ignore criteria for what constitutes useful information in your discipline and for your project

Use materials from journals without a clear understanding of their credibility within your field

Reject sources out of hand because they exhibit bias – first ask whether the bias is unwarranted

Repeat unwarranted bias without comment

Repeat disinformation, misinformation, or dismediation without comment

Ignore the system of gatekeeping within your discipline

Evaluation will be a recurring theme in a later chapter when we move into refining and evaluating your research question.



## Exercises

1. Why do we need gatekeepers in our disciplines?
2. What efforts should you, as a researcher, make to ensure source credibility?
3. What are the differences between warranted and unwarranted bias?
4. How significant are the problems of disinformation, misinformation, and dismediation in our society recently?
5. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
6. What was the most important lesson you learned from this module? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

Note the rubric for evaluating scholarly resources below. Use the rubric as you are evaluating the sources you find.

	<b>Above Satisfactory (A/B)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (C)</b>	<b>Below Satisfactory (D/F)</b>
<b>Authority</b>	The author(s) of identified sources are credible and their findings appear in a peer-reviewed academic journal or a book from a respected academic press.	The author(s) may or may not be credible. Not every source is from a peer-reviewed academic journal or press.	The author(s) lack credibility. Sources are not published in a peer-reviewed academic journal or press.
<b>Warranted Bias</b>	Correctly distinguishes author(s) who avoid unwarranted bias against good evidence and arguments, and who use warranted bias against bad behaviors or false claims, from authors who don't.	Mostly distinguishes author(s) who avoid unwarranted bias against good evidence and arguments, and who use warranted bias against bad behaviors or false claims, from authors who don't.	Does not distinguish author(s) who avoid unwarranted bias against good evidence and arguments, and who use warranted bias against bad behaviors or false claims, from authors who don't.
<b>Grammar/Mechanics</b>	MLA or APA was used correctly while finding trustworthy sources. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while finding trustworthy sources. However, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	There are multiple incorrect sentence structures used while finding trustworthy sources. It also lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.

# Reviewing the Secondary Literature

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

**We discuss the following topics on this page:**

- [What Do We Mean by Literature?](#)
- [Reading Like a Researcher](#)
- [Taking Notes While Reading](#)
- [Strategic Skimming](#)
- [Active Reading](#)
- [The Anatomy of a Journal Article](#)
- [Making Notes on Books](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

**We also provide the following activities:**

- [Reviewing the Secondary Literature \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Reading Like a Researcher \[Refresher\]](#)



## What Do We Mean by Literature?

When we use the word “literature” in the phrase “literature review,” we are not talking about literary writing such as novels, poems, and plays. Instead, we are talking about scholarly research, which is often referred to by scholars as “secondary literature.” Our objective when creating a research project is to tell the story of research up to the point in time of our own contribution. Then, you add your own contribution. You should start by thinking about what types of information and resources you will need to complete your project. In the case of literary studies, we often start with peer-reviewed journal articles and **scholarly monographs** that can be accessed through the library catalog and subject databases. These are both essential resources, but you may need more.

For Jada’s research project about James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues,” we might also think about exploring newspapers and primary source collections related to civil rights, African American studies, and social activism. Your topics may require different types of media, data sets, or case studies, etc.



## Reading Like a Researcher

While conducting your literature review, you will encounter many types of scholarly writing. This material is often long and dense and can seem intimidating to beginning scholars. There is a remedy, however. Reading like a researcher is a skill that demystifies scholarly articles and monographs while making your review more efficient. The key is knowing that reading scholarship is different from other types of reading (like reading literary works). It is an active and strategic process that will help you identify the structure of an academic

book or article, an author's thesis, their argument, and the scholarly conversation in which they are engaged. We'll also discuss thinking while reading, the anatomy of a journal article, and strategies for effective note-taking.

A word of caution about reading the scholarly literature; many scholars begin their writing by presenting the opposing case. Do not confuse this presentation with the scholar's own case. For instance, in Cleanth Brooks' "The Language of Paradox," the first chapter of his book, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, he begins with these words: "Few of us are prepared to accept the statement that the language of poetry is the language of paradox. Paradox is the language of sophistry, hard, bright, witty; it is hardly the language of the soul." Many students incorrectly read this passage as one that Brooks is *affirming*. But he spends the rest of his chapter making the opposite case. In his second paragraph, we get an early hint that he is shifting away from his opening remarks: "Yet there is a sense in which paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry." The word "yet" signals that he wants to object to the claim he opened with. While Brooks doesn't credit anyone for holding the claim he opposes, he is familiar enough with it to present it as a consensus point of view. Again, please be careful not to mistake a scholar's opposing argument for the one they are affirming.



## Taking Notes While Reading

As you read, take notes on the following:

### While Reading Scholarly Literature, Ask

- What is the subject of the reading? What is it about?

- If it is a research paper or theoretical text, what is the thesis?
  - List at least three main points used to support the thesis.
  - What evidence is offered in support of the major argument?
- What is the subtext (the author's purpose)?
- Who is the intended audience?
- How credible is the work?
- What applications can the work have (how might it be used)?
- How relevant are these applications?

Students are strongly encouraged to adopt a note-taking/citation management system. UCF offers students one of the most popular programs, *EndNote*, at no charge. In Chapter 7, we discuss how to use citation management systems like *EndNote*.

### Mind Mapping [2 min 1 sec]



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### Cornell Method [1 min 16 sec]



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## Strategic Skimming

Given the length and density of scholarly books as well as articles, it would be difficult to read them closely during your literature review. At this stage, you're scanning and compiling possible resources for your review. Therefore, strategic skimming is an essential skill. Think of it as getting a bird's-eye view of an article or book chapter and selectively zooming in and out of the sections that are most relevant to you. You may go back to those sections for a closer reading, but for now, you're using this process to identify possible resources. Understanding how scholarly monographs and articles are organized will make this process easier and more efficient.

### Journal Articles

**The Abstract:** The abstract is a concise paragraph that is considered the “executive summary” of the article. Here, you can identify the author’s purpose, main problem or research question, methodology, and key findings.

**The Introduction:** This section builds on the abstract and is where authors make a real effort to connect to their audience. Introductions vary quite widely, but generally, they start broadly and narrow down; they state the author’s aims and the importance of their research; they state the hypothesis or research question, and they include a thesis statement. They may also include what is sometimes referred to as a “forecasting statement,” which helps prepare the reader and guide them through the rest of the paper.

**Section Headers:** If an article is broken into subsections, explore how those subsections are organized to get a sense of how the authors constructed their argument. These subsections may also generate ideas for how you can narrow and



focus your topic. You may find that just one subsection is worth digging into deeper, then note who the author cited in that section to help you establish the theoretical foundation for your project.

**Keyword Searching:** Effective keywords will not only help you locate high quality articles in our subject databases, they can also help you strategically skim through articles to quickly determine their relevance to your project. This strategy can also be effective if you've found a reference to an idea in an abstract or introduction and want to jump to that section to get more info. Skimming is not a replacement for a close reading of an article, book chapter, or book; it's a method for sifting and establishing relevance during the literature review. Think about the article's title: why did the author choose it? Does it epitomize the argument? Also, don't just grab a sentence from a text that agrees with your viewpoint without reviewing the larger context. The sentence you grab may not represent the author's views at all, but may be the author's presentation of an opposing argument.

**The Conclusion:** This section can be read in tandem with the introduction. Authors often use the conclusion to restate key points; however, they may also ask unanswered questions and leave clues for future research. Sometimes, they state these questions explicitly as if they are expecting others to build on what they've started. These questions and clues are points for you to jump into the conversation.

**Other:** Familiarizing yourself with the norms of your field is part of reading like a researcher. Depending on the field, journal articles may also include sections such as a literature review, keywords, methodology, results, discussion, and directions for future research. We'll discuss these points further in "Anatomy of a Research Article" below.

## Scholarly Monographs

**Preface:** This section of the book is equivalent to the abstract in a journal article, in which authors address their main argument, thesis, and often provide a brief overview of each chapter. The preface can help guide you to the most relevant sections of the book.

**Table of Contents:** Not only will this index include a list of chapters, it can also orient you to the theoretical focus and structure of the book. It is useful for understanding the specific text and for providing insight into how you might organize your own study. Much like the “section headers” discussed above, there might be something in a single chapter worth further investigation.

**Introduction & Conclusions:** Just as with journal articles, the introduction builds on the preface by providing a more in-depth discussion of the author’s argument, thesis, and their findings. The conclusion (if there is one – not all scholarly books have one) might be a recap of the thesis and the key findings. Consider reading these sections together before you read the body of the text.

**Indexes:** A variation of “keyword searching” discussed above is to skim the index to identify sections of the book that are most relevant to you. This approach is also an effective way to build and refine your list of keywords that you will search for in library subject databases.



### Active Reading

You should approach the literature review as an *active reader* who believes that other

scholars have something important to say, but also as a skeptic searching for gaps in the conversation and ways to add constructive context or relevance to the discussion.

In “Scholarship as Conversation,” we discussed how the idea of an intended audience can help frame your argument so that you are contributing to the discourse on your topic and are moving the conversation forward. Likewise, when conducting your literature review, try to determine the intended audience of each article, book chapter, or book that you read and what kind of conversation is taking place between these sources. After a while, you should start to see connections within the various works. Ask yourself these questions: who is building on whose argument and where do certain scholars agree and disagree? Do these authors point to areas of further research that you can build on?

Think of others’ research as a relay, or a kind of loose model, for producing your own research project. Published articles and book chapters, especially in edited volumes, provide insight into how researchers target specific audiences and tailor their arguments to meet their reader’s expectations. In your writing, a clear sense of audience awareness will help you establish the proper tone and give your paper a sense of purpose. It can also help establish the scope of your literature review and determine which resources will be most effective in your final draft.



## The Anatomy of a Journal Article

With a little experience, you’ll be able to tell a lot about a journal article just by examining its structure, or anatomy. Articles in the humanities are usually relatively simple compared to the social sciences and STEM (Science Technology, Engineering, Math). While there may be some variation depending on journal requirements, here is a basic breakdown of the two:

## ***Humanities***

Abstract  
Keywords (sometimes)  
Introduction  
Body  
Conclusion  
Works cited

## ***Social Sciences/ STEM***

Abstract  
Keywords (often)  
Introduction  
Literature review  
Methodology  
Results  
Discussion  
Conclusion  
Works cited

Let's examine an article to see how much information we can glean from the first page alone:



JAMDA

journal homepage: [www.jamda.com](http://www.jamda.com)

## Review Article

# The Effects of Advance Care Planning Interventions on Nursing Home Residents: A Systematic Review



Ruth S. Martin MD<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Barbara Hayes PhD<sup>b</sup>, Kate Gregorevic MD<sup>a,b</sup>,  
Wen Kwang Lim MD<sup>a,b</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Advance Care Planning  
advance directive  
nursing home  
aged care facility

**Background:** Advance care planning (ACP) encompasses a process by which people may express and record their values and preferences for care and treatment should they lose the capacity to communicate them in the future. We believe the effects that ACP can have on the nursing home population is distinct from others and sought to gain insight into the outcomes of relevant studies on the topic.

**Aim:** To identify the effects of ACP interventions on nursing home residents.

**Design:** Systematic review.

**Methods:** A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the following 4 electronic databases, Embase, Medline, PsychINFO, and CINAHL, with no limits on year or language. Gray literature search of relevant journals was also performed as was reviewing of the reference lists of all included articles. Inclusion criteria were randomized controlled trials, controlled trials, pre/post study design trials and prospective studies examining the effects of ACP on nursing home residents. A detailed narrative synthesis was compiled as the heterogeneous nature of the interventions and results precluded meta-analysis.

**Results:** The initial search yielded 4654 articles. Thirteen studies fitted inclusion criteria for analysis. The

This article is from a nursing journal. Note how we get the name of the journal with a link to the journal's homepage, the title of the article, the authors with their credentials and affiliations, the abstract, and a list of keywords to index the article and to provide the reader with several search terms. Without reading a word, you should immediately discern from the layout that this is a scientific article published in a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal. Everything here is transparent, and that transparency enhances the validity of the journal, the authors, and their study.

As noted above, humanities articles have a more basic structure that often flows from the abstract, to the introduction, to the body of the text. For example, here's a peer-reviewed article on Milton retrieved from the MLA database:

---

## John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*: Deathly Selfhood

Jennifer Lodine-Chaffey

*Critical attention to death in Samson Agonistes has been dominated by the question of whether Milton's drama glorified acts of religious terrorism, a question that involves death but unnecessarily narrows it. I seek to reframe our understanding of Samson by looking not only at his aggressive exploits, but also at his movement towards death. The poem illuminates Samson's development of what I call a 'deathly selfhood', which relies on an interior awareness of who he is, rather than on an outward manifestation of his abilities, and only becomes available to him as he nears death.*

John Milton's *Samson Agonistes* shows clearly the developmental steps involved in achieving a selfhood that incorporates death into its conception of human identity. Even though many of Milton's most well-known works include sustained examinations of human mortality, including *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*, in-depth consideration of Milton's usage of the *ars moriendi*, his personification of death, and his attention to posthumous monument seems to have come to halt in recent decades, perhaps surprisingly so given that Milton actually says a great deal about death.<sup>1</sup> *Lycidas* asks how we should react to the death of those we love, while *Paradise Lost* argues that although human sin brought death into the world, God uses death as 'his final remedy', which ushers in new eternal life.<sup>2</sup> Milton's engagement with issues of death occurred throughout his life and seems to become more focused as he aged. Indeed, his most sustained work on the subject, the 1671

While the layout is much simpler than in a STEM article, it conforms to the norms of a humanities journal and is easily identifiable as a work of literary criticism. For example, it follows a basic beginning structure of title, author, abstract and introduction. Unlike the STEM article, the author's affiliation will be at the end of the published work, after the works cited.

### Reading Articles to Identify Supporting Evidence [1 min 56 sec]





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## Parts of a Research Article: Arts & Humanities Edition [1 min 16 sec]



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## Making Notes on Books

Scholarly books can be touchstone works in literary studies. Before reading a whole book, take some steps to see if doing so is necessary for your project. Time is a precious resource, and you need to use it wisely! Read book reviews to gauge the book's likely relevance as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Then, read the Table of Contents and the Introduction. If there's a specific chapter that seems most relevant, skim it first. If there's a specific detail you're investigating, use the index to find that smaller section. If, however, you decide that the whole book is relevant (or that it's been assigned by your instructor), then read the instructions below to learn how to take effective notes while reading.

Please do not try to remember a whole scholarly book in your head; our brains are not made to process and store this quantity and density of information. Instead, get in the habit of

taking notes and making an index of the book as you read. Here are some tips to guide you through the process:

1. Think of your notes as your personal reference for the book. Mark page numbers before each note so you can find your way through the book again later, using your notes as a guide.
2. If you see a key term, jot it down. You can usually identify key terms because they repeat.
3. Sometimes, a book will identify its key terms, sometimes not. If you see a term you don't know, jot it down. If you see a word you know, but it's being used in an unfamiliar way, jot it down. It is important to remember that various disciplines and authors use words in a specialized way, and we must be careful to keep their sense of the term. Because of this, try to figure out the meaning of the term from the context before going to a dictionary.
4. Do not add comments, criticize, or "figure out" the author's ideas in your reference notes. The purpose of the notes is to keep a faithful index of the book; if you refer to your notes later, it should be clear which ideas are the author's and which are not. Your comments, questions, and criticisms can be made in a separate column if you choose (see the Cornell Method video above).
5. Take at least one note per page of text.
6. A note does not have to be a full sentence; fragments are fine.
7. An outline is a very useful form for your notes, since it helps to keep track of the parts of an argument, including its thesis, sub-claims, evidence, opposing arguments, etc.
8. Don't take too many notes. A map of Utah is useless if it's the same size as Utah. The purpose of note-taking is to have the information in usable (i.e. reduced) form.

Once you have a set of notes on your scholarly readings, go back through them and notice repeated themes and linked ideas. Highlight the notes that stand out to you. Make a second set of notes that is more condensed than the first. This second set of notes will be raw materials for your research and writing.





## Key Takeaways

### *Do:*

- Ask questions about the text as you read.
- Adopt a citation management system.
- Identify the intended audience for each reading.
- Use strategic skimming.
- Notice the structure of the reading.
- Consider the work as a relay (loose model) for your own research and writing.
- Create an index (set of notes) for books and longer readings.

### *Don't:*

- Read uncritically.
- Wait to manage your citations.
- Ignore the question of the intended audience.
- Read every word of a scholarly work with the same absolute focus.
- Ignore the structure.
- Overlook the ways you might model your research and writing on the work of others.
- Read longer works without making an index.



## Reviewing the Secondary Literature [Refresher]

Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.



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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=121#h5p-18>



## Reading Like a Researcher [Refresher]

Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.



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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=121#h5p-20>

# The Annotated Bibliography

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [The Annotated Bibliography](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Annotated Bibliography \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Annotated Bibliography \[Exercise\]](#)



## The Annotated Bibliography

1

This book presents a two-stage approach for presenting your research sources. The first stage is to write an *annotated bibliography* – a set of notes on discrete items, and the second stage is to synthesize these notes into a *review of literature*, which we present in Chapter 10. The annotated bibliography lists your sources in alphabetical order by author’s last name, just as you would do for a list of works cited. But the list also includes annotations, which are your words detailing relevant points from each source. The annotation is not just a simple summary of the source, but specifically indicates why information in the source

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Creating an Annotated Bibliography.

is relevant to your research problem. Use the annotations to explain the relevance of each source for your research.

Your research problem determines the *scope* of your research, which is the broadness or narrowness of the information you need. Keep in mind that we are not just looking for facts here but also for a sense of the scholarly discussion, which usually covers a range of thought about a given area of knowledge.

Keep in mind that you don't want to only include facts or claims from the secondary literature that support your argument. A better strategy is to think of organizing the material you find in terms of what Gregory Ulmer calls the CATTt – Contrast-Analogy-Theory-Target-tale. *Contrasts* are approaches to the research problem that differ from yours approach; *Analogies* are ways of thinking about your research problem that come from a different knowledge domain; *Theory* is a general explanation of the problem, *Target* is the result you want to see in the scholarly conversation; and *tale* is the demonstration of your method. Your annotations can indicate how various sources relate to these categories.

Broadly speaking, the sources you gather should relate to your literary case study, the scholarly problem you have identified, and the relevant theories, methodologies, and methods you are including. Though you are gathering sources for you to use in your research, you should still keep your audience in mind; think about how your audience make sense of the sources you have identified and what you need to do with the sources to present your argument. The following questions should help you to make appropriate annotations on your sources:

1. What was done?
2. Why it was done?
3. What was found?
4. What are the implications of the results?
5. What future research should follow up on this work?
6. What did you not understand in the paper that someone else can help you with?

While annotated bibliographies are sometimes published as useful guides to areas of knowledge, most scholars *don't* include annotated bibliographies in their published work. Instead, researchers use the much more reader-friendly *review of literature*, which we will be learning about in Chapter 11. The review of literature is where you *synthesize* your

research sources by looking for similarities and differences (among arguments, narratives, and trends in the sources), and *organize* them in terms of their function – case study, theory, methodology, etc. – within your research.

To help you gather annotated materials in one place, we provide a [Matrix Tool](#) that helps you organize your research. The annotated bibliography, unlike the literature review, does not need to be essayistic. We also provide an example of an [annotated bibliography](#) created by UCF student Dolores Batten that explains how her readings relate to her research project (her research project was to help develop methods for improving student writing).



## Annotated Bibliography [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=2213#h5p-16>



## Annotated Bibliography [Exercise]

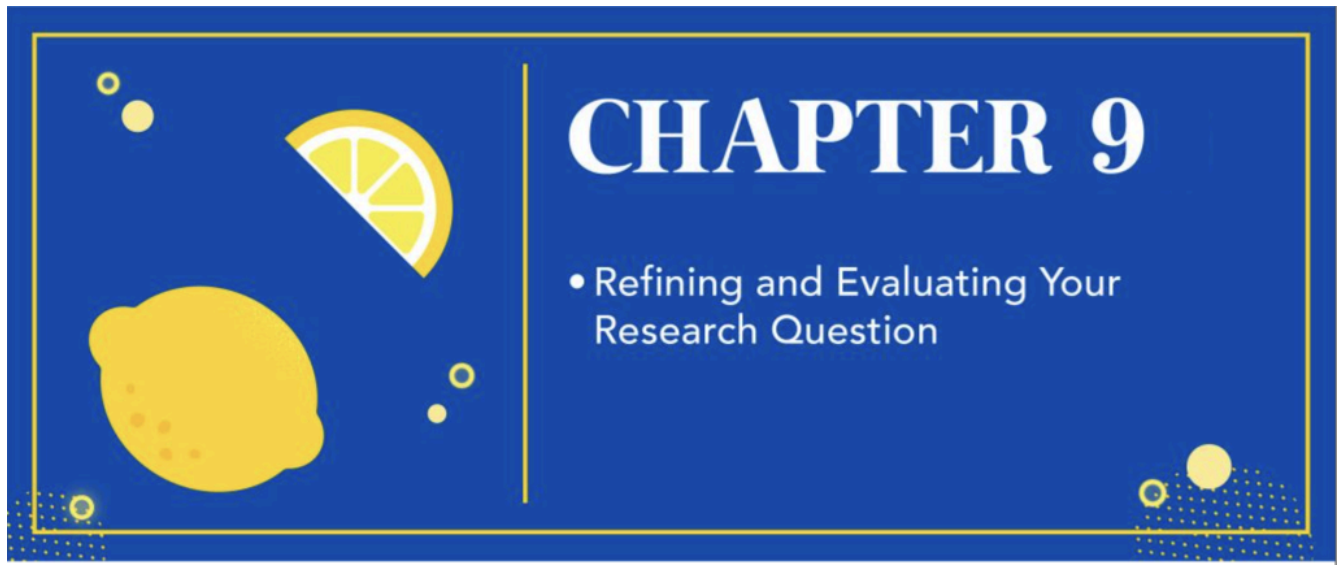
1. For this exercise, we are breaking things down into three stages:
  - First, find six sources that look promising (you can use the ones you gathered working through chapters 6 and 7). List all six.
  - Choose the most relevant three sources.
  - Annotate the three sources using the provided [Matrix Tool](#) to help you organize your research.

# CHAPTER 9: DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION



# Chapter 9 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

This chapter focuses on the art of crafting a clear, concise research question that will drive your research. Beginning researchers often struggle with the task of framing a research question, but we show how asking critical, open-ended questions can provide an entry point into the scholarly conversation on your topic. As we will discuss, a good research question has a clear purpose because it addresses a scholarly problem. It should relate to the work of other scholars and should be one they find relevant and significant.

Developing a good research question requires asking lots of other questions. Think of the research question as the engine that drives your project. If the engine is too simple, it may not work at all. If it's too complicated, it may not work efficiently or effectively. The goal is to have your research question take you a long way toward producing new understanding to add to the scholarly discourse.

This chapter will focus on strategies to help you develop, refine, and evaluate a good research question. We'll begin with Dr. Bruce Janz, professor of Philosophy at UCF, who discusses how he approaches the art of asking good questions with students in his courses.

Dr. Janz's thoughts provide a good starting point that we'll build on in the next section, "Refining Your Research Question" where we'll watch Jada discuss how she used an invention process that consisted of "built-in" questions, frames, and methodologies that caused her to view James Baldwin's work in an unexpectedly personal way.

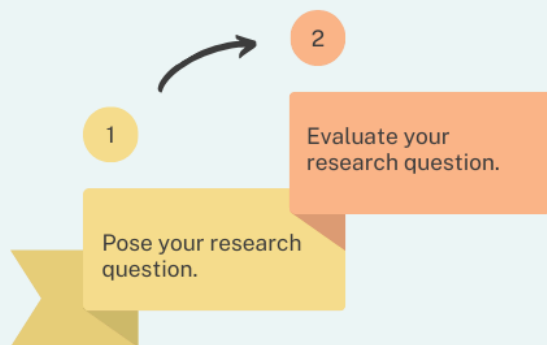
In the final section entitled "Evaluating Your Research Question," we'll circle back to Dr. Janz who provides some strategies for evaluating your question to ensure that it's clear, complex, focused, and that the answer is arguable. The focus is on devising an open-ended and arguable question that adds to the discourse rather than answering a simple question.



Please complete the following tasks as you read through this chapter. Keep track of your

work and reflect on how these tasks relate to the ones you have already completed.

## Chapter Nine Project Tasks





## Learning Objectives

Your thesis statement will answer your research question, so having a polished question is essential to the development of your thesis statement. Having both are essential to writing an abstract. Hence, this chapter helps you to

- posit your research question.
- refine and evaluate your research question.

# The Art of Asking Good Questions



## CONTENTS



Guest contribution: Bruce Janz on the Art of Asking Questions



### Introduction

Bruce Janz is Professor in the Department of Philosophy at UCF, graduate faculty in the Texts & Technology Ph.D. program, and co-director of the Center for Humanities and Digital Research.

We asked Dr. Janz to contribute to this course because he has some interesting thoughts on the topic of questions and questioning in philosophy but also beyond that, drawing on other disciplines. This is very much in line with our thoughts in this chapter where we present the ability to ask good questions as an important but vastly underappreciated research skill, even an artform.

Dr. Janz's approach is to take students through a critique of their provisional questions and to revise those until they come to something that they can really get behind.

"I encourage students to trust their guts," he says, "because sometimes the realization that a question is present comes before its clear articulation. I get them to look for the "hmm, that's weird" moments in data or texts or whatever they are working with – that's a site for questions. All this gets them to be a philosopher rather than study philosophy, and the same would be true of other disciplines as well."



Here are some more of Dr. Janz's thoughts about developing good questions, which is the focus of this chapter:

**On "how" questions:** People often use "how" questions as research questions (how does something happen/come to be/end up like this), and these assume that something is the case. They ask for an account of something. You might have to take a step back and demonstrate that the thing you say is happening is really happening.

**"That's weird" moments:** I sometimes talk about "that's weird" moments in looking at the data or phenomena. Moments like that are more like "why" questions. They are an attempt to give an account of something that's not adding up, that is a certain way but it's not clear why. That suggests that there are forces at work that need to be brought into the open. So, are there any "that's weird" moments? Something you would expect to be one way but it's a different way? I'm not saying that if there are no such moments there's nothing to explain, but it's easier if you see something like that.

**Questions imply methods or disciplinary frameworks:** You could, for instance, ask a question in such a way that it suggests that you are looking for a cause for some phenomenon, in which case you would have to use methods that could yield causes. It's worth being aware of which methods or disciplines you are implicitly appealing to by asking a question. A method is a way of answering a question (among other things).

**What's the ontology of your question?** In other words, what are you assuming exists in the world of your question, and how do things relate to each other? Does your question assume, for example, that individuals are the atoms of the world and any answer must refer back to what individuals do?

**Questions that take risks:** That is, the risk that your answer could be wrong. So it's always

worth asking about any question whether someone could disagree with you and still be right. If you are arguing for using a particular lens to understand something, could someone come along with a different lens and also give a coherent analysis? And if so, are these two lenses essentially the same thing? Is one better than the other in the end? Are these two explaining different aspects of a phenomenon? How exactly do different answers relate to each other? Also, what kind of evidence could there be that might convince you or someone else that your account is wrong? Is there anything? And if not, have you taken any risk in your question?

**Small changes in wording:** Questions might take on a different complexion with a very small change in wording. That's why it is worth going over your question many times, with different wordings, to see whether something new comes up. Defining words in a question, even (maybe especially) the seemingly easy ones, can help you to think about the space your question operates in or opens up.

**More “that’s weird” moments:** Questions might have as their goal to fit something into an existing way of understanding the world (the “that’s weird” moment might get resolved so that it does in fact line up with other existing knowledge). On the other hand, a question might open up a whole new way of thinking (the “that’s weird” moment might lead us to realize that our accounts of the world aren’t adequate). It’s worth knowing what you think your question (or its answer) is doing or leading to.

**Unspoken parts of questions:** Questions have unspoken parts. Sometimes those are assumptions, maybe ones that seem obvious and don’t need defense (always be wary of those – they might in fact need attention). There might be an assumption that something causes something else to happen – that’s an assumption that might need its own support. Sometimes the unspoken parts are about the audience, or they are about who is asking the question and from what social, cultural, racial, gendered, epistemological, religious, or other position. Sometimes there’s an assumption about shared knowledge between the writer and the audience, or shared understanding of social conventions, or something like that. It’s worth bringing out into the open as many of the unspoken parts as possible, because it might affect the kind of question you can or should ask.

**What happens when you answer a question?** Does it just disappear like a checked box in a to-do list? Or does it live on, and if so, why? Is it because the world keeps changing and so the question remains a live one?

**What does your question tell you about your own view of the world?** How do you know when you’ve asked the wrong question, and how do you change your mind on your question?

**How do questions relate to beliefs or worldviews?** Do beliefs or worldviews govern the kinds of questions you think are legitimate? What would it be like to ask questions from outside of that space – would you just have to entirely change the ontology of your world for the question to make sense at all?

**Where do new questions come from?** Sometimes from reading more. But sometimes from living, from doing things. Sometimes from talking to people. Sometimes you have to put yourself in an uncomfortable or unfamiliar space. And sometimes, questions cross-pollinate from other areas, morphing from a familiar space to a new one.



Now let's look at how to apply these ideas to the development and evaluation of your research question.



# Refining Your Research Question

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK

Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers, in turn, develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.<sup>1</sup>



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Narrowing Your Research Question](#)
- [The Invention Process](#)
- [Asking Critical Questions](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Refining Your Research Question \[Refresher\]](#)



## Introduction

You should start developing your research question as you embark on your literature

1. Association of College and Research Libraries. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." 2016. <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

review. We introduced this idea in chapter three when we discussed the notion of research as inquiry and emphasized the importance of curiosity and asking good, critical questions early in the research process. The idea is that, by asking questions and engaging with theory, you will develop a clear, concise question that will guide your research.

The scope of your research question is a critical consideration. Are you focused on one piece of literature or on a broader subject such as a literary genre, period, or theme? Most often, scholars ask questions about a specific work or works of literature, even if they want to better understand a broader subject. One approach to writing about a broader subject is called the case study. An individual work of literature becomes a “case” – an instance – of a larger phenomenon you want to understand. For instance, we might look at a poem by Emily Dickinson as a case study for understanding Dickinson’s poetry writing in general. Dickinson’s poems are mostly composed of quatrains, which are stanzas of four lines each. But occasionally she deviates from the quatrain. A literary scholar might do a case study or two from her works to better understand her use of the quatrain and her deviations from it.

Doing research is an *inventive process* that involves asking *critical open-ended questions*. These questions usually start with who, what, where, when, how, why. While these may seem simple at first, they all perform very specific functions. For example, you may start by asking why something happened (why a literary work was produced at a particular moment in history), but your question will become increasingly complex as you dig deeper. Sometimes it is good to ask questions about things people take for granted and therefore to open them up to new insights. A professor once noted that a really interesting research question was “why *three* little pigs? Why not one or two?”

Your first question raises another one, and the answer to the second raises a third one. For example, “Sonny’s Blues” contrasts different kinds of music: the jazz that Sonny plays, the gospel music the narrator hears in the street (“The Old Ship of Zion”), and the dance (juke) music that their uncle played at parties. What roles did these different kinds of music have in black communities? We could easily find out that Gospel music is sacred, and that jazz and juke music are secular. Jazz music was considered sophisticated (requiring lots of study and practice), while juke music was mostly played by amateurs. But having this answer isn’t enough to build a paper around. So, let’s ask the next question: what is Baldwin’s purpose in showing us this variety of black music? Keep going until you get to something really good.

The research question should be related to your purpose. In Chapter 2, we discussed the [kinds of purpose](#) that a research project can have, which include historical, theoretical, pedagogical, social, and experimental, among others. Your purpose is divided into two parts: what you want to learn about literature, and what you want to teach your audience. Once you have learned something relevant and significant about the literature, you then teach it to your audience. You should be able to clearly state the learning objectives for your audi-

ence; “by reading this research you will learn [x, y, and z].” These objectives may include words such as: identify, distinguish, define, evaluate, understand, make, demystify, conclude, etc.



## Narrowing Your Research Question

Position your research question in relation to the scholarly discussion by finding gaps or problems that still need to be better understood. Many times, scholars identify such gaps or problems in their published work and leave it to other scholars to address them. Focus your question on the most relevant part of a problem. For instance, if writing about racism, note which aspect of racism you are focused on – is it the legacy of racism in the family? in the music industry? in literary stereotypes? Racism in its entirety is probably too much to address in a short paper.

Your research question should be about a clearly identified “thing” – usually a literary text or texts. Whatever the “thing” is you are asking about, you should include it in your question.

It’s ok to start with a broad research question and then narrow it by applying the following criteria:

1. The more **generative** the question is, the better. We want questions that will require more thought and more research to answer.
2. The more **relevant** the question is, the better. We want questions that will be relevant to a community of scholars.
3. The more **original** the question is, the better. We want questions that haven’t been asked before – or, if they have been asked before, we want a different answer from what we already have.
4. The less **obvious** the answer to the question is, the better. We want questions that will shift our assumptions and help us learn something new.

Let’s try applying these criteria to some possible research questions about “Sonny’s Blues” and see what happens.

First attempt: Does Baldwin's story, "Sonny's Blues," criticize racism?

It's fine to start the process of invention with a question as broad as this, but we should check it against the criteria. Is the question generative? Not really because it can be answered with a simple yes or no. Is it relevant? Sure (though most scholars would already agree that the answer is yes). Is it original? No. Many scholars have written about Baldwin's anti-racism. Is it obvious? Yes, it criticizes racism. So, we can only meet one out of four criteria here and even then, it doesn't promise to add much knowledge to what's already written. Let's try again by narrowing the question.

Second attempt: Is Baldwin's critique of racism in "Sonny's Blues" different or more effective than critiques of racism in works by other African-American authors?

Notice that this question assumes that Baldwin's work does criticize racism, but asks a more narrow question: how does he critique it and is his critique different or more effective than others? Is it generative? Yes, it requires lots of additional thought and research since the answer would have to include comparison/contrast with works by other African-American authors. Is it relevant to a community of scholars? Yes. Is it original? Maybe. We would have to do some research into the scholarly conversation to get a sense of how original this question is. For instance, there may already be critical work comparing Baldwin to other African-American authors such as Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and others. Is the answer obvious? No (and that's a good thing). We would need to do some work to get to an answer. We know that Baldwin commented about his own writing.

The bottom line is this: You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well that you probably can't, but also knowing that literature is indispensable to the world. The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it...If there is no moral question, there is no reason to write. I'm an old-fashioned writer and, despite the odds, I want to change the world.

Should we be satisfied with our second attempt at a research question? It depends. Maybe it's not possible to know how effective Baldwin's writing is, but we can try. Was it more effective for some audiences than it was for others? We could focus on black and white audiences to start, but we could also ask about audiences in Baldwin's time and audiences today. Did the story help change attitudes or policies? We would need to do historical research to answer that question. Additionally, we would need to explain what we mean by "different" – Is Baldwin's critique of racism in "Sonny's Blues" different or more effective

than critiques of racism in works by other African-American authors? If we mean that Baldwin applied different critical tools to understand racism, we would need to be able to define what those critical tools are. If we mean he applied a different moral standard, we would need to explain what it is. If we mean that Baldwin suggested different reforms, we need to be able to describe them.

Let's assume, for now, that we can proceed with our second attempt at a research question. However, given that other scholars may have already addressed these questions, we will agree to modify them if we find more information that pushes us to do so. Notice the way that one question leads to others. Here our question prompts additional questions that must be answered before we can address the main question. The structure of questions and their relationships looks like this:

- Primary question: Is Baldwin's critique of racism in "Sonny's Blues" different or more effective than critiques of racism in works by other African-American authors?
  - Secondary question: what do we mean by "different"?
    - Tertiary question: Baldwin's use of critical tools?
    - Tertiary question: Baldwin's application of moral standards?
    - Tertiary question: Baldwin's suggested reforms?
  - Secondary question: what do we mean by "effective"?
    - Tertiary question: Do we need to examine different audiences to determine whether the story is more effective with some than it is with others?
    - Tertiary question: Did the story help change attitudes or policies?

We can begin a research project with a primary question such as this one, accepting that we will need to answer secondary and tertiary questions to properly answer the primary one. We should also be prepared to change our questions should our research point us in a more productive direction.

Let's watch Jada discuss how this process worked for her:

#### Literature Research Strategies – Part 4 [4 min 2 sec]



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=181#oembed-1>

Key Quotes from the Video:

**The Invention Process:**

“James Baldwin’s story dramatized something that felt very real to me. And it’s one of the most beautiful stories written about music and family and brotherhood and living urban life ... And that prompted a little more of my research as well, because I started to think a lot about music and race. I started to think about addiction and race.”

**Asking Critical Questions:**

“In James Baldwin’s story I ended up coming to the conclusion and the thesis statement of race and class being inseparable. And the way that I got there was not just from reading his story, but also asking critical questions about my thesis statement ... once I kept asking questions, then I got to the general thesis of race and class are in fact, inseparable, and James Baldwin’s story does show this through urbanization and music and addiction.”



## The Invention Process

Jada’s perspective on Baldwin, which includes Critical Race Theory, comes with “built-in” questions, frames, and methodologies that she will refine throughout her research. These built-in questions, frames, and methodologies come with the territory of studying Baldwin and his writing, and may come from scholarship in related disciplines. For instance, Critical Race Theory originated in legal studies and is still used within that discipline.

Critical Race Theory uses a variety of methodologies, such as interest convergence, intersectional theory, radical critique of the law, social constructivism, standpoint epistemology,

and structural determinism. Let's look at a methodology – interest convergence – taken from the work of Derrick Bell. Bell argued that the rights of black people don't advance unless they converge with the interests of white people. With that methodology in mind, we might ask whether the rights of black people in the story have advanced. Sonny's uncle was killed decades earlier by a group of whites, and they got away with the killing. The story doesn't provide enough information to say whether such a thing also occurred in the “present day” setting of the story. But we could look at the history of the time (1957) to see how often white people were held accountable for the killing of black people and how that compared to earlier periods (such as the 1930s and 1940s). If we find that there was an improvement over time, we might ask whether there are signs of interest convergence. The story doesn't give us much to go on as there are no significant white characters. But at least we now have a framework for asking more questions, and we can study the historical record to get more information.

What does our literary work and our theory have to teach us that we don't already know? Another example, “Sonny's Blues” provides a fictional lens through which we can understand real events such as drug busts of jazz musicians in New York City. Fictionalized events – such as Sonny's arrest – offer unique insights we don't get from studying statistics or other types of analyses. Jada noted that even though the sociology paper she found provided a unique insight into Baldwin's work, it wasn't as visceral as the experience of reading the story itself, especially its depiction of live jazz performance and other events she could relate to on a more personal level. These two perspectives work in tandem: “Sonny's Blues” dramatized something that felt very real to Jada, which prompted her to ask the types of questions that will drive her research about Baldwin and “Sonny's Blues.”

If we ask whether a literary work “reflects” some aspect of reality, we won't get very far. Most literature can be said to reflect reality, at least in part. But literary authors don't just hold up a mirror to the world. They construct a perspective on reality. We can ask what their perspective is, why they created it, how they created it, and what it says about other perspectives. Questions about the author's perspective will get us much further than questions about a literary work as a reflection of reality.



## Asking Critical Questions

Jada began with an overly broad idea about the intersection of race and class, which is common at this stage. Then she began narrowing her topic into a more refined research question by asking critical questions about how Baldwin dealt with these issues in the story. Her focus moved more specifically to questions about urbanization, addiction, and jazz: issues that are as relevant today as they were then, which is why Baldwin remains such a touchstone for scholars in literature and related fields, such as sociology.

Is this topic still too broad for one research project? Jada's next step is to evaluate her question to see if it can be further refined.



## Refining Your Research Question [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.







*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=181#h5p-31>

# Evaluating Your Research Question

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Evaluating Your Research Question](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Evaluating Your Research Question \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)

How do you know when you have posed a good research question? Below we discuss several criteria for evaluating your research question. Keep reworking your research question until it meets all the criteria.





# Evaluating Your Research Question<sup>1</sup>

*The spectrum of inquiry ranges from asking simple questions that depend upon basic recapitulation of knowledge to increasingly sophisticated abilities to refine research questions, use more advanced research methods, and explore more diverse disciplinary perspectives.*<sup>2</sup>

The research question is your ticket to joining the scholarly conversation. It should help the reader to consider something that is either not well understood or that is currently misunderstood within the current scholarly conversation. Note that your research question can be about either a work (or works) of literature or about the scholarly conversation related to a work of literature.

## Key Concepts

- Does your question have a clear purpose?
- Is your question clear, complex, and focused?
- Is your answer arguable?

Once you have developed a workable research question, the next step is to ensure that it's clear, complex, focused, and that the answer is arguable. This brings us back to the conversation analogy: Will others in your field – your audience – want to discuss your question? Will your findings add anything meaningful to the discourse and keep the conversation going?

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Creating a Research Question

2. Association of College and Research Libraries. “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.” 2016. <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

## Evaluating Your Research Question

- Are you filling a gap or solving a problem in relation to the existing scholarly discourse? (Either is fine – just know which direction your research is going).
- Is your question leading or loaded? (If so, ask a question that doesn't assume the answer)
- Does your question cover too much subject matter? If it is about the entire history of literature, it is likely too broad. (If so, narrow your question)
- Is the scope of your project realistic and researchable within the given timeframe? Keep in mind that some kinds of studies – like comparisons between two authors – can take longer than others. (If not, keep refining your question)
- Do you have the tools and/or technology needed to accomplish your task? (If not, keep refining your question)
- Do you have access to the information and resources you will need? (If not, keep refining your question)

Keep in mind the proper relationship between theory and literature. The theory is the *lens* through which critics look at literary works. So, it's better not to ask if we can see Freudian theory *in* James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues." Ask instead how Freudian theory might help us understand the narrator's psychological state, as in this question: "Is the narrator more interested in protecting himself than he is in protecting his brother? Can Freudian theory help us better understand his motives?"

Let's watch Jada discuss how she evaluated the question she discussed in the last section:

### Literature Research Strategies – Part 5 [3 min 19 sec]



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the*

text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=183#oembed-1>

Key Quote from the Video:

**Is your question clear, complex and focused?**

“So, when thinking about my research question and my thesis statement ... one of the things that I tried to think about and I wish I would have thought about a little bit more, is, ‘is my thesis clear, complex and focused?’ And then the other part of that is, ‘is it arguable?’

It’s important to have a complex research question and then also an arguable thesis statement, because once those two come together, you can have a more productive scholarly conversation ... And you can shift the conversation in a different direction and bring a different light. Because as a writer, as a researcher, you’re bringing forth more evidence and more complex and different ideas that you maybe weren’t important before, weren’t relevant before.”

A key strategy is to avoid questions with easy ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers such as “Did ‘Sonny’s Blues’ contain autobiographical elements?” Probably yes. A more interesting question might be to ask how or why Baldwin worked autobiographical elements into “Sonny’s Blues.” Questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no generally end the discussion, and the goal of your research should be to continue the discussion by making an arguable claim. At the time Jada wrote her paper, her research question centered around why James Baldwin and “Sonny’s Blues” are still relevant today. However, now that we’ve been through the refining and evaluation process, we see that she could further narrow her question to focus on topics such as urbanization, race, and addiction. For instance, how did urbanization after World War II affect the lives of black people? Did changes in urban life lead to more addiction among black people? What does Baldwin’s story teach us about these issues and what can we learn from them about urbanization, race, and addiction today?

As we discussed in the Scholarship as Conversation section, the problems addressed by

Baldwin are largely unresolved; such unresolved problems continue to engage researchers from many fields. Jada could expand on what she started here by adding her personal perspective to her research in literature and sociology. Further work can be done by posing questions about the scholarly literature on Baldwin. For instance, Emmanuel S. Nelson writes about the search for self-identity in Baldwin's writing.<sup>3</sup> Nelson writes, "Baldwin suggests that one can achieve a genuine and liberating sense of self only through complete acceptance of one's self, through loving commitment to another, and through identification with one's community." When that community is despised by the majority, then identifying with that community can produce "anguish" and "despair." We might ask what happens when people resist identifying with their community. Do they engage in more self-destructing behaviors? To ask such questions is to follow up on the scholarly conversation put forth by Nelson. When we ask a question such as this, we address both Baldwin and Nelson in our research.

Move beyond your first question by asking a second question, a third question, and so on. The answer to your first question will have further implications; if X (is true), then Y (is implied). Your second question might be to ask about these implications. For instance, your first question might be about categories, such as categories of music in Baldwin's story. Your second question can be about the function, history, and relationships of music in these categories. Your third question might be about Baldwin's personal experience with these categories of music. Your fourth might be about the role these categories of music play in his story. Your fifth might be about the legacy of these music categories within black culture today. We can read about the uneasy relationship between black gospel music and more secular forms such as blues and jazz. How does this uneasiness play out in Baldwin's life? In the story? In black culture today?

If you are still unsure if your question is refined enough, Wendy Belcher, author of *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks*, suggests talking through your research question with a friend or advisor. She also suggests writing an abstract and sending it to a friend or advisor for review. Even when an abstract is not required for your assignment, consider writing one and soliciting feedback as Belcher suggests. Feedback can be invaluable since at this point you are looking for your moment to jump into the conversation.

In the "Back Matter" of this book, you will find a page titled "Rubrics." In that page, we provide a rubric for the research question.

3. Nelson, Emmanuel S. "James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community." MELUS, vol. 10, no. 2, 1983, pp. 27–31. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/467307>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2023.



## Evaluating Your Research Question [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=183#h5p-32>



## Exercises

1. What is your research question? Does it entail secondary (and tertiary) questions?
2. Does it meet all the criteria for a good research question listed on the page?
  - Does your question relate to the scholarly discussion? Does it point to gaps or problems in the discussion that need to be better understood?

- Does your question name a “thing” (usually a literary text or texts) that your question is about?
- Is your question clear, complex, and focused?
- Is your answer arguable?
- Are you filling a gap or solving a problem? (Either is fine – just know which direction your research is going)
- Is your question leading or loaded? (If so, ask a question that doesn’t assume the answer)
- Does your question cover too much subject matter? (If so, narrow your question)
- Is the scope of your project realistic and researchable within the given timeframe? (If not, keep refining your question)
- Do you have the tools &/or technology needed to accomplish your task? (If not, keep refining your question)
- Do you have access to the information and resources you will need? (If not, keep refining your question)

3. Using the criteria in this page, try to assess one or more of these research questions:

- “Will ‘Sonny’s Blues’ help us solve the problem of racism today?”
- “Why should we teach ‘Sonny’s Blues’ in the classroom?”
- “Does ‘Sonny’s Blues’ encourage people to appreciate Black culture?”
- “How did ‘Sonny’s Blues’ change the conversation about race and addiction?”

4. If you have read “Sonny’s Blues,” posit a research question that might work better than those above.
5. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
6. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

## Creating a Research Question Rubric



**TASK: Create  
a Research  
Question**

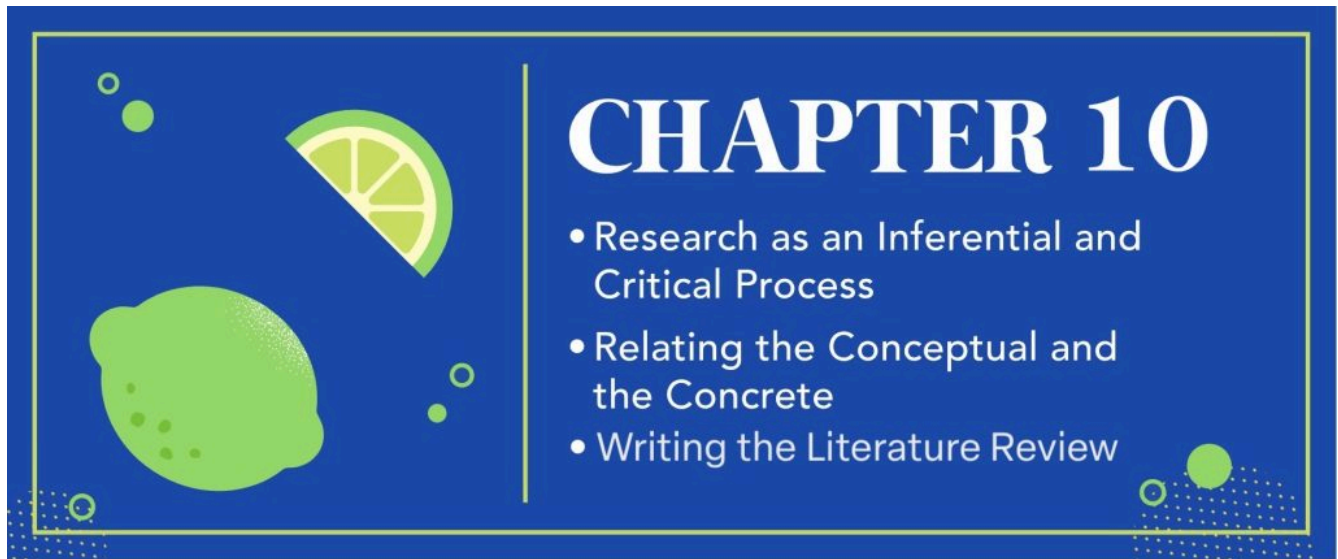
**LEVELS OF  
PERFORMANCE:**

	<b>Above Satisfactory (A/ B)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (C)</b>	<b>Below Satisfactory (D/F)</b>
<b>Clear, Complex, and Focused Question</b>	The research question is clear, complex, and focused. It is not unnecessarily loaded or leaning. It sets up a researchable and realistic project.	The research question remains too broad or too narrow. It is somewhat unnecessarily loaded or leaning. It is not very researchable and the project it sets up is not very realistic. The research question requires refining.	The research question is extremely broad or narrow. It is very unnecessarily loaded or leaning. It is not researchable and sets up an unrealistic project. The research question requires major refining.
<b>Arguable Answers</b>	The possible answers to the research question (the thesis) are arguable. These answers can be much more than just "yes" or "no."	The possible answers to the research question (the thesis) are only partially arguable. These answers can be only slightly more than just "yes" or "no."	The possible answers to the research question (the thesis) are unarguable. These answers can only be a mere "yes" or "no."
<b>Relevance to the scholarly conversation</b>	The research question is relevant to the scholarly conversation and includes key concepts in the discipline. Other researchers and scholars are likely to be highly interested in the question.	The research question is somewhat relevant to the scholarly conversation and may be missing a key concept. Other researchers and scholars may only be slightly interested in this discourse.	The research question does not add anything of value to the scholarly conversation and is lacking any key concepts. Other researchers and scholars would not be interested in this question.
<b>Question relates to available scholarly sources and evidence</b>	Key research sources and evidence are available and relate directly to the research question.	Key research sources and evidence may only partially available and may only partially relate to the research question.	Key research sources and evidence are not available and/or do not relate to the research question.
<b>Grammar/ Mechanics</b>	MLA or APA is used correctly throughout the research question. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly throughout the research question, but with mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The research question contains multiple incorrect sentence structures and lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.

# CHAPTER 10: RESEARCH AS AN INFERENTIAL AND CRITICAL PROCESS

# Chapter 10 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

Much of this chapter deals with constructing cohesive arguments. In “Research as an Inferential and Critical Process,” we discuss how inferences allow us to move from one thought to another; they are the pathways by which thinking occurs.

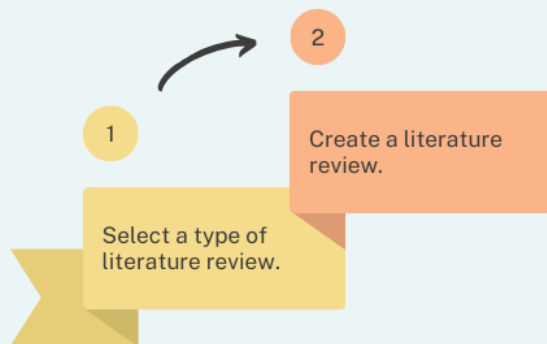
In “Relating the Conceptual and the Concrete,” we return to our analogy between argumentative writing and law by focusing on how to use deductive logic to make your case. A good detective or lawyer alternates between the conceptual and concrete, just as you should in your research project. Deductive logic uses syllogisms, which are three-part structures that tell us what to think about a specific case (person, place, thing, group, event, etc.).



Our first task for this chapter is to select a type of literature review. We will be learning about the different kinds and why you might choose one over another. The second task is to cre-

ate a literature review by synthesizing the materials we collected earlier using library and Google Scholar searches, and for which we produced an annotated bibliography.

## Chapter Ten Project Tasks





## Learning Objectives

Keep the detective analogy in mind as you work through this chapter. Much like a detective, researchers use deductive, inductive, and abductive logic to make sense of their material. The most important lessons you will learn are to:

- ask critical questions
- note claims that follow from a given proposition (or statement of facts)
- synthesize your research into a literature review

# Research as an Inferential and Critical Process

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Inferences](#)
- [Reasoning](#)
- [Prototype, Template, and Procedural Knowledge](#)
- [Ideology](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Research as an Inferential and Critical Process \[Refresher\]](#)



## Inferences

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story, "The Blue Carbuncle," Sherlock Holmes asks Watson:

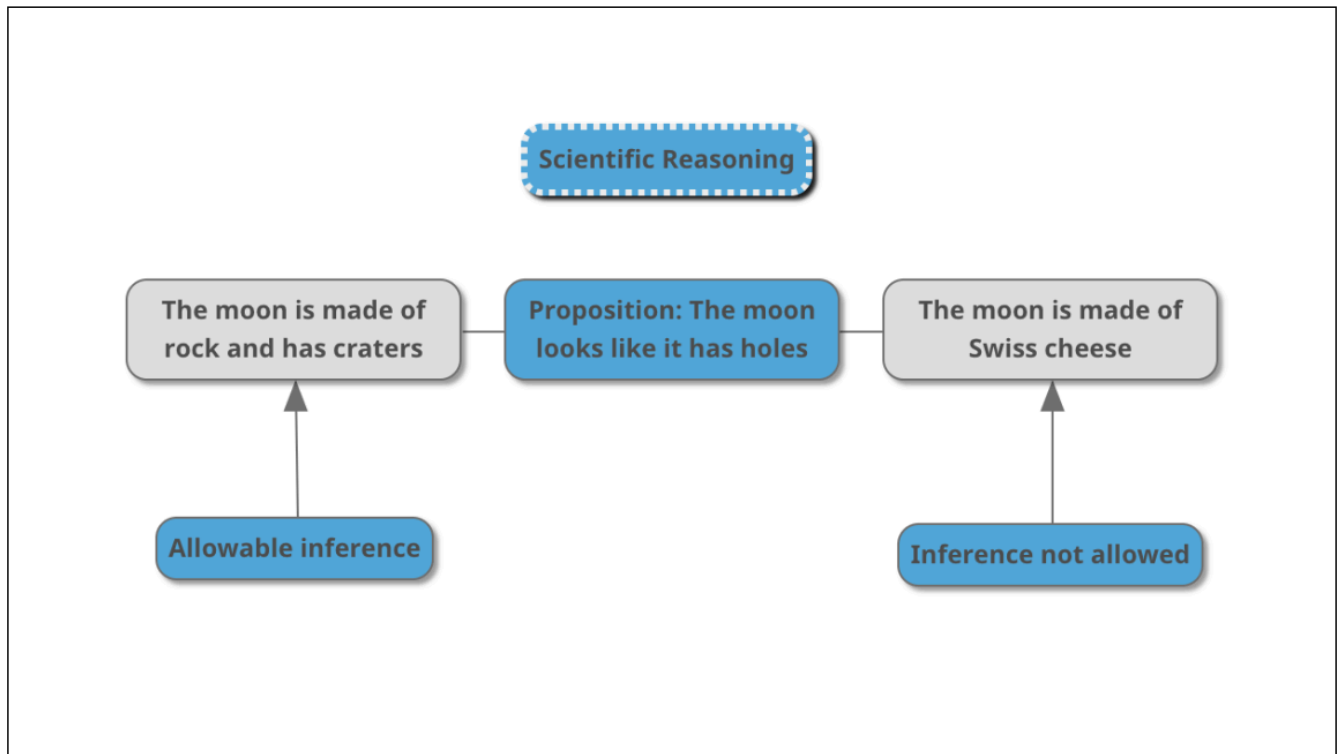
"What can you gather yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this article?"

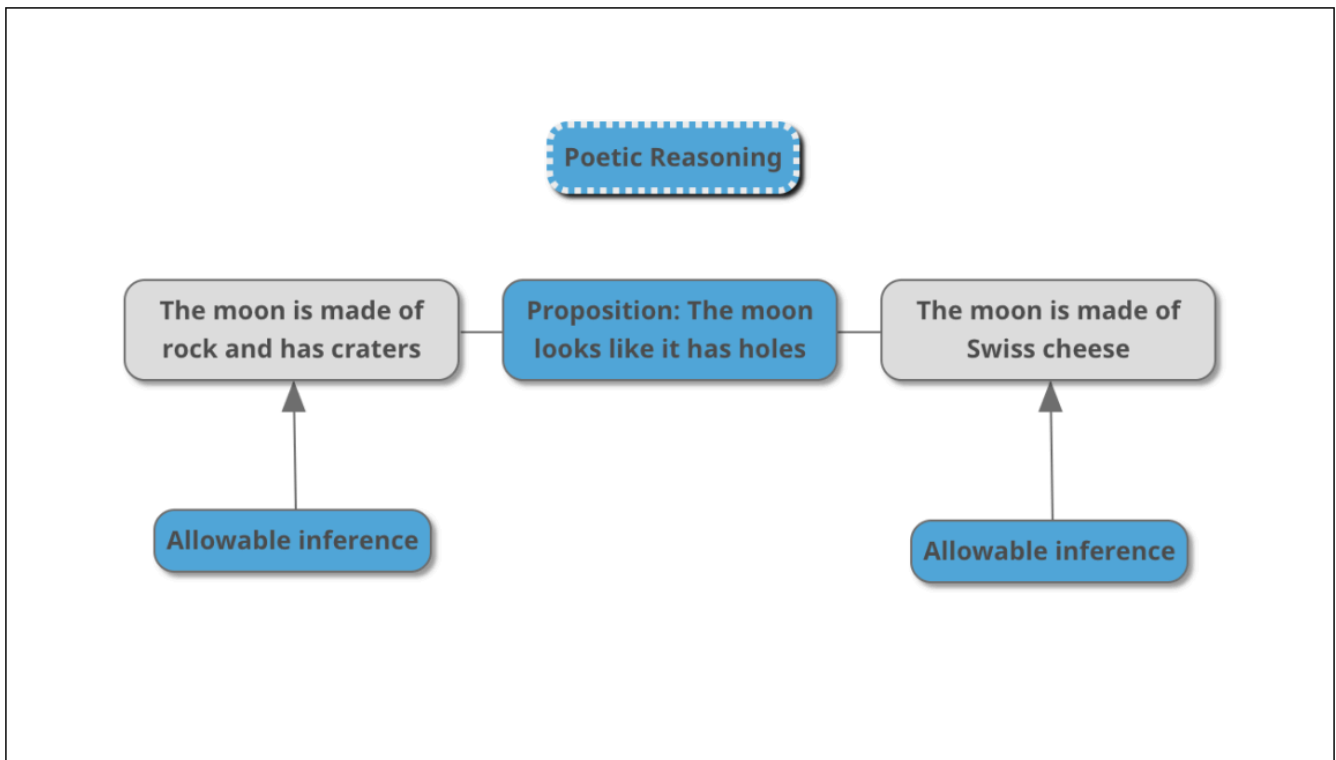
"I can see nothing," said I, handing it back to my friend.

“On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences.”

Without inferences, there is no thinking, critical or otherwise. Inferences allow us to move from one thought to another; they are the pathways by which thinking occurs. To think inferentially is to ask questions about pieces of information. What does this information tell us? Does it lead us to a hypothesis? Does it support our hypothesis or challenge it? If the information is true, what other claims follow logically from it? What additional knowledge is required to make sense of the information?

Thinking critically requires us to restrict ourselves to *allowable* inferences. For instance, we can observe that the surface of the moon is not smooth but appears to have holes in it. We might conclude that it is made of Swiss cheese. Science would reject this inference, but poetry would allow it. We could say that each area of knowledge has its own inference rules, just like each game has different rules of play.





William Parkhurst offers an amusing discussion of Monty Python's famous scene mocking the [faulty reasoning of witch trials](#). Non-allowable inferences are called fallacies. In some settings, logical fallacies lead to injustices (like in the witch trials), while in others they may lead to laughter (like in Monty Python). In humor, logical fallacies are ok. In trials, they are not.



## Reasoning

Reasoning is the process of putting inferences together. There are many kinds of reasoning; one of the common, called *abductive reasoning*, involves reasoning about causation. If we see a house on fire, we reason that there must have been a cause. Was it an accident or was



the fire set intentionally? Without more information, we are merely *speculating*, or reasoning with insufficient information.

A common mistake in abductive reasoning is to assume that *correlation* equals *causation*. Correlation means that two things merely appear together. For example, if we see a book of matches at the scene of a fire, we might assume that the matches were used to start the fire. Yet the appearance of the matches merely correlates with the appearance of the fire. Unless we can rule out other causes, we can't conclude with any certainty that these matches caused the fire. Similarly, if we discover that two authors met once, we do not have enough information to conclude that a literary work written by one author was intended as a response to the other author. We can speculate, but we must indicate that it is only a speculation.

Some types of reasoning are very loose and allow multiple *associations*. Let's take a hypothetical car advertisement in which a shiny new car is parked in the middle of a football field while a male peacock walks around it with its colorful tail fanned out. The peacock is eye-catching and football is about toughness; we associate both with the car. We might make any number of inferences from this scene, such as that the car is supposed to impress and intimidate (which is what male peacocks do with their display) and that it will grant the car's future owner the same powers. Such associative reasoning can help us understand metaphors and allusions in literary works.



## Prototype, Template, and Procedural Knowledge

We build inferences from our knowledge of how the world works. This knowledge can be divided into types: prototype, template, and procedural.

1. **Prototype** knowledge tells us what category or class something belongs to; it can help us relate a literary work to a genre, period, or movement.
2. **Template** knowledge is about patterns and structures (such as the different pieces on a chess board); in the study of literature, we bring knowledge of templates such as narrative structures and symbolic systems.

3. **Procedural** knowledge is about how a process (like eating or riding a bicycle) is done; in literary studies, procedural knowledge can help us understand the composition of a work, the distribution process, the reading process, interpretation, and so on.

When we are trying to understand new information, we usually bring prototype, template, and procedural forms of knowledge together with the new information. For example, in writing about “Sonny’s Blues,” we need to know that segregation existed in America and separated black and white communities (and that we are still living in the legacy of that separation). Our knowledge about the period of official segregation is prototype knowledge. We can make sense of the relationship between the narrator and his brother using template knowledge. Procedural knowledge can help us understand the causes and effects of addiction.

Writing a research paper involves problem solving (research question being the problem). You have to relate the information in the problem (the research question) with the research material you find — and the relevant prototype, template, and procedural knowledge — before making your inferences. If you don’t follow this process, you won’t be able to solve the problem successfully (unless you just make a lucky guess — but even then you still have to support your argument!).

Your paper should demonstrate to your reader how you made your inferences; by doing so, you are providing a *warrant* for your claims by explaining how you move from one proposition to another. Your reader should be able to clearly explain to a third person how you reached your conclusion.



Keep in mind that prototype, template, and procedural knowledge are culturally and historically specific and that they represent the “ideology” of a culture. In other words, this knowledge is not necessarily objective reality. It contains within it a whole set of assumptions about how the world works and these assumptions may be wrong or may serve the interests of one group at the expense of another. For example, race, class, nationality, pro-

fession, gender, and sexual identity can be understood in terms of prototype, template, and procedural knowledge, but this knowledge may be based on outdated and oppressive ways of thinking such as crude stereotypes. We must use prototype, template, and procedural knowledge to produce a research project, but should be aware that all such knowledge deserves scrutiny.

Literary theories, such as feminist, psychoanalytic, new historical, Marxist, etc. provide their own versions of prototype, template, and procedural knowledge. Such knowledge is also subject to scrutiny, but scholars have recognized much of it as valuable for making inferences within the field of literary studies. When writing a literary studies research paper, you should familiarize yourself with the prototype, template, and procedural knowledge related to your chosen theory.



## Research as an Inferential and Critical Process [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=194#h5p-34>

# Relating the Conceptual and Concrete

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following on this page:

- [Relating the Conceptual and Concrete](#)

We provide the following activity on this page:

- [Relating the Conceptual and Concrete \[Refresher\]](#)



## Relating the Conceptual and Concrete

Just as a lawyer in a courtroom alternates between presenting legal principles (concepts) and a specific case (concrete facts), you need to alternate between the conceptual and concrete when you present your argument to readers. Generally, researchers use *deductive* reasoning to make their case to their readers. Deductive reasoning uses *sylogisms* that tell us what to think about a particular case. In deductive logic you need to prove both premises are true and prove that the conclusion must follow from the premises.



## Example

A syllogism is

1. [Major premise – conceptual] The Black Aesthetic is defined as literature or art that seeks to remember history, define identity, gain recognition, and celebrate blackness;
2. [Minor premise – concrete] ‘Sonny’s Blues’ seeks to remember history, define identity, gain recognition, and celebrate blackness;
3. [Conclusion] Therefore, ‘Sonny’s Blues’ is an example of the Black Aesthetic.

The major premise is about a broad *concept* (the Black Aesthetic) and its general principles and purposes. The minor premise is concrete since it is about a particular case: James Baldwin’s story “Sonny’s Blues.” The conclusion results from applying the conceptual principle to the concrete case.

Our sample syllogism is not very good, however, since it tells us something that we already knew or could discover easily. We can make a better argument by considering a specific problem. Addiction is one of the themes in “Sonny’s Blues.” A relevant research question might be: “How does the Black Aesthetic help us to understand or solve the problem of addiction?” The thesis, or answer, might have something to do with figuring out how the loss of history, identity, recognition, and celebrations of blackness draws some black people into addiction and how the restoration of those things might help prevent addiction or help addicts recover.

If we pursue this line of inquiry, we can keep our syllogism above, but we need to add a new one to it:



## Example

1. [Major Premise] Sometimes addiction is a response to *anomie*, which Emile Durkheim conceptualized to mean rootlessness, alienation, and a lack of belonging.
2. [Minor Premise] Black people (such as Sonny) have experienced *anomie* because they have lost much of their history and identity to racism.
3. [Conclusion] Therefore, black people (such as Sonny) are more likely to turn to addiction.

Here you need to define key concepts and show how they apply to the particular case of Sonny. You need to support your major premise; how strong is the theory that *anomie* is a cause of addiction? You also have to explain what “sometimes” and “more likely” mean; are there statistics you can find?

When we find data that supports a major premise, we are using *inductive* reasoning. The deductive syllogism we discussed earlier moved from conceptual principle (about addiction and *anomie*) to a concrete case (Sonny’s experiences with *anomie* as a result of racism). The inductive argument moves the opposite way; it gathers concrete cases from the real world (found in scientific studies) to see if there is a strong relationship between addiction and *anomie*, and between *anomie* and racism. If we can support our premises through inductive reasoning, then our deductive argument is more secure.

But you should expect pushback against your argument. For instance, in “Sonny’s Blues,” Sonny plays music that is integral to black history and identity, so has he really lost a sense of black history and identity? It is Sonny’s non-addicted brother, our narrator, who realizes that he, much more than Sonny, has lost a sense of black history and identity. Given this information, should we give up on our argument? Not necessarily! Sonny’s music may not solve the problem of his addiction, but it may keep him from getting worse. The narrator, though not an addict, may be suffering in other ways as a result of his loss of black

history and identity. Carefully assess the *scientific*, *historical*, and *textual* evidence to make your argument.

An *abductive* argument is about the causal relationships of events. It is similar to the reasoning that detectives and doctors use every day when they see a result (evidence of crime or illness) and reason backwards to determine its causes. The deductive argument about Sonny's addiction discussed above could be reframed as an abductive argument, reasoning from results to causes. What caused Sonny's addiction? Were there multiple factors? Often with abductive arguments we need to gather more evidence to make sure we have identified the correct causes.

*Conductive* reasoning is associative logic based on resemblance, puns, homonyms, and images. It explains how we make associations, such as the way people get nicknames. A famous nickname, used in "Sonny's Blues," is the name "Bird," referring to jazz musician Charlie Parker. How did Parker get the name "Bird"? There are many theories:

The origin stories about his nickname Yardbird (usually shortened to Bird) include that it derived from a cousin mispronouncing his name as "Yarlie", and that it was conferred by a musician after Parker rescued a chicken that had been struck by a car and then had it cooked for dinner. The most convincing explanation is the one provided by trombonist Clyde Bernhardt, in his autobiography *I Remember*. "Charlie told me he got the name 'Yardbird' because he was crazy about eating chicken: fried, baked, boiled, stewed, anything. Down there in the South, all chickens are called yardbirds."<sup>1</sup>

A research paper into "Sonny's Blues" might examine the ways in which conductive reasoning functions in black subcultures such as jazz.<sup>2</sup>

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/charlie-bird-parker-death-jazz-musician-saxophonist-miles-davis-a9689511.html>

2. In the "Back Matter" of this book, you will find a page titled "Rubrics." On that page, we provide a rubric for Relating the Conceptual and Concrete.





## Relating the Conceptual and Concrete [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

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# Writing the Literature Review

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [The Literature Review](#)
- [What is the Purpose of the Review?](#)
- [What is the Scope of the Review?](#)
- [Strategies for Getting Started](#)
- [Types of Literature Reviews](#)
- [Composition Guidelines](#)
- [How to Locate Reviews by Discipline](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Types of Literature Reviews \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Writing the Literature Review \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)





## The Literature Review

Conducting a literary studies research project involves time and effort, with much of it going towards the development of a *literature review*. A literature review synthesizes the materials you gathered for your annotated bibliography and provides the conceptual “map” in which you will position your argument. It sets your reader up to understand the scholarly conversation about your research problem. The literature review might fill several pages of your research paper and usually appears soon after an introduction but before you present your detailed argument.

A literature review provides your audience with an overview of the available research about your area(s) of study, including the literary work, your theory, and methodology. The literature review demonstrates to the reader how these scholarly discussions have changed over time, and it allows you to position your research in relation to research that has come before yours. Your aim is to present the discussion up to this point. Depending on the nature of the assignment, you may also include your critical commentary on prior research, noting among this material the weaker and stronger arguments, breakthroughs and dead ends, blind spots and opportunities, the invention of key terms and methods, mistakes as well as misreadings, and so on.

Once you have gathered the research materials you need for your literature review, you have another task: conducting an analysis on the research to see where your original contribution fits into the scholarly conversation. As the saying goes, “we are standing on the shoulders of giants.” Your job is to show a portrait of these giants to your audience, and to show how your work relates to the portrait. On many scholarly topics, literature reviews already exist. You may refer to such existing reviews within your own, indicating any materials might have been overlooked, new developments that have arisen since the publication of the existing literature review, and new perspectives or insights you have about the materials.

Some beginning researchers try to tear down the work of other researchers in an effort to make their own work look good by comparison. It rarely works. First, it tends to make your audience skeptical of your claims. Second, it ignores the fact that even the mistakes, blind spots, and failures of other researchers contribute something to our knowledge. Albert Ein-

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Creating a Literature Review

stein didn't disrespect Sir Isaac Newton by saying Newton's theory of space was wrong and terrible and that Einstein's own theory was great by comparison. He built upon Newton's work, showing how it could be improved. If, however, a researcher willfully sets out to deceive or distort or to tear down the work of other scholars without good reason, then their work does not deserve such deference.

Most literature reviews appear after the introduction. It presents your reader with relevant information about the scholarly discussion up to now. Later in your paper, you discuss your contribution. Before you begin work on your literature review, let's discuss what we mean by "literature"; understand the purpose and scope of the review; establish criteria for selecting, organizing, and interpreting your findings; and discuss how to connect your findings to your research question.



## What is the Purpose of the Review?

Many students seek to "find sources that agree with my claim or idea." That approach is too narrow, in our view. If we use such an approach, we may get the following results:

1. Because we can find sources that agree with almost any claim, readers will wonder whether your claims are weak and the sources are cherry picked.
2. While literary scholars sometimes cite authorities to support their claims, they don't rely only on authority. They respect authority, but not too much. Your own claims need to rely more on evidence (from the literary text, historical and biographical information), and your critical and creative reasoning skills.
3. Scholarship is a conversation; thus, the goal is less about finding agreement and more about joining the conversation with the aim of making a valuable contribution to the discussion.

The literature review provides your reader with an overview of the existing research about your topic or problem. It provides the context necessary for your reader to catch up with the scholarly conversation and then to appreciate the value of your contribution to it. The lit-

erature review sharpens the focus of your research and demonstrates your knowledge and understanding of the scholarly conversation around your topic, which, in turn, helps establish your credibility as a researcher.

Creating the literature review involves more than gathering citations. It is a qualitative process through which you will discover what is already known about your topic, and identify the key authorities, methods, and theoretical foundations, so you can begin to position your contributions within the scholarly conversation.



## What is the Scope of the Review?

Defining the scope of your review will also help you establish criteria to determine the relevance of the sources you are finding. At this stage, you are not reading in-depth; instead, you are skimming through what has already been published and identifying the major concepts, theories, methodologies, and methods present within these published works. You should also be identifying connections, tensions, and contradictions within the already published works of your topic or problem. This involves building on the knowledge of others and understanding what methods, measures, and models we have inherited from previous researchers in our field.

**Literature Reviews: Common Errors Made When Conducting a Literature Review [12 min 22 sec]**



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=124#oembed-1>

Video provided courtesy of the Center for Quality Research (CQR)



## Strategies for Getting Started

A literature review helps your reader understand the relationship of your research project to the work of other scholars. It covers the existing knowledge about a problem, and allows you to show the relevance/significance of your contribution to the discussion. Your reader may or may not have read scholarly literature about the theories, methodologies, and literary works you are discussing. But they want to know that *you* have read it and have thought about it. Your literature review provides not only an overview of the existing scholarship for readers; it also offers your perspective on it.

Begin your work on the literature review by synthesizing the various sources in your [annotated bibliography](#).

**For advice on Synthesizing Sources, consider the following from The Purdue Online Writing Lab:<sup>2</sup>**

Note that *synthesizing is not the same as summarizing*.

- A summary restates the information in one or more sources without providing new insight or reaching new conclusions.
- A synthesis draws on multiple sources to reach a broader conclusion.
- Don't force a relationship between sources if there isn't one. Not all of your sources have to complement one another.
- Do your best to highlight the relationships between sources in very clear ways.
- Don't ignore any outliers in your research. It's important to take note of

<sup>2</sup>.

3. [2]

every perspective (even those that disagree with your broader conclusions).

Not all humanities research projects contain literature reviews, but many do. Keep in mind that the type of literature review you choose (see list below) pertains to the secondary research – other scholarly sources – and not to the primary literary work. For instance, a literature review about Kate Chopin’s writing will be your thoughts about the *scholarship* on Chopin and not about Chopin’s text itself. You are summarizing what you see in the scholarly literature about Chopin’s writing. The literature review puts you in the position of authority not just on Chopin’s writing but on the scholarship about her writing. You are seeking to understand what scholars have said about her work. Scholars might belong to different schools of thought (psychoanalytic, feminist, Marxist, etc.). They might make different arguments about Chopin. They might use different methodological approaches.

If your research involves two or more theories, such as psychology and genre studies, you may need to create multiple literature reviews, one for each theory or methodology. If the theories overlap with each other significantly (i.e., Marxism and Cultural Studies), you may combine them. Your literature review need not include everything about the subject area – you would need to write a book to cover a single theory – but only those concepts and methods that are most relevant to your research problem.

## Factors to Consider When Developing Your Literature Review

- **Determine the Scope:** How broad or narrow should your literature review be? You may want to focus on recent scholarship only, or on a particular school of thought in the literature. Your scope is determined by your purpose; what is it you aim to achieve with your research?

- **Establish Criteria:** We discussed the importance of defining the purpose and scope of your review on the previous page, but it's worth reviewing here as well. This step will help you establish important criteria and focus your searching. For example, how many sources will you need? What types of sources (primary, secondary, statistics, media)? Is currency important? Do you know who the prominent authors or theorists are in your subject area? Take some time to map out these or other important factors before you begin searching journals and databases.
- **Consider Your Audience:** Unlike a work cited page or an annotated bibliography, both of which are lists of sources, a literature review is essayistic and can be considered a precursor to your final paper. Therefore, it should be written in your own voice, and it should be geared toward a specific audience. Considering your audience during this early stage will help focus your final paper as well.
- **Find Models:** We'll discuss the different types of literature reviews and how to locate examples in the section below. However, even if you're undecided about what type of review will work best for you, you may want to review some example literature reviews to get a sense of what they look like before you begin your own.

One piece of advice before starting: look for existing literature reviews on your area of scholarship. You can build on the work that other scholars have put into reviewing the scholarly literature. There's no need to completely "reinvent the wheel" if some of the work is already done.

Scholars sometimes publish "stand-alone" literature reviews that are not part of a larger work; such literature reviews are valuable contributions to the field, as they summarize the state of knowledge for other scholars.





## Types of Literature Reviews

Maria J. Grant and Andrew Booth's "A Typology of Reviews" identifies 14 distinct types of literature reviews. Further, the UCLA library created a chart to complement the article and for easy comparison of those 14 types of reviews. This section provides a brief summary of the most common literature reviews. For a more complete analysis, please see [the full article](#) and [the chart](#).

To choose the most appropriate structure, put yourself in your reader's shoes and think through their need for information. The literature review is about providing context for your contribution. How much context do people need? Keep it to the minimum necessary; compressing a lot of information into a small amount of text is a must.

These structures are not meant to be straightjackets but tools to help you organize your research. If you find that the tool is working, then keep using it. If not, switch tools or modify the one you are using. Keep in mind that the types of literature reviews are just different ways of organizing information. So, you can discuss literary trends without organizing your review of secondary literature by trend; your discussion can be organized by theory or theme, for examples. In our literature reviews, we are not recounting other scholars' arguments at length but merely providing key concepts so we can summarize the discussion so far and position our own claims. You don't have to adhere strictly to one structure or another. They are just organizing tools that help you manage your material (and help your reader make sense of it).

### Types of Reviews

- **Traditional or narrative reviews:** This approach will generate a compre-

hensive, critical analysis of the published research on your topic. However, rather than merely compiling as many sources as possible, use this approach to establish a theoretical framework for your paper, establish trends, and identify gaps in the research. This process should bring your research question into clearer focus and help define a thesis that you will argue for in your paper. This is perhaps the most common and general type of literature review. The examples listed below are all designed to serve a more specific purpose.

- **Argumentative:** The purpose of an argumentative literature review is to select sources for the purpose of supporting or refuting a specific claim. While this type of review can help the author make a strong case for or against an issue, they can also be prone to claims of bias. Later in this textbook, we will read about [the distinction between warranted and unwarranted bias](#). One is ok and the other is not.
- **Chronological:** A chronological review is used when the author wants to demonstrate the progression of how a theory, methodology, or issue has progressed over time. This method is most effective when there is a clear chronological path to the research about a specific historical event or trend as opposed to a more recursive theoretical concept.
- **By trend:** This is similar to the chronological approach except it focuses on clearly-defined trends rather than date ranges. This would be most appropriate if you want to illustrate changing perspectives or attitudes about a given issue when specific date ranges are less important than the ebb and flow of the trend.
- **Thematic:** In this type of literature review, the author will select specific themes that he or she feels are important to understanding a larger topic or concept. Then, the author will organize the sources around those themes, which are often based on relevance or importance. The value of this method is that the process of organizing the review by theme is similar to constructing an argument. This can help the author see how resources connect to each other and determine how as well as why specific sources support their thesis.
- **Theoretical:** The goal of this type of review is to examine how theory has shaped the research on a given topic. It establishes existing theoretical models, their connections, and how extensively they have been developed

in the published research. For example, Jada applied critical race theory to her analysis of *Sonny's Blues*, but she might also consider conducting a more comprehensive review of other theoretical frameworks such as feminism, Marxism, or postmodernism. Doing so could provide insight into alternate readings and help her identify theoretical gaps such as unexplored or under-developed approaches to Baldwin's work.

- **Methodological:** The approach focuses on the various methodologies used by researchers in a specific area rather than an analysis of their findings. In this case, you would create a framework of approaches to data collection related to your topic or research question. This is perhaps more common in education or the social and hard sciences where published research often includes a methods section, but it is sometimes appropriate for the digital humanities as well.
- **Scoping:** The aim of a scoping review is to provide a comprehensive overview or map of the published research or evidence related to a research question. This might be considered a prelude to a systematic review that would take the scoping review one step further toward answering a clearly defined research question. See below for more details.
- **Systematic:** The systematic review is most appropriate when you have a clearly-defined research question and have established criteria for the types of sources you need. In this way, the systematic review is less exploratory than other types of reviews. Rather, it is comprehensive, strategic, and focused on answering a specific research question. For this reason, the systematic review is more common in the health and social sciences, where comprehensiveness is more important. Literature reviews in the Humanities are not usually exhaustive but tend to show only the most representative or salient developments in the scholarship.
- **Meta-analysis:** Does your research deal with statistics or large amounts of data? If so, then a meta-analysis might be best for you rather than providing a critical review, the meta-analysis will summarize and synthesize the results of numerous studies that involve statistics or data to provide a more comprehensive picture than would be possible from just one study.

An argumentative literature review presents and takes sides in scholarly arguments about the literary work. It makes arguments about other scholars' work. It does not necessarily

involve a claim that the literary work is itself making an argument. Likewise, a chronological literature review presents the scholarly literature in chronological order.

You don't need to keep strictly to one type. Scholars often combine features from various types of literature reviews. A sample review that combines the follow types –

- Argumentative
- Thematic
- Theoretical
- Methodological
- Scoping

– is the excellent work of Eiranen, Reetta, Mari Hatavara, Ville Kivimäki, Maria Mäkelä & Raisa Maria Toivo (2022) "[Narrative and Experience: Interdisciplinary Methodologies between History and Narratology](#)," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 47:1, 1-15

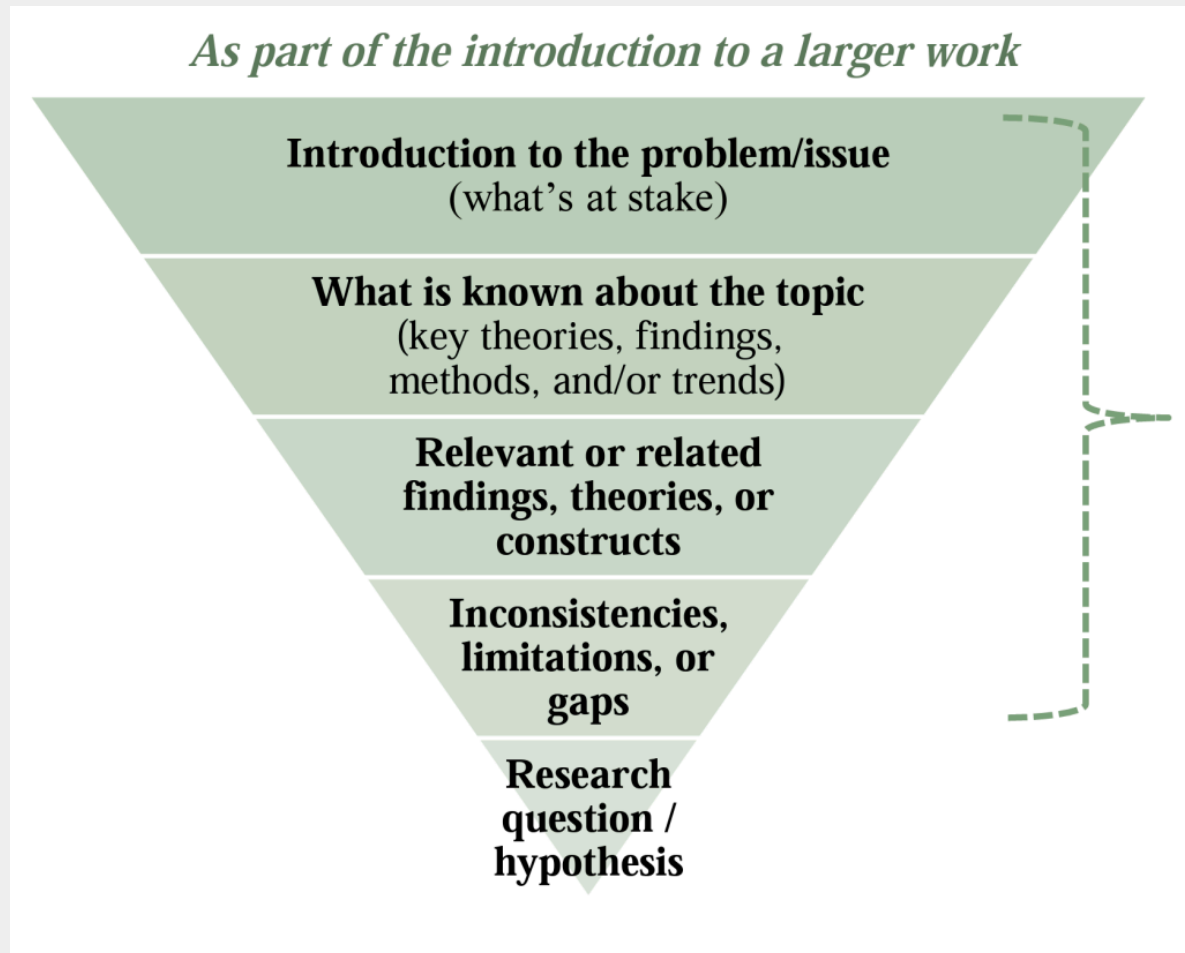


## Composition Guidelines

When writing your literature review, please follow these pointers:

- Conduct systematic searches
- Use Evidence
- Be Selective
- Use Quotes Sparingly
- Summarize & Synthesize
- Use Caution when Paraphrasing
- Use Your Own Voice

Advice from James Mason University's "Literature Reviews: An Overview"



**A note on synthesizing:** Don't make the common mistake of summarizing individual studies or articles one after the other. The goal is to synthesize — that is, to make observations about groups of studies. Synthesis often uses language like this:

- Much of the literature on [topic x] focuses on [major themes].
- In recent years, researchers have begun investigating [facets a, b, and c] of [topic x].
- The studies in this review of [topic x] confirm / suggest / call into question / support [idea / practice / finding / method / theory / guideline y].

- In the reviewed studies [variable x] was generally associated with higher / lower rates of [outcome y].
- A limitation of some / most / all of these studies is [y].

Please see this sample [annotated literature review](#) from James Mason University.

## Structure of a literature review<sup>4</sup>

1. **Problematization:** The 2 to 3 pages of problematization are a distinct, iterative, step. It may take doing such a statement a few times before moving forward to writing the actual paper.
2. **Search:** Write down your keyword sets, your updated keyword sets, and databases. It is perfectly within a reviewer's rights to ask for these details.
3. **Summary:** Really getting to know major themes requires some annotation of articles. You want to identify core papers and themes and write about them. This helps you really learn the material. [ChatGPT or Wikipedia are no substitute for deep engagement with a paper.]
4. **Argument:** Either outline or create a slide deck that help you express the arguments in your paper. Read them out loud. Have friends look at them. Present them. [Every literature review has an argument. If not, it's a summary. A summary does not merit publication in a top outlet.]
5. **Unpacking:** Once you've nailed the short pitch, unpack the full argument.
  - a) Take time in each major section to map out a) the argument, b) the supporting evidence, and the takeaway.
  - b) Take those major sections, reconcile them, make sure they don't over-

4. Richard West, Brigham Young University, amended by Jason Thatcher, Temple University – [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jason-thatcher-0329764\\_academicwriting-topten2023-activity-7146507675021766656-BB0O](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jason-thatcher-0329764_academicwriting-topten2023-activity-7146507675021766656-BB0O)

lap, then move on to writing.

c) Sketch out the paper's sections, tables, figures, and appendices.]

6. **Writing:** Writing is the easy part. You can always put words to the screen. [Revising and improving is hard. Make time to write every day. Improving requires feedback. Find a writing partner to give feedback. Create your tables and figures. Write to them. Make sure the words in the paper align to the visuals.]
7. **Communicate:** When the paper is done, go back and create a paper presentation. [I do this for the papers that I'm most serious about. The act of storyboarding helps me sort out the small pieces of the story that don't fit together. If I really want it to succeed, I present it. The act of presenting helps me get it right. My best papers sometimes take seven or eight presentations to get it right. Then I return to the paper and fine tune it. Only then, does it have a shot at a top outlet.]



## How to Locate Reviews by Discipline

Literature reviews can be published as part of a scholarly article, often after the introduction and sometimes with a header, but they can also be published as a standalone essay. To find examples of what reviews look like in your discipline, choose an appropriate subject database (such as MLA for literary criticism) and conduct a keyword search with the term “Literature Review” added in quotes:

Lit review\_1.PNG



This search yields four results:

literature review\_2.PNG

Not only do these examples demonstrate how to structure different types of literature reviews, but some offer insights into trends and directions for future research. In the next section, we'll take a closer look at some reading strategies to help guide you through this process.

Since scholars already have produced literature reviews on various scholarly conversations, you don't always need to “reinvent the wheel” (start a literature review from nothing). You can find a published literature review and update it or amend it; scholars do that all the time. However, you must properly cite work you incorporate from others.



## Types of Literature Reviews [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.







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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=124#h5p-19>



## Writing the Literature Review [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of*

*the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=124#h5p-17>



## Key Takeaways

### Do:

Provide your audience with an overview of the available research on your area(s) of study, including: the literary work, theory, methodology, and method (if the assignment permits).

Provide your critical commentary on the materials (if the assignment permits).

Build on the research found in other scholarship.

### Don't:

Skip the literature review.

Review only materials about the literary work but not about theory, methodology, and method.

Present previous research as though it is all equally good or useful.

Aim to tear down the research of other scholars.



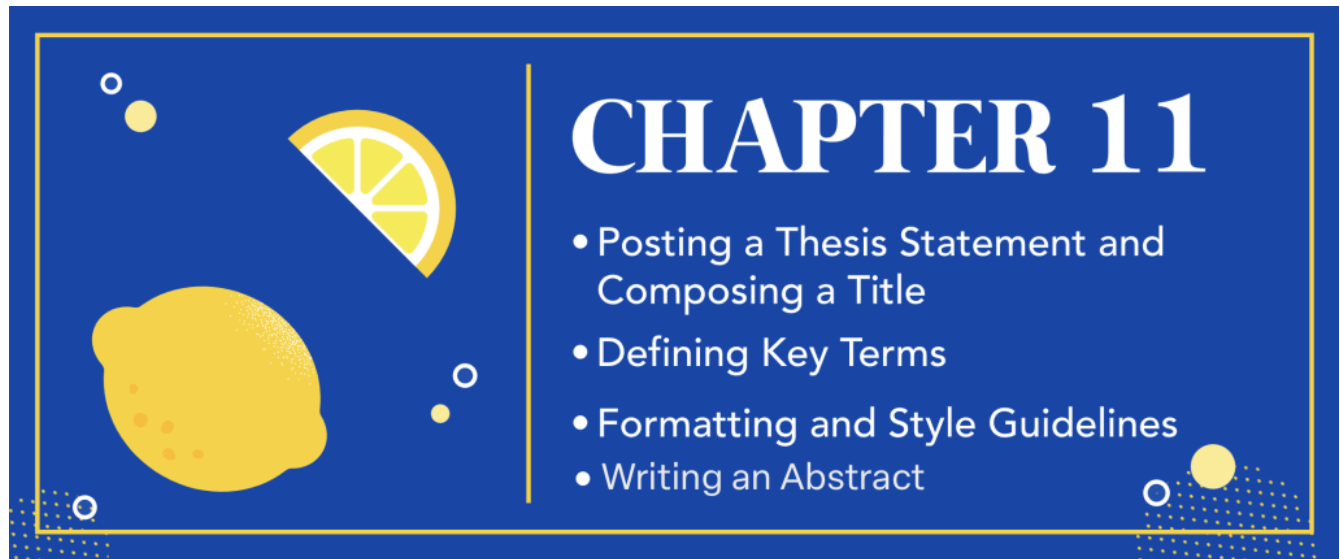
## Exercises

1. What types of literature review will you be using for your research project? Why did you make this selection over others? If you haven't made a selection yet, which types are you considering?
2. What specific challenges do you face in following a literature review structure?
3. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
4. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?

# CHAPTER 11: KEY ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

# Chapter 11 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



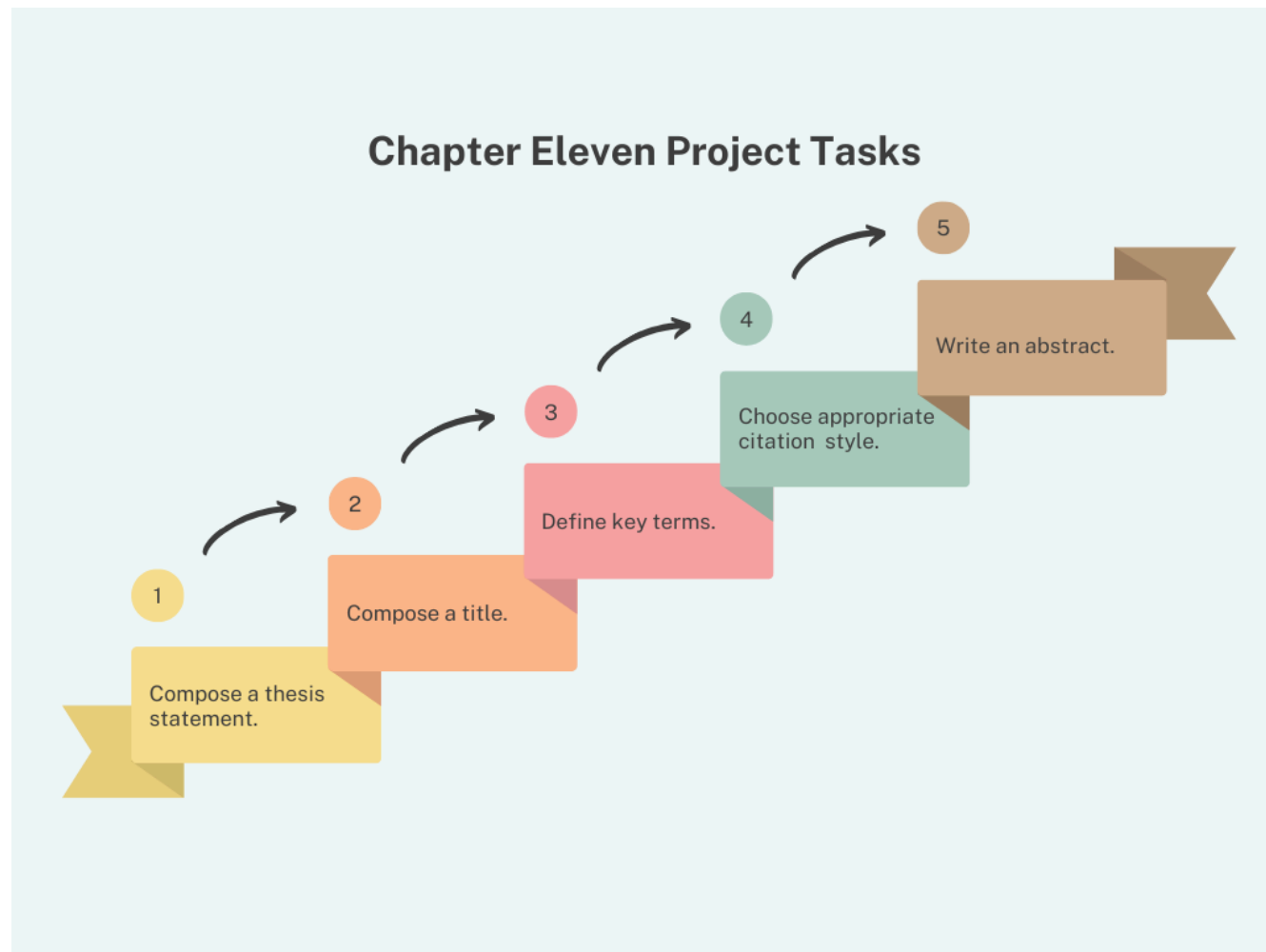
## Objectives

Many novice researchers struggle with crafting an effective thesis statement. We walk you through the steps of writing a good thesis statement and provide examples of thesis statements gone wrong. We also discuss an underrated skill: composing a title.

From there we discuss the importance of defining your terms. In “Scholarship as Conversation,” we explain how to avoid the “hit and run” citation style in which quotes are strung together with little or no context. We previously emphasized the importance of using strategic keywords in your research, but part of your job as a writer is to define and contextualize those terms for your audience. Some terms may have multiple meanings; the definitions you provide will allow your audience to know how you understand them.



The flowchart below indicates the required tasks for this chapter. Please keep track of your work and reflect on how these tasks relate to those you've done previously.





## Learning Objectives

Keep the conversation analogy in mind as you work through this chapter. You will learn how to:

- posit a thesis statement.
- compose a title.
- define your key terms.

# Positing a Thesis Statement

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Positing a Thesis Statement](#)
- [What Makes a Good Thesis Statement?](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Positing a Thesis Statement \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Positing a Thesis Statement

1

We *posit* the thesis statement as part of a scholarly discussion. To posit is to *put* something – in this case an argumentative claim – in place, to take up a position in relation to a research question. A thesis statement still in development is called a **hypothesis**. Once a hypothesis has been sufficiently framed and tested, using critical thinking skills, we can call it a thesis statement. We frame a thesis statement by putting it in relation to a body of knowledge (such as the study of narrative, of race and gender, of environment, etc.), and

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Positing a Thesis Statement.



we test a thesis statement by trying to falsify it; in other words, we see if our thesis statement is strong enough to withstand challenges. These challenges include evidence that doesn't seem to fit the claim, reasoning that doesn't seem to add up, or alternative claims that might better answer our research question.

For discussion purposes, let's pose this research question about James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues"; is the high quality of Sonny's music due mostly to his suffering? A conventional answer might be yes – because many great artists have suffered for their art. Examples include Janice Joplin, John Coltrane, John Lennon, Billie Holiday, and Jimi Hendrix. We might come to the conclusion that these artists are great *because* they were traumatized and became addicted to drugs. The narrator of "Sonny's Blues" describes hearing Sonny play and what he hears is Sonny's painful history through his music:

I heard what he had gone through, and would continue to go through until he came to rest in earth. He had made it his: that long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy. And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever. I saw my mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she had walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died.

There's a famous quote by Sonny's hero, Charlie Parker: "If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn." Parker's words have been interpreted by many aspiring musicians to mean that you should suffer for your art, and that if you don't suffer then your art will be inauthentic. But we may need to make some important distinctions before settling on the thesis that suffering *causes* high quality art. First, we might say that a dead artist is no longer an artist at all and that trauma and addiction can lead to death. So, clearly not all trauma and addiction lead to good art. Some of it leads to death. Beyond that, as was the case with Charlie Parker himself, he became a great musician because he practiced for up to 15 hours a day for three or four years! Drugs didn't cause him to play so well; the drugs interfered with his art! Parker's trauma and addiction eventually reached a point where his music suffered; he would be so "out of it" sometimes that he couldn't play.

Our research might lead us to the work of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, whose book *Creativity* included studies of the most creative people – in all areas, including the arts – and concluded that they tend to be happier and more well-adjusted than the average person. Csikszentmihalyi's study throws a wrench into the common stereotype of the suffering artist. The artist usually experiences joy in their work, not suffering.

With these objections in mind, we might amend our thesis statement to say that while suffering and addiction don't *cause* artists to be great, but that **great artists can transform their suffering and addiction into art, turning adversity into a resource for growth.** That

claim makes a good thesis statement! It tells us that there is a relationship between suffering and art, but it's not what most people think.

We might imagine a different argument; that being a great artist requires openness, a vulnerable state in which you experience tremendous joy and pain as well as the need to share it with others. Sonny says:

It's terrible sometimes, inside . . . that's what's the trouble. You walk these streets, black and funky and cold, and there's not really a living ass to talk to, and there's nothing shaking, and there's no way of getting it out- that storm inside. You can't talk it and you can't make love with it, and when you finally try to get with it and play it, you realize nobody's listening. So you've got to listen. You got to find a way to listen.

Openness can be unbearable for long periods of time, so artists turn to drugs to shut down. When his brother challenges Sonny on his drug use, Sonny explains: "There's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it, to keep on top of it, and to make it seem-well, like you. Like you did something, all right, and now you're suffering for it. You know?"

Maybe our thesis is that **artists have a symbiotic relationship with openness that makes them prone to drug use as a coping mechanism**. Are we satisfied yet? Probably not. We want to ask if this is really true by finding research about the subject. Maybe it's true in some cases and not others. If it is true, or mostly true, we want to keep pushing by turning our conclusion into a premise and asking what additional conclusion we can draw from it.

To develop a good thesis statement is to have a **breakthrough** – an *epiphany* (a flash understanding) – that changes our own thinking. We want to pay close attention to such moments and reflect on them carefully. Epiphanies are usually rare, but they are the most valuable things that artists and scholars can produce. We want more of them! One way to get more of them is to observe when and how they happen. There tends to be patterns to epiphanies, and we can learn to repeat those patterns. One lesson about epiphanies is that they seem like sudden – almost magical – *inspiration*. But mostly they occur after a lot of *perspiration* (hard work). Our minds work on important problems even when we are not aware of it, and sometimes the mind delivers when we are not focused on the problem. But this usually happens only after focusing intensely on the problem for a while.

Your thesis statement is an epiphany put into a concise form so that others can share your understanding!



## What Makes a Good Thesis Statement?

“A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking.”

– Steve Wright

A good thesis statement usually requires a lot of thinking. We don't want to go with the first conclusion we reach. We need to see what other conclusions are possible and see if one supportable conclusion might lead to another more profound one. Also, any conclusion we reach needs to be checked out to see if it explains things adequately and can be properly supported with evidence and sound reasoning. So, in regard to the quote above: keep thinking!

Additionally, your thesis statement should have an impact on your audience; as Andy Norman explains, the goal is to move people from presumptive knowledge to a non-presumptive conclusion:

What currently passes for good critical thinking instruction leaves students confused: it makes them defensive and leaves them with a distinct impression that we apply our standards haphazardly. The concept of presumption, however, allows us to give them real clarity: more transparent guidance about how to write a good persuasive essay, more insight into the process of building new understanding, and greater clarity about how to think critically. Adept critical thinkers understand this: *good argumentation is fundamentally a matter of marshaling presumptive premises to defend nonpresumptive conclusions.* Criti-

cal thinking is all about finding claims that happen to sit on the wrong side of the ledger, and showing why they need to be moved to the other side.<sup>2</sup>

To paraphrase Norman, we are seeking to make and share conclusions that our audience does not already presume to be right. To a degree, that means we are seeking to be original, but this originality is built upon claims that are *not* original (in other words, claims that our audience presume to be right). Our next task is to ward off objections, or counter-claims, by showing they are weaker than our claim.

You can start developing your thesis by making guesses at the answer to your research question. Any hypothesis can work as a starting point because you will be rejecting or revising those that don't work. A good strategy is to write down a number of possible answers to your research question, even ones that seem absurd, and then start testing them by gathering more evidence and testing each thesis statement on your list. If the thesis statement is contradicted by credible evidence and valid reasoning, then you should reject it. For instance, we might ask how authors use each other's work as models for their own writing. But before making a claim that an author modeled their writing on another author's work, we should ask if the chronology makes sense. In other words, if author A published a piece in 1879 and author B published a piece in 1884, we can't assume that author A modeled their work on author B's if it wasn't published yet. You might investigate further, however. Maybe the two authors knew each other and discussed their work together; it then might be possible for author A to have known about the author B's work before it was published. We need research to answer our questions with more certitude.

Note that a degree of certitude is a feature of any claim. Some claims can be stated with near certainty, or even absolute certainty (close to 100%). Other claims may be less certain and can be qualified in various ways (50% or some other amount). Such qualifications might include the limits of the available information or the openness to interpretation of a given text or source. It is fine to posit a thesis statements that cannot be defended with absolute certainty. Because we are contributing to a scholarly conversation, we can posit thesis statements that are speculative, conditional, provisional, limited, and open to revision. Many valuable works of literary criticism posit such claims.

2. Andy Norman. *Mental Immunity Infectious Ideas, Mind-Parasites, and the Search for a Better Way to Think*. Harper Wave, 2021.

The thesis statement is one of the most important steps in writing, so it deserves a *lot* of attention. Below is some advice:

1. Make sure the thesis statement answers a research question.
2. Make sure the question and thesis are of possible interest to scholars in the area.
3. The best way to make your thesis statement powerful and relevant is to position it within the ongoing scholarly conversation.
4. The thesis statement is your way to join the scholarly conversation – it says, “hey, pay attention here to something significant/relevant to us in this area of study.”
5. The way to add significance/relevance is to expand or change our current understanding of a literary work, topic, or problem people in the scholarly community are discussing.
6. A good way to do that is to reference other scholars directly. For instance, “this paper argues that \_\_\_\_ [something in the literary work, something in the scholarly literature] revises our understanding of \_\_\_\_ [something in the literary work, something in the scholarly literature] from \_\_\_\_ [previously held belief] to \_\_\_\_ [new belief].”
7. So, for example, “Sigmund Freud’s work on projection revises our understanding of Hawthorne’s ‘Young Goodman Brown’ from a creepy horror story to a warning about how religiously-induced guilt creates scapegoats.”
8. The above thesis statement is clear, arguable, relevant, and compelling to scholars of literature. Of course, Freud is somewhat old news and scholars may have already treated Hawthorne’s work in just these terms. You would need to look at the scholarly literature to see if the above claim is just a rehashing of what’s already out there. If it is, you can maybe add something to it. For instance, you might make a claim about how such projection typically makes scapegoats out of women.
9. The thesis statement is probably the hardest part of writing. It takes a lot of practice to produce your first good thesis statement. After that, it gets easier.
10. One of the best ways to learn how to do it is to look for thesis statements in the work of other scholars. Then emulate what they do.

- For instance, in Viktor Schklovsky's *Art as Technique*, he presents a general thesis about all art (including literature): "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*"
- Schklovsky then discusses particular works of literature, and for each he presents a thesis statement. About Tolstoy, he claims, "Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects."
- Schklovsky positioned his claims in the ongoing conversation by siding *against* his colleagues who argued that the main purpose of art was to create images.
- Schklovsky's claims still resonate powerfully to this day in studies of art and literature, and in studies of Tolstoy particularly. These few sentences from him (of course he explains and defends his claims in the rest of his work) have affected the community of scholars for more than a century. His thesis statements were *that good!*

Place your thesis in your paper before you state your overview of the supporting arguments that follow. A thesis statement effectively identifies your position and situates your ideas in the context of existing discourse. An effective thesis statement has the following features:

- It answers a research question
- It is arguable, meaning other answers are possible, but they are not as strong as the thesis you are stating

- It takes a side in an argument (and gives your readers a choice to agree or disagree)
- It is clearly stated
- It is specific
- It is relevant
- It is compelling
- It does not contradict itself (state that two opposing claims are true)
- It organizes all the points made in the rest of the paper

### How to Write an Effective Thesis Statement for Your Essay [6 min 38 sec]



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3

**For more advice on *How to Write a Thesis Statement*, consider the following from The Purdue Online Writing Lab:**<sup>4</sup>

Tips for Writing Your Thesis Statement

- Determine what kind of paper you are writing.

3. Taylor, David and PeakWriting, directors. *How to Write an Effective Thesis Statement for Your Essay*. YouTube, YouTube, 27 Nov. 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-e2EthZC0aU>. Accessed 10 Apr. 2022.

4. Purdue Writing Lab. "Creating a Thesis Statement & Thesis Statement Tips." *Purdue Writing Lab*, 2021, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/the\\_writing\\_process/thesis\\_statement\\_tips.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/thesis_statement_tips.html).

- Your thesis statement should be specific—it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.
- The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of a paper.

**For more advice on *Developing a Thesis*, consider the following from The Harvard College Writing Center:<sup>5</sup>**

A good thesis has two parts. It should tell what you plan to argue, and it should “telegraph” how you plan to argue—that is, what particular support for your claim is going where in your essay.

- A thesis is never a question.
- A thesis is never a list.
- A thesis should never be vague.
- An effective thesis has a definable, arguable claim.
- A thesis should be as clear and specific as possible.

**For more advice on *The Thesis*, consider the following from WritingCommons.Org:<sup>6</sup>**

The thesis. It’s a tricky thing to define “thesis” because a thesis comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes. A thesis can be a sentence, two sentences, perhaps even an

5. Rodburg, Maxine, and The Tutors of the Writing Center. “Developing a Thesis.” *Writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu*, 1999, <https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/developing-thesis>.

6. McIntyre, Megan. “The Thesis.” *Writing Commons*, 3 Aug. 2021, <https://writingcommons.org/article/the-thesis/>.



entire paragraph. Every thesis, though, does important things. There are lots of ways to create a successful thesis.

- A thesis acts as a unifying idea for every piece of evidence in an essay.
- A thesis results from research in addition to the writer's own beliefs or opinions.
- A thesis answers a specific question (the research question).
- A good thesis statement encourages discussion.
- A good thesis statement is supported by relevant evidence. (Every paragraph should contribute to proving the thesis to be valid.)
- For additional information on A Weak Thesis and Revising a Weak Thesis, click on the following link from WritingCommons.Org: [When is a Thesis Considered Weak?](#)

Always be willing to revise your thesis as you continue in your research and writing; make your argument stronger, more specific, or different depending on where the evidence leads.



## Positing a Thesis Statement [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=202#h5p-36>



## Exercises

1. What is your thesis statement?
2. Does it meet all the criteria for a good thesis statement listed in the page?
3. What was the most important lesson you learned from this page? What point was confusing or difficult to understand?
4. If there are any elements of your assignment that need clarification, please list them.
5. Using the criteria above, assess what is wrong with these thesis statements and suggest ways to improve them:
  - “Some people say that ‘Sonny’s Blues’ will help us solve the problem of racism today, but some people say it won’t.”
  - “Most people support the idea of teaching ‘Sonny’s Blues’ in the classroom.”

- “Does ‘Sonny’s Blues’ encourage people to appreciate Black culture?”
- “There are numerous types of effects that result from reading ‘Sonny’s Blues.’”
- “I am angry about the way ‘Sonny’s Blues’ has been neglected.”
- “Maybe ‘Sonny’s Blues’ is not the best text for understanding Black culture.”
- “Teaching ‘Sonny’s Blues’ is inappropriate.”
- “The real reason why ‘Sonny’s Blues’ became famous is a mystery.”



## Exercises for Drafting an Arguable Thesis From WritingCommons.org:<sup>7</sup>

A good thesis will be *focused* on your object of study (as opposed to making a big claim about the world) and will introduce the *key words* guiding your analysis.

To get started, you might experiment with some of these “mad libs.” They’re thinking exercises that will help propel you toward an arguable thesis.



By examining \_\_\_\_\_ [topic/approach], we can see  
 \_\_\_\_\_[thesis—the claim that’s surprising], which is important  
 because \_\_\_\_\_. Example:

“By examining *Sixteen Candles* through the lens of Georg Simmel’s writings on fashion, we can see that the protagonist’s interest in fashion as an expression of her conflicted desire to be seen as both unique and accepted by the group. This is important because the film offers its view-

7. Scott, Andrea. “Formulating a Thesis.” *Writing Commons*, 17 Sept. 2021, <https://writingcommons.org/article/formulating-a-thesis/>.

ers a glimpse into the ambivalent yearnings of middle-class youth in the 1980s.



Although readers might assume \_\_\_\_\_ [the commonplace idea you're challenging], I argue that \_\_\_\_\_ [your surprising claim].

Example:

Although viewers might assume the romantic comedy *Sixteen Candles* is merely entertaining, I believe its message is political. The film uses the romance between Samantha, a middle-class sophomore, and Jake, an affluent senior, to reinforce the fantasy that anyone can become wealthy and successful with enough cunning and persistence.

Now it's your turn to try with your own research topic!

# Composing a Title

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Composing a Title](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Composing a Title \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Composing a Title<sup>1</sup>

Once you formulate your thesis statement, you will be prepared to create a title for your research project. Think of your title as a tool that helps other scholars select materials that best fit *their* needs. For example, if your title does not include the name of the literary work you are discussing, the author's name, the theory, or method that you are using, your title may not be clear enough to help another researcher make a choice. Your paper may fit their needs perfectly, but if you do not include enough information in your title, that researcher is likely to skip over your work.

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Composing a Title.

Your title can include a reference to your thesis statement. The title can thus function as an additional way of stating an argument, and help your reader know what to expect from your paper.



## Example [Composing a Title]

- “The Figure of the Couple: Enabling Supplementarity in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958)” Michelle Charalambous
- “An EcoGothic Reading of Hawthorne’s ‘Young Goodman Brown’ and ‘Roger Malvin’s Burial’” Narmin Talebpour Sheshvan & Farah Ghaderi
- “Prosthetic Performatives: Reading Disability’s Discomfort Through Emotives and Affect Patterns in *Jane Eyre*” Andries Hiskes<sup>2</sup>

Titles of scholarly papers often have two parts divided by a colon. One part identifies a theme and the other identifies the literature and key concepts discussed in the research.

**For more advice on *Crafting Effective Titles*, consider the following from WritingCommons.org:**<sup>3</sup>

- The title reflects on your identity as a scholar ([ethos](#)).
- Consider the type of essay– There’s a big difference in titles depending on

3. Lamothe, John. “How to Win Papers and Influence Professors: Creating Positive First Impressions Through Effective Titles.” *Writing Commons*, 17 Sept. 2021, <https://writingcommons.org/article/how-to-win-papers-and-influence-professors-creating-positive-first-impressions-through-effective-titles/>.

what type of paper you're writing.

- Grab the [audience's](#) attention.
- Match your title with the conversation you're entering.
- Keep it scholarly.
- Parallel the research question.
- Consider longer, more descriptive titles.



## Composing a Title [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=1839#h5p-37>



## Exercises

1. Compose a title for your research project.



# Defining Key Terms

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Defining Key Terms](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Defining Key Terms \[Refresher\]](#)



## Defining Key Terms

Earlier in this course, we discussed how to conduct a library search using key terms. Here we discuss how to present key terms. Place yourself in your audience's position and try to anticipate their need for information. Is your audience composed mostly of novices or professionals? If they are novices, you will need to provide more definition and context for your key concepts and terms.

Because disciplinary knowledge is filled with specialized terms, an ordinary dictionary is of limited value. Disciplines like psychology, cultural studies, and history use terms in ways that are often different from the way we use the same words to communicate in daily life. Some disciplines have their own dictionaries of key terms. Others may have terms scattered throughout glossaries in important primary texts and textbooks.

Key terms are the “means of exchange” in disciplines. You gain entry into the discussion by demonstrating how well you know and understand them. Some disciplinary keywords can be tricky because they mean one thing in ordinary speech but can mean something different in the discipline. For instance, in ordinary speech, we use the word *shadow* to refer to a darker area produced by an object or person between a light source and a surface. In Jungian psychology, *shadow* refers to the unconscious or unknown aspects of a personality. Sometimes there is debate within a discipline about what key terms mean or how they should be used.

Every researcher is responsible for defining the key terms of their research. If you think your audience already knows the terms, your reader still wants to know how *you* define the terms. If a definition is contested — meaning different writers define the term in different ways — make sure you acknowledge these differences and explain why you favor one definition over the others. Cite your sources when presenting key terms and concepts. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Defining Key Terms.





## Key Takeaways

### *Do*

Define key terms

Look for definitions of key terms in disciplinary texts before consulting general-use dictionaries

Explore the history of the term to see if its meaning has changed over time

If the meaning of a term is contested, present these contested definitions to your reader and explain why you favor one over the others

Even if you think your audience knows the term, assume they care what your understanding is

### *Don't*

Present key terms without definitions

Assume that ordinary dictionaries will provide you with the best definitions of disciplinary terms

Assume that the meaning of a term has stayed the same over years, decades, or centuries

Present a contested term without explanation

Assume your audience doesn't care about your understanding of a key term



## Defining Key Terms [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=204#h5p-38>

# Formatting and Style Guidelines: MLA, APA, and Chicago

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Formatting and Style Guidelines: MLA, APA, and Chicago](#)



## Formatting and Style Guidelines: MLA, APA, and Chicago

Scholars format their work using the style guidelines provided by professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Psychological Association (APA). These two are the most common, but far from the only, style guidelines used by researchers in the Humanities. Most student projects rely on these guidelines for document formatting, in-text citation, and works-cited lists. Your instructor should let you know which formatting style is required or whether you are allowed to choose one. Listed below are a few resources that will help get your citations right.

- **UCF Libraries Research Guides**
  - [MLA Style Guide, 9th edition](#). This is a quick reference guide to the 9th edition of the MLA handbook. It includes general formatting guidelines, examples of common in-text citation, examples of how to format a works cited page, and links to other resources.
  - [APA Publication Manual, 7th edition](#): As above, this guide includes general format-

ting guidelines, examples of the most common citations, and links to other resources.

- **Style Guides in the UCF Libraries**

- [MLA handbook for writers of research papers, 9th ed.](#)
- [Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th ed.](#)

- **University Writing Center Resources**

- [Resources Page](#): The University Writing Center resources page contains a wealth of information about citation styles as well as grammar and punctuation assistance, academic writing guidelines, and more.

- **Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Center**

- [MLA Style Center](#): The MLA Style Center provides a wealth of support for the new 9th edition including an overview of how to format a research paper, practice templates, sample papers, and more.

- **American Psychological Association (APA) Style Center**

- [APA Style Center](#): Much like the MLA site, the APA also offers online assistance including video tutorials, handouts, and sample papers. Click Style & Grammar Guidelines and Instructional Aids at the top of the page for a full list of free resources.

- **Chicago Style Center**

- [Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide](#): Chicago is another style that is frequently used in humanities research. Chicago has two types of citation styles: (1) notes and bibliography and (2) author-date. Humanities research more frequently uses the author-date style.

# Writing an Abstract

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Writing an Abstract](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Writing an Abstract \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercise](#)



## Writing an Abstract

Put simply, an abstract is a 150-500 word paragraph that provides a quick overview of your paper. Publications may have specific requirements for what to include in an abstract but, in general, they include your research purpose, methodologies, methods, key evidence, results and conclusion. Most undergraduate students would never consider writing an abstract for an assigned research paper. However, as we will discuss here, writing an abstract, especially early in your process, can be an effective way to evaluate your research question.

Before we begin, watch this short video with Jessica, a Texts & Technology graduate student, discuss the importance of the abstract:

### Texts & Technology – Part 6 [2 min 56 sec]



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=185#oembed-1>

Key Quotes from the Video:

#### **Articulating Your Purpose in the Abstract:**

“Write an abstract early in your drafting process and your research writing process because an abstract should absolutely have a definitive statement once you, in the abstract, talk about the context of your research and your methodology – you mention those things briefly in an abstract. Often what follows from that is, ‘the purpose of this study is to ...’ or, ‘in this article, I argue that ...’ Being able to articulate that early on is a really good test of focus because sometimes I would try to write that sentence and it would be two or three sentences long and I need to be able to say this much more concisely.”

#### **Getting Feedback on Your Abstract:**

“[Wendy Belcher suggests] emailing a colleague or friend or advisor and say, ‘Hey John, I’m working on this research project and here’s what I think my argument is ...’ and sending that out to a few trusted friends or colleagues just to get some trusted feedback. Because, really, when something is arguable it means that you’re taking a position in response to this conversation that you’ve entered, that you’ve been listening to, and now you’re going to jump in and say something. And to be able to say it cleanly and clearly and directly so that somebody else who hasn’t been reading all the literature that you’ve been reading for the last weeks or months – if the people you send it out to go ‘Oh, that’s a really cool idea ...’ or ‘I’m not sure what you mean there ...’ that can be a really good check that what you’ve got is a focused argument.”



Jessica referenced Wendy Belcher's *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* in which Belcher suggests talking through your argument with a friend/colleague/advisor. She also suggests writing an abstract early in the writing process and sending it to friends/colleagues/advisors for review. Jessica also noted the "natural reflexiveness" that happens when she's reading literature, analyzing data, and targeting a particular journal. She's listening to lots of scholars while looking for her place to jump into the conversation. When she does, she'll need to have something meaningful to add to the discourse on her topic.

Even if you're not planning to present on or publish your paper right away, the exercise of writing an abstract can help you articulate your purpose, framework, methodologies, methods, scope, results, and conclusions. If there are any aspects of your project that remain unclear, this process will help you iron them out.

## Tips for Writing a Good Abstract<sup>1</sup>

- What makes your work unique? The answer may be in your methods, how you apply theory to a research problem, and where your research fits and builds upon other research.
- Do you need to include more critical context? Such context showcases the importance of your work in relation to others, and it helps the readers know how it relates to the field.
- What is the "problem" and your "solution"? This question is another way for you to think about the purpose of your study. The problem may just be a gap in the current literature.
- Do you list the most important aspects of your methods and results? This synopsis usually indicates the "meat and potatoes" of your work. Just as you may look for studies with abstracts detailing methodology akin to how you want to do research, think about others reading your abstract, perhaps with the same intent.

1. In the "Back Matter" of this book, you will find a page titled "Rubrics." On that page, we provide a rubric for Creating an Abstract.

- Is your abstract coherent? Invite someone unfamiliar with your work to read your abstract. Can that person understand it? Use complete sentences and active verbs, if possible. It is important for your work to be understandable and as engaging as possible, while at the same time being concise.
- How do you conclude your abstract? Are you listing the main takeaways for the reader?

Even if you don't need to write an abstract for your assignment, doing so can be an effective way to evaluate your research question. Start early and revise it as your research develops. Your abstract should evolve along with your project and it can be a strong indicator of what's missing and what needs adjusting. Leaving the abstract for the very last step is common, even among experienced researchers, but we recommend approaching this as an ongoing exercise rather than a final chore.

We strongly recommend that you share drafts of your abstract with others, especially your mentor, to get feedback and improve your work.



## Writing an Abstract [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=185#h5p-33>



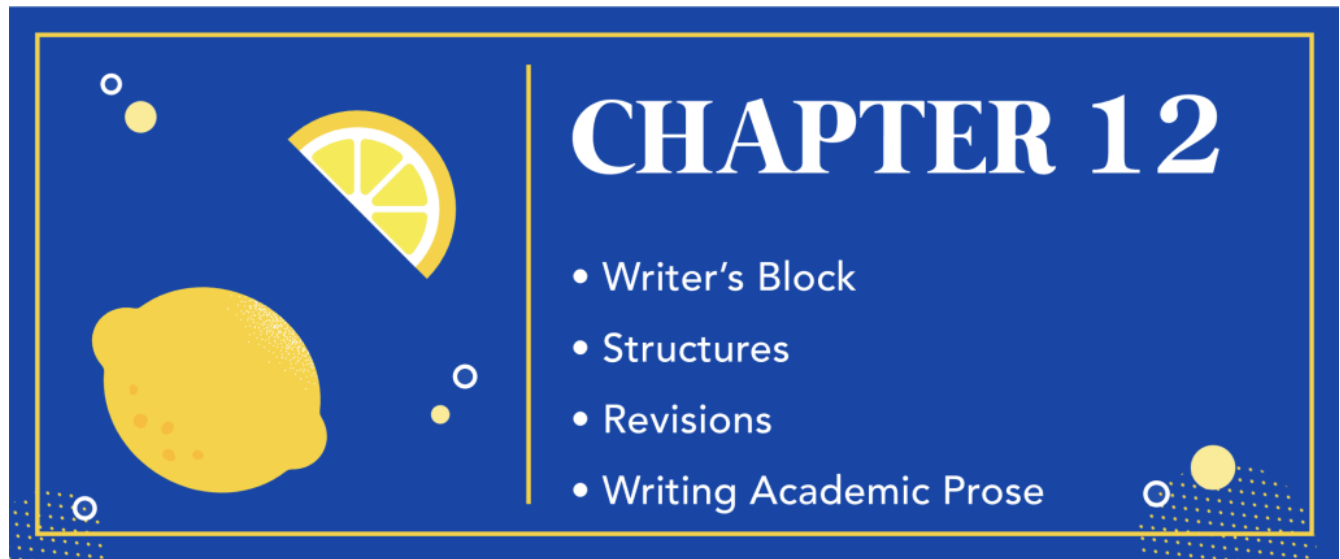
## Exercise

1. Write an abstract of 150-500 words following the guidelines above.

# CHAPTER 12: THE WRITING PROCESS

# Chapter 12 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

Once you have synthesized your research materials and are ready to address your audience with a clear purpose in mind, you should start the process of putting your research in a presentable form. We start this chapter with a page on “Writer’s Block,” a common affliction to writers. We argue that writer’s block can be a productive period because working through the blocks prepares us to solve problems and become stronger writers. “Structures” are there to help writers organize their ideas, which will help readers to follow them.

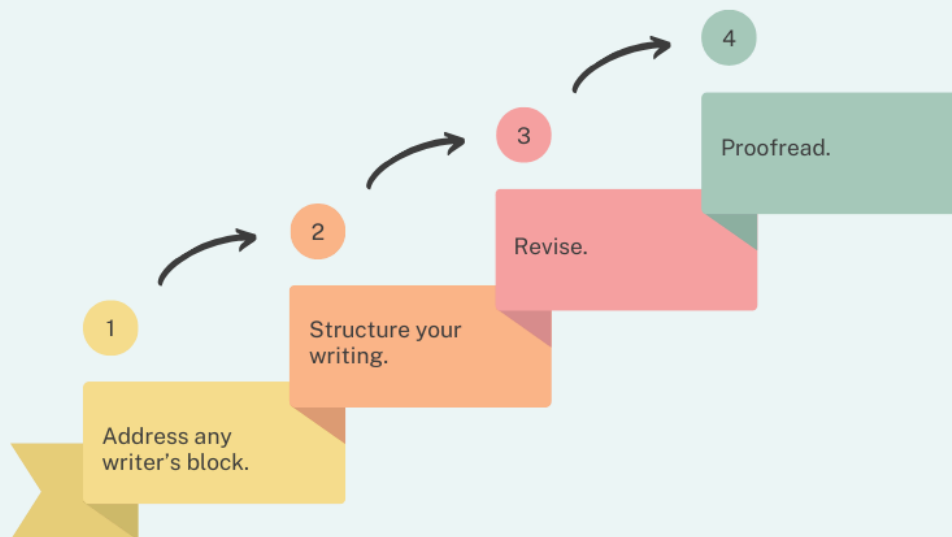
“Revision” is when you review your writing to see whether it meets your objectives. Since virtually no one can write a successful research paper in one draft, writers go through the process of revision (usually through multiple drafts) until they are satisfied they have met their objectives. Your objectives are to join the scholarly conversation, have a clear purpose, a compelling case, and a research project that rewards your audience for their attention. As a student, you also need to meet the requirements of the assignment you’ve been given. Professional writers often give themselves assignments, which can mean they write for publications.

We discuss revisions in terms of content and form. In practice, content and form are inseparable. If your ideas (content) are not intelligible in your writing (form), your audience will not be able to engage with your ideas. You have to know what to say and the best way to say it.



The tasks for this chapter take us through the major writing portions of the research project. They are built upon all the tasks we've done to this point. Make sure to consult your earlier work and build on it during these tasks.

## Chapter Twelve Project Tasks





## Learning Objectives

Revision is where you make major changes to your ideas and the form in which they are expressed. It often involves rewriting whole sections, moving sentences and paragraphs around, and making sure all transitions are clear and logical. Writing guidelines are meant to help make your writing accessible and clear for readers. From the following pages you will learn how to:

- contribute to the scholarly conversation.
- convince your reader to adopt your argument as their own.
- revise your work to meet your objectives.
- write academic prose.

# Writer's Block

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topic on this page:

- [Common Obstacles and Suggested Ways to Deal with Them](#)

We provide the following activity:

- [Writer's Block \[Refresher\]](#)



## Common Obstacles and Suggested Ways to Deal with Them

Just about every writer experiences obstacles in their writing. When these obstacles become very problematic and we are unable to write, we refer to the condition as writer's block. The "block" means that something stands between the writer and the task. It may be frustrating but it can be productive if you work through it. Overcoming writer's block strengthens your ability to solve problems and become a better writer.

A block can be internal, such as psychological resistance. If so, find out why it's coming up. If it's external, it's an opportunity to change your circumstances or your priorities. If it's about the research project itself, it's an opportunity to address complexities or rethink the research problem or your approach.





## Example: Common Obstacles and Suggested Ways to Deal with Them

1. **Bad writing (shapeless or meandering prose).** *Advice: find a scholar whose work you really admire.* Try to write in the style of that person or examine the structure of their work and see if you can structure yours in a similar way. For example, maybe the text you admire is structured as a comparison/contrast. See if that structure works for your project. Ask for feedback and advice from more advanced researchers and writers.
2. **Blocked access to research materials.** *Advice: prepare in advance so you are not without your research materials.* If you are working with digital materials, carry them with you on a storage device such as a flash drive or in cloud storage. If you need access to printed library materials, make sure you look them up in the online catalog first to see if they are available. Schedule a time to go to the library and scan/photograph shorter works or excerpts and store those on an electronic device or in cloud storage.
3. **Busyness.** *Advice: commit to a schedule.* Do your research and writing on a regular basis (like three times a week). Start the work session by setting a timer and work for 15 minutes without a break. When the time is up, see if you can keep going. Make sure you take an actual break and walk around at least once an hour. If there seems to be too many activities in your life that are overlapping (i.e., social gatherings and research time), buy a planner or use your phone's calendar with audio reminders to help you commit to your schedule. If all else fails, you may need to choose one activity over the other.
4. **Depression/Anxiety.** *Advice: prioritize self-care,* such as proper eating, sleep, and exercise. Let go of toxic relationships. Get help from professionals if needed. Think of writing as a meaningful activity that actually helps many people overcome their psychological pressures. If you need additional help from UCF, please visit [CAPS](#) (Counseling and Psychological Services).
5. **Distraction.** *Advice: shut down other things,* like video games, web browsers, music, and text messaging. If you care about your success as a student, you will prioritize your research over distractions.

6. **Exhaustion.** *Advice: get an early start if possible and go at a steady pace.* If you try to do too much too fast, you'll get burn out.
7. **Family and work responsibilities.** *Advice: you may need to change your work schedule, find childcare, etc.* The realities of life can make being a successful researcher difficult. Make adjustments as you can.
8. **Fear of being wrong.** *Advice: do your research and writing in good faith* (by trying not to deceive yourself or others) and if you later discover you were wrong about something, you can produce another piece of writing explaining how your views evolved. We likely will be wrong in our writing from time to time.
9. **Fear of controversy.** *Advice: if your methods or argument are likely to be controversial, be prepared to defend and justify them in your writing.* If you can strongly defend these things, then controversy itself is not a sufficient reason to stop a research project.
10. **Getting started.** *Advice: put words on paper (or on screen).* Lots of people have difficulty taking the first step on a research project. Motivate yourself by using fun activities to reward yourself *after* you've done some research and writing. Starting is the most important thing, so don't worry if your first words on paper or screen are bad. Use accountability partners; take turns reading each other's work every few days.
11. **Getting stuck in the middle.** *Advice: list the remaining tasks.* Do the critical tasks first. Be willing to change to a different part of the research or writing project. Think about your various projects the way a chef does; some things are on the front burners and some things on the back burners. When one project needs to rest, put it on the back burner and work on something else.
12. **Language fluency.** *Advice: plan extra time for your work.* If you are reading and writing in a language that you don't feel fully fluent in, try writing your main ideas in your first language and then work on translating them.
13. **Negative self-assessment.** *Advice: get support from other people.* Our self-talk can get negative and tell us we are not smart enough or not capable enough. Other people can see our intelligence and our capabilities even when we can't. Have them tell you about yours!
14. **Not in the mood.** *Advice: don't allow yourself to get too fussy about your environment.* Some people need a specific set of conditions to do their research and writing: a cup of coffee, a quiet room, and a soft cat. These are all fine, but the best way to get in the mood to write is to start writing.

15. **Other priorities.** *Advice: prioritize things by deadlines and that are most valuable to your career (i.e., prioritize work on high value assignments).* If other things are left unfinished temporarily, that's ok.
16. **Panic.** *Advice: plan far ahead and scheduling tasks on various projects.* If it gets to be close to the deadline and you still have too many projects due, prioritize the ones that are most important, take the loss (you'll probably have more opportunities in the future), and let go of the panic.
17. **Slow pace of writing.** *Advice: keep making progress.* Are you making measurable progress? Then you are doing well. Some research and writing tasks take longer than others. If you are stuck in the weeds (getting obsessive about details), go back to the big picture.
18. **Too much research.** *Advice: know when enough research is enough.* Researchers rarely have the luxury to gather all the available knowledge about a topic (a maximizing strategy called "coverage"). Sometimes researchers feel they must keep going until they understand what everyone has ever said about a topic. We have to accept that uncertainty is part of the process and make the project as good as we can (a strategy called "optimizing") or, if we need to move on, make it good enough (a strategy called "satisficing").
19. **Uncertainty.** *Advice: approach complicated issues in your project systematically.* Sometimes writers are overwhelmed with the complexity of the task before them. Write down a list of the complications in your project and address them one at a time.
20. **"What I have so far is terrible!"** *Advice: take what you have and see how it can be better.* Then do it again. Research and writing are about improvement. Making steady improvements is a process called hill climbing. Eventually you will be high enough on the hill that you can see above the clouds. Judging your work as terrible is part of "Negative Self-Talk." Your project is probably not as bad as what your inner-voice is telling you. Don't think of what you have written as "terrible"; focus on the *good* parts of your writing!

All writers want the muse to carry them across the finish line. The truth is that most good writing requires more perspiration than inspiration; inspiration occurs because we created the conditions for it with our perspiration. Keep at it. Inspiration may or may not come. Your writing will improve as you practice and learn.

THE UNSUCCESSFUL SELF-TREATMENT OF  
A CASE OF "WRITER'S BLOCK"<sup>1</sup>

DENNIS UPPER

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup>Portions of this paper were not presented at the 81st Annual American Psychological Association Convention, Montreal, Canada, August 30, 1973. Reprints may be obtained from Dennis Upper, Behavior Therapy Unit, Veterans Administration Hospital, Brockton, Massachusetts 02401.

*Received 25 October 1973.  
(Published without revision.)*

COMMENTS BY REVIEWER A

I have studied this manuscript very carefully with lemon juice and X-rays and have not detected a single flaw in either design or writing style. I suggest it be published without revision. Clearly it is the most concise manuscript I have ever seen—yet it contains

sufficient detail to allow other investigators to replicate Dr. Upper's failure. In comparison with the other manuscripts I get from you containing all that complicated detail, this one was a pleasure to examine. Surely we can find a place for this paper in the Journal—perhaps on the edge of a blank page.

1. Dennis Upper's famous case of writer's block. See this [US National Library of Medicine/National Institutes of Health](#) page for further information.

**For additional help with your writing, visit these pages from WritingCommons.org:**

- [Mindset](#)
- [Growth Mindset](#)
- [Faith in the Writing Process](#)
- [The Believing Game](#)
- [Why Write](#)
- [Effective Writing Habits](#)
- [Intellectual Openness](#)
- [Demystify Writing Misconceptions](#)
- [Self-Regulation & Metacognition](#)
- [Establish a Comfortable Place to Write](#)
- [Overcome Discouragement](#)
- [Reflect on Your Writing Processes](#)
- [Scheduling Writing](#)
- [Resilience](#)

**Purdue Online Writing Lab also has great resources:**

- [Symptoms and Cures for Writer's Block](#)
- [More Strategies](#)
- [Time Management](#)



## Writer's Block [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

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# Structures

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Presenting Counter Arguments](#)
- [Basic Structure of Academic Writing](#)
- [Key Takeaways](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Structures \[Refresher\]](#)



## Introduction

Your instructors know that writers face anxiety about writing, but they want to see your enthusiasm, not your anxiety, in your writing. They want to know what you think and how you reason. One approach to thinking about a research project, such as a paper, is that it is just an elaborate form of show and tell. You tell your audience what you are going to show them, you show them, and then you tell them about what you've shown. The “show” part is the literary work and the scholarly conversation about it. The “tell” part is your perspective on the literary work and on the scholarly conversation. Your research “show and tell” must have a clear purpose: to address a relevant and significant scholarly problem.

Here are some tips for structuring your writing:

## Tips for Structuring Your Writing<sup>1</sup>

1. Always keep your audience in mind and make your writing as accessible as possible.
2. Address your research question explicitly by showing how you understand it. Explain how you interpret the research question and the significance/relevance of the research question before you move ahead into an argument or discussion.
3. Provide a brief overview of the rest of your response: what resources — conceptual, methodological — are you bringing to the research question? How will you proceed?
4. Define key terms before you begin a discourse about them. Even if you think your readers share an understanding of these terms, they want to see how you define them before moving ahead.
5. When you cite a scholarly text, provide context. In other words, explain where that text fits in the scholarly discussion. Treat the material dialectically, meaning that you show your reader how a “branch of knowledge” or a “school of thought” relates to other branches or schools, how the branch you are dealing with is divided, and how the various parts relate to each other. Be systematic, but also be critical, where appropriate.
6. State your thesis clearly. What is your position? Explain how you will back up your claim.
7. Present obvious counter-arguments to your claim clearly and refute them systematically using strong evidence and clear reasoning (see box below for addressing counter-arguments) Do not dismiss counter-arguments out of hand without first engaging them.
8. In your writing, alternate between the conceptual and the concrete (we discussed this practice in a previous chapter). In other words, when you discuss a concept, show us how it applies to a particular case. When you

1. In the “Back Matter” of this book, you will find a page titled “Rubrics.” On that page, we provide a rubric for Structuring Your Writing.

discuss a case, explain which concepts you use to make sense of it.

9. Explain the warrants — logical connections — as you move your reader from thought to thought or from claim to claim. Make sure your readers can follow your connections and that they make sense logically.
10. Avoid common stylistic errors such as the use of vague pronouns (“it” and “this” are the usual suspects), passive voice sentences that hide agency, and common punctuation problems such as comma splices.



## Presenting Counter Arguments

You should assume your audience will look with skepticism at your thesis. They will be considering alternative claims and will be looking for weaknesses in your argument. You should, therefore, address the reader’s questions and concerns clearly and directly by putting yourself in the reader’s shoes, imagining these possible questions and concerns, and addressing them one by one.

One approach is to present counter-arguments other critics have made and then contrast the weaknesses in their arguments to the strengths in yours. Sometimes you may not be able to find counter-arguments to your thesis in other publications. In that case, you should imagine possible objections to your arguments and state them clearly in your paper before refuting them with evidence and persuasive reasoning.

This process of argument/counter-argument is what you would expect in a courtroom trial where a prosecutor and defense attorney take turns building up their own arguments and tearing down arguments from the opposing side. In most academic papers, your tone will be civil. In general, there is no need to berate a scholar who happens to be wrong. The 16th-century astronomer Tycho Brahe believed that the sun orbited the Earth. It doesn’t

help your case to write, “Tycho Brahe! What a loser!” Instead, you should explain why Brahe believed what he did and then explain that he was lacking the information or the perspective that you have now.



## Basic Structure of Academic Writing

The structure described below is a bare-bones, basic framework for college writing. You are not locked into it (unless your instructor says so) and there are many other structures, but this one will do for most research papers.

### Basic Structure of Academic Writing

#### I. Title

- Reference your thesis statement, theory, method, or topic; name the author and title of the work being analyzed.
- Example: The Downfall of the Southern Gentry: A Marxist Reading of Faulkner’s “Barn Burning.”

#### II. Introduction (usually one paragraph)

- Attention-getting opener: problem, anecdote, question, quote, analogy, definition, or example
- Narrowing of general topic
- Research question
- Thesis:

- Clarifies specific topic, purpose, and focus (your particular point or perspective about topic)
- Does not “announce” these things (“In this paper I will”) but explains why the claim is significant or necessary.
- Usually the last sentence of introduction paragraph
- The rest of the paper supports and explains the claim made in the thesis

### III. **Body**

- In your transition from the thesis statement to the body (main part) of the essay, you lead the reader through your argument and its relevance. Avoid the temptation to merely summarize a literary work. You may, if you choose, present a preview of your argument while summarizing the literary work along the way.
- Topic sentence: each paragraph has a topic sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph
- Support:
  - Reasons/Explanations: show your reader the evidence and reasoning that supports each claim
    - Evidence includes direct quotations from the text; try to avoid long quotes by paraphrasing or by breaking them into smaller parts.
    - Never include a quotation without framing it within your argument. Introduce the quote, then present the quote, then comment on it.
  - Climactic order: your best or most significant idea should be discussed in your last body paragraph

### IV. **Conclusion** (usually one paragraph)

- Reaffirm thesis: don’t use exactly the same sentence, but remind reader of the main idea
- Finish with a broad point or generalization, a suggestion for further research, or a rhetorical question

- Don't bring up new ideas or points regarding your thesis in your conclusion; all support should stay in the body of the essay.

Wendy Belcher's *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* provides excellent advice for structuring your research paper:

"Structure is the organization of your argument and the evidence for your argument. When each part of your article leads logically to the next part, you have a coherent structure" (172). Structures allow your reader to make logical connections as they move through your ideas. They also help you, as you are writing, to connect your ideas into a greater whole."

Belcher identifies two types of structure: micro (paragraph level) and macro (paper level):

## Paragraph Level

1. **Description:** provides information about a topic and answers who, what, where, and when. Includes "for example," "such as," and "that is."
2. **Sequence:** chronological or procedural information such as background, histories, and experiments. Includes: "before," "after," and "more recently."
3. **Causation:** cause and effect relationships. Includes "because," "thus," and "therefore."
4. **Problem/solution:** asks and answers questions. Includes "argues that," "proposes," and "responds."
5. **Comparison:** differences and similarities. Includes "in contrast," "instead," and "on the other hand" (173).

## Project Level

In general terms, you should start with an introduction that focuses the reader's attention, then provide background, propose your argument, provide evidence, confront counter-arguments, and state a conclusion. Most undergraduate essays follow the structure of topic, thesis, evidence, and conclusion. More specifically, you introduce the problem, discuss critical approaches, apply the approach, speculate on implications, and conclude (Belcher, 180).

Two millennia ago, Roman scholars Cicero and Quintilian developed the six-part structure of argumentative presentation that we use to this day.

1. **Introduction (*exordium*)**. The beginning in which you give your main argument and relevant information.
2. **Statement of the case (*narratio*)**. Discuss the facts and qualities of the case. For a paper on literary studies, the “case” is the literary work you are examining.
3. **Outline of the major points in the argument (*divisio* or *partitio*)**. Present the disputed issues and list the arguments in the order you will present them.
4. **Proof of the case (*confirmatio*)**. Validate the statements in the *narratio* and *divisio*.
5. **Refutation of possible opposing arguments (*confutatio*)**. Anticipate disagreements and refute them.
6. **Conclusion (*peroratio*)**. Sum up your arguments.

Structure helps your reader stay connected to the flow of your ideas. Belcher offers the following advice for organizing your ideas in a reader-friendly way:



## Principles of Organization

1. “Go from what your readers know to what they don’t know. That is, start with the familiar.”
2. “Go from the simple to the complex. Get your reader comfortable before introducing the difficult.”
3. “Go from the uncontested to the more contested. Readers who have been convinced to believe one thing may be more easily convinced to believe the next.”
4. “Go from the general to the particular. Start with the large picture and then focus on the details.”
5. “Go chronologically from the past to the present (This common structure is not always the best one for your particular argument and evidence).”
6. “Go spatially through a succession of linked objects, as if on a guided tour. This works particularly well for art history, geography, and so on.” (Belcher, 174)

## Solving Structural Problems

To maintain your paper’s coherence, connect every sentence to the next sentence. The same is true of paragraphs (182). Below are additional strategies you should use to organize your paper.

1. **Use Subheads:** Subheads help the author and the reader to group information (182-183).
2. **Use Summary:** Peter Elbow writes, “Good summaries move the article forward by articulating what has been said and what will be said. Good summaries are not simplistic, verbatim restatements” (183).

3. **Organize around your argument:** Relate all particulars (evidence and proofs) to your argument.
4. **Stay focused.** Don't change topics. Ask whether everything relates to the main argument (184).
5. **Develop examples evenly:** Develop all of your sections equally. Don't treat one part of your argument at length and another with a brief statement (185)
6. **Do not use a discovery structure:** Structure your presentation based on evidence (not on your discovery process). Organize notes in the data collection stage around themes and topics. Your structure will emerge from these themes and topics (183).
7. **Do not use the “mystery novel” structure :** State your argument up front. Tell people where you are going, then lead them through your evidence (183).

## Additional Advice

If you are struggling to follow the instructions above, there is a shortcut. Find a professionally written research paper that you admire. It doesn't have to be in the discipline of literary studies, but something in the humanities is preferable. Keep the structure of that paper and replace the content with your own. While in graduate school, Dr. Mauer, one of the authors of this textbook, used this method to overcome writer's block and structure his master's thesis. He took the structure of a research paper he found about filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard and replaced it with his own content, which had to do with experimental research methods. The essay on Godard was structured as a comparison/contrast in which the author contrasted Godard's films with conventional Hollywood films. The invention process was the same for Dr. Mauer's work. It involved creating a table of two columns, one for the features of the experimental research methods he was studying and the other for conventional research methods. His thesis was built around the table.



## Structures [Refresher]

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# Revisions

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Content](#)
- [Form](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Revisions \[Refresher\]](#)

A *revision* is a rethinking and reorganizing of your research paper at a macro level. Revisions are different from *proofreading*, in which you clean up smaller things like any errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. A revision involves a big picture review of two things: content and form.



## Content

*Content* refers to the various elements that are combined to create a fully realized research project.

## Components of Research Contents

- topic
- research question
- thesis statement
- theory
- method
- major supporting arguments

Reread your work and determine whether you made the best choices in each of these categories. Gather feedback from others, especially experts in the discipline. Professional scholars frequently count on feedback when they write. Constructive feedback, if you are able to receive it, is the highest form of flattery and can be extremely helpful in revisions. Sometimes your revision process will lead you to a total rethinking of the research project with a new topic and research question. That's ok; no matter how far down the wrong road you go, it's always a good idea (if you've left enough time) to turn around and find the right road.



### Form

*Form* refers to the chosen structure of your paper, the order of presentation, logical connections, use of examples, etc.

Researchers typically organize their presentation using one or more of the *modes* of writing. These modes include

## Writing Modes

- Cause and effect
- Process analysis
- Case study
- Comparison/contrast
- Classification and division
- Definition
- Analysis
- Argumentation
- Narrative
- Description

Using the modes can help you stay organized! Try using one if you are struggling to get your thoughts into a coherent form. To learn more about modes, download [Modes of Writing](#) by John C. Hodges.

During revision, consider whether you need to move paragraphs, add or remove examples, eliminate redundancies, provide transitions between paragraphs, strengthen your conclusion, etc.

Professional writers often go through many revisions before they are ready to submit their work for publication. Publishers then review the work and may accept it as is, reject it, or accept with revisions. *Accept with revisions* is a common outcome; the publisher will specify what needs to be revised, with the understanding that the paper will be published if the requested changes are made.

**For more advice and information on Revisions, click on the following links from WritingCommons.org:**

- [Revision](#)
- [Revise for Substantive Prose](#)



## Revisions [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=217#h5p-41>

# Writing Academic Prose

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Writing Guidelines](#)
- [The Retyping Method](#)
- [The Craft of Writing](#)
- [The Word “I”](#)

We also provide the following activities:

- [Writing Guidelines \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Writing Academic Prose \[Refresher\]](#)



## Writing Guidelines

Writing guidelines are standards for achieving consistency, clarity, and precision in your writing, which enables readers to better appreciate your ideas.

Your reader should not have to struggle with prose that is confusing, wordy, vague, or poorly structured. Use these guidelines to keep your writing strong and reader-friendly.



## Writing Guidelines

- Use active voice sentences and avoid passive voice sentences. Active voice sentences have people doing things. They place the subject first and then the verb.
  - “F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby*,” is an example of an active voice sentence; “F. Scott Fitzgerald” is the subject and “wrote” is the verb.
  - “*The Great Gatsby* was written by F. Scott Fitzgerald” is an example of a passive voice sentence.

Active voice sentences engage the reader. The subject and verb are closer together, which strengthens the logical connection between them. Passive voice sentences typically lead to wordiness. In the examples above, the passive voice sentence contains two extra words. Your sentences should be no longer than necessary to convey the required information; we don’t want readers to work more than necessary. Passive voice sentences are appropriate when the focus is on the object of the sentence. For example, we could say that a literary work “was released as a special edition.” In this example, we are not concerned with *who* released the special edition (which would be the subject of the sentence), but only *that* it was released. The most problematic passive voice sentences are those in which a subject is expected but is absent. For example, “*The Great Gatsby* was written” is a complete sentence but is inappropriate for a scholarly paper.

- 
- **Use logical connecting words** to make the relationships of ideas clear to your reader. Logical connecting words include “because,” “since,” “therefore,” “although,” “however,” “thus,” “if . . . then,” “both . . . and,” “neither . . . nor,” and “from . . . to.”
-

- **Avoid vague expletives (“It is,” “There are”).** Such constructions create murky prose and make your reader work harder than necessary to understand your claims. Additionally, such constructions, usually placed at the beginning of sentences, lead to lengthy and weak sentences. Instead, start with the subject of the sentence (the person or thing doing the action) followed by an active verb.

- Don’t write: “It is obvious that there are many ways in which Zora Neal Hurston’s childhood impacted her writing.”
  - Instead: “Zora Neal Hurston’s childhood impacted her writing in many ways.”
- 

- **Replace “to be” verbs (*is, are, was, were, be, will be*, etc.) with active verbs.**

- Don’t write: “It is important to know that there is a lot of interest in this text from scholars.”
  - Instead: “Scholars show significant interest in this text.”
- 

- **Avoid strings of prepositional phrases.**

- Don’t write: “*In light of evidence from the end of the eighteenth century about the process of printing, an improvement in technological means was occurring.*”
  - Instead: “Printing technology improved near the end of the eighteenth century.”
- 

- **Do not use “this” as a stand-alone pronoun to refer to the general sense of a prior sentence.** “This” and “which” are adjectives, not pronouns. Using them as pronouns causes imprecision.

- Don't write: "Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* about a group of fictional characters, focusing on a millionaire (Gatsby) and his obsession with Daisy Buchanan in the Jazz Age. This (???) makes for a great meditation on the American Dream."
  - Instead: Follow "this" or "which" with a specific noun as in "This *novel* makes for a great meditation on the American Dream."
- 

- **In American scholarship, periods and commas go inside end quotation marks, unless the quote is followed by a citation.**

- **Without citation**

- Don't write: "Edgar Allan Poe wrote more than just horror stories like 'The Tell-Tale Heart'".
  - Instead: "Edgar Allan Poe wrote more than just horror stories like 'The Tell-Tale Heart.'"

- **With Citation**

- Don't write: "Edgar Allan Poe wrote more than just horror stories like 'The Tell-Tale Heart.'" (Zeeber and Kooki, 2012)
  - Instead: "Edgar Allan Poe wrote more than just horror stories like 'The Tell-Tale Heart'" (Zeeber and Kooki, 2012).

Colons and semicolons go outside end quotation marks, unless they are part of the quotation.

---

- **Do not use "their" when you mean "there" or "they're."** Homonyms are words with the same sound but different spellings and meanings.

---

- **Know how to properly format titles.** Use quotation marks for titles of essays, short stories, songs, and shorter poems. Italicize the following: very long poems, book titles, movie titles, television series, comic strips, record

album titles, magazines, and newspapers. The title of your own paper should not be in quotation marks. Do not put a period at the end of your title. If your paper's title includes the title of another work, such as a novel or short story, be sure to italicize or use quotation marks, using the guidelines above.

---

- **When referring to people, do not use the pronoun “that” when you mean “who.”**

- Don't write: “People that live in glass houses should not throw stones.”
  - Instead: “People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.”
- 

- **Avoid comma splices.** A comma splice joins two independent clauses (each of which can stand as a separate sentence), unconnected by a conjunction, with a comma.

- Don't write: “Gatsby is a man given to obsession, he thinks about Daisy without stop.”
  - Instead: replace the comma with either a semi-colon or a period, or you may simply add a conjunction (such as the word “and”) after the comma. “Gatsby is a man given to obsession; he thinks about Daisy without stop.”
- 

- **Avoid dangling modifiers.** Modifiers, usually at the beginning of a sentence, must relate to the subject of the sentence or they will dangle.

- Don't write: “Expecting an important call, the telephone was always at Gatsby's side.” Telephones don't “expect.”
- Instead: “Expecting an important call, Gatsby stayed close to the tele-

phone.”

---

- **Sentence elements that are parallel in function should be parallel in grammatical form.**

- Don’t write: “Gatsby liked to play and winning.” (Mixes an infinitive, “to play” and a present participle, “winning.”)
- Instead: “Gatsby liked playing and winning” or “Gatsby liked to play and win.”

---

- **Substitute familiar for unfamiliar or archaic words.**

- Don’t write: “Gatsby was not fully cognizant of the dangers.”
- Instead: “Gatsby was not fully aware of the dangers.”

Scholars should aim to write without reproducing sexist language and stereotypes. See this [Guide to nonsexist language](#) from the University of Arizona.

A collection of handouts about revising your prose can be found in the following link: [The Paramedic Method](#)<sup>1</sup>

1. Includes overviews of the following: The “Paramedic Method” Modified from Lanham, R (2007). *Revising Prose*, 5th ed, Five Characteristics of Academic and Bureaucratic Prose Adapted from *Technical Editing for Scientists*, Bruce Jaffee <http://jaffeerevises.com/index.htm>, Guidelines for Revising Scientific and Technical Prose (modified from materials at The Center for Communication Practices at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Phil Druker’s University of Idaho class and IY Hashimoto’s Whitman College Writing Center)



## The Retyping Method

If the above instructions are too challenging, there is a shortcut. You can learn what good writing is through your fingertips. When Dr. Mauer was told by one of his professors that his writing was unacceptable, this professor provided valuable help; he rewrote the first two pages of Mauer's paper in his own crystal-clear style and gave Mauer the following assignment: "Retype these two pages, exactly as I have written them, without thinking about it."

Mauer felt, in his fingers, what it was like to write like a master! He could feel the rhythm of the complex sentences with their dependent clauses, the power of the active verbs, and the flow of the paragraphs. He grasped the placement of the thesis, the structure of the arguments, and the arrangement of the appeals. This assignment did more to help him learn the patterns of good writing than did all his other writing instruction.

We can learn the rules for punctuation, grammar, and structure, and still not know how to write effectively. Just learning the rules is not enough. We needed training to learn the right habits.

If you are struggling to write effective academic prose, do the following:

1. Find a published academic essay, the best example of writing you can find in the scholarly literature. If you're not sure what qualifies, ask your instructor.
2. Retype the first two pages.
3. Add the following statement: "I did not copy-and-paste this text; I typed all of it myself." Sign your name.
4. Share it with someone else (your instructor, if permitted).

You may find it a relief to get away from rules and from the pressure to be original. You are just copying.

If you think this exercise is a kind of cheating or even "plagiarism," don't worry; you are not claiming the model essay as your own. You are learning the proper style. The analogy is to a tennis student who learns a swing by copying a master (or having a master move the tennis student's arm during the swing). All the theory and advice about playing tennis cannot replace the feeling of the swing itself.



## Writing Guidelines [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

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## The Craft of Writing

The basic skills involved in the craft of scholarly writing are to:

1. Anticipate the reader's need for information, explanation, and context
2. Use logical connections between ideas
3. Use appropriate, clear, and smooth transitions

4. Use sophisticated sentences, appropriate word choice, and professional conventions of written English

The reader should be able to follow your writing without having to ask unnecessary questions about the meaning of a specialized term, the relation of ideas to one another, the identity of a character in a literary work, etc.

A reader should not have to struggle through prose that is vague or has weak sentence structure. No reader wants to confront technical errors such as poor grammar, misspellings, or misuse of punctuation. The best way to write for your reader is to imagine yourself in your reader's position and anticipate the reader's need for information. In other words, ask yourself questions while you read your work and try to answer them all. Ask other people to read your work and to indicate where they have unanswered questions. Then answer these questions in your writing.



## The Word “I”

In literary research papers, there is no hard rule against using the word *I* unless your instructor makes it a rule. *I* can be unnecessary. You don't need to write “I think,” for instance, because your reader assumes your words are your thoughts.

You don't need to tell us the story of your research process unless doing so is particularly relevant. For instance, if you struggled to obtain a document, and that story is worth telling, you can explain what happened using *I*. It is better to use the word *I* if avoiding it would make your prose awkward. For example, if you are describing your own experience with a text (ex.: “I first read *The Great Gatsby* in high school”), writing “One first read *The Great Gatsby* in high school” is not going to work.

John Horton explains when using *I* can be not only appropriate but also a good thing.<sup>2</sup>

2. Horton, J. (2021). Centring reflexivity, positionality and autoethnographic practices in creative research. In N. von



Writing with the first person 'I' can be good for:

- Making a connection between you and the reader, making your writing engaging, affecting and accessible
- Helping you to become more self-aware (or 'reflexive') about your decisions, reasoning and ways of working as a researcher
- Disclosing how you are moved, troubled or transformed by research activities, participants, encounters and contexts (Widdowfield, 2000)
- Being more honest and transparent about the messy process of doing (or trying/failing to do) research
- Recognising, disclosing and critically reflecting upon how your identity, background, norms and assumptions (your 'positionality') invariably affect research encounters, data and outputs (Rose, 1997)
- Subverting norms of academic writing, acknowledging that you are not an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-confident, neutral, authoritative expert by writing 'vulnerably – i.e. not as the objective master of all you survey but as someone in the thick of things, experiencing clarity, confusion, joy, boredom, pain and more' (Crang and Cook, 2007: 175–6)
- Acknowledging the complex processes and encounters involved in any research, and thinking about where (and how) you stand amongst the many interconnected participants, events, bodies, spaces, materialities, discourses, power relations and inequalities that constitute any research setting
- Thinking about how you, as a researcher, have distinctive ethical responsibilities and a duty of care towards research participants
- Developing your own style of writing – or related creative practice – that allows some of your personality, positionality, cares, enthusiasms, culture, community and politics to become more fully part of your work
- And creating a context where others feel able to do some or all of the above.

For more advice and information on Style Guides, click on the following link from The Purdue Online Writing Lab:

- [Style Guide Overview](#)



## Writing Academic Prose [Refresher]

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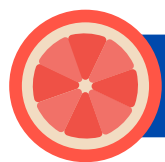
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# CHAPTER 13: AVOIDING PLAGIARISM / ADDITIONAL RESOURCES / FOUNDATIONAL MATERIALS ASSIGNMENT

# Avoiding Plagiarism

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Avoiding Plagiarism](#)
- [Chat-GPT](#)

We provide the following activities:

- [Avoiding Plagiarism \[Refresher\]](#)
- [Exercises](#)



## Avoiding Plagiarism

Susan A. Crane explains: “copying isn’t the problem that produces plagiarism; lack of citation does.” Scholars use other people’s ideas and words all the time. You can use as many of them as you need; there’s no limit! The only requirement is that you cite them.

Scholars keep track of their references as a way to build upon and give credit to other scholars. The trail of references from one scholar to another are like breadcrumbs that researchers can follow to find their path back through a scholarly discourse. By citing others, we are respecting their work and the tradition that keeps the trail of breadcrumbs legible so others can follow it after us.

Plagiarism is not just a theft of someone else’s ideas or words, but is also a violation of the

code that scholars and researchers live by. Without a clear picture of where ideas and scholarly language come from, we lose our trail.

Wendy Belcher, in her book *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*, provides advice for avoiding plagiarism. First, she notes that you will be caught. Especially with the digital search tools available today, checking for plagiarism has become fast and easy. And the penalties can be severe. Plagiarism has cost scholars their reputations and livelihoods. It's just not worth it!

## To Avoid Plagiarism, Do Not<sup>1</sup>

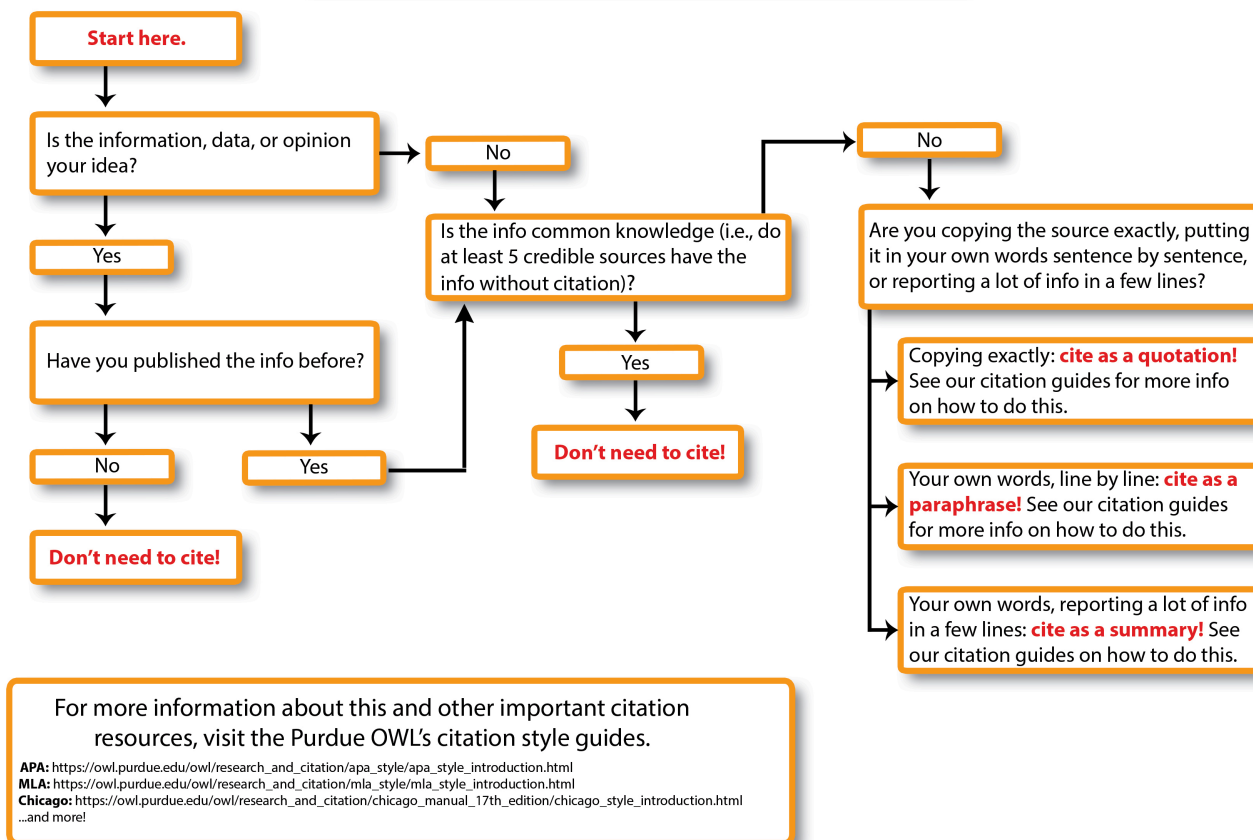
- Present someone else's entire work as your own
- Change little bits and call it your own
- Reword it and call it your own
- Translate it and call it your own
- Take sections or paragraphs and call it your own
- Use word-for-word quotes unless you put them in quotation marks and properly cite them (161).

Additionally, be careful when paraphrasing that your wording is too close. If you are having a hard time paraphrasing, it is better to use direct quotes instead of paraphrasing (161).

Scholars often build on their previous work and when they do, they cite it. But it is not ok to reproduce parts of a previous work you've written without citing it properly. Doing so is called "self-plagiarism." So, if you've turned in an assignment for another class but want to use some of it for a different assignment, you must properly cite your earlier paper.

Below is a flow chart that takes you through the decision tree of when to cite.

1. In the "Back Matter" of this book, you will find a page titled "Rubrics." On that page, we provide a rubric for Avoiding Plagiarism



2

There are several resources available via the UCF Libraries and Writing Center to help you avoid plagiarism:

- **Writing Center Handout:** This [quick-reference guide](#) distinguishes between plagiarism and the misuse of sources as well as what types of materials require citations, the basics of quoting, paraphrasing, and more. Also see [this handout on quoting and paraphrasing](#).
- **Video Tutorial:** The following videos were created as part of the UCF Libraries' [Research Tips Thursdays](#) webinars, a weekly series designed to help students

2. Purdue Writing Lab, and Rachel Atherton. "Should I Cite This?" Poster." *Purdue Writing Lab*, 2020, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding\\_plagiarism/should\\_i\\_cite\\_this\\_poster.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/should_i_cite_this_poster.html).

develop their research skills. The videos featured here focus on skills that every researcher needs to know: When to quote others, how to paraphrase, and why we cite.

### To Quote Or Not To Quote [1 min 59 sec]



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### Use Your Words: Paraphrasing Made Easy [1 min 28 sec]



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### Why We Cite [2 min 15 sec]



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**Avoiding Plagiarism Modules:** [These modules cover Avoiding Plagiarism and Citing Sources](#) in both MLA and APA styles. They're a good way to test your knowledge once you've read the above handouts and watched the video.

**For more information and Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Plagiarism, consider the following from The Purdue Online Writing Lab:<sup>3</sup>**

There are instances when something is clearly *intentional* plagiarism: buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper from someone else. This includes:

- Copying a blog post or stealing an article from online.
- Hiring someone to write your paper for you.
- Copying a large section of text from a source without making it clear it comes from somewhere else through quotation marks or proper citation.
- Intentionally failing to cite someone else's work, to claim that the ideas and words belong to you.
- *It is possible to plagiarize from yourself.* In academia, if you repurpose a paper from previous class or write one paper for two classes without the instructor's permission *this is plagiarism*.

Writers may also *unintentionally* plagiarize. This usually happens for a few common reasons:

- The writer doesn't fully understand the citation system they are using and ends up missing key elements of the source attribution.
- The writer thinks they are paraphrasing (restating a source's point in their own words) and ends up accidentally directly quoting words or phrases without realizing.
- The writer misattributes a quote or idea to the wrong source; this is especially common in larger research projects where the writer is dealing with a lot of source material.

Here is **a brief list of what needs to be credited or documented**:

- Words or ideas presented in a magazine, book, newspaper, song, TV program, movie, website, computer program, letter, advertisement, or any other medium.

3. Purdue Writing Lab. "Plagiarism FAQs." *Purdue Writing Lab*, 2021, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding\\_plagiarism/plagiarism\\_faq.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/plagiarism_faq.html).



- Information you gain through interviewing or conversing with another person, face to face, over the phone, or in writing.
- When you copy the exact words or a unique phrase.
- When you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts, pictures, or other visual materials.
- When you reuse or repost any digital media, including images, audio, video, or other media.

There are certain things that **do not need documentation or credit, including:**

- Writing your own lived experiences, your own observations and insights, your own thoughts, and your own conclusions about a subject.
- When you are writing up your own results obtained through lab or field experiments.
- When you use your own artwork, digital photographs, video, audio, etc.
- When you are using “common knowledge,” things like folklore, common sense observations, myths, urban legends, and historical events (but **not** historical documents).
- When you are using generally accepted facts (e.g., pollution is bad for the environment) including facts that are accepted within particular discourse communities (e.g., in the field of composition studies, “writing is a process” is a generally accepted fact).

**For more advice on some of the Best Practices to Avoid Plagiarism, consider the following from The Purdue Online Writing Lab:<sup>4</sup>**

- Reading & Note-taking

4. Purdue Writing Lab. “Plagiarism FAQs.” *Purdue Writing Lab*, 2021, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding\\_plagiarism/plagiarism\\_faq.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/plagiarism_faq.html).

- Take notes with the same citation habits you would use in the paper.
- If you have a lot of online sources such as journal articles in PDF format, use a PDF reader to write your notes on the source directly so they do not get disconnected from the original.
- Use a citation manager like Zotero and keep a copy of your notes associated with the source entry there.
- Interviewing & Conversing
  - Take lots of thorough notes; if you have any of your own thoughts as you're interviewing, mark them clearly.
  - If you're interviewing via email, retain copies of the interview subject's emails as well as the ones you send in reply. If your email server allows it, create individual folders that you can further organize in order to have easy access if you need to go back.
- Writing Paraphrases & Summaries
  - Use a statement that makes it clear you are referencing another source (e.g., According to Jonathan Kozol...).
  - If you are struggling with a summary, try to paraphrase or summarize the text without looking at the original source material, and simply rely on your memory. What sticks out to you about the original source is what will be important for you to discuss anyway.
  - Put quotation marks around any unique words or phrases that you cannot or do not want to change.
- Writing Direct Quotations
  - Keep the source author's name in the same sentence as the quote.
  - Mark the quote with quotation marks or set it off from your text in its own block, per the style guide your paper follows.
  - Quote no more material than necessary; if a short phrase from a source will suffice, don't quote an entire paragraph.
  - Use ellipses to (...) to mark where you have cut portions of a quote. Make sure that you are not omitting any portion that would change the meaning of the quote, such as by removing the word "not."

- Writing About Someone Else's Ideas
  - The name of the idea's originator should always be mentioned in the sentence or throughout a paragraph about the idea.
  - Parenthetical citations, footnotes, and endnotes are used to refer readers to additional sources about the idea, as necessary. This is why citation is important so that your teachers or classmates are able to find the original source material if they want to.

If, after exhausting these resources, you need additional help or clarification about plagiarism, please make an appointment with the [Writing Center](#) or consult with your instructor.



**Chat-GPT**

ChatGPT and other Artificial Intelligence tools present new opportunities and challenges to scholars. They can be useful tools for producing facts (you always want to double check them) and summaries, overcoming writer's block, helping with revisions, and trying different formats (such as stories, questions, instructions). Of course, you should not claim that AI-generated writing is something you wrote. Just cite it properly. You can claim credit for writing original prompts and for modifying the output of an AI. Check with your instructor for their policies related to AI for assignments.

Chat-GPT and other generative AI tools have the ability to write your paper for you. Is this ok? Of course not! Generating text via a machine means you did not write it. Passing it off as your own writing is ethically wrong and could land you in a lot of trouble. Does that mean you should never use these tools? No. There are a variety of legitimate reasons for using Chat-GPT, such as gathering background information, comparing and contrasting your ideas with those of a generated text, investigating the capacity of AI tools, etc. If you want to use Chat-GPT for any of these reasons, you should make sure your instructor is ok

with it. Then, if you plan to incorporate any of the generated text in your research project, you should do the following:

- Explain and justify why you are using generative AI.
- Explain how you are using AI to address a problem; are you using it to summarize research? develop an outline? develop possible research questions?
- Provide the prompt you used to generate the text.
- Make sure the entirety of any generated text is quoted and properly attributed in your final work.



## Avoiding Plagiarism [Refresher]

**Take this quiz to check your comprehension of this section.**

If you are using an offline version of this text, access the quiz for this section via the QR code.



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<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=225#h5p-44>



## Exercises

Exercise for Avoiding Plagiarism from The Purdue Online Writing Lab:<sup>5</sup>

Read over each of the following questions, and respond to a discussion post as to whether or not each uses citations accurately. If it doesn't, improve it so it's properly cited. All the questions refer to the following passage from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from the Birmingham Jail":

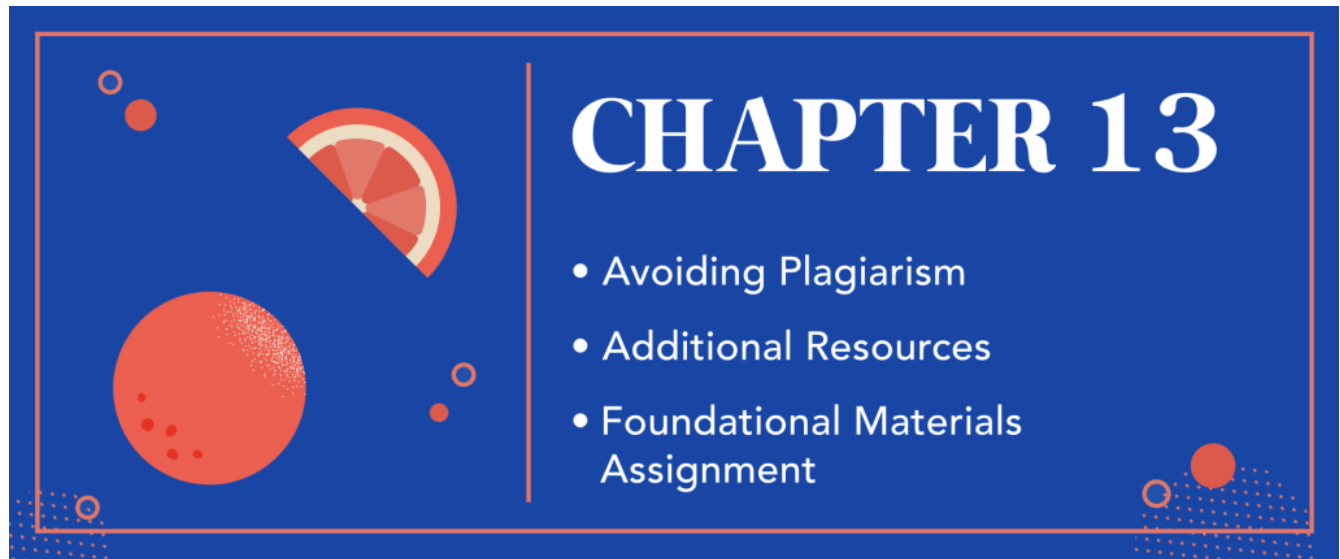
You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

1. Dr. King was certain that nobody would want to be contented with a feigning type of social analysis that concerns itself only with effects and doesn't deal with root causes.
2. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote that the city of Birmingham's "white power structure" left African-Americans there with "no alternative" but to demonstrate ("Letter from the Birmingham Jail" para. 5).
3. In "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," King writes to fellow clergy saying that although they "deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham, your statement fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations."

5. Purdue Writing Lab. "Plagiarism Exercise." *Purdue Writing Lab*, 2021, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding\\_plagiarism/plagiarism\\_exercise.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/plagiarism_exercise.html).

# Chapter 13 Objectives

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## Objectives

In this final chapter we help you steer clear of plagiarism, which is the use of others' words and ideas without proper attribution, find resources to help you with your research, and provide an assignment that puts in place the components necessary for finishing your research project.

Plagiarism is a violation of scholarly integrity and hurts not just the plagiarist (who gets caught) and the source of the information (who is uncredited), but also the knowledge profession itself, which depends on an unbroken chain of attribution so that other researchers can follow the scholarly conversation back to its sources. In our page on plagiarism, we provide advice for how to credit your sources and avoid plagiarism.

Researchers need lots of resources, including training, sources, time, funding, and publishing venues, to do their work. In our page on additional resources, we provide information about many valuable resources, such as UCF's University Writing Center, Information Literacy Modules, Research Tips Thursdays, Undergraduate Research Opportunities, Showcase

of Undergraduate Research, The Pegasus Review, UCF Funding Opportunities, and Publishing and Conferences.

Finally, we provide a Foundational Materials assignment in which you put in place the components necessary to complete your research project. These components include a title, research question, thesis statement, abstract, and annotated list of sources.



Now that we've done the bulk of our writing, our primary task is to make sure we have not plagiarized.

## Chapter Thirteen Project Task

1

Double check to  
avoid plagiarism.



## Learning Objectives

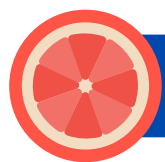
In this final chapter you will learn to:

- steer clear of plagiarism.
- find resources to help you with your research.
- put in place the components necessary for finishing your research project.



# Additional Resources

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [University Writing Center](#)
- [Student Academic Resource Center \(SARC\)](#)
- [Academic Advocacy](#)
- [Research Tips Thursdays](#)
- [Undergraduate Research Opportunities](#)
- [Honors Undergraduate Thesis \(HUT\)](#)
- [Office of Prestigious Awards \(OPA\)](#)
- [UCF Funding Opportunities](#)

We also provide the following activity:

- [Exercises](#)



## Introduction

Doing literary research requires a lot of work and a lot of support, but you don't have to do it alone; UCF has incredible resources to help you succeed! This page presents you with just some of these resources.



---

## University Writing Center

The Writing Center is guided by six valued principles—respect, compassion, diversity, adaptability, collaboration, and learning—with the purpose of:

- providing members of the UCF community free individual and group peer consultations at any stage of the writing process.
- serving as a campus resource for the ongoing cross-disciplinary learning about writing through events and workshops.
- promoting the growth of peer tutors with a rich teaching and learning experience and ongoing professional development in writing center research, theory, and practice to encourage them as leaders, scholars, and teachers.

Visit the [Writing Center](#)!

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## Student Academic Resource Center (SARC)

SARC offers group peer tutoring, one-on-one peer tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic coaching and engagement, and academic success workshops. Their website offers videos and other helpful resources. Visit [SARC](#)!

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## Academic Advocacy

The Office of Academic Advocacy proactively works with students to remove barriers adversely affecting retention (the ability to return each year), persistence (the ability to not skip terms), and timely completion of degree (the ability to graduate).

Visit [Academic Advocacy](#)!

## Research Tips Thursdays

Research Tips Thursdays is a webinar series created by the UCF Libraries one Thursday each month. Some of the early videos are longer in length (30-40 minutes) but the more recent ones are short (2-3:00 minutes) and focus on specific skills that all researchers need to know. Topics include evaluating resources, the research process, search strategies, and tips for success. See the [RTT website](#) for more information.

---

## Undergraduate Research Opportunities

[The Office of Undergraduate Research](#) offers a plethora of useful information for undergraduates including research opportunities, a database for research positions, funding sources, publishing and presenting opportunities, trainings, resources for getting started with research and training to further develop your skills.

---

## Honors Undergraduate Thesis (HUT)

From the HUT website:

The Honors Undergraduate Thesis (HUT) program is the oldest and most prestigious undergraduate research program at UCF. HUT provides juniors and seniors from all disciplines the opportunity to engage in original and independent research or creative activity as principal investigators and independent scholars.

Over the course of two to four semesters, students work closely with a faculty committee to research, write, defend, and publish an original thesis that serves as an honors capstone product of their undergraduate career. This thesis is published through the university library and is available to researchers worldwide through electronic databases.

You do not need to be admitted to the Burnett Honors College to participate in HUT. Visit [HUT!](#)

---

## Office of Prestigious Awards (OPA)

OPA, housed within the Burnett Honors College, helps students apply for scholarships and fellowships and prepare for graduate schools and careers in their fields. OPA has a scholarship database, helpful resources, internships, student exchanges, and institutes. Visit [OPA!](#)

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## UCF Funding Opportunities

Interested in opportunities to have your research funded? Visit the [UCF Funding Opportunities](#) page to learn more.

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## Exercises

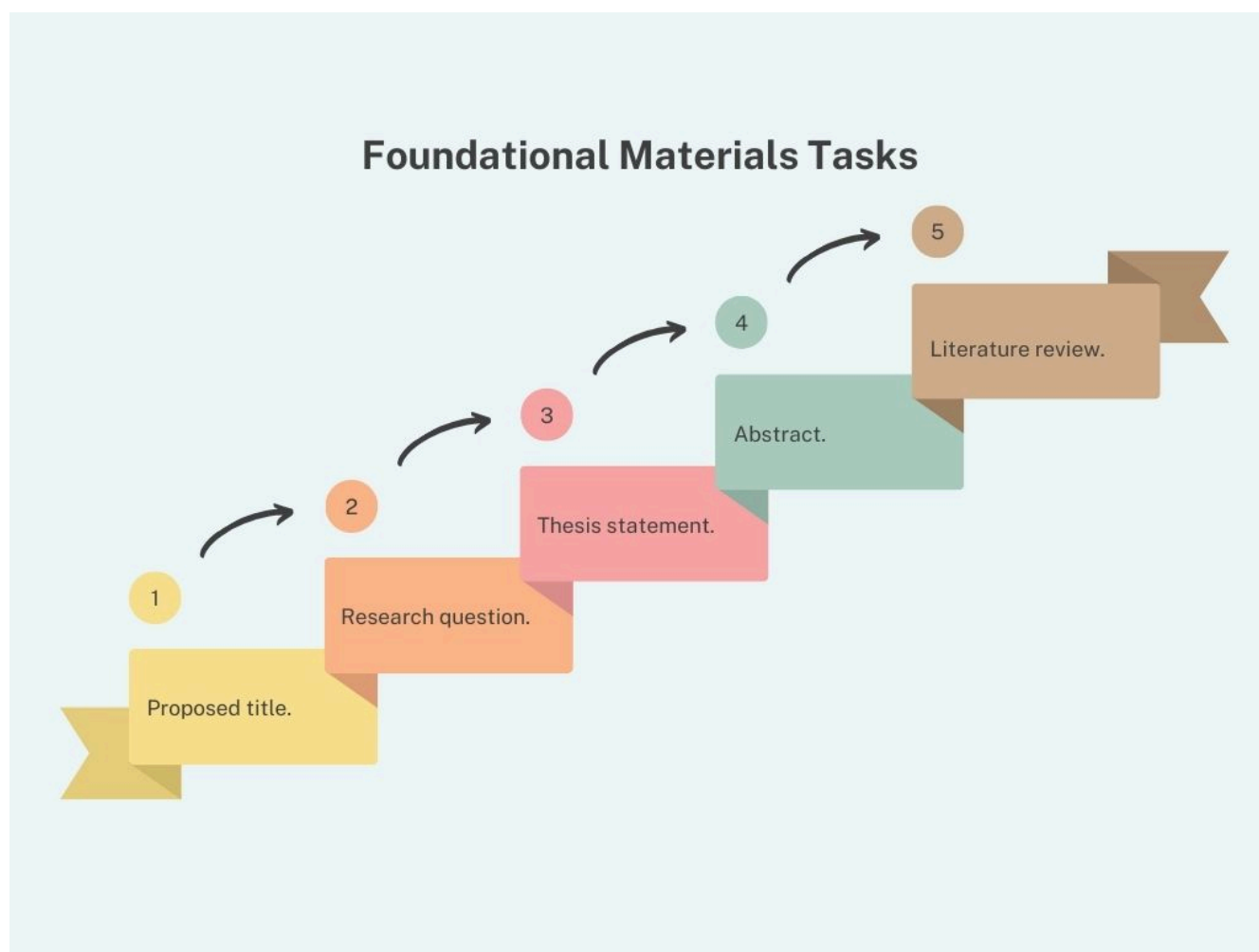
1. How much of the material in Strategies for Conducting Literary Research was new to you? How much did you already know? Did the course help you build upon what you knew?
2. Do you have a better understanding of literary research as a discipline after working through the course? Does your work with the course help you with other humanities research outside of literary studies (could include theater, visual arts, music, languages, history, etc.)? Explain.
3. Have you been able to adapt and apply skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in this course to new situations and/or to solve difficult problems or explore complex issues in original ways? Explain.
4. Have you been better able to formulate and present your ideas and your research in coursework as a result of working through the chapters in this course? Explain.
5. Envision a future self using what you have learned in this course. What do you see yourself doing? Are you using these lessons in your future career? What plans do you have and how do the lessons you learned here help you realize them?

# Foundational Materials Assignment

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK

*"I never know what I think about something until I read what I've written on it."*  
— William Faulkner

This assignment is a major step on your way to the research project. It includes the following components:



Rubrics for each of these components are available in the [“Rubrics”](#) section of the appendix. You can absolutely re-use past assignments here, but it is a good idea to rework them, espe-

cially once you see all the parts together. Think about how all the parts relate to one another and adjust them if they need to be more cohesive.

If you've been following this textbook, you should have completed all these steps by now. For this assignment, you put them together and see that they all relate. Your Foundational Materials work may only end up a couple of pages long, but we are going for quality not quantity. Begin with a clear sense of audience and purpose, and clearly define the problem, research question, thesis, and argument. Provide context for your work by citing the scholarly discussion. You should identify a journal or other scholarly platform (conference, showcase, edited collection, etc.) that would be a good fit for your research.

Your arguments need specificity, strength, support, and coherence. Please ask for your instructor's feedback or help if you need it before turning in this assignment.

If your instructor has given you a choice of prompts, indicate which **prompt** from the project assignments you are referring to. By choosing one, you are choosing the "frame" for your work. Make sure you incorporate **key terms** in your proposal. If your research is about metaphor in a literary work, you need to explain which metaphor(s) in particular you are addressing. It shouldn't be about metaphor in general. The **parts of the assignment**, such as composing a title, developing a research question, writing a thesis statement, and so on, are explained in the chapters of this book. Following the advice in these pages will help you stay away from many common yet avoidable mistakes.

1. **Titles:** If a key word appears in your title, it needs to appear somewhere else in your proposal.
  - The title should indicate which **text** is your object of study. It should also indicate which theory, methodology, or method you are using to discuss the work.
  - Your title needs to give the reader some guidance on what to expect in the paper. Imagine that your title is listed among twenty other titles in a journal – how will readers know which text you are discussing? Which theory or perspective are you taking?
  - You should capitalize all words in your title except for prepositions (unless a preposition is at the beginning of the title, in which case you capitalize it).
  - Your own title does not go in quotation marks.
  - It is a mistake to imply in your title that a particular writer is using a theory *in* their writing (as in this made-up example: "Judith Williamson's Myth Structure *in* Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death.'" The word "in" here implies that Williamson's theory is *in* the story itself. Instead, you could say you are doing a reading of the story *through* Williamson's theory).

2. **Research questions:** An assignment prompt is not the same thing as your research question.

- Your research question should be aimed at filling a gap in the scholarly literature or clearing up a misunderstanding about a topic related to literature.
- A research question can include primary, secondary, and tertiary questions.
- What is it you want to know about this text?
- Don't make your research question too broad.
- Make your research question about a specific text (usually no more than two for an undergraduate paper) and specific topics (such as particular metaphors or paradoxes, social or psychological questions, etc.).
- The research question should be answerable with an arguable claim.
- Make sure your research question is relevant to an audience of literary scholars.
- Don't ask whether we *can* apply a theory to a text. We can apply almost any theory to almost any text, but what is it *you* want to know about the text? Is there some specific benefit we gain from a theory that can't be gained by other means?

3. **Thesis statement:** Writing a good thesis statement is one of the most difficult tasks in academic writing.

- Your thesis statement should answer your research question.
- It should relate to a specific text or texts, rather than (merely) to a general topic.
- Because you are stating an **arguable** claim, you should do more than claim you *will discuss* or *will analyze* a text (these terms imply an *explanatory* paper, which is "about" something, and not an argumentative one that makes a claim).
- Avoid claiming we can "understand" a text (instead tell us *what* we should understand).
- Avoid making claims that are *presumptive* (already known or generally accepted), such as that Ernest Gaines' writing is about injustice. Tell us what actions he portrays that are unjust and explain why they are unjust.
- Avoid *vague* language. Stating that something is "different" or "unique" is not an arguable claim.
- Avoid claiming that a text is an *example* of a theory. Most theories are general enough to cover a potentially infinite number of examples. Tell us what is *special* about a text and why it matters.

- Avoid claiming that you will *prove a theory*. If a theory is in the scholarly literature, it is *presumptively true*. You *can* criticize a theory or even seek to disprove it. You can explain how other theorists have amended and extended particular theories. (Remember that a theory is *not a fact*; it is an *explanation that accounts for a set of facts*).
  - Keep your thesis statement as short as possible (though it can be several sentences) and put longer explanations in the abstract.
4. **Abstract:** Explain what your research contributes to the scholarly conversation. Your abstract should explain your argument in more detail and provide an idea of what support you are using and why your claim is significant.
5. **Literature Review:** How are you positioning your argument in relation to that of other scholars? Which ones do you agree with or disagree with? Of the ones that agree, how will your work differ from or add to theirs? Are you deviating from other scholarship in some ways? Building upon it? Providing meta-commentary on it?
- Which sources are you using for evidence?
  - How does your work contribute to the scholarly discussion?
  - Keep in mind that your sources may focus on different things: the literary work, the theory, the methodology, etc.
  - If your proposal refers to a theory or method, include something about it in the bibliography about it. Sometimes one source you found will be closest to the paper you are writing. You can use it as your primary jumping off point – how does your work differ or supplement this work?
  - Each work listed in your literature review should have a full citation. Make sure your citations are properly formatted (MLA, APA, etc.).
  - If you'd like to see an excellent example of a literature review, see this one about [narratology by Carissa Baker](#).

**Stylistics:** General scholarly practice is to write in present tense. In other words, avoid writing “this paper will . . .,” which is future tense.

- Avoid passive voice sentences, especially agentless ones that don't tell us who is doing what.
- Make sure your arguments are strong and clear and that there are no mechanical or style problems to slow down your reader. Your reader wants to learn and enjoy – they do not want to struggle to figure out what you mean, how your ideas are connected, or to confront style problems. Writers work



harder so that their readers don't have to.

- Short story titles go in quotation marks and book titles go in italics.
- Avoid using "this" as a stand-alone pronoun, which leads to vagueness.

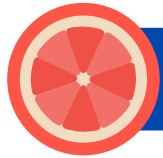
If your project uses a theory outside of its normal application, then explain why it is doing so and how you are making it work. For instance, Vladimir Propp's morphological theory is about folktales. If you are applying Propp's theory to a modernist literary work, explain why Propp's theory is relevant outside of folktales. Your reader may think, for example, that modernist works don't follow the narrative structures of folktales and that applying Propp to one will just tell us what we already believe – that folktales and modernist literary works are different. But if applying Propp to a modernist literary work reveals something about that work we could not have understood otherwise, then by all means, use it!

Research projects take time to prepare and write. Be sure to schedule time regularly to do this work. Start with something very manageable like 15 minutes a day, and then if you go over that time, consider it a bonus. The hardest part is starting.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense that can lead to expulsion from the university. You must properly cite your sources, using quotation marks (or offsetting longer quotes) and providing proper citation. See [Avoiding Plagiarism](#) for information.

# Scholarly Venues

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## CONTENTS

We discuss the following topics on this page:

- [Showcase of Undergraduate Research](#)
- [The Pegasus Review](#)
- [Publishing and Conferences](#)



## Introduction

Sharing research with other scholars is the most valued activity any researcher can do in their career. UCF provides venues where student researchers can share their work. The wider world also awaits your research, and the various CFP lists provide thousands of opportunities for you to gain the professional experience of showcasing your research and sharing it with other scholars!



## Showcase of Undergraduate Research

[The Showcase of Undergraduate Research Excellence](#) (SURE) is a poster forum for UCF undergraduates to present their research and creative projects to the broader university community. Undergraduates from all disciplines are encouraged to present current or recently completed academic projects showcasing the diversity of topics, approaches, and interests at UCF. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase your work among the best undergraduate researchers at UCF. You can showcase your research in a poster session first, then as an article for the Pegasus Review.

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## The Pegasus Review

Even as an undergrad, publishing your research is a real opportunity and is especially worth considering if you're planning to go to grad school. [The Pegasus Review](#) is UCF's journal of undergraduate research and they're always on the lookout for high-quality student work, especially from the humanities. If you're interested in publishing your research, consult their [submissions guidelines](#) and review their [archive of back issues](#).

---

## Publishing and Conferences

Humanities venues are always looking for new research, and students can start their careers through these avenues. You can find CFPs (Calls For Papers) in the following:

- [UPenn](https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/) [<https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/>]
- [HNet](https://networks.h-net.org/subject-fields/humanities) [<https://networks.h-net.org/subject-fields/humanities>]
- [WikiCFP](http://www.wikicfp.com/cfp/call?conference=humanities) [<http://www.wikicfp.com/cfp/call?conference=humanities>]
- [CFPList](https://www.cfplist.com/) [<https://www.cfplist.com/>]
- [Commlist](http://commlist.org/archive/calls/2023-all/index.html) [<http://commlist.org/archive/calls/2023-all/index.html>]

# FINAL PROJECT AND EXAM



This chapter contains a 50-question final exam and a final research assignment.



# Final Exam

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=1846#h5p-49>

# Final Project and Exam

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



This chapter contains a 50-question final exam and a final research assignment.



# Final Research Assignment

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK

Note to students: the assignment below may be modified or replaced with a different assignment by your instructor.

*"Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which the publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs."*

*– Hélène Cixous*

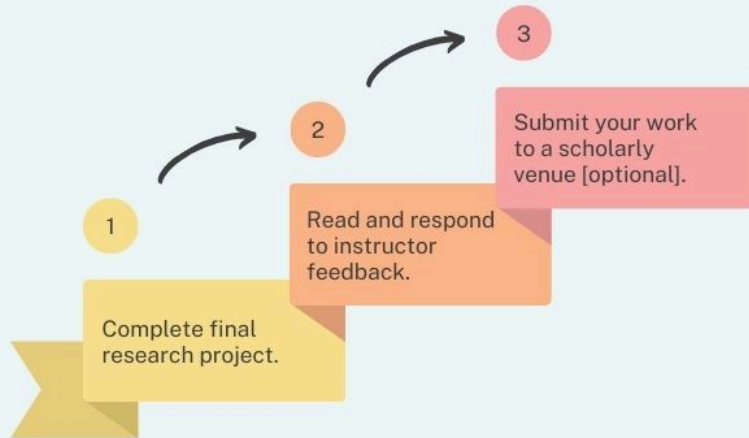
*"It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what others say in a whole book."*

*– Friedrich Nietzsche*

*"Don't be 'a writer'. Be writing."*

*– William Faulkner*

## Final Project Tasks



The purposes of the final research paper are to

- use your research skills
- apply your knowledge of literary theory and methodology to interpret, critique, historicize, or creatively adapt a work of literature
- apply best writing practices, explained in this text, to produce a strong argument within a polished academic research project

Your work should be aimed at publication in a [literary studies journal or other professional venue \(conference, platform, etc.\)](#). It is your choice whether to actually submit your work to the journal or platform, but doing so is not required for the assignment. The project should be accompanied with a brief note to the prospective journal or platform (so your instructor knows which one you are aiming for).

Because we are doing a relatively short research project (and not something like a whole book), our project should focus on a particular case study or two at most. A case study is a particular work of literature, event, or phenomenon. We don't have the time or space to



properly research an entire literary period, movement, or even the complete works of a single author. Keeping things simple and focused is key to making this project work!

You **must** include at least three outside sources (in other words, sources that have not been assigned to the class) in your research project. The three works you choose to cite must be scholarly works; in other words, they must be from scholarly journals, books, or websites. You may cite additional, non-scholarly works, but do not do so exclusively. The total length for a conventional essay is 5-20 pages. Journal articles are usually between 300-6000 words. Essays are not your only option, however, and you may produce a graphic work, conference presentation, video, exhibit, or other form of work. See [Presenting Your Research Visually: Academic Posters and Slides](#), if you are interested in using these media.

Your project must include an abstract, as well as a review of literature (see the Types of Literature Reviews page for advice on how to develop your annotated bibliography into a literature review), a properly formatted works cited page, and all of the components we have covered so far (research question, thesis statement, title, etc.). You may choose MLA, APA, or Chicago as your style guide. These components should be integrated into the paper. The abstract can serve as the first paragraph and the review of literature can be in one place in the paper (usually close to the beginning) or may be distributed throughout (particularly if your review touches on different topics).

By doing this assignment, you are learning and demonstrating skills – such as close reading, argument construction, and clear writing – that you can transfer to other classes and projects.

Make sure you refer to this textbook for instructions about writing the essay.

## Sample rubric

Criteria	%
<p>Learning Outcome: Conceptual</p> <p>Has cogent analysis, shows command of interpretive and conceptual tasks required by assignment and course materials: ideas original, often insightful, going beyond ideas discussed in lecture and class.</p>	20%
<p>Learning Outcome: Rhetorical</p> <p>Commands attention with a convincing argument with a compelling purpose; highly responsive to the demands of a specific writing situation; sophisticated use of conventions of academic discipline and genre; anticipates the reader's need for information, explanation, and context.</p>	20%
<p>Learning Outcome: Thesis</p> <p>Essay controlled by clear, precise, well-defined thesis; is sophisticated in both statement and insight.</p>	15%
<p>Learning Outcome: Development and Support</p> <p>Well-chosen examples; uses persuasive reasoning to develop and support thesis consistently; uses specific quotations, statistics, aesthetic details, or citations of scholarly sources effectively; logical connections between ideas are evident. MLA, APA, or Chicago citation is used correctly.</p>	15%
<p>Learning Outcome: Structuring</p> <p>Well-constructed paragraphs; appropriate, clear, and smooth transitions; arrangement of organizational elements seems particularly apt.</p>	15%
<p>Learning Outcome: Language</p> <p>Uses sophisticated sentences effectively; usually chooses words appropriately; observes professional conventions of written English and manuscript format; makes few minor or technical errors.</p>	15%
Total %: 100	

# Glossary

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK

## **analysis**

examination of the elements or structure of something.

## **arguments**

reasons given to persuade others that a belief or action is right or wrong.

## **counterclaims**

arguments that could be raised against yours

## **criteria**

a standard by which something may be judged.

## **critical race theory**

Investigates racial disparities embedded in political, economic, legal, and social systems.

## **disinterestedness**

They are not invested in a particular outcome and stand to gain or lose nothing by taking a side in a dispute.

## **ethos**

The character of a speaker or rhetor.

## **hypothesis**

A provisional claim that requires further information and testing to verify.

## **interrogative**

Posing and answering questions

**interrogatory**

A form of writing that anticipates reader's questions and answers them, anticipates follow-up questions and answers those, and so on.

**Monograph**

A monograph is a specialist work of writing or exhibition on a single subject or an aspect of a subject, often by a single author or artist, and usually on a scholarly subject. For more information, visit: [Wikipedia](#)

**Positing**

assume as a fact; put forward as a basis of argument.

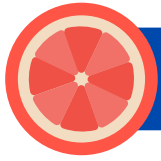
Definition from Oxford Languages

**scholarly monographs**

a book-length treatment of a single topic usually by a single author

# Rubrics

BARRY MAUER; JOHN VENECEK; AND EMILY SMELTZ



## CONTENTS

This page contains the following rubrics:

- [Identifying a Problem](#)
- [Establishing Relevance](#)
- [Evaluating Purpose](#)
- [Searching as Strategic Exploration](#)
- [Using Evidence for a Research Project](#)
- [Interpreting Literary Works](#)
- [Creating an Annotated Bibliography](#)
- [Creating a Literature Review](#)
- [Finding Trustworthy Sources](#)
- [Creating a Research Question](#)
- [Creating an Abstract](#)
- [Relating the Conceptual and Concrete](#)
- [Positing a Thesis Statement](#)
- [Composing a Title](#)
- [Defining Key Terms](#)
- [Structuring Your Writing](#)
- [Avoiding Plagiarism](#)



Identifying a Problem Rubric (Chapter 2)

## TASK: Identify a Problem

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Relation of Problem to Audience	Problem is relevant to literary critics and scholars.	Problem is somewhat relevant to literary critics and scholars.	Problem is not relevant to literary critics and scholars.
Innovative Thinking	Presents an original problem or one that has not been explored in detail, or approaches a known problem in an original way.	Presents a known problem in a somewhat original way.	Does not present an original problem.
Explanation/Definition of issue	Problem is stated clearly and described comprehensively.	Problem could be stated with more clarity and more comprehensively.	Problem is not clearly stated or described.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA is used correctly while identifying a problem. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while identifying a problem; however, there are some mistakes.	There are significant errors in sentence structure, identifying the problem, the use of format, in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.



## Establishing Relevance Rubric (Chapter 2)

TASK: Establish Relevance

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Answers "So What?" Question	Argues convincingly why the topic and claim should matter to the audience.	Argues somewhat convincingly why the topic and claim should matter to the audience.	Relevance is not established. It does not matter to the audience.
Specificity	Proposes specific answers to the question of relevance.	Proposes generic and/or generalized answers to the question of relevance.	Proposes no answers to the question of relevance.
Consideration of Audience	Target audience was carefully considered.	Target audience was only somewhat considered.	Target audience was not considered.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly while establishing relevance. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while establishing relevance; however, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The student's writing is not clear. The student's writing is not organized. The student's writing is not polished. The student's writing is not professional. The student's writing is not appropriate for the audience.



Evaluating Purpose Rubric (Chapter 2)

## TASK: Evaluate Purpose

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Docere, Movere, Delectare (to teach, to move, to delight)	Successfully teaches on an intellectual level, touches audience feelings, and keeps their interest.	Somewhat teaches on an intellectual level, slightly touches audience feelings, and/or barely keeps their interest.	Does not teach on an intellectual level, does not touch audience feelings, and does not keep their interest.
Epideictic (or Ceremonial), Judicial (or Forensic), Deliberative (or Political)	Clearly aims for at least one clear purpose: Epideictic (or Ceremonial), Judicial (or Forensic), Deliberative (or Political)	Vaguely aims for one of these specific purposes: Epideictic (or Ceremonial), Judicial (or Forensic), Deliberative (or Political)	Does not aim for any of these specific purposes: Epideictic (or Ceremonial), Judicial (or Forensic), Deliberative (or Political)
Consideration of Audience	The target audience was carefully considered.	The target audience was only briefly considered.	The target audience was not considered.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly; however, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The MLA or APA format is not used correctly. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used incorrectly with many errors.



## Searching as Strategic Exploration Rubric (Chapter 3)



**TASK: Search Strategically**

**LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:**

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Inquiry	Determined the scope of the project and information needs.	Somewhat determined the scope of the project and information needs.	Did not determine the scope of the project and information needs.
Discovery	Successfully divided a broad search into strategic keywords that yielded high-quality scholarly articles.	Divided a broad search into strategic keywords that yielded adequate scholarly articles.	Did not divide a broad search into strategic keywords that yielded adequate scholarly articles.
Serendipity	Successfully expanded the scope of the research to include multiple perspectives and was open to unexpected discoveries.	Somewhat expanded the scope of the research to include multiple perspectives, but did not discover much new information.	Did not expand the scope of the research to include multiple perspectives or discover unexpected information.



**Using Evidence for a Research Project Rubric (Chapter 4)**

TASK: Use Evidence for a Research Project

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Facts and Reasoning	Found significant facts and linked them convincingly to reach a significant and convincing conclusion.	Found somewhat significant facts and linked them together to reach a conclusion.	Found few or no significant facts and did not link them together to reach a conclusion.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	MLA or APA format was used correctly; however, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	MLA or APA format was not used correctly. Sentences are awkward and contain many grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.



Interpreting Literary Works Rubric (Chapter 5)

TASK: Interpret Literary Works

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Use of Schemata	Successfully used one or more patterns of meaning (genre, social-cultural, creative, and/or psychological) to interpret and/or critique a literary work.	Somewhat successfully used one or more patterns of meaning (genre, social-cultural, creative, and/or psychological) to interpret and/or critique a literary work.	Did not use patterns of meaning (genre, social-cultural, creative, and/or psychological) to interpret and/or critique a literary work.
Moves from Specific to General	Interpretation successfully moves from the specific to the general, from the details of the literary work into more conceptual terms.	Interpretation sometimes moves from the specific to the general, or the connections are not entirely clear.	Interpretation does not move from the specific to the general, or the connections are not clear.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly while interpreting literary works. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while interpreting literary works; however, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The MLA or APA format is not used correctly while interpreting literary works. There are many mistakes. Sentences are awkward and lack punctuation. There are many grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.



Creating an Annotated Bibliography Rubric (Chapter 6)

**TASK: Create  
an Annotated  
Bibliography**

**LEVELS OF  
PERFORMANCE:**

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Quality/ Reliability of Sources	Gathers a sufficient number of appropriate sources, which are highly relevant and credible.	Gathers a few appropriate sources, which are somewhat relevant and credible.	Does not gather enough sources; sources are not appropriate or relevant, or lack credibility.
Currency of Sources	Includes sufficiently current content.	Lacks some sufficiently current content.	Current content is entirely lacking.
Summarization	Summarizes the relevant ideas of chosen sources, states the purpose of the resource, and discusses the resource's contribution to the topic.	Vaguely summarizes the relevant ideas of chosen sources. Most entries state the purpose of the resource and the resource's contribution to the topic.	Does not adequately summarize the main ideas of chosen sources. Does not state the purpose of the resource nor the resource's contribution to the topic.
Annotation	The annotation shows careful reading and a clear understanding of the source's content, quality, and relevance. It clearly explains why the sources were chosen. Offers insight into sources and makes explicit connections to the argument as well as to other chosen sources.	The annotation shows some understanding of the source's content, quality, and relevance. It briefly explains why the sources were chosen. Offers some insight into sources but makes few connections to the argument or to other chosen sources.	The annotation shows little to no understanding of the source's content, quality, and relevance. It does not explain why the sources were chosen. It offers little to no insight into the sources and does not make connections to the argument or to other chosen sources.
Grammar/ Mechanics	MLA or APA is used correctly throughout the annotated bibliography. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly throughout the annotated bibliography, but with mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The annotated bibliography contains multiple incorrect sentence structures and lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.



## Creating a Literature Review Rubric (Chapter 6)

TASK: Create  
a Literature  
Review

LEVELS OF  
PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Introduction of Topic & Research Question	Effectively introduces the topic and direction of the literature review. The research question is clearly identified and connected to the content of the review.	Introduces the topic of the literature review. The research question is identified and connected to some of the content in the review.	Does not introduce the topic of the literature review. The research question is either not identified or not connected to the content of the review.
Coverage of Content/ Organization	Covers appropriate content related to the topic and research question in depth. Sources are cited correctly. The organization of material is clear, effective, and appropriate.	Covers some of the content related to the topic and research question. Sources are cited with minor mistakes. The organization of material is not as clear, effective, and/or appropriate as it could be.	Does not cover appropriate content related to the topic and research question. Sources are cited incorrectly. The organization of material is not clear, effective, and/or appropriate.
Meaningful Discourse	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the available research about their topic. It situates ideas in existing discourse.	Demonstrates a partial understanding of the available research. It partially situates ideas in existing discourse.	Does not demonstrate an understanding of the available research. Ideas are not situated in existing discourse.
Essay Form	The literature review is in essay form.	The literature review is mainly or partly in essay form.	The literature review reads like a list of sources summarized.
Consideration of Audience	The target audience was carefully considered.	The target audience was only somewhat considered.	The target audience was not considered.
Connections to Discipline/ Synthesis of Ideas	Creates “wholes” out of multiple parts, synthesizes, and/or draws conclusions by combining examples, facts, and/or theories.	Struggles to make “wholes” out of multiple parts, synthesize, and/or draw conclusions by combining examples, facts, and/or theories.	Does not create “wholes” out of multiple parts. Does not synthesize or draw conclusions. Merely summarizes material from different sources.
Grammar/ Mechanics	MLA or APA is used correctly throughout. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly throughout, but with mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	Lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.



Finding Trustworthy Sources Rubric (Chapter 9)

TASK: Find Trustworthy Sources

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:			
	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Authority	The author(s) of identified sources are credible and their findings appear in a peer-reviewed academic journal or a book from a respected academic press.	The author(s) may or may not be credible. Not every source is from a peer-reviewed academic journal or press.	The author(s) are not credible. Sources are not from a peer-reviewed academic journal or press.
Warranted Bias	Correctly distinguishes author(s) who avoid unwarranted bias against good evidence and arguments, and who use warranted bias against bad behaviors or false claims, from authors who don't.	Mostly distinguishes author(s) who avoid unwarranted bias against good evidence and arguments, and who use warranted bias against bad behaviors or false claims, from authors who don't.	Does not distinguish author(s) who avoid unwarranted bias against good evidence and arguments, and who use warranted bias against bad behaviors or false claims, from authors who don't.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly while finding trustworthy sources. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while finding trustworthy sources. However, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	MLA or APA format is not used correctly while finding trustworthy sources. There are many mistakes. Sentences are awkward and often contain grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.



## Creating a Research Question Rubric (Chapter 10)

TASK: Create  
a Research  
Question

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Clear, Complex, and Focused Question	The research question is clear, complex, and focused. It is not unnecessarily loaded or leaning. It sets up a researchable and realistic project.	The research question remains too broad or too narrow. It is somewhat unnecessarily loaded or leaning. It is not very researchable and the project it sets up is not very realistic. The research question requires refining.	The research question is extremely broad or narrow. It is very unnecessarily loaded or leaning. It is not researchable and sets up an unrealistic project. The research question requires major refining.
Arguable Answers	The possible answers to the research question (the thesis) are arguable. These answers can be much more than just "yes" or "no."	The possible answers to the research question (the thesis) are only partially arguable. These answers can be only slightly more than just "yes" or "no."	The possible answers to the research question (the thesis) are unarguable. These answers can only be a mere "yes" or "no."
Relevance to the scholarly conversation	The research question is relevant to the scholarly conversation and includes key concepts in the discipline. Other researchers and scholars are likely to be highly interested in the question.	The research question is somewhat relevant to the scholarly conversation and may be missing a key concept. Other researchers and scholars may only be slightly interested in this discourse.	The research question does not add anything of value to the scholarly conversation and is lacking any key concepts. Other researchers and scholars would not be interested in this question.
Question relates to available scholarly sources and evidence	Key research sources and evidence are available and relate directly to the research question.	Key research sources and evidence may only partially available and may only partially relate to the research question.	Key research sources and evidence are not available and/or do not relate to the research question.
Grammar/ Mechanics	MLA or APA is used correctly throughout the research question. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly throughout the research question, but with mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The research question contains multiple incorrect sentence structures and lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.



## Creating an Abstract Rubric (Chapter 10)

TASK: Create  
an Abstract

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Purpose	The abstract is clear, concise, and relevant.	The abstract could be clearer, more concise, and/or more relevant.	The purpose of the abstract is not clear, concise, and/or relevant.
Methodologies / Methods	Identifies the methods / methodologies used to support the thesis or answer the research question in an organized, specific, and concise manner.	Identifies the methods / methodologies used, but does not show how they support the thesis or answer the research question.	Does not identify the methods / methodologies used or how they support the thesis or answer the research question.
Evidence	Identifies key evidence found within the research clearly and concisely, and connects it to the purpose of the study.	Identifies evidence found within the research but does not clearly connect the evidence to the purpose of the study.	Does not identify key evidence.
Results/ Conclusion	Provides an explanation of what was expected, discovered, accomplished, collected, and produced throughout their research in an organized, specific, and concise manner.	Provides an incomplete or confusing explanation of what was expected, discovered, accomplished, collected.	Does not provide an explanation of what was expected, discovered, accomplished, collected, and/or produced throughout their research.
Grammar/ Mechanics	The abstract is the appropriate length and MLA or APA is used correctly throughout. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly throughout the abstract, but with mistakes. It's not quite the appropriate length, and some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The abstract contains multiple incorrect sentence structures and lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization, and it is not long enough.





Relating the Conceptual and Concrete Rubric (Chapter 11)

TASK: Relate the Conceptual and Concrete

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:				
	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)	
General to Specific	Argument successfully moves from a broad concept and its general principles to a specific/concrete case and vice versa.	Argument sometimes moves from a broad concept and its general principles to a specific/concrete case and vice versa.	Argument does not move from a broad concept and its general principles to a specific/concrete case and vice versa.	
Supportive Data/Evidence	Conclusion of the argument is successfully supported by effective data and evidence.	Conclusion of the argument is somewhat supported by data and evidence.	Conclusion of the argument is not supported by data and evidence.	
Expect Counter-Arguments	Successfully acknowledges and counters possible opposing arguments.	Somewhat acknowledges and counters possible opposing arguments.	Does not acknowledge and counters possible opposing arguments.	
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly while relating the conceptual and concrete. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly while relating the conceptual and concrete. However, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	MLA or APA format is not used correctly while relating the conceptual and concrete. There are many mistakes. There are many awkward sentences, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	



## Positing a Thesis Statement Rubric (Chapter 12)

TASK: Posit a Thesis Statement

LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

Above Satisfactory (A/B)

Satisfactory (C)

Below Satisfactory (D/F)

Clarity

The thesis statement clearly conveys the argument and answers the research question. The reader knows what to expect from the work.

The thesis statement only slightly conveys the argument and/or answers the research question. The reader isn't sure what to expect from the work.

The thesis statement does not convey the argument and does not answer the research question. The reader has no idea what to expect from the work.

Arguable

The thesis statement is arguable. Other answers are possible, but they are not as strong as this thesis statement.

The thesis statement is only partially arguable, or other answers are possible, but they are just as strong as this thesis statement.

The thesis statement is unarguable, or other answers are possible, but they are stronger than this particular thesis statement.

Meaningful Discourse

The thesis statement situates claims in existing scholarly discourse. It adds value to the scholarly conversation.

The thesis statement partially situates claims in existing scholarly discourse. It does not add much value to the scholarly conversation.

The thesis statement does not situate claims in existing scholarly discourse. It does not add any value to the scholarly conversation.

Position

Takes a supportable position on the chosen topic and acknowledges other positions.

Takes a supportable position on the chosen topic, but fails to acknowledge other positions.

Does not take a supportable position on their chosen topic.

Effectiveness

Thesis statement is specific, relevant, and compelling. It effectively organizes all the points made in the rest of the work.

Thesis statement is only slightly specific, relevant, and/or compelling. It partially organizes all the points made in the rest of the work.

Thesis statement is not specific, relevant, and/or compelling. It does not organize the points made in the rest of the work.

Grammar/Mechanics

MLA or APA is used correctly in the thesis statement. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.

Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly in the thesis statement, but with mistakes. Some awkward phrases or sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.

The thesis statement contains multiple incorrect phrase or sentence structures and lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.



## Composing a Title Rubric (Chapter 12)

### TASK:

Compose a  
Title

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
References the literary work, theory, and/or method	The title references the student's chosen literary work, theory, and/or method.	The title is vague about the student's chosen literary work, theory, and/or method.	The title does not reference the student's chosen literary work, theory, and/or method at all.
Clarity	The reader knows exactly what to expect from the student's work.	The reader isn't exactly sure what to expect from the student's work just yet.	The reader has no idea what to expect from the student's work based on the title.
Grammar/ Mechanics	MLA or APA is used correctly in the title. Grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly in the title, but with mistakes. Some awkward word choices or phrases as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The title contains multiple incorrect sentence structures and lacks the use of correct MLA or APA format. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization.
References Thesis Statement*	The title references the chosen argument.*	The title only slightly references the chosen argument.*	The title does not reference the chosen argument at all.*

\* Note: Titles that reference thesis statements and arguments may be OPTIONAL. Please check with your instructor.



## Defining Key Terms Rubric (Chapter 12)

## TASK: Define Key Terms

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Detailed Definition	Includes key terms with definitions from disciplinary sources.	Includes key terms but with broad or vague definitions, and/or those definitions were not from disciplinary sources.	Key terms were not defined.
Consideration of Audience	Target audience – novice or professional – was carefully considered.	Target audience – novice or professional – was only somewhat considered.	Target audience was not considered.
Acknowledgment of Other Definitions	Different definitions, if they exist, were acknowledged. If one definition is favored over others, there is an adequate explanation.	Some different definitions were acknowledged, and/or there was no explanation for why one definition was favored over others.	Other definitions were not acknowledged.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors. Sources were cited properly.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors. Sources were cited with slight errors.	There are many errors in sentence structure, the use of format, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. Sources were not cited properly.



## Structuring Your Writing Rubric (Chapter 13)

## TASK: Structure Your Writing

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Organization	The organization of material is clear, effective, and appropriate.	The organization of material is not as clear, effective, and/or appropriate as it could be.	The organization of material is not clear, effective, and/or appropriate.
Counter Arguments	Successfully acknowledges and counters possible opposing arguments.	Somewhat acknowledges and counters possible opposing arguments.	Does not acknowledge or counter opposing arguments.
Consideration of Audience	The target audience was carefully considered.	The target audience was only briefly considered.	The target audience was not considered.
Grammar/Mechanics	MLA or APA was used correctly. Sentence structure as well as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization were used correctly with minimal to no errors.	Generally, MLA or APA format is used correctly. However, there are some mistakes. Some awkward sentences appear as well as some grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.	The format is not used correctly. There are many mistakes. Sentences are awkward. There is a lack of grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.



## Avoiding Plagiarism Rubric (Chapter 14)

## TASK: Avoid Plagiarism

### LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE:

	Above Satisfactory (A/B)	Satisfactory (C)	Below Satisfactory (D/F)
Proper Citations	Sources were cited correctly using the proper MLA or APA format.	Sources were cited with minor mistakes.	Sources were not cited or cited incorrectly.
Paraphrasing & Direct Quotes	Paraphrasing is distinctly different from its source material. Quotes are introduced and cited correctly.	Paraphrasing is close to the source material. Quotes are mostly introduced and cited correctly, but with errors.	Paraphrasing is too close to the source material. Quotes are not introduced and cited correctly.
Avoid Self-Plagiarism	Student acknowledges and cites the past work they've turned in.	Student somewhat acknowledges the past work they've turned in.	Student does not acknowledge past work.

# Presenting Your Research Visually: Academic Posters and Slides

BARRY MAUER; JOHN VENECEK; AND ERIKA HEREDIA



The essay is an enduring form for presenting research, but research also appears in other forms such as visual media. Two of the most conventional forms of scholarly visual media are posters and slides. In general, both posters and slides preserve the classic structure of information organization found in essays, and include elements such as title, introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. Posters and slides can play a supporting or collaborative role in a verbal presentation, during which the speaker refers to graphs and charts, featured images, and bullet points. Other times, posters and slides stand on their own without a speaker there to present them.





# Posters

An academic poster summarizes your research in a way that is visually compelling. Made up of the harmonious arrangement of graphics, images and text, the poster can be an opportunity to engage in public speaking, share ideas, and demonstrate your expertise while networking at conferences, symposia, showcases and other scholarly events.

Successful posters have information arranged strategically and are easily readable. Some good practices include:

- Use a short and interesting title
- Make your main text readable from 10 feet away
- Only include the main ideas about your research
- Make the layout clean
- Use a text body of 300 to 800 words in a readable font
- Use bullets points, numbering and headlines to create a visual hierarchy for the content
- Use a compatible set of colors and a balanced visual structure
- Include your name, acknowledgments and institutional affiliation. (NYU Libraries, 2021)

## What information to include in a poster?

Traditionally, a poster is divided into sections which organize information clearly and concisely.

- Title: brief and succinct presentation of the research. Include your name and institutional affiliation in a subheading.
- Introduction: This section is dedicated to establishing, in no more than 200 words, a context of the investigated topic. It is useful for target people outside of your field.
- Summarized literature review including the most representative authors to demonstrate the connection with the academic discussion in the field.
- Research question (see chapter XY) and the methodology proposed for addressing the research question (see chapter MN).
- Discussion including the analysis of the most important findings. You can incorporate charts, graphs and images.
- Conclusion establishing the relevance of your research, connecting once again the research question and your proposal to address it. Point out limitations, if any, and future research.

Figure 1 Landscape Academic Poster Example

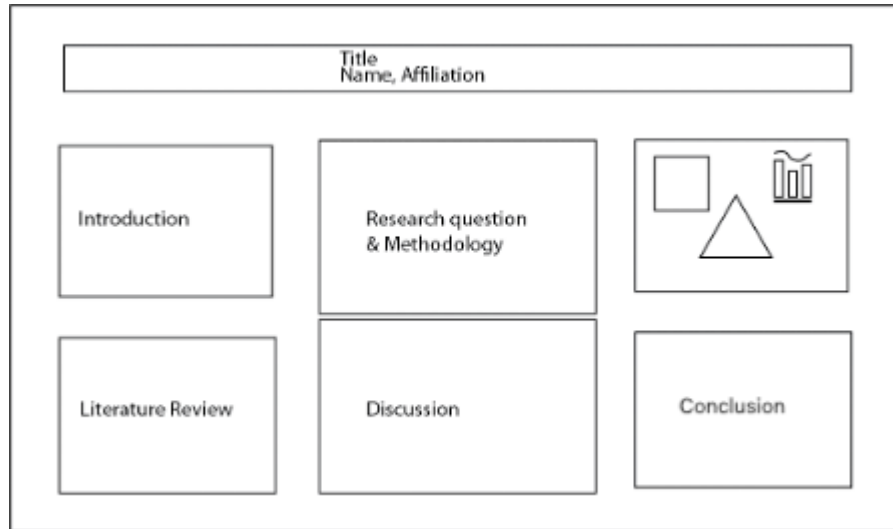
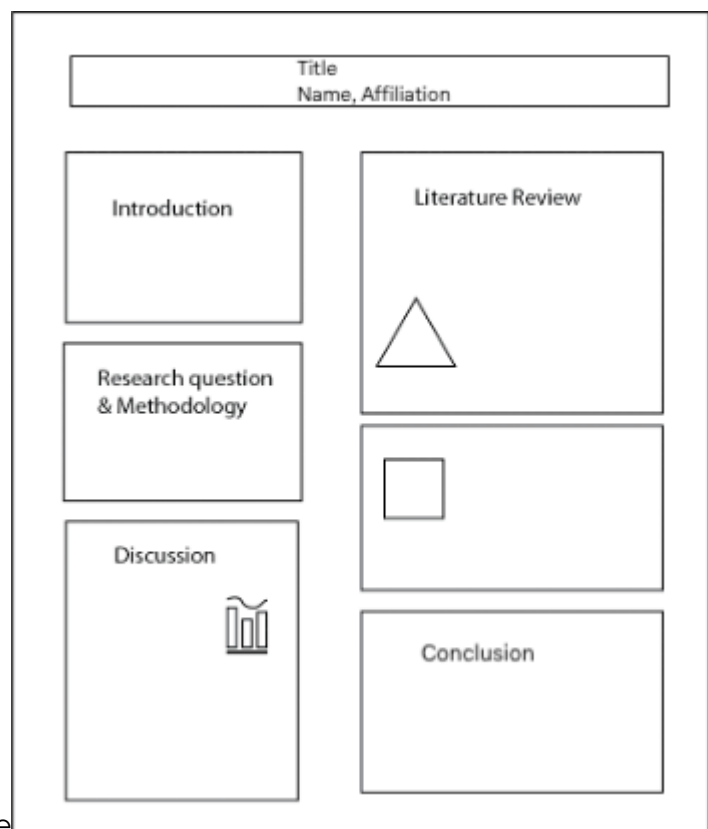


Figure 2 Portrait Academic Poster Example



## Applying design principles to posters

A poster designed respecting design fundamentals must strike a balance between negative space (white space) and positive space (where the text is positioned). An overcrowded

poster will discourage reading. Think about your target audience and in turn make your task easier when presenting your research.

- Consider cultural factors. In the West we are used to reading information from left to right; therefore follow this visual guide to organize your information and make it easier to the reader.
- Remember that your poster will be spotted several meters away, so consider organizing the information in blocks to make it more attractive and readable.
- The use of cold colors is recommended, in the range of blues and greens, and neutrals to establish softer transitions in sight.
- Use warm colors (yellow, red and orange) if you want to highlight certain specific phrases.

## Colors and accessibility

The use of light backgrounds in contrast to dark font colors is called luminance contrast ratio and is recommended for a smooth and intuitive reading. Moreover, its use helps people with visual impairments to not miss substantial information. The highest luminance contrast ratio is the combination of white background and black font but that does not mean that you cannot combine other alternative equal accessibility friendly. Here there is a tool for helping you with picking colors for your poster <https://color.adobe.com/create/color-contrast-analyzer>

As a rule, if possible, use no more than 4 colors in your design and no more than 2 fonts, one for the title and one for the body. Subheadings can be bold or in a different color than the body text to bring dynamism to the overall composition.

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## Slides

In general, slides accompany an oral presentation. To do a slide presentation, consider your message and your audience's knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about your topic. In this way, the slides will highlight the main points and present the evidence that supports our argument.

## General recommendations

- Length: The rule of thumb is “one slide per minute,” though 1 slide every 2 minutes may work better, depending on the density and complexity of the information. The typical conference presentation is 20 minutes, which may stop at the 15 minute mark to allow 5 minutes for questions.
- Text: Avoid overcrowding the slides, and include only principal ideas. Break your text in bullet points (no need for complete sentences), use a headline per each slide, and avoid spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Fonts: use font size: 30 – 48 point for headlines, 24 – 28 for body text. Use conventional fonts like Arial, Verdana, Times New Roman or Calibri to avoid unexpected problems with the layout.
- Images: Include images and figures that are relevant for supporting your argument. Use labels for images (titles, credits, etc.).

## Applying design principles to slides

Good design involves a clean and consistent layout. Many products, such as PowerPoint, provide vertical and horizontal guide markers to align elements. Your audience will group items by proximity, so put things together that go together.

Keep your presentation focused on the content and make it easy for your audience to follow. Make sure fonts are legible and large enough, and that there is some space on the slides (so they're not too crowded). Keep slides in the same style with the same designs, colors, and fonts. Avoid animated transitions.

At the end, practice your oral presentation while reviewing the entire slide deck to confirm it has a logical organization, that the design is consistent, the text is accurate, and the images are relevant.

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## Software

There is specific software for designing poster layout. The most standard and popular are Illustrator, Photoshop and InDesign, all of them included in Adobe Suite. Currently, Adobe Suite offers discounts for college students that can be checked in the company website.

Nevertheless, there are alternatives to Adobe Software that can deal with poster layout like Gimp, CorelDraw, Affinity Designer and MS Word.

For designing slides, the most popular are MS Power Point, Google slides, Prezi, Slide Share, Apple Keynote, Slidebean, among many others.

In recent years, there were developed online software that works with intuitive interfaces for those who are not familiar with design skills, many of them could be accessed creating a user or login through Google mail or Facebook account. Examples of them are Genially, Visme, Canva, PickToChart, DesignCap, Desygner, among others. Almost all of them allow creating posters and slide presentations that can be accessed by a computer, laptop or smartphone.

# Contributors

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



Barry Jason Mauer is associate professor, English, at the University of Central Florida. He is the author of *Deadly Delusions: Right-Wing Death Cult* (2020) and co-editor (with Anastasia Salter) of *Re-imagining the Humanities* (Parlor Press 2023). He has published numerous articles and book chapters about citizen curating, which brings ordinary people into the production of exhibits, both online and in public spaces.



John Venecek is a Humanities Librarian at the University of Central Florida. His primary areas of interest include open education resources, textbook affordability, and digital humanities. Prior to his arrival at UCF, John taught English at the College of DuPage and served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ekaterinburg, Russia where he taught English and founded a foreign language library/resource center.



Emily Smeltz was born and raised in Lakeland, FL and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Management from Polk State College (PSC). To pursue her long-term goal of becoming a college professor, in 2017, she was hired as a Tutor and Teacher's Assistant at PSC for upper-level English and Business courses. In fall 2021, she was hired as an Adjunct Professor for Webber International University and PSC. She is currently teaching English courses at both institutions. Also in fall 2021, she joined University of Central Florida's (UCF's) Library team to produce *Strategies for Conducting Literary Research*, an open-resource textbook for UCF professors. She continued her education and graduated with a master's degree in English Technical Communications at UCF in December 2021. Along with her passion for teaching, she also has a natural talent for media production and successfully built several professional websites. Additionally, she has a love for writing, film production, and social sciences. In the near future, Emily hopes to continue her academic career by applying for overseas PhD programs.





Nikky Suárez — MA English: Literary, Cultural, and Textual Studies program 2023 UCF. She is a Latin-American woman who was raised in Saudi Arabia. Her research focus lies in bridging cultures of underrepresented languages and civilizations through digital archives and history, uniting critical theory with classical and contemporary texts and media. E-portfolio: <https://portfolium.com/NicoleS>.



Erika Maribel Heredia is an emergent scholar working at the intersection between the humanities and digital technology. Her interest in national identities, their racial aspects, and social configurations are displayed in her doctoral dissertation “How Twitter exposes daily whiteness practices in Mexico and Argentina” (UCF, 2021). Her background includes an



M.A. in Humanistic Studies (Tec. De Monterrey, 2014) and a BA in Audiovisual Communication (UBP, 2005).



Jada Reyes is sometimes a poet, always a teacher. She loves reading, writing, and doing both of those things with her students! She's currently a graduate student at UCF where she is working on her Master's in Teaching English Secondary Education. Her research interests include poetry (inside and outside of the classroom), writing workshops in the high school ELA classroom, reading-writing connections, teacher narratives, and writing centers at the secondary level. Her classroom values are equity, inclusion, respect, and collaboration.





James Paradiso focuses on problems related to adaptive learning / intelligent tutoring systems, open education / pedagogy, the cognitive science of teaching and learning, instructional design, applied linguistics / second language development, and how complex dynamic(al) systems theory applies to them all.



Mireya Ramirez joined the Graphics team in Summer 2019 as a newly graduated UCF Knight with a B.F.A. in Emerging Media, specializing in Graphic Design. As the team's newest designer, she works with Instructional Designers and faculty to create both in-house and Webcourses@UCF graphics, which includes everything from infographics and banners to logos and book covers. When she is not working on designs, Mireya continues to be creative by learning new languages, lettering, and trying to cook Mexican food. She

also volunteers her design skills to non-profit organizations as a way of contributing to our community.

# "Sonny's Blues" Refresher and Exercises

BARRY MAUER AND JOHN VENECEK



## James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" [Refresher]

An interactive H5P element

has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.online.ucf.edu/strategies2e/?p=2079#h5p-46>

## Exercises

1. Do some quick research about James Baldwin. Who was he and why was he important? Share some of your findings with the class.
2. Do some quick research about *The Partisan Review*, the journal in which Baldwin's story, "Sonny's Blues," was first published. Share some of your findings with the class.
3. Who is the narrator? Why do you think he doesn't ever give his name?
4. What are the most important events in the story? How would you describe the plot?
5. What do you think changes as a result of the last scene of the story? In other words, we might imagine how this final scene changes the narrator, and perhaps his relationship with his brother. Share your ideas with your classmates.

# Sample Syllabus

BARRY MAUER

## Sample Syllabus for *Strategies for Conducting Literary Research, 2e*

**Catalog Description:** Research and Writing about Literature (LIT 3212). This course is designed to teach literary research and writing skills. PR: Grade of “C” (2.0) or better required in ENC 1102 or C.I. Research, writing, and critical analysis skills applicable to upper-level English courses. 3 credit hours

**Research-Intensive Course statement:** You will actively engage in research processes and a significant portion of your grade will be derived from course-related project(s) based on original research and/or creative scholarship.

**Detailed Description:** This course walks you through the process of conducting literary research while helping to refine your library skills. Along the way, we will draw from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Framework. According to the ACRL, “Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers lead to additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.” We will discuss this concept more in-depth throughout the course. Your goal in the course is to produce a research paper suitable for publication in a literary studies journal.

The course will also focus on a research project created by Jada, an English major who conducted a literary study of James Baldwin’s classic short story, “Sonny’s Blues.”

The basic textbook we will be using for our class is [\*Strategies for Conducting Literary Research, 2e\*](#). It has loads of concepts and vocabulary, some of which you may not have encountered before. In a research-based course, your instructor will require you to write a research paper of 5-8 pages, but the knowledge you need to perform this task can fill dozens of pages. Writing about literature is a complicated, often messy process; it needs to meet high standards while incorporating knowledge from other fields such as psychology, history, science, and other arts. It entails knowledge about language, genre, structures, styles, and more. To produce good research about literature, we need to know a lot of things about a lot of things!

Although we will discuss the research process in a linear fashion throughout this course,

you'll find that, in practice, literary research is a highly recursive process. We're constantly circling back through the process as we write. Because writing instructors are locked into presenting the writing process in a linear way, we tend to discuss it in terms of stages such as preliminary research, drafting, revising, and so on. But writing a research paper requires us to rethink and redo our work at any stage. It's not uncommon for writers to be in the middle of proofreading (one of the final stages) and realize they need to go back and gather more research. Though this course focuses on research about literature, the skills and knowledge in these chapters apply to many other areas and topics, especially in the humanities.

We have many short exercises in our textbook and they are designed as a scaffold leading up to the final research assignment. As you do each of the smaller assignments, archive it and bring it up again when you do the next one. They are all connected and build upon one another. By the time you come to the final research project, you will have done most of the work already.

### *Key Objectives for This Course*

- Read disciplinary texts and develop a “toolbox” of content knowledge, core principles, and practices.
- Improve research, interpretation, writing, and argumentation skills about literary texts and society by obtaining, critically evaluating, and synthesizing scholarly literature and relevant data.
- Implement appropriate methodologies to address key research problems.
- Gain communication skills through the dissemination of the research (process and product) in appropriate formats and venues, including professional journals and platforms in literary studies.
- A more granular breakdown of course objectives is below:
  - Understand the assignment
  - Identify a research problem
  - Develop audience awareness
  - Enter a scholarly conversation
  - Understand theory's integral role within humanities research
  - Understand how theory relates to particular research methodologies and methods for gathering evidence
  - Learn to use online library catalogs, database search strategies, library services, citation management, and search alerts
  - Evaluate source credibility
  - Posit your research question
  - Posit a thesis statement

- Compose a title
- Define your key terms
- Write persuasively
- Write academic prose
- Steer clear of plagiarism

## Course Objectives

1. Students need help to enter into academic and professional discourse. My teaching aims to help you enter these communities by integrating four knowledge areas: literacy, critical thinking, self-knowledge, and citizenship.
  - **Literacy** is more than the ability merely to read and write; it is also the ability to read reality and to interpret the “instrument panels” (the mediated data streams and theoretical frameworks) that tell us about it. At the university level, literacy means the ability to communicate within academic and professional communities using specialized discourses. From my perspective, I want your literacy skills to be high enough to write for publication in a professional peer-reviewed journal. Such work requires new habits of reading and writing, habits that do not come easily or naturally for most people. Gregory Ulmer used to remind me that a pencil was probably the cheapest technology a person could buy but the most expensive to learn to use effectively. I focus on improving each student’s abilities regardless of his or her skills on the first day of class. You may not reach the level of a professional writer, but with practice you will move closer to that goal.
  - **Critical thinking** is the ability to assess the merits of an idea or It requires skills in analysis and interpretation. Analysis describes what type a text is, how it functions, details its elements and explains how it achieves its effects. Interpretation declares what a text means, what its major themes are, and what morals or lessons the reader should draw from it. When students become adept at these skills, they are ready to assess the merits of ideas, including their own.
  - **Self-knowledge** lies at the origins of scholarly learning, beginning with the Delphic Oracle’s instruction to Socrates: “Know thyself!” Self-knowledge is the process of creating an inventory of one’s thoughts and behaviors, discovering one’s values, and checking for congruence. By studying literature, we explore different ways of being in the world.
  - **Citizenship** is a process of engagement with the world, one that balances empowerment with humility. It begins with an understanding of self, of groups, of traditions, and of actions and their consequences. The citizenship process is like the

self-knowledge process. It entails examination of a group's values and its beliefs and behaviors. Again, theory and the arts are agents for understanding what it means to have responsibility, power, and limitations in our own place and time.

By integrating these four areas, you will gain a sense of confidence about your place in academic and professional worlds. You will have the ability to find, evaluate, and use information. Below are additional goals of the course.

2. To train you to work in the field of literary studies.
3. To identify the formal and stylistic features of a variety of texts.
4. To identify the methods of composition practiced by the producers of such.
5. To learn how to read and incorporate elements from difficult works, including experimental texts, theories that account for such texts' methods and meanings, and written accounts of complex historical events on your own.
6. To write persuasively about the "how" and "why" of critical and theoretical work, particularly your own. Each act of composition, even in theory and criticism, involves developing the "rules of the game," a set of constraints about what is and isn't. You will learn to explain and justify the rules of the game for your own as you communicate your findings.
7. To formulate an original research question or objective appropriate to the discipline.

## Course Projects and Grading

### Projects

- **Final research assignment** is a literary research project of 5-8 pages (or equivalent) (300 points/30%), aimed at publication in a professional journal or platform. Students investigate a literary work and produce an argument about it. Objectives
  - use your research skills
  - apply your knowledge of literary theory and methodology to interpret, critique, historicize, or creatively adapt a work of literature
  - apply best writing practices, explained in our *Strategies for Conducting Literary Research*, 2e text, to produce a strong argument within a polished academic research paper

The skills involved in producing this project are required in upper division literature courses.



The skills you learn and demonstrate in this work are also transferable to any activity that requires careful reading, critical thinking, rhetoric ability, and effective writing.

Make sure you refer to the textbook for instructions about writing the essay.

You **must** also include at least three outside sources (in other words, sources that have not been assigned to the class). The works you choose to cite must be scholarly works; in other words, they must be from scholarly journals, books, or websites. You may cite other, non-scholarly works, but do not do so exclusively. Length: 5-8 pages.

- **The Foundational Materials assignment** (100 points/10%) is a late “midterm” assignment (it comes nearer the end of the course) that compiles five previous assignments—spaced throughout the semester—proposed title, research question, thesis statement, abstract, and annotated bibliography. The assignment requires research into literary works through secondary sources and engagement with original evidence.
- **Discussions** (100 points/10%). For each of the class modules, discuss at least one question (which can be your own, someone else’s, or just one from any provided by the instructor), but feel free to discuss as many as you’d like. Also, the discussion gets lively if you check back in with it to see if anyone has responded to your post.
- **Quizzes** (42 total at 5 points each). Quizzes are incorporated in the module pages/textbook and each is worth five points. You have unlimited attempts at each quiz and the best score is recorded in the gradebook.
- **A series of 25 scaffolded assignments** build towards the Foundational Materials assignment and the Final Research Project:
  1. **Types of Research Projects Exercise:** Choose the type of research project that most appeals to you (10 points).
  2. **Conducting Preliminary Research Exercise:** Discuss your previous research experiences and get clarification about the major assignments for this course (10 points).
  3. **Personal Notes on Literary Readings Exercise:** Meant to capture some basic facts and considerations about the three literary works you are required to read (10 points).
  4. **Personal Notes on Works of Literary Theory or Criticism Exercise:** Meant to capture some basic facts and considerations about the two literary of literary theory or criticism works you are required to read (10 points).
  5. **Identifying a Problem Exercise:** Discuss your plan for researching problems your audience considers to be “significant” and “relevant.” Problem identification can be provisional (subject to change) at first (10 points).

6. **Evaluating Relevance/Purpose Exercise:** Choose one work of literary criticism or theory and discuss its rhetorical purpose, noting the ways that literary critics and theorists try to persuade their audiences (10 points).
7. **Considering Audience Exercise:** Develop a plan for researching what problems your audience considers to be “significant” and “relevant” (10 points).
8. **Searching as Strategic Exploration Exercise:** Present a coherent plan for beginning your research and note parts of the plan that need to be more clearly defined (10 points).
9. **Scholarship as Conversation Exercise:** Discuss your ideas and feelings about the need to be “original” in their writing; has the fear of being “influenced” by other writers held them back from reading them and studying their work? (10 points).
10. **Theories Exercise:** Select the theory or theories you will use for your research project and explain why you made this theory selection over other theories. Discuss what specific concepts from the theory/theories you are most interested in exploring in relation to your chosen literary work and put forward your plan for researching your chosen theory and its major concepts (10 points).
11. **Methodologies Exercise:** Select the methodologies you will use for your research project and explain why you made this theory selection over other methodologies. Discuss what specific concepts from the methodologies you are most interested in exploring in relation to your chosen literary work and put forward your plan for researching your chosen methodologies (10 points).
12. **Research Methods Exercise:** Select the research methods and skills you will use for your research project and explain why you made this method and skills selection over others. Put forward your plan for learning your chosen methods and skills (10 points).
13. **Interpreting Literary Works Exercise:** Practice your reading skills on “Tell Me a Story” by Paul Auster and “Departures” by Storm Jameson using explication, analysis, or comparison/contrast. Do an interpretation of one or both stories, using either an explicatory or symptomatic approach (10 points).
14. **Critiquing Literary Works Exercise:** Make a critique of the provided literary anecdote by Walter Benjamin, who was an early 20th century German-Jewish writer. What critical standards will you use? What do you need to know about Benjamin's writing to adequately critique it? (10 points).
15. **Library Resources Exercise:** Using library databases, find three scholarly sources for your research project. Choose a citation management system. Store your citations. (10 points).
16. **Google Scholar Exercise:** Using Google Scholar, find three scholarly sources for your research project. Store your citations in your chosen citation management system. (10 points).

17. **Evaluating Scholarly Resources Exercise:** Discuss why we need gatekeepers in our disciplines, what efforts we should make to ensure source credibility, the differences between warranted and unwarranted bias, and the significance of disinformation, misinformation, and dismediation (10 points).
18. **Evaluating Your Research Question Exercise:** Posit your research question and make sure it meets all the criteria for a good research question listed in the textbook (10 points).
19. **Annotated Bibliography Exercise:** First, find six sources that look promising (you can use the ones you gathered working through chapters 6 and 7). List all six. Choose the most relevant three sources. Annotate the three sources. (10 points).
20. **Writing the Literature Review Exercise:** Determine what type of literature review you will use for your research projects and explain why you made this selection over others. Additionally, discuss specific challenges you face in completing an annotated bibliography or a literature review (10 points).
21. **Thesis Statement Exercise:** Posit your thesis statement and make sure it meets all the criteria for a good thesis statement listed in the textbook. Also, propose a title, following criteria (10 points).
22. **Title Exercise:** Compose a title for your research project. (10 points).
23. **Writing an Abstract Exercise:** Write an abstract of 150-500 words following the guidelines in the Writing an Abstract page (10 points).
24. **Avoiding Plagiarism Exercise:** Respond as to whether each quote uses citations accurately (10 points).
25. **Additional Resources Exercise:** Review and reflect on what you've learned in this class (10 points).

# Grading

## Project Grades

Assignment	Calculated	Total points
Discussions	Calculated over the semester	100 points (10%)
Quizzes	42 quizzes (@5 points each)	200 points (20%)
Short Assignments	25 @10 points	250 points (25%)
Foundational Materials Assignment	1@100 points	100 points (10%)
Final Research Project	1@300 points	300 points (30%)
Final Examination	1@50 points	50 points (5%)
Total		1000 points (100%)

## Course Grades

### Grade breakdown

Letter Grade	Points
A	940-1000 points
A-	900-939 points
B+	870-899 points
B	840-869 points
B-	800-839 points
C+	770-799 points
C	740-769 points
C-	700-739 points
D+	670-699 points
D	640-669 points
D-	600-639 points
F	599 and below

# Course Schedule

## **Week 1: Introduction / “Sonny’s Blues”**

### *Day 1*

1. Read the [Course Syllabus](#), [Course Schedule](#), [Course Introduction](#), [Course Objectives](#), [Course Policies](#), [Course Projects and Grading](#), and [Tips for Success](#) (seven separate pages)
2. Introduce yourself in the discussion.

### *Day 2*

1. Read [Introduction to Strategies for Conducting Literary Research](#). Read James Baldwin’s [“Sonny’s Blues.”](#) Review the [Table of Contents](#).
2. Take the “Sonny’s Blues” Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.

## **Week 2: Understanding the Assignment / Types of Research Projects / Conducting Preliminary Research**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 1 Objectives](#), [Understanding the Assignment](#), [Types of Research Projects](#), and the [Final Research Assignment](#) page (four separate pages)
2. Take the Understanding the Assignment Refresher Quiz (5 points) and the Types of Research Projects Quiz (5 points). Both quizzes are within the *Strategies for Conducting Literary Research* assigned chapters.
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Types of Research Assignments Exercise: Choose the type of research project that most appeals to you (10 points).

## *Day 2*

1. Read [Conducting Preliminary Research](#) and [Calls for Papers](#).
2. Take the Conducting Preliminary Research Refresher Quiz (5 points), and the Calls for Papers Refresher Quiz (5 points)
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Conducting Preliminary Research Exercise: Discuss three of your previous research experiences and get clarification about the major assignments for this course (10 points).

## **Week 3: Choose Your Literary Works**

### *Day 1*

1. Read three literary works chosen from literary anthologies.
2. Participate in the discussion.
3. Complete the Personal Notes on Literary Works Exercise: include the Title of the literary work, the Author, Publication date, Literary genre / theme, Nation or region of author, Brief description, and Initial thoughts. (10 points).

### *Day 2*

1. Read two works of literary theory or criticism chosen from literary theory and criticism anthologies.
2. Participate in the discussion
3. Complete the Personal Notes on Works of Literary Theory or Criticism Exercise: include the Title of work, Author(s), Publication date, Major theory or type of criticism, Nation or region of author(s), Brief description, and Initial thoughts. (10 points).

## **Week 4: Identifying a Problem / Evaluating Relevance and Purpose / Considering Audience**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 2 Objectives](#), [Identifying a Problem](#), and [Establishing Relevance and Evaluating Purpose](#).
2. Take the Identifying a Problem Refresher Quiz (5 points), the Establishing Relevance Refresher Quiz (5 points), the Evaluating Purpose Refresher Quiz (5 points), and the Establishing Relevance & Evaluating Purpose Refresher Quiz (5 points). Please note that these last three quizzes are within the Establishing Relevance and Evaluating Purpose page.
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Identifying a Problem Exercise: discuss your plan for researching problems your audience considers to be “significant” and “relevant” and identify a problem you wish to research. Problem identification can be provisional (subject to change) at first. (10 points)
5. Complete the Evaluating Relevance/Purpose Exercise: choose one work of literary criticism or theory and discuss its rhetorical purpose, noting the ways that literary critics and theorists try to persuade their audiences. (10 points)

### *Day 2*

1. Read [Considering Audience](#).
2. Take the Considering Audience Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Considering Audience Exercise: Explain your plan for researching what problems your audience considers to be “significant” and “relevant” (10 points).

## **Week 5: Research as Inquiry / Searching as Strategic Exploration / Scholarship as Conversation**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 3 Objectives](#), [Research as Inquiry](#), and [Searching as Strategic Explo-](#)

[ration](#).

2. Take the Searching as Strategic Exploration Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Searching as Strategic Exploration Exercise: present a coherent plan for beginning your research into a literary work (or works) and note parts of the plan that need to be more clearly defined. (10 points).

## *Day 2*

1. Read [Scholarship as Conversation](#).
2. Take the Scholarship as Conversation Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Scholarship as Conversation Exercise: discuss your ideas and feelings about the need to be “original” in your writing; has the fear of being “influenced” by other writers held you back from reading them and studying their work? (10 points)

## **Week 6: Research Goals / Theory / Methodologies / Methods / Skills**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 4 Objectives](#), [Research Goals](#), [Theories](#), and [Methodologies](#).
2. Participate in the discussion.
3. Complete the Theories Exercise: select the theory or theories you will use for your research project and explain why you made this theory selection over other. Discuss what specific concepts from the theory/theories you are most interested in exploring in relation to your chosen literary work and put forward your plan for researching your chosen theory and its major concepts. (10 points)
4. Complete the Methodologies Exercise: select the methodologies you will use for your research project and explain why you made this theory selection over other methodologies. Discuss what specific concepts from the methodologies you are most interested in exploring in relation to your chosen literary work and put forward your plan for researching your chosen methodologies. (10 points)

### *Day 2*

1. Read [Research Methods](#) and [Research Skills](#).
2. Take the Research Skills Refresher Quiz (5 points).



3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Research Methods Exercise: select the research methods and skills you will use for your research project and explain why you made this method and skills selection over others. Put forward your plan for learning your chosen methods and skills. (10 points)

## **Week 7: Reading, Interpreting, and Critiquing Literary Works / Intercultural Competence**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 5 Objectives](#), [Reading Literary Works](#), [Interpreting Literary Works](#).
2. Take the Reading Literary Works Refresher Quiz (5 points) and the Interpreting Literary Works Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Interpreting Literary Works Exercise: practice your reading skills on “Tell Me a Story” by Paul Auster using explication, analysis, or comparison/contrast. Do an interpretation of the story, using either an explicatory or symptomatic approach. (10 points)

### *Day 2*

1. Read [Critiquing Literary Works](#) and [Intercultural Competence](#).
2. Take the Intercultural Competence Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Critiquing Literary Works Exercise: make a critique of an anecdote by Walter Benjamin, who was an early 20th century German-Jewish writer. What critical standards will you use? What do you need to know about Benjamin’s writing to adequately critique it? (10 points)

## **Week 8: Using Primo / Library Services and Resources / Databases / Citations / Search Alerts**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 6 Objectives](#), [Using Primo](#), and [Library Services & Resources](#) (three separate links)
2. Participate in the discussion.

### *Day 2*

1. Read [Database Search Strategies](#), [Citation Management](#), and [Creating Search Alerts](#).
2. Take the Database Search Strategies Refresher Quiz (5 points), the Citation Management Refresher Quiz, (5 points) and Creating Search Alerts Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Creating Search Alerts Exercise: using library databases, find three scholarly sources for your research project, choose a citation management system, and store your citations. (10 points).

## **Week 9: Google Scholar / Advanced Search / Sources / Avoiding Disinformation / Secondary Literature / The Annotated Bibliography**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 7 Objectives](#), [Getting the Most Out of Google Scholar](#), and [Advanced Search Features](#) (three separate links).
2. Participate in the discussion.
3. Complete the Advanced Search Features Exercise: using Google Scholar, find three scholarly sources for your research project and store your citations in your chosen citation management system.

### *Day 2*

1. Read [Chapter 8 Objectives](#), [Finding Trustworthy Sources](#), [Avoiding Misinformation](#).

[Disinformation, and Dismediation](#), [Reviewing the Secondary Literature](#), and [The Annotated Bibliography](#) (five separate links)

2. Take the Finding Trustworthy Sources Refresher Quiz (5 points), the Reviewing the Secondary Literature Refresher and Reading Like a Researcher Refresher Quiz (10 points – both on the Reviewing the Secondary Literature page), and the The Annotated Bibliography Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Evaluating Scholarly Resources Exercise: discuss why we need gatekeepers in our disciplines, what efforts we should make to ensure source credibility, the differences between warranted and unwarranted bias, and the significance of disinformation, misinformation, and dismediation (10 points).

## **Week 10: Research Questions**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 9 Objectives](#), [The Art of Asking Good Questions](#), [Refining Your Research Question](#), and [Evaluating Your Research Question](#) (four separate links).
2. Take the Refining Your Research Question Refresher Quiz (5 points) and the Evaluating Your Research Question Refresher Quiz (5 points).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Evaluating Your Research Question Exercise: posit your research question and make sure it meets all the criteria for a good research question listed in the textbook: Is your question clear, complex, and focused? Is your answer arguable? Are you filling a gap or solving a problem? Is your question loaded or leading? Is your question too broad or narrow? Is the scope of your project realistic and researchable within the given timeframe? Do you have the tools &/or technology needed to accomplish your task? Do you have access to the information and resources you will need? (10 points).

### *Day 2*

1. Complete the Annotated Bibliography Exercise: first, find six sources that look promising (you can use the ones you gathered working through chapters 6 and 7). List all six. Then, choose the most relevant three sources. Finally, annotate the three sources using the provided [Matrix Tool](#) to help you organize your research. (10 points)

2. Participate in the discussion.

**Week 11 (March 18-20): Inference / The Conceptual and Concrete/ The Literature Review / The Thesis Statement, Title, Key Terms, Formatting and Style / Writing an Abstract**

*Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 10 Objectives](#), [Research as an Inferential and Critical Process](#), [Relating the Conceptual and Concrete](#), [Writing the Literature Review](#) (four separate links).
2. Take the Research as an Inferential and Critical Process Refresher Quiz (5 points) and the Relating the Conceptual and Concrete Refresher Quiz (5 points), the Writing the Literature Review Refresher Quiz (2 quizzes on this page: 10 points).
3. Participate in the discussion
4. Complete the Writing the Literature Review Exercise: determine what type of literature review you will use for your research projects, and explain why you made this selection over others. Additionally, discuss specific challenges you face in completing an annotated bibliography or a literature review. (10 points)

*Day 2*

1. Read [Chapter 11 Objectives](#), [Positing a Thesis Statement](#), [Composing a Title](#), [Defining Key Terms](#), [Formatting and Style Guidelines: MLA, APA, and Chicago](#), and [Writing an Abstract](#) (six separate links).
2. Take the Positing a Thesis Statement Refresher Quiz, Composing a Title Refresher Quiz (5 points), the (5 points), the Defining Key Terms Refresher Quiz (5 points), and the Writing an Abstract Refresher Quiz (5 points)
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Complete the Thesis Statement Exercise: posit your thesis statement and make sure it meets all the criteria for a good thesis statement listed in the textbook. (10 points)
5. Complete the Composing a Title Exercise: make sure your title indicates the literary work, theory and/or method (and it may also hint at the thesis). (10 points)

## **Week 12: Writer's Block / Revisions / Academic Prose / Foundational Materials Assignment**

### *Day 1*

1. Read [Chapter 12 Objectives](#), [Writer's Block](#), [Structures](#), [Revisions](#), and [Writing Academic Prose](#) (five separate links).
2. Take the Writer's Block Refresher Quiz (5 points), Structures Refresher Quiz (5 points), Revisions Refresher Quiz (5 points), and the Writing Academic Prose Refresher Quiz (two quizzes on this page).
3. Participate in the discussion.
4. Writing an Abstract exercise: Write an abstract of 150-500 words following the guidelines in the [Writing an Abstract](#) page (10 points)

### *Day 2*

1. Read and begin work on [Foundational Materials Assignment](#).
2. Participate in the discussion.

## **Week 13: Foundational Materials Assignment / Avoiding Plagiarism / Additional Resources**

### *Day 1*

1. [Foundational Materials Assignment](#) due.
2. Read [Chapter 13 Objectives](#), [Avoiding Plagiarism](#), [Additional Resources](#), and [Scholarly Venues](#) (four separate links)
3. Take the Avoiding Plagiarism Refresher Quiz (5 points)
4. Participate in the discussion.
5. Complete the Avoiding Plagiarism Exercise (10 points)
6. Complete the Additional Resources Exercise: reflect on your learning experiences in this class. (10 points)

### *Day 2*

1. Work on your [Final Research Project](#).

2. Participate in the discussion.

### **Week 14: Final Exam / Final Research Project**

#### *Day 1*

[Final Exam.](#)

1. This is a short exam – multiple choice, true/false, and matching – worth 50 points.

#### *Day 2*

[Final Research Project](#) due.