Composition

TWO

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

As they did hundreds of years ago, toddlers still make demands with pointed fingers. Military commanders still bark their orders with loud, crisp voices. Parents still glare at misbehaving children to get them to shape up.

Unlike centuries ago, we moderns send and receive a lot of messages and with great ease. The Pony Express covered hundreds of miles to deliver handfuls of letters in about two weeks. The phone in your pocket can deliver thousands of messages a day.

The modern world loves written communication. We tweet, text, and send emails, but we balk at writing a "composition." People pair the word with all sorts of strenuous academic feats. They shiver at the thought of composing an essay, a research paper, or a lab report. Composition has become as popular as having a tooth drilled. Still, composition remains a valuable tool for communicating ideas and emotions.

Composition is thinking on paper.[1] The paper may be literal, as in a notebook, or digital, as on a tablet. "How do I know what I think," asked modern author E. M. Forster, "until I see what I say?" He understood the value of the written word. Tweets and emojis convey messages. Well-written essays, short stories, and blog posts, though, convey clearer, fuller, richer messages. Text messages are snacks; the others are meals. "LOL" says that we think something is funny, but writing a persuasive essay can change someone's mind.

Long before Forster, God chose the written word to convey His ideas. God called and inspired a variety of authors to compose His thoughts. (Think about that!) He could have continued the oral tradition, passing down His word one campfire at a time. He could have recorded His words with some sort of heavenly iPad. God did neither, and His choice to use written communication underscores its value.

Still skeptical about composition? Consider a few of its varied uses. A persuasive essay could convince your parents to extend you greater freedoms. A blog post could convince readers to get marriage and children in the right order. A cover letter could help your résumé stand out in a pile of job applications. Whatever the composition, our thoughtful writing can lead to others' thoughtful reading.

The lessons in this book focus on writing that calls for more thought than a single emoji requires. The composition skills you'll develop will benefit all your written communication. You'll learn how to write a solid essay, and those skills will equip you to write a better email. Composition, whether of an essay or of free-verse poetry, exercises your brain. It prepares you to interact with the world thoughtfully and skillfully. You will learn to be heard.

When you think of being heard, you might think of the word *voice*. We can learn a lot from how a person speaks. An accent points to a geographic location or cultural background. A loud voice could indicate urgency or anger. Facial expressions and hand gestures add meaning to the words we speak. We shrug when we say "I don't know." We smile when we say "I love you!"

1 Throughout the book, you'll notice spotlighted terms—like *composition* in this sentence. These terms are concepts or skills important for young writers to learn. When you find a spotlighted term, don't leave the lesson until you know what it means. We help you out by defining each term in context, but ask your teacher if any term's still unclear.

Writers have a voice, too. They rely on it to convey their messages and to bring their words to life. A book may not open its mouth to speak, but the author's voice can make its words almost audible. You can't read *Gone with the Wind* without hearing Scarlett O'Hara's Southern accent. Nor can you read *Animal Farm* without hearing the persuasiveness of Squealer's pleas. Effective nonfiction contains as vibrant a voice as in fiction. When reading makes you laugh out loud or clench your fists, you're responding to the writer's voice.

Unfortunately, we often check our engaging voice at the door of formal writing. We save our creativity for blog posts and poetry. The very students who make teachers laugh at their memoirs put them to sleep with their essays. Many a student has handed in a paper with a self-defeating warning: it's so boring. Think about that admission. If you don't want to read your paper, why would your teacher? Write something compelling, something you yourself want to read. Invite your readers to hear and enjoy your distinct voice.

Your voice develops the more you read and write. The lessons in this book expose you to several genres of writing, from blogs to essays to one-act plays. You will learn from writers with distinct voices, but those voices have common traits. As you study these traits, you will learn to apply them to your own writing. Think of your writing voice as a patchwork quilt. You keep arranging the fabric (the traits of a distinct writing voice) until it works together as a whole. The result will be a unique voice—your voice—and readers will hear it in all your work.

"I have become all things to all men," wrote the Apostle Paul, "that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Learning how to compose our thoughts on paper offers us another way to "become all things to all men." It allows us to engage the modern world with our words. Let's start by considering the audiences we reach and the stages we need to set.

UNIT I

FIND YOUR VOICE

LESSON 1

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

If you're part of an audience, then you're anticipating something. You expect to see, hear, or otherwise experience an event. Football fans expect to see tackles and touchdowns. Moviegoers expect to see famous faces and special effects.

A reading audience is no less an audience. Readers expect an experience, so writers need to remember whom they're addressing. Writers need to consider how they want their readers to react. Your essay, blog, article, or poem is a stage. Make sure your writing is ready to go—skillful and engaging—before raising the curtain.

When considering how you should relate to your audience, try this. Think of how you would dress for a particular occasion. Can you imagine showing up to a bonfire in a tuxedo or a ball gown? You'd be awkwardly conspicuous among the flannel shirts and jeans. You'd be as conspicuous wearing cutoffs and flip-flops to a black-tie affair. Give some thought to this analogy before you compose any sort of writing. Who is the audience, and what's the occasion? Are you expected to dress up or dress down?

How you relate to the audience, what you show up wearing, depends on what you're writing. The following chart shows examples of formal and informal writing assignments.

FORMAL	INFORMAL
research paper	journal
abstract	personal narrative
persuasive essay	blog
literary analysis	personal letters
book report	reaction papers

Certain characteristics distinguish formal from informal writing. **Point of view** is one of them. Which of three perspectives should we write from: mine/ours; yours; or his/hers/its/theirs? Authors need to consider their audience before choosing the appropriate point of view.

Grammarians call these three points of view the first, second, and third persons. The chart below shows the pronouns we use for each point of view.

POINTS OF VIEW

FIRST PERSON	SECOND PERSON	THIRD PERSON
Singular: I, my, mine, me, myself *Plural:* we, our, ours, us, ourselves	*Singular/plural:* you, your, yours, you,* yourself (singular), yourselves (plural)	*Singular:* he/she/it; his/her/its; his/hers/its;† him/her/it; himself/herself/itself *Plural:* they, their, theirs, them, themselves

* Yes, this *you* is identical to the first *you* in the list. We duplicate it here only for chart consistency.

† Most grammarians would consider this use of *its* ungrammatical. We'd say, "The book is hers" or "The book is his." If the book belongs to the library, though, we'd rarely or never say, "The book is its."

For this *Composition II* text, for example, *we're* writing to *you*, the student. We want to be conversational, addressing you as though sitting in your living room. We ask, "What do you think?" instead of "What does Chuck think?" You answer, "I'm not sure," instead of "Chuck isn't sure." (Referring to yourself by name sounds comedic in most settings.) Often in this text, we'll use we/us/our when talking about perspectives or experiences we share.

Another characteristic that distinguishes formal from informal writing is intended objectivity. Formal writing requires authors to write as objectively as possible. They refrain from tossing in their opinions as though they were fact. They also refrain from addressing readers directly. These writers want readers to focus on their evidence, research, or other content. Formal writing says, "Evidence suggests that. . . ." It avoids saying, "You will see how the data prove my point." That would be wearing a bathing suit to a ball.

Some authors choose to use the first-person point of view in formal writing. This may be at odds with what previous writing teachers taught you. They may have discouraged the use of "I" and "we" pronouns (and their other grammatical forms). Those instructors' advice was sound.

A writer's "right" to use the first person grows with his or her knowledge and writing experience. Say you're a research scientist who has collected her own data or conducted an original study. In that case, you should use the first person. You should also pair your first-person pronouns with vivid verbs and precise details. You might write, for example, "I collected 183 surveys over a 28-day period." The word *collect* shows readers a clear action. They imagine that you distributed and then gathered the surveys, filing them for later use.

Now imagine writing something vague, like this: "I'm pretty sure there were more than 180 surveys during the month." Readers struggle to imagine anything specific. Who conducted the survey? Did anyone collect the results, and if so, who? How long is a month: 28, 29, 30, or 31 days? With so vague a statement, readers may question the reliability of your results.

Formal writing requires writers to pay attention to style also. Young writers often believe they must sacrifice creativity for formality. But that's not true, and your teachers don't want to read dry essays. Formal writing deserves as much style as a poem.

One aspect of writing style is knowing which language practices to use and which to avoid. Dads don't speak to their colleagues at work as though they were five-year-old children. Formal writing doesn't speak like informal writing, either. Formal writing avoids the following:

- contractions (can't, don't, wasn't . . .)
- idioms and clichés (such as "raining cats and dogs" and "fish out of water")
- colloquial language (e.g., gonna, y'all, wanna)
- loaded language (horribly, outrageous measures, always/never . . .)
- slang (such as ROTFL, deal with, idk)
- conjunctions as sentence starters (e.g., "And then Mr. Crimini said something funny.")

With this talk of formality, objectivity, and evidence, let's dispel a suspicion you may have. Formal writing does not mean writing like a robot. Teachers want to hear your voice and opinion. Still, you need to respect the distance between you and your reader.

Expressing an opinion in formal writing doesn't require the use of "I." You may want to write, "I believe eating chocolate reduces stress." What you *should* write omits the "I believe." Your opinion, that eating chocolate reduces stress, remains clear. Now all you need to do is find the evidence that supports your claim. (Please say there's evidence!)

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

You want to be the next class president at school. Write three versions of the first paragraph of your campaign speech. You'll "dress" each version for a specific audience: peers, teachers, and administrators.[1]

ACTIVITY 2

Choose a book, article, or any other kind of interesting writing. Find something with a single author. Answer the following questions about the writing:

1. Who is the author? What's the name of the book (article, blog post, etc.)?
2. What type of writing did you choose (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, comic book, magazine article)?
3. How does the work start? How does the author try to engage you?
4. Whom is the author trying to reach? Who is the intended audience?

1 If schooled at home, you can still imagine you're writing for a handful of teachers and a few administrators.

5. How would you describe the author's voice? To answer that, imagine what the author's personality might be like and try to describe it. What would he or she be like if you met in person?

ACTIVITY 3

Let's take another look at the writing you chose for activity 2. What would the author need to change to address a different—and unexpected—audience? Would vocabulary need to change? Would sentences need to shorten or lengthen? Would serious writing need to take on some humor or vice versa? Pretend, for example, you chose a *Sports Illustrated* article about NBA playoff games. How would the writer need to change the content or voice to address middle-school girls? How could a scientist change an article about artificial intelligence to address musicians? In a paragraph, do this:

- Choose a new audience for the writing you read for activity 2.
- Explain why that audience would be "unexpected." Why is that audience not a typical audience for the writing you chose?
- Summarize changes the writer would need to make to address the new audience.

LESSON 2

SHOW DON'T TELL WITH CONCRETE NOUNS

Which young children don't enjoy show-and-tell? Little Johnny uncovers a cage to show the class his pet iguana. Little Jane places her gymnastics medal around her neck. Their classmates ooh and aah. They pet the iguana and examine the engravings on the medal.

Now imagine a different scene. Little Billy stands in front of the class to share definitions of *courage* he found in a few dictionaries. Not to be outdone, little Donna volunteers to share her own definition of *poverty*. The kids in the class squirm on their carpet squares, and the teacher looks for a way to end the show-and-tell. Little Billy and little Donna failed to show their classmates what they wanted to share. They told, but they didn't show.

Like an effective show-and-tell, effective writing paints a picture in our readers' minds. We can discuss abstract ideas, but we make them understandable by appealing to the senses. If Billy wants to talk about courage, he needs to paint an illustration in our imaginations. He should aim to activate our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and touch.

Let's look at an example from novelist and short-story writer Flannery O'Connor. She begins her short story "The River" by showing us an unhappy child named Bevel. Rather than tell us he's miserable, O'Connor paints a picture: "The child stood glum and limp in the middle of the dark living room while his father pulled him into a plaid coat."[1] You can see the downcast little boy's facial expression and body language. You feel the weight of the jacket on his back and the gloominess of the room around him.

O'Connor goes on to describe how "his right arm was hung in the sleeve but the father buttoned the coat anyway and pushed him forward toward a pale spotted hand that stuck through the half-open door."[2] The writer doesn't have to tell us the boy resents the suit coat and his destination. We can almost touch the nouns she uses. The plaid of Bevel's coat reminds us of a thrift-store special, and we can feel the twisted sleeve around his arm. O'Connor sharpens the image by describing the hand that holds the door. We imagine the "pale spotted hand" reaching out toward Bevel, and we feel his reluctance to leave the house.

For our writing to show, not tell, we need to use concrete nouns and vivid verbs. We learned how to write this way in elementary school. What did Fido the dog do? Fido ran. How does a bunny move? A bunny hops. Three-word sentences work in first grade, but we don't want to fill an essay with them. Our readers will feel like they're bumping down a stairway.

As we grow up, our thinking becomes more abstract. We may think about running dogs and hopping bunnies, but we also think about courage and poverty. The more abstract our thoughts become, the less attention we tend to pay to sensory details. This is unfortunate because these

1 Flannery O'Connor, "The River," in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 25.

2 O'Connor, 25.

details help us grasp and describe abstract ideas. How can we keep the description of our ideas more concrete, then?

Start by focusing on the subjects of your sentences. Ask yourself who the subjects are and what they're doing. Joseph Williams and Joseph Bizup suggest writers view their sentences' subjects as characters. They challenge you to "make the subjects of most of your verbs the main characters in your story."[3] Concrete nouns make strong main characters.

You've known for years what a noun is. When you hear the word, you think person, place, thing, or idea. We think of nouns as the easiest part of speech to understand and master. We learn how to use them in elementary school, and then we should grow up. Sophisticated writers depend on elaborate adjectives and long verb phrases, right? If you're shaking your head no, good call. Great writers make their nouns and verbs the stars of their sentences.

Think of a concrete noun as a noun with skin on. You can grab a handful of sunflowers, but you can't grab a handful of self-righteousness. In His parables, Jesus uses concrete images to convey abstract ideas. He commands us not to judge others' souls, but He illustrates the idea with a speck and a plank.[4] When He describes the kingdom of heaven, He compares it to the growth of a mustard seed.[5] Jesus knew His audience understood the language of woodworking and farming. He chose images that people understood. As Jesus did, we need to consider our audience. We need to think of words and images they can understand and appreciate.

Before you start writing, whatever you're writing, create a word bank of concrete nouns and images. The following chart shows a word bank for a persuasive essay about the benefits of caffeine. We intended the words to resonate with our target audience: tired, overworked

3 Joseph Williams and Joseph Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2017), 47.

4 See Matt. 7:1–5.

5 See Matt. 13:31, 32.

students. You might be able to relate. We listed caffeine-related nouns for people, places, and images. You could create your own categories, of course.

CAFFEINE WORD BANK

PEOPLE	PLACES	IMAGES
teens	coffee shop	soda
college students	Starbucks	chocolate
high school students	Dunkin'	coffee beans
barista	kitchen	tea
researchers	school	bleary eyes
doctors	sports	energy
parents	home	sleep
teachers	convenience store	coffeemaker
	cafeteria	French press
		aroma
		steam
		energy drinks
		migraines
		Keurig
		deadlines

As you look at this chart, you start to think of actions. The barista brews the coffee. A high school student rubs his bleary eyes. Steam rises from a cup of Earl Grey. You note that where there's a concrete noun, a vivid verb is sure to follow.

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

Choose a topic of interest to you. Pretend you're writing a letter, blog entry, essay, or speech to the audience of your choice. Create a word bank of concrete nouns like the example in the lesson.

TOPIC

CATEGORY	CATEGORY	CATEGORY

ACTIVITY 2

Read the following excerpt from Flannery O'Connor's "The River." Afterward, go back through the excerpt and highlight its concrete nouns.

> They walked on the dirt road for a while and then they crossed a field stippled with purple weeds and entered the shadows of a wood where the ground was covered with thick pine needles. He had never been in woods before and he walked carefully, looking from side to side as if he were entering a strange country. They moved along a bridle path that twisted downhill through crackling red leaves, and once, catching at a branch to keep himself from slipping, he looked into two frozen green-gold eyes enclosed in the darkness of a tree hole. At the bottom of the hill, the woods opened suddenly onto a pasture dotted here and there with black and white cows and sloping down, tier after tier, to a broad orange stream where the reflection of the sun was set like a diamond.[6]

ACTIVITY 3

Illustrate the above passage from "The River." You can sketch, paint, collage, or use any other medium. Your finished product should show us what you see when you read her words.

LESSON 3

SHOW DON'T TELL WITH VIBRANT VERBS

Actions can speak louder than words. If you want an example, watch the lion's cage scene from Charlie Chaplin's 1928 film *The Circus*.[1] Chaplin finds himself trapped in a circus train car with a sleepy lion. We don't need narration or dialogue to make his predicament clear. He tiptoes, he crawls, and he scales walls in an attempt to escape. Chaplin conveys meaning with actions we can see—no words necessary.

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6 Flannery O'Connor, "The River," in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1971), 4.

1 Charlie Chaplin, "The Lion Cage," in *The Circus* (United Artists, 1928), YouTube video, 3:25, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79i84xYelZI.

Writers can't depend on live actors to do their bidding. They must rely on words to capture the warmth of a sunset, the crackling of talking trees, or the cries of the wounded. **Concrete nouns** engage readers' senses, but **vivid verbs** bring these nouns to life.

Every complete sentence needs a verb. As our ideas become more abstract, we tend to rely less on vivid verbs. We gravitate toward *be* verbs (e.g., am, is, are, was, were, will be). These verbs are necessary (we just used one), but the more we use them, the more we tell instead of show. Vivid verbs do the opposite.

To illustrate the difference, let's meet Tamar, the star of a short story we're writing: "Tamar is a secret agent." Is that a satisfying introduction of a character? Of course, not! We learned what her profession is, but that's it. The verb in the sentence that introduces Tamar, *is*, acts like an equal sign. Grammarians have a fancy description for this type of sentence construction. They say it connects a subject (Tamar) to a predicate nominative (secret agent) using a linking verb (is).[2] *Be* verbs serve a purpose, but omitting them can sometimes add more power, especially to a secret agent.

Let's reintroduce our star character: "A mist settled in over the river just after midnight. Tamar's sunglasses hid her eyes, but her walk revealed purpose. She slipped her hand into her pocket and pulled out a curious scrap of paper."

Why is Tamar out at midnight? Why is she wearing sunglasses? Where is she going, and why is she so intent on getting there? What's on the paper: a name, a number, an address, a message?

Mysteries remain. Still, our new introductory sentences paint a picture a reader can imagine. Each sentence's subject pairs with a vivid verb. Mist settled, sunglasses hid, walk revealed, and she slipped and pulled. We share details about Tamar, but we don't tell readers too much. We invite them, require them, to use their imaginations.

When Barbara Kingsolver writes about beachcombing, she invites us to Bahamian beaches. She uses the proper names of the shells she describes, but the names may be unfamiliar to many readers. She pairs the names with familiar actions, though.

2 A predicate nominative is a noun or noun phrase that renames the subject of a sentence and usually comes after a *be* verb.

> I had spent a week in the Bahamas, and while I was there, wishing my daughter could see those sparkling blue bays and sandy coves, I did exactly what she would have done: I collected shells. Spiky murexes, smooth purple moon shells, ancient-looking whelks sand-blasted by the tide—I tucked them in the pockets of my shirt and shorts until my lumpy, suspect hemlines gave me away, like a refugee smuggling the family fortune. When it was time to go home, I rinsed my loot in the sink and packed it carefully into a plastic carton, then nested it deep in my suitcase for the journey to Arizona.[3]

Kingsolver's paragraph reads like a how-to manual. If you didn't know how to transport seashells, you do now.

Using vivid verbs engages the imagination. That's one reason to prefer them to *be* verbs. Here's another reason. The more you use *be* verbs, the more likely you are to use the passive voice. Writing teachers love to bully sentences that use the passive voice. Students try to avoid using it, but many struggle because they don't understand what the passive voice is.

When you use **active voice**, the opposite of **passive voice**, the subject of the sentence *does* the action. When you use passive voice, the subject *receives* the action of the verb that follows. Let's look at an example: Venison was hung in the hollow tree. You understand the sentence, but you wonder who hung raw meat in a tree. (If you've read any of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books, you've learned that hanging raw meat in a tree preserves it.) The subject of the sentence, venison, wasn't doing the verb's action. It was receiving it. Raw meat doesn't saunter up to a tree and hang itself; someone has to do it.

Let's change the sentence into active voice: Pa hung the venison in the hollow tree. The subject of the sentence, Pa, performed the action. When we use the active voice, we have a clear view of who does the action of the verb. Who hung the venison? Pa did.

Writers do sometimes need to use *be* verbs and passive voice. A well-placed "is" can offer readers a moment of clarity. Some authors use a *be* verb's simplicity to shock the reader. Ray Bradbury begins *Fahrenheit 451* with a disturbing sentence: "It was a pleasure to burn." You got chills, right?[4] When Moses asked God for His name, He replied, "I AM" (Exod. 3:14). It's as though He said, "I am the one who exists, period." His response was perfect. He didn't need to follow it up with a predicate adjective or predicate nominative.

3 Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 1.

4 Anyone catch the irony in the question?

Passive voice creates distance between the writer and the reader. Sometimes, we need to create distance. Scientific writing often does.[5] When writing a lab report, scientists prefer the passive voice. It gives their writing a more objective tone. It emphasizes the object of a verb's action rather than the subject performing it. Scientists want readers to focus on their evidence, not on those presenting it: "The ions from the plasma were sampled for unusual electron configurations." The focus here is the ions, not who conducted the experiment.

Even if you're not writing a screenplay or a mystery, provide readers something they can see. Show them your thoughts instead of telling them what to think. Consider how you can put a little Charlie Chaplin into your writing.

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

The *be* verbs we've been discussing have eight forms: *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *be*, *being*, *been*. Review a few paragraphs you've written recently or a short excerpt from a book. Count how many times you see these words. Choose at least three sentences to rewrite using vivid verbs.

ACTIVITY 2

Passive voice can be tricky to identify. Finding a *be* verb in a sentence isn't a sure sign that the writer used passive voice. Many reputable sources can give you guidance on how to identify passive voice. Your local library will likely have books on grammar and writing. Also, many colleges and universities have helpful online writing centers.[6]

Here's a two-step method to catch most passives. First, look for the sentence's complete verb phrase. Is it a *be* verb plus a past participle (like "was eaten" or "has been found")? If yes, then you've likely found a passive. To be sure, take this second step. Ask yourself whether the subject of the sentence is doing the action of the verb or receiving it. If it's receiving it, then you've found a sentence in the passive voice: "The unlucky fellow was struck by lightning twice in the same day." Checking both steps confirms that this sentence is in passive voice.

Now it's time to show what you've learned about the active and passive voices. Explain in writing how to identify the passive voice. Include three to five examples of each, the active voice and the passive voice. Be sure to use your own ideas and your own words.

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5 Nathan Sheffield, "Passive Voice in Scientific Writing," Duke University Graduate School Scientific Writing Resource, accessed June 2, 2020, https://cgi.duke.edu/web/sciwriting/index.php?action=passive_voice. The writer presents a balanced approach to scientific writing's uses of passive and active voices. We'll discuss this further in unit VII.

6 One such writing center is at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Here's its concise explanation of passive voice, complete with examples: "Use the Active Voice," Writing Center—University of Wisconsin-Madison, accessed May 4, 2020, https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/style/ccs_activevoice/.

ACTIVITY 3

Write six to eight sentences about some aspect of your life. Below are writing prompts to help you get started. Don't use any *be* verbs in your sentences. Focus on concrete nouns and vivid verbs.

Prompts:

- What childhood experience do you remember most? Why is it so memorable?
- What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?
- Who or what has impacted your life the most? Why?
- What important lessons have you learned from a sport, hobby, trip, or relationship?

LESSON 4

WORD VARIETY

We've met the stars of the writing process—concrete nouns and vivid verbs. Now let's get to know the supporting players. A supporting role doesn't mean a lesser role. Where would Juliet be without her nurse? How would Simba survive without Timon and Pumbaa?

Word variety, the first supporting role we'll consider, impacts both what you say and how you say it. Aim to use words that are precise, that say exactly what you mean. When a wife asks her husband how she looks, he could shrug and say, "Good." If he does, though, she might glare at him. She wants him to be more expressive with his words, more precise. She wants him to embrace the rich variety of the English language. (She won't mind a more generous compliment, either!) A better response from him might have sounded like this: "That top accentuates the azure of your eyes."

Concrete nouns and vivid verbs need to take center stage in your sentences. Young writers sometimes overwhelm their writing with adjectives and adverbs. A mere litany of adjective and adverb modifiers isn't word variety; it's fluff. To *modify* means to tweak something. You can modify a car to give it a louder muffler, or you can modify a game of kickball so your younger sister can play. In grammar, **modifiers** "limit or restrict the meaning" of the word or phrase to

which they attach.[1] What kind of car? A red car. How much candy? Too much. Like *be* verbs, simple adjective and adverb modifiers serve a purpose.

Their overuse, though, leads to vague writing. Imagine asking Henry David Thoreau to describe Walden Pond.[2] What if he responded this way: "It's pretty nice. It has blue, wet water and tall, brown trees. I even saw some furry animals eating little, red things by some fallen leaves." This anemic description could fit any pond anywhere.

Fortunately for us, Thoreau wrote with detail. In the following passage from *Walden*, he describes his walk next to the pond. He admits he sees "nothing special to attract me," but this ordinariness appeals to him. As you read the passage, observe his varied language. Instead of saying that a "bird" sang, he identifies the type of bird. Instead of saying that the trees swayed, he names the types of trees and focuses on their leaves. His choice of verbs fits the scene. Bullfrogs trump, wind blows and roars, waves dash, and creatures lull and roam.

> As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen.[3]

Thoreau uses simple modifiers, but he doesn't depend on them to create his image. He chooses a specific word first, adding modifiers to enhance its meaning. Had he omitted "stony" in the first sentence, we might have imagined a muddy or sandy shore. Describing some of the

1 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. "modifiers," accessed December 20, 2019, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/modify.

2 We tend to pronounce his last name /thuh Roh/; his contemporaries said it more like /Thor oh/.

3 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; and, Civil Disobedience* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 104.

animals as "wildest" leads us to understand he is not talking about house pets. Thoreau's words show us around Walden Pond's wild and stony shore.

Thoreau's language reflects his learning and his experience. He knows the names of the trees and the birds, but his readers may not. Before he wrote, Thoreau considered his audience, "dressing" his writing appropriately. A writer's word variety reflects his or her knowledge about a topic or situation.

Writing requires us to know our stuff, but don't worry. God gave us remarkable word sponges we call brains. The writers we've met so far—O'Connor, Kingsolver, and Thoreau—appear to choose words with ease. They sometimes may, but if so, they learned from other writers how to do it. Excellent writers read a lot, collecting words for their mental word banks. Kingsolver doesn't cite a composition class that transformed her writing. Instead, she "learned to write by reading the kinds of books [she] wished [she'd] written."[4] The more good material you read, the better you will write.

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

Rewrite the following paragraph, adding more precise language and more word variety. Don't change the meaning of the paragraph, only how it's written. Consider how you can make this (boring!) little story come alive.

> The good boy is going to eat dessert after he eats something good for him. He likes ice cream because it is yummy. Unfortunately, ice cream makes him feel bad. The good boy can't decide whether the ice cream is worth it. He stands in line and looks at the nice ice cream sign. At the bottom of the sign, he notices another type of dessert. It looks yummy. He is happy about the other option. After he buys and eats the treat, he is satisfied. Now he will enjoy a sweet without getting sick.

ACTIVITY 2

In the previous lesson, you wrote two or three paragraphs about your life. You avoided *be* verbs and focused on concrete nouns and vivid verbs. Revisit these paragraphs, rewriting them according to how you answer the following questions. Do you use any word or phrase too much? Do you depend too much on simple, one-word modifiers? Find any places where you could be more specific? For example, you may have written, "I stood by the pretty tree." You could revise it to say, "I stood by the trunk of the towering poplar."

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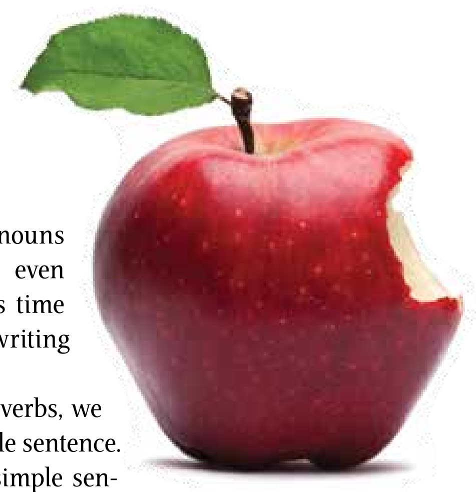
4 Barbara Kingsolver, "About Writing," Barbara Kingsolver—The Authorized Site, 2018, accessed June 2, 2020, http://www.kingsolver.com/faq/about-writing.html. You may not be used to seeing brackets in quoted text. The brackets mean that the original text has been changed *slightly*. Writers need to do this sometimes to make a quote fit into a sentence's grammar or context.

ACTIVITY 3

Create a word wall. You can do this on poster board, on index cards, or in electronic form. Challenge yourself to add to your word wall at least five times a week. If reading a book, jot down words you like or memorable words you did not know. You can even pick up words from conversations, movies, or anywhere else. If you don't know what a word means, be sure to look it up before writing it on your word wall.

LESSON 5

SENTENCE VARIETY



You've included a variety of concrete nouns and vivid verbs in your writing. You've even weeded out some pesky *be* verbs. Now it's time to plant some sentence variety in your writing garden.

When we want to showcase our vivid verbs, we often rely on one type of sentence: the simple sentence. Readers welcome the ease and clarity of simple sentences. Reading a simple sentence is like grabbing an apple for a snack. Sink your teeth in, chew and swallow, repeat. No fuss, no muss.

Sometimes, though, you hanker for something different, something more engaging. Readers are like that, too. They want some sentences to read more like apple pie than raw fruit. They want to read sentences that provide both cadence and change to your writing voice. Without sentence variety, you limit your readers to eating a healthy *but bland* diet.

English has a dizzying variety of words, but it uses them in only four types of sentences. Writers learn how to construct the four types and how best to use each. One consideration writers keep in mind is how their sentences will look on the page. They know readers brace themselves when they see long sentence after long sentence. These thickets of words can deter even the most eager reader. When readers see a series of short sentences, by contrast, they assume it'll be a quick and easy read. Of course, we don't want readers thinking that about *all* our writing. Each type of sentence has its value and place.

The first of these types, the simple sentence, lays the foundation for *all* sentences. Simple sentences are the basis of the other three types. Well-placed simple sentences invite your readers to pause. Sometimes, these sentences shock us. The Apostle John understood this when he described how Jesus was moved by Lazarus's death. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35), John writes. In two words, he conveys Jesus's love, humanity, and compassion.

A **simple sentence** contains one independent clause and no dependent clauses. You'll recall that a **clause** is a meaningful cluster of words that contains a subject and a verb. When

the group of words can stand alone as a sentence, we call it an **independent clause**. If the cluster can't stand on its own as a sentence, we call it a **dependent clause**. For now, simply tuck these definitions away. You'll see some examples below.

Before we see them, let's define the other three sentence types. A **compound sentence** joins two independent clauses. These clauses are joined with a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *but*, *yet*, or *so*) or a semicolon. A **complex sentence** connects an independent clause to one or more dependent clauses. The dependent clause will start with a subordinating conjunction. Common **subordinating conjunctions** are *although*, *when*, *if*, *since*, *as*, and *because*. A **compound-complex sentence**, as you might suspect, is both compound and complex.

Eyes crossing or head spinning? Don't worry. These examples should dispel the dizziness:

independent clause independent clause independent clause

Simple sentence: Lily paused by the bridge.

independent clause

Compound sentence: Lily paused by the bridge, but she looked over her shoulder.

independent clause | independent clause

Complex sentence: As the car approached, Lily paused by the bridge.

dependent clause | independent clause

Compound-complex sentence:

Lily paused by the bridge, and she looked over

independent clause | independent clause

her shoulder as the car approached.

dependent clause

We've discussed clauses, but let's not forget the importance of **phrases**. Phrases aren't clauses, but that doesn't mean they're insignificant. Independent clauses and dependent clauses come from the same family. The DNA they share is that they both have a subject and a verb. Think of the phrase, then, as the family pet. You include him in your family Christmas photo, but he's not one of your parents or siblings. Pets liven our family life as phrases enliven our writing.

There are seven kinds of phrases, and all add details to our clauses. We use five of them often enough not to discuss them here.[1] We use the other two kinds far less often, but they give our sentences sophistication and depth.

One is the **participial phrase**. This kind of phrase begins with a *participle*, a verb form usually ending in either -ing or -ed. All present participles end in -ing, and most past participles end in -ed. You'll notice that the past participle of a verb looks like the verb's past tense. The past tense of most verbs ends in -ed, but many don't. The ones that don't, we call irregular. Verbs that have an irregular past tense also have an irregular past participle.

lifting (present)	spending (present)	teaching (present)
lifted (past)	spent (past)	taught (past)

Participial phrases act like adjectives. They give more details about nouns, pronouns, and noun phrases. Take a look at this example: "*Lifting the heavy rock*, Sebastian strained his muscles." The first four words make up a (present) participial phrase. The sentence doesn't need those words to stand on its own as an independent clause. Still, the phrase gives us details about Sebastian, the subject of the sentence.

A participial phrase can appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. Placement depends on the writer's style and on what makes the phrase's meaning clearest. Be careful how you punctuate sentences with participial phrases. Consider these two sentences:

> The fearful lad noticed the coal-colored birds, glancing up at a gray and gloomy sky.

> The fearful lad noticed the coal-colored birds glancing up at a gray and gloomy sky.

In the first example, the boy is looking up; in the second, the birds are. The only formal difference between the sentences is the comma. To make clear that it's the boy who is looking up, we could move the participial phrase to the start of the sentence: "Glancing up at a gray and gloomy sky, the fearful lad noticed the coal-colored birds."

Don't confuse a participial phrase with a **verb phrase**. You'll know which one you have when you try to remove the -ing/-ed word or phrase from the sentence. Look at this example: "Sandy is lifting the heavy rock." What happens if we remove either "lifting" or "lifting the heavy rock"? The sentence falls apart; it no longer means what it *should* mean. "Is lifting" is a verb phrase, not a participial phrase.

The rarest type of phrase is the **absolute phrase**. Absolute phrases are "almost-sentences." They have a subject and part of a verb phrase. Adding a *be* verb to an absolute phrase creates an independent clause. Unlike a participial phrase, an absolute phrase modifies

1 They are noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases, and gerund phrases. You may not recognize their names, but you're used to speaking and writing them all.

an entire clause. They perch with grace on the front or back of sentences, but they can pack a punch.

"George played his violin in the park, his notes dancing from tree to tree." In that sentence, the absolute phrase follows the independent clause. The absolute phrase has a subject (notes) and part of a verb (dancing). We say *part* of a verb because "his notes dancing from tree to tree" can't stand alone as a sentence. The first part of the sentence tells us what George is doing. The absolute phrase at the end invites us to hear what his music is doing.

As you consider how to add variety to your writing, think about the notes you want your readers to hear. English poet William Cowper had it right: "Variety is the very spice of life." The right word in the right place in the right sentence makes all the difference.

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

For each quotation below:

- Identify the main subject and the main verb of each independent clause.
- Label each quotation as S (simple), CD (compound), CX (complex), or CC (compound-complex).
- Imitate it. Using the same structure, create a similar sentence using your own language. Don't use a thesaurus to replace each word. Instead, seek to understand the meaning of the sentence. You can create a sentence with a similar meaning, or you can create a sentence with a new take on the original idea.
    1. "We all owe death a life." —Salman Rushdie
    2. "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." —C. S. Lewis
    3. "She had waited all her life for something, and it had killed her when it found her." —Zora Neale Hurston

4. "Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness." —George Orwell
5. "Your intuition knows what to write, so get out of the way."[2] —Ray Bradbury

ACTIVITY 2

Review the seven different types of phrases. Then look for two or three examples of each. Look in favorite books, a reading assignment for another class, or an online article. (Finding an absolute phrase may prove challenging, so one or two examples will do.) The equations below—their examples, at least—should help you get started.[3] If needed, read up on the different types of phrases. You could consult a favorite grammar book or a reputable online resource.

1. Noun phrases: optional modifier(s) + noun + optional modifier(s)
   Example: *The four jubilant runners* donned their team's gold medals.
2. Verb phrases: auxiliary verb(s) + main verb + verb ending when necessary
   Example: Although he *had burned* the last three batches of cookies, Paulo decided to try again.
3. Prepositional phrases: preposition + noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause *or* preposition + modifier(s) + noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause
   Example: Commander Zabok targeted the ship's phasers *at the enemy vessel.*
4. Infinitive phrases: "to" + infinitive + object(s) and/or modifier(s)
   Example: *To swallow a fish whole*, you need either a small fish or a large mouth.
5. Participle phrases: participle + object(s) and/or modifier(s)
   Example: *Stretching out on the hot sand*, Ben and Jerry took giant licks of their ice cream cones.
6. Gerund phrases: gerund + object(s) and/or modifier(s)
   Example: *Mowing the lawn* meant getting paid.[4]
7. Absolute phrases: noun + participle + optional object(s) and/or modifier(s)
   Example: *The younger boy stifling a giggle*, Omar watched Khalil perform an accidental belly flop.

ACTIVITY 3

Soon you'll be writing a blog entry as a *Composition II* unit assignment. The prompts in lesson 3 helped prepare you for this assignment. You wrote two or three paragraphs on a personal topic. Here were the prompts:

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2 Can't identify which type of sentence this is? The second part uses the imperative, or command, form of the verb *get*. Think of the sentence with a slight rewording. "Your intuition knows what to write, so [you must] get out of the way."

3 Robin L. Simmons, "The Phrase," Chompchomp.com, 1997, https://www.chompchomp.com/terms/phrase.pdf. This resource includes more information about verb phrases.

4 "Mowing the lawn" is the subject of the sentence. It's not to be confused with a participle phrase. Consider a different example: "Mowing the lawn, Billy looked forward to getting paid." In this sentence, "Mowing the lawn" is a participle phrase.

- What childhood experience do you remember most? Why is it so memorable?
- What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?
- Who or what has impacted your life the most? Why?
- What important lessons have you learned from a sport, hobby, trip, or relationship?

It's time to expand on that topic. Add at least one more paragraph. After you add another paragraph, review and revise your work in the following areas. Add or improve:

- concrete nouns
- vivid verbs
- sentence variety

LESSON 6

RHETORICAL DEVICES

We've been working on finding our writing voice. The last few lessons focused on showing, not telling. You've seen the power of concrete nouns, vivid verbs, and sentence variety. You've begun to see how writers can draw readers in with the turn of a phrase. Now it's time to explore the magic and methods of style. It's time to enter the world of rhetorical devices.

Rhetorical devices are creative uses of language designed to engage an audience. You may not know them by name, but you already love rhetorical devices. What's not to love? Novelists and screenwriters use them to add color to black-and-white stories. Advertisers and songwriters use them to win our attention. Politicians and lawyers weave them into their speeches. Rhetorical devices give us creative ways to convey our message.

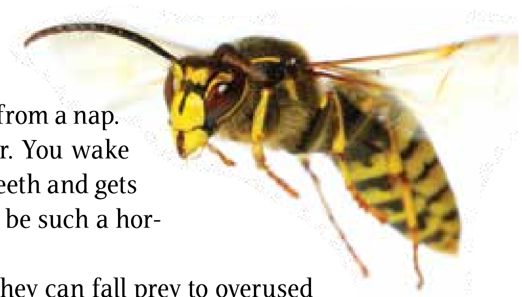
The term **rhetoric** has a long and complex history. For our purposes, we'll define it as the art of using language to persuade an audience. Focus on the word *persuade*. As we fill our toolbox with rhetorical devices, we'll consider how we can use them to persuade others.

You might be wondering whom we're trying to persuade and about what. After all, how many essays can students write about extending their weekend curfew? That's one use of rhetoric but not the only one. It's not even the most basic or most important one. Instead, think of rhetoric's primary goal as persuading an audience to read on. You can't persuade your parents to extend your curfew if they aren't interested in hearing your message.

Rhetorical devices do more than color your writing. They keep your readers anticipating, wanting to read, your next line. Now that we've talked them up, let's look at some examples and put them into practice. We'll focus on several common rhetorical devices, but there are dozens and dozens.

Many rhetorical devices owe their effectiveness to the use of **figurative language**. The term *figurative* means "not literal." Though you ate a meal only hours earlier, you tell your mom you're starving. She rolls her eyes because she knows how much you've eaten that day. Next time you tell her how famished you are, you could inform her that you're practicing hyperbole. The rhetorical device of **hyperbole** uses exaggerated speech for emphasis.

Similes and **metaphors** compare unlike objects to emphasize an unexpected similarity. The simile softens the comparison with the use of "like" or "as." You tell your sister she's as angry as a hornet when woken from a nap. A metaphor's comparison is starker, stronger. You wake your sister from a nap, and she clenches her teeth and gets a fiery look in her eyes. You say to her, "Don't be such a hornet! I woke you because it's dinner time."



Similes and metaphors are effective, but they can fall prey to overused comparisons. Hackneyed similes litter common language: good as gold, sweet as honey, bright as the sun. "Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech," wrote George Orwell, "which you are used to seeing in print."[1] We'll do well to follow his advice.

Adding rhetorical devices can intimidate even the strongest writers, but it need not. Get to know a few of the more common "crowd-pleasing" techniques. See the chart below.

Whatever you write, focus first on vivid verbs and concrete nouns. For your second draft, ask yourself some questions. Are there comparisons that could enhance the content? Are there important ideas that would benefit from a creative use of language? Where do I most need to engage my readers? Once comfortable using one rhetorical device, try another. Allow your readers to sit back and enjoy the reading ride. (Notice which device we just used?)

DEVICE	DEFINITION / EXAMPLE
Imagery	Using language that appeals to the five senses *His hands gripped the frozen railing, his eyes squinting from the glare of the winter sun.*
Personification	Giving inanimate objects human characteristics *The violent winds relented, and the sea breathed a sigh of relief.*

1 George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1946), 170.

Simile	Comparing two unlike things using *like* or *as* *Her breath was almost imperceptible, like a light touch against a calloused hand.*
Metaphor	Comparing two unlike things without using *like* or *as* *I am the vine; you are the branches* (John 15:5).
Alliteration	Repeating the first consonant sound in a group of words *Soft sunlight spread over the savanna.*
Allusion	Referring to another work of literature, historical event, or historical figure without mentioning the reference explicitly *Not only is he a Boy Scout, but he's also a Good Samaritan. He helped the lady across the street and then bought her a meal.*
Parallelism	Using words or phrases with similar structures to balance a sentence *To err is human; to forgive, divine.*
Symbolism	Using one thing to represent or stand for something else *Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword* (Rev. 6:4). [The red horse represents the fatal violence its rider brings.]

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

Let's play some hide-and-seek with books, magazines, blogs, ads, lyrics, and sermons. You're it, and it's your job to find rhetorical devices in these (or similar) print or digital sources. Create a chart like the one below. Write down the example and source next to the appropriate device.

DEVICE	EXAMPLE (SOURCE)
Imagery	
Personification	
Simile	
Metaphor	

Alliteration

Allusion

Parallelism

Symbolism

__________ (your choice)

ACTIVITY 2

Soon we'll be learning how to write a blog. To prepare yourself, get acquainted with at least three of these blogs:

- *The Rebelution*: https://www.therebelution.com
- *Fervr*: https://fervr.net
- *Boundless*: https://www.boundless.org/blog
- *Desiring God*: https://www.desiringgod.org
- *Ann Voskamp*: https://annvoskamp.com

Skim their websites and read some of their blog entries. Then choose one of the bloggers and answer these questions:

- What do you like about this blogger? Is it the writing itself or the topics the blogger chooses?
- How does the blogger engage the audience?
- How does the blogger create a distinct voice? What techniques does he or she use to make the words resonate with readers?
- Does the blogger use vivid verbs, concrete nouns, and sentence variety? Does the blogger use rhetorical devices? If so, which ones, and is their use effective?

ACTIVITY 3

Revisit the personal-topic writing assignment from the previous lesson. Add to it at least two rhetorical devices. Ask yourself the questions suggested earlier in this lesson: Are there comparisons that could enhance the content? Are there important ideas that would benefit from a creative use of language? Where do I most need to engage my readers?

LESSON 7

INTRODUCTION TO BLOG TYPES

Trends come and go. High school pictures of your parents illustrate the point. Ask them about shoulder pads, perms, and paisley prints. The blog appeared to be a 1990s trend, too. Who'd want to read the opinions and experiences of total strangers? Turns out, everybody. Blogging isn't the only way to communicate our thoughts and feelings, but it's a popular and powerful way. It isn't going away anytime soon, either.

Blogs began as online diaries. People used them to express their daily woes and wonders. Brian Neese's timeline of the blog shows how it morphed from "Open Diary" to "TheMommyBlog" to "microblogging."[1] Today's internet boasts half a billion blogs, and successful bloggers earn sizable incomes.[2]

Unlike formal essays, blogs dress for a camp-out. Bloggers strike a conversational tone, using colloquial language and the first person. Journalist Mary Wiltenburg described her blog as "a place I could cut loose a little bit, but also reflect."[3] Blogs have a common thread, but their short entries can stand alone. Anyone can start reading a blog at any time, at any point in its loose conversation thread. You don't have to start from the beginning.

Reading a blog is one thing; creating one is another. You cringe at the thought of baring your soul to strangers. Most blogs are personal, true, but only in that they arise from a knowable author. You don't have to share your darkest secrets. You don't have to share *any* secrets. Blogs need only to be understandable enough for the common person to read. If you have an idea that you can turn into words on a page, the internet will make room for you.

The most common type of blog remains the **personal blog**, which relies on anecdotes. The "mommy blog" is an example. Joanna Goddard's *A Cup of Jo* provides a host of practical posts, but Goddard weaves her personal life into them, too. In a post about preserving the sanctity of the home, she describes how she makes her home a haven:

> And, the next morning, when Toby pads into our bedroom at 6 a.m., and stands at my side of the bed saying "Mama? Mama?," I pull off my ratty sleep mask and

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1 Brian Neese, "History of Blogging," Notre Dame of Maryland University, March 22, 2018, https://online.ndm.edu/news/communication/history-of-blogging/.

2 Nick Gavlov, "How Many Blogs Are There?," Hostingtribunal, February 14, 2019, https://hostingtribunal.com/blog/how-many-blogs/.

3 Jerry Lanson, *Writing for Others, Writing for Ourselves* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), ix.

give him a huge grin, no matter how exhausted I am. Home is a haven, a soft landing place, and no matter what happens in the outside world, they will always have that.[4]

She starts with an intimate description of her son waking her. By the end of the paragraph, mothers reading the entry echo the desire to create a similar haven in their own homes.

Unlike the personal blog, the **how-to blog** focuses on the practical. The personal matters less, though authors use their own lives to frame their entries. A father starts a post describing how his two-year-old stuffed socks in the toilet. He uses the personal to engage his audience, but most of the post details how he fixed the clogged toilet. How-to blogs include pictures and videos to supplement the written directions. Food blogs, such as the mouthwatering *The Cinnaman*, fall into this category.

If personal and how-to blogs don't scratch your itch, a **"hobby and fan blog"** will allow you to share your passion. This sort of blog allows you to write for and find readers who share your interests. Let's say you love bugs. You scorn those who scream at the sight of centipedes and beetles. In your blog, you share tips about collecting and identifying creepy-crawlies. Fellow bug-lovers respond to your posts with admiration, questions, and advice.

The ability to create and maintain a blog can also be a useful, marketable skill. Many businesses and other organizations create and maintain blogs. At Whole Foods Market's *Whole Story,* readers find new recipes and the latest trends in organic food.[5] At TechCrunch, readers can follow tech-industry news about start-ups, apps, and gadgets.[6] It's someone's job to write, edit, and organize these posts and to present them to the public.

Your blog doesn't need to sound like someone else's. Indeed, it shouldn't. Your blog is a reflection of you—your experiences, your perspective. Blogging lets you add your own digital footprint to the crisscrossing paths on the web. Put your footprint out there. You never know who might follow.

4 Joanna Goddard, "Home as a Haven," *A Cup of Jo*, October 27, 2014, https://cupofjo.com/2014/10/motherhood-mondays-home-as-a-haven.

5 "Whole Story Blog Archive," Whole Foods Market, accessed June 3, 2020, https://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/tips-and-ideas/archive.

6 Jonathan Shieber, "Startup and Technology News," TechCrunch, June 3, 2020, https://techcrunch.com.

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

This lesson discussed three blog types: the personal blog, the how-to blog, and the hobby and fan blog. Find two or three examples of each and choose the type of greatest interest to you. By the end of this unit, you'll write a post for that blog type.

ACTIVITY 2

Like any type of longer writing, writing a blog post requires a plan of action. What message or big idea do you want to convey? How much of your real life should you include? How should you organize your blog entry? Our next lesson will discuss the elements of an effective blog.

Review the two templates linked below for suggestions on how to outline and organize. Choose one of the templates and create at least one outline for a potential blog post. Your post may build on ideas you wrote about in prior lessons, or you may choose a new idea. Type your outline, saving it for future use.

- Template 1: Ann Handley and C. C. Chapman's "The Content Rules Easy-Peasy Blog Post Template"[7]
- Template 2: Corey Wainwright's "The Foolproof Formula for Writing a Solid Blog Post [Template]" on HubSpot.[8]

ACTIVITY 3

Get worthwhile feedback on your outline from a parent, other adult, or older sibling. Ask the following three questions: What do you think the point of my article will be? Does my opening idea hook you? In which blog category would this idea best fit: personal, how-to, or hobby and fan? If your and the other person's answers differ much, you'll want to investigate why that is.

7 Ann Handley and C. C. Chapman, "The Content Rules Easy-Peasy Blog Post Template," Content Rules, 2010, https://vpress.us/36U7Su.

8 Available at https://vpress.us/3eLOlz.

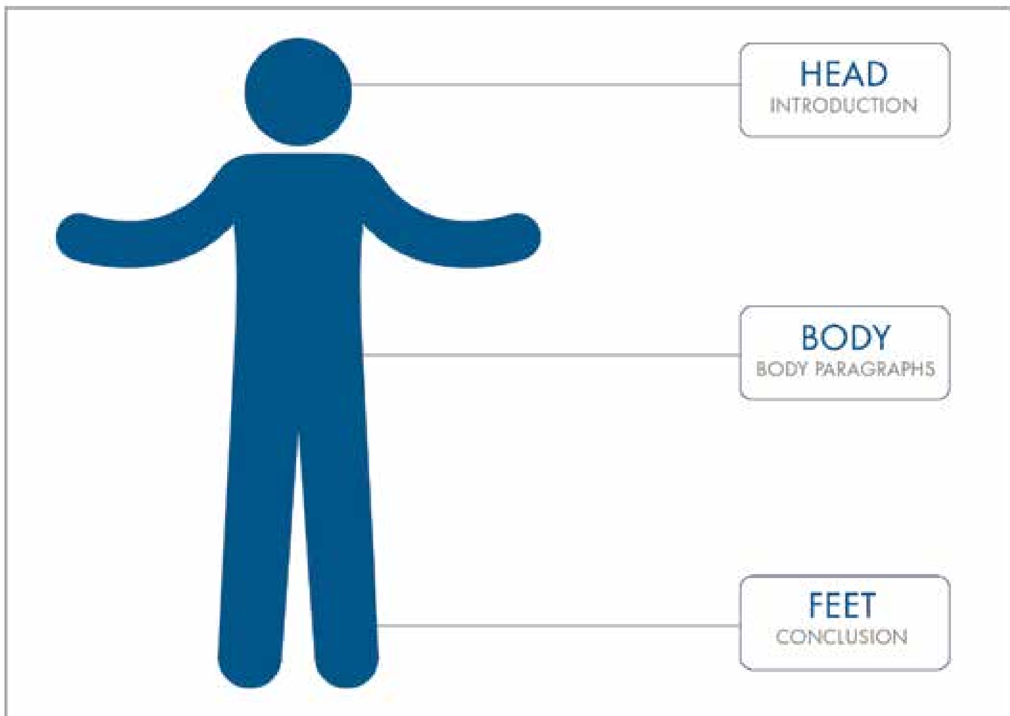
LESSON 8

HOW BLOGS PACKAGE A VOICE

Few athletes look forward to preseason. They know it's necessary, but who looks forward to running lines and drills? Though grueling, those long, hard days lead to a better first game.

Writers go through a preseason, too, when they focus on strengthening their voice. Last lesson, you created an outline of a blog entry. Now it's time to package that voice into a bona fide blog post.

All effective writing—whether blog post, essay, or story—contains similar ingredients. Mr. Sammy Stock Figure gives us an easy way to remember them.[1]



The head and the feet are small but mighty parts of the body. Your head contains your brain, like an introduction contains a piece of writing's intent. In an essay, the introduction contains the thesis statement. In a blog, the introduction expresses the purpose or question you aim to answer. Readers want to know what's coming. Don't make them wait for it.

Sammy Stock Figure's feet take him places. More important, his feet take his readers places. The conclusion to a piece of writing, its feet, gives readers something to walk away with. In a blog post, you may be starting a conversation with your readers. You may be inviting them to

1 Charlotte Gleason, *Cairn Writing Guide* (Langhorne, PA: Cairn University, 2017), 23.

make something you've written about. Like an introduction, a conclusion is shorter than the paragraphs that make up a piece of writing's body. Try ending your post with a single thought, question, or idea you want your readers to remember.

Without a body, Sammy's head and feet would lack support. Body paragraphs make up the bulk of a piece of writing. They support the point the writer made in the introduction. In general, body paragraphs are longer than paragraphs in the introduction and conclusion. For a blog post, aim to write body paragraphs of about 100 words, or four or five sentences.[2] Shorter paragraphs help create a blog post's informal, conversational tone.

A blog post includes three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. Tana Lala-Pritchard's blog template expands on these parts and provides helpful tips.[3] She created the template to help scientists blog about water solutions for dry areas. (Wait, what? Scientists blog?) The following chart shows names and descriptions for each section of a blog post.[4]

BLOG SECTION	DESCRIPTION
Heading	Grab your reader's attention right away with a catchy title.
Image	Complement your title with a related picture, cartoon, or meme.
Hook or subheading	Hook your readers' curiosity with an interesting first line.
Body	Support your idea, address a problem, or answer a question.
Conclusion	In the type of blog posts you're writing, a conclusion and call to action may be combined. What do you want your readers to walk away with—to think or to do?
*Acknowledgment	Give credit to any sources you used.
*Illustrations and other media	Add pictures or other media to enhance or illustrate your content.
*Key words/tags and links	Provide hyperlinks that point readers to helpful resources.

* Indicates optional elements—acknowledgments must be included if outside sources are used.

We know what ingredients make up an effective blog post. Wouldn't it be helpful to see how those ingredients come together to make a whole? Let's say you want to write a how-to blog post to share your mom's recipe for shortbread cookies. Why not share the goodness with everyone? For this post, you don't need research. Years of helping your mom have made you an expert. You give the topic some thought and then begin writing your first draft.

Here's an example.[5] As you read, try to identify its heading, image(s), hook, body, conclusion, and call to action.

2 This is shorter than a typical essay paragraph. In *The Lively Art of Writing*, Payne suggests body paragraphs be six to eight sentences. We'll discuss this in a later lesson.

3 Tana Lala-Pritchard, "Blogging Guidelines and Template," CGIAR for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, January 2016, http://drylandsystems.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/DS_Blogging%20Guidelines.pdf.

4 Lala-Pritchard, 14.

5 The example is a first draft. In lesson 9, we'll revise this version and work toward a better, final copy.

MOM'S QUICK SHORTBREAD COOKIES

When I think about Christmas, I think about "the reason for the season," but cookies are a close second. And know this: my mom's shortbread cookies beat your mom's sugar cookies any day.

My mom inherited this recipe from my dad's side of the family. He grew up with a doting Irish mother who fed him well. The more butter, the better. Unlike sugar cookies, the shortbread cookie only contains ½ cup of sugar. It's practically a health food, right?

My mom's sweet tooth required her to ice the cookies. She used a simple powdered sugar icing, but buttercream icing works just as well. Remember: the more butter—you finish the sentence. You can buy ready-made icing from the store (insert yucky-face emoji here). Homemade buttercream icing takes 5 minutes and a fraction of the ingredients. Here's a simple recipe from Martha Stewart[6] (one of her only simple recipes).

The key to Mom's shortbread recipe is using cold, from-the-refrigerator butter. I use salted butter, omitting any additional salt. A stand mixer, like this KitchenAid, works best to cream the 1 cup of cold butter and the ½ cup of raw sugar. You'll notice we are halfway done once you cream the sugar and butter. Add two cups of flour (I like Montana Wheat) and 1 tsp. of vanilla and you're done. Bam! Just like that the dough's done.

My mom often refrigerated her dough, especially when she used ½ butter, ½ margarine (not my favorite). I like to mix the dough and roll it out right away. All-butter dough gets pretty hard in the fridge. On a hot day, I stick the dough in the fridge for about 10 minutes. It gives me an opportunity to clean up my messy kitchen.

The rest is cookie-making 101. Flour a surface, roll out the dough, use those charming Christmas cookie cutters, and repeat. If your sweet tooth comes a knockin', slather cookies with buttercream icing (and sprinkles, of course).

Just you wait. Try this 4-ingredient recipe and you will see what I mean. Go butter or go home.

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6 Hyperlinks are common features of blog posts. In this *printed* textbook, hyperlinks are indicated by underlining.

You might be thinking, "This could use more vivid verbs" or "I found a typo!" Keep in mind that this is the post's first draft. The first draft isn't the final post. Next lesson, revision begins!

The blog-writing preseason is over. As the regular writing season begins, don't forget your training. Readers want to hear your voice as much as your ideas. They're interested in what you have to say. They may be more interested in how you say it.

ASSIGNMENT

ACTIVITY 1

Last lesson, you used one of the templates to create an outline for a blog post. Does your outline include the sections discussed in this lesson? To write your post, you may follow your outline from the previous lesson or start fresh. Sometimes, it's helpful to compare two ideas, or two outlines, side by side. Which one has more audience appeal? Which one excites *you* more? Your best writing comes when you like your topic.

ACTIVITY 2

Once you've outlined your ideas, jot down answers to these questions:

- What's the title of the post?
- Have an image, meme, or other graphic you'd like to share? If so, do you need to credit the source, or is the graphic your own?
- Would your hook capture a friend's curiosity? A stranger's?
- Have enough information for your body paragraphs? Will they be longer than your introduction and conclusion?
- What do you hope your post will accomplish? Will it answer a question? Will it start a conversation? Do you want readers to make a craft or follow a recipe?

ACTIVITY 3

You're ready to write the first draft of your blog post.[7] Here are this assignment's requirements:

- *length:* 350–500 words (not including image captions)
- *rhetorical devices:* at least two
- *images:* at least one
- *format:* heading, image(s), hook, body, conclusion, and call to action

7 For every writing assignment, you'll complete a first draft and a final copy. Your teacher or parent may require you to submit additional drafts.

You may type or handwrite your first draft. If you type it, use a 12-point Times New Roman or similar font and double-space. In the next lesson, you'll make revisions to this first draft. At the end of that lesson, you'll type the final copy. In it you'll include digital images and, if desired, hyperlinks.

LESSON 9

REVISE AND REWRITE—THE BLOG POST

Roald Dahl didn't get *The BFG* right on the first try—or any of his other books, for that matter. "By the time I am nearing the end of the story," Dahl claimed, "the first part will have been reread and altered and corrected at least one hundred and fifty times." He believed "good writing is essentially rewriting."[1] If Dahl valued revision, shouldn't we?

In *Composition II*, you'll encounter several "revise-and-rewrite" lessons. This current lesson explains what *revise* and *rewrite* mean. It also provides a framework for similar future lessons, so use this lesson as a reference. The next revise-and-rewrite lessons include longer checklists without lengthy explanations.

Revising requires us to examine four areas: content, organization, style, and mechanics. The revise-and-rewrite checklists you'll find in this book reflect what you've been learning in its lessons. The more we learn, the more we'll check.

The first pair of watchful eyes that should review your paper are your own. Some students expect a teacher or parent to find all their mistakes. Don't be one of those students. Fix what you can and then allow an experienced writer to focus on what you don't know how to fix. Find a quiet place to read your paper *aloud*, pen in hand. You'll be surprised by what you can catch.

The checklist below reflects lessons from unit I. Content, organization, style, and mechanics work together to make writing clear and engaging. Content focuses on ideas. What are you trying to prove, explain, describe? Did you provide sufficient details and support? Organization keeps your writing orderly. Can readers see the logical development of your ideas? Style shapes your writing voice. How is your writing distinct, engaging? The last area, mechanics, considers punctuation, citations, and overall grammatical clarity. Do any errors confuse the meaning of your message or distract your readers?

Before you start reading your paper aloud, review each item in the checklist below. Give a specific and helpful answer to each question asked. "I don't know" may be specific, but it's not helpful. Some of the questions include a to-do task in parentheses. If you have a pack of colorful highlighters, now's the time to use them. Some items and areas below are easier to revise than others. Ask a teacher or parent for help if something is unclear.

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1 Emily Temple, "My Pencils Outlast Their Erasers: Great Writers on the Art of Revision," *Atlantic*, January 14, 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/my-pencils-outlast-their-erasers-great-writers-on-the-art-of-revision/267011/.

It's been a delight for our journalistic team at World News Group to work with the folks at Veritas Press in creating this writing manual. This combination of sponsors offers an intensely practical perspective on the writing task while simultaneously meeting curricular requirements. Students and their families will find here the helpful preparation they will need as Christian wordsmiths, both in their undergraduate and more advanced studies, and later on in the workplace. In those regards, this manual has no equal.

—JOEL BELZ

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