

CHAPTER 2

THE BRICKS AND MORTAR OF WRITING

Writing is more than just organizing words on a piece of paper. It is a process of creating and revising. It is a way to think through ideas as well as a way to express them. Unfortunately, what is in your head does not always reach the paper intact. This can have a dramatic effect on how we understand the thoughts of others and the ways others understand us. This chapter will provide guidance on writing at the level of organization and presentation, ensuring that the final writing product is received as intended.

THE STRUCTURE OF WRITING

For most of us, our first experience with significant writing was the five-paragraph essay. It begins with an introduction, is supported by three paragraphs within the body, and ends with a conclusion. While it often feels as though we are starting from scratch when we write papers at the college level, that basic structure does not change as we advance through our education. What does change when writing becomes more complex are the details within the body of the work, which will vary depending on the type of writing. Those details will be discussed thoroughly over the remaining chapters of this book. Here, we will examine the general structure of writing with an overview of its basic building blocks.

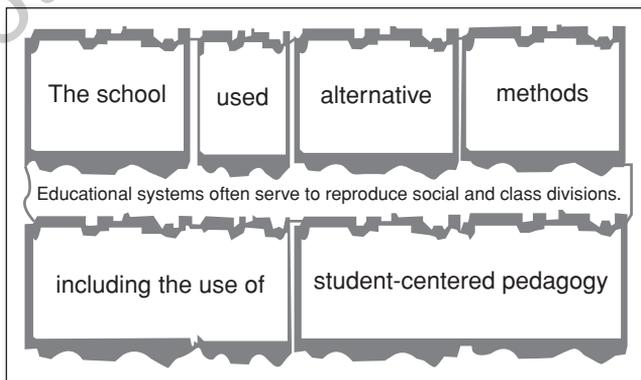
The Foundation of Your House

Building a paper is similar to building a house with a limited budget. Each piece has a purpose, and extraneous pieces should be avoided. The paper is built on propositions—a research question, a hypothesis, and/or

a thesis. A research question is the question that guides your research. A hypothesis is the potential answer to the research question based on little research or knowledge. Similarly, a thesis is the potential answer to the research question based on significant research or knowledge. Which of these you include in your paper may depend on your professor and/or the specific assignment, but regardless of how you structure your research question, hypothesis, or thesis, they act as the mortar that holds the paper together. Every so often, a paper will have to return to the propositions and connect that particular brick (a word), row (a sentence), or wall (a paragraph) to the rest of the house.

This means that each paragraph must be properly justified or supported. There should be a reason for each paragraph that is evident within the paragraph itself or in those that surround it. It should be possible to pick out a few paragraphs, or an entire section in a paper, and understand how it connects to the propositions. The length of the paper determines how long you can go without directly referring to your propositions. In a short paper, each paragraph should have a direct justification. For longer works, the document is likely to be divided into sections. In this case, each section should refer back to the propositions. Many writers rely on headings to distinguish between sections. However, headings should not be used as a replacement for transitions—the indicators of change from one thought to the next. It is still necessary both to introduce a section (and its connection to the topic as a whole) and to conclude the section before transitioning into the next one.

Figure 2.1



The Walls of Your Room

In any long piece, you may have different types of paragraphs that can be characterized into four types—introductory, main point, elaboration, and concluding paragraphs—some of which do not refer directly to the propositions. An introductory paragraph explains the importance of that section to the overall propositions. The main point paragraph provides and explains the most important point in the section. Elaboration paragraphs provide the evidence and examples that prove that connection. The section ends with the concluding paragraphs, which restate the connection and the evidence and connect that section to the section that follows.

Additionally, elaboration paragraphs will likely fall into two categories: affirmation or contradiction. You can use these paragraphs to develop or support your point further or to present the opposing perspective. To affirm or confirm a point, you should include evidence or expound on previous evidence. In presenting an opposing viewpoint, you should present evidence from other research and explain why your perspective should be considered over the perspectives of others.

Similar to how each section of the paper includes paragraphs that mimic the structure the paper as a whole, each individual paragraph should be written in the same manner. Each paragraph should have an introduction, an elaboration, and a conclusion and/or transition into the next paragraph. In theory, someone should be able to follow a paper at a very basic level by simply reading the first and last sentences (the introductions and conclusions) in the paragraphs.

Most of the students' complaints about their CPESS experience can be placed in [the college category]. According to the data collected here, 95.8% of former CPESS students applied to college, nearly all were accepted and 89% of survey participants began college. However, sustainability in college proved to be more of a challenge than may have been expected. One of the most significant problems, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is that after spending between two and 14 years in an alternative educational program, students had to return to or, for many students, enter for the first time, the type of traditional educational institution that CPESS had socialized them to resist. Similar to findings in other chapters in this volume (see Hantzopoulos; Bloom), many former students and teachers from the first five graduating classes referred to a culture shock in the process of moving from the sheltered, nurturing CPESS environment into college.¹

In this example, the reader can gain an understanding of the context of this paragraph and the next one by simply examining the introductory and concluding sentences. However, the elaboration is important for a more complete understanding of the writer's point.

The Lines That Form the Walls

At a basic level, the purpose of a sentence is to describe something doing something. "A woman walked" is a very simple example of this. It begins with a capital letter. There is a noun, then a verb, and it ends with a period, exclamation point, or question mark. A noun is a person, place, thing, animal, or abstract idea and the world is filled with them. As a student you might use nouns such as *analysis*, *emphasis*, *approach*, *summary*, *result*, *argument*, and *quote*. A verb expresses an existence, action, or occurrence. *Occurs*, *equals*, *critiques*, and *formulate* are all examples of academic verbs.

In academic writing, sentences tend to have more information than what is in our sample sentence in the previous paragraph. From that sentence, we know a couple of things. There existed a woman and she walked. However, there is a lot missing from this sentence. Who is this woman? Why is she walking? How is she walking? Where is she walking? Context clues can often be found prior to or after the sentence, but there is also much space within the sentence for elaboration. For example, you can use an adjective—a word that modifies or describes a noun or pronoun. In our original sentence, the woman could be tall or smart, young or elated. In academic writing, these kinds of adjectives are less likely except when describing individuals in qualitative research. Instead, you might use adjectives such as *alternative*, *consistent*, *decreasing*, *different*, *important*, *innovative*, *hierarchical*, *high*, *necessary*, *possible*, *primary*, and *significant*. Adverbs can also add more detail to your sentence as they modify or describe verbs or adjectives. An adverb might be added to the sample sentence and lead to the woman walking quickly or slowly. Again, some of the adverbs you might use in academia are *also*, *even*, *extremely*, *further*, *generally*, *only*, *particularly*, *perhaps*, *probably*, and *relatively*.

A sentence can also include other parts of speech, such as pronouns, which replicate or replace a noun. Often, we use the last name of an author to refer to that author later in a sentence or paragraph, but pronouns such as *he* and *she* are also used. You can also use gender nonbinary terms such as *they* (as singular), *ne*, *ey*, *ve*, *zie*, for example, but you will want to make sure your reader is familiar with these terms first as

these different pronouns are new to many people. You can also use a footnote to explain if you are aware of an individual preference. You will notice in this book that she is used more often than he to refer to a generic person. Prepositions can also be used in your sentences to show the relationship between or among words in terms of direction, place, time, cause, manner, and amount. Examples of prepositions are *to*, *under*, *on*, *at*, *after*, and *by*. Finally, conjunctions connect words, sentences, or clauses. Similar to the prepositions, the conjunctions used in academia do not differ significantly from those used outside of an academic sphere. These are words such as *and*, *or*, *but*, *if*, *after*, *unless*, and *although*. These are also words to note when you are reading or writing as they signal whether the rest of the sentence will be confirming, contradictory, or the next element in a sequence.

In academia, many of our sentences are compound sentences. When we talk about changing the length of your sentences to adjust the flow of your work, you can often accomplish that by creating or destroying compound sentences, which use conjunctions or transitions to connect clauses—a group of words containing a subject and a verb—or sentences. Often this is an independent clause, with a subject and a verb, and can stand alone or be part of a larger compound sentence, and a dependent clause, that cannot function as a sentence by itself. Usually, dependent clauses are preceded by a comma or a conjunction.

A more complicated version of the compound sentence is a complex sentence. This is a combination of several independent and dependent clauses. These are also very common in academic texts. For example:

If students internalize school cultures as well as what is said in a lesson or textbook, then it makes sense to foster learning environments marked by habits of risk taking, generosity, and understanding of self and others. (DiPardo 2000:307)²

These different types and aspects of sentences line up to build the “walls” of a paragraph. While many of the serious edits you make to a sentence often happen during the revising phase (which will be examined more fully in Chapter 6), there are guidelines that you can consider while writing an early draft. As stated above, every sentence tells a particular story. If words are missing from a sentence, pieces are missing from the story. If something is unclear in a sentence, the story being told is unclear to the reader. You should keep in mind the story you are trying to tell when you write and check to make sure it has been told when you are finished.

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Clarity in a sentence or paragraph often comes from finding the proper balance of information to place within a sentence. If there is not enough information in a sentence, the reader's picture is incomplete, as in the walking woman above. Some of the information may be included in the sentence(s) that precedes or follows. However, there should be enough information in the sentence that it does not leave the reader with too many questions about what he has just read. For example:

The relationship between family and education has been researched a lot.

If a reader is presented with this sentence, she will have several questions that could easily have been answered by elaborating on the provided information: What is "a lot"? What time period is being referred to? What kinds of results have been found? A lack of answers to these questions is not the mystery that will encourage the reader to move on and might, instead, lead to her interest waning or deciding that the research presented will be elementary or poorly presented. Here are a few possible revisions to this sentence with each including a bit more clarity:

The relationship between family and education has been well researched over the past 50 years.

The results of studies on the relationship between family structure and education have been inconclusive over the past 50 years.

There are more than 1,000 articles from the last 50 years that examine the potential effects of family structure on educational attainment, and the results have varied.

A sentence can also contain too much information and become what many teachers and professors refer to as a run-on sentence. You should try to make only one or two points in a sentence. When you make multiple points within a sentence, the entire sentence is weakened. It is very possible that each point of the sentence is more powerful on its own. In addition, watch for multiple independent clauses within one sentence. If another sentence can be made, it probably should be.

The formation of the United States began in 1776 with the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but the ideals of democracy for all citizens were delayed because African Americans were not

officially able to act as citizens until 1965 with the ratification of the Civil Rights Act, even though the Fourteenth Amendment to the Bill of Rights stated that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States . . . are citizens of the United States” (Bill of Rights 1965), many people were prevented from taking full advantage of their rights.

This is an extreme example, but this type of sentence is not unheard of. One cannot expect to explain the history of American democracy and civil rights in one sentence. There are several places within the sentence where the writer could have added a period to create a paragraph composed of more than one sentence. If the reader has to take several breaths to get through a sentence, it is too long. The paragraph above could be edited to create:

The formation of the United States legally began in 1776 with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. However, even though the Fourteenth Amendment to the Bill of Rights in 1868 stated that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States . . . are citizens of the United States” (Bill of Rights 1965), the ideals of democracy for all citizens were delayed. African Americans, for example, were not officially able to act as citizens until 1965, with the ratification of the Civil Rights Act.

The type of run on sentence above can also be the result of the use of speech-to-text technologies. If you choose to use something like this to speak your paper rather than write it, you have to take the next step and edit your work. The program cannot always determine where you would like a period or a comma or even whether you mean “to,” “two” or “too.” Even quickly reviewing your paper for these common edits (see Chapter 6) can make a difference in clarity.

The Bricks That Build the Walls

The other problems within sentences can come from the words used to build them. To ensure that the meaning a reader receives from a work is the meaning intended, it is important to examine each piece and its interaction with every other piece. One source of common misunderstanding in creating sentences is the use of the wrong words. When writing, and especially when revising, it is important to double-check which words have been used and whether there is a better choice or, if you have

misused a word, a correct choice. Many words are easily mistaken for others. *Then* and *than*, for example, are often misused; *then* means following after, while *than* indicates a comparison (see the Appendix for additional examples of confused words).

Words can also be misused because of an uncertainty of the audience you are serving and how to speak to them. Some writers will use every word they know to make their point because they believe that having a large vocabulary makes them appear intelligent. However, you must also know how to use the words properly for them to be effective. If you truly know the vocabulary of sociology, or of the specific area in which you have interest in the discipline, you will be able to use the words economically and not overburden your paper with attempts to display your vocabulary. If you do not yet know the language of your discipline, reading is the best way to learn it. Study scholarly journal articles and read books within sociology to grow your familiarity with the discipline, and its language will eventually become yours. Do not simply use a thesaurus to turn your words into bigger or more relevant words within your discipline. It is generally better for your point to be understood than for you to use vocabulary that you do not understand. In addition, while using the words from an article you read or an assignment given to you by your professor demonstrates that you have at least read it, if you do not understand the words that will also become evident. It is also more likely that you will plagiarize because of that lack of understanding. Make sure you look up any words you do not understand before trying to write using them. Forcing yourself to put a sentence into your own words also ensures a higher level of understanding.

Features of Academic Writing

In addition to the more general structure of a paper, particular attributes are important in the creation of an academic paper.

Formality

Some refer to academic writing as formal, others as semiformal. What this generally means is that the informality that is a part of other types of writing you might do is not present in academic writing. We elaborate on this a little more in our section below on letters, but your writing should generally avoid slang, most abbreviations, colloquialisms (informal words or phrases found in casual speech), and contractions.

Objectivity

While writing in academia usually means presenting a particular perspective, objectivity is still important to maintain. You should always avoid any indications of bias by presenting multiple sides to your arguments. In many cases, the opposing arguments are the foundation of your perspective and you write your piece in response to them. In these situations, an overview of the opposing ideas is typically integrated into the literature review section (see Chapter 5) of your paper. However, even when such an overview does not flow organically from your viewpoint, an objective presentation is important to the legitimacy of your paper.

Caution

Regardless of whether or not your data are qualitative or quantitative, they are usually indefinite. Generally, you can say that “the evidence demonstrates” or that the “data appear to show.” It is unlikely that you will come across any information that provides you with something definite. Therefore, your language should reflect that. If you do have some evidence that shows a firm result, you should share that. More likely, however, you will find a suggested relationship, and you should write it up as such. Words such as *should*, *may*, *could*, and *potentially* will likely be important in your writing.

Clarity

You should be clear and precise with your language in academic writing. If you are explaining a relationship in your data, your language should reflect that particular relationship. If you want to lead your reader in a particular direction in your paper, use indicators such as transitions to let them know where the story will be taking them. Your vocabulary should also be accurate and representative of what you actually intend to say. We speak more about this when we discuss voice below.

Evidence

Any points you make in academic writing will have to be supported by evidence. This evidence may be data you collected, information you read from what others have examined, or conclusions drawn from analysis of the data of other researchers. All evidence that you include must

be properly cited and should be well integrated into your document. This includes both introducing it—a quote, for example—and explaining its place in your work (see Chapter 3 for information on citing and integrating quotes).

Perspective

Academic writing is generally written in the third person. This means that work is done by her or him, sometimes by I (first person), and never by you (second person). This can often lead to passive sentences (see below), but it can also add a level of objectivity (see above), which is important for scientific writing in academia. There is still discussion about the use of the first person in academic writing, and where this perspective is most likely to be seen is in a methods section (see Chapter 5 for more information), especially in qualitative research. Some professors might also ask you to write a proposal or even an essay in first person, so it is important to ask or to examine the work of others to find out if and how first person is used in your school or class.

The construction of your paper with the proper words, an academic structure, fully formed sentences, and well-structured paragraphs can help you build your paper and express your ideas. This enables you not only to be understood but also to share your writing persona or personality with the reader. We refer to this representation of yourself—the personality of your writing—as its voice.

The Voice on the Paper

What a professor refers to as “voice” comes down to two general ideas. The first is when a professor tells you that *you* are missing from the work. This form of voice is about understanding the research and the writer's contribution to his work. The way this type of voice is emphasized in writing varies depending on the type of writing that is created. We will examine it further as we work our way through this volume and the different types of writing. The type of voice we will examine in this section, as well as more fully in the chapter on editing and revising, is more general. Here, we will explore the ways a written piece can be imbued with a voice to make it both interesting and clear—what we will refer to as aesthetic voice.

Aesthetic voice is also about the audience to whom you are speaking. As you will read about in other chapters in this volume, your voice will be dictated to some extent by your intended audience. Writing a paper

for a class requires a certain type of formal, semiformal, or academic voice, while an entry on a webpage or blog might use a different voice. You will hear much more about this as we work our way through the book, but most of the types of writing you will find here will be academic. However, our own writing in this text is less formal, as our goal here is to interest our audience in the types of writing in which sociologists participate.

Providing an interesting and clear voice is not easy. While some may be born with the ability to speak beautifully and translate it perfectly to paper, for most of us, it takes some work to create a masterpiece. After much practice, you can reach a point where a first draft will contain a level of aesthetic voice, but until you reach that point, much of the insertion of voice may happen during the editing stage (see Chapter 6).

The first part of including aesthetic voice in a written piece is knowing the audience. Understanding who the audience is, as well as what they expect, allows the writer to speak in a way that resonates with those who are reading. If the audience is your professor or classmates, using the vocabulary and formal structure of the relevant field of sociology will be important. If the writing is for a blog, sociological language can quickly become jargon to the audience.

You should make sure to read the piece aloud. While writing for a presentation and for written formats is different (see Chapter 7 for more information), voice is heard in the minds of the individuals reading the work. If it flows when the writer speaks it out loud, it will probably sound similar to the reader. Several voice edits may happen during your first and subsequent read-throughs, as you may struggle somewhere in your piece or become out of breath and will therefore know it is necessary to change some words or add periods or commas.

If the problem is not immediately evident, there are several places to look to make changes. Many of the structural aspects mentioned above can add to voice when utilized properly. Check your sentences for run-ons or vagueness. Another common problem in papers without a strong voice is a lack of variation in sentences. Writing is very much about flow. Sentences with the same or very similar lengths give the writer's voice an automated tone. Changing the length of sentences might include combining a couple of sentences, inserting a new sentence between existing ones, or adding additional words to refine the sentences.

Example:

The researchers did not agree. One study found positive effects. The other study found negative effects. More research needs to be conducted.

Possible revision:

More research needs to be conducted to explore the topic fully. The two studies differed in their findings, as one found positive effects and the other, negative.

Another way to add variation to sentences is to ensure that the words used to begin or conclude a sentence vary throughout a paragraph or section. *The*, for example, is an easy word to begin a sentence with, and it is just as easy to be unaware of using it repeatedly. If the same word, group of words, or type of word is being used to start every sentence, the sentence should be restructured or, if possible, the structure of the paragraph should be changed.

Example:

The school used alternative pedagogical methods. The students in the classes did much of their work in groups. The teachers emphasized student-centered pedagogy. The administrators protected the teachers from outside influences that might have a negative effect on what occurred within their classrooms.

Possible revision:

The school used alternative methods, which included group work and student-centered pedagogy. Administrators at the school also protected the teachers from outside influences that might have a negative effect on what occurred within their classrooms.

Clichés can also disrupt the voice of a paper. They are considered too casual for most academic papers and should be replaced by words that do a better job of making the same point. Clichés are phrases that use a well-known illustration of an idea, such as “sharp as a tack.” Instead of clichés, you should use a selection of accurate and precise words to describe what you are trying to say.

You should also check your sentences for words that are repeated, places where several words have been used when one might work better, and words that may not have been used properly. These modifications will all assist in changing the voice of a paper. Additionally, once you have revised the work by reading aloud, you should look for another person to read it. If that other person can read it aloud, that is even better. Listening to it read by someone else will certainly help illuminate for you any problems in voice.

Recognizing the difference between active and passive sentences can also change the voice of a piece. Passive sentences can make a piece sound flat, while active sentences can add interest or action to your writing. In a passive sentence, the subject of the sentence is being acted on rather than initiating the action. Academic writing is often written with a more passive voice because sometimes there is no subject, the subject is unknown, or the use of a subject comes off as too casual. The third-person perspective that dominates academic writing can also lead a paper to more passive than active sentences. For example, “Research was conducted on the students” is a passive sentence often used to describe methods. While, technically, you conducted the research, some academics believe it is poor form to refer to yourself in an academic paper. Most individuals will accept it either way, but some professors may prefer the more passive version.

A sentence can usually be changed from passive to active by finding the active subject and making sure it is doing the work. Often, in a passive sentence, the subject is missing and/or only implied. If you add the word *by* to the end of a passive sentence, the subject implied after the *by* should be the focus of the sentence to make it active. In the passive sentence, “The test was taken,” the invisible subject might be students, professionals, or teachers. To turn the sentence active, make sure the “students took the test.”

Form

Some professors will give you a particular format for the overall structure of your assignment. They will tell you exactly how files should be identified and papers should be labeled. This is extremely helpful when you are putting together your assignments as it ensures that you create a document that your professor is comfortable with. Others will give you no information. This does not mean, however, that they have no expectations or that they would not appreciate a particular presentation of your work. Most importantly, any format that you use should be clear and informative.

If you do not receive any instructions, understand that most professors prefer papers that are written in 12-point black font. Do not go below 10 or above 14 in font size. For figures, you can usually go as low as 8. Times New Roman is generally the preferred font but other serif fonts can be used if one is not indicated. Sans (without) serif fonts may be used for figures. Papers should also be double spaced unless otherwise indicated.

There are other formatting preferences in sociology. The margins of your paper should be no smaller than one inch, unless you are writing for publication. You should not use hyphens to separate a word into two pieces at the end of a line and your text should be left justified, which means the left side of your paper (when you are facing it) has text that is even and the right side is jagged. Rather than putting one or multiple spaces between paragraphs, the format recommended by the American Sociological Association (ASA) is indented. Most of your work will only require three levels of headings and subheadings. The first is all capital letters in line with the left side of the paper. The second level is in italics and again, aligned with the left side of the paper. The third level is indented and placed before the beginning of the paragraph, on the same line as the rest of the paragraph.

Unless specifically asked not to, including a cover page is a good way to present yourself as well as information about the assignment. According to ASA, a cover page should include the name of the assignment or the title (if required) and your name. This page should also have the name of the course and the date. Optionally, you can include the name of the professor. A formal cover page should also include a university affiliation (such as a department and/or position). However, this is not likely to be needed for a paper you submit for a course. If an abstract is required (see below for more information), it can follow this information on the cover page.

Some professors prefer that a paper not include a cover page. In this case, the above information (without the abstract) can be written at the top of the first page in two columns on the left and right sides of the header. You can also add a running head which repeats some identifying information on every page following the first one. This header can include your name and the assignment or date. It should not include more than 50 characters and should not be counted in any word or page count. Page numbers can be in the header but ASA format dictates that they are placed at the bottom of the paper.

Similarly, your professor may give you specific information about naming any files that you submit digitally through e-mail or a course/learning management system. If she does not, you should make sure that your files include your name (your last name is probably adequate unless there are other students in your class with your last name) and the name and/or number of the assignment. This will make it easier for you to find and submit assignments and for your professors to identify and grade them. You should also try to keep digital or paper copies of all your assignments at least until you receive your final grade.

Most of this book will focus on writing in your sociology classes, but we begin our instruction on specific types of writing with something that is often a little less formal—the letter. Even though the letter is one of the shortest types of writing involved in sociology, when written properly, the structure of a letter still mirrors many of the other types of writing in this book. We begin with this because it is something we are all familiar with yet still often have trouble completing in an academic, formal, or professional manner.

LETTERS

Letter writing is a very specific type of writing and an art that was once valued and is now, for the most part, lost. It is not the first thing that comes to mind when you think of a sociological guide for writing. However, as a sociologist, in school and beyond, you will have several opportunities to write letters. While some of us may feel we have already mastered the art of writing a quality letter in a professional setting, we can probably all find some helpful hints or suggestions in this section.

E-mails

E-mails are a good place to start a lesson on letter writing, as writing e-mails is something most current college students grew up doing and its format has become second nature. However, few have ever learned the appropriate way to compose an e-mail message. Therefore, it is an extremely misunderstood form of writing.

Since e-mails are generally used for casual conversations, too many people forget that is not their only purpose. Most students understand the respect due to a professor, professional, or other superior in a face-to-face interaction, yet those same people lose that understanding when they are safely behind their computer screens. You should also remember that, while your letter is addressed to a particular person, it is stored on a server and even deleting it does not necessarily erase it. They can be copied, forwarded, and saved. Depending on the laws of your state and institution, they may be accessible to others. They can be very much public. This is a lesson that cannot be taught enough times, regardless of your level as a writer.

For someone who has never had to write and mail a professional letter, saying that writing a proper e-mail should be just like writing a

Figure 2.2

To: Professor1@school.edu
 From: HotLips12@isp.com
 Subject: HEY Prof!

HEY Prof!

I need to get the homework from today. Can you email it to me ASAP?

Thanks!
 Patricia Joy

formal letter is pointless. Instead, looking at an improperly written e-mail can allow us to understand the dos and don'ts of e-mail writing in a formal setting. Here, we will focus on writing a professional e-mail to a course professor. However, the same rules apply whether the e-mail is to a professor or to any other professional or person with whom you have a working relationship.

Information in Header

While this is not exactly an issue of proper writing, it's something to think about if you want to become a professional in any field. When sending an e-mail, make sure to use an e-mail address appropriate for a professional setting. Though the e-mail name you have always used may be hotlips12, it could just as easily be PatriciaJoy12 or PJ.Walker12. Most institutions provide their students with school e-mail addresses (.edu), which would likely make that process easier, but we understand that students do not always keep up with their college-issued e-mail addresses. It is not difficult to create a personal address to use with your professors or any other professional contacts you might have. Most e-mail clients will allow you not only to forward PJ.Walker12's e-mail to hotlips12 but also to send e-mail from hotlips12's account as PJ.Walker12, if you so choose. You can always delete the e-mail account once the course is over, but many people have a main account from which they collect and send e-mails from a variety of other e-mail addresses. Using an e-mail address with your name is ideal. If that is not possible, nonoffensive words or a collection of letters and numbers (such as initials and parts of a date or address) are also acceptable.

Subject

The purpose of a subject line is to inform the receiver of your intent before she opens the e-mail. While not used as often, letters sent through the U.S. Postal Service can also have a “subject line.” Sometimes the writer of a letter might write “Re: Your bill” on the outside of an envelope or on a message pad so the recipient knows that the enclosed is “regarding your bill.” The same care should be used in an e-mail to a professor or other professional. What is the letter “regarding” or “in reference to”? A basic subject line could simply say, “The homework from May 14th” but, if you send an e-mail with that title, the professor may choose not to open it if she is not ready to grade. If the e-mail is a question about the homework, a more detailed subject line could read, “Question from P. Mullings about the homework from May 14th,” and it may receive a response in a timelier manner. Be careful of length; your subject line should not require any scrolling. You should also keep in mind that your professor may get many e-mails from students in a given day and the more detail you can provide, the more likely you are to get the appropriate response.

Greeting

Another concern with the e-mail in the example is the “HEY!” in the subject line. This problem is similarly evident in the greeting. First, you do not want to start a professional letter by writing “hey.” You should address a professional letter, specifically one to a professor, with “to,” “dear,” or even simply the professor’s title and name (see the table below for a selection of titles). Unless you already know how the professor would like to be addressed, you should begin with Dear Professor (or Dr.) Monte. You can leave off the last name (i.e., “Dear Professor”), but its use tells the professor that you know who he is, as well as allowing you to be sure your message is going to the right person. Once you have written your first message, you can follow the recipient’s lead in greetings and titles. Do not let a professor’s use of your name be an example (although you can look at the type of greeting she used). Instead, make a note of how she has signed her letter. If she used her first name, unless she has already told you not to, you can probably use it when you address her in your next e-mail. If she uses her full name, you should address her as you have in previous letters. You should respond similarly if she has not used any name or used just her automatic signature.

Dear:	Can begin almost all letters; can be followed by names (Gwen), titles (Dean), or categories (Hiring Committee)
To whom it may concern:	Should be used only if you cannot uncover the name of the person
Hi, Hello, Hey	Should be used only for informal letters to people you are close to

If you are on a level playing field with the person you are corresponding with, rather than a subordinate to him, you can follow his example in terms of what he calls you and how he signs his name. If he addresses you as Emily and signs his name Mike, you can probably address him as Mike. Similarly, if you would like someone to call you by your first name, you can either tell him so or sign your letter with the name. If you have not been given any particular instruction in how to refer to someone, you should use a title.

Ms.:	For an unmarried woman or if marriage status cannot be determined. Ms. is considered more politically correct than Mrs. Must be used with a last name.
Mrs.:	For a married woman using her married name. It should be used only if you have been told to use it. Must be used with a last name.
Mr.:	For a man with no other title. Must be used with a last name.
Dr.:	For someone with a PhD, MD, DDS, or other higher degree. Must be used with a last name.
Professor:	For someone who teaches at a college or university.
Dean, Director, President, Provost, etc.:	The heads of an office, institute, or institution. Must be used with a last name.

If you need to address two people, you should use both of their names and titles with an *and* in between them. For three or more names, you may use “classmates,” “professors,” or “students,” depending on who will be receiving the letter.

Finishing this section on the greeting, you should never use an exclamation point in a greeting to a professor. In fact, you should try to avoid them anywhere in your e-mail. In the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Cut out all those exclamation points. An exclamation point is like laughing

at your own jokes.”³ If you want to emphasize something in an e-mail, use a modifier—usually an adverb or adjective (or a word that acts as one) that adds description to the sentence—and explain your emphasis, rather than trying to elicit the emotion with a punctuation mark.

Body

Unarguably, the body is the most important part of your e-mail. This is why you are writing. This is where you explain yourself, make your argument, or ask your question. Yet even students who know exactly what they need often express themselves poorly in the bodies of their more professional e-mails. There are several important guidelines to remember. While these specifically center on writing professional e-mails, they can also be useful in writing an e-mail to anyone.

Recognize the Reader’s Head. This means that, regardless of your intention, the reader will almost always take her mood, attitude, or feelings and breathe that life into the e-mail. If she is angry and there is anything at all ambiguous in your e-mail, she will hear it as angry. People often forget this attribute of letters and can both read emotional states in someone’s e-mail that were not present and unwittingly send an angry e-mail to a friend. For this and many other reasons, it is important to read your e-mail before you send it out. Try reading it out loud with a different emotion in your voice. Can your receiver read something completely different in your letter than what you intended? If so, go back and try to change your words into something more neutral.

Additionally, intended emotions can also often be misread or missed all together. Sarcasm should never be in an e-mail to a professor, but if you are sending an e-mail to someone else, make sure you exaggerate the sarcasm. Without the inflection in your “voice,” subtle sarcasm can easily be missed.

Don’t Yell. Avoiding exclamation points was previously mentioned, but that is only one way your e-mail can seem demanding. You must keep in mind that you are likely sending this e-mail because you need something, yet your professor may not be able to assist you immediately. Avoid demanding terms such as *want* and *need*, and, at all costs, do not use phrases that signify that the receiver should stop what he is doing right away to help you—words such as *immediately*, *today* (except in a descriptive manner), *now*, and *ASAP*. Instead, remember you are asking the recipient to do something for you that may fall outside of her responsibility or course guidelines and that she will get to it when and if she can.

Write Properly. An e-mail to a professor is closer to a class paper than it is to a text message or a chat with a friend. You should follow the same conventions you would when writing anything for your professor. Write in full sentences with proper punctuation, grammar, and spelling. This includes not interrupting a sentence with an exclamation, words, or phrases the professor may or may not understand. Your professor doesn't want to hear that you are "LOL" or if something is "gr8." There should be no "text speak" in your e-mail. Similar to the Fitzgerald quote above, you don't need to LOL at your own jokes. If they are funny, they will be perceived as such. If they are not, no one will know they are jokes.

Follow Instructions. This is less about the actual writing and more about the considerations before you write. For example, in writing to a course professor, be sure to pay attention to what is listed in the syllabus or what your professor has said about e-mailing. If Professor Jones has told you that she will not accept late homework by e-mail, do not try to send it. If she has not given you an alternative, you may e-mail and ask if there is another way to drop off your work.

The structure of the body portion of your letter should mirror an essay in other ways as well. As in a basic essay, the main part of your e-mail should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

The introduction can do many things. Depending on the purpose of the e-mail and how many e-mails you have already shared, you may need to introduce yourself:

My name is Colby Mani, and I am in your Sociology 101 class.

Or you may want to inquire as to how the recipient is doing:

I hope you are doing well.

However you begin, your letter can start with a casual tone but still fit within a formal structure. The body of your e-mail should explain your question, comment, or issue. You should keep it short and get to the point. We will discuss the different ways you might use the body of an e-mail when we discuss specific letters below.

Closing

You should conclude your letter with an appropriate closing or a closing salutation. You can end by wishing your professor well or letting him know that you will be in class for the following session. You can also

include something like “best,” “best regards,” or “sincerely.” You should not, however, include salutations such as “love,” “yours,” and “truly.” You should follow the closing salutation with your name, especially important if you have not introduced yourself or e-mailed before, or if your name is not part of your e-mail address.

Appropriate salutations for formal letters include the following:

- Sincerely
- Yours sincerely
- Respectfully yours
- Kind regards
- Best regards
- Warmest regards
- Many thanks
- Take care
- With appreciation

There is a school of thought that e-mails should not have closing salutations because their true nature is more conversational than that of a traditional letter. Many of the messages exchanged among friends and family members are very informal and you will probably forgo much of the formality described here. After several interactions with your professor on a particular topic, she might stop using the greeting or signing the message, you should feel free to do the same. Your first professional e-mail, however, should follow these guidelines to ease the communication for both parties.

Finally, remember that a response may not be immediate, but you shouldn't push it. If the next class session and the office hours have passed and you have not heard anything, you can bring up the e-mail questions in person, but, unless it is an emergency, more than a week should go by before you send another e-mail, if you do at all. E-mails provide a quick way to communicate, but not everyone thinks of e-mails as needing an immediate response. The convenience of e-mails tends to overshadow the problems with them. If you can follow the guidelines in this section, you can be sure that you are able to address those problems.

Formal Letters

As a student, you may on several occasions need to write a business or professional letter. If you apply for a job, for example, your prospective employer may require you to write a cover letter. Some graduate or

professional schools may require a cover letter with an application. Additionally, you may have a situation, separate from school, where you need to write a formal letter. Even if your letter is sent by e-mail, it is still important that it is in the correct format.

Writing a business letter was once something all students were required to do to graduate from high school. Now, in this age of e-mailing and texting, students are taught “snail mail” letter writing much later in their educations or never at all. Sometimes, like so much other writing, it is not until they have written a poorly structured letter that they are taught how to do it properly. Yet a well-written letter can assert authority, confidence, and competence.

Similar to e-mails, formal letters can be divided into different sections: header, introduction, body, conclusion, and footer. While the header and footer in an e-mail are often included in the e-mail client's programming, in a formal letter, you will write the header yourself and what is contained within it will vary depending on the type of letter.

The header of a letter usually includes the addresses of both the letter writer and the letter recipient. If you use a letterhead with an address, you do not need to include your address in the header. If there is no address, you should include one on the right-hand side of the header. The street address should be in the first row and the state, city, and ZIP code in the second row in the normal format for addresses. On the next line, the date should be inserted in the form “month, day, year” (although, if you are writing to an organization or company outside of the United States, “day, month, year” might be more appropriate). You may also include the day of the week preceding the rest of the date.

The receiver's information should be on the left on the following line in the same format, but it should also include the receiver's name in the first row. Alternatively, the sender's address and the date can be on the same side as the receiver's address (the left side) with an extra line break

Figure 2.3

<p>Professor B. Johnson Green Men Consulting New Haven, CT 06511</p> <p>Dear Professor Johnson,</p>	<p>123 Electric Street New York, NY 10023 September 18, 2012</p>
---	--

Figure 2.4

123 Electric Street
 New York, NY 10023
 September 18, 2012

Professor B. Johnson
 Green Men Consulting
 New Haven, CT 06511

Dear Professor Johnson:

between each element. Finally, after another line break, you should write a salutation and the individual's title and name. In most cases, that salutation is "Dear," and the title will depend on the individual.

As mentioned above, you should do your best to use the proper title of the person to whom the letter is addressed. If you cannot discover the recipient's gender, and you are using one of the gendered titles, you should use that person's full name. If you cannot find a name, you may use "To Whom It May Concern" (this can be written with each word capitalized or with only *to* capitalized); however, this should be used only as a last resort. Either greeting-plus-name combination can be followed by a colon; the combination that includes "Dear" may also be followed by a comma. See above for additional examples of greetings and titles.

The body of your letter should begin after a line break and, like other types of writing in this book, should be divided into several pieces. The details within each section in the body will vary depending on the type of letter being written, but each will begin with an introduction within which you explain to the receiver your purpose for writing and give a little information about who you are. If you were directed to write the letter by someone or have a contact at the school or organization, or someone you share in common with the recipient, that should also be mentioned in the introduction. In a longer letter, this could be a full paragraph. In a shorter letter, the introduction could be just one or two sentences. However, the meat of the body is where different letter types vary.

Job Letters

The introduction of a job cover letter should explain why you are writing the letter, such as "I am writing to apply for the position of

statistical consultant at Green Men Consulting.” Additionally, it should give a quick overview of your story and your qualifications: “My experiences in statistical analysis and software qualify me to fill your position.”

The body of the letter is where you share the details of your qualifications. You should sound confident and competent. Review the qualifications required for the job before writing your letter and make sure to emphasize the experiences you have had that most closely fit the position in their order of importance to the potential employers.

Think about each of your former jobs, research you have conducted, organizations you have been a member of, or experiences you have had as a series of skills gained, responsibilities held, or activities completed. For example, if you worked as a college assistant, you probably had a lot of different types of responsibilities. You may have had to do administrative work, such as filing, data processing, and written communication. The job might have included research, and/or other knowledge of the school or other schools. It may have also required certain computer software, meeting with other members of your office, or organizing events or meetings. These all become skills you can highlight in a cover letter. Remember that your résumé or curriculum vitae (see Chapter 8) will provide an overview of all of your relevant jobs, skills, and service/volunteer work, so your cover letter should highlight particular experiences and draw the reader's attention to the ways you fit that particular position. In writing up your skills in a cover letter, make sure to emphasize what you actually did rather than what your title or official responsibilities were. It may also be a good place to explain how the jobs you had allowed you to gain the experience that the job you are applying for requires. A cover letter allows you make the link between the jobs you have had and the job that you want especially if that is not entirely clear in your résumé/curriculum vitae.

Organize your letter by skill, and, as usual, make each paragraph its own miniature paper. Introduce the skill, either with an introductory sentence or an example of the skill from your own experience. You then want to support your claim that you have that skill or can complete that task. You should try to avoid using more than three examples. Remember, they will have access to your résumé/curriculum vitae and can get further information from there. Follow up your skill paragraphs with a closing or transition sentence. As you want the receiver of your letter to be excited about you, you should use active words that exhibit your achievements and bring them to life. Rather than saying that you “wrote a few summaries,” tell them you “created reports to promote changes in your program.”

While much of your letter will be the same from position to position, make sure that you personalize each letter with the name of the school/organization/company and by addressing their particular needs and how your qualifications fit those needs. Also, the different jobs you apply for may have different emphases, so you should consider changing the order of the items in your letter. If you are applying for a position in a research office, you should make sure your research experience is the first thing the receiver reads. If it is a position where you will be expected to help with workshops, your experiences with tutoring or organizing should be addressed early in your letter. If the employer is interested in someone with nonprofit experience, any service work you have done should be mentioned as early as possible. This not only will ensure that the receiving parties recognize you as someone who fits their interests but also will give the impression that the letter was written specifically for them and their positions. While most will know that much of the letter is repeated for others, the effort is often appreciated (see the Appendix for a sample job letter).

Request/Inquiry Letters

In a request letter, your tone is very important. As a sociology student, the request letters you write will most likely be requests for an update, recommendation letters, information, an interview or survey, or help. It is essential that the body of your letter present your request, cushioned by an understanding of the receiver's schedule and the commitment your request might require. This may include apologizing for taking up the receiver's time (unless your request is within the boundaries of his everyday duties). You will then want to present your situation and your request.

You should also be sure that you have done all you can on your own and have included or attached any information she might need to comply with your request. For example, if you are requesting letters of recommendation, a professor will require information on who she is writing to, who you are, and your experiences. Therefore, you should attach a copy of your résumé or curriculum vitae and a highlight sheet (see Chapter 8) that describes your qualifications to your recommenders. Also, a copy of your cover letter may be helpful. Some of the other letters might include an attached survey, interview, or web link. (A sample request letter is provided in the Appendix.)

Thank-You Letters

Thank-you letters, in any form, are a lost tradition. If someone sends you something, meets with you, or writes a letter on your behalf, it is

always good to thank that person for her help and time. While you may believe the verbal thank you that you provided immediately after you received what you requested was adequate, it does not hurt to provide something in writing in addition. A thank-you note shows not only appreciation but also manners and, for many people, will add to their impression of you.

If you have primarily corresponded digitally, that is a perfectly acceptable method of sending your thanks. This may be done as either an e-mail letter or an e-card. However, if you have access to an address, sending a physical card or letter is still a good idea. A thank-you letter can be very brief. You should simply remind the receiver of the situation for which you are thanking her and then thank her for whatever action was helpful to you. Because of the short length of a thank-you note or letter, a card can work very well. Sending a thank-you letter shows common courtesy, but if the thanks is for something like a job interview, such a letter can also remind the interviewers who you are and ensure that your interactions with them remain in their minds. Generally, you want to send this letter within a few days of the action, but within a week is probably still okay. (You can see a sample of a thank-you letter in the Appendix.)

Whatever the type, your letters should conclude by briefly reemphasizing the purpose for the letter and thanking the receiver for reading it. If additional items are enclosed, attached, or will be forthcoming, that should also be noted. The conclusion should include your final personalization of the school, organization, company, or person and an invitation for further correspondence. Again, end with an appropriate closing salutation and your full name and title, if appropriate.

NOTE-TAKING

In addition to organizing assignments and writing papers (which will be discussed in Chapter 5), note-taking is an essential skill in your sociology classes. It can also be very important for any other classes you currently take or plan to take in the future and, depending on what you go on to do, for your life after school. However, like much of the writing in this chapter, it is something that students often never learn and, if they do, they do not always learn how to do it well.

There are generally two circumstances in which you may want to take notes: when you are watching and/or listening to something and when you are reading something. Some of the strategies for note-taking remain consistent while others change depending on the context.

General Note-Taking

The most important thing to remember about taking notes is that they are notes. You are not trying to re-create, in its entirety, what someone is saying or what you are reading. You are trying to record the least amount you possibly can without losing any important information. Therefore, notes need to be (1) short, (2) understandable, and (3) retrievable.

Proper organization is one way to ensure that your notes are retrievable. At the very least, your notebook should be divided into sections for each class. A binder that allows you to remove sheets works best because you can remove and reorganize your notes in a way that fits your study habits. You could also have separate notebooks for each class. Make sure that, however you are organizing your class notes, you have space for everything you need, including notes that you have edited, the syllabus of the class, and any handouts you might get. Your notes and handouts should be organized by date or by topic.

Should you choose to organize your notes electronically, you may want to print, e-mail, or save a copy of them to the cloud, in addition to what you keep on your device. The repetition of copying your notes into a word processor or other online repository can help with retention, but it will also provide you a backup should you lose them or lose access to your device. A benefit of storing your notes in an electronic note-taking program or app is the use of tags—the multiple labels that you can give to the work you do. This can help in both the organization and the retrieval of the notes.

Preparation is also important in making sure your notes are short and understandable. If you have read what the professor assigned before class, you will be better prepared to judge what is important. You will also have a record of places where you need more information or where your understanding is strong and can use the information that is shared in class to fill in gaps or expand your knowledge. If you have questions after completing the readings, bring them to classmates, to class, or to the professor's office hours to help find the answers.

Notes From Readings

Most often your notes for a particular class will be a combination of those taken from a lecture or class discussion and those collected from class readings. Most professors prefer that students read course readings before the class in which it is discussed so these are generally the first notes that you will take on a particular topic. To gather information from textbooks and articles, you must begin with active reading.

Active Reading

This may be different from how you have read for school previously. In the past, you may have allowed the words to wash over you and picked out what you could use in class, papers, or exams. To be a writer in the social sciences and many other college courses, however, your methods of reading have to change from what they once were. We have to be able to engage with what we are reading—to remember it, analyze it, and understand it—and it is through engaging with reading that we expand our knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of how to write.

Your active reading should begin with a preview. There are several places in academic writing that you could examine to understand where the piece is going. These places should also be kept in mind when writing, as the same elements could be read in your own writing as a preview for interested readers.

If you are reading a book, the table of contents is always a good place to start. The table of contents provides the path the writer takes through writing and can also provide information on her theories or the types of evidence she used. Prologues, chapter summaries, and introductory chapters can similarly provide a reader with an explanation of the structure of the book as well as a preview or summary of what is in each chapter. Prologues and introductory chapters often also include some synthesis that may or may not be found in other places in the work.

With an article, the abstract provides much of the important preview information. If written correctly, the abstract can give the reader a basic

Figure 2.5

Abstract: For three decades, Oscar Lewis's subculture of poverty concept has been misinterpreted as a theory bent on blaming the victims of poverty for their poverty. This essay corrects this misunderstanding. Using a sociology of knowledge approach, it explores the historical origins of this misreading and shows how current poverty scholarship replicates this erroneous interpretation of Lewis's work. An attempt is made to remedy this situation by arguing that Lewis's subculture of poverty idea, far from being a poor-bashing, ideological ploy, is firmly grounded in a Marxist critique of capital and its productive contradictions. As such, Lewis's work is a celebration of the resilience and resourcefulness of the poor, not a denigration of the lower class and the cultural defenses they erect against poverty's everyday uncertainty.^a

^aHarvey, David L. and Michael H. Reed. 1996. "The Culture of Poverty: An Ideological Analysis." *Sociological Perspectives* 39(4):465–95.

outline of the entire document. A good abstract will include an introductory sentence (or two), a thesis sentence, and sentences on the methodologies and important findings, and can even include implications and suggestions for future research.

This abstract introduces the article with the thesis that Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty theory has been misinterpreted. It goes on to tell us that the article will correct this misperception through the "sociology of knowledge" theoretical perspective by exploring the historical origins of the theory and showing "how current poverty scholarship replicates this erroneous interpretation." The findings are that Lewis's work is "firmly grounded in a Marxist critique" and is a "celebration of the resilience and resourcefulness of the poor" (Harvey and Reed 1996:465).

Headings and subheadings are another useful way to preview an article, but if you are not already familiar with the topic, they can be difficult to follow. Often headings include terms or phrases explained within the body of the document and, therefore, may provide less information for someone who is not yet familiar with the terms. If the reader understands the headings, or if the writer has taken care to create clear and informative headings, these can be a useful road map. If not, it can also be useful to preview some of the vocabulary that could help you to understand what you are about to read and looking up the words you do not understand can also be helpful.

While it is always important to read an article in its entirety, the introduction, discussion, and conclusion sections can provide much initial information on what the writer intends to do, how she has interpreted the data, and what the data mean to her larger questions. This can provide a solid framework for the reading that follows.

In a textbook, there are a few other places you can go to get a preview of what you are about to read. Textbooks generally include a lot of summary information at the end. There may be discussion questions, a list of terms, or a summary. Textbooks also indicate big ideas and new words or concepts through off-set text boxes, bold words or paragraphs, or colored text. This provides the signal that it is something to pay attention to.

Once a preview has been conducted, the rest of the piece should also be read closely. Breaking the work down into some of the structural elements discussed above helps to fully understand what has been read. Remember that each section or paragraph is like its own small paper. It should include an introduction, a conclusion, and the body between them. The reader can also make a distinction between what is core material and what is elaboration. All the material should be read; however,

the core material is usually most important and should receive the most attention.

Identifying core material is also extremely important in highlighting or taking notes. You are most likely to need to return to the core material, rather than the elaboration; therefore, the core material is what should be saved. This core information is likely less than 10 percent of the entire document, and your highlighting, underlining, or note-taking should represent that.

Once you have the basic structure and the key ideas, you want to fill in the information that supports it. If there are steps, evidence, or other elaboration, you should go back to your main points and pull those out. You can summarize this information or include a bullet or two on it. You may want to create a separate list for vocabulary or other types of information that does not really fit the core or elaboration classification.

Notes on the reading can also be kept in the margins of books or on Post-Its or other sticky notes made especially for that purpose. Once you remove the notes from the actual reference, make sure that all information is referenced back to its original source.

A particular class assignment may tell you exactly what you should be looking for. Chapter 5 will give you some hints about doing a close reading of your assignment before completing your work. If you have a syllabus that outlines all your assignments in detail, check for the vocabulary words, concepts, and ideas mentioned in the assignment. The homework worksheet described in Chapter 5 includes some of the terms you might come across in an assignment and therefore what you might need to save in your notes. In addition, you should also consider recording the following annotations, depending on the nature of your assignment: important information, new information, answers to questions, elaboration of previous assignments, discussions or readings, and contrary or confirming information. Once you have identified the core and elaboration material, you can use one of the methods below to organize them.

Notes From Auditory Material

As described above, notes should primarily represent core material, whether it is from what you read, what you hear, or what you see. When someone is speaking, it can be difficult to judge what you should be writing and then to keep up and write everything that you will need. Therefore, you will need to pay attention to what is being said and how it is being said to figure out what to write.

First, and most importantly, if you have completed the reading before class, you will be able to listen for concepts and keywords from what you have read. This can provide clarity or elaboration for the notes you have already taken. You should create a new document with the notes from the lecture or video and you can then add them to your notes on the reading in a new document or review each group of notes separately.

In addition to words you may have picked up from the readings, there are other markers that you should pay attention to that indicate important information that you should record and retain. If the professor sets the stage for a list of items using bullets or numbers, you should keep the information in that sequence. If the professor presents contrasting information or makes a point and then follows it up with evidence, that information should be written down. The professor may also signify through words or tone that something is important or significant by speaking loudly, slowly, or using words like *important*, *essential*, or *significant*. Information can also be emphasized because they are written (on the board or PowerPoint), underlined, circled, or repeated.

As you record the information, try to write quickly, replacing words with symbols or shorthand where possible (see Appendix for examples of shorthand). You can also use your own abbreviations, but be sure to use words that you can understand or keep a key nearby to remind you of what you meant. Try to write as clearly as you can so the information is more easily retrievable when you have the time to do it.

Organizing Notes

Whether your notes are from a textbook or based on a lecture, how you record them can have an influence on your ability to find and recall them. You may choose to create your own system for taking notes or you might decide to use one of the methods described below. An individual's note-taking style is often a modification of a standard method that creates one that better suits your purposes. Those who are more advanced in their careers might even use more ethnographic methods (see Chapter 4) in their note-taking.

The Cornell Note-Taking system was published in 1962 in the book *How to Study in College* by Cornell University professor, Dr. Walter Pauk. It is the most well-known and widely used method for student note-taking. The method includes six R's: Record, Reduce, Recite, Reflect, Review, and Recapitulate. We will primarily focus on the first few as they are most relevant to writing.

The Cornell Note-Taking system organizes your notepaper into three different areas. Draw a horizontal line at about two inches from the bottom of the page. This is the summary area. Draw a second line vertically 2.5 inches from the left side of the page. To the left of this line is the cue or recall area, and to the right is the main notes area.

As you record, your notes should be focused on the main notes section. When you review your notes (ideally, the same day but no more than 48 hours later), use the cue area to write out questions or keywords that you can use to help you recall what is in the main notes area. Figure 2.6 is an example of this.

Following this extraction of review terms, you can summarize the information in the summary section at the bottom of the page. The Cornell structure also allows for quick review of notes as you can cover the main notes area and use the cue area to provide a clue help you recall what you have written.

There are several other note-taking methods that are useful for students. An outline format (see Chapter 3 for more information) can provide a very detailed summary of what you hear or see. It requires you to synthesize and organize the information and for this reason, many people will take notes quickly and then rewrite it into an outline later. In either case, your

Figure 2.6

What is sociology?	Sociology is the scientific study of people in groups
Who came up with the term sociology?	We credit Auguste Comte with coming up with the term Sociology
The definition of sociology and the person who came up with the term	

section headings should represent headings or subheadings in what you are reading or topics and subtopics in what you are hearing. Each of the smaller sections would represent main points or paragraphs within that topic or heading. This method is also useful because it can provide information about how the topics are structured in relationship to each other.

While much of our communication with each other has become fast moving and littered with grammar and spelling faux pas and our notes have become disorganized and forgotten, the space still exists for communication and record keeping in an intelligent and well-written format. This chapter represents the first step on your journey to becoming a better writer.

SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overview of the foundations of writing. We emphasized the following writing issues:

- How to organize the elements of a paper
- The concept of voice
- The writing of e-mails and formal letters
- Note-taking

In our first “Writing in Practice,” Professor Katz Rothman describes the process of writing and what it means to her as a scholar and a person. She uses a trip to Germany to frame a discussion of the importance of books, writing, and sharing what is written.

WRITING IN PRACTICE

by Barbara Katz Rothman

*Wie schrijft, die blijft.
Who writes, lives.*

I really believe that Dutch proverb—writing is a way of living beyond our own space and time. My sociological research consists mostly of book-length projects. One was translated into German and has brought me to Berlin pretty regularly. Berlin is a city so filled with its own history that one cannot make it down a street without stumbling across

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memorials—literally, there are “stumble stones” embedded in the sidewalks with the names of people who were taken off to die in concentration camps. A quick trip to pick up a bike map ends up leading to a sign telling you that Eichmann’s office was located on this spot. I became used to it, sighed, nodded, and walked on.

But the memorial that brought tears to my eyes, the one that truly made me stumble, was the book-burning memorial. In front of Humboldt University, at the law school no less, there is a memorial marking the spot where the Nazis burned piles of the books they found offensive. You stand on a square of thick glass in the plaza and look down into a small white room lined with empty white bookshelves. I stood there and cried—the books! It wasn’t enough they killed all those people; they had to kill their thoughts and their legacy. Of course they couldn’t actually kill the books. Bodies go up in flames once and for all, never to return—but books, books hide in all kinds of places around the world. I could order any one of those burnt books and have a copy in my mailbox next week. I’m tempted to go find the list of books burnt that day and do just that right now.

So for me, writing is central—the way we leave parts of ourselves behind and send parts of ourselves forth, the way we enter the larger ongoing human conversation. And writing isn’t just something I do—it’s something I teach. I work mostly with graduate students, people doing their first major original piece of writing, making their own first contributions to the conversations they have been studying. Helping those people find their own voices fills me with as much joy as anything life has to offer.

This book is teaching you the early steps of finding your own voice. Do think of your writing as your voice, the way that ideas flow through you to others. Think about your “tone” as you write. People pick up “tone” and “accent” from others—ever notice yourself struggling in a conversation not to copy a strong accent? Or try this fun exercise—read Dr. Seuss aloud to some willing kid for a while, and then pick up a novel or textbook and read it to yourself. You’ll probably find the singsong Seussian inflection bubbling inappropriately through. One lesson from that: Immerse yourself in the tone in which you want to write. To write academic papers, read a bunch. To write research reports, read them.

The other lesson to be had from thinking of writing as a voice in a conversation is to remember that writing is read as a voice is heard, that it exists in a meaningful way only when it is read. Share your writing—it improves with reading. Give a rough draft of a paper to a few friends and listen to their comments. Before you record that voice for posterity, before you submit it to an editor or to a grader, get it read by people who will let

you know what they are hearing in it. We all sometimes say things we don't quite mean, express ourselves awkwardly or badly—and others can help us see that. I don't—even now, having written a respectable small shelf full of books—submit a piece of writing without having a few sets of friendly eyes go over it for me first.

Write. Live. Read and share. Join the conversation.

—Barbara Katz Rothman, PhD, is a professor of sociology at Baruch College and the Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York.

NOTES

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2. DiPardo, Anne. 2000. “What a Little Hate Literature Will Do: ‘Cultural Issues’ and the Emotional Aspect of School Change.” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 31(3):306–32.
3. Graham, Sheilah and Gerold Frank. 1958 [1974]. *Beloved Infidel: The Education of a Woman*. New York: Bantam Books.