Reading for Knowledge: Retain the Information

Over the years, students and educators have developed different ways to *read for knowledge*. Sometimes just beginning at the first word of a text and reading through to the last word is not enough to retain new information.

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Most of the texts you read, whether they are books or articles or essays, are constructed or organized in similar ways. They all have, for example, a title. They all have an opening or introductory paragraph with a thesis statement and a closing or concluding paragraph with a concluding statement. The paragraphs in between are called *body paragraphs*, and they each have a **topic sentence** that states the **main idea** of the paragraph or what the rest of the paragraph will support, argue, discuss, or illustrate. Many texts also have headings and subheadings. These divide the text into sections and describe in a word, phrase, or clause the contents of each section.

Previewing: Get the Overall Picture

When you preview a text, you use your knowledge of how it is organized to get an overview. Think of an overview as a scan of the text to get the whole picture. You are trying to familiarize yourself with the text, to learn what it is about and what it contains.

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Your scan of the text should follow a plan:

Previewing Reading Materials

1. **Read the title of the article, essay, chapter in a book, etc.** *What does the title tell you about the contents? Does the title tell you anything about the writer's attitude towards the subject?*

2. **Search for any headings or subheadings.** *How has the writer divided the main topic into subtopics?*

3. **Look for any illustrations.** *Does the illustration appear to help explain the main topic? Does the choice of illustration point you to the idea that is complex and particularly hard to understand?*

4. **Read the opening paragraph of the work.** *Does the introductory paragraph contain a thesis statement (often the last sentence in the paragraph)? Does the writer tell what his or her attitude is towards the work?*

5. **Read the first sentence of each paragraph.** *Do these sentences appear to be topic sentences? Do they tell the focus or topic of the paragraph?*

6. **Read the entire closing paragraph.** *Does the conclusion sum up the main point and subtopics of the work? Does this paragraph function as a condensed version of the work?*

This process will give you an overview of the reading. You are becoming familiar with the text. You are learning what the **topic**, **thesis**, and **subtopics** of the reading are and how these are organized. Another way to see this process is to think of it as laying out the skeleton or the bare bones of the text. Later, you will add the details.

The *topic* is the subject of the reading or what the material is about. The *thesis* is the position or opinion the reading will take on the topic or subject. The rest of the essay will attempt to explain or persuade you that this position or opinion is valid. The *subtopics* are the way the thesis has been broken down into parts. Each subtopic will serve as the main idea of a paragraph or section of the essay.

If the topic of an essay is *racism*, the thesis will present a position on this subject. The thesis may be *that racism is a prejudice caused by unfounded fear of those unlike ourselves*. In this essay on racism, the subtopics may include (1) whom we consider to be unlike ourselves; (2) why we fear those unlike ourselves; and (3) how we can overcome the fear.

Here are the topic, thesis, and subtopics presented in a chart:

Topic, Thesis, and Subtopics

topic: *(the subject of the essay)*	racism
thesis: (*what the writer is going to say or argue about the topic*)	Racism is a prejudice caused by unfounded fear of those unlike ourselves.
subtopics: *(how the writer has broken down his thesis)*	(1) whom we consider to be unlike ourselves (2) why we fear those unlike ourselves (3) how we can overcome the fear

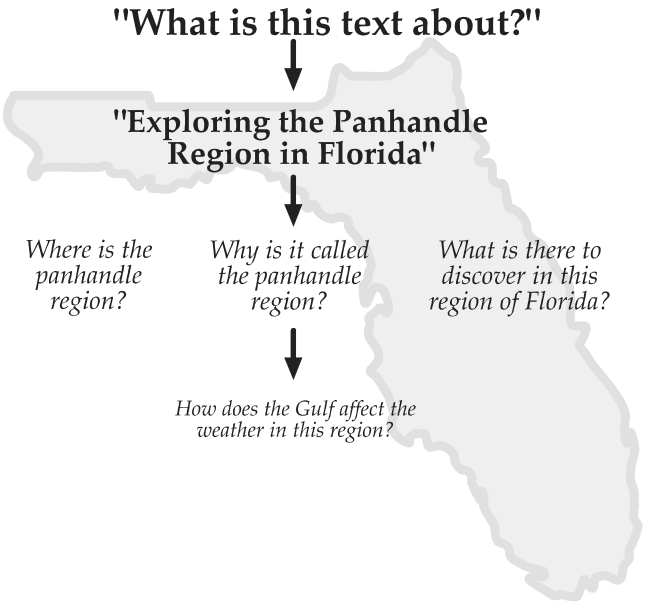
Previewing also helps you discover the writer's purpose: Is the writer attempting to explain something? To argue something? To describe something? To entertain? Knowing the writer's purpose, thesis, and subtopics helps you to organize and interpret information and ideas right from the start, so you read more efficiently.

Asking Questions: Organize Your Search

Now that you have gained an overview of your reading, you are ready to ask questions about the reading. Begin forming and asking the questions you think the text will answer. Since you have gotten a bare-bones outline of the text, you can ask specific questions. A question such as, "What is this text about?" will not help you organize your reading. You want to be as specific as possible, so you can find specific answers in your reading. For example, imagine that you are reading an article entitled "Exploring the Panhandle Region in Florida." You might ask the following questions: Where is the panhandle region? Why is it called *the panhandle region*? What is there to discover in this region of Florida?

Next, read the subheadings or topic sentences to form more in-depth questions. For example, if a subheading or topic sentence or paragraph focus were the *influence of the Gulf on the weather of the Panhandle region*, you would ask the question, "How does the Gulf affect the weather in this region?"

You are now ready to use your reading to look for answers to these well-formed questions. Keep a copy of these questions close by as you read. Refer to them to keep them fresh in your mind.



Actively Reading: Mark Key Points and Look for Answers

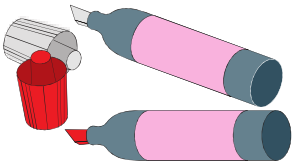
As you read, you look for answers to the questions you have developed. This process of asking questions and then looking for answers as you read will help you remember your reading.

The more actively you read, the more you will gain from your reading. There are many ways to read actively. Previewing and asking questions about the text are active ways to read. Two other important ways to read actively include the following:

- underlining key words and phrases in the text so you can easily locate them
- annotating your reading or writing comments in the margins

Underlining, Circling, and Highlighting: Emphasize Key Words and Phrases

Underlining, circling, or highlighting a word, phrase, or clause is a way of marking key language and important points in your reading. Unfortunately, underlining is misused by many readers. Many readers underline far too much. They underline whole passages and paragraphs. Some readers underline so much that the text is practically covered in yellow "highlighter." This misuse of underlining or marking the text occurs because they don't really understand the purpose of underlining, circling, and highlighting.



It is not permissible for you to make marks in certain books, such as school textbooks or library books, but you can make photocopies of pages for marking with margin notes, underlining, highlighting or other forms of notation, or you can use adhesive notes to mark important passages and make notes.

Underlining should be done to remind you of what is especially important within the text. There are three kinds of text you should underline: (1) important statements, (2) key terms and their definitions, and (3) helpful examples.

- Underline key words or phrases in the *big statements* in your reading. These include *topic sentences and sentences that sum up or make important claims or points*.

When you underline topic sentences, you set up a flag that waves to you as you reread. It says: "If you are looking for the paragraph that discusses this idea or subtopic, it is right here!" Take, for example, a topic sentence that could appear in the essay on racism used as an example above: "One reason why we fear those unlike ourselves is because we are narcissistic: we want to see ourselves in others and fear that if we cannot see ourselves in others, then our reflection has faded." This would be an important point in the essay and the reader should mark it or flag it, so he or she can quickly find it. However, it is a long sentence. Mark only those words or phrases you need in order to catch the point of a sentence or passage. Generally, you should mark only nouns that identify key ideas or the subject of the sentence and the part of the predicate or verb that develops those nouns. So, for example, the topic sentence above should be underlined or marked as follows:

> One reason why we fear those unlike ourselves is because we are narcissistic: we want to see ourselves in others and fear that if we cannot see ourselves in others, then our reflection has faded.

If this reason had been included in the essay's thesis statement and you had underlined it there, then you could simplify your underlining of this sentence.

> One reason why we fear those unlike ourselves is because we are narcissistic: we want to see ourselves in others and fear that if we cannot see ourselves in others, then our reflection has faded.

From the underlining above, you would be able to find when you return to or reread this essay that here is the paragraph that discusses *narcissism* as a *reason* for our fear of those *unlike* ourselves. So, underline only as much as you need in order to remind yourself where an important sentence, paragraph, or passage is located and what it is about.

- Underline *key terms or concepts and their definitions*.

When you underline key terms and their definitions, you throw up a flag to help you locate information and ideas you may need in the future. How many times have you come across a term in a textbook that had been

defined a page or so before? Did you have to hunt for the definition? Well, if you had marked it, you could scan only those parts that had been underlined and save yourself valuable time.

A good method for marking these is to circle a key term and underline its definition. Again, mark as few words as possible.

> Exposition is a kind of writing that explains something to readers through the use of facts, ideas, and analysis.

Five words are underlined to define the term exposition. In the above example, 19 words have been reduced to six. That is a good use of underlining and marking your reading.

- Underline the key words in an *example or illustration that clarifies a difficult concept*.

For many of us, examples help us understand difficult or complex ideas or concepts. When you find an example you would like to consult in order to refresh your memory about a concept, mark only its key words or phrases. An alternative to this method is to draw a line vertically along the passage in the margin of the page or to place a small adhesive note in the margin. Whatever method you use, remember: Your marks should help you easily find the example should you need to reread it.

Annotations: Putting Your Comments and Marks on the Page

Annotations are the comments you write in the margins of a text. Similar to underlining, annotating indicates places in the text so you can find them quickly. Annotating also has other benefits. When you write comments in the margins, you are, in a way, having a dialogue with the text. Therefore, annotating is a good way to read actively and stay alert and interested. Again, sticky notes with your comments may be applied to the pages in library books or school textbooks. The following are the types of comments you should include in your annotations:

- Annotate to clarify or interpret a passage and to show what a passage says.

In this type of annotation, you sum up or make clear to yourself a passage in as few words as possible. This type of annotation provides many benefits. First, you put the meaning of the passage into your own words, and thus make sure that you understand the passage. Secondly, annotating permits you to condense longer passages into just a few words.

- Annotate to show what a passage does.

In this type of annotation, you describe the function of a paragraph or passage. It answers the following questions: Does it state the text's thesis or one of its subtopics? Does it define a concept or term? Does it argue a point? Does it explain an idea or offer instruction? Does it offer an example or illustration?

- Annotate to express your opinion or ask questions.

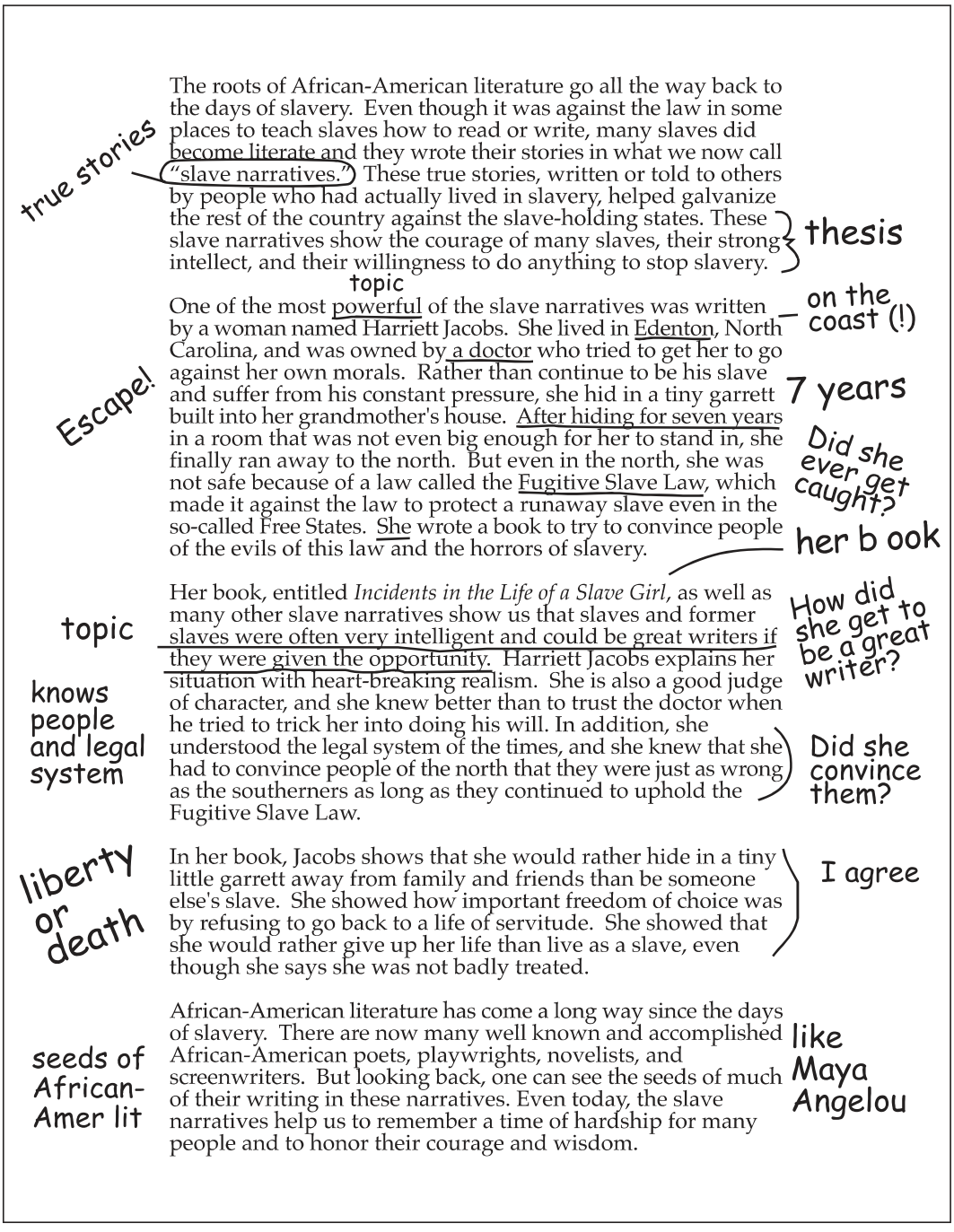
In this type of annotation, you express your own thinking on a paragraph or passage. Do not restrict your responses in any way. These are your comments—they are not to be judged as true or false, valid or invalid. Your responses may include answers to the following questions: Do you agree or disagree with a statement or opinion? Does the reading make you ask a question? Can you think of another example that supports or counters a point?

Annotating: Develop Your Own System

As you do more and more annotating of your reading, allow yourself to develop a system that works for you. For example, you may organize your annotations by putting your interpretations and descriptions of passages

in the left-side margins. Your own responses to the passages would then go in the right-side margins.

Study the example below and a reader's reaction to it.

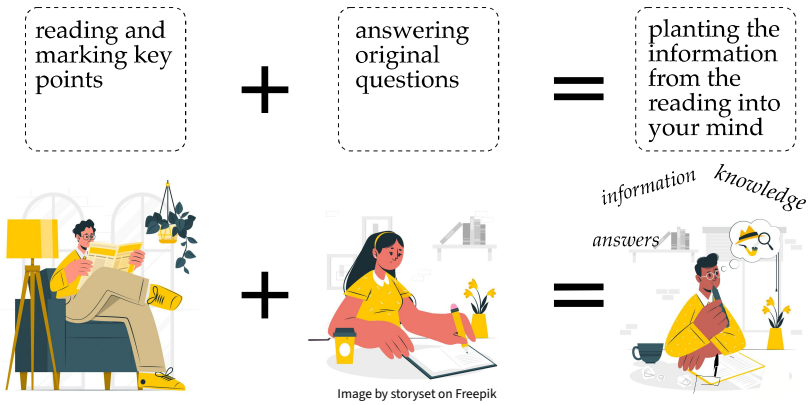


Answering Questions: Get the Most from Your Reading

When you have finished reading and marking key points, you can begin answering your original questions. You may find after reading that there are questions you should add, delete, or change. When you are satisfied with your questions, answer them. As you go through the process of actually answering your questions, you are helping to plant the information from your reading into your mind.

You may think it is a waste of time to actually *write out* the answers to the questions you have developed. It may seem as if just saying the answers to yourself is enough. However, you are more likely to remember your answers if you put them on paper.

When you actually go through the process of answering your questions, you are making the information a part of your working knowledge. One of the main reasons we forget what we've read is because we have never really made it a part of our memory. We often ask our memories to hold onto things that we haven't yet fully grasped. If you carry a letter very loosely in your fingers on a very windy day, the letter will most likely drop and blow away. So it is with things we read—they will drop easily from our minds if we never really get a good grasp of them. Using your reading to answer your list of questions is a good way to secure the information in your mind.



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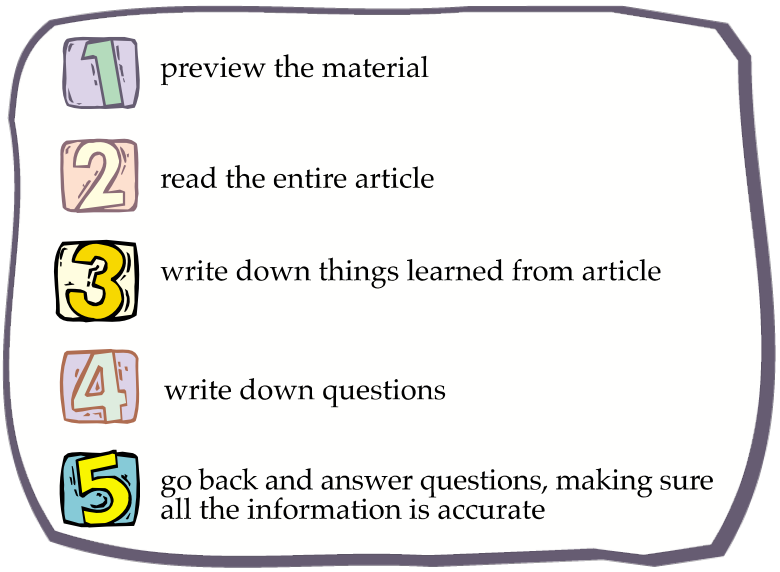
When you actually go through the process of answering your question, you are making the information a part of your working knowledge.

Rereading: Review to Remember

Another reading method that builds on previewing and answering questions about the material is to read your material more than once. This process involves a brief scan of the text followed by a complete reading. Questions that arise from the complete reading are then answered during the rereading stage. This method can be especially useful when you are reviewing material that you've already studied. Here are the steps to follow when using the *rereading* method:

- Preview the material as before, reading the title, subheadings (if there are any), topic sentences, and perhaps even the conclusion.
- Next, read the article from the first word to the last.
- Then write down what you think you learned from the article. You will most likely discover that you have bits and pieces of information. You may also have questions about how all those bits and pieces fit together.
- Now, write down questions you've formed from trying to remember what you learned.
- The last step is to go back and answer your questions, making sure all the information is accurate.



Reading for Meaning: Recognize, Paraphrase, and Summarize

You may find that many of your reading assignments are written at a comfortable level for you. Simply by previewing, answering questions, rereading, underlining, and annotating, you will be able to read for knowledge. In some instances, however, this will not be the case. The level of a reading assignment or text may challenge you. You may find it difficult simply to understand the literal, or the ordinary, meaning of a text. Fortunately, there are ways to help you shine a revealing light on a text. Ways to find and grasp the meaning in a complex text include the following:

- *Recognizing* whether a piece of writing is meant *to explain* or *to argue* and to persuade. The structure of an **expository essay**—an essay intended to explain something—differs from the structure of a **persuasive essay**—an essay intended to change readers' thoughts or behaviors. Knowing the structure of each will help you find and recognize the bigger statements from the smaller ones.

- *Paraphrasing* a piece of writing helps you translate a text into your own words. When you **paraphrase**, you rewrite a text using your own words and sentence structure. In short, paraphrasing turns the writer's language into your own.

- *Summarizing* a piece of writing helps you recognize its main points. If you can summarize accurately, then you have grasped the writer's thoughts and put them in a shortened form.


Recognizing


Paraphrasing


Summarizing

Exposition or Persuasion: To Explain or to Change

There are many types of writing you have no doubt read in your life; however, the two types you will most often read for knowledge are (1) exposition and (2) persuasion.

Exposition: Writing That Focuses on the Topic or Subject

Expository writing explains something to the reader by using facts and ideas to clarify or support the information. Another word for *expository* is "explanation." One kind of expository writing explains a topic or subject. Many school textbooks contain this type of writing. Most likely, you have read expository writing in your science, math, and composition textbooks. The purpose of these books is to instruct you in a subject of study. The first algebra or biology texts you studied introduced you to algebra or biology. They explained the basics. The algebra text explained how symbols are used to represent numbers, how to compute algebraic equations, and much more. The biology text instructed you in how living things are classified, how life reproduces and sustains itself, and much more. Advanced algebra and biology textbooks build on the instruction offered in the introductory ones.

Another kind of expository writing is the "how-to" article or book. You may have wanted to learn *how to* grow an organic garden or *how to* hit a tennis ball. How-to books may include ideas and theories. For example, a book on tennis may explain the physics of why a ball with topspin arcs over the net and then falls quickly and bounces high. Equally, it would then explain why a ball with underspin floats over the net and does not drop as quickly, after which it does not bounce very high after landing. The book would include these explanations as a way to elp its instruction in *how to* hit a tennis ball.

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The point to recognize and remember is that exposition does *not* attempt to change your mind or behavior—*it simply offers information and explanation*. Exposition focuses on its topic or subject. Writers of good expository writing, as you have learned in earlier English PASS books, do consider their reader. They want to choose the information,

examples, and language that will help their reader understand the subject. However, the writer of expository reading only makes choices in writing in order to reveal his or her subject.

In many instances, the reader may decide to change a belief or behavior after reading expository writing. For example, after reading in a biology book that human beings function best when their bodies process oxygen efficiently, you may decide to avoid smoke-filled rooms and air-polluted cities. However, this change in your behavior would not have been the purpose of a biology textbook. It would have been, instead, an example of how you used the knowledge you gained.

The Structure of Exposition: Organized to Explain

Being aware of the structure of expository writing will help you read more quickly and understand more fully. The structure of a piece of writing is the way in which it is organized. The structure includes the order in which the information or ideas are presented in the essay or article. It also includes the way the paragraphs are organized.

Expository writing is usually organized in a simple and direct way. The text written to explain a subject usually has its thesis in the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. The thesis usually contains a clue as to how the text is organized. The following are examples of introductory paragraphs and their thesis statements. The thesis statement has been bolded. Note that the organization of each article is expressed in its thesis statement.

> ***Article title*: "The Five Kingdoms of Living Things"**
>
> *Introductory paragraph*:
>
> All living things are divided into five major kingdoms: *plants*, *fungi*, *animals*, *protists*, and *monera*. What follows is a description of each category and the traits that place an organism in that category. Some groups of living things are so familiar that they are difficult to define. Have you ever thought of how you would define a plant? An animal? **Here are some scientific definitions of the five kingdoms of living things.**

Organization of article:

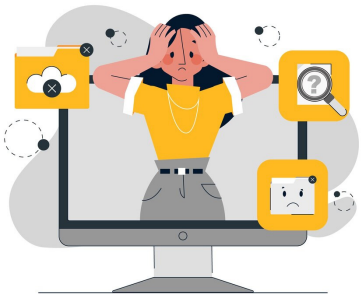
As the thesis statement suggests, each paragraph or section of this article will be devoted to one of the five kingdoms of living things. The five kingdoms are listed in the first sentence: plants, fungi, animals, protists, and monera. To grasp this article most efficiently, create a kind of mental file system in your mind. Create five files, each labeled with one of the five kingdoms. As you begin reading about each kingdom, place the information and ideas in the matching folder.

There will be occasions when you only want certain information from an article. If, for example, you were looking for a scientific definition for the protist kingdom, you would first find the thesis statement. After discovering that this article does in fact describe the protist kingdom, you would scan the article until you came to the paragraph or section focusing on this subtopic.

Often the topic sentence, or the sentence indicating the focus of a paragraph, will be the first or second sentence of a paragraph. For example, the paragraph describing the protist kingdom begins this way: "The protists are members of a kingdom that exists almost outside our awareness—they are microscopic organisms of fantastic forms and lifestyles."

The "how-to" text also usually has a straightforward structure. The thesis statement is often the last sentence in the introductory paragraph or section. Contained within the thesis statement will be a clue or phrase that tells the reader how the material is organized.

> *Article title*: **"Changing Your Posture for Energy and Health"**
>
> *Introductory paragraph*:
>
> Most of us begin standing on our own two feet and then walking between our first and second year of life. By now you've had a great deal of practice and experience holding yourself erect so you don't fall on your nose. In fact, you've had so much practice that most likely you take the way you stand (and walk) for granted. Most people, however, do not know the correct posture to use when standing. They slump.



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They let their bodies hunch to the ground, seeming to want to get a head start toward their final resting place. "So what?" you may ask. Did you know that by simply learning to use the right posture when standing (and walking), you can increase your energy and keep the muscles in your body more flexible and supple? **To correct your posture, you need to change the way you hold your head, your shoulders, your pelvis, and your knees.**

Organization of article:

As the thesis statement suggests, each paragraph or section of this article will be devoted to one of the four parts of the body integral for good posture. One paragraph or section will be devoted to holding the head, another to the shoulders, another to the pelvis, and another to the knees. Again, to gain a lasting understanding of this article, create four files, each labeled with one of the four parts of the body to be discussed.

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Persuasion: Writing That Focuses on the Reader

The persuasive essay attempts to change you in some way. It may try to change the way you *think* about an issue. For example, a writer may try to persuade you that computer courses at your school should be dropped in favor of more art courses. A persuasive essay may try to change your *behavior*. For example, it may try to persuade you to learn a foreign language or to stop watching so much television.

The persuasive essay attempts to move you by using two strategies. (1) It uses **logic** to convince us that a claim is true. (2) It also appeals to our emotions.

Logic: The Study of Reasoning

Logic is the study of reasoning. For many people, logic is one of those words and concepts they would just as soon leave to philosophers. But you have been using logic much of your life. For example, you notice that every time you ride an elevator more than 12 floors up, your ears pop. You conclude that if you ride an elevator more than 12 floors, then your ears will pop. In this example you have used a sample (all of the times you rode elevators) to draw a conclusion. Of course, you can only say that most likely your ears will pop the next time you take an elevator 12 floors. This kind of reasoning is called ***inductive reasoning***. It cannot provide you with absolute or certain conclusion. It can provide you with strong probabilities.

Besides inductive reasoning, there is another kind of reasoning: **deductive reasoning**. It begins with a pair of premises or statements.

(1) Michael Jordan is a basketball player.

(2) Basketball players are athletes.

(3) *Therefore, Michael Jordan is an athlete.*

This kind of structure is know as a *syllogism*. It consists of three statements: two premises or assumptions and a conclusion. The conclusion will be either true or false depending upon the two premises.

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Here is this syllogism again, but this time letters have been added to help you understand the way this kind of reasoning works.

A = B
(1) (Michael Jordan) is a (basketball player).

B = C
(2) (Basketball players) are (athletes).

A = C
(3) *Therefore, (Michael Jordan) is an (athlete).*

If A = B, and B = C, then A = C.

Knowing how inductive and deductive reasoning work will help you follow an argument. Recognizing inductive and deductive reasoning at work in an essay, you will be able to sort the pieces of an argument.

Appealing to Emotions: Move the Reader

No matter how sound the reasoning is in an argument, people may not be persuaded by a writer's claim: That is why a persuasive essay also must appeal to our emotions. A good example of the way appeals to our emotions work can be seen in a popular television commercial. In this commercial, a man stands surrounded by children who look starved. Any viewer would be hard pressed not to be touched by this scene. Imagine the difference if this commercial simply presented the man alone. He describes, but does not show, this scene. He explains that for pennies a day a child can be spared from starvation. Would you be moved? Which commercial would persuade you?

An essay about cities that expected great returns for having hosted the Olympics might include a description of areas of the cities that were supposed to gain new life but have never been improved. The description might illustrate boarded-up buildings, dangerous school buildings, and interviews with angry hotel owners.

Similarly, the essay proving that Michael Jordan is an athlete may include descriptions of Michael when he was making difficult shots. Perhaps his coach has been interviewed and offered testimony about Michael's contribution to the sport of basketball.

Many appeals to the readers' emotions are valid and responsible. Think of the powerful imagery in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech, *I Have a Dream*. Some, on the other hand, may exploit our emotions. An essay arguing that more bus routes should be added would be using unfair emotional appeal if it mentioned horrific car accidents to drivers whose areas were not serviced by bus routes.

When you read a persuasive essay, make a mental file for emotional appeal. Whether it is fair or exploitative, you will want to examine it separately and not let it blind you from the logical argument of the essay.

Following is an essay that combines both logic and emotional appeal. Notice that the first few words are familiar words to almost all Americans and help to create a feeling of shared community. The writer then uses a statistic to make her point and follows it with a personal account of her own experience. Then at the end she reiterates or restates her thesis statement. This kind of essay is often referred to as a personal essay because it tells about a situation or event from one particular person's perspective.

Unavailability of Health Care Is Sickening

by Kitty Gretsch

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—in this country we assume these are basic rights, but recently I've learned how none of these things matter unless, first, I have my health. Reportedly, there are 48,610 uninsured people in the county where I live and many more who are underinsured. As a free-lance writer, I'm one of those who has no health insurance. Health care should be another of our basic rights, and it should be available to all.

Many artists, writers, and self-employed people I know are in the same position as I am. We often talk about how scary it is not to have insurance. In Florida, 75 percent of the uninsured are employed but earn low wages. One member of my circle of friends died this year, in

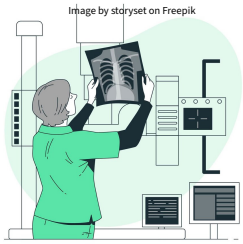
part because he had no health insurance. He feared going to the doctor, knowing his chest pain would be a hugely expensive ordeal.

This is going to be expensive, very expensive.

Lucky for me, my general practitioner found a way to offer me health care when I had no health insurance during college. She and her staff let me pay in installments for appointments, and they even supplied me with coupons for generic medicines. I am a worrier, and the peace of mind this afforded me helped me stay healthy.

One of my scariest times as an uninsured person occurred last fall when I discovered mysterious lumps in my neck and arms. Because I am a cancer survivor, my doctor and I are always wary. My doctor felt I needed to see a specialist, but she was concerned about the cost.

"This is going to be expensive," she told me. "Very expensive." She scheduled me for tests at a local hospital that afternoon. But once I got there, I couldn't even get in. No one else was in the huge waiting room, but I was informed that hospital policy forbade them to see me until I showed proof of insurance or the ability to pay up front. All I needed was admittance on an outpatient basis for blood work and an X-ray, and these services totaled more than $100.



reading the x-ray

As it happened, I had a check in my pocket for some free-lance writing, but I was still $20 short. So I sat alone in that cavern of a room as some talk show barked down at me from a wall monitor for half an hour as I called friends and family for help. Finally, my mom came through with the cash.

It takes luck to get help outside the system.

My tests came back negative and the X-ray clear, but the lumps got larger and appeared in more places. I couldn't stop worrying. My doctor contacted a health network for indigent patients, but months passed and we heard nothing. My lumps grew bigger still.

Eventually, a friend of mine helped me find a hematologist-oncologist who sees people who have very little money. The doctor's staff readily agreed to set up a payment plan. They never suggested I should have gone without treatment.

He and his physician's assistant put an end to my months of anxiety when they explained the lumps in my neck and arms were normal lymph nodes, possibly swollen from excessive amounts of caffeine. I started drinking more water and less coffee. Ironically, even though I had the lumps for more than eight months, they disappeared within two weeks. My visit to this doctor and his expert staff brought me a long-missed sense of well-being.

Of course, I'm grateful for loving friends and family and for a sensitive medical community. And I have been just plain lucky. But what happens next time? Will my luck run out? And what about others who haven't been able to get medical attention?

Without some kind of universal health care policy, too many of us are at risk.

Now, that you've read the essay once, go back and reread it. Did you confuse any words the first time you read it? For instance, did you read "country" instead of "county" in the first paragraph? What did you learn about the writer? Did her conversational style of writing help you sympathize with her situation? Were there any words that you needed to look up in the dictionary?

Persuasion: Organized to Change the Reader

Like the expository essay, the persuasive essay has its own structure or organizing plan. And, like the expository essay, the persuasive essay often contains its thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph. However, on occasion, a writer chooses not to present the thesis at the front of the essay. Sometimes it may appear in the last third of the essay. If you don't find it in the introductory paragraph or even second paragraph, then look towards the end of the essay.

The thesis statement of the persuasive essay is unique. The following are a sampling of thesis statements from persuasive essays. What do you notice about them?

Thesis: School uniforms should be mandatory because they promote equality on the school grounds.

Thesis: School uniforms should not be required because they stifle individuality.

Thesis: Universal health care should be made available to everyone.

Thesis: High school students should not be allowed to work because it teaches them to be adults before their time.

Thesis: High school students should be encouraged to seek part-time employment because work helps young people learn responsibility.

Thesis: Our school district should not go to a year-round system because the summer is a time for families.

The persuasive thesis usually makes a forceful statement. Notice that the language contains *shoulds* and *should nots*, although this is not always the case. Some of these thesis statements also contain a *because* clause. The statement includes the reason for the claim.

After the introductory paragraph or section, many persuasive essays address opposing arguments. For example, the thesis listed above supporting school uniforms would raise and argue against the notion that wearing uniforms takes away individuality. Similarly, the thesis on year-round schooling would raise and argue against the notion that students forget much of their learning during the long summer vacation. During this section of the essay, the writer refutes the logic of the opposition. The writer may show that the inductive or deductive reasoning used by the opposition is not valid or not true.

After doing away with opposing arguments, the essay presents evidence in its favor. So, for example, the thesis on supporting school uniforms would present studies that show there is less violence in schools with uniforms. The essay against year-round schooling would present evidence that students need long breaks to refresh their minds. During this section of the essay, the writer uses deductive and/or inductive reasoning to make the case.

The more you are able to predict the organization and content of an essay, the more you will be able to set up a mental filing system and collect the information and ideas.

Paraphrasing: Reword the Writing

When you paraphrase, you put the meaning of a piece of writing into your own words. Of course, you have been paraphrasing for a long time. Just think of the occasions when someone younger than yourself has asked you to explain what somebody said in a movie or book. Or think of a time when someone asked you to "translate" a difficult passage in a textbook. Or think of a time when someone responded to you by saying: "I don't quite understand—can you say that in a different way?"

Paraphrasing, however, is not the same as summarizing. Whereas a **summary** is a shortened version of a text, a paraphrase includes all the main points *and* details. *Nothing is left out*.

Paraphrasing is a good way to turn a complex and difficult piece of writing into a form you can understand. Paraphrasing is also used in essays and articles to present someone else's ideas or information in your own words. However, always tell your reader when you are paraphrasing. A simple, "In his essay, Smith says that…." Or, "Hernandez argues that…." In addition, include the necessary documentation, which you will learn in the unit on writing.

To paraphrase, replace key words in the texts with synonyms or words that mean the same thing. The synonyms you choose should be words you understand and are comfortable using. Take, for example, this notable sentence from the Declaration of Independence:

> We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal….

To begin your paraphrase, restate this sentence into your own words, making sure to retain the meaning.

> The people of the United States of America believe that the following statements are valid for all times: every person is born with the same rights.
>
> "We" = The people of the United States of America
>
> "hold" = believe
>
> "these truths to be self evident" = that the following statements are valid for all times

"that all men" = every person

"are created equal" = is born with the same rights

After changing the words, in the next step change the structure of the sentence. In other words, rearrange the clauses, phrases, and/or words of the sentence containing your translation.

That every person is born with the same rights is a statement that the people of the United States of America believe to be valid for all times.

Summarizing: Condense and Capture the Main Point

The summary is similar to the paraphrase in one way: Both take the original work and turn it into something useful for you, the reader. However, whereas the paraphrase included all of the main points and details, the summary condenses, or shrinks, the original work down into only its most important or key points. If you can summarize accurately, then you have grasped the writer's thoughts and put them in a shortened form.

The summary can vary in length from a sentence to an entire page. How long your summary is will depend on your purpose for writing it. In some instances you are summarizing for your own information. For example, you may be doing research on a topic. As you read articles, essays, book chapters, or even whole books, you will want to record a summary of each. You will then be able to use your summaries to remind you of the focus of each source. And, of course, doing a summary on your sources tells you whether you have truly understood them. This type of summary will depend on the source. If the source has many main points, your summary will probably be a paragraph or more. If the source, however, has only one or a few main points and is mostly examples, your summary may only be a sentence or two.

In some instances, you will use a summary in an essay or article you are writing. You may use the summary to report the findings of a study related to your topic or a writer's opinion or thesis on your topic. When presenting a summary of someone else's work, always tell your reader by using a simple introductory phrase such as "To summarize Bergen's article,…. " Or, "In her article, Samuels argues that…." In addition, include the necessary documentation, which you will learn in the unit on writing. Generally, a summary used for these purposes will be brief—from a sentence to a short paragraph.

Use the following steps to develop a summary:

1. **If there is a single thesis statement, circle or underline it.** *(Be sure to use a photocopy or adhesive notes if you are using a school textbook or library book.)*

2. **Next to each paragraph, write a word or phrase that describes what the paragraph says.** *This should sum up the paragraph's content—its information or ideas.*

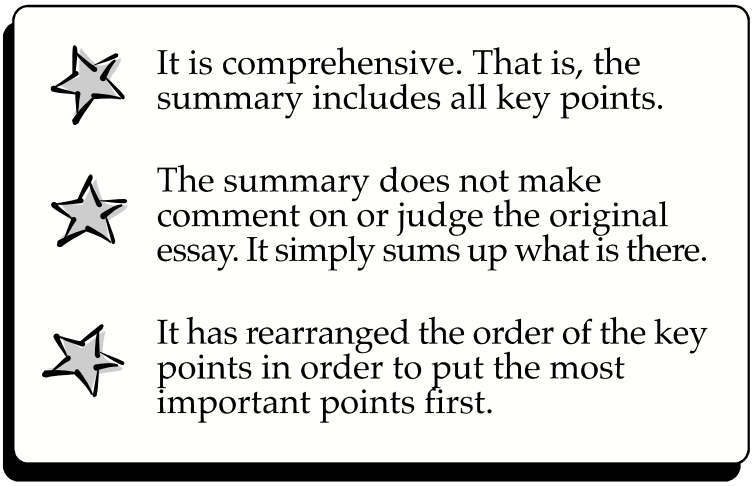
3. **Next to each paragraph, write a word or phrase that describes what the paragraph does.** *Does the paragraph continue a point made in the previous paragraph? Does the paragraph introduce a new idea or subtopic? Does it provide examples or illustrations? Does it define a key term?*

4. **Go back through your notes in the margins.** *Ignore examples or illustrations. Collect those that refer to main points or important subtopics. Turn them into a sentence or paragraph.*

For example, the following is a summary of the article about teen smoking from pages 69-70:

> The writer of "Real Rebels Don't Smoke" states that it is difficult to stop smoking once you've started, and therefore teens should not start in the first place. The article also gives several reasons for not smoking, including better health, saving money, and being in control of your life and your future; smoking doesn't help teens look more adult and only makes depression worse. Those teens who do smoke should quit now, according to this article, and the ones who don't smoke should serve as good examples.

Study the shape and features of the summary above. Note the following features:



Below is the summary reprinted, sentence by sentence. Analysis follows in italics.

The writer of "Real Rebels Don't Smoke" states that it is difficult to stop smoking once you've started, and therefore teens should not start in the first place.

> *The first sentence of the summary is the thesis statement of the source. Notice that this sentence works as a topic sentence of the summary. The rest of the paragraph should focus on this topic sentence, as is true of the relationship of all topic sentences and paragraphs.*

The article also gives several reasons for not smoking, including better health, saving money, and being in control of your life and your future; smoking doesn't help teens look more adult and only makes depression worse.

> *The summary has rearranged the order of the key points. The first point above actually came after the second point in the source. However, because it is the most important supporting point, the summary has moved it. This phrase points back to the first sentence of the summary and creates coherence in this paragraph. Your summary should read well, not like a list of sentences that do not relate to one another.*

Those teens who do smoke should quit now, according to this article, and the ones who don't smoke should serve as good examples.

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he other two, and least supportive points are then presented.

Again, note that this paragraph reads like a well-written paragraph, complete with a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and transitions. Even when you are writing a summary, you should write well.

The Dictionary: A Tool for Readers

When reading complex material, you may come across words that you don't know. This often stops readers right in their tracks. Sometimes we may understand a word by the context, but other times we need to look it up in a dictionary. It's often useful to keep a vocabulary journal nearby while you're reading. When you come across a word you don't understand, jot it down. You can stop and look it up immediately or wait until you've read the entire article, essay, or chapter. It will help if you write the meaning down in your journal and try to think of other contexts for the word.

There are many types of dictionaries. When you were a child, you probably saw picture dictionaries at school. Many computer programs come equipped with a spell checker and a **thesaurus**, handy tools for the writer. But for the reader, a dictionary is one of the best tools for comprehension. A compact dictionary is quite often satisfactory, but a trip to the library may open your eyes to what a dictionary can really offer.

A dictionary is a key to words. It gives definitions, origins of a word, and pronunciations. A dictionary will tell you if a word is a noun, verb, or some other part of speech.

A dictionary may offer other information as well. For instance, a universal, **unabridged dictionary** may provide weights and measures in both the English system and the metric system. It may contain a crossword puzzle dictionary, a bad speller's dictionary for especially troublesome words, a rhyming dictionary, and a manual style which is helpful for all kinds of writing. A dictionary quite often will tell you the origin of a word, such as whether it comes from French, Greek, or Latin. Another interesting aspect of the dictionary includes the lists of words associated with a prefix. For instance, the *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* has 12 pages of lists for words beginning with "non."

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While a good dictionary is an essential tool for writers for many reasons, readers will find that the most useful part of the dictionary is usually the definitions.

Research: Unlocking the Information Vault

Research is a term that sometimes scares people. It makes them think of long, boring papers on topics about which they have little interest. In fact, research is one of the most valuable tools we have for improving our lives, whether it entails scientists doing research to find a cure for deadly diseases or simply the secretary of your school club researching the perfect class trip.

Researching can take many forms. You might try tasting several different types of flavored mineral water to decide which you like best. That is research! You might ask several of your friends which of two movies is the best before you decide what you'll do on Friday night. That is also a form of research. In addition to asking your friends about a movie, you might read reviews in newspapers or magazines or even on the Internet. You might watch a television special about the making of the movie. All of these things will help you make up your mind whether or not you want to spend your money on a particular movie.

Researching a topic for school or a project for your boss at work may entail a trip to the library, as well as some exploration online.

Follow these steps in research:

- Before you look in the library or on the Internet, write down all the questions you could possibly have about your chosen topic. Your research may not turn up all the answers, but it will give you a good base to begin your search.

- The first source for most research is reference material, including encyclopedias, dictionaries, and almanacs. But there are many more sources of important and interesting material, including newspapers, magazines, books, and people. To find relevant material in the newspapers, you must first have the dates of the events or people you wish to research. Newspaper articles will often provide you with the facts and opinions of those involved with your topic. Magazine articles will provide more in-depth analysis or offer more arguments in favor of or opposing one position or another. One way to find material in

newspapers and magazines is to search the *Reader's Guide to Periodicals*. This is a set of reference manuals with major newspaper and magazine articles listed by periodical, topic, and author.

Research papers don't have to be boring. Suppose you needed to research the Vietnam War for a history class. You could simply look in an encyclopedia and copy down the information about the war that you found there. But you probably wouldn't learn the material very well.

However, if you looked up the topic Vietnam in your library's card catalog or online catalog, you would also find whole books about the topic. Once you've found a book about the topic, go through the table of contents and see what chapters might apply to your area of interest. In the back of the book, you might also find something called a *bibliography*, or a listing of other books about the same or similar topics. Not all books have bibliographies, but many do, and they can be a useful source of information.

In this case, you might also check your phone book for veterans organizations under the special government sections of the phone books, or ask friends if they know people who were directly involved with the war and interview them.

Research is made up of many things: life experience, interviews with others, surveys, and written material, including reference materials such as encyclopedias, as well as books, diaries, newspapers, magazines, or Internet articles.

Reading Imaginative Texts: Gain Inner Knowledge

It's easy to understand why we need to be able to read textbooks, manuals, and how-to articles. For instance, how would we ever figure out how to do a spreadsheet on our computer if we didn't have computer manuals, and how would we learn how to figure out what to tip the waiter in a restaurant if we didn't have math textbooks to teach us percentages? How-to articles are valuable for everything from buying the perfect running shoes to cooking a stuffed pumpkin.

But why do we need literature, short stories, novels, poetry, and drama? How does reading this kind of material benefit us?

Well, there are many answers to that question. For one thing, reading literature can provide a wonderful vacation for us from our everyday lives. We can spend an hour or so on the moors in *Wuthering Heights*. We can experience the love of a sister and a good friend, as well as the hardships of a cruel marriage, in *The Color Purple.* In addition to taking us out of our own lives while we are reading, literature also helps us to discover the inner lives of other people and encourages us to examine what's going on inside our own hearts and minds.

We might never have been hungry, but if we read *Oliver Twist* we can learn to sympathize with those who have little to eat. We can understand why people do the things that they do, and we can imagine and wonder about what we would do in their circumstances.

In other instances, literature can show us something in a fresh, new light. Or it can connect us to other people—people we've never seen or met, by letting us know how they feel about something. Poetry is especially useful for allowing us to know exactly how someone feels. Since feelings are often hard to describe, the poet uses many devices including rhythm and imagery, drawing pictures with words, to help readers understand. When we read a poem we might not always know in our heads what it means, but we can feel what it means in our hearts.

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Sometimes reading literature is easier than reading other kinds of material because an interesting or funny story has engrossed us, but other times reading literature seems harder. Literature can be difficult to understand because it deals with the lives and feelings of individual people, and we all know how complicated that can be at times. Sometimes a piece of literature needs to be read several times in order to really understand what the writer is saying. Other times, it may not be necessary to understand exactly what the writer meant but merely to feel the mood that he or she is trying to convey.

Because writers of the imagination often try to use language in new and innovative ways, you may need to have a dictionary handy when you read. Make a note of words whose meanings you don't understand, then look them up. Try to put a synonym, or word that means the same, in their place as you reread the text.

The more you read literature or imaginative writing, the more you will enjoy it. Like anything, it is a skill that you develop with practice.