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## ABSTRACT

Substantially updated for today's world, this second edition offers chapters on 12 different categories of writing, each of which is briefly introduced with a definition, notes on appropriate writing strategies, and suggestions for using the book to locate topics. Types of writing covered include description, comparison/contrast, process, narrative, classification/division, cause-and-effect writing, exposition, argumentation, definition, research-and-report writing, creative writing, and critical writing. Ideas in the book range from the profound to the everyday to the topical--e.g., describe a terrible beauty; write a narrative about the ultimate eccentric; classify kinds of body alterations. With hundreds of new topics, the book is intended to be a resource for teachers and students alike. (NKA)

# What Can I *Write* About?

ED 470 655

## 7,000 Topics for High School Students

CS 511 615

### Second Edition

### Revised and Updated

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# **What Can I Write About?**

**7,000 Topics for High School Students**

**Second Edition**

**Revised and Updated**

**Based on the Original by David Powell**

**National Council of Teachers of English  
1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096**

Staff Editors: Kurt Austin, Zarina Hock, Tom Tiller

Book Design: Tom Jaczak

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# Acknowledgment

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We are deeply grateful to David Powell for creating the first edition of this book more than two decades ago. Although we have brought the twenty-first century into the book, his framework and many of his

original ideas remain. It is for this reason that we have retained David Powell's preface to the first edition and most of his introductory comments to individual chapters.

# Preface to the First Edition

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The question all composition students ask—“What can I write about?”—is answered more than 7,000 times in this volume. The teacher in search of assignments can simply glance down any page of a desired category of writing and see countless ideas spring forth. Appeals are made throughout the book to a comprehensive range of interests, knowledge, experience, feelings, and thoughts; there is an abundance of “something for everyone.” Furthermore, mind being limitless, these topics passed on from teacher to students should suggest to all students (not just the inquisitive or imaginative ones) still other ideas they can identify with, many of which they may

come up with on their own. Certainly one of the first aims of teaching is to bring students to self-discovery, and it is no small accomplishment if, by looking outside, students are brought to look within themselves.

Notes heading each of the chapters in *What Can I Write About?* briefly define the different kinds of writing, tell how to write them, and indicate how the book may be used to locate topics suited to them, leaving little need for formal classroom instruction. The best (and perhaps the happiest) teacher may be the one who has the least to say.

*David Powell*

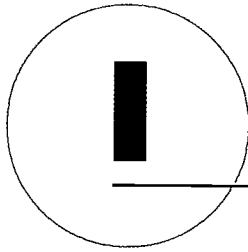
# Foreword

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Revising and updating a successful book is no easy matter. In the first edition of this book, David Powell gave us a rich array of topics—some apparently simple but surprisingly complex and some so unusual as to make us sit up and think about a myriad of related subjects—topics so varied that it was difficult to know which ones to delete when the Acquisitions editors, Kurt Austin and Tom Tiller, and I began updating the book. We knew that teachers loved that first edition and used it enthusiastically. We also knew, however, that many dynamic changes had taken place in the United States since the book was written—that our classrooms, our demographics, and our universe are all radically different from what they were a few decades ago. Educational concepts of literacy, of inquiry, and of making meaning have also

widened and shifted. Our challenge, then, of was to mirror here the diversity, the interests, the media, the technology, and the issues that so profoundly affect our students' lives today. We have captured these in some measure; indeed, in some cases a topic appears in more than one chapter, thus reminding the user that there are many ways to approach the same subject. Now it is for you, the teacher, and you, the student, to take these topics and genres as starting points and to go from there to discover and explore ideas that will intrigue you; that will fire your imagination; and that will help you write well because you are engaged in a meaningful enterprise.

*Zarina M. Hock, Director of NCTE Book Publications & Senior Editor*



# DESCRIPTION

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## What Description Is

For our purposes here, we might say that to describe something—object, emotion, thought, event, and on over the horizon of human experience—is to surround it with words, much the way lines shape the subject of a drawing. The Greek root of the word “scribe” is instructive. It means to scratch, or sketch an outline. Often, in description, that implied lightness of touch can be important. We should seek to surround our subject—not so much to capture it (and least of all to annihilate it) as to liberate it, let it stand forth in a new fullness and freshness. Descriptive writing can free its subject from itself, from the obscurity of experience, and in the same stroke bear it to a life larger than the words surrounding it. The words should not draw attention to themselves; rather, they should scratch a descriptive network so tough and resilient it can spring the subject free of its own description. But description can also come from piling rich detail after detail, yet never getting so carried away that your description becomes what critics call “purple prose.” However you paint your picture, the details make it come alive.

## How to Write Description

Good descriptive writing is first of all concrete. Search out the telling detail, the essential characteristic, then nail it down. But the warning above applies here as well: the subject must be nailed down without stabbing it to death. We are not out to pin dead dry bugs to a board. Keep them alive. Keep them moving. This is best done with verbs and nouns. When we run on to a chasm between the verb and

the noun, we can throw an adjective like a lifeline, or a bridge, between the two, always remembering, though, that such connections are seldom strong enough to support a sentence.

Look, for example, at N. Scott Momaday’s opening description of a plain in Oklahoma, in “The Way to Rainy Mountain” (first published in *The Reporter*, 1967). His words vividly capture the landscape with its “brittle and brown grass,” and “its writhing, steaming foliage.” As he paints his picture, you become the observer in this landscape: “Your imagination comes to life,” says Momaday even as he brings the scene to life. The topics offered below encourage the students to use their imaginations. Personal experience, books, videos, and the Internet are among the texts that students will look at as they explore a topic. Let the imagination run free; but finally mold it through carefully chosen words.

## Locating Subjects for Description

Description is clearly one of the broadest kinds of writing. Just about any subject listed in this book could inspire a descriptive passage. Descriptive writing is, by way of example, sometimes fundamental to creative and narrative writing. This would, then, be an appropriate time to begin to regard this book as a whole and to move, by directing the assignments to students, freely from part to part. The subjects in the present chapter will be productive for descriptive writing exercises of all kinds, but the book strives to become, as a whole, a descriptive network not unlike the one we have described above, outlining, however lightly, the power and possibility of writing.

### Nature and Natural Settings

#### **Describe:**

a morning rain  
snow falling on a city street  
a rainstorm over the ocean  
sleeping in a tent in the woods  
the desert by day  
the desert by night  
outer space  
a fallen tree, dead or still growing  
the wilderness next door  
the wilderness in the garden  
a blend of mist, geese, sky, and water  
the spirit, atmosphere, and tone of a natural place  
how the earth looks to someone from outer space  
a sunflower  
a muddy road  
walking beans  
detasseling  
weeding a garden  
gathering firewood  
the center of a cyclone  
a view of Mount Kilimanjaro or Mount Fuji  
running rapids  
an apple tree, a cherry tree, a chinaberry tree, a mulberry tree, a banyan tree  
a mangrove swamp  
a bamboo grove  
a coral reef  
the Everglades  
April showers  
March winds  
the Grand Canyon, perhaps by concentrating on its colors, the order of description determined by the change of colors with the season  
the natural scenes seen by Native Americans in North America before the Pilgrims arrived (or before the early explorers arrived)  
some natural object that suggests something else or someone else  
“my territory”  
something sight unseen  
“under the sun”  
a school walk in the mountains, slippery with rain  
a part of (or something on) the Mississippi as Mark Twain saw it  
the landscape as seen from a descending parachute  
a mountaintop as seen from it  
a mountaintop as seen from the ground  
a branch of madder  
the “roof of the world”  
a pre-dawn morning  
“down-under” skies  
fire on the water  
a lonely mesa  
a watering hole  
a Peruvian landscape  
a sunset on the river  
a natural bridge  
a dust storm  
a tornado approaching  
the dark side of the moon  
the surface of Mars  
ice thawing on a pond  
sledding  
a windstorm  
a place named Windy  
a sun-pounding day  
the call of the Rocky Mountains  
the lure of the sea  
treacherous waters  
a path off the trodden path  
signs and seasons  
the sun or moon as a rider of the sky  
the beginning of the world  
the world as split open and seen from the inside  
shadowy, mysterious trails  
an approaching storm  
a rainbow of flowers  
dandelion season  
walking in the rain  
a road not taken  
catching the dawn  
catching a falling star  
“my woods”  
a volcanic eruption  
a wildfire  
bringing the country to the city  
the little picture in nature  
the big picture in nature  
a winter wonderland  
redwood trees  
infinity as evidenced in nature  
color and light in nature  
a snow in May  
coming to life in the spring  
sand castles  
riding in mist  
an early snow/a late snow  
first monsoon rain

the desert after a rainstorm  
 a tropical storm  
 a sunny day  
 a smiling sky  
 winds that don't let up  
 tides  
 the "your land" part of "This Land Is Your Land"  
 the ending of the day  
 a catwalk over a rockwall canyon, over thundering water  
 an idyllic setting that conveys a certain mood  
 a setting with the title of a famous book (such as *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*)  
 the quality of a natural setting by way of some aspect of it  
 unexplored territory that is terrifying  
 the outdoors taken inside  
 jogging on a beach  
 the most beautiful sunset you've ever seen  
 the view from atop Mount Rainier (or any other mountain)  
 the grandeur of Mount Everest  
 the Earth as "a little island of Creation amid the circumambient Void"  
 the Earth, as approached via spaceship by friendly extraterrestrials  
 vegetation growing through the cracks of an abandoned house  
 Iguazú Falls (bigger than Niagara Falls)  
*Where the Sidewalk Ends* (name of children's book)  
 pleasure gardens  
 country roads  
 the view from a hilltop overlooking a great city  
 an artificial environment that intrudes on a natural setting  
 magnificent treasures or scenery available to the beachcomber  
 the same scene today contrasted with that seen by another writer years ago  
 snow in the forest (as if you are there in it)  
 a natural world "charged with the grandeur of God" (G. M. Hopkins)  
 a honeycomb (as seen scientifically and then as seen nonscientifically)  
 some natural object as for someone who has never seen one (say, a tree or a certain kind of cloud)  
 "the Pleiades in a silver row"  
 a natural setting *beyond* the commercial description of it  
 a natural setting as seen by a microscopic eye  
 the indifference of nature  
 an everyday occurrence in nature  
*Where the Wild Things Are* (name of children's book)  
 a small island in a huge, rough sea

## Creature Life

### **Describe:**

a litter of newborn puppies  
 a slug moving on the sidewalk  
 an eel swimming  
 a shark eating  
 the biggest snake  
 spiders swinging from their threads  
 cockroaches scurrying for cover  
 a home where the buffalo roam  
 butterflies/fireflies by the thousands  
 mosquitoes in Paradise  
 circus animals  
 an ant with a grain of sugar  
 an animal that eats humans  
 a fox seeing a movement in the grass  
 a nest of field mice  
 a grouse running  
 a chicken coop  
 the caw of a crow  
 birds at a birdfeeder  
 a grizzly bear with its cubs  
 an ant colony  
 fish in an aquarium  
 a bloated tick  
 a bird feeding its young  
 a trick pony  
 otters playing on a riverbank  
 a water bird prying open a shell  
 a dragonfly  
 a grasshopper jumping a bumblebee gathering pollen  
 a gorilla eating a banana  
 a squirrel burying a nut  
 a family of chimpanzees grooming one another  
 geese in flight  
 a duck landing on a lake  
 two lion cubs playing  
 a bird building a nest  
 a house cat stalking a bird  
 a mother bird defending its nest  
 a hummingbird feeding from a flower  
 a cattle roundup  
 wild mustangs  
 animals fleeing from the enemy (man or beast)  
 the flight of an eagle  
 weightless birds resting on reeds  
 a homeless, hungry dog  
 Texas or Alaska mosquitoes  
 a snapshot of a beloved pet

## 4 What Can I Write About?

insects seeking sanctuary from humans  
a praying mantis praying  
flamingos in flight  
a whale leaping into the air  
a bird colony  
a civilization of insects in one room  
the path of a turtle across the road  
an endangered species  
a walking fish  
animals in battle to the death  
animals fleeing from a fire  
a Yellowstone bear hunting food  
a dog that is the subject of a Beware-of-the-Dog sign  
an animal (or an animal scene) in a medieval bestiary  
the tiger as an image of awesomeness  
a household dominated by pet cats or dogs  
a civilized, almost-human, animal  
gerbils jockeying for position in a revolving, circular cage  
gorillas in the mist  
the lamb as an image of innocence  
the kestrel hawk (the windhover) as an image of something that does the difficult with great ease  
scene at a dog obedience school  
an animal adopted by one from another species  
wildlife on the Serengeti Plain

### Human Beings, Individuals

#### **Describe someone:**

who does as he/she pleases  
who tells you more than you want to know about one subject or another  
who is “chicken” about one thing or another  
who delights in order  
who delights in disorder  
who wants a tourist to take his/her picture  
who is homesick  
who is superior to others but does not try to show it  
who has an inferiority complex  
who epitomizes dignity  
whose fate is a far less happy one than predicted  
who works just to be busy  
who hates anyone who does not love him/her  
who is a good-natured egotist  
who is too hot, or too cold, to handle  
who has, in character, many contradictions  
who is an authority about something or someone he/she has no interest in or liking for  
who is a seeker  
who can’t take criticism

who follows fads  
who is double-jointed  
who is a late bloomer  
who opposes something without understanding it  
who writes up the national psychological and vocational examinations  
who is a “living legend”  
who is oracle, sage, and know-it-all  
who is the ultimate fan  
who is left speechless  
who has a short fuse  
who “says little, thinks less, and does nothing at all”  
(quotation from George Farquhar)  
who is trying to look sober but is not  
who would rather give up life than material possessions  
who has a mad impulse  
who is a pragmatist  
who is lonely  
who is at a loss for words  
who behaves like a deranged and frightened Ichabod Crane  
who loves tattoos  
who has only one idea, and that one a wrong one  
who is a pebble on the beach, one of the crowd  
who is in spirited conversation with himself/herself  
who is a compulsive taker of notes  
who tries to appeal to everyone  
whose identity is revealed only at the end of your description  
who is shrewd  
who is one of those who will “inherit the earth”  
who always says, “Let’s get serious.”  
who is a saver or collector  
who recycles compulsively  
who is an unofficial psychoanalyst  
who is expert at avoiding serious commitment  
who has to settle for a second choice  
who is just learning self-respect  
who is on a soap box  
who is “worth watching”  
who is like his or her pet  
who is in love with love  
who has an unusual habit  
who has an unusual interest  
who is free again  
who has gambling fever  
who looks intelligent  
who looks wealthy  
who looks poor  
who looks tragic

who looks self-pitying  
 who cuts into line  
 who takes herself too seriously  
 who should have quit while he was ahead  
 who is mean to animals  
 who lives underground  
 who lives in a tree  
 who rages at God whenever something goes wrong  
 (such as bad weather)  
 who is an actor without an audience  
 who has too little to do  
 who behaves characteristically  
 who is like Bartleby, a fictional character who says only,  
 "I would prefer not to."  
 who is a "roads" scholar, a wanderer  
 who is always "the one in charge"  
 who sings while at work  
 who is always first with the worst  
 who is shaped by experience  
 who is "crazy like a fox"  
 who is a pied piper  
 who succeeds exceptionally well in something he or she  
 does not seem suited for  
 who has no enemies  
 who has no friends  
 who is a "city-slicker" in the country  
 who behaves spontaneously  
 who is a quick study, a superb mimic  
 who suffers from the effects of someone else's trying to  
 break a bad habit  
 who is in heart but not in sight  
 who likes to dance  
 who is all business  
 who is dressed up to scare  
 who knows how to answer the question "How lazy can  
 you get?"  
 who learns everything without help  
 who has only initials as a name  
 who is a name-dropper  
 who is a troublemaker  
 who is a busybody  
 who is a heartbreaker  
 who is a daredevil  
 who is a class clown  
 who is a "dark horse"  
 who is without vices  
 who is without a single virtue  
 who appears, but is not, intelligent  
 who appears, but is not, ignorant  
 who is an advocate  
 who monopolizes conversations  
 who is one of a kind  
 who is his own man/her own woman  
 who is misguidedly zealous  
 who has a force or energy born of terror  
 who is like his or her residence  
 who is undeservedly famous  
 who is undeservedly infamous  
 who is pretending to like you  
 who is obsessed with you  
 who doesn't have a clue  
 who thinks he's/she's God's gift to women/men  
 who can't cope  
 who tries too hard  
 who wishes she could start all over  
 who is brave in spite of an obstacle to bravery  
 who is a freelancer at something  
 who is tight-lipped  
 who is a "wonder of wonders"  
 who is "programmed"  
 who is ageless  
 who is self-consciously middle-aged  
 who is a wayfaring stranger  
 who is poetry in motion  
 whose behavior is controlled by conditioning  
 who is responsible for having changed your life  
 who is a hermit in the city  
 who is outlandish  
 who is a great impostor  
 who tries to stay on a diet  
 who tries to give up smoking  
 who tries to give up drinking  
 who characteristically over-reacts  
 who is right off the comics page  
 whose main weakness is \_\_\_\_\_  
 whose main strength is \_\_\_\_\_  
 who is an angel  
 who has escaped from prison  
 who is a high-roller  
 who is flaky  
 who runs the wrong way  
 who is seeking the unattainable  
 who is a workaholic  
 who is "strange"  
 who is a born leader  
 who is a born follower  
 who is in a shaky position  
 who is prematurely old  
 who is cute (or "cutesy")  
 who is, though grown, a baby  
 who is godlike



## 6 What Can I Write About?

who is a “good person”  
who has the gift of gab  
who never confesses to losing an argument  
who has “coffee nerves”  
who has “nicotine fits”  
who delivers jeremiads  
who is spoiled by success  
whose name and personality match exactly  
who can’t tell the truth  
who is at war with herself  
who can’t say “I’m sorry”  
who can’t stop talking  
who can’t stand to lose  
who can’t stand to be alone  
who has a special gift  
who is like a chameleon in personality  
who is describing himself/herself only by what he/she sees in a mirror  
who is a caricature  
who feels discouraged because of having suffered in a natural disaster  
who, even if not known, ought to be Man/Woman of the Year  
who, even if not known, ought to be Student of the Year  
who is confused by the world but not worried about it  
who has a face and manner of authority  
who wears “the smile of God”  
who is a modern Sphinx  
who has absolute confidence  
who can see though blind  
who is coming to terms with the fact of death  
who is a double for someone else  
who is an “All-American” type  
who is obsessed by TV  
who is tied up in knots  
who is used up or burnt-out  
who is blissfully unaware  
who is austere  
who is a scapegoat  
who is “cool”  
who is egotistical  
who has a hidden talent  
who is eccentric  
who is a good judge, though without experience  
who is a picture-straightener  
who is a perfectionist  
who is in need of special attention  
who is “always around”  
who is “never around”  
who is a high-climber

who is just now finding a voice  
who never gives in  
who delivers tedious speeches or sermons  
who is “asleep at the switch”  
who is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing”  
who is an outsider or a pariah  
who is a master fundraiser  
who is utterly imperturbable  
who is easily perturbed  
who has a name that sometimes causes accidental humor  
who is hopeful of catching a fish  
who is hopeful of finding the right job  
who has incorruptible scruples  
who is in prison for political reasons  
who is exhausted almost to the point of death  
who has noble qualities  
who knows what it’s like to be alone  
who doesn’t know how to be happy  
who loves the rain  
who believes he was a dog in a past life  
who has a lot to learn  
who stops to smell the roses  
who is compulsively clean  
who is a non-heroic figure  
who can be characterized by speech mannerisms  
who has a voice “like a great bell swinging in a dome”  
(quotation from James Elroy Fletcher)  
who is a scholar of esoteric subjects  
who is a member or a joiner  
who has (in the words of John Ford) “shaked hands with time”  
who is nameless  
who dares/who “dares not” do something  
who is capable of inspiring confidence  
who is exotic  
who is a saint  
who loves the stage (as observer, or as performer)  
who has many kinds of deep troubles  
who is a lover of the country  
who is an audience of one  
who speaks to one person as if to an audience  
a relative or a close acquaintance  
someone as the god or goddess of something  
a pickpocket in action  
a control freak  
the child in you  
someone you love to hate  
someone with a “singing face” (quotation by John Fletcher)  
a child in the White House

someone trying to sleep when it is impossible to sleep  
 a reluctant Santa Claus  
 someone who expresses an opinion without thinking  
 a great person known to you  
 a lunatic employer  
 a lunatic principal  
 someone surviving the winter  
 someone with a distinctive laugh  
 someone who is uncommonly shy . . . who laughs, for example, with great embarrassment at just about anything  
 someone surviving a great public embarrassment  
 someone who is ostracized  
 someone who is too conscious of his/her best profile  
 someone before and after  
 someone hard to catch, hard to conquer  
 an uninvited guest  
 someone who is lovable and loving  
 someone who is unorthodox  
 someone throwing a tantrum  
 someone who is an authority on a wide range of obscure subjects: for example, derbies, hieroglyphs, praying mantises  
 a first-time Broadway playwright awaiting first reviews  
 someone who is a "clear-cut choice"  
 someone who has the lowdown on someone  
 someone who has retained elegance and charm  
 the president as through the eyes of a child  
 what *your* inferiority complex is like  
 the child in someone  
 an heir  
 a wild public celebration  
 the unknown soldier/the unknown citizen  
 a bouncer  
 a broken individual  
 your interview with a famous person  
 someone in the moment before death  
 a veteran  
 someone shopping online  
 someone who lurks on the Internet  
 someone who gossips compulsively  
 someone who is self-consciously kind  
 a night security guard at work  
 someone who would like to harm you  
 someone watching something intently  
 an IRS official as seen by a reluctant taxpayer  
 a reluctant taxpayer as seen by an IRS official  
 the thing in you that others admire  
 someone who is unknowingly self-revealing  
 someone surviving the loss of the savings of a lifetime  
 someone surviving the failure of an important examination  
 someone rushing to catch a bus  
 someone suddenly realizing he or she is late  
 someone reacting to an unfunny joke  
 someone reacting to a speech  
 someone suddenly remembering something  
 yourself as you were at one time  
 someone, such as a small child, who can get dirty where no dirt is  
 someone who walks hundreds of miles to prove love to the one waiting at the destination  
 someone in despair  
 "someone I ought to know better"  
 someone who "wrote the book" on \_\_\_\_\_  
 the top-sergeant, still more active than the recruits after more than thirty years of military service  
 someone who has weathered *everything*  
 an underdog who likes the role of underdog  
 someone real or fictional who is a slumbering giant  
 awakening  
 someone who is made up of many different parts, all of which are funny  
 someone who laughs at everything  
 someone who cries at everything  
 someone who needs a good talking to  
 someone who knows how to keep a secret  
 an unusual child whom you met on a trip  
 someone who disproves the following: "No one can read the comment behind an expression."  
 a petty bureaucrat  
 a painting—say, "The Blue Boy" or the "Mona Lisa"—come to life  
 a person who uses ceremonial language for any occasion  
 Hagar as a living type  
 Senator Dianne Feinstein  
 Muhammad Ali as a legend in his lifetime  
 Thomas Jefferson at home  
 a once-maligned person who is lauded now  
 a once-lauded person who is maligned now  
 a globe-trotter  
 a person described as though by William Faulkner  
 a thinker/dreamer  
 someone who is fascinated with the ordinary  
 a shallow person/a dull person  
 someone with a long comic history invented by you  
 someone who has beaten the odds  
 someone who was right there where it happened at the time it happened  
 yourself as others see you

## 8 What Can I Write About?

someone who is politely, coolly efficient  
someone who is shy only because of being too proud to risk being made a fool of  
any famous modern person as a child  
yourself as in the first moment of your birth  
Bill Clinton  
Senator Hillary Clinton  
Tiger Woods  
Madonna  
a psychic  
The Williams sisters (tennis champions)  
Mephistopheles as a living type  
someone made hesitant or too cautious by a bad experience

### Human Beings, Groups

#### **Describe:**

world response to Princess Diana's death  
the public's fascination with John Kennedy Jr.  
autograph hunters  
paparazzi  
Pope John Paul II's appeal to the masses  
Mother Teresa's impact  
reverence for a local "saint"  
soldiers in the face of battle  
evangelical preachers  
people celebrating a special occasion  
soup kitchens  
dj's  
wanderers, wayfarers, nomadic peoples  
snowboarders  
skateboarders  
ski bums  
surf bums  
people who go into the witness protection program  
professional wrestlers  
people who live in retirement  
ranchers  
bikers  
game show hosts  
houseguests  
people who believe they have been abducted by aliens  
people who follow fashion  
people who ignore fashion  
people who aren't aware of their surroundings  
stock car drivers  
Trekkers  
*Rocky Horror Picture Show* fans  
*Star Wars* fans

video game players  
political demonstrators  
soccer hooligans  
Harley riders  
beauty pageants  
celebrities and the media  
a daytime talk-show audience  
a neighborhood (or a city, or a country) who has its own personality  
a bullfight crowd  
an enthusiastic opera crowd  
everybody trying to get into the act  
people with multiple tattoos/piercings  
sightseers  
a séance  
a teenage dance  
a political convention  
a private club  
a metropolitan bus station  
people who carry their pasts around  
people who leave their pasts behind  
the early Vikings  
listeners when a joke falls flat  
rabid fans  
prisoners  
bored teens living in suburbia  
people who help others  
a retirement community  
kids playing in a sandbox  
an ethnic neighborhood  
people who visit  
lunch dates  
a spring-break beach  
an all-week party  
people at Bingo Night  
the rat race  
an SRO crowd  
pie-judging contest at the county fair  
a POW camp in the United States  
a Japanese internment camp in the U.S. during WW II  
a slave auction  
a citizen protest  
an old-fashioned talent show  
people who make every day a holiday  
muscle flexers  
sorority/fraternity party  
an amusement-park crowd  
a sidewalk sale/a fire sale/a rummage sale  
a hog-calling contest  
Londoners during wartime attack

American citizens immediately after the 9/11 terrorism  
 the gates of heaven  
 the gates of hell  
 much ado about something  
 much ado about nothing  
 the end of the world  
 a hometown celebration  
 a wedding party  
 the delivery room of a hospital  
 people in the streets of Paris during the French Revolution  
 people in the streets of Paris celebrating the end of  
 World War II  
 group therapy  
 a concert  
 ice-hockey players  
 pop music concert audience  
 political activists  
 a snowed-in airport  
 people at the fall of the Berlin Wall  
 the crowds on Fifth Avenue or some other famous New  
 York City thoroughfare  
 baseball announcers  
 the crowded stands at the Super Bowl  
 pedestrians, traffic, and the resulting confusion when all  
 try to cross a small bridge at the same time  
 the Bolshoi Ballet  
 the ceremony at the beginning of a bullfight  
 a poor singer of the national anthem before a baseball  
 game  
 the Gold Rush  
 Bohemians at home  
 a shantytown  
 the lost-luggage room of a major airline  
 an athletic team for which nothing goes right  
 a bilingual theater troupe  
 “just a big mess,” anywhere  
 kids on the last day of school  
 teachers on the last day of school  
 the subway as hell  
 the firefighters’/police officers’ ball  
 a “blended” family  
 a crowded beach  
 a sleepy village and its inhabitants  
 people saying goodbye  
 a “country on the brink of democracy”—riots, troops in  
 the streets, etc.  
 the scene-behind-the-scenes for a certain film produc-  
 tion  
 a big publishing house  
 newsroom of a major newspaper  
 a county fair

a demolition derby  
 a night club crowd as *you* see the people  
 “unpersons”  
 missing persons  
 people invisible to society

### **Places and Things**

#### **Describe:**

your favorite museum  
 table scraps; leftovers  
 the packaging of your favorite CD  
 a burning barn  
 a ghost town  
 a favorite meal  
 the bottom of the Grand Canyon  
 a recycling center  
 a ski resort  
 a fully packed jumbo jet  
 a time capsule from today  
 a time capsule from 1980  
 a time capsule from 1990  
 a new hybrid fruit or vegetable (that you invent)  
 a food you hate  
 a food you love  
 a rusty fire escape  
 an overflowing dumpster  
 a barren landscape  
 a flooded basement  
 a dry riverbed  
 a desert in spring  
 the view from a train window  
 a hidden treasure  
 a public notice  
 a polling booth in Florida  
 a historical document  
 stained-glass windows  
 a particular painting  
 a “speakeasy” of Prohibition times  
 a roadside attraction  
 a box of rotting produce  
 a basket of laundry  
 a messy desk  
 a sink full of dishes  
 a cluttered basement  
 a misty morning  
 a long day  
 a favorite childhood toy  
 a dentist’s office  
 a leather jacket

## 10 What Can I Write About?

a rare gem  
a fragile vase  
a stolen moment  
a swaying footbridge  
your bedroom  
your favorite place  
view from the Sears Tower  
view from the Empire State Building  
on first seeing Ground Zero (New York City)  
view from the Eiffel Tower  
on first seeing the ruins of Machu Picchu  
a condemned hotel  
a lost-and-found office  
Main Street  
hand-me-downs  
a bowl of cherries  
a double-dip ice-cream cone  
a locked box  
a piece of ancient metalwork  
a tapestry  
an ancient book  
a certain architectural style  
a wrecking yard; a car dump  
a deserted stage  
the world in a grain of sand  
a ferry boat carrying twice the number of passengers it should  
a place named Easy Street  
a ship passing by  
something close-up and then faraway  
the scene from the inside  
the scene as viewed by the Statue of Liberty  
the scene from a lighthouse  
the view from the St. Louis Arch  
the view from Seattle's Space Needle  
something that is sterile in appearance  
the lure of old almanacs and diaries  
a book by its cover  
a black book/an address book  
the sense of being there where it happened—e.g., at Omaha Beach or Pompeii  
an iconic image in a dorm poster  
a mystical setting, using mystical terms  
what's in a purse  
what's in a backpack  
what's in an old trunk in the attic  
what's in a pirate's sea chest  
what's inside a home on the Aegean Islands/Aran Islands  
a pawn shop  
a single-room schoolhouse  
a sandbox  
Air Force One  
something without revealing what it is until the end  
a quiet place  
a shopping mall  
bumper stickers  
t-shirt messages  
license plate messages  
a campground  
Woodstock (whichever one you choose)  
graffiti  
after the wrecking ball strikes  
animal shelters  
a sound bite  
your grandmother's kitchen  
a place that's mournful  
an overgrown orchard  
a weedy alley  
a place that frightens children  
a place that is too quiet  
an empty city lot with a secret  
a cheese shop that has run out of cheese  
a library in the middle of the night  
a shopping mall the day after Thanksgiving (or the day before Christmas)  
an old-age home  
an orphanage  
the dust under the carpet  
a medal  
a reflection  
a mirage  
a cellar full of canned goods  
a soup kitchen  
a waterbed  
a jewelry store  
new sneakers  
new braces  
a gimmick  
a city you consider to be cosmopolitan or glamorous, e.g., Las Vegas, Paris, New York  
cereal-box surprises  
The Book of \_\_\_\_\_  
a work and hobby bench  
something Byzantine  
the inside of a doorknob  
signs of the times—road signs, etc.  
a golf course that has some unusual hazard  
a *pentimento* painting  
a palimpsest

what you see from the top of \_\_\_\_\_  
 the land passing by as you stand on a ship  
 the scene from the balcony  
 the scene from the back seat  
 the scene from the top of the Washington Monument  
 something that is dingy  
 something that glitters  
 Hell as if it were a certain city  
 items in a house abandoned years ago  
 the last book  
 an image from yesterday  
 velvet paintings  
 the view from the bottom of a swimming pool  
 an abandoned well  
 a rock quarry  
 a construction site  
 a house made of glass  
 a luxury doghouse  
 a costume shop  
 a king's palace  
 St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest city in the United States  
 Mesa Verde  
 Bath, England, as it was in the Middle Ages or before  
 a glass menagerie  
 a mystical setting, using concrete terms  
 what's in a medicine cabinet  
 a bell  
 a dilapidated boat  
 an unusual house  
 the local bookstore as a hangout  
 a single-room house  
 a soldier's home  
 a door  
 a map  
 a Viking ship  
 a shelter  
 an oil spill  
 your imaginings about a city you'd like to visit but never will  
 a future no one expects  
 a picnic  
 the scene after a parade  
 the scene after a party  
 a huge foreign city  
 a small efficiency apartment  
 the underside of a damp log  
 the contents of a buzzard's nest  
 your bare foot, as experienced by an ant  
 the inside of an old coat pocket

a piano abandoned at a junkyard  
 a bicycle left outside all winter in Minnesota  
 a vacant lot  
 a barn fallen into disrepair  
 Salvation Army shop window  
 what you imagine the \_\_\_\_\_s [decade] to have been like  
 deserted downtowns  
 a greasy-spoon cafe  
 a town dump  
 the last place on earth  
 old haunts  
 a city street at 5:00 a.m.  
 a crowded subway station  
 a cramped city bus  
 an empty church

### Senses, Intangibles

#### **Describe:**

having an itch  
 sneezing  
 hiccupping  
 waking up  
 falling in love  
 falling asleep  
 getting dizzy  
 a bad headache  
 a paper cut  
 riding in a hot-air balloon  
 early-morning sounds  
 electronic music  
 Sunday smells  
 aromas on entering a coffee shop  
 smell of hops  
 smell of wet wool blankets  
 what you feel when you look into outer space  
 a certain musical style  
 the joy of playing a certain musical instrument  
 "a shining artistic achievement"  
 serenity  
 time/timelessness/eternity  
 sounds and sights in the moment between waking and sleeping (or between sleeping and waking)  
 your best friend's laugh  
 a pregnant pause  
 your dog's personality  
 the sound of a snowstorm  
 God  
 the Goddess

## 12 What Can I Write About?

the “indescribable” by using unusual terms  
the sixth sense  
“more than a feeling”  
nausea  
physical manifestations of anxiety  
springtime scents  
“winter dreams”  
the ever-changing flame of a candle  
a dream house as a house that one has dreams in  
an impulse or a compulsion  
a situation that admits of ambiguity or ambivalence  
the face of hope  
the face of despair  
the misery of \_\_\_\_\_  
“sublime noise” (E. M. Forster’s allusion to  
Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*)  
ominous silence  
something “full of sound and fury”  
a kind of hush  
a “dirge without music” (Millay’s term)  
a pompous speech  
being alone in outer space  
Fourth of July spent in a foreign country  
Christmas away from home  
“shaking the spheres of the universe”  
“the music of the spheres”  
“the splendour of a sudden thought” (quotation from  
Robert Browning)  
feeling free (in the sense of *unrestrained*)  
a dream within a dream  
flying in a dream  
the dreamlike quality of something  
the feeling you have when you dream you’re awake  
what it feels like to survive an accident or close call  
the physical aspects of feeling furious  
holding a purring cat  
what gravity feels like  
the intangible quality of something  
surfing a wave  
surfing the Web  
virtual reality  
déjà vu  
a dream come true before the dream is dreamed  
“a dream deferred” (Langston Hughes)  
“I have a dream” (Martin Luther King Jr.)  
the action and thought of an instant’s time  
it (*or* It)  
a gesture which has deep meaning  
a state of mind  
“not with a bang but a whimper” (Eliot)

where \_\_\_\_\_ begins  
listening in nature  
the joy of solitude (as recorded in a diary)  
“unbearable lightness”  
terrible beauty

### Actions/Miscellaneous

#### **Describe:**

a favorite kind of job  
a bureaucratic operation  
sticking together  
mending a fence with someone  
beaming signals  
something comforting  
the turn of the screw  
breaking the glass ceiling  
learning to ride a bike  
rolling down a hill  
teaching something to a child  
how to blow a bubble with bubblegum  
the steps involved in getting to know someone  
how to play your favorite computer game  
getting home after your curfew  
arguing with a sibling  
making up with a girlfriend or boyfriend  
overhearing a conversation you weren’t meant to hear  
finding out a secret  
stubbing your toe  
dancing in public for the first time  
a sneak preview  
camera eye  
the difficulty of sharing a secret  
the interesting people you meet at \_\_\_\_\_  
going home  
undoing a great damage  
biting the dust  
bungee jumping  
skydiving  
a discus, javelin, or weight throw  
the maneuvers of a non-glamorous position in football  
flying off the handle  
blocking the view  
the last straw  
hunting in a trash pile  
\_\_\_\_\_’s Day  
the center of attention  
what there is to do in \_\_\_\_\_  
a compromising position to be in  
so as to answer the question, “What have we got here?”

on-the-job training  
swapping roles  
diversionary tactics  
a showdown  
a “smoke and mirrors” technique

### **Celebrations**

bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah  
Chinese New Year  
Christmas Day  
Diwali

Eid  
Hanukkah  
Iftaar  
Kwanzaa  
May Day  
Native American festival specific to a particular nation  
Seijin No Hi—Japanese Coming-of-Age Day  
Thanksgiving  
Whitsun  
a celebration of your choice



# 2

# COMPARISON/CONTRAST

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## What Comparison/Contrast Is

As a literary device, comparing and contrasting things to gain a heightened impression of them goes back in Western civilization as far back as Homer, in other cultures to an even earlier age. Here, abridged, is how James Joyce parodies one of those Homeric similes: “Clinging to the sides of the noble bark, they linked their shining forms as doth the cunning wheelwright when he fashions about the heart of his wheel the equidistant rays whereof each one is sister to another. . . . Even so did they come and set them, those willing nymphs, the undying sisters.” Joyce would have us spoke our literary wheels with a craftsman’s care and cunning. One of the handiest and most natural ways to do that is to compare two things that are somehow alike, or contrast one thing with something dissimilar in a certain telling way. Recall how the contrasting tones of a black-and-white photograph can cast a face into such compelling relief, or how Vermeer’s colors beat so vividly in the dim lowland sun. That much and more comparison/contrast can do for language.

## How to Write Comparison/Contrast

One way to use this device effectively is to make sure the things compared or contrasted fit. We might, for example, compare a redwood tree with a rosebush, but it probably would not gain us much beyond a laugh. If it is the skyscraping stature of the redwood we are after, we might compare it instead with the stalk that Jack climbed into the land of giants. The redwoods would be at home there.

Or we could compare a young guerrilla in an impoverished country, son or daughter of a peasant, with an American college student who goes to a business school, not because he or she feels impelled to work in business, or is even much interested in it, but because that is where the surest money is. The comparison might lead us to a study in irony, though probably there would be little room to sow much seed in the common ground between the two young people. This is possibly the place, then, where *contrast* might be more effective. Let us say that we contrast that same guerrilla with a young person from the revolutionary’s own country: child of a wealthy landowner, graduate student in economics at the University of Chicago. The two threads of such a contrast could weave the social fabric of a nation and pattern the history of our time. One secret of comparison/contrast, then, is harmony.

## Locating Subjects for Comparison/Contrast

Beyond the specific listings in this chapter, this book as a whole might itself become a study in comparison/contrast. It could certainly be readily used that way. Compare, for example, the chapter on description with the chapter on research-and-report writing. Contrast creative writing with process analysis writing, and so on. All the approaches to writing discussed here are spokes for the wheelwright’s craft, all are sisters.

**People**

the real Pocahontas and media images of her  
 politician as candidate/politician as officeholder  
 shepherds/cattle drivers  
 actors off-screen/actors on-screen  
 a historical figure in two different periods of his/her life  
 cliff dwellers/New York apartment dwellers  
 fellow travelers/tourists traveling together  
 the nomad/the homebody  
 a certain person/the same person transformed  
 country person/city person  
 a “nobody”/a “somebody”  
 religious leaders of different religions  
 the adolescent as protester/the adult as protester  
 historian/dramatist  
 model of society/the average person  
 the just/the unjust  
 a gullible person/a stupid person  
 Nelson Mandela/Mahatma Gandhi  
 the same person in and out of uniform  
 one person in two roles  
 generals/privates  
 an alcoholic/a drinker  
 innocent today/guilty tomorrow  
 the right person/the wrong person  
 two all-time best athletes  
 person poor/same person rich  
 married person/single person  
 Baby Boom generation/Generation X  
 the mathematical mind/the mechanical mind  
 Spanish-speaking people in Europe/Spanish-speaking  
 people in the Americas  
 the needy/the greedy  
 congress/parliament  
 blue-collar workers/white-collar workers  
 a past star now not a star  
 born to lose/born to win  
 Henry VIII/Ozymandias  
 fictional TV figure on camera/fictional TV figure off  
 camera  
 a friend now an enemy  
 an enemy now a friend  
 the temperaments of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
 two faces of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X  
 Dalai Lama/Pope John Paul II  
 Indira Gandhi/Golda Meir  
 Harriet Tubman/Sojourner Truth  
 child like an adult/adult like a child  
 the Stoic/the Epicurean  
 the lyricist/the composer  
 a real person/the depiction of him or her on television  
 Billy Budd/Claggart  
 revivalist/used-car salesperson  
 right brain/left brain  
 a person before and after winning the lottery  
 young Elvis/old Elvis  
 spouses/partners  
 defense attorney/prosecutor  
 a child before and after gaining a sibling  
 a person before and after acquiring a pet kitten or puppy  
 one rebel/people rising up as one  
 how one sees oneself/how others see one  
 the scholar/the untutored  
 different parts in same person (“Two souls, sadly, are in  
 my breast.”—Goethe)  
 two football players switching roles  
 the actor/the role the actor plays  
 amateur/professional  
 attorney/doctor  
 Captain Kirk/Captain Jean-Luc Picard  
 Data/Mr. Spock  
 Luke Skywalker/Darth Vader  
 person on offense/person on defense  
 original/imitation  
 two TV sitcoms  
 seeming free/not being free  
 ordinary person/uncommon person  
 the same person, tough and tender  
 citizen/noncitizen  
 the best/the worst  
 students in 1900/students in 2000  
 salesclerk/customer  
 hearts made of stone/hearts on fire  
 young college students/old college students  
 Albert Einstein/Stephen Hawking  
 compulsive reader/bookworm  
 pedestrian rights/driver rights  
 people modern and ancient in their view of the universe  
 folk rock singer/hard rock singer  
 the forever friend/the sometime friend  
 Benedict Arnold, before and after  
 the one blamed/the one who should be blamed  
 the powerful/the powerless  
 Shakespeare’s Macbeth/a modern Macbeth  
 adolescents and their values/adults and their values  
 soccer mom/little league dad  
 Madonna/\_\_\_\_\_  
 William Jefferson Clinton/John F. Kennedy

## 16 What Can I Write About?

George Herbert Walker Bush/George W. Bush  
aristocracy/tyranny  
student unrest/student apathy  
scientist's view of the stars/poet's view of the stars  
two major candidates for the same office  
American opera stars/Italian opera stars  
Harvard student/Berkeley student  
John McEnroe/Pete Sampras  
Pete Sampras/Andre Agassi  
movie actor/television actor  
movie actor/stage actor  
ideal American/real American  
oneself/old friend  
oneself/new friend  
swing dancer/step dancer  
marching bands/orchestras  
manic/depressive  
Beatles/Rolling Stones  
Massachusetts Colony as seen by a pilgrim/Massachusetts Colony as seen by a native person  
baseball fan/football fan  
yourself now/yourself 10 years ago  
spending a night in your own bed/spending a night in a tent  
learning something from a book/learning by doing  
the person given the credit/the person who should have gotten credit  
a famous person/someone who looks like the famous person  
companionship/friendship  
what I wanted/what I didn't want  
life in a polygamous society/life in a monogamous one  
"day people"/"night people"  
Compare/contrast these opposing bases of marriage: In some cultures, it is said that "you don't marry the person you love; you love the person you marry."  
Compare/contrast yourself with Thoreau as, for example, on the issue of imprisonment.  
Compare/contrast opposing parts of your personality.  
Compare/contrast short professional basketball players with tall ones.  
Compare/contrast famous people with their children.  
Compare/contrast famous people with their parents.  
Compare/contrast in a theme, "Anything but What I Expected."  
Compare/contrast the negative views of yourself against the positive ones.  
Compare/contrast one person who has two occupations.  
Compare/contrast the native of a country with a tourist to that country.  
Compare/contrast tourists/explorers.

Compare/contrast the assassination of one president with that of another.  
Compare/contrast yourself with someone like you.  
Compare/contrast yourself with someone not like you.  
Compare/contrast two people who are much alike in many ways.  
Compare/contrast so as to show someone changing a role—Aladdin, for example, doing something for the genie.  
Compare/contrast someone's bark and bite.  
Compare/contrast the TV-watching habit with some other habit or obsession.  
Compare/contrast newspaper and TV coverage of the same story.  
Compare/contrast the Russians and the Americans of the Diomedes Islands.  
Women spending time together/men spending time together  
Write a comparison/contrast essay about a comic book hero as presented in the comic book versus as presented in a movie version.  
Compare/contrast yourself with your best friend.  
Compare/contrast a typical day for you during the school year versus a typical day during summer vacation.  
Compare/contrast two different places you have lived.  
Compare/contrast where you live with where you would like to live.  
Use comparison/contrast to show whether a member of the clergy can be an entertainer.  
Use comparison/contrast to show whether a teacher can be an entertainer.  
Use comparison/contrast to show whether a politician can be an entertainer.  
Use comparison/contrast to show which counts more in football: brawn or brain.  
Use comparison/contrast to show which requires more work: casual dress or fancy dress.  
Use comparison/contrast to relate the *beginnings* of the football careers of quarterbacks Johnny Unitas and Peyton Manning.  
Use comparison/contrast to write on the subject, "If I can't have \_\_\_\_\_, I'll take \_\_\_\_\_."  
Use comparison/contrast to show whether the choice at the polls is one more of comparison than of contrast.  
Use comparison/contrast to show that people with disabilities are more like people without disabilities than different from them.  
Use comparison/contrast to write of someone, unlike the average person, who would take the smallest piece of something good and give the best and largest piece to a neighbor.  
Use comparison/contrast to show that, as William Cowper believed, God made the country and human beings made the town.

Use comparison/contrast to show how, according to Anna Barbauld, society is worse than solitude, and one human being with another is still the greatest curse.

Use comparison/contrast to show that, as Oliver Wendell Holmes argued, the world's great people have not commonly been great scholars, nor its great scholars great people.

Use comparison/contrast to show that, as William Lloyd Garrison believed, our country is the world and our citizens are all humanity.

Use comparison/contrast to show that it is reasonable that, as Madame Cornuel believed, great people are not great to their valets.

Use comparison/contrast to show that, as Oliver Goldsmith believed, little things are great to little people.

Use comparison/contrast to relate Richard Nixon and Shakespeare's Richard II.

**Comparison/contrast topics about humanity may be drawn from the following:**

“The hunger of love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.” (Mother Teresa)

“It is not enough to prepare our children for the world; we must also prepare the world for our children.” (Luis J. Rodríguez)

“If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded” (Maya Angelou). Compare and contrast different kinds of success on the basis of this comment.

“Religion without humanity is poor stuff.” (Sojourner Truth)

“There are only two ways of spreading light—to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” (Edith Wharton)

“I would have girls regard themselves not as adjectives but as nouns.” (Elizabeth Cady Stanton)

Is “the face the index of a feeling mind”? (George Crabbe)

“Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.” (John F. Kennedy)

“When students get good grades they say Look what I got; when they get bad grades they say Look what the teacher gave me.” (newspaper item)

“I describe not people, but manners; not an individual, but a species.” (Henry Fielding)

“Be careful with him: He’s going to be a father.” (Ronald Colman, speaking of his dog, in a movie)

“There are two kinds of people here in Washington,” says a cartoon—“those who know what’s going on . . . and the rest of us.”

“It is impossible to enjoy idling thoroughly unless one has plenty of work to do.” (Jerome K. Jerome)

“Is a team better off resting for a week or staying sharp under game conditions?” an AP article asks regarding the NBA playoffs.

“Americans, of course, hold no monopoly on producing memoirs. The practice of celebrating the great leader’s life by putting pen to paper (or hiring a ghost) dates back at least to Caesar’s ‘Commentaries.’” (re Nixon’s memoirs, newspaper article dated May 29, 1977)

“It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one’s neighbor.” (Eric Hoffer)

“The real American is all right; it is the ideal American who is all wrong.” (G. K. Chesterton)

“The people have little intelligence, the great no heart. If I had to choose I should have no hesitation in choosing the people.” (Bruyer)

“They’re only truly great who are truly good.” (George Chapman)

“If youth but knew; if age but could.” (Henri Estienne)

“Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself, but talent instantly recognizes genius.” (Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes)

“To be nameless in worthy deeds exceeds an infamous history.” (Sir Thomas Browne)

“All the world over, I will back the masses against the classes.” (William Gladstone)

“The living need charity more than the dead.” (George Arnold)

“I have been a stranger in a strange land.” (Bible)

“It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.” (Oliver Wendell Holmes)

“The love of liberty is the love of others; the love of power is the love of ourselves.” (William Hazlitt)

“The most fluent talkers or most plausible reasoners are not always the justest thinkers.” (William Hazlitt)

“In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.” (Albert Camus)

**Human Conditions**

- dark days/happy days
- choice between two roads
- nearsighted, farsighted
- style, comfort
- discrimination/absence of discrimination
- fasting/feasting
- orthodox/unorthodox
- two kinds of birth
- dating in high school/dating in college
- lazing/relaxing
- despair/hope
- meditation/daydreaming
- assisted living/assisted dying
- family dinners then/now
- parents working/parents staying home

## 18 What Can I Write About?

single-parent home/two-parent home  
pleasure/duty  
being alone/being lonely  
controlling your life/letting your life control you  
living deliberately/living accidentally  
new look, new life  
discrimination of one kind/another kind of discrimination  
young Americans are healthier today than they were 20  
years ago/health problems among young Americans  
have increased in the last 20 years  
private things/public things  
obligation/pleasure  
families today/families 50 years ago  
two kinds of death  
different ways of mourning  
different funeral customs  
different marriage customs  
different ways to celebrate a birth  
body language/verbal language  
different marriage customs  
reading a printed book/reading online  
mind/heart  
mind/brain  
overconfidence/insecurity  
class clown/class bully  
honor/fame  
delusion vs. reality in sports  
lean years/fat years  
habit/disposition  
God's gifts/human dreams  
progress/improvement  
apartment living/dormitory living  
Compare/contrast two procedures at birth.  
Compare/contrast the views two different cultures have  
of death.  
Write a comparison/contrast essay on the subject,  
Things Gone Good.  
Write a comparison/contrast essay showing that some  
things are common to us all.  
Use comparison/contrast to show what the world would  
be like if millions of people exactly like you had  
controlled the progress over these past six million  
years.  
Use comparison/contrast to show what it is besides  
courage that is opposed to cowardice.  
Use comparison/contrast to show that blindness is, as  
has been said, "another way of seeing."  
Show by comparison/contrast that, like a person, a  
neighborhood (or a class, or a country) has its own  
personality.

Show by comparison/contrast whether the big things, or  
the little ones, shape our lives.

Consider from the point of view both of individuals and  
of the United States government whether we know  
as much how to solve our own problems as those of  
others.

Compare/contrast on the basis of the title of an article in  
*International Wildlife*, "Animals Are Only Human."

"It has been claimed that war is the ultimate act of  
patriotism, yet war destroys the humanity in us."  
(Zarina Hock)

Compare and contrast traditional notions of war with  
feminist wars as described in this quotation: "Femi-  
nism has fought no wars. It has killed no opponents.  
It has set up no concentration camps, starved no  
enemies, practiced no cruelties. Its battles have been  
for education, for the vote, for better working  
conditions, . . . for safety on the streets, . . . for child  
care, for social welfare, . . . for rape crisis centers,  
women's refuges, reforms in the law." (Dale  
Spender)

### **Comparison/contrast topics about the human condition may be drawn from the following:**

"Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last  
of life, for which the first was made." (Rabbi Ben  
Ezra)

"Chains are worse than bayonets." (Douglas Jerrold)

"Dying is more terrible than death." (Henry Fielding)

"Wit has truth in it; wisecracking is simply calisthenics  
with words." (Dorothy Parker)

"I'm saddest when I sing." (Thomas Bayly)

"Into each life a little sun must fall." (L. E. Sissman)

"The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the  
next." (Helen Keller)

"Just remember one thing, son," says a cartoon father:  
"I know a lot more about being young than you know  
about being old."

"The act is all, the reputation for it nothing." (Goethe)

"Religion's in the heart, not in the knees." (Douglas  
Jerrold)

"Sometimes it's worse to win a fight than to lose."  
(Billie Holiday)

### **Science and Nature**

prairie/mountain

drought/oasis

thorn/flower

plowing under/harvesting

bacteria/virus

toads/frogs

animals as humans/humans as animals

ethics of cloning sheep/humans  
 the mallard/the loon  
 green/ripe  
 the coral snake/the snake confused with it  
 life on earth/life in outer space  
 ice/dry ice  
 animal intelligence/human intelligence  
 two animals in intelligence  
 fingerprints/retinal scans  
 simple foods/fancy foods  
 natural gas/lignite  
 good things of spring/not-so-good things of spring  
 anthropology/sociology  
 science/art  
 domestic plant/wild plant  
 two sides of nature  
 typhoon/tornado  
 a doctor of medicine/a doctor of philosophy  
 hay fever/asthma  
 honey/bee  
 coldblooded/warmblooded  
 someone set in nature/nature itself  
 insect/another of its genera  
 science/science fiction  
 evolution/creation

Use comparison/contrast to show that nature has a way of keeping up its own beauty and humanity has not found a way to improve on natural beauty.

Distinguish between nothing on one hand and, on the other, coming into existence where there had not been anything before.

Compare/contrast the chestnut tree, the tulip, or the comet described by the scientist on the one hand, the non-scientific philosopher or poet on the other.

Compare/contrast someone who has an affiliation with nature with someone who does not. Show, for example, how the former can merge naturally with the landscape while the latter seems out of place.

Preparing and preserving foods then and now.

Carbon dating techniques in archaeology/another archaeological dating technique

Microwave cooking/crock-pot cooking.

Experiencing the news on the Internet/the news on television.

Two different ways of listening to music.

## Language

old saying before/old saying now  
 oasis/watering hole  
 inhibition /restraint

known/renown  
 thing/thang  
 good conversation/ordinary conversation  
 thought/expression of thought  
 libel/slander  
 objectivity/subjectivity  
*radical left* as political term/*radical right* as political term  
 bureaucratic language/clarity  
 introvert/extrovert  
 major speech/minor speech  
 re-creation /recreation  
 possibility/probability  
 something before being translated/something after being translated  
 Scriptures in one language/Scriptures in another  
 pessimism/optimism  
 thinking/writing  
 writing/speaking  
 denotation/connotation  
 what is said/how it is said  
 turned on by/turned off by  
 status quo/the norm  
 notoriety/fame  
 banter/teasing  
 first language/second language  
 scheming/planning  
 spin doctor/spokesperson  
 reactionary/revolutionary  
 spoken language/sign language  
 being direct/being rude  
 exchanging small talk in two different cultures  
 expressing courtesies in two different cultures  
 formal/informal language  
 speaking as people write/writing as people speak  
 induction/deduction  
 legalese/"legal-ease" (to quote *Time* magazine on improved legal terms)  
 English in England/English in America  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay in which you delineate a conventional truth using unconventional terms and ideas.  
 Use comparison/contrast to make a dull idea sound interesting.  
 Use comparison/contrast to make an interesting idea sound dull.  
 Compare/contrast the symbolic languages of music and mathematics.  
 Compare/contrast a headline and an article under its heading that does not match it in content.

## 20 What Can I Write About?

Compare/contrast changing ideas of what “well-balanced” means to a psychoanalyst, a cook, or a coach.

Compare/contrast the views of language and thinking expressed in the following two quotations:

- (1) “Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we can think about.” (Benjamin Lee Whorf)
- (2) “The words of language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought.” (Albert Einstein)

Dude, compare and contrast slang and scholarly language.

“Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have a different effect.” (Blaise Pascal)

### Education, Knowledge

wisdom/knowledge

curiosity/inquisitiveness

innocence/experience

conventional teaching/Montessori teaching

traditional fairy tales/contemporary children’s books

natural law/divine law

thinking/letting the mind wander

book learning/practical learning

homework time/television time

objectivity/subjectivity

philosophy/religion

conventional literacies/other literacies

learning/teaching

a book/another book of the same kind

opinion/belief

mental energy expended over a long time/mental energy expended over a short time

logic/instinct

knowledge in one situation/knowledge in another

what is right/what is taught as being right

in-person learning/distance learning

teacher’s role 20 years ago/teacher’s role today

rational argument/emotional appeal

ethics/morals

high school graduates then and now

virtual classroom/traditional classroom

learning by doing/learning by thinking

math as language/music as language

the teacher as coach/the teacher as *guru* (sage)

learning by observing/learning by doing

Compare/contrast the popular idea of what an educated person is with your own idea.

Compare/contrast a narrow professional area and a wide

professional area: generalist teaching vs. specialist teaching, for example.

When do you think best, when you are sitting or when you are on the move?

**Comparison/contrast topics about education and knowledge may be drawn from the following:**

“Where ignorance is bliss, ’tis folly to be wise.” (Thomas Gray)

“What I don’t know isn’t knowledge.” (Henry Beeching)

“Knowing things is being them.” (Ortega y Gasset)

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” (Socrates)

“As light is greater than darkness so wisdom is greater than folly.” (Bible)

“To learn something new, take the path you took yesterday.” (proverb)

“Poetry is something more philosophical and of graver import than history.” (Aristotle)

“There is no joy in smallness. Joy is in the infinite.” (Chandogya Upanishad)

### Places, Perspectives

up close/far away

clockwise/counterclockwise

NYC 1950/NYC today

Chinese communism/ Cuban communism

city alive with activity/large city deserted

coming/going

state/country

living on the margins/living at the center

space/the opposite of space

military bureaucracy/civilian bureaucracy

shopping mall/Main Street, USA

same solution, different results

bedroom community/suburb

Silicon Valley/Rust Belt

trip to Las Vegas/trip to the Grand Canyon

two different places of burial

forever-home/sometime-home

Alberta/Texas

Paris, Texas/Paris, France

Venice, California/Venice, Italy

Taj Mahal: monument to love/symbol of ego

South American gauchos/North American cowboys

up against the ceiling/up against the wall

Ground Zero on September 11, 2001/Ground Zero in 20\_\_.

the view from outside/the view from inside

the view from below/view from above

the Great Wall of China/the Berlin Wall  
 your dream home/your real home  
 the underlying purpose of building the Suez Canal/the  
 underlying purpose of building the Panama Canal  
 a village in the United States/a village in another  
 country  
 a painting by Monet from far away and from up close  
 ups/downs  
 yin/yang  
 swamp/desert  
 cave/hilltop  
 Chicago/New York City  
 rural community 100 years ago/today  
 light penalty for something/heavy penalty for same thing  
 poor and rich at the same time  
 two kinds of hunger  
 youth culture of two kinds  
 kind cruelty  
 pyramids/Stonehenge  
 prairie sunsets/ocean sunsets  
 my house/your house  
 top half, bottom half, each making the other possible  
 two sides of a certain hotel, house, or town  
 Use comparison/contrast to show disparity in what free  
 speech is and what it is not.  
 Use comparison/contrast to answer the question: What  
 is happening in this very moment in another part of  
 the world?  
 Use comparison/contrast to show that sometimes  
 forward and backward, up and down, are all the  
 same.  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay on a change of  
 feeling, place, or situation.  
 Compare/contrast something other than in the conven-  
 tional or popular way.  
 Compare/contrast different attitudes to aging in different  
 cultures.  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay to show that nothing  
 stays the same.  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay to show that (to  
 translate from a French expression) the more things  
 change, the more they remain the same.  
 Compare/contrast cloak-and-dagger conceptions with  
 real espionage.  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay that answers the  
 question, What is happening in this very moment in  
 different parts of outer space?  
 Which is better, a harmless lie or a hurtful truth?  
 Compare/contrast the changing perspectives about  
 scholarship, law, or machinery.  
 Use comparison/contrast to show a person before and  
 after he or she is out of sight.

Compare/contrast the same kinds of orchards in  
 different parts of the country.  
 Compare/contrast the Old South and the New South.  
 Compare who you think you are and who your parents  
 think you are.  
 Compare who you think you are and who your teacher  
 thinks you are.  
 Compare who you think you are and who your class-  
 mates think you are.  
 Compare/contrast two kinds of strategies for a cam-  
 paign, a game, or a speech.  
 Use comparison/contrast to show the way a certain  
 building dominates other buildings around it, even if  
 the other buildings happen to be taller.  
 How does the average citizen of a country in Western  
 Europe live differently from the average citizen of  
 \_\_\_\_\_?

Compare/contrast a situation in the “Land where the  
 light is darkness.” (Bible)

**Comparison/contrast topics about places  
 and perspectives may be drawn from the  
 following:**

“Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel  
 your thousand miles to see it?” wrote Herman  
 Melville.  
 “They are ill discoverers that think there is no land,  
 when they can see nothing but sea.” (Sir Francis  
 Bacon)  
 “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”  
 (Charles Dickens)  
 “It’s always morning somewhere.” (Richard Horne)  
 “It’s morning in America.” (Ronald Reagan)

**Economy, Trade**

browsing in online bookstores/in traditional bookstores  
 Compare/contrast ways of spending and misspending.  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay about old money vs.  
 new money.  
 Write a comparison/contrast essay that distinguishes the  
 dollar from the confederate note.  
 Compare/contrast spending in one part of the country  
 with spending in another part.  
 Compare/contrast the dollar in the United States with  
 the dollar in some other part of the world.  
 Compare/contrast two cars you would like to have.  
 Compare/contrast two jobs you know about.  
 Use comparison/contrast to distinguish between  
 economy and economics.  
 Use comparison/contrast to distinguish between wet  
 goods and dry goods.  
 Use comparison/contrast to distinguish between old  
 values of farmland and modern values of farmland.



## 22 What Can I Write About?

Compare/contrast the manufacture of something—candles or soap, for example—then and now.  
Discuss by comparison/contrast: “In this economy average is below average,” says a cartoon.  
Compare/contrast authentic money and counterfeit money.  
Compare/contrast stocks and bonds.  
Compare/contrast online trading with trading through a broker.  
Compare/contrast a global economy with a national economy.

### Measurement

Compare/contrast the Arabic number system and the Roman number system.  
Compare/contrast metric measurement with another principal kind of measurement.  
Compare/contrast simplicity and precision.  
Compare/contrast two things usually thought to be equally good.  
Compare/contrast two things usually thought to be equally bad.  
Compare/contrast something thought to be possible by one, impossible by another.  
Compare/contrast statistics that mislead and “honest” statistics.  
Compare/contrast a glass that’s half empty with one that’s half full.  
Compare/contrast compliment and insult.  
Write a comparison/contrast on the subject “Little but Important.”  
Write a comparison/contrast on the subject, “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind” (Mohandas Gandhi).  
Compare/contrast the degree of frightfulness in the realistic and the supernatural.  
Compare/contrast musical and poetic meter.

### **Comparison/contrast topics about measurement may be drawn from the following:**

“A minute’s success pays the failure of years.” (Robert Browning)  
“Between good sense and good taste there is the same difference as between cause and effect.” (Jean de la Bruyere)  
“It is the nature of all greatness not to be exact.” (Edmund Burke)

### Art and Entertainment

this movie/that movie  
television comedy/society  
television shows past/television shows present  
Oprah/Jerry Springer

“reality TV”/reality  
circus from inside/circus from outside  
wrestler as actor/actor as actor  
two great architectural types  
art criticism by self/art criticism by others  
hit song/non-hit  
movie acting/stage acting  
American movie controversiality vs. foreign movie controversiality  
background vs. foreground in painting or photography  
humor/macabre humor  
movie acting/TV acting  
British TV ads and frankness/American TV ads and frankness  
Seinfeld’s world/the Simpsons’ world  
fictional character/same character given your name  
Monet/Manet  
Impressionism/Expressionism  
watching something on TV/watching something on the Internet  
U.S. news reportage of an event/another country’s reportage of the same event  
VCR versus DVD player

### Past and Present

old city, new city side by side  
word processor/pen and paper  
film camera/digital camera  
the scribe/photocopier  
old demands, old conditions/new demands, new conditions  
family farm/agribusiness  
the generation gap then and now  
old commandments/new commandments  
cooking with a wood stove/cooking with a microwave  
old views of divorce/new views of divorce  
military training then and now  
spanking/“time-out”  
family reunions then and now  
past danger/present danger  
the same fable, old and new  
the family unit, then and now  
old and new dentistry  
old-time religion/modern religion  
Compare/contrast a situation in which something old has been added.  
Compare/contrast what wildcatting was like in Alaska fifty years ago with what it is like today.  
How did the treatment of children in 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe differ from that of today?

Compare/contrast Prohibition laws with today's marijuana laws.

Write a comparison/contrast essay to show that things are not that simple anymore.

Write a comparison/contrast essay to show that things (or, the times) are better, or worse, than they were before.

Compare/contrast old and new soap-opera scripts.

Compare/contrast a situation in which the modern and the traditional co-exist comfortably side by side.

Compare/contrast the before-and-after of an old picture or an old event.

Compare/contrast the American psyche before and after September 11, 2001.

Compare/contrast a situation in which something new has been added.

Compare/contrast politics (or some part of it such as language) before and after Watergate.

Compare/contrast medieval ways and modern ways.

A cartoon shows that a battering ram was the medieval equivalent of today's doorbell. Using comparison/contrast, draw other relationships of a humorous kind between medieval times and present ways.

See the opening paragraphs of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where there is a description of England as it must have looked to the conquering Romans. Compare/contrast Conrad's description with a description of the modern scene of the same area (even if it is your own description rather than one you find).

Compare/contrast Dagwood's office and Dilbert's office.

Use comparison/contrast to discuss this quotation from Eisenhower: "Things are more like the way they are now than they ever were before."

Use comparison/contrast to discuss the import of the following: "In old time we had treen chalices and golden priests, but now we have treen priests and golden chalices." (Bishop John Jewel, 16th century)

Compare/contrast politics before and after the Berlin Wall came down.

Compare/contrast classic westerns with revisionist westerns.

Compare/contrast the attack on Pearl Harbor and the attack on the World Trade Center.

### Analogy

the body/the body politic

a person's life/a book

river/mother

a person/a city

a person/a parade

professional football/warfare

an adult's home/a castle

eternity/moment

life/party

life/TV show

life/football game

camera/eye

writing/composing music

New York City street/battlefield

music/language

animals/United States presidents

marriage/driving

novice police officers conducting traffic/novice conductors conducting musicians

a hotel/an ocean liner

a blind date/\_\_\_\_\_

a child's room/a kingdom

a mind/a kingdom

an island/\_\_\_\_\_

eating with chopsticks/\_\_\_\_\_

mind/eye

the Irish Sea/\_\_\_\_\_

fame/river

dance hall/church

home/country

architecture/nature

### Analogical subjects may be drawn from the following:

"Every drop of the Thames is liquid history." (John Burns)

Luther said that people stay busy as a factor making things to worship.

"Slavery is a weed that grows in every soil." (Edmund Burke)

In our destinies are we more like buses, free to move in any direction, or like trains, fixed in our tracks?

"Love is like linen often changed, the sweeter." (Phineas Fletcher)

"Reasons are not like garments, the worse for wearing." (Robert Devereux)

"Money speaks sense in a language all nations understand." (Aphra Behn)

"A good book is the purest essence of a human soul." (Thomas Carlyle)

"Justice is truth in action." (Benjamin Disraeli)

"It was my tongue, not my soul, that cursed." (Euripides)

"The leaves of life keep falling one by one." (Edward Fitzgerald, translation of a line in *Omar Khayyam*)

"The tree is known by his fruit." (Bible)

"Bad laws are the worst sort of tyranny." (Edmund Burke)

"The tongue has no bones," F. L. Lucas said, "but it can break millions of the bones of human beings."

## 24 What Can I Write About?

“For how agree the kettle and the earthen pot together?”  
(Bible)

Show by analogy what sense some nonsense can make.

“Inflation is the neutron bomb of economics. It destroys everything in your bank account while leaving the figures intact.” (*The Houston Chronicle*)

“Life is like a game of bridge. The players are dealt cards unknown to them. But they can play the game well or badly. A skillful player may have a bad deal and yet win the game, whereas a bad player may get a good and yet make a mess of it.” (S. Radhakrishnan)

“There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires.” (Nelson Mandela)

“There will always be some curveballs in your life. Teach your children to thrive in that adversity.”  
(Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe)

“The human mind is not capable of grasping the Universe. We are like a little child entering a huge library. The walls are covered to the ceilings with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written these books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. But the child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books—a mysterious order which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects.” (Albert Einstein)

# 3

## PROCESS

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### **What Process Writing Is**

Writing about a process generally tells the reader how to do something, or how something is done, by proceeding one step at a time. This procedure may be used in anything from a recipe to a repair manual to the complexities of a political movement. Process writing might best be understood as a particularly disciplined form of exposition. Writing about a process requires precise writing, often in linear order.

### **How to Write about a Process**

As implied above, the central feature of process writing is that it proceeds from one point to another in whatever sequential order (logical, chronological, physical, mechanical, and so forth) the subject demands. The key to effective process writing is shaped to an orderly selection and presentation of the material. In that sense this form is usually more stringent than some of the other forms might be. The writer who breaks the sequence and disrupts the procedure risks jumbling the process and confusing the reader. But this does not mean we should use the key to process writing to lock the form in its tomb. Robust verbs and trenchant nouns will keep it alive.

This type of writing is especially useful for technical subjects. Here is a simple example from an ar-

ticle in the *Scientific American*. It has to do with a device that allowed Galileo to use his telescope as a measuring instrument: “There was a circular grid with a diameter of ten centimeters and a spacing between rulings of about two millimeters. The grid had a pin through its center by which it was attached to a rod ending in a ring that fitted snugly around the tube of the telescope. When Galileo looked through the telescope with his right eye, he looked with his left eye at the grid and optically superposed Jupiter on the central pin. The grid was then rotated to align a horizontal ruling with the plane of the satellites. . . .”

### **Locating Subjects for Process Writing**

Process writing can become an important part of any other type of writing, including the most creative variety. Its relevance to the other parts of this book will be evident. But concentrating on some of the subjects listed in this chapter—ranging, as they do, from “how gravity works” to “how football drafts work”—and moving them step-by-step through a rigorous, concrete, and clear explanation would be a helpful exercise for anyone who wants to write anything at all. Process writing is that fundamental. The student who does it well will then be well into the process of learning the writer’s craft.

### **Food and Drink**

making sushi  
 making tandoori chicken  
 making baked Alaska  
 making earth bread  
 using the microwave  
 using an old-fashioned grill  
 cleaning a fish  
 making sausage  
 baking in a sand pit  
 making *arroz con pollo*  
 preparing fried rice  
 preparing refried beans  
 barbecuing  
 broiling  
 making ice cream  
 making candy  
 making tacos  
 making a combination pizza  
 making a flour tortilla  
 making a cake  
 making a spicy spaghetti sauce  
 presenting a recipe on TV  
 shopping for food in a foreign country  
 eating with chopsticks  
 brewing a cup of tea or coffee  
 how to sprout beans  
 eating a fruit from start to finish

### **Writing**

creating a Web page  
 using endnotes  
 writing to \_\_\_\_\_  
 writing argumentation  
 writing more simply  
 using the pronoun “you”  
 writing pompously  
 writing an F paper  
 organizing a paper  
 saying nothing in many words  
 taking notes  
 proofreading  
 achieving clarity, brevity, correctness, simplicity, or thoroughness in writing  
 educating oneself to know genres one is writing in  
 writing a job application  
 writing a short story  
 writing an introduction to a composition  
 thinking creatively

sound writing or sound-writing  
 marking compositions  
 describing your personal writing process  
 creating an outline  
 writing an effective resume  
 writing a job description  
 how to prepare for a debate  
 grading or editing another’s writing  
 revising one’s writing  
 composing on a word processor  
 registering in writing a complaint about writing  
 getting down to the agony of writing

### **Education, Learning Processes**

searching for a library book using an online catalog  
 using the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*  
 reading a dictionary  
 researching a topic using a search engine  
 predicting success or failure  
 taking an advanced course  
 answering a question  
 wasting time effectively  
 meditating  
 using mnemonic devices  
 figuring by the Chisanbop method  
 learning through mistakes  
 teaching a language by a special method  
 saving public schools  
 getting or losing accreditation  
 communicating when you don’t know the language  
 bringing out whatever talents you have  
 reading or teaching Braille  
 getting preliminary experience or education  
 learning how to read in an unfamiliar subject area  
 learning argumentation by practicing it or reading it  
 recording audiobooks  
 learning without taking notes  
 using the library card catalog  
 finding out information on \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to cut class  
 learning to ride a bicycle  
 using newspapers in the classroom  
 teaching a first reading lesson  
 choosing children’s books  
 reading a map  
 learning how to ask the right question(s)  
 learning a second language  
 choosing a major  
 planning a degree

reading body language  
 planning a road trip using the Web  
 learning to like \_\_\_\_\_  
 telling an illustrative story  
 preparing an oral presentation  
 learning to balance school and extracurricular activities  
 being more observant  
 making drudgery exciting  
 learning how to put things off as long as possible  
 how children play  
 how parents can start a school of their own  
 how Alexander the Great was tutored  
 how television has changed learning  
 how computers have changed learning  
 how children were educated in England during the 19<sup>th</sup>  
 century  
 how decisions are made in your school  
 how to be understood  
 how to solve discipline problems in elementary school  
 or high school  
 how the Montessori method works  
 how playthings help a child grow  
 how a child (grows, learns, loves)  
 how to skim-read by skipping judiciously  
 how to experiment by the scientific method  
 critiquing World Wide Web pages and sources  
 how to write a précis

## History

How were duties relegated in medieval abbeys and  
 monasteries?  
 How are war criminals tracked down?  
 How was apartheid opposed and defeated?  
 How did a certain country put down a coup?  
 How is the past recaptured?  
 How did Napoleon plan the invasion of Russia?  
 By what process did the British colonies in America  
 become independent?  
 By what process did Hawaii become a U.S. state?  
 How did Elizabeth I improve her navy?  
 What was it like to \_\_\_\_\_?  
 How can the forebears of a certain famous contempo-  
 rary be traced?  
 How does a country surrender to another country in  
 time of war?  
 How is wartime neutrality maintained?  
 How did De Valera rise to power in Ireland?  
 How did the draft system (conscription) come about?  
 How did it first operate? What changes were made in  
 the operation in subsequent years?  
 How is genealogical research conducted?

How is the coast defended?  
 How are votes from certain groups courted?  
 How did India achieve independence from Britain?  
 How did the “slavery triangle” work?  
 How does a presidential election work?  
 How did the Cold War end?  
 Trace the evolution of the Civil Rights movement.  
 What is the proper way to display the United States flag?  
 How did New York City physically rebuild after  
 September 11, 2001?  
 How did the United States emotionally rebuild after  
 September 11, 2001?  
 How can map-making be political?

## Nature

how the earth is measured  
 how gravity works  
 how nature resolves overloading  
 how evaporation and condensation work  
 how an ox-bow lake is formed  
 how bees build hives  
 how ants construct colonies  
 how African termites build castles  
 how spiders spin webs (according to kinds of webs)  
 how the salmon goes upstream  
 how a wasp traps a spider  
 how the cuckoo nests its eggs  
 how to curb erosion  
 how a beaver builds a dam  
 how antlers are used  
 how fireflies can be used  
 how a bloodhound can follow a trail  
 how to conserve natural resources  
 how coffee is produced  
 how the weather is predicted  
 how infinity is measured  
 how *flora* and *fauna* are protected  
 how fruits and vegetables are inoculated  
 how insects, birds, reptiles, etc., live on their internal  
 food reserves  
 how snails battle  
 how ants battle  
 how spontaneous combustion works  
 how creatures are protected from extinction  
 how the Grand Canyon was formed  
 how glaciers changed the landscape  
 how monarch butterflies migrate  
 how erosion creates certain geologic/geographic  
 formations (choose a particular area)

**Human-and-Creature Processes**

how wildlife is photographed  
 how lakes are stocked with fish  
 how to fish in salt water  
 how to breed fish  
 how to tame a rabbit  
 how to crossbreed \_\_\_\_\_  
 how whale blubber was sliced in the 19th century  
 how to get rid of troublesome birds or animals without killing them  
 how to train an animal for a television commercial  
 how to talk with animals  
 how to milk by hand  
 how to rid a dog of fleas  
 how to bathe a dog  
 how to bathe a cat  
 how to set up a birdbath  
 how to breed a mule  
 how to shoe a horse  
 how to fish the old way  
 how to find the angle for angling  
 how to bird-watch  
 how to fish for halibut  
 how to share your backyard with wildlife  
 how to thwart squirrels from raiding bird feeders

**Games, Sports, Outdoor Activities**

how to judge a contest  
 how to skate using inline skates  
 how to use a sail bike  
 how to perform a certain figure in ice-skating  
 how to get lost in the wilderness  
 how to hunt for underwater treasure  
 how to hand-load a \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to load a blunderbuss  
 how to hit the bull's-eye  
 how to prepare for a hunting trip  
 how to buy the right tent  
 how to equip for a backpacking trip  
 how to practice falconry  
 how to trail-ride  
 how to pick a winner  
 how to warm up  
 how an umpire/referee makes a call  
 how to keep long-distance bicycling from becoming painful  
 how women have entered formerly all-male sports  
 how football drafts work

how to maneuver a sailboat  
 how to stay fit for \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to shoot a basketball  
 how to steal bases  
 how to make a certain tennis shot  
 how to get the hang of hang gliding  
 how to run the 100-meter dash  
 how to use strategy to win the race  
 how to use strategy rather than brute force in \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to play badminton  
 how to set up the football wishbone; how it works  
 how to challenge an umpire without being thrown out of the game  
 how to perform a certain kind of high jump  
 how to juggle  
 how to ride a unicycle  
 how to make a certain wrestling hold or movement  
 how to swim a certain stroke  
 how to train for a marathon  
 how to take an early-morning constitutional  
 how to get up again after falling down (in skating or skiing)  
 how to lift weights the wrong way  
 how to perform a certain judo hold or movement  
 how to roll a bowling ball  
 how to cut corners in skiing  
 how to deep-sea dive  
 how to ribbon-rope in a rodeo  
 how to bungee jump  
 how to blaze a trail  
 how to break a leg  
 how to play jacks  
 how to play checkers  
 how to play pool  
 how to juggle  
 how to dribble a ball  
 how to fly a kite  
 how to mountain-climb  
 how to perform a certain water-skiing maneuver  
 how to skateboard  
 how to teach visually impaired people to ski  
 how to ski cross-country  
 how not to win at \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to be disqualified in \_\_\_\_\_  
 how plays are called from the bench  
 how to shoot a certain kind of gun  
 how to set up a certain chess strategy  
 how a jockey is responsible for the success of his/her mount

how to hike with the family  
 how to walk a certain style  
 how to run a certain style  
 how to perform certain calisthenics

### **Religion**

how someone converts to \_\_\_\_\_ (pick a religion)  
 how someone is exorcised  
 how one becomes canonized  
 how to enter the priesthood/ministry  
 how the Pope is chosen  
 what happens at a bar/bat mitzvah  
 what happens at a Hindu “thread” ceremony  
 rite of passage (or coming of age ceremony) in a particular religion

### **Airplanes, Air Travel**

how flight accidents are investigated  
 how a “black box” works  
 how to fly a hot air balloon  
 how to pass time between airline flights  
 how to survive a plane crash  
 how to skywrite  
 how to fly over the Alps (or Andes)  
 how to dust crops  
 how to fly—as a bird, passenger, or pilot  
 how to barnstorm  
 how to land a plane where there is no airport  
 how a fire-engine airplane works  
 how to get through security smoothly

### **Cars, Road Travel**

how to drive defensively  
 how to catch a car thief  
 how to put a car together from scrap  
 how to jump-start a car  
 how to ride a motorcycle  
 how to take a driver’s test  
 how to control/minimize pollution  
 how recalls of cars are made  
 how to care for a car  
 how to get more miles out of a gallon of gas  
 how to change a tire  
 how to drive on icy roads  
 how to drive on rainy roads  
 how to change the oil in a car  
 how to detail a car

### **Travel, Travel Preparation**

how to pack a suitcase  
 how to find the best fare online  
 how to get a visa  
 how to get a passport  
 how British soldiers crossed the Darien Gap of lower Panama  
 how to get medical help abroad  
 how to make reservations  
 how to travel light  
 how to protect your luggage—from loss, from theft  
 how to visit \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to travel in Europe  
 how to travel with a family  
 how to communicate when you don’t know the language (e.g., how to order a meal)

### **Telecommunication and Audiovisual Processes**

how cellular phones work  
 how telephone cables work  
 how to trace a telephone call  
 what a telephone operator does  
 how a pager works  
 how the Internet works  
 how a telecommunications satellite works  
 how to build a sound system  
 how to build a radio  
 how to install a hard drive  
 how to install a sound card

### **Grooming**

how to use dental floss the right way  
 how to choose the right clothes for the time of year  
 how to cut hair  
 how to tie a shoe  
 how to look casually elegant  
 how to choose the right soap, shampoo, or other toilet article  
 how to sew on a button  
 how to care for shoes  
 how to launder clothes  
 how to fold your laundry  
 how to maintain a particular hairdo  
 how to look cool  
 how to color your hair  
 how to look shocking



### **Sleep/Sleep Processes**

- how to relax
- how to go to sleep by not trying to go to sleep
- how to wake up a little bit at a time
- how to learn the fine art of napping
- how to handle insomnia
- how not to snore

### **Entertaining, Social Arrangements**

- how to run a restaurant
- how to eat at \_\_\_\_\_
- how to dj a party
- how to be a bore at a party
- how to have fun at a party
- how to arrange a surprise party
- how to arrange a Super Bowl party
- how to plan a party
- how to arrange a wedding
- how to arrange a baby or wedding shower that includes both men and women
- how to celebrate a special birthday

### **Safety**

- how to stay safe in a foreign country
- how to put out an electrical fire
- how to put out an oven fire
- how to put out a grease fire
- how to react if mugged
- how to prevent electrocution
- how to use a flak jacket
- how to protect yourself in a natural disaster
- how to have a contingency drill—for fire, attack, disaster, etc.
- how to protect yourself on the street
- how to guard against poisonous plants
- how to prevent childhood accidents or diseases
- how to make \_\_\_\_\_ safe
- how to cycle safely
- how to keep camp life safe
- how to make roller-blading safe

### **Medicine, Physiology, Health**

- how to take blood from a donor at a blood drive
- how to give birth at home
- how the human embryo develops
- how to trace the cause of a certain sickness
- how Lincoln's medical history could be researched to speculate on his health during his second term

- how to avoid unnecessary health-care and hospital expenses
- how a bypass operation is performed
- how to put in a contact lens
- how to gather information on a certain medical topic
- how to deal with jet lag
- how doctors and nurses prep for an operation
- how to treat oxygen lack
- how to eliminate most deaths from \_\_\_\_\_
- how scientists proved the link between smoking and cancer
- how to save your teeth
- how to conduct a medical appointment effectively when the doctor is rushing
- how dialysis works
- how laparoscopy works
- how asthma is treated
- how the root-canal is treated
- how a face-lift is performed
- how cryosurgery works
- how polio was conquered
- how a certain vaccine was discovered or developed
- how breast cancer is detected and treated
- how alcoholism is treated
- how to test for allergies
- how AIDS is prevented
- how AIDS is treated
- how to treat bee stings or insect bites
- how to cure acne
- how to deal with frostbite
- how to stop hiccups
- how the pacemaker works
- how to use the Heimlich Maneuver to save a choking victim
- how the heart works
- how the brain works
- how to improve your sleep
- how to correct a "lazy eye"
- how your body tells you you're cold or hot
- how the human eye sees
- how the human ear hears
- how the sense of touch works
- how to perform an ultrasound scan
- how to test for twins in the last trimester of pregnancy
- how to determine whether pain relievers advertised on TV are dependable or safe
- how an MD makes a medical prognosis
- how to cure infection of \_\_\_\_\_
- how to fight against infection
- how an organ is transplanted

how to still butterflies in the stomach  
 how to treat snakebite  
 how to perform a certain operation  
 how to take someone's blood pressure  
 how to treat poisoning from poison plants  
 how to give artificial respiration  
 how midwifery works  
 how to read temperatures

### **Constructions, Constructing**

how the Pyramids were constructed  
 how sewage systems worked during the Victorian era in England  
 how dams are built  
 how windmills are constructed; how they work  
 how oil pipelines are constructed under water  
 how to make adobe bricks  
 how to lay the groundwork for a house  
 how to build a crib  
 how not to design an auditorium  
 how to build a sandbox  
 how to make a \_\_\_\_\_ chair  
 how to make a \_\_\_\_\_ table  
 how not to build a house  
 how to build a modular home  
 how to build a solar-powered house  
 how to build a personal solar collector for powering, say, your stereo  
 how to shingle a roof  
 how to build a sweat lodge  
 how to construct a model inside a bottle  
 how to perform a certain kind of carpentry  
 how to make a porcelain figure  
 how to build a dugout  
 how bridges are constructed for strength  
 how to make buildings earthquake-proof  
 how to build an inexpensive bookcase

### **Repairing, Cleaning, Inspecting**

how to inspect a restaurant for cleanliness  
 how to window-clean tall buildings  
 how to clean up a town  
 how to repair potholes  
 how to mow a lawn or trim hedges  
 how to clean a chimney  
 how to proceed if a bat flies into your house through the chimney  
 how to install a doorknob  
 how to install a deadbolt lock

how to paint a \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to refinish a \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to repair a heater  
 how to repair a bicycle brake  
 how to service a DVD player

### **Art, Handicrafts, Domestic Arts**

how early animation worked  
 how to animate  
 how computer animation works  
 how to foreshorten in drawing  
 how to contour-draw  
 how an artwork is preserved or repaired  
 how an artwork is examined for authenticity  
 how to fake a Jackson Pollock painting  
 how to fake an Andy Warhol painting  
 how to make a collograph print  
 how to draw with a pencil  
 how to draw with charcoal  
 how to create a chiaroscuro effect  
 how to create distressed furniture  
 how to arrange furniture according to principles of feng shui  
 how to fake a Renaissance painting  
 how to engrave  
 how to turn scraps into decor  
 how to hang wallpaper  
 how to decorate a room  
 how to quilt  
 how to sew by a pattern  
 how to make clothes better and more cheaply than you can buy them  
 how to display your collectibles  
 how to make fractal art  
 how to do origami  
 how to do macramé  
 how to do batik  
 how to make a sand sculpture  
 how to make an ice sculpture  
 how to make pottery  
 how to decorate a Christmas tree by theme or color  
 how to decorate for Halloween

### **Plant Life**

how fruits and vegetables are picked, processed, packed, and sent to the consumer  
 how to plant grass  
 how to clone redwood trees  
 how to plan a spring garden

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how a seed grows  
how to protect trees  
how to get an orchard on the way  
how to control the growth of grass  
how to grow house plants  
how to grow a bonsai tree  
how to create a “nature garden”  
how to create a windowbox garden  
how to mulch your garden  
how to make compost for your garden  
how to get your violets to bloom  
how to make an herb garden  
how to make a rock garden  
how to make a rooftop garden  
how to start your outdoor garden indoors  
how to do Xeriscape landscaping

### **Money, Business, Saving, Theft, Economics**

how a pyramid scheme works  
how smuggling is done  
how to prevent hotel thefts  
how to make out an income-tax return  
how to save money on a drug prescription  
how to take measures against shoplifting  
how bill collectors work  
how to collect on your insurance  
how to save money  
how travel agencies operate  
how the IRS catches tax-evaders  
how to plan an economical trip  
how the phone company is defrauded out of payment for long-distance calls  
how customers rip-off the electric-power companies  
how customers are ripped-off by public utilities companies  
how the economy of a foreign country can be undermined  
how to spot counterfeits  
how to keep from being reckless with credit cards  
how to live off the wilderness  
how money is spent by charity organizations  
how to live simply  
how to boost tourism in \_\_\_\_\_  
how to collect unemployment  
how to conserve energy in the home  
how to sell \_\_\_\_\_  
how to have a garage sale  
how to buy public land  
how to end unemployment

how students can pay their own college costs  
how millionaires spend their money  
how money is “laundered”  
how money is printed at the mint  
how old money is discarded at the mint  
how an ATM works  
how to exchange money at borders  
how countries that have disasters are helped financially  
how dividends are determined and distributed  
how a hospital is administered  
how to live within a salary or an allowance  
how charity organizations work  
how to be a philanthropist  
how returned goods are paid for in the long run  
how a stock exchange works  
how grocers stock a produce section  
how to sell your own book  
how to hunt for a bargain  
how to buy at an auction  
how a Dutch auction works  
how a silent auction works  
how to conduct a meeting  
how the realtor works after an agreement has been reached to buy or sell a home  
how to trade foreign money without getting taken  
how ancient traders did without money  
how to lose a job through incompetence  
how to do comparative shopping  
how to bargain with a car sales representative  
how to save for college  
how to travel in \_\_\_\_\_ on a shoestring budget

### **Film, Film Media, Photography**

how music videos have changed advertising/filmmaking  
how to use a camera in soft light  
how to keep a camera clean  
how to take a picture with an old camera (specify what kind)  
how to pick out an inexpensive manual camera  
how to post a photograph on the Web  
how to develop films privately  
how Hollywood screen extras work  
how television ads are pre-screened for bloopers  
how to set up a television translator station  
how the laugh track on television works  
how an actor or actress plays a double role (or more) in the same take  
how early filmmakers showed the passing of time  
how modern filmmakers show the passing of time  
how early filmmakers moved from one scene to the next

how modern filmmakers move from one scene to the next  
 how a television producer works  
 how a movie producer works  
 how to program a VCR  
 how to use a digital camera  
 how to use a CD burner

### **Language, Information, Communication**

how to break a code  
 how the Chinese calendar works  
 how the Aztec calendar works  
 how the \_\_\_\_\_ calendar works  
 how e-mail works  
 how to prepare for a job interview  
 how to behave in a job interview  
 how libraries have changed since early days  
 how to outline  
 how to understand HTML  
 how Hitler used propaganda  
 how the Associated Press works  
 how the news is written  
 how the English language developed from its beginnings  
 how a search engine works  
 how words change meanings  
 how Webster worked on his dictionary  
 how James Murray compiled the *Oxford English Dictionary*  
 how slang becomes acceptable  
 how to break the language barrier  
 how to set up a debate between presidential candidates  
 how to debate on TV as a presidential candidate  
 how to speak as an insider to be part of a particular group  
 how to cajole or persuade

### **Mechanical and Chemical Processes**

how a home pregnancy test works  
 how to test a driver for alcohol  
 how to program a computer  
 how a rotary engine works  
 how to bug an office  
 how a new invention works  
 how an oil well works  
 how \_\_\_\_\_ can be kept afloat (or aloft)  
 how to build a better mousetrap  
 how the Hughes toolbit worked  
 how a ticker-tape works

how to use earphones  
 how the first liquid-fuel rocket worked  
 how to desalinate water  
 how to purify water  
 how to control a certain kind of pollution  
 how sugar is refined  
 how copper is refined  
 how sulfur is mined  
 how coal was first mined  
 how strip mining is done  
 how waste can be converted for use  
 how mummies were mummified  
 how bodies are embalmed

### **Psychology, Emotions, Social Actions**

how to handle fear of failure  
 how to change jobs  
 how to prepare for job-hunting  
 how to pass driver's education without stress  
 how to check on one's own honesty  
 how to come to a family decision  
 how to make a Zen garden  
 how to bring out the best in \_\_\_\_\_  
 how a secretary handles the public  
 how to live with a two-year-old child  
 how to meditate  
 how to keep a poker face  
 how to manipulate someone  
 how the person under psychoanalysis can get along while the doctor is away  
 how to kick a habit  
 how to live with a Waterloo  
 how to heal emotional wounds  
 how to control the violence that exists in us all  
 how to make the mind wander effectively  
 how to relax  
 how to go beyond your endurance  
 how to end post-meal hunger  
 how to pull your own strings  
 how to get your first job  
 how to handle overworrying  
 how the human mind/body system works  
 how to manage kids at a summer camp  
 how to release a friend from an obligation  
 how to fire a friend  
 how to help employees work better  
 how the public is sometimes "emotionally blackmailed" by public servants  
 how to get along with an older (or a younger) brother or sister

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how to get away from someone  
how to deprogram a person  
how to psych out your opponent  
how to recover from an emotional blow  
how to get back on the road to confidence  
how to get over feelings of guilt  
how to avoid a scene (or other unpleasantness)  
how to adjust to the first year of high school  
how to adjust to the last year of high school  
how to prepare for the first year after high school  
how thought worked before the evolution of language  
how to become involved in a community project  
how to organize a community effort  
how to help a visitor to your community  
how to help an exchange student from another country  
feel comfortable

### Law

how to organize a boycott  
how to profit from complaining legally  
how to file a lawsuit  
how to protect yourself legally from the landlord  
how the taxpayer can legally revolt  
how to make a class-action suit  
how to settle an account without trouble  
how to unload a lemon legally  
how border officials crack down on narcotics  
how aliens are registered in the United States  
how to get a permit for \_\_\_\_\_  
how whistle-blowers are protected from their superiors  
how the small-claims court works  
how police use computers in identifying, tracking, and apprehending suspects  
how a court decision can be challenged  
how to read fingerprints  
how a police officer is trained  
how to make up a legal petition  
how lawyers are protected from those they help convict  
how eminent domain works  
how to fight a traffic ticket  
how to let thieves know you are not at home  
how to help police in their work  
how to proceed if arrested  
how those who await trial are handled  
how judges perform their duties  
how to make a citizen's arrest  
what to do at the scene of a car accident  
how to prevent a certain kind of crime

### Government, Politics

how a grand jury operates  
how a census works  
how a "political machine" works  
how the government protects historical sites  
how a town council can bring about the resignation of a city official  
how to lobby  
how to burrow into office when another party comes into power  
how to run a national campaign  
how computerized voting works (or is supposed to work)  
how political pressure is applied  
how a government agent penetrated the intelligence apparatus of a foreign power  
how to set up a wiretap  
how to conduct a nonviolent protest  
how sabotage was committed  
how sabotage was discovered  
how a press secretary operates  
how a Senate committee investigates  
how a president is elected  
how the Supreme Court operates  
how to ratify an amendment  
how Russia chooses its top government official  
how the American political process works  
how the "loyal opposition" is supposed to exercise its duty  
how majority rule operates  
how national polls are taken  
how a bill becomes a law  
how to spin bad news  
how to run for office in your school  
how to run someone's campaign for office  
how to petition for change in \_\_\_\_\_  
how one registers people to vote

### Miscellaneous Processes

how fakery works in \_\_\_\_\_  
how to find the killer  
how to speak out against abuses  
how someone becomes thoroughly Americanized  
how houses were built in early colonial America  
how to scare a reader or a moviegoer  
how accuracy is checked for world record claims  
how to select the right sound system or computer  
how to change a baby's diaper

- how to feed a baby  
 how to bathe a baby  
 how the U.S. Geological Survey researches its map information  
 how to get tickets for a television show  
 how the Muppets work  
 how to live primitively  
 how to behave like a \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to shop at an antiques store  
 how to conduct a \_\_\_\_\_ contest  
 how to collect valuable stamps, coins, etc.  
 how applications for employment are verified for such things as education and work experience  
 how to expose a rip-off or a con job  
 how to see backwards into time  
 how to take \_\_\_\_\_ apart  
 how to meld or blend \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to shave comfortably  
 how to drift  
 how to chill out  
 how to break a routine  
 how to thwart  
 how words are added to a language  
 how to stop \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to keep going in \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to get started  
 how to perform a certain monumental task  
 how \_\_\_\_\_ (money, a ship, a grade) was raised (or can be raised)  
 how to stalk the wild \_\_\_\_\_  
 how \_\_\_\_\_ works  
 how to revamp \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to learn the ropes  
 how to make a practice run at \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to get along better with your \_\_\_\_\_
- how to observe something  
 how to collect art  
 how to learn the music scales  
 how a fire crew responds to a call  
 how an advertising agency works  
 how to arrive at the same result by opposing means  
 how to paint what is not there  
 how to read music by sight  
 how to tune a sitar  
 how to conduct a symphony  
 how to undo something  
 how a major hotel operates  
 how forest lookouts work  
 how an airport control tower works  
 how the metric system was arrived at  
 how a system other than the metric system was arrived at  
 how to do a pedicure or manicure  
 how to make a miniature \_\_\_\_\_  
 how to audition  
 how hunger works  
 how to make a guitar  
 how to get from here to there  
 how sweat glands work  
 how to make radio contact  
 how to get rid of a cold  
 how to recharge a \_\_\_\_\_ (something other than a battery)  
 how missing persons are located  
 how to get a job as a forest ranger  
 how thinking can be made into a hobby  
 how art can enrich life  
 how impostors fake their qualifications  
 how Pulitzer Prize winners are chosen  
 how to support a really worthy cause  
 how to organize a float for a parade

# 4

# NARRATIVE

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## What Narrative Writing Is

A narrative tells a story or gives an account of what happened. It is certainly one of the oldest forms of communication. One thinks of the ancient epics—the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the trickster tales of West Africa, Beowulf, Grimm’s fairy tales, the epic of Gilgamesh, the *Cantar de Mio Cid*—ancient narratives from all parts of the world, capturing the history, the values, and the imagination of a people and transmitting them orally or in writing. Even the drawings in prehistoric caves tell their own stories. It’s the power of story that keeps Scheherazade alive in the Arabic story within a story, *The Thousand and One Nights*. Life itself is a narrative, a history, a story (Latin, *historia*). Would anyone’s deepest heart not recognize and respond to that truth? It seems fair to say that people everywhere have always looked with pleasure and a certain awe towards the one who could tell that story well.

## How to Write Narrative

It is no accident that this chapter on narrative follows the section on writing about a process. There is no question here about how those two spokes in the rhetorical wheel relate. The “and then and then and then” of the narrative is close indeed to the sequential advance from point to point of process writing. A similar attempt at precision and clarity should be

made, but at the same time the narrative form demands that the writer be allowed more freedom. A narrative line may often be kept straight and strong by twining process techniques through the core of it. But here the rope must be allowed to fray, to soak up the smells, the colors, the taste, and the touch of circumstance. A good storyteller knows how to draw a long bow, the better to whistle the arrow dead to the heart of the matter.

Of course there are other, far more radical, narrative liberties. Many contemporary novelists delight in them. Most beginning writers, however, would probably do well to learn how to spin a straight yarn before they tangle it, web intricate plots, and risk getting the narrative confounded.

## Locating Narrative Subjects

Everyone has a story to tell, even students who insist they have nothing to tell because they think their lives are dull. There are stories everywhere, in just about anything, and this book offers no exception to that commonplace. Let’s hope that the subjects in this chapter will goad memories, spark imaginations, in a special way. Close attention could as well be paid to the chapters on creative writing, critical writing, and description. There is surely something here that should arouse any student to relive, in writing, an experience (even if the “experience” originates in the imagination) that ought to be shared.

## **Domestic, Personal, and Autobiographical Narratives**

sibling rivalry  
 in the middle  
 the coming fury  
 stuck with it  
 the most important  
 unopposed  
 the addict  
 revealing for the first time  
 secretest thoughts  
 five minutes more  
 gaffes and bloopers  
 talking it over  
 curiouser and curiouser  
 over the edge  
 over the top  
 under the radar  
 under the boardwalk  
 punning around  
 good news  
 seeking independence  
 seeking identity  
 in the back of my mind  
 not being predictable  
 ready for a new start  
 blowing dust  
 on the brink  
 a special sound  
 winter love  
 summer love  
 at the wrong hour  
 a personal message  
 being spurred on  
 skipping class to do something else  
 job for the inexperienced  
 peak experience  
 determined to be  
 the oldest of many  
 one example, repeated ad nauseam  
 plunder  
 unexplained act  
 ready for prime time  
 sky's the limit  
 convertible car  
 not ready yet  
 hot shot  
 do or die, now or never  
 in command

the first day  
 the last day  
 cramping my style  
 all at one time  
 advancing steadily  
 making up for lost time  
 your turn now  
 best offer  
 old catalogs  
 the long, hot summer  
 joining a family  
 a student-exchange program  
 dream vacation  
 pulling an all-nighter during finals week  
 walking in the rain  
 a secret vote  
 bird in the hand  
 a rolling stone  
 the last one  
 rising again  
 under dire circumstances  
 private word  
 working off a debt, moral or financial  
 a supernatural happening  
 disappearing  
 closing a chapter  
 leaving someone for the first time  
 cover girl or boy  
 on the take  
 topping this or that  
 a place of honor  
 with this ring  
 spiders and snakes  
 doubtful deeds  
 even now  
 vacancy/no vacancy  
 a week ago  
 the target of threats  
 being bitter/not being bitter  
 first visit  
 trouble with the manager  
 claiming to be someone else  
 meeting your double  
 home to stay  
 home alone  
 flirting  
 dirty work  
 more than the usual  
 hearing/listening



## 38 What Can I Write About?

last-gasp effort  
fleeing  
precognition  
short-changing  
fighting the doldrums  
signing on, signing off  
self-righteousness  
just looking on  
outside looking in  
inside looking out  
making up  
gone but not forgotten  
some changes or else  
show of good faith  
look who's talking  
two for the money  
critic's choice  
street corner preacher  
alone in \_\_\_\_\_  
when all is said and done  
adopting a baby  
adopting a pet  
the day the terrorists attacked  
Sunday afternoons  
a tornado approaches  
walking on the beach  
the face of terror  
rediscoveries  
frivolity  
check not in the mail  
winning a prize  
winning the lottery  
losing your cool  
under fire  
hearts on fire  
on the hot seat  
nothing the same  
doing it best  
still up in the air  
in distress  
laughing/not laughing  
being ready  
World's Greatest  
coming out  
for seven years  
after school  
separate ways  
every step of the way  
learning to adapt

feeling no pressure, feeling no pain  
Yuletide  
getting the gold star  
hoax  
urban legends  
somewhere between  
a significant aside  
a significant other  
a power trip  
in conquest of others  
playing second fiddle  
to go out, or to eat here  
teacher outdone by pupil  
\*\$#@!  
something I can't put behind me  
small change  
getting down  
foreign currency  
one sour note  
one small step  
one giant leap for \_\_\_\_\_  
day on the farm  
the institution  
"inmates running the asylum"  
anything for a drink of water  
the measure of \_\_\_\_\_  
going ballistic  
going Hollywood  
going, going, gone  
May/December marriage  
broken promise(s)  
not alone  
sounds and silence  
sounds of silence  
end of a song  
taking consolation  
a roaring wind  
once over lightly  
clearing the air  
passive resistance  
the day \_\_\_\_\_ happened  
fearing the "other"  
understanding the "other"  
unlearning a response  
fin de siècle  
a recycling adventure  
pizza parties  
my job as a telemarketer  
my job as \_\_\_\_\_

walking a dog  
 walking a cat  
 bump in the road  
 bump on the head  
 bad hair day  
 bad day for a zit  
 shielding someone  
 following someone  
 the awful truth  
 the last laugh  
 a country kitchen  
 favorite child  
 little joys—snow days, flowers growing up through  
 pavement  
 nearing the finish  
 in disgrace  
 asking for money/the car/permission  
 parental bond with child/children  
 a charmed life  
 a flash of insight  
 graveyard shift  
 daydream  
 the midnight hour  
 breaking curfew  
 breaking the ice  
 breaking away  
 story behind the story  
 not being afraid  
 they all laughed  
 discovery of my father/mother/sister/brother  
 revitalizing spirits  
 breathing new life  
 friendship with \_\_\_\_\_  
 homemaking  
 in traditional dress  
 nursing  
 separating  
 one step closer  
 wake-up call  
 making merry  
 watching with amazement and alarm  
 day or night  
 being a complete person  
 earning a living in an unusual way  
 eating your heart out  
 a serious mistake made in childhood  
 a shot in the arm  
 a funny kind of \_\_\_\_\_  
 variety

not over yet  
 footing the bill  
 nerves on edge  
 a time and a place  
 shut away  
 last-minute change  
 bridal shower  
 a stillness  
 when my computer crashed  
 farmers' market  
 flea market  
 a Million \_\_\_\_\_ March  
 promises to keep  
 feeling good  
 doing good  
 waiting for the other shoe to drop  
 meditation  
 many happy returns  
 hanging on  
 hanging out  
 a word from home  
 a family affair  
 in the midst of life  
 a day spent with a living legend  
 being an army brat  
 winning in a bargain or barter with a shrewd individual  
 only recently  
 sleeping on it  
 breaking loose  
 entering the mainstream  
 rejecting the mainstream  
 spending time  
 coming home  
 first results  
 too much of a good thing  
 early responsibility  
 seeing the family only rarely  
 greatest personal success  
 caring  
 face to face  
 coming full circle  
 clearing the tracks  
 covering your tracks  
 owning up  
 lesson from the expert(s)  
 talking and thinking backward to remember the past  
 dogfight  
 a voice from the past  
 going through it like everyone else

## 40 What Can I Write About?

being predictable  
reminding of someone or something forgotten  
much ado about nothing  
almost alike  
almost famous  
unmoving minute hand  
bearing the pain  
taking the cake  
someone following  
only yesterday?  
I made it!  
freedom personified in action  
favorite spot  
one day at a time  
reunion/uniting old pals  
the last word(s)  
honest mistake(s)  
a worthy accomplishment  
when I fall in love/when I feel in love  
climbing through the window late at night  
losing the key(s)  
second helping  
puppy love  
love of puppies  
on turning 18  
on turning 21  
getting my driver's license  
slacking  
the ultimate eccentric  
tempest in a teapot  
the long road ahead  
a piercing experience  
making ends meet  
where the heart is  
green, green grass of home  
on the road  
on the river  
defender of the \_\_\_\_\_  
the day of reckoning  
Ozark living  
stage fright  
bad moment  
an instant's lapse of attention  
humbling experience  
supplicating  
suffocating  
I can see clearly now  
the beautiful today  
the simple made hard

letting off steam  
marching to the tune of a different drummer

## Dreams, Fantasies, Make-Believe

a pot of gold  
free as the birds  
setting the world on fire  
Bigfoot  
glorifying \_\_\_\_\_  
invincible  
the first moments before Creation, when God, in  
Shelley's words, was "weary of vacancy"  
windjammer  
meeting an archetype  
encounter with a snallygaster  
dreams in technicolor  
magic  
end of the rainbow  
if I were the opposite sex  
if I were rich  
if there were no rules  
going home with an extraterrestrial  
pantomime  
nightmare(s)  
till the end of time  
back from heaven/hell  
soapbox  
with the original Berserkers  
family dream(s)  
terror from the sky  
out of time  
dream(s)  
prophetic dreams  
Nostradamus  
rewriting history  
maelstrom  
supernova  
living symbols and images  
the last frontier  
a space odyssey  
alien abductions  
"If I were queen/king for a day."  
teacher for a day

## Sports and Their Metaphors

interference  
winning combination  
tennis without a net  
loser take all

crossing the line  
 leveling the playing field  
 landing some big ones  
 giving no quarter  
 reruns/repeats/playbacks  
 illegal procedure  
 good sporting behavior  
 no substitute for rules  
 showcase talent  
 back seat to no one  
 maximum performance  
 Olympic spirit  
 passing the torch  
 two out of three  
 watching \_\_\_\_\_ run  
 the winner explaining how it was done  
 target shooting  
 glider, gliding  
 down the homestretch  
 a game of inches  
 running neck and neck  
 loose ball  
 strategic error  
 making all the difference in the outcome  
 coming out swinging  
 overbearing  
 a lightweight  
 fast service  
 rained out  
 gone fishing  
 fishing as a “contest against nature” (Steinbeck)  
 a big sweep  
 crossing swords  
 throwing down the gauntlet  
 rolling with the punches  
 rope-a-dope  
 sparring  
 shadow boxing  
 blockbuster  
 horse race  
 over-confident  
 moving the goalposts  
 getting injured in the game  
 making the leap

### **Travel, Adventure**

driving in a blizzard  
 O, Paris!  
 big move

and away we go  
 border crossing  
 climbing a mountain  
 slow, unanxious ride  
 meeting in \_\_\_\_\_  
 fugitive  
 muddy road  
 last journey  
 someone met on a trip  
 surviving a natural disaster  
 the first/last bus/train/plane home  
 ships passing in the night  
 on the loose  
 long way yet  
 westward ho!  
 living on the coast  
 a long day’s journey into night  
 trekking in \_\_\_\_\_  
 seven years in \_\_\_\_\_  
 sailing away for a night and a day (or more)  
 the Great Wall  
 the \_\_\_\_\_ route  
 the yellow brick road  
 scuba diving  
 a rafting expedition  
 getting lost in canyon country  
 security checks  
 subway adventures  
 captains courageous  
 going where?  
 having been where?  
 roving  
 long and winding road  
 rocky road  
 the call of faraway places  
 hard traveling  
 bon voyage  
 taking chances  
 train adventure  
 driving  
 national parks  
 easy way back  
 hard way back  
 the nomad finding a home  
 asking for something in another language  
 fording a river  
 stopping by the wayside  
 adrift on the Amazon  
 drifting

international friendships  
 atop a double-decker bus  
 strange places  
 pickpocket  
 born to danger  
 stranded at the airport  
 waiting all night for a ferry  
 package tour  
 the cruise  
 booking online  
 going to Mexico  
 the love boat  
 tourist in space  
 celebrity astronaut  
 roughing it  
 a blowing nor'easter  
 the call of the wild  
 already there  
 taking the road less traveled  
 tunneling through  
 visiting the "Forbidden City"  
 going on pilgrimage to \_\_\_\_\_

**Mystery**

at a séance  
 the uninvited  
 unexplained incident  
 premonitions  
 psychics' predictions  
 psychological terror  
 a figure in the shadows  
 a trunkful of old letters  
 a lost key  
 a twin brother or sister that no one told you about  
 a scar  
 a raspy voice on the phone  
 accident, or homicide?  
 no stone unturned  
 black cat  
 looking for the one that got away  
 investigation  
 mystery behind reality  
 at random  
 first discovery of the strange  
 sabotage  
 proofs  
 suspicion  
 a voice of eternity  
 surprises galore

portent  
 undiscovered country  
 an abandoned house  
 the attic  
 rattle in the attic  
 "You gotta believe me!"  
 "I didn't do it!"  
 "I know what you did . . ."  
 left for dead  
 the evil car  
 twilight zone experience  
 nightmare on your street  
 in the cellar  
 ghost in the machine  
 ghostwriter  
 the woman in white  
 the man in black  
 the glass eyeball  
 the rustling behind the door  
 creaking stairs  
 illusion or reality?  
 echoes  
 waiting for what comes next  
 chasing down a stolen/missing item  
 strange doings  
 flickering lights  
 impending but unseen or unknown danger  
 reading tarot cards  
 my visit to the psychic

**Miscellaneous**

out of tune  
 in the long run  
 nose for news  
 threat becoming actuality  
 folk custom  
 tricky going  
 junk-food addiction  
 dealing with bureaucracy  
 people of leisure  
 keeping up with the \_\_\_\_\_  
 glad to be here  
 at home/not at home  
 always watching, always being watched  
 honor among thieves  
 jury of peers  
 threat  
 a lesson for all  
 the old boy network

swimming upstream (metaphorically)  
 sitting/standing on ceremony  
 knowing what to do  
 breach of faith  
 laughing at/being laughed at/laughing with  
 curiosity-seeking  
 supporting locals  
 maneuver, strategy  
 spitting venom  
 shootings  
 race with the devil  
 baring your claws  
 diplomacy  
 white-collar criminals  
 living à la Martha Stewart  
 chivalry becomes sexism  
 Miss Manners says \_\_\_\_\_  
 prom night  
 volunteering  
 neighborhood watch  
 keeping up appearances  
 secular saints  
 polite applause  
 a joke that fell flat  
 common-sense scorn, as for UFO sightings  
 a pledge of quality  
 setting an example  
 snubbing  
 covering for someone  
 dog-biting man  
 handling being famous  
 follies of the wise  
 choosing only one  
 “oops . . . !”  
 putting your foot in it  
 “Netiquette”

leaving someone out  
 ingroups and outgroups  
 online chat groups

Write a descriptive narrative in which you re-create in the mind of the reader an understanding of some unusual experience you have had (or have heard about from someone close to you).

Write a narrative essay entitled, “Someone for All Reasons,” about a person who was everyone and everything—say, a college president or a high school principal or a mayor who tended not only to administrative matters but also swept the sidewalks.

Use the narrative style of one of these writers as a starting point for your autobiographical narrative: Maya Angelou, Margaret Atwood, James Baldwin, James Boswell, Charlotte Brontë, Sandra Cisneros, Charles Dickens, Frederick Douglass, Isak Dinesen, Madeleine L’Engle, Ralph Ellison, William Faulkner, Anne Frank, Benjamin Franklin, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Jack Kerouac, Jamaica Kincaid, Stephen King, Jack London, Gabriel García Márquez, Herman Melville, Nathan McCall, Walter Dean Myers, V. S. Naipaul, George Orwell, Gary Paulsen, Plutarch, Katherine Anne Porter, Arundhati Roy, William Saroyan, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Brent Staples, Amy Tan, Henry David Thoreau, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Mark Twain, Thomas Wolfe, Tom Wolfe, Tobias Wolff, William Wordsworth, Malcolm X, Laurence Yep, Paul Zindel.

Write a narrative essay entitled, “If Anything Good Can Happen, It Probably Will.” A possible opening could be, “To tell the truth I am sickeningly optimistic.”

Use one of the following as a beginning for a narrative essay:

Without even trying, I have come face to face with \_\_\_\_\_.

What I planned to say and what I did say in my first public address were not remotely similar.

Draw suitable narrative topics from the section of this book on creative writing.

# 5

## CLASSIFICATION/DIVISION

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### What Classification/Division Writing Is

The most immediate example that can be offered of this kind of writing is the book itself, which at the very least is an extended exercise in classification/division. The material of the book is classified in terms of various types of writing and then divided into more specific categories. Classification, then, is the systematic arrangement of something into classes—groups usually founded upon some common ground. Those classified groups may then be divided into their separate parts. Strictly speaking, it is virtually impossible to classify without dividing, but for rhetorical purposes it might be helpful to think of division as tending to be more distinct, more particular. Language-family history provides an excellent example of classification: Linguists group languages into language *families* (Afro-Asiatic, Indo-European, Iroquoian, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, Uto-Aztec, to name a few). These in turn can be divided and subdivided into language *branches*, *languages*, *dialects*, *varieties*, and ultimately, *idiolects*—the last term being used to refer to one’s own private variety of speech.

### How to Write Classification/Division

As with process writing, the key here is order, the systematic arrangement of our material. An essay on types of pain, for instance, might begin with the classification of pain into its two general types, mental and physical. That general classification could then be divided into the almost innumerable kinds of mental and physical pain. Pain—physical, emotional, psychological—can range from a nagging discomfort to an agony so unbearable that the afflicted per-

son prefers to die. It is easy to see, then, why the kind of writing this chapter is concerned with can be an effective method for exploring such a wide-ranging notion.

It is also worth noting that mental pain can be related to and can even cause physical pain, and vice versa. Thus this example also points up the fact that seemingly distinct categories can, upon closer examination, blur together—as well as the fact that, oftentimes, distinct categories are established not so much because they simply exist in the “real world” but because they are constructed to serve a human purpose. Another example, and one where the human purpose has sometimes been unfortunate, can be seen in the use of various notions of racial identity.

### Locating Subjects for Classification/Division

As pointed out before, this book is a handy example of classification/division. It might be of help to browse through it to mark how thousands of diverse subjects can be classified and divided. Keep in mind that the same subject can be classified according to different principles, depending on the criteria or even the classifier. For example, you may classify people by their age, their ethnicity, their class, their education or any other criterion, depending on the nature of your inquiry. Of course you will be looking at lists for the most part. Once classification/division is taken beyond the list format, other writing types and techniques will come along quite naturally, such as description and characterization. For example, consider subgroups in the student body at your school, e.g., “nerds,” “jocks,” “brains,” and so on.

**Animal Life**

endangered species  
 unique ways of trapping  
 ways of taking care of animals  
 kinds of unwanted animals  
 emotional problems of animals  
 food habits of animals  
 ways of training animals  
 hibernation  
 bears  
 metamorphic creatures  
 creatures that use camouflage  
 kinds of eyesight  
 kinds of hearing  
 rodents  
 birds  
 rare animals  
 animal variety on the Galápagos Islands  
 recognizing poisonous snakes  
 the smartest animals  
 the dumbest animals  
 common diseases of animals  
 selective breeding of dogs  
 animal communication  
 group behaviors of animals  
 vertebrates

**Intellectual, Psychological, and Emotional Perceptions and Reactions**

various ways to look at \_\_\_\_\_  
 ways of organizing thoughts for \_\_\_\_\_  
 kinds of nonphysical weapons  
 words as weapons  
 kinds of hints, innuendos, accusations  
 kinds of old ways to learn  
 ways of looking at trees  
 kinds of intellectual climate  
 different kinds of teasing  
 the dreadful, the bad, and the not-so-bad  
 kinds of epiphany that influence life  
 kinds of impressions teachers/students have of one another  
 kinds of response(s) to crises  
 kinds of time thieves  
 several ways the world reacted to \_\_\_\_\_  
 emotions involved in courage  
 kinds of logic or rationale  
 kinds of knowledge

kinds of perception  
 kinds of “erroneous zones”  
 ways of observing  
 kinds of madness  
 kinds of terror  
 kinds of symptoms of violent patients  
 behaviors deriving from id, ego, superego  
 kinds of conditions under which it is impossible to concentrate  
 kinds of ways of opening paths to reconciliation  
 kinds of emotional retreats  
 kinds of pain  
 kinds of psychological games  
 kinds of eating pleasures  
 kinds of stress relievers  
 ways to relieve depression  
 ways to cope with fear  
 ways to offer comfort  
 ways to get revenge  
 ways in which \_\_\_\_\_ is manifested  
 kinds of dilemmas  
 kinds of laughter  
 personality types  
 kinds of ignorance  
 new ways to learn  
 kinds of temptations  
 kinds of taste(s)  
 kinds of thinking  
 kinds of moral courage  
 moods according to season  
 moods according to days of the week  
 moods according to certain incidents  
 kinds of ways of looking at something (using “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” by Wallace Stevens, as a guide)  
 ways of reading the world  
 kinds of literacy  
 kinds of groups within a community  
 ways to let off steam without violence  
 kinds of flattery  
 ways to show appreciation  
 ways of showing respect  
 kinds of humor  
 kinds of love  
 kinds of possessiveness/territorial behavior

**Law**

kinds of law(s)  
 kinds of legal professionals



kinds of legal fields  
kinds of procedure by the defense  
kinds of indemnity  
kinds of homicide  
kinds of appeals  
extortion, kidnapping, blackmail distinctions  
kinds of “strange” laws  
degrees of felony  
kinds of procedure by the prosecution  
kinds of jeopardy  
kinds of evidence  
kinds of British legal professionals (barrister, solicitor,  
and so forth)  
kinds of summons  
kinds of legal courts  
kinds of waivers  
kinds of fraud  
kinds of conflict between civil and religious laws  
kinds of licenses  
kinds of punishment

### **Human-Made Structures**

kinds of places of worship  
kinds of living quarters  
kinds of architecture of modern times  
kinds of ancient architecture  
kinds of toys that are harmful  
kinds of harmless toys  
kinds of canoes/boats  
kinds of adobe bricks  
kinds of cheap hotels  
kinds of specialized hotels  
kinds of bridges  
kinds of clocks  
kinds of train cars  
kinds of furniture  
kinds of television sets  
kinds of beds that cause trouble in sleeping  
kinds of towers  
kinds of monuments for self-glorification  
kinds of shopping malls  
kinds of memorials  
kinds of aircraft  
kinds of baby strollers  
kinds of playgrounds  
sophisticated bicycles  
kinds of automobiles  
kinds of recreational vehicles  
kinds of bridges  
kinds of parks and monuments

### **Natural Phenomena**

kinds of carnivorous plants  
kinds of drinking water  
kinds of snow  
kinds of mind-affecting plants  
Alexander Pope’s classification, “The Great Chain of  
Being”  
kinds of sunsets/sunrises  
kinds of colors  
bodies of water  
celestial bodies  
gross things in nature  
beautiful things in nature  
cool things in nature  
kinds of teas  
kinds of winged insects  
kinds of Medieval classification of the elements  
kinds of clouds  
kinds of storms  
kinds of sounds  
kinds of order among natural things  
kinds of group/pack behavior  
kinds of chemical elements  
kinds of poisons  
kinds of rock formations  
kinds of canyons  
kinds of prairie grasses

### **Arts and Entertainment**

kinds of crime novels  
kinds of action heroes  
types of drama  
writers imprisoned for their principles  
superheroines, real or fictional  
ways horror movies scare or surprise us  
kinds of popular music  
kinds of art interpretation  
kinds of literary schools  
kinds of technique in art  
kinds of style in literature  
kinds of criticism of art  
country music  
humor on TV  
junkyard art  
found art  
garden/yard art  
types of TV detectives  
kinds of video games  
kinds of computer games

kinds of parades  
 kinds of Madonna's personae  
 types of sitcoms  
 types of game shows  
 kinds of pop art  
 kinds of literary expression (surrealism, expressionism, impressionism, etc.)  
 kinds of oral entertainment  
 kinds of art not requiring special training  
 kinds of art  
 kinds of vocal music  
 Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin as signature styles  
 Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Miles Davis as signature styles  
 kinds of composers  
 kinds of musicians  
 kinds of British Invasion bands  
 kinds of musical ensembles  
 kinds of talk shows  
 different audiences as seen by actors  
 kinds of fictional works  
 kinds of poetry  
 kinds of literature  
 kinds of schools of art  
 kinds of views of humanity in art  
 kinds of racing  
 kinds of "whodunnits"  
 kinds of science fiction  
 kinds of fantasy literature

### **Sociopolitical Concerns**

organization of the (local, state, federal) government  
 causes of homelessness  
 kinds of social status  
 kinds of city problems  
 divisions of Los Angeles or another city of your choice  
 kinds of slavery (not just physical slavery)  
 kinds of social units  
 kinds of discrimination  
 kinds of animal rights groups  
 kinds of activist groups  
 kinds of corporate pollution  
 types of women's groups  
 kinds of election conclusions  
 the boring 1950s, rebellious 1960s, selfish 1970s, greedy 1980s, the \_\_\_\_\_ 1990s, etc.  
 kinds of things seen as status symbols in society  
 types of popular fashion trends  
 kinds of mail service in different countries

kinds of war  
 kinds of governments  
 kinds of views of what obscenity, profanity, and pornography are  
 kinds of service learning  
 kinds of youth clubs  
 Saturday night activities  
 kinds of Web fun  
 kinds of "spam"

### **Religion, Myth, Worldviews**

astrological groups  
 divisions of the Hindu caste system  
 ways the Medievals viewed the seven deadly sins  
 ways the ancient \_\_\_\_\_ honored their gods  
 types and sub-types of religion  
 major world religions  
 kinds of Judaism  
 kinds of Islam  
 various kinds of belief  
 kinds of prayer  
 kinds of paganism  
 kinds of Protestantism  
 kinds of spiritual experiences  
 kinds of Eastern religion  
 kinds of Western religion  
 cosmology of a particular religion  
 Native American ways of worship (choose a particular group)  
 kinds of supernatural figures in folklore  
 types of pilgrimages  
 religious rituals involving the use of food  
 types of religious apparel  
 types of religious training  
 kinds of sacrifices  
 kinds of agnosticism  
 kinds of atheistic worldviews  
 kinds of Buddhism  
 approaches to pleasure (e.g., hedonism, asceticism)  
 kinds of mourning  
 kinds of ecstasy  
 kinds of religious ceremonies connected with coming of age  
 kinds of feasting  
 kinds of fasting

### **Communication and Rhetoric**

kinds of sentences  
 internal monologue, monologue, dialogue  
 kinds of insults

## 48 What Can I Write About?

kinds of questions that children ask  
kinds of language you use depending on your audience  
kinds of television ads  
kinds of titles for royalty  
kinds of laughter  
kinds of bumper stickers  
ways of blowing the car horn to deliver a message to other drivers  
body language  
facial expressions  
kinds of charisma  
kinds of language within a single language  
kinds of narrative  
kinds of compliments  
methods of news analysis  
different levels of expression  
kinds of funny things children say  
kinds of roles you play depending on your audience  
ways in which language is imperfect  
kinds of rhetoric common to rebels of all time  
kinds of language within a single group  
kinds of comic-page devices for humor  
kinds of testimonials  
things done to poke fun at politicians  
kinds of touch  
ways to express the same thing  
parts of a book  
kinds of editing  
kinds of occupational titles  
kinds of city language  
kinds of country language  
ways in which new words come into use  
kinds of advertising pitches  
verbal techniques of telemarketers  
kinds of obfuscation  
kinds of “doublespeak”  
kinds of language within a single country  
kinds of letters  
kinds of public speaking  
ways to define what “is” is  
kinds of written language  
ways to communicate displeasure  
ways to communicate “I told you so”  
ways to apologize  
different kinds of tales

### **Work, Customs, and Ways of People**

ways to classify the books on your bookshelf  
ways to be polite in different cultures  
journalistic types

kinds of people I like  
kinds of people I dislike  
people in television ads  
people in television shows  
people at the stage theater  
kinds of workers  
kinds of bores  
cool people  
faces  
cultures within your school or another community or population  
doctors  
lawyers  
merchants  
kinds of crowds  
kinds of families  
kinds of holidays  
kinds of celebrations  
kinds of frauds  
kinds of city folk  
kinds of country folk  
types of factory work  
types of farm work  
types of coastal work  
kinds of friends  
movie audiences  
kinds of TV hosts  
kinds of workers in television  
mental health professionals  
small ambitions  
kinds of companions  
kinds of salespersons in different parts of the country  
kinds of clowns  
celebrity models  
singing/courting customs in \_\_\_\_\_  
the staff of the White House  
types of martial arts  
expeditions  
kinds of racing  
types of meditation  
types of diets  
types of volunteering  
types of body alterations  
types of hair styles  
types of protests  
types of extreme sports  
types of festivals  
types of wildlife enthusiasts  
types of youth groups  
nature lovers

types of groups to promote ethnic pride  
 drinkers  
 chewers  
 walkers  
 runners  
 conversationalists  
 jokes  
 kinds of pomposity  
 kinds of humility

**Classification/Division items may be drawn from these quotations:**

“In the language of screen comedians,” said James Agee, “four of the main grades of laugh are the titter, the yowl, the belly laugh, and the boffo. The titter is just a titter. A yowl is a runaway titter. Anyone who has ever had the pleasure knows all about the belly laugh. The boffo is the laugh that kills.”

“Broadly speaking,” said Winston Churchill, “human beings may be divided into three classes: those who are toiled to death, those who are worried to death, and those who are bored to death.”

“One religion is as true as another,” said Robert Burton.

“To every thing there is a season,” says Ecclesiastes.

“At twenty years of age,” said Benjamin Franklin, “the will reigns; at thirty, the wit; and at forty, the judgment.”

“Everybody has his own theatre, in which he is manager, actor, prompter, playwright, sceneshifter, boxkeeper, doorkeeper, all in one, and audience into the bargain,” said Julius and Augustus Hare.

Philip James Bailey said: “America, thou half-brother of the world;/With something good and bad of every land.”

Shakespeare says, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon ’em.”

“Life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating,” said O. Henry.

“Nations, like men, have their infancy,” said Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

“If I were really asked to define myself, I wouldn’t start with race; I wouldn’t start with blackness; I wouldn’t start with gender; I wouldn’t start with feminism. I would start with stripping down to what fundamentally informs my life, which is that I’m a seeker on the path.” (bell hooks)

# 6

## CAUSE AND EFFECT

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### What Cause and Effect Writing Is

Cause and effect are correlative terms, and they are immensely useful as a rhetorical combination: if this and this and this happen the more or less natural result will be that (the effect). Or, to turn the technique on its deductive head, that happens because of this and this and this. Humankind has always looked for such connections, always wanted to know why. In fact, entire philosophical systems were developed out of cause and effect structures by ancient civilizations around the world, offering complex or simple cosmologies to explain the principle of causality, asking the same question in different ways that Stephen Hawking asks here: “Where do we come from? How did the universe begin? Why is the universe the way it is? How will it end? . . . If, like me, you have looked at the stars, and tried to make sense of what you see, you too have started to wonder what makes the universe exist.”

### How to Write Cause and Effect

Identify the fact, the person, thing or condition, describe how that circumstance brings about the more or less natural result, and you will find yourself in the midst of writing cause and effect. The method is orderly and, it would seem, obvious. And yet a caution is necessary at this point to guard against making too simplistic a connection between cause and effect. Twentieth-century physics, in fact, complicates causality, bringing the very notion into question—through the uncertainty principle as defined by Werner Heisenberg, founder of quantum mechanics, and through chaos theory, nonlinearity, and concepts such as the butterfly effect. At the rhetorical level, establishing cause and effect entails other perils: we need to make sure that the connections being made

are not just coincidental, that the argument does not fall into the logical fallacy *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*: “After this, therefore because of this.” As Robert Todd Carroll says in *The Skeptic’s Dictionary*, “Many events follow sequential patterns without being causally related. For example, you have a cold, so you drink fluids and two weeks later your cold goes away. You perform some task exceptionally well after forgetting to bathe, so the next time you have to perform the same task you don’t bathe.” Are the events connected by cause and effect? Examining the causal relationships, rejecting those that are coincidental, analyzing logical relationships, all help to clarify one’s thinking, and more important, to theorize.

Despite the uncertainties and the perils, however, writing about cause and effect offers the opportunity to construct order from confusion when dealing with the unknown; in matters where a risk is involved, in confrontation with chaos, or when something personally vital is on the line, one can reach out to make sense out of the muddle.

Thus, though we know now more than ever that writing is more than explaining—that it is a way of exploring and even constructing reality—we can still value an orderly method of interrogating something and of making meaning. As far as humanly possible, given any individual’s necessarily limited perspective, writing helps us to see what *is*, as we follow in its widest sense the imperative that E. M. Forster offers: “Only connect!”

### Locating Subjects for Cause and Effect

This chapter is one of the most substantial in the book. Almost anything can be interrogated through cause and effect. The approach to this device can

easily bring together process, research-and-report, argumentative, and expository writing. It can also be put to a more explicitly creative use, however. Consider a mystery story, for example, working its way backwards from the corpse to the first cause, the prime mover of the deed. Or, to turn the order around, consider a story tragic in a classical sense,

where the inherent faults (causes) in a character of whatever nobility effect or at least affect his or her eventual downfall.

Clearly, cause and effect can be crafted in various ways, but we would do well *especially in this kind of writing* to let go of our opinion that everything is as ordered as it seems to be.

### **Art, Drama, Music, Graphics, Film, Etc.**

- Why is \_\_\_\_\_ considered such an accomplished artist?
- What is the effect of experience on art?
- What is the effect of art on experience?
- What is the effect of war on art? On creativity?
- What is the effect of the emotions on art? On creativity?
- Why are some artists “discovered” only posthumously?
- What would cause (or what *did* cause) a great producer, director, or actor to make a bad movie?
- Discuss in cause-and-effect terms the moral dilemma of an actor who is asked to play the role of an evil person—say, of a Nazi war criminal.
- Discuss in cause-and-effect terms the fact that in the movie world “you have to have talent, you have to work hard, and it is well to have a talent for luck.”
- Discuss in cause-and-effect terms the belief that we all have a little of the musician, the poet, and the crazy person in us.
- Why is pottery a key to understanding past cultures?
- What are the effects of a particular painting technique?
- What effects can be achieved through special camera lenses?
- Why do the works of a certain important artist affect you?
- Assume that there is always an explanation for a like or a dislike, and tell why you like or dislike a certain work of art.
- Through cause and effect, relate psychiatry (*not* psychodrama) to drama.
- Where does the inspiration of a song come from? Which comes first, words or music? What things are there all around us that, not taken for granted, could supply us with material for songs?
- As an exercise in sensuous description, listen to a favorite piece of music and write a description of the effects of the music on your senses. Obviously you will describe the sounds, but also bring your other senses into play: What visual images does the music cause (or create)? What smells, tastes, or textures? What particular details of the music cause these sensations and associations?
- Pick a particular music group, e.g., Sweet Honey in the Rock. Why was the group created, and what has been its impact?
- Is there a cause-and-effect relationship between listening to complex music and improving mental performance?
- How does a particular piece of art reflect the artist’s life?
- Discuss in cause-and-effect terms whether jazz expresses a unique aspect of American culture.
- How did Pablo Picasso’s work change modern art?
- How did surrealism in art become an expression of the times?

- Is there a connection between great art and personal ethics?
- What cause-and-effect lesson is there in the fact that Pandora opened the box?
- Why is the art world usually considered as separate from the “real” world? What effects does this way of thinking have?
- Why do we look up to the stars—that is, movie stars and singing stars?
- Why do we spend time on art that might be spent more practically?
- Why is a certain television show an unexpected success?
- Why does something seen over and over still strike some people as funny?
- What drains the life out of creativity?
- Why would you want, or not want, to judge the work of your classmates or to have them judge your work?
- Why do we value some artists’ work more than others’?
- Why do more women than men watch talk shows?
- What makes something art?
- Why are we so interested in child prodigies in music, art, etc.?
- What theories have been posited to explain child prodigies? Which is the most convincing?
- How does music create atmosphere in a film?
- How do graphics influence how a message is received?
- Choose a film-maker and describe his or her effect on the film-making industry.
- How does a particular music group connect to popular culture?

### **Biological Sciences**

- What effects does oxygen or some other chemical element have on plants?
- What effects do enzymes have on human physiology?
- What causes food to spoil?
- What damage does a certain non-human creature cause?
- In what ways are animal instincts not always best for certain animals?
- Explain the scientific observation that complex animals survive less well than simple animals do.
- Why do jumping beans jump?
- Why did the dinosaurs become extinct? Why have creatures in modern times become extinct?
- Why do vines wind a certain way?
- What effect does helium have on vocal cords?
- Why is there no cure for a virus?
- What enables diseases to become resistant to treatment?
- How does introducing nonnative plants or animals change the ecosystem?
- How does coloration benefit animals?
- What causes bread to rise?

How do grapes become wine?  
 How do bacteria create edible food?  
 Why do mushrooms grow in the dark?  
 How do the rings of a tree tell time?  
 How is yogurt made?  
 How do seemingly unpleasant processes (fermentation, growing molds/bacteria) result in some tasty foods?  
 How do marinades work on foods?  
 How does composting work?

### **Business, Office, or Bureaucracy**

What does industry do (or what can it do) to prevent routine from becoming depressing for its employees?  
 Show why, according to the Bible, “in all labor there is profit.”  
 Why should one get a job?  
 Why can, according to Cervantes, “Many littles make one big”?  
 What factors cause airline prices to rise?  
 What factors cause airline prices to fall.  
 Why is time considered money? Why is money considered time? What would be the effect of your investing time?  
 How can complaints bring results?  
 Why does the “squeaky wheel get the grease?” Describe a situation where you’ve seen this phenomenon in action.  
 “A lot of determination is behind each little success.” Explain.  
 Why has it been said that “losing a job can be the first step towards a new and better job”?  
 What comes of being in the right place at the right time?  
 Does avarice spur industry, as David Hume argued?  
 What would be the effect(s) of your putting off until tomorrow some important task that you have been advised to do today?  
 How does supply and demand affect the market for \_\_\_\_\_?  
 What factors affect consumer confidence in the stock market?  
 How does shoplifting affect the overall economy?  
 What are the causes of shoplifting?  
 What causes either the end of plenty or the end of a certain shortage?  
 What are the effects of inflation on people whose incomes are fixed?  
 Why do real estate prices rise and fall?  
 What effects did the New Deal have on the wealthy? On the poor?  
 Is turmoil the effect of progress? Or the price of progress?  
 Why are there restrictions on bringing plants and uncooked foods across national borders?

Why might Joseph Addison have said that “A good face is a letter of recommendation”?  
 What is the status of the solar-energy business? What is its status the effect of?  
 Why is it true that “all that glitters is not gold”?  
 Why do some businesses fail during hard times?  
 What factors make a small business succeed or fail?  
 What causes a decline in the quality of merchandise sold to a mass market?  
 Why has the reputation of the hamburger declined in recent years?  
 “A hungry rooster doesn’t cackle when it finds a worm,” said Joel Chandler Harris. Explain what effects “cackling” in the business world would have.  
 For what reasons can one be denied U.S. citizenship?  
 What are the effects on the individual of a bloated bureaucracy?  
 Give an example of how supply and demand works.  
 How can your body language help or hinder you in a job interview?

### **Children**

Why do children run away from home?  
 What effects does television violence have on children?  
 Why is it assumed by some that an only child will be spoiled?  
 In what ways might it be true that “the child is father to the man”—or mother to the woman?  
 Why do siblings quarrel?  
 What is the effect on a girl who knows that the parent(s) wanted a boy, or vice versa?  
 Why do children need “quality time” with their parents?  
 How do children learn social behavior?  
 In the words of a song by Rodgers and Hammerstein, children “have to be carefully taught” to have prejudice. Is prejudice something that children learn? Can tolerance be learned?  
 Does television teach children (as it has been argued) bad grammar, bad language, bad manners, and bad diet?  
 Why do children learn languages more readily than adults?  
 “A child’s best friend is \_\_\_\_\_.” Why?  
 In what ways is the TV set a bad babysitter?  
 Why do more girls than boys go in for babysitting?  
 “One thing about raising children is that they grow in any soil.” How can you justify this statement in terms of cause and effect.

### **Economics**

“Money is the root of all evil.” Show how this saying is true or false.  
 What effects does trucking have on the economy? What effects does the economy have on trucking?



- What is behind the increase/decrease of \_\_\_\_\_ in the economy?
- How does taxation contribute to a civil society?
- What causes certain jobs to fail during hard times?
  - What causes certain jobs to hold up during both good times and bad?
- Is it so that, as Benjamin Franklin said, “Necessity never made a good bargain”?
- Why did a certain economic measure fail?
- In what ways can it be said that “poverty’s catching” (Aphra Behn)?
- “Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better,” said Richard Hooker. Apply this cause-and-effect argument to economics.
- What were the causes and effects of the collapse of Enron?
- Do inflated salaries cause inflation?
- What is the prediction for the economy five years from now? Why?
- What effects do natural conditions such as drought or heavy snow have on the economy?
- How can “mom and pop” stores compete with superstores?
- How would the world be different if its material stores were equally divided?
- The family farm can no longer survive because \_\_\_\_\_.

### Education

- “Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” (ascribed to Confucius). Apply this saying to any human being to show how he or she may be empowered.
- What effects does a multicultural education have on you?
- How can you promote multicultural awareness in your school?
- How does diversity educate your community?
- How might one’s high school experience influence one’s choice of a college?
- What effects does education have on you?
- Why can students in these times say after their education, All of that for *nothing*?
- Why is it assumed that a university degree assures the graduate of a better life?
- Why might students be bored in school?
- How can extracurricular activities enhance a student’s life?
- What effects, if any, does knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_ have on us?
- How might more reading make for more wisdom?
- Why might criticism teach condemnation?
- Why might hostility teach belligerence?
- Why might fear teach apprehension?
- Why might pity teach self-pity?

- Why might encouragement teach confidence?
- Why might differences teach tolerance?
- Why might awareness of difference teach one to celebrate difference?
- Why might tolerance teach respect?
- Why might praise teach appreciation?
- Why might approval teach self-respect?
- Why might acceptance teach love?
- Why might love teach acceptance?
- Why might recognition teach goals?
- Why might fairness teach justice?
- Why might security teach faith in self?
- Why might friendliness teach friendliness?
- Why might learning often come from the strangest or least likely experience?
- How can the truth make you free?
- Why do some think that it pays to be ignorant?
- Why might community colleges be more attractive options than traditional colleges?
- Why, according to Sir Francis Bacon, is knowledge power?
- How do low test scores among students of a certain area affect an industry’s decision to move into the area?
- What could cause us to love reading more? To hate it more?
- What is the consequence of the fact that, as Heraclitus said, “All is flux, nothing is fixed”?
- Does a learning problem necessarily cause a learning disability?
- What effects do private schools have on public education?
- Why did Blake think that “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom”?
- Why is it considered that the one who knows much knowledge knows much sorrow?
- What causes graduation depression?
- What effect(s) did Socrates’ ideas have on modern education?
- What effect(s) did Aristotle’s ideas have on modern education?
- Why do some families/cultures put such a high priority on education?
- What are the effects of learning in isolation rather than with others?
- Discuss in terms of cause and effect the statement by Disraeli, “Experience is the child of Thought, and Thought is the child of Action.”
- Discuss in terms of cause and effect the statement by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being.”
- Discuss: You have to carry knowledge with you if you want to bring knowledge home.

What effects did Maria Montessori's ideas have on modern education?

What effects did John Dewey's ideas have on modern education?

Why is it necessary to educate for democracy?

What comes of learning without preconceptions?

Why can learning be an effect of dialogue or conversation?

Why can learning be an effect of introspection?

What will be, or what would be, the effects of a nationwide "scientific illiteracy"?

What would be the effect of learning from a little bit of adversity at a time?

What would be the teaching effects if \_\_\_\_\_ (some public figure) were a teacher?

Knowledge helps us "escape the hell of subjectivity," said Samuel Johnson. Why should that be so?

What causes experience, and what does experience cause?

"Age teaches," says a Spanish proverb. What does age teach?

"No one is deafer than the one who does not choose to hear," says a Spanish proverb. Discuss this statement in terms of cause and effect.

"Wisdom denotes the pursuing of the best ends by the best means," said Francis Hutcheson. Discuss this statement in terms of cause and effect.

Discuss whether in education "better late than never" applies.

In what way will *society* be affected by *your* education?

What effects might a college education have on you as a person?

"You can't win unless you learn how to lose." (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar)

"A little learning is a dangerous thing." (Alexander Pope)

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." (Thomas Gray)

"The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all." (Aung San Suu Kyi)

"Learning is a place where paradise can be created." (bell hooks)

## Environment

What effects does building a dam have on animal, plant, and human life in the surrounding area?

What are the arguments for and against saving rain forests?

What are the arguments for and against drilling for oil in Alaska?

What are the causes and effects of having too much

ozone in ground-level air we breathe and too little ozone in the atmosphere?

What are the causes of groundwater contamination? What are the effects on people or animals?

What are the arguments for and against storing the nation's nuclear waste in Yucca Mountain, Nevada?

How does studying ecology help us better our environment?

How does recycling a particular product have specific environmental effects?

Why is the ocean salty?

Why is the Dead Sea the saltiest?

Why do some creatures prey on their own species?

Discuss in terms of cause and effect the processes of natural selection and evolutionary change as Darwin explains them.

Discuss in terms of cause and effect: "The history of life tends to move in quick and quirky episodes, rather than by gradual improvement." (Stephen J. Gould on evolutionary change)

## Ethics and Philosophy

Discuss from either side of the ambiguity/ambivalence the statement that nothing comes from nothing.

Is there ever "a victim of circumstance"?

Discuss whether or not ideas always have consequences.

Discuss whether it is possible for good to exist without evil or for evil to exist without good.

What is the effect of having someone else's thoughts in your mind?

Why can adversity be described as "bread"?

Discuss whether or not it is true that, according to Byron, the weak alone repent.

Explain in terms of cause and effect what Shakespeare meant by the comment that conscience makes cowards of us all.

Why do some people need keys to open doors that are already open?

Was Browning right in saying, "Truth never hurts the teller"?

Is humanity the sole mistake of Nature, as William Gilbert said?

Is it better to die on your feet than to live on your knees, as Dolores Ibarruri said?

Does virtue breed happiness, as Benjamin Franklin claimed?

Discuss mind over matter/matter over mind in terms of cause and effect.

Show whether it is true in life that when one door closes, others open.

Is it human nature to enjoy the struggle more than the achievement?

Discuss whether it is true that, as Thomas Hardy said, life offers, only to deny.

Is it better to lose with friends than to win with enemies?  
Discuss a situation where cause *is* effect.

An idea from Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *Omar Khayyam* is that "the flower that once has blown for ever dies." Discuss in terms of cause and effect.

Is it better, as a Spanish proverb says, to be loved than not hated?

Is it so, as a Spanish proverb says, that one who walks from flower to flower will finally choose the worst?

Discuss Thomas Henry Huxley's position that "it is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies and to end as superstitions."

Does, as Mahatma Gandhi suggested, an eye for an eye leave the world blind?

What are the effects of the condition that, according to the Spanish proverb, the first one to get wet has more time to get dry?

Why do people seek success? Why do people fear success?

How is time an "effect" of life, or vice versa? Discuss Benjamin Franklin's comment: "If you love life, do not squander time, of which life is made."

Is life-after-life or death-after-life the effect of living? Why?

If you believe there is a next world, what is necessary in this world to enjoy the next?

What is the effect of the pursuit of perfection?

What is the effect of pursuing "sweetness and light," as Matthew Arnold used the term?

What effect does freedom have on human relationships?

What are effects of allowing or barring stem-cell research?

Discuss in cause-and-effect terms the observation by Emerson that "the reward of a thing well done, is to have done it."

Why would you be satisfied, or not be satisfied, with enough if others had more?

Trace the cause-and effect reasoning or the events behind a particular belief you hold.

Apply Huckleberry Finn's comment "All right, then, I'll go to hell . . ." to a real-life situation.

Why does our inability to conceive of the size of the universe lead us back to thinking about ourselves?

Do you control circumstance, or are you controlled *by* it?

How have attitudes about sex been affected by birth control?

Discuss in terms of cause and effect: "Youth is wasted on the young."

What effects does belonging to a group have on us?

If you help yourself, will heaven help you, as Jean de La Fontaine declared?

Discuss the proverb, "Man proposes, God disposes, and the devil discomposes."

What does it mean, in cause-and-effect terms, to "keep your mind level" when "life's path is steep"?

What makes people believe in, or want to believe in, immortality?

Why does tradition exercise such a powerful hold on us?

Link the following ideas through cause and effect: love, death, money, and life.

Why can intended good at times be harmful?

Do we try too hard to make it in the world and thus allow too much good to pass us by?

Why does Robert Frost's idea of "the road not taken" arouse such interest?

What are the consequences of bucking tradition?

Describe a personal encounter with the law of *karma*.

### Address the following quotations in cause-and-effect terms:

"Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks." (Gloria Anzaldúa)

"The mind is everything; what you think, you become." (Gautama Buddha)

"I think, therefore I am." (Descartes)

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality." (T. S. Eliot)

"If I enclosed truths with my hands, I would be wary not to open them." (Fontenelle)

"The unexamined life is not worth living." (Plato)

"The un-lived life is not worth examining." (Tomás Shrink)

"The long habit of living indisposes us for dying." (Thomas Browne)

"The one who lives on hope dies fasting." (Benjamin Franklin)

"People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes." (Abigail Van Buren ["Dear Abby"])

"I make myself laugh at everything, for fear of having to weep." (Beaumarchais)

"Prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue." (Sir Francis Bacon)

"What does it profit to know the world but not oneself?" (Jean de La Fontaine)

"Religion without humanity is very poor human stuff." (Sojourner Truth)

"I was raised to believe that excellence is the best deterrent to racism or sexism." (Oprah Winfrey)

"Those who are free of resentful thoughts surely find peace." (Gautama Buddha)

"As a person acts, so he [or she] becomes in life." (Kena Upanishad)

"Sometimes it's worse to win a fight than to lose." (Billie Holiday)

"We are shaped and fashioned by what we love." (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

“Who steals my purse steals trash; 't is something, nothing;  
'T was mine, 't is his, and has been slave to thousands;  
But he that filches from me my good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches him  
And makes me poor indeed.” (William Shakespeare)

“Because our every action has a universal dimension, a potential impact on others' happiness, ethics are necessary as a means to ensure that we do not harm others.” (Dalai Lama)

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” (Helen Keller)

“I am a part of all that I have met.” (Alfred Tennyson)

“Everything you don't do has an effect.” (Kurt Austin)

“Happiness is a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you.” (Nathaniel Hawthorne)

“Knowledge and experience bring contentment.”  
(Bhagavad Gita)

“Eternity is not something that begins after you are dead. It is going on all the time. We are in it now.”  
(Charlotte Perkins Gilman)

“Hatred, which could destroy so much, never failed to destroy the man who hated, and this was an immutable law.” (James Baldwin)

“Everything that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself.”  
(William Blake)

“There never was a good war, or a bad peace.” (Benjamin Franklin)

“Life demands to be lived.” (H. L. Mencken)

“Lying is done with words and also with silence.”  
(Adrienne Rich)

“To enjoy freedom we have to control ourselves.”  
(Virginia Woolf)

“In adverse fortune the worst sting of misery is to have been happy.” (Boethius)

“There are two ways of spreading light—to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” (Edith Wharton)

## **Government, Politics**

Dennis Brutus said, “Never take the students too lightly. Students have very often been the spearhead of the struggle in this [South Africa] and in other countries.” Discuss the effect of student involvement in a specific political movement.

Why, in voting, is a political incumbent usually favored to win?

“What is past my help is past my care,” said John Fletcher. Does this view explain why people take the attitude they take towards politics?

Why do friends (and relatives) in politics sometimes cause more trouble than enemies?

Will reforming a bureaucracy simply cause more bureaucracy?

What ails (now, or at any time) the American spirit?

What invigorates (now, or at any time) the American spirit?

Why is it so that, as Richard Hooker said, “One who goes about to persuade people that they are not as well-governed as they ought to be will always have listeners”?

What effect does bureaucracy have on idealism?

What effect does idealism have on bureaucracy?

What changes can student government make in your school?

In politics why is it so that (as James Anthony Froude said) “Experience teaches slowly, and at the cost of mistakes”?

In cause-and-effect terms, answer the question “What is happening to the American dream?”

Why does common interest not always determine what happens in a democracy?

Why do negative campaign ads sometimes succeed?

How does the media influence the results of political races?

Discuss Jeremy Bentham's statement, “The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.”

Tell what caused certain U.S. Congress members or Senators to leave office willingly rather than pursue other terms.

Discuss what makes stories of political chicanery so interesting.

What effects will government have on education in the near future?

How does personal charisma help build a political career?

Apply to politics the cause-and-effect Spanish proverb, “The one who walks with wolves will learn to howl.”

How do regional backgrounds of certain presidents affect their presidential style?

Why is the government so often reactive rather than proactive?

What effects does being president have on the president? What does the presidency do to or for the moral stature of the person holding the office?

What has caused aristocracies to fail?

What brought about the downfall of \_\_\_\_\_?

Is it true in politics at any level that, as the Bible says, “A soft answer turns away wrath”?

Why does the government resort to doublespeak?

What does reason teach/not teach in government and politics?

What happens to military personnel who challenge the military?

What happens to government personnel who challenge the government?

Discuss in terms of government and politics the Biblical quotation, "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one."

Why did a certain government or country come into being?

In what ways did the end of apartheid affect the political balance in South Africa?

What factors contributed to the rise of terrorism in a particular country (such as Ireland, India, Germany, Japan, the United States)?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." (Margaret Mead)

"Feminism is the single most powerful social movement of our time, one that addresses every aspect of human and social life." (Richard Epstein)

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (Lord Acton)

"Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily, but who think that they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure." (Henry David Thoreau)

"Freedom never descends upon people; it is always bought with a price." (Harry T. Moore)

"This struggle [against slavery] may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." (Frederick Douglass on abolition)

## Health

What are causes of acne?

Why is acne more than skin deep?

Why does caffeine affect you as it does?

What are the effects of rest and time off as remedies for health?

What are the effects of a smoker's stopping smoking?

How has the changing perception of HIV affected peoples' behavior?

Why do miscarriages happen?

What causes kitchen accidents? bathroom accidents?

What are the causes and effects of E. coli contamination?

What causes anorexia, snoring, depression, asthma, insomnia, ADHD, obesity?

What is a cure for each of the conditions noted just above? What unusual cure(s) do you know of?

Why is sound body related to sound mind?

What cause-and-effect relationship is there between exercise and mental health?

Why do people in Mediterranean countries have a low rate of heart problems?

Why is "happiness the sister of health"?

Why do eating habits affect health?

What are some of the different causes of heart disease?

Discuss these quotations from Sir Francis Bacon: "Cure the disease and kill the patient." "The remedy is worse than the disease."

Why was the frontal lobotomy outlawed?

What can be the bad effects of too much exercise?

How does pollution affect the health?

Why does one have to know the cause of something before suggesting its remedy?

What are the drawbacks of extending the human lifespan?

How might this statement be true or untrue: "Cheerfulness is the very flower of health." (Japanese proverb)

"Health is not a condition of matter, but of mind." (Mary Baker Eddy)

## History

How have the definitions of "great men" and "great women" changed over time?

What makes immigration to the United States so attractive?

Why are civil liberties considered a mixed blessing?

Why will \_\_\_\_\_ be less visited than before?

What made the 1960s a decade of violence?

Discuss Malcolm X's quotation, "History is a people's memory, and without memory man is demoted to the lower animals."

What cause-and-effect connection was there between slavery and "Manifest Destiny"?

In history, has force been a remedy?

Discuss Thomas Jefferson's quotation, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."

Why was a certain city or a certain university founded?

Why was there such a delay in ending the Korean War?

What positive effects in human rights would we see today if slavery had really ended with the Civil War?

Why is the private life of the President of the United States expected to be impeccable?

Explain why Thomas Jefferson is so maligned.

Explain why Thomas Jefferson is so admired.

Explain why Franklin Delano Roosevelt (or John F. Kennedy, or Bill Clinton) is so maligned.

Explain why Franklin Delano Roosevelt (or John F. Kennedy, or Bill Clinton) is so admired.

What, specifically, do we gain from learning about history?

How have computers changed the lives of human beings?

Explain why a certain great historical event came about.

Does greatness result from intention, necessity, or accident?

Associate by cause and effect terrorism and \_\_\_\_\_ as it relates to September 11, 2001.

Point up some present influence from a past idea.

Discuss Edmund Burke's quotation, "You can never plan the future by the past."

Discuss John Lennon's quotation, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

Show what caused someone to be accidentally thrust into greatness.

Will there be a World War III? Why or why not? And if so, what effects will it have?

What were the causes and effects of the Persian Gulf War?

What were the causes and effects of the Spanish Civil War?

What is the effect of the war in Afghanistan?

What have been the effects of the Watergate scandal?

What is the effect of instantaneous telecommunications on our sense of history?

Why does bad news dominate the newspaper and TV newscasts?

Why might one think of history—as Daisy Ashford referred to it—as "piffle before the wind"?

What drives explorers to explore?

Discuss Thomas Paine's quotation, "Every quiet method for peace hath been ineffectual."

Discuss a large injustice in terms of cause and effect.

How has recent history given vindication for someone or something wronged in the past?

What is behind a prediction by a modern "prophet"?

Why should we view history with the phrase "truth or consequences" in mind?

What—considering recent history—are the future effects of tradition?

Why do other countries worry so much about U. S. policies?

In recent history, where have we come from and where are we going?

Discuss Thomas Henry Huxley's quotation, "Logical consequences are the scarecrows of fools and the beacons of [the] wise."

Why does each generation tend to view past generations nostalgically?

What are the effects of isolationism as a national policy?

Discuss with reference to history the quotation by William Norman Ewer, "I gave my life for freedom—This I know: / For those who bade me fight had told me so."

What has become of a celebrated figure among Americans during the last ten or fifteen years? What caused him or her to continue rising in esteem, or to fall?

What have been the effects, historically, of "gentle persuasion"?

Why are the United States and \_\_\_\_\_ wary of each other?

What has reason taught/not taught to history?

Discuss in historical cause-and-effect terms Chaucer's quotation, "It is not good a sleeping hound to wake."

Is custom, as David Hume said, the "great guide of human life"?

Why should Aristotle have considered poetry as "something more philosophic and of graver import than history"?

"History is the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon." (Napoleon Bonaparte)

Discuss Disraeli's quotation, "Assassination has never changed the history of the world."

Discuss Paula Gunn Allen's quotation, "I have noticed that as soon as you have soldiers the story is called history."

What recent event in the nation or the world will be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ years from now?

Why might the following statement by Chinese prime minister, Zhu Rongji, be accurate? "History can never be covered up."

## Language

Why did language begin?

Why do new times bring new language(s)?

How has the Internet (e-mail, the World Wide Web) influenced language?

What happens to babies who are not exposed to a rich variety of language?

Why are some languages valued more than others?

Why do we speak differently in different situations (for example, at home versus at school)?

Does language make its user, or does the user of it make language?

What makes a language fall out of use?

Discuss in terms of cause and effect: "Writing teaches us our mysteries." (Marie de l'Incarnation)

What social factors influence language change?

Explain why English was not replaced by French after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.

Using cause and effect, outline the general path of the English language from its beginnings to the present.

Why does legal language read as it does?

How does body language speak for us?

Why does slang change so rapidly?

Why could someone who becomes fluent in a foreign language still have difficulty communicating with a native speaker?

To what extent and why does "inflammatory language" inflame?

How do some words or terms become value-laden?

## 60 What Can I Write About?

What causes communication problems between generations?

What causes semantic changes?

What languages other than English are having an influence on world politics?

Aphra Behn said, "Money speaks sense in a language all nations understand." How can language be considered money and money be considered language?

How can learning another language change one's view of the world?

How can being bilingual help or hurt you?

Why do some immigrants give up their native languages when they come to the United States?

Why do some people drop their home dialect or language while others continue to value and use it?

Why is Yiddish not spoken as much as it used to be?

Why is one language or another gaining supremacy in the world?

Why is one language or another gaining supremacy in world politics?

Why is English a world language?

Will English ever be replaced as the dominant language of the United States? What could cause such a change?

Describe the impact of an event or action that has been taken "in the name of God."

What would be the effect of legislation that makes English the official language of the United States?

"We write because we believe the human spirit cannot be tamed and should not be trained." (Nikki Giovanni)

"A riot is the language of the unheard." (Martin Luther King Jr.)

"Language is the roadmap of a culture." (Rita Mae Brown)

### Law, Crime

"Civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the State becomes lawless or, which is the same thing, corrupt." (Mahatma Gandhi)

How was the Underground Railroad an act of civil disobedience?

Why is the crime rate higher in some areas than in others?

What would happen if everyone were a lawmaker?

What would happen if there were no laws, restrictions, or police?

What is the effect of law by vigilantes?

Discuss the result of a certain recent investigation (presidential conduct, a major bankruptcy, terrorism).

What accounts for the belief that "a police officer is never around when needed"?

How does upholding some laws have a negative effect on society?

Why does crime break out in the streets during a blackout of power in a major city?

What is gained, if anything, by punishing those who break the law?

What effects do parents who commit crimes have on their families?

Why are celebrities who break the law often treated differently than "regular" people?

Why do old statutes remain on the books?

Does a focus on "quality of life" crimes (littering, vandalism) help contribute to a lower rate of major crimes?

What causes police brutality (or what allows it to happen) where it occurs?

Discuss the probable result of dispensing justice according to "an eye for an eye."

Why are some drug crimes punished more harshly than others?

How does prison overcrowding affect punishment and parole decisions?

What is the effect on crime in states that support the death penalty?

Discuss the probable result of following the quotation by Edmund Burke, "Liberty must be limited in order to be possessed."

Why are all of us affected by major crimes?

What causes child abuse?

Why are there inequities in the law in the way the poor and the rich are treated?

Explain why a particular mystery remains unsolved.

What is the effect of enforcing personal safety laws (car seats for infants, bicycle and motorcycle helmets, drinking age)?

How does the Internet make some crimes easier to commit?

How does the Internet make some crimes easier to track?

Explore the cause and effect of speaking out or keeping silent about sexual harassment.

### Literature, Writing

"The world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me." (Gloria Anzaldúa)

Show how fairy tales can condition our responses.

Why is the computer said to take over the writer's control?

Why do scholars of composition say that the computer can improve our writing skills?

Discuss how literature can manipulate others, for good or bad.

What makes a piece of writing "literature"? Who decides what is literature, and what criteria do they use?

What "causes" literature?

- What are the effects of literature?
- What benefits result from literature? Are people changed for the better by moral literature, that is, literature which demonstrates what ethical behavior ought to be?
- What effect(s) can one word have in a sentence? In society?
- What are the effects of a report that is easy to understand?
- What are the effects of a report that is hard to understand?
- Why do many people not like literature?
- Why are Homer, Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare difficult to read?
- Explain in cause-and-effect terms the quotation by Sir Arthur Helps, "Reading is sometimes an ingenious device for avoiding thought."
- Why is it that some women and minority writers of the past are being "discovered" only now?
- Is it true that, as Bacon said, writing makes one "exact"? "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." (Percy Bysshe Shelley)
- "Poetry makes nothing happen." (W. H. Auden)
- "A poet's work is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep." (Salman Rushdie)
- "'And where is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'" (Lewis Carroll)
- Describe the effect of a piece of literature in terms of what Stephen King says here: "I don't want to just mess with your head. I want to mess with your life. I want you to miss appointments, burn dinner, skip your homework."
- W. Ross Winterrowd has said that "critical readers learn more and certainly enjoy their reading more than passive readers." Why might this be so?
- "She is too fond of books, and it has turned her brain" (Louisa May Alcott). Show how this might apply to you.
- "Books can be dangerous. The best ones should be labeled 'This could change your life.'" (Helen Exley)
- "A book must be an ice-axe to break the seas frozen inside our soul." (Franz Kafka)
- "The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power" (Toni Morrison). Use cause and effect to show how an author has familiarized and mystified something for you.
- Media**
- What is lost or gained by watching a film instead of reading the original book?
- How do Disney film versions of stories change the original source materials?
- What has been the effect of cable networks on the television industry?
- Why do networks play down certain world news?
- What are the effects of advertising?
- Why do advertisements often have such little connection with reality?
- What are the effects of the "hidden persuaders" in the media?
- Why might a newspaper lose its readership?
- Why are people gullible about the news?
- How does cigarette advertising make smokers out of nonsmokers?
- Why do people smoke despite anti-smoking campaigns publicizing clear evidence that smoking is harmful to one's health?
- How have advertisers responded to changing gender roles?
- What effect do spin doctors have in politics?
- What are the benefits and dangers of instantaneous telecommunications?
- What impact has television had on education?
- What impact has television had on thought?
- Why is television called the opiate of the masses?
- Why do magazines and newspapers collapse? What has caused the collapse of a particular magazine or newspaper that was very famous?
- How are advertisers capable of manipulating people?
- Why are certain facts released only gradually by the media?
- Why is \_\_\_\_\_ a very popular magazine?
- Why is \_\_\_\_\_ a very popular television program?
- What is the influence of the media in national politics?
- Discuss the causes and effects of the development of printing.
- Discuss the effect of watching a sitcom that uses a laugh track versus one that does not.
- What is the effect of selling reputations through the media?
- Why do soap operas appeal to so many?
- Why do game shows appeal to so many?
- Why does "reality TV" appeal to so many?
- Discuss the quotation by the television commentator Sander Vanocur, "How do you balance the necessity to be entertaining but at the same time informative?"
- Discuss the quotation by Arnold Bennett, "Journalists say a thing that they know isn't true, in the hope that if they keep on saying it long enough it *will* be true."
- How does "public service" advertising help big business?
- How are contemporary beauty pageants trying to cope with feminist expectations?



## Physical Science

“Landscape shapes culture.” (Terry Tempest Williams)

What causes “acid rain”?

What are the causes of a certain weather condition?

What are the effects of a certain weather condition?

What are the causes and effects of “star death”?

What causes tornados?

What causes windows to steam up?

What is the value of studying astronomy?

What causes smog? What can prevent smog?

What are the positive effects of having been to the moon?

What causes static electricity?

Is there any effect in physical science for which there is no cause? Does everything in the world having to do with physical science have a cause?

Discuss Robert Ingersoll’s quotation, “In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments—there are consequences.”

Why is it, as Sherlock Holmes says, “a capital mistake to theorize before one has data”?

What scientific evidence, if any, exists to indicate the time and cause of the end of the world?

What effect has Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* had on the world?

What was the cause behind a certain major power failure?

Thomas Henry Huxley said, “The great tragedy of Science—the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact.” Apply this quotation to a major scientific or medical discovery.

Discuss the quotation by Dr. George Polya, a mathematician, “What is the scientific method except Guess and Test?”

Drawing from the range of both superstition and fact, discuss some element of scientific revolution.

What causes global warming?

Why are coral reefs dying?

What caused a certain geological formation (such as natural bridges, the Grand Canyon)?

What are the consequences of relying upon a particular energy source?

What are the limits of recycling?

What have been the effects of the nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl?

Read David Hernandez’s poem “The Butterfly Effect.” What does the poet say about causality?

Discuss El Niño in terms of cause and effect.

What effect has the Green Revolution had on developing countries?

## Psychology

Why are stories of near-death experiences fascinating to most of us?

What motivates courage?

What motivates fear?

Why does losing breed losing?

Why does winning breed winning?

What are the possible effects of being “burned” emotionally?

Why might someone be made, in Thomas Hood’s words, “Mad from life’s history”?

Why is it, as Jean de La Fontaine says, “a double pleasure . . . to deceive the deceiver”?

What caused \_\_\_\_\_ to come emotionally into her/his/their own?

Why do people behave as they do in elevators?

What purpose do emoticons serve in electronic communication?

What are the causes and effects of charisma?

Why do some psychiatrists say there is no such thing as an accident?

How can a single person’s personality influence many others?

What psychological effect is there in standing over someone?

What are the effects of having a psychological edge on someone?

Why do we acquire habits? What causes habit to rule our lives?

What makes one method of persuasion more effective than another?

Why does the simple often become difficult?

What good results can we have by applying animal behavior to human behavior?

Why did a certain experiment with animals lead to a better understanding of them and/or of human behavior?

What is the reason behind a bully’s behavior?

Why are “Some people . . . so fond of ill-luck that they run half-way to meet it,” as Douglas Jerrold said?

Which makes the individual: heredity, or environment?

Why do wives/husbands/children run away?

What explains why some people choose one part of the room to sit in and other people choose another?

Why do smiles, winks, or sympathetic grunts affect us as they do?

Why do some people who have nothing to say talk anyhow?

What are the effects of a good/a bad sense of humor?

Explain what causes employers to react as they do to prospective employees who have a history of illness or who have been in prison.

What causes one phobia or another? What are its effects?

What causes one mania or another? What are its effects?

What causes an obsession? What are its effects?

Explain what psychological factors were responsible for

- a good/a bad turnout for a recent event—an election, for example, or a major athletic event.
- Why do we forget what we did?
- Why do we deceive ourselves in thinking that time spent on an effort is all we need to accomplish it?
- What causes stereotypes? What causes prejudice?
- Why do popular superstitions persist?
- Some people say they aren't "mechanically inclined." Why?
- Why do we remember some things and not others?
- What determines the physical distance one keeps from others in conversation?
- What accounted for the fact that a certain day of yours went wrong/right?
- Why do you feel/not feel at home at \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why does love stoop in order to rise, as Robert Browning has said?
- Why does love cease to be a pleasure, as Aphra Behn says, "when it ceases to be a secret"?
- Why does the world have little to offer "where two fond hearts in equal love are joined," as Anna Barbauld said?
- Discuss the opinion of Alfred Tennyson that "'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all."
- Discuss this lyric by the rock group Yes: "Owner of a lonely heart, much better than owner of a broken heart."
- Discuss in psychological cause-effect terms the quotation, "When the wine is in, the wit is out."
- Why are happy surprises good for us?
- Why do we need praise to do well?
- Why do insignificant memories sometimes take precedence over important ones?
- How does laughter help mental health?
- Why do people lie about their ages?
- What, psychologically, is behind our drive to "save time"?
- Why do you and \_\_\_\_\_ not get along as well as you once did?
- How is self-torture related to self-pity?
- Discuss the causes for, and effects of, psychological crutches and psychological retreats.
- Why is it accurate, or why is it not accurate, to say "What I'm to be I am now becoming"?
- How can imagination or dreaming make us happy?
- Why is there such an emphasis on youth in U.S. popular culture?
- Might there be such a thing as reasonable paranoia?
- What are the causes and effects of frustration?
- What are the causes and effects of different methods of disciplining children?
- What are the causes and effects of gossiping?
- What are the causes and effects of venting?
- Why are some shopping malls designed to mimic a small-town main street?
- What are the psychological effects of urban sprawl?
- Why are some people hypnotizable and others are not?
- What are the causes and effects of deep despair?
- What causes accident-proneness?
- Why does staying bitter cause more pain?
- What are the roots of, and causes of, embarrassment?
- Why is one kind of death more terrifying than another?
- Does television contribute to, or detract from, the thinking process?
- What explains an individual's handwriting, especially the way we sign our names?
- Discuss James Anthony Froude's statement, "Fear is the parent of cruelty."
- Discuss Matthew Arnold's statement, "We forget because we must and not because we will."
- Why does crying help us emotionally?
- Discuss the relationship between the brain's biochemistry and mental illness.
- Draw a cause-effect relationship between electricity and the brain.
- Discuss a specific example of the relationship between bodily changes and emotions.
- Why do those we love have the "most power to hurt us"?
- How can a moral strength sometimes have negative consequences?
- What are the causes and effects of anger?
- Is cursing a sign of laziness, intelligence, vitality, or what?
- Discuss the phenomenon of "behavior control."
- Why do certain kinds of sounds or words convey certain feelings?
- Discuss the proverb: "Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are."
- Apply this statement by Jean de La Fontaine to psychology: "I bend but do not break."
- Discuss this cartoon caption: "I finally got rid of my inferiority complex, but it loosened my grip on reality."
- What effects do feelings have on the facial expression?
- What effects have advances in medicine had on our fear of (or lack of fear of) death?
- What causes you to be who you are?
- What are the effects of pain on the mind?
- Discuss these lines from William Blake:
- I was angry with my friend:  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
- Discuss a specific mind-body connection.
- Discuss how belonging to a support group can have positive health benefits.

How does political satire benefit society?  
 What makes some people more likely to indulge in binge drinking?  
 Why does hazing continue to be popular?  
 What are the effects of making or not making eye contact with someone you are interacting with?  
 How does being online affect the persona you present to the world?  
 Why might different people remember the same event differently?  
 What could cause a person to “invent” childhood memories?  
 Why do they say opposites attract?  
 How can we learn from our dreams?  
 Why do we dream what we do?  
 How do “blind spots” affect human behavior?  
 What makes some people become quiet when they are angry and others become loud?  
 Why do people sometimes remain in destructive relationships?  
 Why might you act like one person with one friend and like a different person with another friend?  
 What makes you want to get to know someone?  
 Why do people sometimes confuse power with love?  
 Why do people sometimes confuse dependence with love?  
 What could cause someone to act against her or his individual principles when in a group?  
 What causes mob psychology?  
 What makes people want to be part of a group?  
 What are the effects of sleep deprivation?  
 What are the effects of falling in love?  
 What does it mean to “stoop to conquer”?  
 Describe the purpose of “tough love.”  
 Why do we procrastinate?  
 “You lose a lot of time, hating people.” (Marian Anderson)

### Religion

Is morality an effect of religion?  
 Why do athletes—from opposing teams—pray for victory?  
 Why are there so many major similarities between major religions of the world?  
 What effect has religion had on a certain period of history?  
 Can good in the religious sense exercise influence on evil?  
 Can evil exercise influence on good in the religious sense?  
 What causes a religious believer to see the light? to be reborn?

What causes people to believe that they are doing the will of God?  
 Do the religious convictions of persons determine how much help they are willing to give those in need?  
 Discuss this quotation from William Blake, “Love seeks not itself to please.”  
 Why do people watch religious services on television?  
 What are the reasons for televangelism and what are its effects on society?  
 How did a particular religion shape the course of world events?  
 Has religion done more good or bad in the world? Why? Might this change?  
 How would the world be different if all people practiced the same religion, or if all people were atheists?  
 “True religion is real living; living with all one’s soul, with all one’s goodness and righteousness.” (Albert Einstein)  
 How might religious conviction motivate you to do the right thing for the wrong reason?  
 How might religious conviction motivate you to do the wrong thing for the right reason?

### Social Science (Sociology, Social Theory, Etc.)

How do different cultures use shame to shape behavior?  
 “We all do ‘do, re, mi,’ but you have got to find the other notes yourself.” (Louis Armstrong) What are the implications of this statement as a metaphor?  
 Why is it acceptable to be “classy” but unacceptable to be “classist”?  
 “There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love.” (Martin Luther King Jr.)  
 Why were people so divided over the outcome of the O. J. Simpson trial?  
 Why do we vote as we do?  
 What causes giddiness? Why are laughter and yawning contagious?  
 Why do couples break up?  
 What makes a town begin in a place where there is “nothing”?  
 What causes people to engage in “ethnic cleansing”?  
 What is the current trend in marriage-divorce statistics? Why?  
 What effect did televising the Gulf War have on U. S. audiences’ perception of the war? Why?  
 In what ways can natural surroundings determine a people’s practical and cultural ways of life?  
 What will people do, or not do, to gain fame, money, or public office?  
 Tell what would happen in your life if you lived with or without pets.  
 Why do some places have higher suicide rates than others?

Does custom reconcile us to everything, as Edmund Burke declared?

Why do people like cell phones?

Why do the works of certain authors come into, then fall out of, public favor?

Why are people fascinated with fire-eaters and other daredevils?

What effects does convention have on society?

Why do we lie? Why do we make excuses?

Why are beauty pageants popular?

What explains the compulsion we have to be with others? Why is the human being basically not a lone animal?

What are the first concerns and questions among family members united after an exceptionally long separation? Why?

What does its graffiti tell us about a community or about its individuals?

What social phenomena are revealed when there is a newly vacant seat on a crowded bus?

How does the definition of “society” vary from one person to the next?

What common values exist in society, and why?

What causes us to realize when we are most alone?

How does group behavior change in an electronic classroom? In a chat room?

What are the arguments for and against adopting a child from a different culture than the parents’?

How does the untimely death of a famous person affect that person’s public image?

Why are societies so slow to correct pollution problems?

Explain the results of the 2000 presidential election in terms of cause and effect.

How does a victim’s speaking out against wrongdoing affect an institution or society?

What is the effect of breaking a corporation’s monopoly over certain products?

What are the arguments for and against legalizing same-sex marriages?

Is development of public land always in the best interests of society? Why or why not?

What questions does a poor person have who falls in love with a rich person? Why?

What questions does a rich person have who falls in love with a poor person? Why?

Discuss this quotation from Henry Fielding: “Some folks rail against other folks, because other folks have what some folks would be glad of.”

What questions does a person who marries someone from another culture have?

Why do people appear as guests on tell-all talk shows? Why do people like to watch such shows?

Why does it become chic to have certain problems?

Discuss an example of the domino effect in society. Apply to your life the metaphor of cause and effect described in this nursery rhyme:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;  
 For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;  
 For want of a horse, the rider was lost;  
 For want of a rider, a message was lost;  
 For want of a message, the battle was lost;  
 For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost!

## **Sports and Physical Activities**

Discuss Bill Russell’s argument that winning and losing depend more on “chemistry” than on skill or good players.

Why do people jog, or run?

Why do people who have no chance of winning a marathon still participate?

Why should a certain baseball player have felt obligated to give up part of his salary while he was in a slump?

Define sporting behavior in terms of cause and effect.

In what ways is sport some people’s religion?

What do athletes think about while they are participating in their sports? Why?

Can nutrition and training make an athlete?

Why is winning so important to most athletes?

Why does one select one sport rather than another?

What aside from losing can break a team’s morale?

Why are some mascots or team names considered offensive?

Why might an athlete prefer to set records rather than help the team win (or vice versa)?

What really constitutes or brings about “individual effort” in sports?

What accounted for the fact that a certain sports upset took place?

Are athletes controlled more by themselves, or by circumstances?

What, besides age, causes decline in an athlete?

Can one by intense exercise make up for years of leisure and physical non-activity?

Why don’t more people exercise?

Why are some people obsessed with exercise?

How has the role of the coach changed in the era of big-money athletics?

What is the effect of trash talking in sports?

Is it more effective for a coach to be nice to players or mean to them?

Why are athletes called heroes when what they are doing is playing a game?

Why do some athletes use visualization techniques?

What cause-and-effect thinking underlay Muhammad Ali’s rope-a-dope boxing strategy.

# 7

## EXPOSITION

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### What Exposition Is

Exposition is the setting forth of purpose or meaning—not, in a strict sense at least, to criticize, argue, or develop a subject, but to open it up, lay its bones bare. A more literal image of the art might be described as moving the subject out of position, coaxing, jolting, or driving it into a fresh new perspective, so that it will stand more clearly forth and expose itself for what it is.

### How to Write Exposition

Clarity is essential in exposition. Limit your subject. Keep it tight, unified, concrete. Do all that yet let the subject breathe and you will have turned the trick of exposition. Perhaps that can best be done by allowing the subject to explain itself, expose itself from within, from that depth where the bones are barest. Impose an explanation of your own and there is every chance you will violate that stricter sense of the form. Therefore, this form would probably be better used to explain a subject you know well, rather than to explore something you are only just discovering. In any case, effective exposition is good writing dis-

cipline, useful in nearly any other kind of writing and fundamental to most.

### Locating Subjects for Exposition

We have held to the stricter sense of exposition here partly because broader senses are more explicitly engaged in other sections of this book. Exposition shares a common root with the word “expound,” which also describes a way of presenting a subject. But expounding on a subject will more likely lead beyond bare explanation into interpretation, argumentation, or other critical techniques best considered in their own right. Of course, almost any subject listed in those other chapters is open to an expository treatment in the stricter sense we are struggling to maintain here as well. (It might be helpful to recall that in certain musical forms the “exposition” refers to the first part in which the thematic material is straightforwardly presented. Later in the movement other techniques are used to shape, develop, and adorn that same material.)

An expository essay on *exposition* itself might toughen its *definition* by *contrasting* it with *narration*. It would take an excellent student essayist to explain a story without explaining it away.

## **Professions, Occupations**

- What jobs hold up best during both good times and bad times?
- For what is Buckminster Fuller known?
- For what is Bill Gates known?
- For what is Mother Teresa known?
- For what is Nelson Mandela known?
- For what is Marie Curie known?
- For what is Mother Jones known?
- For what is Albert Einstein known?
- How has prophecy become a profession?
- What criteria qualify someone as an expert?
- Describe the value of the \_\_\_\_\_ profession to society.
- What factors have encouraged people to retire at a later age?
- What new field creates many new professions?
- Why are farmers sometimes paid *not* to grow crops?
- Why are employees less likely to feel loyalty to a single company?
- What must a poet laureate do to qualify for the title?
- Describe Gloria Steinem's role in the women's movement.
- What is a career politician?

## **Commerce, Finance, Economy, Economics**

- What were some common ways of making a living during the Depression?
- What assumptions are implied by the statement "the customer is always right"?
- Discuss the growth of multinational corporations.
- Discuss how debts are paid.
- Discuss whether the average person has the ability to make a lot of money.
- What are some major financial frauds?
- What will stores of the future be like?
- Describe the history and current state of car pools.
- Discuss Harry S. Truman's fight against hoarding.
- Discuss government efforts to encourage consumer spending in times of economic crisis.
- Discuss money devaluation.
- Discuss the battle for control of a certain company.
- What are alternate energy production incentives?
- What tax breaks exist for individuals? For companies?
- What are some calculated billing snares for credit-card holders?
- Discuss government-supported student loan programs.
- To what extent does customer protest affect the price of goods?
- Discuss the abuse of expense accounts.

- Discuss the estate tax.
- What is a venture in which young people have become financially successful?
- Describe the growth of the telemarketing industry and the backlash against it.
- Discuss the increasing globalization of business.
- Trace the increasing interconnections between educational institutions and big business.
- How is Internet commerce changing the nature of buying and selling?
- Why does one job pay more than another, even though both require specialized training?
- Describe the shift from the family farm to agribusiness.
- Why does economic trouble in one country cause problems in others?
- What "extras" are offered by the telephone company but not generally known to the public?  
\_\_\_\_\_ are not getting any cheaper/are not getting any easier to come by.
- How accurately does Hollywood portray the financial world as it really is?
- Why has social security lost its status?
- Discuss the practice of giving children allowances.
- Discuss owning a farm.
- How has online shopping had an impact on department stores?
- How are our tax dollars used?
- Discuss television networks and money.
- Write of an unusual entrepreneurial venture.
- Are you, in these times, "what you own" or "what you owe"?
- Write an extended example of how money makes money, or how money buys time.
- Discuss insurance abuses, from both sides: the consumers and the businesses.
- Discuss the growing divorce "business."
- How independent is a salesperson?
- What happens in an audit?
- What employment prospects are there in the field of ecology?
- How can one drive a hard bargain?
- Discuss taxpayer revolts.
- What caused an isolated (that is, not a national) labor-management dispute?
- How does the stock market work?
- Describe the problem of credit-card debt among students.
- Describe the environmental impact of SUVs.
- Describe the Enron debacle.
- Describe the ongoing debate about affirmative action.
- Discuss the ongoing debate on whether to privatize the social security system.

“From lemonade stand to \_\_\_\_\_.” Describe the jobs you’ve held.

Describe barter as a means of commerce in a particular culture.

“America was built with small farms. They keep saying the farmer is the country’s backbone. I never heard anything about agribusiness being the backbone of the country.” Jessie Lopez De La Cruz. Describe how the farmer is the country’s backbone.

### **Sports, Entertainment**

Discuss the events that typify the Tour de France.

Discuss the set up of the winter Olympics.

Is there a way in sports in which both opponents can lose?

How accurately does Hollywood portray the sports world?

Discuss the phenomenon of a new craze or fad.

Discuss a certain sports scandal.

Discuss athletes and religion.

Discuss the fan phenomenon known as “the wave” and/or other sports crowd behavior(s) of your choosing.

Discuss rituals observed at sporting events.

Why do more and more fans stay home and watch sports on television?

Is it true that “there’s no business like show business”?

Discuss the history of ratings systems for Hollywood films.

Discuss sports (radio, television) announcers.

Discuss free agents in sports.

Discuss a certain child superstar, such as Michael Jackson or Shirley Temple.

Discuss time as it applies to the athlete.

Trace an athlete’s career from player to coach.

What do families do on weekends?

Do sports spectators like violence?

Why are stars (athletes, actors) paid so much?

Discuss drug abuse among Olympic athletes.

Describe how college coaches recruit future players.

Trace an athlete’s career during and after the playing days.

Describe an athlete-recruiting incident that made headlines.

Discuss a favorite form of entertainment for you and your friends.

### **Education**

Discuss the battle for control of a certain school or school system.

Discuss the idea that all teaching is political.

Be an expert in a specialized topic and, using the special language associated with it, explain it to someone who is unacquainted with it.

Give to a layperson some understanding of a difficult subject, such as a scientific law.

Discuss the rationale of organizing schools on the basis of grade level.

How is reading taught?

How is writing taught?

What do group homes offer people with disabilities?

What difficulties do public schools in urban areas have? In rural areas?

Is it possible not to think?

Explain a common logical fallacy.

Discuss self-education.

Discuss the challenge of balancing school security with student freedom.

At what age do we first become aware of ourselves and others?

Why do some high schools require proficiency tests for graduation? How do such tests work?

What is cultural literacy?

What purpose do college summer programs serve?

Write on the revival of \_\_\_\_\_.

Emerson said that life consists in what one is thinking all day. Discuss.

What new practices exist for grading papers?

What new teaching trends are there, either in methodology or subject matter?

What are the responsibilities of students in high school?

Develop the thesis: “\_\_\_\_\_ is an education.”

What is “emotional intelligence”?

What does the term “multiple intelligences” mean?

What will your child’s first teacher expect of him/her?

“He [or she] is wise who learns from everyone,” says a proverb. Discuss.

Write on self-improvement.

John Donne said, “Go, and catch a falling star . . . .” How can you apply this to your life?

Why is the college presidency such a difficult profession?

What is service-learning?

Discuss opening up new worlds in education.

Discuss learning all the angles of \_\_\_\_\_.

Discuss a significant discovery about \_\_\_\_\_.

What did Helen Keller say she would concentrate on looking at if given only three days to see? Discuss her answer as it concerns you.

Judge the employment outlook over the next ten years in various areas of teaching (or in some other profession).

Many adults in the United States are functionally illiterate. Discuss this condition.

What is the role of an educator as defined in your community?

What role does the school board serve in your school district?

Discuss a key issue in university admissions policies.  
 What is a search engine, and how does it work?  
 Discuss how the human brain is—and is not—like a computer.  
 In some (few) schools, teachers do not assign grades. What are the potential pros and cons of this approach?  
 In many parts of the United States, some public schools are much better funded than other schools are. What is the history of this problem? What is being done (or suggested) to fix it?  
 What are “charter schools,” and what debate has arisen over them?  
 Discuss the debate over whether evolution or creationism should be taught in public schools.  
 Cable television programming is piped into some classrooms. What arguments have been made for or against this practice? What may happen in the future regarding this practice?  
 Discuss the lunches provided in your school’s cafeteria from a nutritional standpoint. Are they healthy or unhealthy? Who decides what will be on the menu?  
 Where does funding for your school come from? Has there been debate about whether to increase or cut funding to your school in recent years? If so, what were the arguments, and what happened?  
 What policy does your school (or school system) have about censorship? How was this policy developed?  
 Who decides which books you will read in your English class? What factors go into this decision?  
 In what ways is computer technology changing public school education? What debates exist over how to use the Internet in education?  
 Discuss censorship and freedom of expression as they relate to student publications (print and nonprint).  
 What is a “renaissance man”—or woman?

## Law

Discuss legal proceedings on television.  
 Discuss first offenders and the law.  
 Discuss abuses in the armed forces.  
 Discuss illegal drugs in high school.  
 Discuss “the law’s delay” (*Hamlet*).  
 Discuss how one can legally fight the boss.  
 Are there any uniform prison/jail standards?  
 How do natural-disaster victims appeal for government-assistance funds?  
 How is the legal system being called upon to judge mother against father, one lifestyle against another?  
 What are some unusual legal or insurance services?  
 What are labor unions? How do they affect the relationship between an employer and employees?  
 Discuss debate over cameras in courtrooms.  
 Discuss women in the military.

Discuss the issue of gays in the military.  
 Do research, and then write, on the question of who owns the mailbox legally. Does the government own it, or does the person whose mail is directed to it? What restrictions and so forth are there on and for mailboxes?  
 What was prison life like in the Gulag Archipelago?  
 What are some typical laws about posters—kinds of posters, kinds of display, and so forth?  
 How can one legally protect his or her job?  
 Where does the court stand on obscenity?  
 What ordinances about pornography exist at the small-town level?  
 Do military or political bodies in the United States have a record of “dealing with” people who threaten to blow the whistle on them?  
 Write about the pickpocket conditions of a certain area.  
 Discuss the law about racial-ethnic listings or identifications.  
 Discuss a loophole in the law.  
 Discuss personal property and the law.  
 Tell what it was like during the 1950s Red Scare in the United States.  
 Discuss violent encounters outside the law.  
 Discuss mail fraud.  
 Discuss counterfeit documents—passports, visas, recommendations, birth certificates, graduation certificates, university transcripts, and so forth.  
 Discuss the law and the right to protect news sources.  
 What does the law do about rape?  
 What does the law do about child abuse?  
 What happens in small claims court?  
 What are some legal abuses by the FBI? The CIA?  
 Discuss cracking down on \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Discuss the comeback(s) of “blacklisted” writers.  
 Discuss consumer protection and the law.  
 Discuss solitary confinement and the law.  
 Can students collect legal damages from their schools?  
 What are your rights concerning the pledge of allegiance? Considered from the legal side, does our patent system work?  
 Discuss gang control of the law and government.  
 Discuss witness protection under the law. What does the law do about threats?  
 Discuss the law and bribery.  
 Discuss identity-theft crimes—telephone calls made free, misuse of bank credit cards, illegal bank withdrawals, and so forth.  
 Discuss Internet crimes.  
 What are “right to work” laws? How do they affect the relationship between an employer and an employee?  
 What is “welfare-to-work” legislation? How has it affected welfare recipients’ lives in recent years?



Some courts now apply harsh drug laws that sentence relatively minor offenders to long prison terms. What are the arguments for and against this practice?

When and why did the practice of searching students' school lockers begin? What debate has arisen about it?

What new legal questions have arisen with the rapid development of the Internet? (Or pick one such question and lay out its dimensions and significance.)

Research and write about debate over "racial profiling"?

Some localities have enacted laws giving same-sex unions similar legal status to that of married couples. What arguments are made for and against such laws?

In many areas, eighteen-year-olds can be drafted into military service but cannot legally buy or consume alcoholic beverages. Why this difference?

Summarize the debate over whether it should be legal to smoke marijuana.

In response to the September 11 terror attacks, some lawmakers wanted to give more power to the authorities who fight terror while others wanted to ensure protection of the many freedoms that U.S. citizens enjoy. Summarize the resulting debate.

Discuss the Homeland Security Department created by President George W. Bush after the September 11 terror attacks.

Explain the ongoing debate about school prayer.

Discuss current issues relating to laws prohibiting sexual harassment.

Discuss lawsuits against tobacco makers.

Discuss educational programs in prisons.

Explore how white collar crime is treated differently from other crimes.

### Travel, Transportation

Describe Route 66.

Discuss the rigors of traveling to remote places.

Write of a classic car.

Write about ways in which automakers put profits ahead of lives.

Discuss long-distance car travel.

Discuss modern ways of improving cars for luxury or comfort.

Discuss changes in air safety since 9/11/01.

Discuss modern ways of improving cars for safety.

Discuss driving in a foreign country.

Discuss bicycle speed barriers.

Discuss the popularity of SUVs.

Discuss road rage.

Discuss big-city driving.

Discuss Americans' attitudes toward their cars.

Discuss the development of airbags in cars.

Discuss child-safety features in cars.

Discuss the popularity of a certain vacation spot.

Discuss high-speed trains.

Discuss prospects for increased mass transportation.

Discuss the differences in pollution laws for cars vs. those for buses and trucks.

Discuss current work on cars using renewable energy sources.

Discuss "alternative spring breaks."

Discuss plans for a particular kind of expedition.

### Animals, Plants, Natural Phenomena

Discuss the "animals nobody loves."

Discuss the illegal use of contaminated animals for food.

Discuss the abuse of animals.

Discuss the animal rights movement.

Discuss cat personality.

Discuss dog personality.

Discuss pet cemeteries.

Discuss the intelligence of animals.

Discuss the emotions of animals.

How do elephants establish graveyards?

How do animals demonstrate territoriality?

Discuss animals and language.

Discuss animals and neurosis.

Discuss the habits and characteristics of kangaroos.

What does it mean that the mother mink sets out five food settings for her five children?

How does the film *Jaws* differ from the reality of sharks?

Discuss ostrich ranching.

Do we have anything to fear from birds?

What is the truth about the black widow spider?

Discuss the spread of fire ants in the United States.

Discuss hunting for truffles.

Discuss the ecosphere, the area from which our natural resources (everything needed to support life, in this case) come.

Discuss the origin and/or control of forest fires.

What should plants be fed?

Discuss global warming.

Discuss the El Niño effect.

Discuss desert agriculture.

Discuss Siberian resources.

What is the value of a swamp?

Discuss the nature of electricity.

Discuss the "challenge of the deep."

Discuss current uses of the laser.

Consider the ramifications of the Law of Entropy—the theory that the universe has reached its peak and is winding down.

Discuss the Big Bang Theory.  
 Discuss String Theory.  
 Take a light-hearted look at Chaos Theory in your life.

### Religion, Beliefs

What did early human beings believe about the natural world that we now do not believe?  
 What is involved in spiritual freedom?  
 What are some current religious problems?  
 What are some religious questions that are unsettled?  
 Discuss some intimations of mortality/immortality.  
 Discuss the belief that there are ghosts that don't know what happened to them, that don't know, for example, that they are ghosts or how they died.  
 Discuss the role of magic in ancient times.  
 Discuss the role of magic in modern times.  
 What is the role of the Bible in U.S. national life?  
 Write about snake handlers, an American religious sect.  
 Write about new religions.  
 Discuss Wicca as a recent popular religion.  
 Discuss Quakers and their beliefs.  
 Discuss the Amish and their beliefs.  
 Discuss Christian Scientists and their beliefs.  
 Write about the expansion of religion into television.  
 Write about the growing relationship between religion and politics.  
 Pick a belief system and explain its features.  
 Describe how Eastern religions/philosophies have influenced the West.  
 Discuss similarities/differences between various mythologies.  
 Discuss various beliefs about what happens after death.  
 How did the "founding fathers" view religion?  
 What role does religion play in the conflict in \_\_\_\_\_?  
 What do Hindus mean by "transmigration of souls"?  
 Discuss the Buddhist eightfold path as a code of conduct.  
 Discuss Yin and Yang as Taoist principles.  
 Discuss Islam's belief in a just God.  
 Discuss a basic teaching from Judaism.

### The Media, Rhetoric, Communication

Discuss motivations for writing.  
 Discuss propaganda and elections.  
 Discuss the use of negative campaigning.  
 Do people really listen to the words of popular music?  
 Describe an instance of a song becoming popular despite widespread misunderstanding of its lyrics.  
 How do newspapers determine what is "news"?  
 How can the audience affect programming on television?

If people were taped so that they knew what they sound like, would they change in their speech habits or their behavior?  
 How has the development of cable and satellite television changed the media industry?  
 Discuss the appeal of African American rap music to White teenagers.  
 Discuss changing standards of what is acceptable on television.  
 Discuss the cult of personality in media.  
 What are some reasons movie producers have for delaying the release of their films?  
 Discuss a famous composer-lyricist team.  
 How is audio-visual technology used in the field of medicine?  
 How does TV present useful information in an interesting way?  
 What is a "real" person in fiction?  
 How is a symphony like a play?  
 Should news reporters be entertainers?  
 Write of a campaign waged against a certain advertisement or against certain kinds of advertisements.  
 Discuss how the reception of a given show/film has changed over time.  
 How might a writer's characters come to gain control of the writer?  
 Discuss the use of movie ratings.  
 What do we mean when we say that a certain TV show is "predictable"? Predictable why?  
 Discuss the changing content of television.  
 Discuss multiculturalism on television.  
 Write on legal language.  
 In what ways have certain futuristic novels (such as Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*) proved themselves to have been accurate forecasts?  
 Write on the destruction of important records in a significant public event.  
 Write on "weasel words" used in advertising.  
 Write on TV and censorship.  
 Discuss how you can tell that a commercial is locally produced.  
 Discuss advertisements/commercials in which the product is hardly shown/discussed.  
 Tell what the Burma Shave commercials (or other past American folklore items in advertisements) were like.  
 Write about bumper stickers as American dialogue.  
 Describe an incident of censorship in schools.  
 Discuss the Harry Potter books and censorship.  
 Write on editorial cartoons.  
 Discuss reading trends among the American people.  
 How accurate are newspapers as keepers of history?  
 How accurate are historians as keepers of history?

## 72 What Can I Write About?

- “The strength of a community comes from the ability and desire of its people to communicate with one another,” a newspaper item says. Discuss.
- Write on propaganda in Soviet life in the 1960s.
- Write on censorship in a foreign country.
- Write on censorship in advertising.
- What is the translator’s greatest problem?
- Write on the battle for possession of the mind—through radio, television, books, religion, and so forth.
- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of local reportage.
- What role does public television have in United States society?
- Write of a program in which business executives are learning how to communicate in other cultures.
- Write about audio books.
- Write on the decline of the LP.
- Write an essay about the golden age of radio.
- Write about how people adjust their speech to fit a given context.
- Write on the growing importance of English as a political and commercial language of the world.
- Write on the use of doublespeak.
- What makes a commercial/advertisement effective?
- How might the author of a classic from the last century react to today’s analysis of the book?
- Write on over-correctness or pseudo-correctness.
- Write on the government and television.
- Write on exchanges of favors among television networks.
- Write on advertising in which there are direct attacks on opposing commercial products.
- Write on what television advertisers and television producers do to avoid unfortunate juxtaposition between products and shows.
- What are some important misconceptions about language?
- Why do people write to the editor of the newspaper?
- How can “plain talk” be used to manipulate an audience?
- Do words often conceal more than they express?
- How does slang/jargon mark a person as a member of a particular group?
- Write about current technology used to make media accessible to people with sight or hearing impairments.
- How has the Internet changed publishing?
- How has the Internet changed reporting?
- How are computers complicating the meaning of the “written word”?
- Compare several news accounts of the same event. Draw out their differences, and explore how these differences present the event in a different light—or even as a different event altogether.
- Compare several reviews of the same movie or book. Draw out their differences, and explore the assump-

tions each makes about the work, about the process of watching or reading, or about readers of the review.

- Describe some of the ways that women are “commodified” on television (shows or commercials).
- Describe commercials that deconstruct conventional images and notions.

## Health, Medicine

- Write of someone who has regained eyesight after blindness.
- Write about required drug warnings.
- Write about healthy hobbies.
- Write about the link between the mind and the body.
- Write about schizophrenia.
- Discuss the pros and cons of laser eye surgery.
- Write about cellular phones and radiation fears.
- Write about research into cures for HIV/AIDS.
- Write about a high-functioning autistic person.
- What are the newest medical developments regarding \_\_\_\_\_ (condition)?
- Write on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- Write about food poisoning.
- Write on the health problems caused by the Chernobyl disaster.
- Write about research into cures for cancer.
- Write about allergies in the home.
- Write about the common cold.
- Write about radioactive fallout and health.
- Write about medical uses of plants and herbs.
- Write about anthrax contamination.
- Write about smallpox contamination.
- Safe Nuclear Burial Unlikely: Geologists, says a headline. Discuss.
- Write about intravenous feeding.
- Write about emergency medical technicians (EMTs).
- Write about an emergency room.
- Write about carbon monoxide poisoning.
- What can be done to protect public water from being sabotaged?
- What can be done to make drinking water safe?
- Write about reconstructive surgery.
- What are some complications of pregnancy?
- What are operational problems of a veterans’ hospital?
- What new directions have been taken in epidemiology?
- What does Aristotle observe about sleep and sleeplessness?
- Write on non-Western healing techniques.
- Write on the use of stem cells in the treatment of genetic disorders.

Write about groundwater contamination.  
 Write about asbestos contamination.  
 Write on chiropractic care.  
 Write on prenatal technology.  
 Discuss recent medical breakthroughs in surgery.  
 Write about a sleep disorder such as sleep apnea.  
 Write about autism.  
 Discuss the rising level of obesity in the United States.  
 Write about organ donation.  
 Discuss race and the prevalence of a certain disease.  
 How much of one's health is determined by genetics?  
 Write on research studies on women's health.  
 Discuss the relative lack of insurance coverage for mental health care.  
 Discuss the problem of rising health care costs.  
 Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of HMOs.  
 Write about virus mutations.  
 Write on public health services.  
 Write on modern medical uses of the leech.  
 Write about the benefits of taking dogs to nursing homes.  
 Write about guide and care-giving dogs for people who live alone.  
 Describe vector-borne diseases.  
 Describe how you think a cold might spread in school.  
 What are the health hazards of asbestos?  
 What are the health hazards of radon?  
 Describe the health-giving properties of a particular food.  
 Describe "comfort" foods.

### **Politics, Government, History**

What are some examples of intelligence failures by the FBI and CIA?  
 Write of someone who was immensely successful in a first venture at politics.  
 The personal is political. Discuss.  
 How does the Chinese government put down dissidents?  
 Write on the erosion of freedom in democratic states.  
 Can freedom be too much for many people to handle?  
 How is an aristocrat trained for rule?  
 Write of an attack that has been made on a certain political group.  
 How do intelligence agencies work to put down those against them?  
 Discuss the passing of the cavalry.  
 How accurately does Hollywood portray historical events?  
 Discuss immigration (or emigration) policies.  
 What goes on in the armed forces that the armed forces would prefer the public not know?

Write on political sloganry.  
 Write on the transition from one president to the next.  
 Write on the bureaucratic use of government vehicles and other items.  
 How popular is Britain's royal family?  
 Write on White House news conferences.  
 Summarize a certain public figure's position on a certain issue—terrorism, welfare, the environment, for example.  
 What are the vital functions of the United States Census Bureau?  
 Write on government in the former Soviet republics.  
 Write on island-hopping during World War II.  
 What crises play big parts in elections?  
 Write on prisoner exchanges or spy exchanges.  
 What determines who can run for political office?  
 Explain the Teapot Dome Scandal.  
 What was the last blow to the South in the American Civil War?  
 What was the Iran/Contra scandal?  
 What happened to the Watergate conspirators?  
 Write about a human rights watchdog group.  
 Write on White House media relations.  
 Write on fictionalized media portrayals of the White House/the presidency.  
 Write about an espionage case.  
 Write about Operation Desert Storm.  
 Write on the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy regarding gays in the U. S. military.  
 Discuss corporate welfare.  
 Write about impeachment.  
 Write about lobbying on Capitol Hill.  
 Write about efforts toward campaign finance reform.  
 Write about voting irregularities in the 2000 presidential election.  
 Write about redistricting.  
 What is pork in government?  
 Describe the structure of your local government.  
 Write on globalization.  
 What role has Nelson Mandela played in South African politics?  
 Write about the end of communism in eastern Europe.  
 Write about the reunification of Germany.  
 Write about the creation of Pakistan.  
 Write about Hong Kong returning to Chinese rule.  
 Write about a civil rights movement.  
 Write about parliamentary democracy.  
 What usually happens in off-year elections?  
 Write on the concept of global responsibility.  
 Write of minority representation in American government.

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Write of foreign influence on American governmental decisions.

Why did a certain Japanese admiral say, “We have waked a sleeping giant”?

Why does the United States government not enforce the metric switch?

What part does celebrity status play in politics?

Write about living history in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Williamsburg, St. Augustine, etc.).

Write of some issue having to do with territorial rights.

What happened at Babi Yar?

What procedure is behind a presidential decision?

Write of so-called “instant history”—bringing the pyramids, bridges, and so forth of the famous past to the United States.

Write on this quotation from Bill Moyers: “Most presidents don’t rise above their times. They reflect their times.”

Describe the different kinds of voting methods in the Florida presidential election of 2000.

Describe what experts claim that computers can do to count ballots. Describe why the claims may be untrue.

Describe the role of women voters in a particular election.

What is political asylum?

# 8

# ARGUMENTATION

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## What Argumentation Is

In its root sense, argumentation musters proof and brings it forth in order to persuade, defend, or, at times, attack. In that stricter sense this process of writing is logical and formal. Let us free the term from its dictionary sense and let it come to grips with anything from a legal brief to a political showdown. Exposition strives to explain, argumentation strives to win.

## How to Write Argumentation

Once again, clarity is essential as with any kind of writing. We emphasize it again here because argument so often tends to become melded with emotion. Even if argumentative material demands a certain degree of ambiguity or subjectiveness, the one who argues should be clear about it. The word “argue” is derived from the Latin *arguere*, which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means “to demonstrate, make clear.” As the OED tells us, the word is derived from the same root as that underlying *argentums*, meaning “silver,” and originally referred to that which was “brightly shining,” hence also “clear.”

A balanced, reasonable approach is often most effective, and it is always better to gather more proof than opinion. Nothing is more likely to put people off than a hedgehog piece of writing bristling with opinions. Reason and logic are not the end-all of anything, however, though we sometimes find it comforting to believe they might be. Emotion is powerful; it has moved nations. But emotional appeals are skittish. They tend to bolt off the track. Riding them rhetorically is dangerous even for experienced writers. Anyone attempting to argue from emotion should

remember that the faster the heart races, the tighter the rein.

It can be instructive simply to argue a position for the fun of it, to play the devil’s advocate. But when you turn serious about it and are out to win the day, you had best believe in what you are doing. Be sincere. Sincerity convinces. It will help you see clearly through the thick of things. Anything else will work against you. Truth persists between the lines of a hypocritical page like checked light through a lattice.

Integrity, then, is the place where you make your stand. Imagination can broaden the field. Reason, logic, emotion, humor, irony, satire—any of these can be viable forms of argumentation. How you use them is another matter. You might find yourself brandishing a polemical club. Or is it an irenic olive branch you brush across the page? Then maybe you turn acrobat, tumble your argument on its grinning head, much as Swift did when he made his modest proposal. Circumstance will have its say. Only stand firmly in the integrity of your argument.

## Locating Subjects for Argumentation

Argumentation is another substantial section of this book. Almost anything can become controversial, including most of the subjects listed in this book. A word of caution, though, before this chapter is crossed with other disciplines and techniques: It is best to keep forms and priorities straight. Although creative and imaginative thinking are necessary for a powerful argument, creative writing as such is, generally speaking, ill suited for the purpose of argumentation. Powerful arguments can be made creatively, but the difference between argumentation and art is definitive.

## **Education, Learning, Experience**

Argue for or against: “Literature, whether handed down by word or mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality” (Chinua Achebe).

Should high school students be required to learn a foreign language?

Do Americans tend to undervalue intellectuals?

Why is it important to study history?

What educational philosophy of the past continues to influence education today?

Argue for/against school uniforms.

Should there be bilingual education in the United States?

Should we read “the classics”?

What should the university demand of its students?

Where should college and university costs be cut?

How should public funding for schools be determined?

Is there too much hair-splitting in education?

Which is it better to see: the forest, or the trees?

What is the place of, or what should be the place of, a public intellectual?

What are the most important factors to consider when choosing a college to attend?

What is the best way to prioritize your school activities?

Argue for/against standardized testing.

Argue for/against exit exams in high school.

Argue for/against travel as education.

Argue for/against grade inflation.

Argue for/against letter grades.

Argue for/against allowing students (especially young children) to choose for themselves among educational alternatives.

Agree/disagree: “A little learning is a dangerous thing” (Alexander Pope).

Agree/disagree with the argument that politicians and bureaucrats should be required to take literacy tests.

Agree/disagree with the practice of block scheduling.

Agree/disagree: The public education system is broken.

Agree/disagree: There are too many restrictions on teaching.

Agree/disagree: There are not enough restrictions on students.

Agree/disagree: There is too much time off among students for special activities.

Argue for/against school prayers.

Argue for/against sex education.

Argue for/against teacher strikes.

Argue for/against private schools.

Argue for/against a “value-added” approach versus a “weed them out” approach to education.

Agree/disagree with the practice of year-round schooling.

Agree/disagree: College entrance exams should be changed.

Argue for/against stricter college entrance requirements.

Argue for/against school vouchers.

Argue for/against textbooks.

Argue for/against censorship of certain kinds of books.

Argue for/against peer teaching.

Argue for/against public discipline by teachers.

Argue for/against a specific change in the curriculum.

Argue for/against a university education.

Argue for/against periodically evaluating teachers on their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

Argue for/against periodically evaluating teachers on their teaching ability.

Argue for/against fraternities/sororities.

Argue for/against student government.

Argue for/against strictness of form in schoolwork.

Argue for/against all-boys and all-girls schools.

Argue for/against busing of students to promote integration.

Argue for/against setting a life goal at an early age.

Argue for/against parents’ determining their children’s careers.

Argue for/against high registration fees.

Who ought to be permitted to serve on the school board?

Who ought to have the responsibility (and authority) for educational policy?

What should be the limit, if any, of academic freedom?

What measures of academic ability should be used in schools?

Agree/disagree: In the current age of specialization, it is impossible to be an expert in many things.

Argue with reference to your own experience: “The most interesting things are those that didn’t occur.”

Agree/disagree: Sometimes children misbehave because they want to be corrected.

Argue for/against the idea that youth is wasted on the young.

Argue for/against spanking.

Argue for/against curfews.

Agree/disagree: “Humankind cannot bear very much reality” (T. S. Eliot).

Whose history does American history as it is taught in your school represent?

Agree/disagree: “There’s nothing wrong with sameness.”

Agree/disagree: “It is easier to be reasonable than unreasonable.”

Agree/disagree: Solitude is one of the happiest routes to happiness.

Agree/disagree: Solitude is one of our best teachers.

What opportunities should schools offer students to use what Howard Gardner calls “multiple intelligences”?

Argue for/against prayer in schools.

- Agree/disagree with the opinion about experience that good is not always rewarded and evil is not always punished.
- In growing up, *does* Hope reign supreme, or does it not even reign at all?
- Agree/disagree, with regards to education and experience: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (William Blake).
- Does philosophy have a real place in the world?
- Should everyone be admitted to the university? Should there be no restrictions on entry?
- Agree/disagree: The Internet improves education.
- Agree/disagree that students should be allowed to sue schools for wrongly educating them.
- What should be taught?
- What should not be taught?
- Who should decide what curriculum is followed?
- Argue for/against federal spending for education.
- Argue for/against student employment as an educational or otherwise important experience.
- Argue for/against viewing the university as a giver of moral education.
- What modern songwriter's songs could be fruitfully studied in school?
- Agree/disagree: "Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave."
- Should students be paid as an encouragement to make good grades?
- Agree/disagree: Teachers should enliven their classes with entertainment.
- Discuss argumentatively any book which educated and changed the world.
- Argue for a particular way in which textbooks should be chosen.
- Argue whether near-misses teach anything.
- Argue what truth is and where to find it.
- Agree/disagree with the opinion that knowledge can get in the way.
- Does what we don't know hurt us?
- Agree/disagree: The personal digital assistant in education is a fad.
- Agree/disagree: Parents should be allowed to sue teachers for giving students poor grades.
- Argue for/against gifted and remedial classes.
- Argue for/against standardized testing.
- Argue for/against tracking by ability.
- Argue for/against athletic scholarships.
- Argue for/against charter schools.
- What, if anything, should be done about absenteeism in school?
- Is it true that, as novelist John Gardner has said, our schools are "thrown up like barricades in the way of young minds"? Does school education thwart, or does it assist, life education?
- Discuss argumentatively T. S. Eliot's poetic statement, "Teach us to care and not to care. / Teach us to sit still."
- Discuss argumentatively Max Beerbohm's statement, "The Socratic manner is not a game at which two can play."
- Discuss argumentatively Emerson's statement, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."
- Discuss argumentatively the statement popularized by Hillary Clinton, "It takes a village to raise a child."
- Discuss argumentatively: "A worthy idea is one that withstands resistance."
- Agree/disagree with Thoreau's argument that it is not necessary to travel in order to learn.
- Discuss argumentatively: "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives" (James Madison).
- Discuss argumentatively Sir Francis Bacon's statement, "Silence is the virtue of fools."
- Discuss argumentatively Sir Thomas Browne's statement, "We carry within us the wonders we seek without [outside of] us."
- Discuss argumentatively Thomas Henry Huxley's statement, "Irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors."
- Argue for/against attending an Ivy League school.
- Agree/disagree: "Still waters run deep."
- Agree/disagree with the argument that grades indicate something about achievement.
- How can it be that, as John Donne said, "affliction is a treasure"?
- Argue a particular formula or standard for judging when a person is educated.
- Argue whether it is fun to have to work in order to know.
- Argue what is the best lesson that education gives.
- Argue whether history is "bunk."
- Argue for/against reading *only* for pleasure.
- Argue for/against the opinion that there is too much learning and too little common sense.
- Argue for/against the junior college or community college.
- Argue for/against some procedure at a junior college or a community college.
- How would you teach a particular class unit? Argue for this approach.
- Agree/disagree: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?" (Robert Browning).
- Agree/disagree: Education should be more connected to the real world.
- Argue for/against the statement "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach."



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Argue for/against Santayana's idea that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.

Argue for/against the idea that some questions might be asked but shouldn't be answered.

Argue for/against the opinion that teachers have enough time to teach.

Argue for/against the opinion that people are what they observe and absorb. Or think. Or do.

Argue for/against having security guards in schools.

What should be done to solve the problem of disparity in school funding?

Argue for/against home schooling.

"There is no true love without some sensuality. One is not happy in books unless one loves to caress them" (Anatole France). How would you argue for/against this statement in an age of electronic books?

Present an argument for or against this: "The function of education . . . is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically" (Martin Luther King Jr.).

"The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses" (Malcolm X). Argue for or against this statement.

### Law

Argue for/against closed meetings of governmental bodies.

Argue what should be done about spouse abuse.

Argue what should be done about child abuse.

Argue for/against noise ordinances.

Argue what should be done under the law to regulate charity organizations.

Argue for/against the decriminalization of marijuana.

Argue for/against lie-detector tests.

What should be done under the law about spam (junk e-mail)?

How do some people justify profiling by a given characteristic (race, age)? What is your view?

What law(s) should be created for certain new ways of life?

Argue for/against assisted suicide laws.

Argue for/against "privilege under law."

What old laws, if any, should be reinstated?

Argue for/against some general position the law takes.

What can be done, or what should be done, to a biased or prejudiced judge?

How can public defenders' offices be made more effective?

Argue for/against raising the driving age to eighteen.

Argue for/against the existing high car insurance rates for male drivers under the age of 25.

Argue for/against laws against cellular phone use while driving.

Argue for/against vehicular speed limits.

Argue what ought to be done about hard drugs.

Argue what ought to be done about drug dealers.

If you want to effect change, is it better to fight the system or work within it?

What should the law be concerning censorship?

What should be done to protect patients in nursing homes?

What ought to be done under the law about stray animals?

Argue for/against capital punishment.

Argue for/against plea bargaining.

Argue for/against zero-tolerance policies/laws.

Argue for/against gun control.

Argue for/against "three strikes" laws.

Argue for/against abortion being legal.

Argue for/against parental notification laws covering abortion.

Argue for/against a certain hunting or fishing law.

Argue for/against acting as your own lawyer.

Argue for/against diplomatic immunity.

Argue for/against a world court.

Argue for/against unmarked police cars.

Argue for/against ambulance chasers.

Argue for/against minor offenses being legally treated as major ones.

Argue for/against major offenses being legally treated as minor ones.

Argue for/against stronger laws against corporate crime.

Argue for/against treating adolescents as adults are treated under the law.

Argue for/against a certain light sentence or heavy sentence handed down.

Argue what ought to be legally done to punish a foreign nation that has committed a crime against the United States.

Argue for/against questioning the judge.

Argue for/against televising court proceedings.

Argue for/against televising executions.

Argue for/against the jury system as it is.

Argue the point whether illegal acts by a president are ever excusable.

Argue what ought to be done with the accused who await trial.

Argue whether violent acts in self-defense are defensible.

Argue for/against certain parking laws.

Argue for/against FBI raids without recourse by the persons raided.

Argue for/against easing a certain ban.

Argue for/against being required to serve on a jury.

Argue whether or not jury verdicts should be unanimous.

Argue for/against oaths of loyalty.

Argue for/against subliminal advertising.

- Argue for/against electronic eavesdropping.
- Argue for/against allowing smoking in public places.
- Argue for/against the conscience as law.
- Argue for/against no-fault insurance.
- Argue for/against change of venue (generally or in specific cases).
- Argue for/against a catchall law—that is, one that covers many things at one time.
- What ought to be done under the law about antitrust violations?
- What standards ought there to be for medical lawsuits?
- Argue for/against the practice of awarding monetary damages in wrongful death lawsuits.
- What safety codes ought there to be for police chases, ambulances, and so forth?
- Argue for/against cracking down on jaywalkers.
- Should a lawyer seek the truth or pull out all the stops to free/convict a defendant?
- Argue for/against attorney-client privilege.
- Argue what should be the basis for deciding who gets custody of a child.
- Argue what should be done about deadbeat parents.
- Argue for/against public funding of political campaigns.
- Argue for/against proportional government.
- Argue for/against the right to die.
- Argue whether or not needle-exchange programs should be legal.
- Argue whether actors should be legally responsible for claims they make for the products they endorse.
- Who ought to be responsible for paying for a window broken by a legal minor?
- What should the penalty be for kidnapping?
- What standards ought there to be for legal remunerative awards?
- What laws should there be to protect innocent bystanders?
- Discuss argumentatively Thomas Drummond's statement, "Property has its duties as well as its rights."
- Argue whether drivers should be regularly retested.
- Who, legally considered, should/should not be allowed to drive?
- Argue whether there should be a maximum age for drivers.
- Argue whether a stock market investor should be considered (for tax purposes, let us say) a legal gambler.
- What laws ought there to be to protect privacy?
- What laws ought there to be to protect confidentiality?
- What laws ought there to be to protect workers from their bosses?
- What laws ought there to be to protect bosses from their workers?
- Discuss argumentatively Edmund Burke's statement, "There is a limit at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue."
- Argue for/against capital punishment as seen *only* from the concept of justice.
- Argue for/against presidential pardons.
- Argue for/against a certain extradition.
- Argue for/against minding your own business (as regards the law).
- Argue for/against the nonenforcement of a certain law.
- Argue what the rights of children ought to be under the law.
- Argue for/against the stricter enforcement of speeding laws.
- Should failure to honor campaign promises be considered a crime?
- Argue for/against the measure-for-measure, eye-for-an-eye law.
- Should those who make war be the only ones who have to fight it?
- Argue whether or not the death penalty is a deterrent to crime.
- Argue for/against using marijuana as a painkiller.
- Argue for/against buying goods manufactured in sweatshops.
- How should multinational corporations be regulated?
- Argue for/against the United Nations.
- What ought to be the laws regarding sexual harassment?
- Argue for/against the position that the self is private property.
- What ought to be the law for protecting private citizens against harassment by government officials?
- Discuss John Locke's statement, "The end of the law is, not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom."
- Argue for/against a law that restricts freedom.
- Argue for/against absolute free speech.
- Argue for/against the right of bigots to be heard, to be read, to march, to protest.
- Argue for/against a specific legal position regarding athletics.
- Agree/disagree: "No one has the right to destroy the land one owns."
- Can (and should) punishment always "fit the crime"?
- What ought to be done to protect people from being indiscriminately committed to mental health facilities?
- How should property taxes be determined and used?
- What should be the punishment for second offenders? for first offenders? (Choose a crime.)
- What qualifications should a police chief have?
- What qualifications should a trial judge have?
- Argue for/against the statement: We reserve the right to \_\_\_\_\_.
- What recourse under the law is there for \_\_\_\_\_? What recourse should there be?
- Discuss argumentatively the right to remain silent and not reveal the source of certain information.

Discuss argumentatively the headline, *Escapee Sues Jailers for Allowing Him to Break Out*.

Interpret argumentatively a single passage of the United States Constitution regarding elections, immigration, personal rights, gun laws, or another issue.

Argue who ought to have immunity from prosecution in politics, medicine, law, religion.

Argue who owns space.

Argue who owns the seas.

Argue for/against increased security measures in airports.

Argue for/against increased security measures in schools.

Argue for/against state lotteries as a source of public revenue.

Argue for/against unionization.

Argue who owns Antarctica.

Should HMOs be able to determine what health care a policyholder receives?

Should students be required to recite the pledge of allegiance?

Argue for/against the concept of private property.

Argue what limits there should be on the right to litigate.

Argue for/against living wills.

Argue the point whether grand juries further justice or hinder it.

Argue whether there was obstruction of justice at Kent State.

Argue what should be done under the law with terrorists when they are captured.

Look into the local laws and see which of them ought to be obsolete.

Argue who can be legally excluded from receiving financial credit.

Argue for/against the position taken by Emperor Ferdinand I, "Let justice be done, though the world perish."

Argue for/against stricter DUI/DWI laws.

Argue for/against telecommunications deregulation.

Discuss the pros and cons of Blue Laws.

Write an argumentative essay entitled, "Which Is Better—Military Justice or Civilian Justice?"

How should police be involved during strikes?

Should flag burning be legal as a form of protest?

Argue for/against this statement: "The history of women's work in this country shows that legislation has been the only force which has improved the working conditions of any large number of women wage-earners" (Helen L. Summer).

Argue for/against this statement: "No written law has ever been more binding than unwritten custom supported by popular opinion" (Carrie Chapman Catt).

## Government, Politics

Argue for/against this statement: "It is common knowledge among lenders—but a secret they keep from borrowers—that creditors are dependent on their major debtors for their own well-being" (Jeremy Brecher and Dennis Brutus).

Argue for/against this statement: "Africa doesn't need charity, Africa needs Liberation" (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o).

Argue for/against this statement: "The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Stephen Biko).

Should proceedings of office holders be televised?

Argue for/against MacArthur's firing by Truman.

Argue some point having to do with local or regional interests.

Argue for/against Clinton's impeachment.

Argue for/against legal rights for domestic partners.

Should publicly funded health care be provided for children of illegal immigrants?

Should the government provide universal health care?

Argue about some aspect of the 2000 presidential election.

Should electronic sharing of copyrighted music be legal?

Should tobacco companies be liable for damage to smokers' health?

Argue for/against campaign spending limits.

Argue for/against televising presidential debates.

Argue for/against reform of political lobbying laws.

Argue whether or not further limits should be imposed on immigration.

What should be the restrictions on public funds used by politicians?

Argue for/against Ayn Rand's position(s) as elaborated in her books.

Agree/disagree: "The world needs troublemakers."

Was Clarence Thomas treated unfairly in his confirmation hearing? Should he have been made a member of the Supreme Court?

Agree or disagree with the opinion that Sir Thomas More was the admirable person that popular history says he was.

Argue for/against a certain position taken by a president.

Argue what a recent poll proves/disproves.

Should the United States government make reparations to the descendants of slaves? To Native Americans?

Argue whether Puerto Rico should become a state in the United States.

Argue what the United States can do to control treatment of foreign peoples in their own countries.

Argue for/against isolationism.

Argue whether the United States is prepared for \_\_\_\_\_.

Argue how the United States might prepare for \_\_\_\_\_.

Argue for/against keeping things the way they are in \_\_\_\_\_.

Argue for/against the premise of a certain movie on politics or government.

Argue for/against restraints on freedom of the press.

Argue for/against reform of voting methods.

Argue for/against voting via the Internet.

Argue for/against write-in ballots.

Argue for/against a political watchdog program.

Argue for/against warrantless activities by the government.

Argue for/against campaign finance reform.

Argue for/against young people in high political places.

Argue for/against very old people serving in high political places.

Argue for/against a larger role for the federal government.

Discuss Walt Whitman's statement, "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem."

Discuss whether our foreign policy is misguided.

Agree/disagree: "There are too many people—and consequently there is too much confusion—in Civil Service."

Agree/disagree: "Only in America do we pretend to worship the majority, reverently listening to the herd as it Gallups this way and that" (Gore Vidal).

Agree/disagree: "There's one sure way to tell when politicians aren't telling the truth—their lips move" (Felicity Kendall).

Argue for/against an independent Quebec.

Argue for/against executive privilege.

Argue for/against the use of Internet filters in public libraries.

What should be done about Internet spam?

Argue whether or not the United States should be the police officer for the world.

Argue for/against the creation of a Department of Homeland Defense.

Argue for/against the abolition of the Department of Education.

Argue for/against term limits for congresspeople.

Argue for/against military government.

Argue for/against: "The government should be responsible for toxic-waste problems."

Argue for/against a political individual who is generally considered radical.

Argue for/against the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps.

Argue for/against the opinion of Samuel Johnson, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

Argue for/against revealing government secrets.

Argue for/against the opinion of John Dryden, "Better one suffer, than a nation grieve."

"The king never dies," said Sir William Blackstone.

Argue whether the President of the United States ever dies.

Argue for/against parliamentary versus presidential democracy.

Argue for/against the Constitution.

Discuss argumentatively the contention by Charles James Fox that "the right of governing is a trust, not a property."

Discuss argumentatively the statement by Thomas Jefferson, "No duty the Executive had to perform was so trying as to put the right man in the right place."

Discuss argumentatively the opinion that those who are behind the president are the ones who really ought to be watched carefully.

Argue for/against appointing rather than electing people to certain political offices.

Why hasn't the United States had a woman president?

Just to sharpen your argumentative skills, argue *against* voting.

Argue a certain appointment that the president ought to make.

Argue what you can do when you disagree with the government.

Argue what the postal service can do to come out even, or perhaps even make money.

Agree/disagree with the opinion that we need political heroes today.

Discuss argumentatively this quotation from Thomas Jefferson: "When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself a public property."

Discuss argumentatively this quotation from Robert Frost: "Good fences make good neighbors."

Argue for/against the opinion that the state is the greatest danger to the well-being of humanity.

Argue for/against a constitutional amendment allowing prayer in schools.

Argue for/against a military draft.

Would you vote for a candidate you didn't like in order to elect the first woman or minority president?

Does polling have a good or bad effect on elections?

Argue whether or not power corrupts.

Argue for/against a public monument to a certain political figure.

Argue for/against an isolationist approach to foreign policy.

Argue for/against proportional government.

Discuss argumentatively how we can pay back the founders of the nation.

- Discuss argumentatively what fight ought to be waged over America's future.
- Discuss argumentatively what should be the prime target of government reform.
- Discuss argumentatively whether nice guys finish last in politics.
- Argue whether it is reasonable to think that people don't really want bureaucracies to end.
- Discuss argumentatively the Spanish proverb, "The monkey dressed in silk is still a monkey."
- Argue whether leaders are born great, or whether they rise to greatness.
- Argue what the government can do to help those without food.
- Argue whether government would protect freedom of speech where the people did not insist upon it.
- What should be done about Social Security?
- Argue for/against the value of having more than two political parties dominate government.
- Argue what is an inescapable future for the United States.
- Argue whether it is possible to be truly independent in politics.
- Argue whether the American Civil War has been the worst internal event of the United States.
- What should the government do to ensure that all citizens have health care?
- Argue for/against televising presidential debates.
- Argue for/against making it difficult to fire civil servants.
- Take a stance on a local government issue.
- What should be the limits of government surveillance?
- Argue what the role of the president's spouse should be.
- How does television influence the public's perception of candidates?
- Argue for or against political figures making public confessions of personal indiscretions.

### War and Peace, Strife, Violence

- Discuss argumentatively Thomas Jefferson's saying, "A little rebellion now and then is a good thing."
- Discuss argumentatively the quotation from Ibsen's dramatic work, "One shouldn't put on his best trousers to fight for what is right."
- Argue for/against conscientious objectors.
- Is it sometimes necessary to fight fire with fire?
- Argue for/against the statement, "If you can't say anything good about somebody, don't say anything at all."
- Argue for/against protesting the protester.
- Argue for/against the contention that war is, according to Norman Angell, "the great illusion."
- Argue which is more threatening to the human race: nuclear war or biological war.

- Argue what is necessary for peace between Palestinians and Israelis.
- Argue what is necessary to resolve the conflict over Kashmir.
- Argue for/against developing the neutron bomb.
- Argue for/against possessing weapons of mass destruction as a deterrent to war.
- Argue where the moral responsibility lies for atrocities of war—whether with the political leaders, the military leaders, the enlisted soldiers, the munitions factory employees, the inventors or developers of weaponry, or the people as a whole.
- Argue whether TV violence makes people more violent. Which is worse, pornography or, to quote Tom Wolfe, "pornoviolence"?
- Discuss argumentatively the Biblical statement, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."
- Argue for/against the loving of one's enemies.
- Argue for/against the opinion that the saying should be: "Speak loudly but carry a little stick."
- Discuss argumentatively the violence in sports, to include violence in the grandstands among sports spectators.
- Discuss argumentatively (but with reference to his obvious irony) George Orwell's statement in *1984*: "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength."
- Argue how much force is enough and how much force is too much.
- Discuss argumentatively what can most assure national security. World security?
- Discuss argumentatively Richard L. Tobin's statement about television violence: "There is little connection evinced between the use of violence and the suffering such acts [of violence] would inflict in real life."
- Argue for/against allowing children to play violent video games.
- Is there more violence today or merely more reporting of violence?
- How did live coverage of the Gulf War affect the public's perception of it?
- How would you define justifiable police violence?
- What role does oil play in current global unrest?
- What limits, if any, should there be on hate speech?
- What is the best way to deal with hate groups?
- What is the best way to minimize terrorism?
- How are corporations involved in violent conflicts around the world?
- Why did the September 11 terrorists do what they did?
- Discuss argumentatively whether a person—say, a president—should be honored for having changed a position that had been harmful to humanity.
- Argue what is the root of all evil.
- Argue for a particular method of nonviolent activism.

Argue for or against going to war with a particular country.

Agree/disagree: “We have reached a place where it is not a question of ‘can we live in the same world and cooperate’ but ‘we must live in the same world and learn to cooperate’” (Eleanor Roosevelt).

Argue for/against cooperation with a perceived enemy.

### Athletics, Outdoor Activities

Argue for/against challenging the referee’s decision.

Argue for/against a certain athlete’s retirement.

Argue whether or not celebrity athletes are role models/heroes.

Argue for/against the calling of a certain play.

Argue for/against the pay of professional athletes.

Argue for/against paying college athletes.

Argue for/against social protest by way of athletic events.

Argue for/against the instant replay as arbitrator.

Agree/disagree: In working for perfection in their sports, many athletes practice the wrong things.

Argue for/against the contention that coaches should be given a certain time to produce winning teams.

Argue for/against the high or low rating of a certain athlete.

Argue for/against hunting or fishing—or the killing of a particular creature, such as the eagle.

Argue for/against fireworks.

Argue for/against stricter rules regarding steroid use.

Argue for/against giving student athletes special academic treatment.

Argue for/against a coach making more than the president of a university.

Argue for/against keeping a school mascot/team name even though some groups find it offensive.

Argue for/against boycotting the Olympics for political reasons.

Do the Olympics really promote international understanding and solidarity?

Argue for/against allowing professional athletes to compete in the Olympics.

Argue for/against reporting on the personal lives of athletes.

Argue for/against athletic scholarships.

Should physical education be mandatory at the K–12 level?

Do sports teach competition or cooperation?

Why are men’s sports generally better attended than women’s?

Should “recreational vehicles” be allowed in national parks?

Is golf a sport? Is bowling?

### Freedom, Free Will

Agree or disagree with playwright Wole Soyinka: “The greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism.”

Argue for/against standing alone for one’s convictions.

Should one be required to stand during the national anthem?

Argue for/against “the right to die.”

Discuss argumentatively: “Freedom of the press belongs to the one who owns the press.”

Discuss argumentatively the opinion of Samuel Johnson, “The will is free, and that’s that.”

“Some say that free will does not exist, but I find it useful to say that it does.” (Tom Tiller)

Agree/disagree: “Freedom is survival.”

Agree/disagree: “All Americans are free.”

Agree/disagree: “The worst frustration of all is getting what you want.”

Agree/disagree: “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.” (Shakespeare)

Agree/disagree: Freedom depends on self-discipline.

Agree/disagree: You can’t have a true democracy until everyone’s stomach is full.

Do animals have free will? Do humans?

Your freedom to swing your arm ends at the tip of my nose. Agree or disagree.

### Transportation

Argue whether or not the federal government should subsidize Amtrak.

Argue whether or not the federal government should subsidize the airline industry.

Argue whether a certain major roadway is correctly designed for smooth transit.

Argue whether Japanese cars are as good as they are said to be.

Argue for/against bicycles as replacements for cars in a certain locale.

Argue for/against using a car in New York City.

Argue for/against expanding train service.

Argue for/against seat belts.

Argue what the best outboard motor is.

Argue what the best transport for cargo by land is.

Argue whether public transportation servants are overworked.

Argue what the old \_\_\_\_\_ had that the new one does not.

Argue what the new \_\_\_\_\_ has that the old one did not.

Should commercial trucks be restricted to nighttime travel?

## 84 What Can I Write About?

What role should public mass transit play in the United States?

Argue for/against carpooling.

How can cities be designed to make transportation easier?

Argue for/against subways in your city.

What should be done to reduce pollution from cars?

What should gas mileage requirements be for cars?

What should be done to improve air travel?

### **Eating, Drinking, Health**

Argue for/against the supposed health benefits of garlic.

Argue for/against exercising.

Argue for/against fasting.

Argue for/against dieting.

Argue for/against a certain diet.

Argue for/against the latest health-food trend.

Argue for/against allowing fast-food companies to furnish school lunches.

Argue for/against the effectiveness of Vitamin C for controlling colds.

Argue for/against eating a vegetarian diet.

Argue for/against organic foods.

Argue for/against bioengineering foods.

Argue what the most useful food is.

Argue how you can get by in a drinking crowd without drinking but without making a big deal about it.

Argue whether there ought to be a law against television commercials that advertise foods children ought not to eat.

What is the best way to reduce smoking among teens?

What is the best way to reduce the tendency toward obesity among children?

### **Religion, Ethics**

Argue whether or not confessions made to clergy should be confidential.

*Star Trek's* Mr. Spock once said, "The good of the many outweighs the good of the few." Argue for/against this idea.

Argue for/against doing the "wrong thing" for the right reason.

Argue for/against doubt, unbelief, or questioning.

Argue for/against the ethic of this ancient Sanskrit saying: "Be like the sandalwood tree that perfumes the very ax that cuts it."

Discuss argumentatively this quotation from novelist John Gardner: "Religion's chief value is its conservatism: It keeps us in touch with what at least one section of humanity has believed for centuries."

What, in religious terms, is the highest good? The lowest evil?

Is there ever a time, in ethical terms, when lying or even hypocrisy is better than truth?

Can science and religion be reconciled?

Should parents try to instill their beliefs about religion in their children or leave it up to them to decide?

What argumentative position does some sacred book (New Testament, Torah, or Koran, for example) take on a public question such as capital punishment, abortion, pacifism?

Discuss argumentatively this newspaper quotation: "A Roman Catholic bishop says restoration of the death penalty is 'counterproductive to the pro-life crusade of the church.'"

Argue for/against the Biblical injunction, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

Argue whether the content of holy scripture is the same in any language. Argue whether it is the same, consistently, even in a single language.

Argue for/against *in vitro* fertilization.

Argue for/against doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

Argue for/against: the ends justify the means.

Can religion and culture be separated within an individual's life?

Should members of the clergy be held to a higher standard?

Should Catholic priests be allowed to marry?

Argue for/against posting the Ten Commandments in public places.

Should the phrase "In God We Trust" be removed from U. S. currency?

Should there be a Christmas tree on the White House lawn?

Is it ever all right to cheat? To lie?

### **Medicine, Psychology**

Agree/disagree: Sometimes people don't feel well because they don't want to.

Argue what the obligation is of a medical doctor.

Argue for/against faith healing.

Argue for/against medical treatment.

Argue for/against treatment with herbs.

Argue for/against donation of human organs.

Argue for/against natural childbirth.

Argue for/against alternative medicine.

Argue for/against holistic medicine.

Argue for/against cosmetic surgery.

Argue for/against using organs from animals in humans.

Argue for/against the merits of biofeedback.

Argue the best way to break an unhealthy habit.

Argue for/against taking a certain injection or pill.

Argue for/against reducing the number of and power of X-rays.

- Argue for/against stricter qualifications for medical doctors.
- Discuss argumentatively, and in terms of psychology: “I love to keep work by me: the idea of getting rid of it nearly breaks my heart” (paraphrased from Jerome K. Jerome).
- Discuss argumentatively, and in terms of psychology: “The existence of ESP cannot be proved.”
- Discuss argumentatively, and in terms of psychology: ““Deny yourself” is the never-ending song” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe).
- Discuss argumentatively, and in terms of psychology: Regarding change, “it is often a comfort to shift one’s position and be bruised in a new place.”
- Argue for/against the use of fetal tissue for medical research and treatment.
- Argue for/against animal experimentation.
- Argue for/against international family planning programs.
- What is the best way to improve nutrition in a developing country?
- What should be done to respond to the AIDS crisis in developing countries?
- Argue for/against human cloning.
- What should be done to reduce the price of prescription drugs?

### **Science and Progress**

- Argue for/against the use of nuclear power.
- Argue for/against the theory of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Argue for/against recycling.
- Argue for/against a new form of, or new source of, energy.
- Agree/disagree: “In almost every case, progress takes back what it gives.”
- Agree/disagree: “Science is spoiling our way of life.”
- Agree/disagree: “Progress makes us lazy.”
- Argue for/against the contention that scientists are responsible for the destructive uses to which their discoveries are put.
- Argue whether science cares about art.
- Argue whether art cares about science.
- Argue for/against the opinion that the moon has lost its poetic charm because human beings have walked on it.
- Agree/disagree: “There is delight in simple things.”
- Agree/disagree: “Science is more moral than we usually give it credit for.”
- Argue for/against daylight saving time.
- Argue for/against the contention that progress of a material kind holds back, or interferes with, spiritual progress.
- Argue whether it is possible to argue with facts as posited by science.

- Argue for/against the use of face-recognition technology in public places.
- Argue for/against the growth of big-box chain stores.
- Argue for/against hybrid cars.
- Should national chain stores be required to blend in with existing local architecture?
- Argue for/against investing money in space exploration.
- Argue for/against the idea that there is alien life.
- Argue for/against requiring Internet access in all public schools.
- What should the international community do to respond to global warming?
- Which is better: polyester fleece or wool?

### **Language and Communication**

- Argue for/against: “I like to tell the truth as I see it. That’s why literature is so important. We cannot possibly leave it to history as a discipline nor to sociology nor science nor economics to tell the story of our people. It’s not a ladder we are climbing, it’s literature we’re producing, and there will always be someone to read it” (Nikki Giovanni).
- Argue for/against: “Music is the greatest communication in the world” (Lou Rawls).
- Argue for/against practicing public speaking in front of a mirror.
- Argue for/against observing the rules of “Netiquette.”
- Argue for/against requiring high school students to study a foreign language.
- Argue for/against adopting a new trend in public language.
- Argue for/against diagramming sentences.
- Argue for/against a certain language usage.
- Argue for/against the prohibition against using your first language when it is not the first language of the society.
- Agree/disagree: “There is nothing sacred about words in print.”
- Agree/disagree: “One should fear silence.”
- Agree/disagree: “Silence is golden.”
- Agree/disagree: “All writing is persuasion.”
- Agree/disagree: “All language is persuasion.”
- Agree/disagree: “We speak even in our silences.”
- Agree/disagree: “Anyone can write, anyone can create.”
- Agree/disagree: “There is an immense amount of biased listening and inaccurate listening” (Eric Sevareid).
- Agree/disagree on the point of whether language sets the tone of civilization.
- Agree/disagree with the argument that language does not always mean what it says.
- Discuss argumentatively the battle over the right to one’s own language—Chicano Spanish, for example, or Quebec French.



Agree/disagree: "There are times when good language is bad sense."

Argue whether docudramas are distorted and therefore, as the writer Mark Harris has said, dangerous.

Argue for/against secrecy in a certain matter.

Want to Land a Job? You Might Try Lying, says a headline, with the idea that those who tell the truth, or too much of it, on job applications are often not hired. Discuss argumentatively.

Agree/disagree: "No people or group can be put under one heading."

Argue whether language is interpreted in different ways in a court of law depending on the persons being tried.

Argue for/against less formality in e-mail correspondence.

Argue the merits of a particular form of discourse in public speaking.

How do a contemporary culture's commercials comment on its values?

Is advertising more communicative or more manipulative?

Is surfing the Web an active or passive process?

Argue for/against commercial sponsorship of public broadcasting.

Argue for/against commercial sponsorship of scholarships.

Argue for/against keeping your variety of English, using this rationale from Chinua Achebe: "The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience."

Argue who won a political debate based on your reading of the transcript.

Look at two newspapers and argue which is the best, and why.

Argue the strengths and weaknesses of a particular political candidate's communication style.

### **Society, Social Interaction**

What is the most effective metaphor for American culture: melting pot, salad, mosaic?

Argue for/against Jesse Jackson's interpretation of the melting pot: "I hear that melting-pot stuff a lot, and all I can say is that we haven't melted."

Argue for/against "gated" communities.

Are you your brother's or your sister's keeper?

Each for oneself? All for one and one for all?

Argue for/against joining \_\_\_\_\_.

Agree/disagree: To remake the world we have to start with ourselves as individuals.

Agree/disagree: Concern for others is concern for self. Argue what the matter is with you/me/them.

Agree/disagree: Divorcing parents ought to think first of their children.

Agree/disagree: Apologies are usually better for those who do the apologizing than for those apologized to.

Argue for/against adoption by single parents.

Argue for/against adoption by same-sex parents.

Argue what should be parental responsibility under the law.

Argue whether it depends on the individual to say what is good and what is bad.

Discuss argumentatively Walter Van Tilburg Clark's statement, "A mob is no more intelligent than its least intelligent member."

Argue what our most worthy inheritance is as a society.

Explain argumentatively a certain shift of population that has occurred.

Argue for/against early marriage.

Argue for/against arranged marriages.

Argue for/against the "money dance" (in which those who attend a wedding reception pin money on the bride's dress).

Argue for/against birthright.

Argue what is reasonable adult or mature behavior in public.

Agree/disagree: "You can take a person out of \_\_\_\_\_ but you can't take \_\_\_\_\_ out of a person."

Agree/disagree: It is a stereotype that old people are conservative.

Argue for/against suburbia.

Argue for/against birth control.

Argue for/against being married.

Argue for/against being single.

Agree/disagree: Having biological offspring does not make one a parent.

Agree/disagree: Every child should be raised by his or her natural parents.

Argue what a particular society needs to cure its ills.

Agree/disagree: Tradition should be maintained at all costs.

What should be the roles for surrogate mothers?

Agree/disagree: A home without a pet is not complete.

Agree/disagree: "A person does not do enough merely to acknowledge equality."

Agree/disagree: "All of the nation suffers when one person suffers the loss of civil rights."

Agree/disagree: "So far is it from being true that people are naturally equal, that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other."

Argue whether any individual is indispensable.

Argue whether neighbors are necessary.  
 Argue for/against giving up one's religion for someone.  
 Discuss argumentatively this quotation from Sir Thomas Browne: "Charity begins at home, is the voice of the world."  
 Argue when it is best not to be frank.  
 Argue whether the world, as Wordsworth says, "is too much with us."  
 Argue the redeeming qualities of someone or something not considered as having any.  
 Argue what psychiatry has done for society.  
 Argue some issue of feminism that until now has been completely ignored.  
 Argue for/against a universal definition of feminism.  
 Take a stance on a local feminist issue in your community.  
 Argue whether or not discretion is the better part of valor.  
 Argue whether there is any use in society for Mother's Day and Father's Day.  
 Discuss argumentatively the quotation from Hart Crane: "For we can still love the world, who find a famished kitten on the step."  
 Argue for/against labor unions.  
 Argue for/against your joining a union.  
 Argue for/against: "No people come into possession of a culture without having paid a heavy price for it" (James Baldwin).  
 Argue for/against: "We have become ninety-nine percent money mad. The method of living at home modestly and within our income, laying a little by systematically for the proverbial rainy day which is due to come, can almost be listed among the lost arts" (George Washington Carver).  
 Argue the worth of a certain city because of the things to do there.  
 Argue for/against putting the individual above the community.

## **Economy, Employment**

Is anything ever "absolutely free"?  
 Argue for/against a certain boycott.  
 Argue whether it is true that two can live as cheaply as one.  
 Try to persuade your boss on a certain issue or plan at work.  
 Argue your worth to a certain employer.  
 Argue for/against gold, or silver, as the money standard.  
 Argue for/against a particular measure to reduce the energy crisis.  
 Argue what government spending should give priority to.  
 Argue for/against a national debt.  
 Argue what our assets are nationally.

Argue for/against subsidizing farms.  
 Argue for/against subsidizing corporations.  
 Argue for/against free bus travel for certain citizens over certain short routes.  
 Argue for/against a certain tax reform.  
 Argue what the best place is for inexpensive living for retired people.  
 Argue for/against parking meters.  
 Argue for/against tipping.  
 Argue for/against farming as a profession.  
 Argue whether one should be exempted from high payments of car insurance if proven accident-free.  
 Argue who should, or who should not, keep receiving financial support from the government.  
 Discuss argumentatively this quotation from Thomas Jefferson: "Never spend your money before you have it."  
 Argue for/against patronizing locally owned businesses instead of chain stores.  
 Argue for/against joining a food co-op.  
 Argue for/against "sin taxes" (such as on cigarettes).  
 Argue for/against the idea that the customer is always right.  
 What is the fairest way to determine who gets laid off?  
 Argue for/against investing in the stock market.  
 Should people not spend money on nonessentials?

## **Time and Eternity, Life Pursuits, Death and Life**

Agree/disagree: "No man can serve two masters" (Bible).  
 Agree/disagree: "It is the best of all trades, to make songs, and the second best to sing them" (Hilaire Belloc).  
 "Desire for the fruit of one's actions is responsible for [a person's] bondage to the cycle of birth and death. [A person's] right is to work only, not to the fruit of his [or her] actions" (Bhagavad Gita). Argue for/against this position.  
 "All that we are is the result of what we have thought. We are formed and molded by our thoughts." (Gautama Buddha)  
 "What does it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?" (Gospel according to Matthew). When have these words been relevant in your life?  
 Argue for/against "wasting" time.  
 Argue for a past custom that is worth bringing back.  
 Argue for/against the four-day work week.  
 Argue how one should spend time.  
 Argue for a particular pastime.  
 Agree/disagree: "There is nothing wrong with chasing rainbows."

Argue for/against the idea “carpe diem.”

Agree/disagree: “In landlessness alone resides the highest truth” (Herman Melville).

Argue how our lives would be different if there were no recorded history.

Argue whether modern people are significantly different from people of ancient times or of medieval times.

Argue for/against age-defying drugs (such as hormones).

Agree/disagree: Humanity will not only endure; it will prevail (paraphrased from William Faulkner).

Agree/disagree: “Our life is frittered away by detail” (Henry David Thoreau).

Agree/disagree: “It’s hell to be old in the United States.”

Argue whether there is an age when a person can get by with just about anything.

Argue whether age is necessary for experience.

Argue whether you should buy life insurance.

Agree/disagree: “Why fear death? It is the most beautiful adventure in life” (Charles Frohman).

Argue whether life is a line, or a circle.

Argue what the milestones of life are.

Argue what the millstones of life are.

Argue for/against belief in life after life.

Agree/disagree: “It matters not how one dies, but how one lives.”

Argue for/against cremation rather than burial.

Argue the point technically and spiritually: When is death, when is life?

Discuss argumentatively this quotation from John Donne: “Death be not proud.”

Discuss argumentatively this quotation from the poet William Ernest Henley: “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”

Agree/disagree: “Nature’s Time should be left as it is.”

Agree/disagree: “Time is your best ally.”

Argue that time will show that \_\_\_\_\_.

Argue what in life, or in all eternity, is our greatest resource.

Agree/disagree: “Truly loving another means letting go of all expectations. It means full acceptance, even celebration of another’s personhood” (Karen Casey).

Agree/disagree: “If you judge people, you have no time to love them” (Mother Teresa).

Agree/disagree: “Love without reason lasts the longest” (unknown).

Agree/disagree: “If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country” (E. M. Forster).

Agree/disagree: “Friends are God’s way of apologizing to us for our families” (unknown).

Agree/disagree: “It’s no good trying to keep up old friendships. It’s painful for both sides. The fact is, one grows out of people, and the only thing is to face it” (W. Somerset Maugham).

What benefits will come from extending the human lifespan?

What problems will come from extending the human lifespan?

Argue whether the arts are essential.

What is the best balance between a life of action and a life of contemplation?

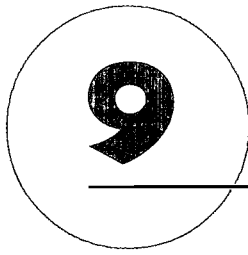
Agree or disagree: the devil is in the details.

At what age does one handle success best?

Argue for/against keeping one’s cultural identity rather than trying to assimilate.

Argue whether or not it is sometimes okay to “sweat the small stuff.”

According to this saying, “We were given memories so we could have roses in winter.” Argue for/against what memory affords us.



# DEFINITION

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## What Definition Is

Definition seeks to establish the limits or boundaries of a word as it is used in any given context. This book offers only the most immediate example of the topic at hand. Each introduction attempts to define a particular kind of writing for the specific purposes of this volume. Many approaches are used. Some may appear almost to throw off the dictionary meanings as they wrestle with the demands of circumstances, but each definition is etymologically rooted. The etymology of *definition* itself has to do with “bringing to an end.” But no dictionary definition is definitive—not in a living language. It may determine the meaning(s) of a word for the time being, settle the boundaries of a word, but not its hash.

Words are alive, and, like any other living thing, words grow and change. In fact, as linguists Hans Henrich Hock and Brian Joseph tell us, “Whole books are written—and indeed have been written for centuries—warning of impending doom, prophesying that our language will go to the dogs. . . . [However,] attempts at stemming the tide of change are ineffectual: Language changes inexorably” (*Language History, Language Change, and Language Relationship*). Nowhere is language change more visible than in slang, where, Hock and Joseph say, “the motivation for constant lexical renewal is similar to the motivation for constant change in dress fashion[s]. There is nothing more stale than outdated slang—or yesterday’s fashion.” Slang aside, however, even in more formal language you can trace how a word grows and changes in value and meaning. Take, for example, the word *black*, which has through the ages carried negative value in the English language. The civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, and especially the Black Power movement, redefined

the word, imbuing it with a positive value, emphasizing that “black is beautiful.”

It might be helpful to think of definition as a way of describing a word (in terms of our approach to description, say, which appeared earlier in this book). Here again our ultimate aim is not to capture our subject—and certainly not to bring it to a permanent end—but to set it free. Definition is one of the spokes in the rhetorical wheel we have been spinning through these pages and (to give the analogy one final turn) it is also part of the hub grease that keeps the wheel turning freely.

## How to Write Definition

Definition is not only a way of explaining a word clearly, precisely, concretely; it is also a way of exploring both the word and how it relates to its private context. Sometimes it seems we do not really know what a word means—or what it means to us—until we attempt to describe it on paper. Definition, much like any other form of writing, is a way of thinking and of discovering what we know, of looking at all the many accretions of meaning that enrich it. An essay in definition could hardly avoid, nonetheless, digging into the roots of a subject, investigating its history. That kind of groundwork tends to deepen a word, build its muscle, give it centuries of room in which to swing its arms.

Surely the writer ought always to know the meaning of any word he or she uses. In the age of what Orwell called “doublethink,” definition is not only imperative but crucial. Can there ever be a *holy* war? Are people oppressed to be free? Are countries destroyed to be saved? By all means, let us define our terms.

### **Locating Subjects for Definition**

Many of the subjects listed in this chapter are quotations. Often they are aphoristic and their sense depends upon word definitions that are at once stringent and free. Wrestling with some of them will be vigorous exercise, both for the muscle-bound writer and the writer whose loose-limbed prose sprawls all over the page.

Definition rightly claims its own spoke on that rhetorical wheel. But the crafty wheelwright will shape it clear round the rim. Argumentation, exposition, research and report, critical writing—none of these will get very far without some solid element of definition.

## Human Beings and Human Types for Definition

### A

Abelard, absent-minded professor, Chinua Achebe, acrobat, activist, actuary, adolescence, African, agnostic, airline pilot, air-traffic controller, Lewis Carroll's Alice, alpha male, amateur/professional, Amazon, the American people, Anasazi, Andromeda, anonymous, army brat, Asian, astronaut, atheist, athlete, auctioneer, Australian, auto mechanic, average citizen

What are the criteria for judging a great actor?

What are the criteria for judging a great athlete?

Athlete-recruitment programs—define ethical or unethical recruitment.

How would you define the “earliest American”?

“We are all Armenians,” said William Saroyan. What did he mean, in terms of definition?

Define someone with “attitude.”

### B

Babbitt, Bach, backpacker, backwoods people, bad/good neighbor, Bilbo Baggins, Pearl Bailey, James Baldwin, top banana, barnstormer, Dave Barry, bartender, Count Basie, Batman, Mr. Bean, the Beatles, Harry Belafonte, Beltway bureaucrats, best friend (or dog's best friend), Benazir Bhutto, Big Brother as created by George Orwell, Larry Bird, the Black Panthers, blusterer, James Bond, bookworm, bouncer, “boy band,” braggart, Brahmin, Brand X, brat, Eva Braun, breadwinner, brother, Charlie Brown, the Brownings, bullies, bumpkin, George Burns, George W. Bush

Discuss in terms of definition the fact that Mel Blanc created his voices from the beginning—before the cartoons.

Benevolent despot.

How would you define a Boston Brahmin?

What stereotype definition is understood in this cartoon item?—“He doesn't know the meaning of the word fear, or anything else for that matter,” a manager says of his boxer.

Bristly personality.

Discuss Jack Anderson's saying, “All the world's a stage and bureaucrats play it.”

Define the British sense of humor.

Is a bookish person different from a bookworm?

### C

Cadillac, Cajun, Calamity Jane, Caliban, Canadians as seen by the Japanese, Captain Kirk, cardiologist, Andrew Carnegie, Lewis Carroll, Kit Carson, Enrico

Caruso, Casanova, Casaubon, cavalier, cavalry, celebrity, Wilt Chamberlain, chameleon personality, Charlie Chaplin, charlatan, Cesar Chavez, Chief of Protocol, the child inside, Christ as portrayed on television and in movies, Cleopatra, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Kurt Cobain, Joe College of the '50s, “cop,” Joseph Cornell, Crazy Jane as created by William Butler Yeats, Creole, Davy Crockett, Walter Cronkite, crusader, Marie Curie

What does the following poetical definition by John Collins Bossidy tell you about the Cabots, the Lowells, and other Bostonians high and low?

And this is good old Boston,  
The home of the bean and the cod.  
Where the Lowells talk to the Cabots,  
And the Cabots talk only to God.

How would you define Calvin (of “Calvin and Hobbes”) or some other famous cartoon character?

Explain how this is possible: “Character is destiny.”

“The Child is father of the Man,” said William Wordsworth. What special definition of the child is Wordsworth using?

*The Children's Crusade* is a book about a real movement by 50,000 children in 1212 to stop war. What characteristics of this movement can be defined in terms of what has happened in recent history?

The Chinese have stopped using the term *Mandarin* because it is too class-conscious. Define some class-conscious term formerly used in the United States.

Shirley Chisholm of the U.S. House of Representatives wants to be remembered, she says, for what she is able to do to help her constituents. What does her statement have to do with definition of the politician?

Explain the definition implied in the fact that certain churchgoers were reprimanded by the courts for making their “joyful noise unto the Lord” too loud.

Distinguish between a Christian Scientist and a Christian scientist.

A headline reads, Citizen Catches Police. Even if you do not know the subject of the article that follows, what fixed definitions come to your mind immediately?

A certain coach says that his team is number 2, not number 1. Another coach, referring to his playing a team now that formerly trounced his team, says that revenge does not fit into his vocabulary. Discuss both these coaches in terms of definition.

According to current world conditions, what is a communist?

George Eliot said that conceited people carry their comfort around with them. How would you define a conceited person?

What do conservatives usually denounce about society?

What stereotypes of Asians are encouraged by the Charlie Chan movies?

Is there any difference between a moral coward and a physical coward? Can a coward be brave and moral? Define in your own terms what a coward is.

“Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*). Define how this can happen.

Why does Curious George have so much appeal to children?

## D

The Dalai Lama, Salvador Dali, a dangerous liaison, daredevil, Darth Vader, daughter, “Deadhead,” James Dean, Agnes de Mille, Cecil B. De Mille, Democrat/Republican, deus ex machina, devil’s advocate, Princess Diana, Dickensian, dictator, dilettante, Dionysian, the dispossessed, diva, do-gooder, Donald Duck, dot-com millionaire, Doubting Thomas, Frederick Douglass, down-home person, dowser, Dr. Dolittle, dreamer, drone, Isadora Duncan, dunce

How does the biblical character Delilah become a symbol that feminists reject?

Define what a doctor is in light of the following: Is a PhD, a Doctor of Philosophy, a doctor?

“Over-Doctor” is the Japanese term for an overeducated, unplaced, unemployable PhD.

“Every physician almost hath his favourite disease,” Henry Fielding wrote in the eighteenth century. Does his statement still define the doctor, in part?

“Anger makes dull men witty,” said the first Queen Elizabeth. How do you define a dull person?

## E

Each and every one, early riser, Clint Eastwood, easy rider, eccentric, egghead, egotist, Elvis, emigrant/immigrant, Eminem, worst enemy, proponents of the English-Only movement, evangelist, Everyman or Everywoman, everyone a stranger

A certain entertainer’s talent is that he can make himself look like any make of car. What other entertainer do you know who is defined by an unusual talent?

Everyone has some kind of handicap, it has been said. In what important ways can everyone be defined as being like everyone else?

How did Elvis redefine his image throughout his career?

“Evita—she has been called whore, feminist, tyrant, and saint. Evita was the beautiful, legendary woman who rose from poverty to become the hypnotically powerful First Lady of Argentina.” What definitions of Evita emerge in the film, in the musical, and in historical accounts?

How did Elizabeth I, queen of England, define her nation and her era?

How does Elizabeth II, queen of England, define her nation and her era?

## F

Face in the crowd, fair-weather friend, fakir, Falstaff, the American family, the “blended” family, the “extended” family, fanatic, farrier, Fascist, father, Father, faun, Fenian, Millard Fillmore, firefighter, firestarter, flower child, football widow, fox in the henhouse, Frankenstein, freedom fighters, friend, fundamentalist

What face is on a certain coin or bill? Why that face on that item rather than another face?

What can one do to determine human definition when the following is true?—“It is the common wonder of all men, how among so many millions of faces, there should be none alike” (Sir Thomas Browne).

“The family that prays together stays together.” Discuss this slogan, or another that it reminds you of, so as to indicate that slogans do not define particularly but only generally. (One example of this fact: The Manson group called itself a family and had its own kind of prayers.)

How do movies about the famous portray them?

To what extent has the attitude expressed in the following statement (by H. L. Mencken, the famous journalist) become a stereotyped definition of farmers: “The only political idea he can grasp is one which promises him a direct profit.”

If you are on file somewhere, are you therefore defined as no more than the file says you are? Are you merely the sum of the personal items mentioned there?

W. C. Fields was democratic: he hated everyone equally. What playful, complete definition do we have of W. C. Fields on the basis of his movies and popular image?

The Bible says “A fool utters all his mind” and “Answer a fool according to his folly.” What, by your definition, is a fool?

How do descriptions of us sometimes limit or confound what we are? Note that sometimes people get swallowed up by name and town descriptions of them: “With him is his wife the former Mary Smith of Johnsonville.” Does the word *former* mean that Mary no longer exists? Is Johnsonville where she lives *now* or where she used to live?

What, in definition, is behind the fact that Franklin is the name most used in naming American towns?

“Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, / Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned” (William Congreve). How would you define a woman’s fury in feminist terms?

## G

Clark Gable, gadfly, a gallant man in today’s context, Mohandas Gandhi, Bill Gates, geek, geisha, Generation X, Mirza Ghalib, gift horse, God, God as defined by a child, Goddess, Goethe, Katharine Graham, a great person, Che Guevara, Lady Jane Grey (The Nine Days’ Queen), guru, Gutenberg

How would you define a genius? Does a genius have time for the ordinary world? Is everyone a genius? Does genius require only a high IQ? Is a genius very much different from you and me? "To know what a genius is," says a GE advertisement, "ask a genius." "Genius is of no country," said Charles Churchill.

What can "godfather" imply?

Define a gospel singer as someone who does more than make "a joyful noise unto the Lord."

What stereotypes are suggested by the word "grandparent"?

Define a grave (serious) person after consulting this quotation from G. K. Chesterton: "It is really a natural trend to lapse into taking oneself gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do; for solemnity flows out of men naturally, but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. Satan fell by force of gravity."

What defines a great person? Is it misleading to call persons the "all-time greatest" in their fields? What definition enters into the idea in this quotation from Robinson Jeffers?—"Greatness is but less little; and death's changed life."

"Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon 'em" (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*). How would you define greatness?

**Some views of God for definition:**

"And God said unto Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM'; and He said: 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you.'" (Torah, Exodus 3)

"An honest God is the noblest work of man." (Robert Ingersoll)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (Gospel according to John)

"It is God's trade to pardon." (paraphrased from Heinrich Heine)

"If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him." (Mikhail Bakunin)

"The nature of God is a circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere." (Anonymous)

God is the oldest of poets. (proverb)

God is \_\_\_\_\_.

"The groves were God's first temples." (William Cullen Bryant)

"It may be that our role on this planet is not to worship God, but to create him." (Arthur C. Clarke)

"Nature is the art of God." (Sir Thomas Browne)

"God is love." (New Testament)

"Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" (Epicurus)

From the Rigveda:

Whence did this creation  
Come into being?  
Whether He supported it or He did not  
The one who dwells in the highest region watches it,  
He alone knows it,  
Or perhaps He knows it not.

From the Bible:

The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside still waters.

He restoreth my soul:  
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;  
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:  
Thou anointest my head with oil;  
My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

"We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty Humans, then blames them for his own mistakes." (Gene Roddenberry)

From the Koran:

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!  
The compassionate, the merciful!  
King on the Day of reckoning!  
Thee *only* do we worship, and to Thee do we cry for help.

Guide Thou us on the straight path.  
The path of those to whom Thou has been gracious;—with

Whom Thou art not angry, and who go not astray.

The Upanishads (the ancient Hindu scriptures) teach that "Atman (individual soul) is Brahman (the supreme Godhead, beyond all distinctions or forms)."

The Bahá'í Scripture says: "Light is good in whatsoever lamp it is burning. A rose is beautiful in whatsoever garden it may bloom. A star has the same radiance if it shines from the east or the west. Be free of prejudice so that you will love the Sun of Truth from whatsoever point in the horizon it may arise."



“I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.” (Frank Lloyd Wright)

How do the following words define a person’s relationship to God? “Reason is like an officer when the king appears; the officer then loses his power and hides himself. Reason is God’s shadow; God is the sun. What power has the shadow before the sun?” (Rumi)

“If there be gods we cannot help them, but we can assist our fellow-men. We cannot love the inconceivable, but we can love wife and child and friend. We can be as honest as we are ignorant. If we are, when asked what is beyond the horizon of the known, we must say that we do not know.” (Robert Green Ingersoll)

## H

Ham actor, Hamlet, Oscar Hammerstein II, ham radio enthusiast, the Hare Krishna movement, harlequin, Hassan and Hussein (descendants of the Prophet Mohammad and founders of two Islamic sects,) Hatfields and McCoys, Vaclav Havel, Lillian Hellman, Ernest Hemingway, Henry the Eighth’s wives, Henry Higgins, “his and hers,” Hitler as seen by a teenager, Ho Chi Minh, Billie Holiday, Sherlock Holmes, homebody, Captain Hook, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Julia Ward Howe, howitzer, Zora Neale Hurston

“Hell is other people.” (Jean-Paul Sartre)

Give a deliberately stereotyped definition of a hero. To understand the stereotype is to understand, as well, what is not a stereotype.

Is the idea of the dying hero romantic or realistic?

After considering the following quotation from Ferdinand Foch, define the term *human soul*: “The most powerful weapon on earth is the human soul on fire.”

Using definition, argue whether hypocrites know that they are hypocrites.

## I

Iago, Henrik Ibsen, ideologue, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Incas, Indiana Hoosier, indispensable person, insider, intellectual, Inuit, Irish, Isaac, Ishmael, Ivy Leaguer

People once identified as Indians are now also known by such terms as first nations people, indigenous peoples, and Native Americans. What does each definition connote, especially as compared to “Indian”?

Define by comparison/contrast an Indian from India and an Indian from the United States or Canada.

What is an innocent? Is it the same in definition as an innocent person? How do we behave towards people who have been tried as criminals but have been found innocent?

A particular immigrant community.

Define a “wild Irish rose,” comparing traditional and contemporary use of the phrase.

## J

Jesse Jackson, Jazz musicians, Jelly Roll Morton, Jeremiah, Jesuit, JFK, jihad, Jim Crow laws, Jingoist, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Joan of Arc, a “Job’s comforter,” Elton John, John Paul II, Magic Johnson, Jonah, Barbara Jordan, journalist, judge, junkie (choose a particular kind), Supreme Court Justice, Jute, juvenile

Someone who’s climbing Jacob’s Ladder.

Jesse James was formerly the Treasurer of Texas, and he was replaced by someone who also had a famous name, Warren G. Harding. How might definition affect someone who has the same name made famous by someone else?

Define Justice \_\_\_\_\_, United States Supreme Court.

## K

Franz Kafka, Helen Keller, Grace Kelly, Walt Kelly, Jomo Kenyatta, Jack Kerouac, the Kikuyu, Kilroy, Martin Luther King Jr., King Kong, knight in shining armor, Koko the gorilla, the Kurds

Distinguish, by definition, between the Kafir people of Africa and the Kafir people of Afghanistan.

Define *kaiser* by way of its etymology.

Define the kamikaze pilot in religious and patriotic terms, not just historically.

Define the Katzenjammer Kids of comic-strip fame.

In what sense can we consider Jacqueline Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis two different people?

The Kennedy dynasty

The Kennedy “legacy”

What is a kibitzer?

How does the popular perception of the king change, depending on what monarchy you’re examining?

What, in *modern* terms, is a knave?

How does Kris Kringle differ, in definition, from Santa Claus?

## L

Lao-tzu, layperson, left-handed person, Doris Lessing, David Letterman, libertine, Lilith, literati, loan shark, Lolita, lone wolf, look-alike, the Lost Generation, Low Churchman, Low German, Lucifer, Luke of the Bible, Luke Skywalker, Martin Luther of the Reformation

Define the current use of the term *Laodicean*, connecting the word to its origins.

“Lawyers talk, but it is their business to talk,” said Thomas Jefferson. James Boswell said of the lawyer that he “has no business with the justice or injustice of the cause which he undertakes, unless his client ask his opinion, and then he is bound to give it

honestly. The justice or injustice of the cause is to be decided by the judge.” How do these statements define what a lawyer is in ways opposed to a stereotyped definition? How do you define a lawyer?

What does a liberal denounce about society? How does this denunciation define what a liberal is? What is an English liberal as opposed to an American liberal?

What does a libertarian believe?

Define *Lord Chancellor*.

Define *lord of misrule*.

What is your definition of a loser?

What would be a good example of a modern lotus-eater?

What would be a good example of a modern “Lot’s Wife”?

Define *lowbrow*.

Define *lumpen* as a political term.

## M

Yo-Yo Ma, Lady Macbeth, Machiavelli, Madonna, Mahavira, Miriam Makeba, Malvolio, Nelson Mandela, Imelda Marcos, mask (meaning *persona*), a human maverick, the Real McCoy, Golda Meir, mensch, Micawber, Mickey Mouse, Arthur Miller, minister’s child, Minnesota Fats, misogynist, Martha Mitchell, a mod person, Marilyn Monroe, Monty Python, Thomas More as seen by his contemporary opposition, Toni Morrison, Moses, Grandma Moses, someone voted Most Likely to Succeed, mother, Mother Teresa, Iris Murdoch, mutual friend(s), someone morally myopic

What does it take to be in a marching band?

Define how Mr. Rogers’s neighborhood is different from one that you know about.

Clothes make (or do not make) the person.

A newspaper item tells of a man who agreed to become another person to please passport officials who kept giving him a name other than his own.

“My favourite, I might say, my only study, is man.” (George Borrow)

The term “man” is still sometimes used to refer, supposedly, to all humanity. What does this usage imply about women, or about the relationship between men and women?

Benjamin Franklin said of humanity that there are “those who are immovable; those who are movable; those who move.”

Define who Mao’s widow is, taking into account that she is known more as “Mao’s widow” rather than by her name.

Define *media person*. Who are, or what are, the media?

A Bible verse says, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Who are the meek?

Give your own definition of *metaphysician* after noting

the following: A metaphysician, said Charles, Baron Bowen, is “a blind man in a dark room—looking for a black hat—which isn’t there.”

Who are the mild?

What has come to be defined as “the model minority” in the United States? How might this definition be complicated?

The actor Ricardo Montalban insists on keeping his Latin accent so as to keep his dignity. How were earlier actors defined by their accents or their origins so that they became stereotyped?

Who is the “mother of all living”?

What is meant, in terms of definition, by someone’s saying, “I’m not myself today”? Is there only one *myself* for each person? What are the differences in definition among the pronouns *me*, *myself*, and *I* as they refer to a single person? Is there any difference between *my self* and *myself*?

Give an elaborate definition of *mystagogue*.

Define someone who is said to be “a mystery.”

Write an extended definition of a modern mystic.

Write about a mythical person as if he or she were defined by the real world.

Define *mythomaniac*.

## N

Vladimir Nabokov, a human nag, the Nahua people, a naiad as a real person, a *naïf*, someone who is a namesake, a modern (and real) Narcissus, Gamel Abdul Nasser, Carry Nation, native, a “natural” for one pursuit or another, a literary naturalist, the Navajo Nation, Navy SEAL, Nazi, Neanderthal, Queen Nefertiti, Jawaharlal Nehru, neighbor, Willie Nelson, nemesis, neophyte, a modern (and real) Nestor, a neurotic, a “new face” or a “new kid on the block,” news anchor, a 19th-century nihilist, ninny, a nit-picker, nitwit, Richard Nixon, a noble, the Noble Savage stereotype as defined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a nobody, Nobody (in a “Vote for Nobody” drive), a nonagenarian, a nondescript person, a nonesuch, the “Royal Nonesuch” of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, the Normans, *nouveau riche*, someone who is just a number, Rudolph Nureyev

Define the New Yorker in a deliberately stereotyped way; then define a specific New Yorker.

Define *nonresident* better than the following definition (from a New York City document) does: “A non-resident individual means an individual who is not a resident.”

**After considering the following, discuss definition according to names and nicknames:**

A newspaper item says that a man has 10-8 as his first name.

- Will the real \_\_\_\_\_ stand up?
- Are persons who change their names different persons?
- How can our names sometimes wrongly define us?
- Secret names are often used for protecting highly placed officials and those close to them.
- Sometimes, two or more persons with the same name run for the same public office.
- In Sweden, 40 percent of the population shares twenty names all of which end in *-son*.
- What would you expect of someone named for, say, Watergate?
- Who is No-Man? Who is Everyman? Who is Everywoman?
- When names of certain streets named for certain persons are misspelled, what happens to definition?
- Don Coryell May Become a Saint, says a headline, referring to the coach's possibly joining the New Orleans Saints, a professional football team.
- Take into account how some names invite puns: Beane, Soldier, Tree, and so forth.
- What is behind a certain nickname?
- What's *not* in a name? What's in a name?
- Is it possible for someone to have the wrong name?



Oberon, Oceanus, a modern (and real) Odysseus, an Ojibway Indian, Oklahoma Sooner, oneself, an only child, Oprah (Winfrey), orator, a modern (and real) Orpheus, Ossian, Othello, outlaw, overachiever, an Oxbridge type, Oxonian, Ozymandias

In a cartoon, the old woman in a shoe gives an account of what her children, now grown, are doing. Define in your own terms what the "old woman who lived in a shoe" is like.

"You optimists are all alike," says a cartoon figure to a sign carrier whose sign reads: Doomsday Is Near. Define *optimist*.

Define *ordinary people*.

What defines "the Orient"? What are old and new attitudes toward this term?

Define someone thought of as an "original."

What defines Orlando, the literary character, in Shakespeare's play or in Virginia Woolf's novel?



Pacifist, pagan, a modern and real Pan, a modern and real Pandora, Dr. Pangloss, a modern and real Pantagruel, Papa Doc Duvalier, paragon, Dorothy Parker, Parnassian of the second half of the 19th century, partisan, Dolly Parton, pastor, patriot, patron saint, a modern and real Pecksniff, Penelope, Peregrine Pickle, a peripatetic, the person inside, person of trust, person on the street, a whole person, *persona*, pessimist, philistine (in the modern sense),

Pict, a carnival pitcher, "plain folks," Pocahontas, James K. Polk, Jackson Pollock, an individual Polynesian, pooh-bah, President of the United States, prima donna, prince, Prince (the artist formerly known as The Artist Formerly Known as Prince), prison guard, prisoner, a modern and real Prometheus, Prufrock, psychotic, Puritan

Define *pandit* (or *pundit*) in the traditional sense and in its current context.

What are the criteria for defining a great painter?

Have the words *patrician* and *plebian* changed in value?

What does it mean when someone is described as a Peter Pan?

What are the criteria for defining a great philanthropist?

What are the criteria for defining a great philosopher?

Can a philosopher be a philosopher without preaching philosophy?

What are the criteria for defining a great poet?

Define *poet* as William Cullen Bryant does in saying "Every individual is more or less a poet."

Can a poet be a poet without writing poetry?

Who are "the poor"? Are there legal terms that, in the United States, define who the poor are and who the wealthy are? What does it mean that the poor, by definition, have to have money just to be poor?

President Ford could have named Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller as President in his last days in office. Are there other ways in which a President might be said to hold an ambiguous office?

What person is the most glorified professional person in the United States?

"A rottenness begins in the conduct of a man who casts his eye longingly on public office," said Thomas Jefferson. How do you define *public servant*?



Quacksalver, quadrille dancer, Quaker, quarterback, Quasimodo, the Quechua people, queen, Queen Latifah, Quetzalcoatl, quibbler, quidditch-players (from J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books), quintuplets, quisling, quitter, Quixote



Rabelais, ragamuffin, Bonnie Raitt, Raphael, Rasputin, Ronald Reagan, a literary realist, revivalist, Adrienne Rich, Renee Richards, a modern and real Rip Van Winkle, Jackie Robinson, Norman Rockwell, Eleanor Roosevelt, Roseanne, the Rosenbergs, Rumi, Salman Rushdie, the Russian people, Ruth

Can a raconteur be boring? When?

Describe a rebel without a cause.

Who is a modern-day Renaissance man or woman?

Define any robber baron, especially in terms of American history.

Define the characteristics of a particular music group.  
Define *role player*. Is everyone a role player in some way?

## S

Sacred cow, sad sack, Saddam (Hussein), sage, saint, Samaritan, Samson in the Bible, a sandman, the Biblical Sarah, Satan, scapegoat, schlemiel, Arnold Schwarzenegger, scoundrel, Seabee, second but not least, Section Eight (as defined to 1944 in the United States Army), self-image, self-made person, sepoy, Ravi Shankar, Shia Muslims/Sunni Muslims, Sikh, Bart Simpson, O. J. Simpson, sister, Sister, sitar player, skipper, slyboots, smart aleck, John Smith (of whom there are tens of thousands in the United States), Joseph Smith's wives, Snoopy, soldier, son, Steven Spielberg, spieler, Mr. Spock, a stage version of anyone (such as a hero, a villain, an Irishman, a drunkard), Stagedoor Johnny, Jimmy Stewart, Martha Stewart, Stradivarius, sultan, the Sultan of Swat (Babe Ruth), Billy Sunday, Superman or Supergirl, suzerain, swashbuckler

How might a child seeing a different Santa at every street corner define Santa Claus?

Is the term "senior citizen" insulting?

"She is the youngest of four brothers," says a newspaper item. Define the *she* of this quotation.

Define Siddhartha the man, Siddhartha the character in Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*.

"For she was the maker of the song she sang," wrote Wallace Stevens. How do you define *singer*? What makes a great singer?

Define *social climber*.

Define *sponge* in human terms.

Can a sport be a sport without participating in sports?

"I refuse to be data-processed," said a student, who was concerned about having to fill out so much computer information. How might a computer define a student?

Define *style-setter*.

## T

the Tagalog people, tallyman, a modern and real Tarzan, Elizabeth Taylor, teacher, a television critic, a tenement dweller, terrorist, Texas Ranger, a thief who steals Bibles, a modern and real Thor, Jim Thorpe, tinker, titan, Tolstoy, top gun, tourist, trickster (as from fables and folklore), troubadour, troublemaker, troubleshooter, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Desmond Tutu, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, twin, tycoon, type, tyrant, Mike Tyson

Is it true that the teacher who is defined as the "meanest" and most demanding of the students is the one who is the most respected?

What does it mean to be a teenager? Find a definition and say why it does or doesn't fit your experience.

It has been said, "There is no 'them,' just lots of 'us.'" How are *them*, *they*, and *us* defined?

Define a modern-day Thwackum, a glimpse of whom is seen in this quotation from Henry Fielding:  
"Thwackum was for doing justice, and leaving mercy to heaven."

Define *Transylvanian* as if you were an expert about, or an enthusiast for, horror tales.

## U

Ugly duckling, a modern and real Ulysses as a compulsive wanderer, underachiever, undertaker, a universalist, Unknown Citizen, Unknown Soldier, upstanding citizen, upstart, Dickens's unctuous Uriah Heep, Uriah Heep the rock band, a user, a utilitarian

What distinguishes U2 from other rock groups? Why the choice of the name? Does it relate to the U2 incident of 1960?

A man who won an "Ugliest Man" contest says that he "looks forward to becoming still uglier." Discuss his statement in terms of definition.

Who is one of the "undecided" *after* an election is over?

Define someone who regularly uses understatement.

## V

Vagabond, valedictorian, Valkyrie, Valley Girls, vamp, vampire, vassal, vaudevillian, veep, Vermeer, vernacular speakers, Vice President, viceroy, victim, a Victorian, Viking, villain, Dick Vitale, volunteer, vulgarian

What defines a venture capitalist?

Define Gore Vidal, taking into consideration the title of an article about him, "With Malice Towards Some and Charity for Few."

## W

WAF, Wagnerian, waif, Mike Wallace "the jugular journalist," Walloon people, WAVE, Wednesday's child, Weird Sisters, Orson Welles, Westerner, Whig, whipping boy, Walt Whitman as Everyone, whiz, widow or widower, a "\_\_\_\_\_" widow, wimp, Walter Winchell, Winnie the Pooh, wizard, Wonder Woman, Bertie Wooster, wunderkind

## XYZ

Xanthippe, X-Man (whether man or woman), Yahoo, Yankee, Yanqui, yes-man or yes-woman, yeti, yogi, you as seen by your best friend and then as seen by your enemy, *your self* as distinguished from *yourself*, youth, zealot, Zen Buddhist, Zionist, zombie, Zoot suiter, Zouave

"You are what you eat."

## Human Conditions, Human Relations, Sociology

Achilles' heel, aging, alcoholism, alternative culture, American Indian Movement (AIM), angst, anti-establishment, Apocalypse, backlash, bandwagon, the Beatitudes, benign neglect, the big sleep, blackout (as used during World War II), blessing in disguise, bundling, caste, catbird seat, challenge, Christmas as a symbol of the American culture, circumspection, class, code-living, (skin) color, commencement ceremony (as a beginning), competition, conflict, consistency, contemplation, conventionalism, coordination, cost of war, counterculture, cult, the Cultural Revolution Decade (China), culture shock, death, delirium tremens, dog days, dot-coms, dyslexia, eclecticism (in a specific area, say religion), ecotactics, ecumenical movements, enrichment, environment, escapism, ethnic purity, etiquette (as opposed to "manners"), fad, failure (as defined by an American), *fatwah*, feedback, Fifth Column, *fin de siècle* mood, fixed idea, flag-waving, the Four Horsemen, generation gap, global village, gluttony, gossip, grass roots, gullibility, "hangin' out," hassle, heart, heartland, heredity, hiatus, high-tech, hip hop, hoarding (as in wartime), hoopla, human, human being, human condition, humanity, hypocrisy, idea, illumination, implication, incomplete investigation, inference, informality, innocence (as opposed to sophistication), introspection, involvement, jambo-ree, jealousy, jeopardy, judgment (not justice), justice, Kabuki, kibbutz, kindness, kismet, knowledge, kosher, life (including life after death and life after life), light as knowledge, light pollution, lingua franca, love, *machismo*, marriage-go-round, marriage of convenience, marriage to one's (job, motorcycle, pastime), meditation, meeting one's Waterloo, mellowness, Mexican *mordida*, middle-of-the-road, moderation as excess, moral cowardice, moratorium, nature/nurture, negligence, neutrality, new morality, new wave, noise pollution, notoriety/infamy, obedience, oblivion, old money/new money, over a barrel, oxymoron, pain, panhandling, panic, parasitism, paternalism, patriotism, pedantry, permissiveness, pilgrimage, prejudice, primogeniture, privacy, private Utopia, puberty, punk movement, pushiness, quintessence, raisin in the sun, ready for love/in love with love, recession, reclamation, relevance, responsibility, rumor, sacrifice, scandal, "semi-happiness," sense of place, sensibility, sentiment, sentimentality, September song, serendipity, the Shari'a (Islamic moral and legal code), showdown, sluggishness, success (as defined by an American), swan song, sweet sixteen, taboo, tact, carrying the torch/passing the torch, troubleshooting, the ultimate adventure, uncouthness, urban/rural, utilitarianism, vindication, Weltanschauung, Weltpolitik, Weltschmerz, wit/humor/sense of humor, women's liberation, wonder/awe/amazement, xenophobia, Zeno's nine paradoxes, the concept of zero, zero population growth

## Draw subjects for definition from the following items about the human condition:

Augustine said that total abstinence is easier than perfect moderation.

"Anger is a short madness." (Horace)

Apartheid as it existed; as it exists now.

Back-to-school blues.

In *Dr. Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, Helen of Troy is described thus: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" How would you define beauty?

A particular kind of group behavior.

How does Emerson's phrase "the blowing clover, the falling rain" relate to the human condition?

"Boldness is a child of ignorance and baseness." (Sir Francis Bacon)

"Boldness is an ill keeper of promise." (Sir Francis Bacon)

Is there anyone or anything in the human condition that cannot be captured—that is, defined and understood—in a book?

"Being busy is a national excuse as well as a national passion." (Norman Cousins)

What is a "worthy cause" in these days when almost everything is said to be one?

"Character is destiny." (Novalis)

Define the "chasing-after-the-dream" syndrome.

"Give me chastity and continence," said St. Augustine, "but do not give it yet."

What does it mean to be "color blind"?

Common sense, someone has said, is uncommon sense.

"No true compassion without will, no true wit without compassion." (John Fowles)

"Conscience is a coward, and those faults it has not strength enough to prevent it seldom has justice enough to accuse." (Oliver Goldsmith)

What makes something or someone cool? You are cool if you \_\_\_\_\_.

"Courageous the pine that does not change its color under winter snow." (Hirohito)

What does it mean to dance with words?

What defines a particular kind of dance, old or new, e.g., ballet, break dancing, jitterbugging, swing, the twist, or any other of your choice. How does your choice of a particular dance define you?

"Dancing is just discovery, discovery, discovery" (Martha Graham). Define what you've discovered through a particular kind of dancing.

How is dating defined by your family? Your friends?

"Death is a continuation of my life without me." (Jean Paul-Sartre)

Find a definition for *dharma* as used in India. Now define your own *dharma*.

"Death, in itself, is nothing; but we fear, / To be we know not what, we know not where." (Dryden)

“Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.” (Rabindranath Tagore)

“Deeds, not words, shall speak me.” (John Fletcher)

“You have delighted us long enough,” says Mr. Bennett to his daughter, who is entertaining the company in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

“Desperate times call for desperate measures.”

What in your opinion is the “whole duty” of a person?

Education is a “means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us.” (Ngugi Wa Thiong’o)

“To err is human, to forgive divine” (Alexander Pope). How would you define the key terms *err* and *forgive*?

“The Evil Empire.” Take your pick and define.

How does a country’s flag tell us about it?

“Rightly understood, freedom is the universal license to be good.” (paraphrased from lines by Hartley Coleridge)

“Freedom is unbelievably precious.” (Soviet seaman, now free in the United States, who once was captured by the Soviets when he tried to escape from them)

“To be furious / Is to be frightened out of fear.” (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*)

Define *future shock* as it relates to the human condition.

Define the Golden Rule as articulated in different faiths.

Define Graceland as depicted in Paul Simon’s album by that name.

Define Hajj as a physical and spiritual experience.

“What is the worth of anything, / But for the happiness ’twill bring?” (Richard Cambridge)

Happiness is \_\_\_\_\_.

What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word “heart”? What are some other words with multiple definitions (literal, metaphoric)?

“Hereditry,” says a newspaper item, “is what you believe in when your child gets A’s in school.”

Hiroshima—what does it signify?

Define *Honi soit qui mal y pense* (“Shame be to he who thinks ill of it”) as the statement relates to the human condition.

What is “honourable” as it is used in the title of John le Carré’s novel *The Honourable Schoolboy*?

“Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad of forms.” (Henry James)

What is ethnic humor? (When is it offensive and when not? Who has the right to use it?)

How has the term “innocence” come to have negative connotations?

Can intelligence be defined as proportion?

Define the many faces of Islam.

Describe Jain beliefs about nonviolence and how they translate into everyday life.

Define what is meant by a jaundiced view of a particular thing.

“Justice was invented by criminals.” (Dashiell Hammett)

Define the spiritual experience of kensho.

“Knowledge and experience bring contentment” (Bhagavad Gita). How do you define these key terms?

Define the four koans of the Zen tradition.

Define Krishna consciousness.

What are the different kinds of laughter?

Define the term *li* as it connects to Confucian philosophy.

“Whoever destroys a single life is as guilty as though he had destroyed the entire world; and whoever rescues a single life earns as much merit as though he had rescued the entire world.” (Talmud)

“To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.” (Thomas Campbell)

What are different kinds of love?

An idea from Daniel Defoe is to love the subject for the sake of the teacher. Illustrate and define love put in a similar context.

“Love’s tongue is in the eyes.” (Phineas Fletcher)

“I loved not yet, yet I loved to love. . . . I sought what I might love, in love with loving.” (St. Augustine)

How accurate is the definition of love in I Corinthians 13?

“Ever has it been that love is master where he will.” (John Gower)

Define what is meant by Shakespeare’s saying that one should “choose love by another’s eye.”

*Mantra*—the original definition and how the word is used now.

Karl Marx’s definition and a current definition of Marxism.

What is a mystique? How can it be created and maintained?

Define different brands of nationalism—in the United States or around the world.

Define “Never-never land.”

Define nonviolence viewed as an activist method.

Define *nirvana* as a metaphysical concept.

What does the syllable *om* signify?

John Keats believed that reading poetry should be like remembrance of something from your thoughts. Is that how you respond to poetry? How does it resonate with you?

“There is no crime as shameful as poverty.” (paraphrase of a line by George Farquhar)

“Procrastination is the thief of time.” (Edward Young)

“Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes.” (Sir Francis Bacon)

Describe a Pyrrhic victory you’ve encountered or experienced.

Define a quagmire as you have experienced it.

- Define how one makes a quantum leap.  
 What kinds of quarantines are there?  
 Human beings have always gone on quests. Name one and define it. Or choose one you're on and define.  
 What is quid pro quo in a particular context?  
 How would you define a quirky sense of humor?  
 Define *quite nice* as used in New Zealand. How does it differ from your usage?  
 In which situations is a quorum necessary? Define your own.  
 Define a quota that could affect your life.  
 What would be a quotidian quiddity in your life at school?  
 Define the many things that a rainbow signifies.  
 Define how the Ramayana is a living epic.  
 Define rebellion, teenage style.  
 "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving."  
 (Shakespeare)  
 Define the code of conduct presented in the Sermon on the Mount.  
 Define the Shinto belief system.  
 Define the significance of Mount Sinai in ancient Israel and present-day Israel.  
 The power of story as expressed here: "[O]nly the story . . . can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story . . . that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us." (Chinua Achebe)  
 On seeing the Taj Mahal a poet wrote: "A mighty emperor, sustained by wealth, has made a mockery of us, the poor" (translated from Urdu by Zarina Hock). How would you define this monument?  
 "The strongest reason best." (Jean de La Fontaine)  
 "A tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use." (Washington Irving)  
 "Treason doth never prosper: What's the reason? / For if it prosper, none dare call it treason." (Sir John Harington)  
 "The tree will wither long before it fall." (Lord Byron)  
 "Truth cannot afford to be tolerant where it faces positive evil" (Rabindranath Tagore). Define a particular context in which you can apply this maxim.  
 "Truth is the daughter of Time."  
 Julius Caesar said, "Veni, vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered). Use this claim to define something you've experienced.  
 The term *Victorian* has changed in value many times since the reign of Queen Victoria of Great Britain.

Choose one value and develop the implications of your definition.

*Western culture* can mean several things. Pick one meaning and define in further detail.

Define a Zen belief system (choose one school of thought).

What defines a Zen garden?

What culturally distinguishes the Zoroastrian community?

### Identity

What defines your identity? In other words, what makes you, you?

"If you come to fame not understanding who you are, it will define who you are" (Oprah Winfrey). Choose a famous person and show how his or her public image defined the person.

"When I discover who I am, I'll be free." (Ralph Ellison)

"It isn't where you came from, it's where you're going that counts." (Ella Fitzgerald)

"Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also" (Gospel According to Matthew). How can your "treasure" define you?

### Nonhuman Life/Creatures

aardvark, aardwolf, adder, Afghan hound, albatross, alpaca, amoeba, anaconda, ant bear, antelope, ape, armadillo, auk, baboon, bacterium, bee eater, beetle, bighorn, bison, black widow, blenny, brown recluse, buffalo, cat, chicken snake, cicada, clam, conch, crab, cygnet, dinosaur, dog-faced butterfly, a cross between a donkey jenny and a zebra stallion, dove, dragonfly, drake, duck, duck-billed platypus, elephant, fox, gander, heron, ibex, the mythical jabberwock, kite, kiwi, lizard, lobster, mealybug, mink, myna or mynah, nanny goat, okapi, prairie dog, puffin, quail, razorbill, sea horse, shark, springer spaniel, squab, staghound, tick, Galápagos turtle, the mythical unicorn, vulture, warthog, weevil, right whale, yellow jacket, zebra fish

### Draw subjects for definition from the following items about creature life:

"Bull fighting is not a sport. It is a tragedy." (Ernest Hemingway)

Two headlines: *Bulldogs Battle Demons Today and Scorpions Trounce the Eagles.*

Are cats wrongly maligned?

What defines hunting dog behavior?

Do chimpanzees really talk, or do they merely imitate their human teachers?

Look over the first paragraph of Dickens's *Hard Times* for the stereotyped definition and the natural definition of a horse. Then write a stereotyped definition of any nonhuman creature, followed by an opposing, and natural, definition.

What is an animal emotion? (Is it the same as a human emotion?)

Define the process of metamorphosis.  
 How did the peacock get its reputation?  
 Does a pet know its name?  
 Does a racehorse know it is a racehorse?  
 When is an animal “rare”?  
 What happens during hibernation?  
 What in elephant behavior indicates that they “never forget”?

## **Paradox**

Is *young adult* a paradox?  
 Is it possible to be mildly fanatical?  
 How can fast food be so good and so bad for you?  
 An old hymn by Jane Taylor says that it is “quite a disgrace to be fine.” How could this be?

### **Explore definitions involving paradox as prompted by the following quotations:**

“In my beginning is my end.” (T. S. Eliot)

From William Blake:

To see a world in a grain of sand  
 And a heaven in a wild flower,  
 Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
 And eternity in an hour.

“There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness.” (Herman Melville)

“Every exit is an entry to somewhere else.” (Tom Stoppard)

Define how the Internet broadens your universe and yet shrinks it.

“One should lift up the self by the self, And should not let the self down; For the self is the self’s only friend, And the self is the self’s only enemy.” (Bhagavad Gita)

“He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (New Testament, Gospel According to John, 12:25)

“The way up and the way down are one and the same.” (Heraclitus)

“If there is cause to hate someone, the cause to love has just begun.” (Wolof proverb, Senegal)

“To be praised is to be lost.” (Kikuyu proverb, Kenya)

“A joke’s a very serious thing.” (Charles Churchill)

“You can’t win unless you learn how to lose.” (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar)

“I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.” (Martin Luther King Jr.)

## **Psychology and the Mind, Emotions**

“abnormality,” after-vacation blues, anti-social, astro-soul, bipolar disorder, blood lust, blue Monday,

brain waves, child’s nightmares, compulsive behavior, conscience, depression, ego, “emotional cannibalism” (from Henry James), exploitation, fanaticism, fixation, *gestalt*, the green-eyed monster, guilty conscience, hijacker syndrome, hostage syndrome, id, insanity, instability, instinct, intelligence quotient, intuition, love/hate relationship, mania, manipulation, narcissism, neuroticism, normality, obsession, out-of-body experience, panic reaction, paranoia, passion, personality, perversion, psychiatry, psychology, psychopath, psychotherapy, “pushing the envelope,” testing the limits, rebelliousness, sanity, schizophrenia, sense of the absurd, sixth sense, Skinner’s “behaviorism,” social friction, sour grapes, spring fever, superego, triskaidekaphobia, *Zeitgeist*

## **Ambiguity, Infinity, and the Kitchen Sink**

### **Draw subjects for definition from the following terms and thoughts:**

about/nearly/hardly, ambiguity, ambivalence, anachronism, black holes, Calvary, drop in the ocean, energy, euphemism, exoticism, fat/plump, forever, hard side/soft side, hypothesis, imagination, impossibility, infinity, insight, -ism, kaleidoscope, karma, less/few, malapropism, measurelessness, metaphysics, mirage sale, mutually exclusive, nomadic syntax (used by the journalist Tom Wicker to refer to Eisenhower’s rambling public pronouncements), phenomenon, rare/unusual, reality, reasonable/unreasonable, semi-terrific, something that stays, sprezzatura, symbol, thief of time, to be or not to be, tomorrow/yesterday, ubiquity, unknown quality, unknown quantity, up/down, wacky names, want-ad terms, weather

## **A**

Define what coming of age means to you in your everyday life. Are there any contradictions that you see?

Discuss the ambiguities in these defining parts: “used car” in “used car salesman”; “easy” in “easy chair”; “small animal” in “small animal hospital”; “match” in “match box”; “hot” in “hot cup of coffee”; “good” in “good and angry,” “your universe in the universe.”

Write of a characteristic problem arising from imprecise or ambiguous language in documents.

Illustrate the ambiguity in each of the following; then write a definition essay discussing ways to eliminate ambiguity where it is not intended:

There wasn’t a single man present.

Visiting relatives can be dangerous.

The chicken is ready to eat.

I couldn’t praise the candidate highly enough.

Eye Drops Off Shelf (newspaper headline)

Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half (newspaper headline)



She sold Mark Twain books.  
Begin Conceding While Sadat Waits (newspaper headline)

What aspect of America does Muhammad Ali capture in this statement? "I am America. I am the part you won't recognize. But get used to me. Black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own; get used to me."

What is the most coveted award?

## B

Why are Darwin's definitions of beauty and love circular and therefore incomplete?

"Beauty is momentary in the mind— / The fitful tracing of a portal; / But in the flesh it is immortal." (Wallace Stevens)

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." (Margaret Hungerford)

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever." (John Keats)

Are the stars beautiful up close?

"Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror." (Khalil Gibran)

"Beauty is truth's smile when she beholds her own face in a perfect mirror." (Rabindranath Tagore)

"No; we have been as usual asking the wrong question. It does not matter a hoot what the mockingbird on the chimney is singing. The real and proper question is: Why is it beautiful?" (Annie Dillard)

"Beauty is its own excuse for being." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

When is big small? When is small big?

According to Montaigne, the thumb is the most important finger. Can the head commit a revolution against the body? Define the most important part of the body.

Show that "both sides" are not necessarily all sides.

"Brevity is the soul of wit" (Shakespeare). How would you define wit?

Why is Bugs Bunny an enduring part of American culture?

## C

*To card*, according to the dictionary, means "to cleanse, disentangle, and collect together (as fibers) by the use of cards preparatory to spinning." What does *to card* or *to be carded* mean to you?

Note the definitions of these words, which either sound or look nearly alike: *ceras*, *cereous*, *ceres*, *Cereus*, *cerous*, *cerris*, *ceruse*, *cirrous*, *cirrus*. Can you offer some pairs of words to this collection, providing the definitions?

"When it is not necessary to change," said Viscount Falkland, "it is necessary not to change."

"What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (Henry James)

Discuss the change of definition of the word *chauvinism* since its origin.

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (New Testament, Paul's epistle to the Corinthians). What does it really and specifically mean to think as a child?

What logic do children use in choices of words—such as "snew" as the past tense of the verb "snow"?

How do children know when they are children? Does a "child" have to be a child?

What is the popular image or definition of Christ? Mohammad? Buddha?

Choosing paint (especially its colors) gets tougher all the time because of the great number of different shades and the names for them. Define some colors other than the primary ones.

An absent comma makes all the difference in this sentence from a newspaper account of a political barbecue: "It should be an interesting day to say the least." Define a punctuation mark by considering its importance.

In a letter to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Lillian Hellman said, "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." What metaphor was she employing? What is another way of expressing her idea?

## D

Take certain terms and give them new definitions. Can you make these definitions seem to fit?

Does the number of words define the value of a document? There are 1,322 words in the Declaration of Independence, and there are 26,911 words in a certain government document regulating the sale of cabbages.

Define something that has at least two opposing names. "Stardust," for example, is also called "atmospheric contaminants."

Ask the question, "What's up with *that*?" about some important something that needs definition. Then write the definition that answers your question.

The power to define is the power to cure, says William Raspberry, syndicated columnist. He gives as examples: "school districts that cure the problem of non-learning not by improved teaching but by setting lower standards; social statisticians who cure poverty not by improving income but by reassessing the assets of those who are impoverished. . . . The prospects are endless. Robbers could be transmuted into income-transfer specialists. Joblessness could be redefined as full-time leisure. Racial animosity could be ethnotension. . . ."

Distinguish, by definition, between the terms "lower depths" and "the pits."

When she married again, Elizabeth Taylor sold the diamond Richard Burton had given her. This is an

illustration of the fact that things have definitions of different kinds at different times and under different circumstances. What are some other examples?

“Diamonds are a girl’s best friend.” What definition of women is implied in this song? Why would it be considered offensive by many women?

Direction: Which way is east? west? north? south?

Franklin discovered, not invented, electricity. Write comparison/contrast definitions of *discovery* and *invention*.

How would you define distance in the context of outer space?

How might *divorce* be defined, as used in the headline *Man Divorced from Army*?

“Do one to others as you would have them do one to you,” said an elementary student.

What could be defined as a case of “double reverse discrimination”?

How big, by definition, is a drop? How many droplets make a drop?

## E

Does *egghead* imply the same thing as *intellectual*?

How is your e-mail persona different from your personality?

What defines empty? Are there empty spaces?

“Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.” (Malcolm S. Forbes)

To meditate you must empty your mind of clutter. How do you empty your mind?

According to Zen philosophy, “The everyday mind is the empty mind, . . . the mind which does not discriminate the self from the world.” Define the everyday mind and the empty mind in this context.

The comic strip character Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” In what ways are we our own enemies?

Show by definition how contradictory and confusing the English language is. Some examples: *man’s laughter* and *manslaughter* (pointed out by Mario Pei the linguist) and “It took a *month* of *fast talk* to convince them.”

## F

How would you define *fad*? How do fads define us?

The outstanding farmer of the year, according to a cartoon, is the one who had the lowest loss.

What’s the distinction between farm subsidy and farm aid?

Define something by using the word *fradnip* to name it. (A *fradnip* is a term used as a substitute for any other term.)

“Our friends, the enemy.” (Pierre-Jean de Béranger)

How would you define being a friend?

How would you define your expectations of a friend?

“The future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don’t plan for it.” (Tennessee Williams)

## G

“The game is my wife. It demands loyalty and responsibility, and it gives me back fulfillment and peace.” (Michael Jordan)

Nowadays, we avoid gender-specific references (*actor, poet*, rather than *actress, poetess*). How is this a consequence of a redefinition of gender?

What is the difference between *gentle* and *genteel*?

What were the “good old times”? Were they as good as people say they were?

A newspaper asks whether government is the incompetent’s best friend.

What does this German saying mean, “At night, all cats are gray.”

When everything is grotesque is nothing grotesque?

Below is one definition of growing up from Sara Teasdale. Can you offer an alternative definition?

When I can look Life in the eyes,  
Grown calm and very coldly wise,  
Life will have given me the Truth,  
And taken in exchange—my youth.

## H

“The hand that signed the paper felled a city,” said Dylan Thomas. How do you define *hand* as it is used in this statement?

How do you think a woman’s role is defined here: “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”

“Heaven lies about us in our infancy! Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy” [or girl], says William Wordsworth. Define your experience of losing your carefree childhood as you grow up.

“O Lord, wandering with thee, even hell itself would be to me a heaven of bliss” (Ramayana). Define a situation that makes a heaven out of hell for you.

“History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awaken.” (James Joyce)

“People are trapped in History, and History is trapped in them!” (James Baldwin)

“The world’s history is the world’s judgment.” (Friedrich Schiller)

Your home is your castle. Is a king’s castle his home? Home is \_\_\_\_\_

Is “How much can I get for it?” a definition of “sentimental value”?

Give definitions of “How are you?” and “How do you do?”

## I

“Ignorance is not innocence but sin,” said Robert Browning.

What in your life has been an illusion? What happened when your illusion turned to reality, or when your reality turned out to be an illusion?

“Impression is nine-tenths of the law,” says David Rife. What definitions are changed by this pun?

What is “in” this year? What is “out” or “not in” this year?

An Irish bar in Seattle is run by Japanese people; the original owner died fifty years ago.

Define an intangible something by using concrete terms or by giving it a concrete aspect.

Define an intangible of a concrete something.

Istanbul was Constantinople. What different connotations do different names for the same place create?

## J

The name *Jack* appears frequently in nursery rhymes and fairytales. What qualities does a *Jack* have? When is a *John* not a *Jack* (and vice versa)?

“Jealousy is all the fun you think they had.” (Erica Jong)

In the song title “June Is Bustin’ Out All Over,” what is implied about the month of June? Could some other month “bust out”?

One person’s junk is another’s treasure. Why?

How do you define *justice*?

## K

Though Arthur, Henry VIII, and Edward VII were all kings of England, their roles as kings were very different. How has the definition of what it means to be king changed over the years?

What different meanings can a kiss have?

Write a comparison/contrast definition between an old airplane and a modern kite, in which the kite comes out the better of the two.

“Knowledge is the prime need of the hour” (Mary Macleod Bethune). How is this comment true today?

## L

When, by definition, might a person be said to know two languages equally well, that is, be bilingual?

When is less more? When is more less?

“Lift not the painted veil which those who live call Life” (Percy Bysshe Shelley). How does the poet define life here?

Define the many ways in which you are literate.

If you lose a key, is the key itself lost? What defines being “lost”?

Intangible though it is, love can be measured and therefore defined. How?

## M

“The map is not the territory it symbolizes.” (Hayakawa)

“I hear that melting-pot stuff a lot, and all I can say is that we haven’t melted.” (Jesse Jackson)

The mind does not act separately from the body like a “ghost in the machine,” said Gilbert Ryle.

“The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, and a Hell of Heaven.” (John Milton)

There is only one witness to what goes on in the mind in thought or dream.

“It [the mind] has memory’s ear that can hear without having to hear.” (Marianne Moore)

Give an example that defines “mind over matter.”

“In the old days,” says a newspaper item, “if you saved money you were a miser; now you’re a marvel.”

February is the worst month of all, it is said, because it brings depression, boredom, and flu. What kind of month is April? What are April showers to different people of different ages? What is behind the quotation from T. S. Eliot’s long poem “The Waste Land”: “April is the cruellest month”? Write an extended definition for one of the months of the year.

How does Louis Armstrong’s comment here apply to other things besides music? “We all do ‘do, re, mi,’ but you have got to find the other notes yourself.”

## N

How do our names help define us? What does it mean to say that someone doesn’t “look like” his or her name?

Is there someone you could call your nemesis? Why?

Discuss the difference in definition between “Newfoundland” and “New Found Land.”

Why do many Native Americans object to the term *New World*?

What are some “new words for old deceptions”?

“That noise scared my ears,” said Alden Powell. What definition does this quotation give to the sense of hearing?

Define literally such nonliteral expressions as “Keep on your toes.” Find other examples.

Write a definition essay showing that nothing is like anything else; that anything is unlike anything else.

Write a definition essay on *number(s)* after reading the following: “Round numbers are always false,” said Samuel Johnson. “The half is greater than the whole,” said Hesiod. A famous performer of mental arithmetic was asked, “How many bulls’ tails to the moon?” to which he replied, “One, if it’s long enough.” Is it possible for something to add up to more than it is? Is it possible for something to add up to less than it is? Is it possible to count pearls and oysters together? Is it possible for the sum of parts of something to be less than the whole of that something?

## O

What are onomatopoeic sounds really like? Define them as they should be.

What is Optimism as Voltaire has Pangloss define it?

Distinguish between optical illusion and other illusions.

**P**

“Paint what you know is there, not what you see,” said Gertrude Stein in reference to cubism. Define what is meant by her statement.

Write a definition of what one might see in a particular photograph that is contrived to be confusing.

Write a definition showing that plain talk is the hardest kind of oral expression.

Write a definition of pleasure based on Aphra Behn’s saying that “Variety is the soul of pleasure.”

What does the pledge of allegiance mean? What do its individual words mean, especially the words *pledge*, *allegiance*, *flag*, *nation*, *indivisible*, *liberty*, *justice*, and *all*?

Everyone has a different definition for, or understanding of, the word *poetry*. There are as many different definitions for it as there are people. What is your definition of it?

Was all poetry, as the saying goes, written before time began?

A legislator said that he could get through legislation for teaching poetry in prison only if he did not call it poetry. What definition of poetry is so distrusted that legislators would not want it taught in prison?

Define a “portmanteau” word. Give some examples.

When is progress inhumane, or does progress always, by definition, help humanity?

What is the result of reversing the principal parts of a proverb? (Example: What goes down must come up.)

“A proverb is much matter decocted into few words,” said Thomas Fuller.

**R**

A young boy is quoted in a newspaper item as saying that he likes radio more than television because he can “see the pictures better.” What definition is at work in his seeing?

Define *reaction*. Remember that one person’s reaction is not another’s. There may even be many people whose knee reflexes are controlled, for example, by hitting their opposing knees.

Define *reductio ad absurdum* to illustrate that it is an ambiguous term.

Do children define what they draw? Do they draw to reproduce, or to represent? Write a comparison/contrast definition of the terms *reproduction* and *representation*.

Show by comparison/contrast definition that *re-sign* and *resign* are opposites in meaning.

Show by comparison/contrast definition what a professor meant by saying that there was “entirely too much student rest” on campus.

Define *reverse discrimination*.

Show by definition that what is right or wrong to one person is not the same to another.

Define the “road-not-taken” syndrome.

What is a “roadrunner”? Is it, as Rod Powell says, a bird that is “still running” when some other creature might have stopped? Do definitions and names limit in this way the things they define or name?

**S**

Develop a definition of one of the seasons like this one from *Time* magazine: “Autumn: A Season for Hymning and Hawing.”

What does it mean to be selfish in practice but not in principle?

What is the most important sense according to your definition?

“That kitten smells black,” said Diane Ephthimiou. Are some things identifiable by similar ambivalence of the senses?

Illustrate unusual definitions of the senses, as in this quotation from Shakespeare: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.”

A cartoon asks, “Are you shocked at the things that don’t shock you anymore?” What two definitions, at least, are there of *shock* in this quotation?

What is *future shock*?

What is *sticker shock*?

What activity do you consider to be “sick”?

A visitor to Northern Ireland was asked which side he was on in the conflict there, and he answered, “I am on the side that doesn’t require that I have to be on a side.” Is it possible, by definition, not to be on a side in some issue?

Sometimes the sign is not the real message, as when a welcome mat is put out just for convention or when a dictator says that he welcomes criticism. Define a sign that does not mean what it says.

Signs are read in a cultural context. Why might someone from another culture find these signs confusing.

*Gone fishing. No strollers on escalators. No shoes, no shirt, no service. Toilet tissue—facial quality.*

*Garage sale.* Can you think of other ambiguous or evocative signs?

What is a silver spoon? Is it necessarily a good thing?

Simple things are often the hardest to define. Illustrate the point by defining a door, a two-letter word, a color, or even the words *simple* and *simplicity*.

Is almost anything that is fun defined as a sin?

Define the expression, “since God knows when.”

Define a human being as a social security number.

Show how spelling confuses definition, as in the following “One, two, three, Gough!”

Discuss by definition the fact of a statue’s shaking its fist at a snowy sky.

What constitutes a stereotype? How is this different from recognizing difference?

Define an old stereotype, such as the one that said that a 50-50 sharing in the home was this: the wife cooked, the husband ate.

Does one have to be in prison to go “stir-crazy”?

“Style is whatever makes writing distinguishable even where it is not distinguished,” said W. D. Powell. What is your definition of *style*?

Define someone so lacking in subtlety as to be like the mother, say, who sent her prisoner son a buzz-saw in a huge cake.

“There is a superstition in avoiding superstition,” said Sir Francis Bacon. What is your definition of *superstition*?

Define, in your own way, what is meant by the song title, “Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life.”

Does Swiss cheese have holes to help you recognize what it is? Which comes first in a definition, the thing defined—or merely our external impression of it?

## T

What does “It takes two to tango” imply?

What is taste? What is good taste? What is bad taste?

What does it mean to be a team player?

Does teamwork mean team work?

Telephone books may be used not only for locating numbers but also for standing on. Does a momentary function of a thing change that thing’s definition?

Do you define television as a literal, or a symbolic, medium?

Why, by definition, can there rarely be a television commercial that ends unhappily?

Show how the titles of certain television shows can be used interchangeably and with reasonable accuracy.

Someone accidentally defined television as an “escape goat.” How accurate is this definition, whether or not it is an intended one?

Why is a television or a radio commercial referred to as a “message”?

How would you define “the thought of God”—meaning “God’s thought”?

Can anyone—such as a timekeeper—“keep” time?

“The time is now . . .”—Is it possible by definition for time to be now?

“Scientists know no time,” said da Vinci. Give a definition of time as he defined it, or understood it, in this statement.

“The time is now seventeen minutes before the hour,” said the disc jockey, to which a listener responded, “What hour?” What two definitions of time are seen here?

What is the difference in definition between *time* and *eternity*?

How would a prisoner probably define *time*?

How do most Americans feel about time and distance? What definitions of each are implied in these feelings?

Define what Lord Byron meant by referring to Time as the “Avenger.”

A prisoner is asked what comes after five and says “ten years to life.” A time keeper might have said “5:01.” A sophisticate might have said “cocktails.” Consider different ways time is defined depending on the person defining it.

Is the term *totalitarianism* applied only to communism?

How is the tourist’s view of a foreign locale defined?

Define *translation*. Myles NaGopaleen, the Irish journalist, said of it: “If I write in Irish what I conceive to be ‘Last Tuesday was very wet,’ I like to feel reasonably sure that what I’ve written does not in fact mean ‘Mr. so-and-so is a thief and a drunkard.’”

Regarding translation of the Bible there is the contention of some that angels were symbolic of, rather than literal evocations of, messengers from God. How does definition affect translation?

What are the many ways that one can “travel light”?

“We forgive you for trespassing against us,” says a church sign, “but you still will be towed away.” What vastly different definitions are there of *trespassing*?

“He said true things, but called them by wrong names,” said Robert Browning.

They really do say “All aboard!” What other truths are often defined almost as if they were clichés?

“Truth, when witty, is the wittiest of all things,” said Julius and Augustus Hare.

## U

How would you define what an “unaskable question” is? “Unbelievable!” Define.

What does “understanding” mean when we understand people but not their handwriting?

How does William Butler Yeats define a unity of being in the following lines?

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

“The universe is neither hostile nor friendly; it is merely indifferent,” said John Haynes Holmes. Do you define the universe, in part, that way?

Define what is meant by the unspeakable or the unthinkable.

## V

Is an “upset victory” a victory that upsets the victor?

Some films get an “R” or “NC-17” rating because of the

violence that is portrayed. How much violence is too much? When does depiction of violence cross the line from acceptable to too graphic?

Who decides who is and who is not a VIP?

“One man’s vulgarity is another man’s lyric,” a newspaper item said of the right of Nazis to march. Discuss this fact about definition.

## W

Sports announcer Jack Whitaker said for a U.S. Open Tennis Championship, “I hope the weather stays well.” Is it possible to define the weather as something measured in terms of its health?

Hilaire Belloc said: “Strong Brother in God, and last Companion: Wine.” Define or explain his definition of wine.

“We thought that he was everything / To make us wish that we were in his place,” said Edwin Arlington Robinson of Richard Cory. How is a wish a definition?

Writing to Santa Claus, Charlie Brown said, “’Tis the season to be wishy-washy.” Define *wishy-washy* in this context.

Is a word a thought, or is it merely a reference point for one?

What are some words that can do quadruple duty?

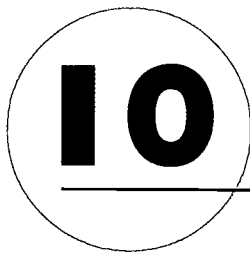
“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less” (Lewis Carroll). Name some words that you have redefined. Have they worked for you?

## A Game of Fictionary

Without looking up the meanings of these words, define them, using your free association and imagination (fiction). Then check them in the dictionary\*:

aperient, babbitt, corm, devi, eelyadah, flageolet, galumph, hendiadys, intaglio, jipijapa, kiddush, loupe, moly, nisuus, octroi, perestroika, quagga, rutilant, sampan, toff, ululate, viva voce, wergild, xenopus, yataghan, zenana

\*You can play this game in a group, where each person makes up a definition designed to fool the others and writes it down. The definitions are collected and read out loud (they’re anonymous, of course), including the correct one. Then you guess which one you think is correct!



# RESEARCH AND REPORT

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## What Research-and-Report Writing Is

Research-and-report writing is nearly always formal and scholarly. Sources, both primary and secondary (from research in private papers, personal correspondence, verbal reminiscences, and so forth), are usually cited in footnotes and in a bibliography. In some cases strict formats are required. The mode of expression is basically expository, though other stylistic and rhetorical devices may certainly be used.

## How to Write From Research

Effective research-and-report writing is almost impossible without clear and accurate notes. All sources should be investigated scrupulously, reported precisely, and interpreted judiciously. A disciplined effort should be made always to give credit where it is due and to see every idea, circumstance, and argument in the round. That kind of discipline is essential to good scholarship. This does not mean, however, that research-and-report writing has to be pedantic or dry. It can be as vigorous and imaginative and fulfilling as any other kind of writing. A scholarly exploration, for example, into the assassination of Becket might lead the researcher to wonder how the historical Thomas à Becket he or she discovers shapes up against the more literary Becket T. S. Eliot offers us, or Jean Anouilh. Using footnotes or not,

the scholar who is gripped by such a comparison is already breaking some fecund ground.

## Locating Subjects for Research-and-Report Writing

As implied above, research-and-report writing may simply be an exposition of the information gathered on a certain subject, or it may seek to interrogate, interpret, or theorize upon that information. The subjects listed here are mostly of the information-gathering variety, but, as one can see from the example of Thomas à Becket, many students will be able to take flight from almost any one of them.

This section is readily informed, too, by ideas from other parts of this book. For example, one has barely to approach a random topic listed here, say, "Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance," before one is into the area of definition. What did Harlem signify? What is a Renaissance? How did the literary movement connect with the music and other arts? What was the impact on the African American community and the wider culture? How did Langston Hughes enter this world? What was his role in shaping the Harlem Renaissance? Suddenly we are into argumentation. Before we know it we are using every stylistic device and discipline we can muster to explore the complexities of an unfolding topic.

## Individual Personalities

- Abdication of a Famous Royal Figure  
 Abigail Adams: Second First Lady  
 Abraham (what he stands for and his role in the scriptures of three major religions)  
 Chinua Achebe  
 John Adams and the Boston Massacre Trial  
 Jane Addams and Hull House  
 Adenauer's Stand Against Hitler  
 Adrian I and Charlemagne  
 Aesop: The Teller of Tales  
 Agassiz and Glaciation  
 Akbar the Great, the Enlightened Mogul Emperor  
 King Albert's Stand against the Germans (World War II)  
 Prince Albert: Consort of Queen Victoria  
 John Alden: Beyond the Legend  
 Alexander's Last Battle  
 Sherman Alexie  
 Ethan Allan  
 Amundsen: A Report of One of His Expeditions  
 Hans Christian Andersen: The Teller Not the Tales  
 Marian Anderson and Music  
 Maya Angelou  
 Kofi Annan (Secretary-General of the United Nations)  
 Susan B. Anthony and Suffrage  
 Gloria Anzaldúa's Experience of the Borderlands  
 Yasser Arafat  
 An Arctic or Antarctic Explorer  
 Neil Armstrong  
 Chester Alan Arthur: His Quarrel with President Hayes  
 The Real King Arthur  
 Ashoka, Emperor of India and Messenger of Peace  
 The First Astronomer  
 Attila the Hun  
 Crispus Attucks  
 John James Audubon  
 Aung Sang Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Laureate  
 Marcus Aurelius  
 Jane Austen of the Small Town  
 Bach: His Occupation Not as a Composer  
 Francis Bacon's Legal Problems  
 Joan Baez—Activist and Singer  
 Balboa as Discoverer  
 James Baldwin  
 The Veep: Alben Barkley  
 P. T. Barnum as a Showman  
 Clara Barton and the Red Cross  
 Judge Roy Bean and "The Law West of the Pecos"  
 Becket's Assassination  
 Beethoven's Torments  
 Menachem Begin  
 Alexander Graham Bell as a Teacher  
 Bernadette of Lourdes  
 Bernhardt's First American Tour  
 Leonard Bernstein  
 Benazir Bhutto—Woman Leader of an Islamic State  
 Stephen Biko and the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa  
 Bismarck's Unification of Germany  
 Elizabeth Blackwell, First Woman Doctor of the United States  
 Captain Bligh and the *Bounty*  
 Queen Anne Boleyn  
 Bolivar's Unsuccessful Beginnings  
 Boone and the Cumberland Gap  
 Lucrezia Borgia: All Evil?  
 Was There a *Good Borgia*?  
 Gutzon Borglum  
 Omar Bradley  
 Matthew Brady, Civil War Photographer  
 Willy Brandt: More Than a Mayor  
 Bertolt Brecht's Many Contributions to Music and Theater  
 Leonid Brezhnev and the Cold War  
 The Death of John Brown  
 Robert Bruce's Persistence  
 Martin Buber's Contribution to Jewish Philosophy  
 Gautama Buddha—His Life and His Name Change  
 Ralph Bunche and the United Nations  
 Edmund Burke in Support of Revolution  
 Ken Burns and Documentary Film  
 Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton  
 Byron's Last Days  
 Augustus Caesar  
 How Caligula Became Emperor  
 Julia Margaret Cameron  
 Stokely Carmichael and Black Power  
 Andrew Carnegie and Public Libraries  
 Jimmy Carter's Post-Presidential Career  
 George Washington Carver as a Scientist  
 Casement's Death, Burial, and Reburial  
 Johnny Cash  
 Castro as Revolutionary  
 Catherine the Great  
 William Caxton  
 The Fall of Neville Chamberlain  
 Neville Chamberlain's Treaty with Hitler  
 Charlie Chaplin  
 Cesar Chavez



- Chiang Kai-shek and Formosa  
 Madame Chiang Kai-shek  
 How did Chiang Kai-shek Rise to Power?  
 Julia Child  
 Churchill's Loss of the Prime Ministership  
 Cicero as Orator  
 El Cid  
 Clemenceau as Peace Negotiator  
 Hillary Clinton  
 Bill Clinton's Failures as President  
 Bill Clinton's Successes as President  
 George M. Cohan, Showman  
 Christopher Columbus: Hero or Villain?  
 Sean "Puff Daddy/P. Diddy" Combs  
 Confucius's Real Message versus Commercial Distortions of His Teachings  
 Joseph Conrad's Self-Teaching  
 Coolidge and the Boston Police Strike  
 Copernicus and His Theory  
 Charlotte Corday  
 Cortez and Montezuma  
 Stephen Crane's Sea Rescue  
 A Great Criminal Reformer  
 The Fall of Richard Cromwell, Oliver's Son  
 Tom Cruise  
 Madame Curie before She Was Madame Curie  
 Currier and Ives  
 Dalai Lama  
 Salvador Dali's Art  
 The Public Personality of Salvador Dali  
 Richard Henry Dana and the Change of Naval Laws  
 David, King of the Israelites (before and after he became king)  
 Darwin and *The Beagle*  
 The Dauphin  
 Angela Davis  
 The Trial of Jefferson Davis  
 Charles Dickens and Prison  
 Diderot and the Encyclopedia  
 Babe Didrikson  
 Frederick Douglass  
 The Pardon of Dreyfus  
 Isadora Duncan  
 Amelia Earhart  
 Edward the Confessor in 1066  
 Will Eisner  
 Mary Ann Evans *alias* George Eliot  
 The First Queen Elizabeth  
 The Second Queen Elizabeth  
 Erasmus and Thomas More  
 The Empress Eugénie  
 Walker Evans and the Documentary Tradition in Photography  
 Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot  
 Dianne Feinstein  
 Edward Fitzgerald as Translator  
 Henry Ford and the Assembly Line  
 Bob Fosse's Dance Innovations  
 George Fox and the Quakers  
 Franco as a Soldier  
 Anne Frank and Her Diary  
 "Fulton's Folly"  
 Galen and Astronomy  
 Galileo's Troubles  
 Indira Gandhi and India's Rule of Emergency  
 Mahatma Gandhi and Pacifism  
 William Lloyd Garrison  
 Bill Gates and Microsoft  
 Artemisia Gentileschi  
 Geronimo in Old Age  
 Lillian and Dorothy Gish  
 Harold Godwin, 1066  
 Théo van Gogh and His Relationship with His Brother Vincent  
 Jane Goodall  
 Mikhail Gorbachev and Glasnost  
 Gordon at Khartoum  
 Katherine Graham  
 Grant and Lee at Appomattox  
 Grant's Troubles as President  
 The Nine-Day Reign of Lady Jane Grey  
 Zane Grey's Writing Success  
 D. W. Griffith and the Making of *The Birth of a Nation*  
 Günter Grass  
 Che Guevara  
 Alec Guinness  
 Haakon VII, King of Norway  
 Hadrian the Builder  
 Dag Hammarskjöld  
 Hannibal and the Alps  
 Hawkins and the *Armada*  
 Hawthorne's Ancestor at Salem  
 Hemingway as a Young Journalist  
 Henry VIII's First Wife, Catherine of Aragon  
 O. Henry's Latin American Experience  
 A Medieval Heretic  
 Thor Heyerdahl and Kon-Tiki  
 Hindenburg and Hitler  
 Hippocrates  
 Hirohito: Merely a Figurehead?

- Hiss and Whittaker Chambers  
 A Historian from Modern Times  
 Adolf Hitler as an All Too Human Being  
 The Hohenzollern Family  
 Hans Holbein  
 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.  
 Who Was Homer?  
 Why Hoover Lost the Presidency  
 J. Edgar Hoover's Popularity Decline  
 Sam Houston as Governor  
 Howe's Patent Difficulties  
 Julia Ward Howe  
 W. D. Howells, "Father" of American Literary Realism  
 Charles Evans Hughes as a Presidential Candidate  
 Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance  
 The Rediscovery of Zora Neale Hurston  
 Anne Hutchinson as a Religious Leader  
 The Huxleys  
 Ibsen and Censorship  
 Ivan the Terrible  
 Jesse Jackson  
 Stonewall Jackson before the American Civil War  
 Harriet Jacobs  
 King James I: Coming into Power  
 Thomas Jefferson as Inventor  
 Thomas Jefferson as Naturalist  
 Thomas Jefferson as Translator  
 Thomas Jefferson as Writer  
 Edward Jenner  
 Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Creation of Pakistan  
 Joan of Arc in Battle  
 King John and the *Magna Carta*  
 Andrew Johnson's Stormy Presidency  
 Samuel Johnson's Dictionary  
 Joshua and the Battle of Jericho  
 Juarez, the Lincoln of Mexico  
 Judith and Holofernes  
 Keats in Italy  
 Helen Keller as a World Figure  
 John F. Kennedy  
 Robert Kennedy  
 Ted Kennedy  
 Jerome Kern  
 Khrushchev in America  
 Captain Kidd  
 Martin Luther King Jr.  
 Stephen King  
 Maxine Hong Kingston and Women Warriors  
 Jack Kirby and Marvel Comics  
 The Krupp Family  
 Winona LaDuke  
 "Fighting" Bob LaFollette  
 Mayor LaGuardia  
 Lao-Tse  
 Lenin's Tomb  
 Leonardo da Vinci  
 Lewis and Clark Expedition  
 Ben Lilly and Theodore Roosevelt  
 Charles Lindbergh  
 Lincoln as a Congressman  
 Livingstone's Contributions to Africa  
 Livingstone Viewed through Postcolonial Eyes  
 Louis XIV  
 Toussaint L'Ouverture  
 Clare Boothe Luce  
 Martin Luther  
 Madonna's Changing Public Image  
 Magellan's Circumnavigation  
 Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation  
 Mahashweta Devi, Bengali Writer and Activist  
 Malcolm X  
 Mallarmé and the Symbolists  
 Sir Thomas Malory  
 Nelson Mandela from Political Prisoner to Politician  
 Horace Mann  
 How Did Mao Rise to Power?  
 Imelda Marcos  
 Queen Maria Theresa  
 Thurgood Marshall  
 The Marx Brothers  
 Margaret Mead  
 Golda Meir  
 Melville in Typee  
 Mesmer and Hypnotism  
 Mirabeau—A Nobleman for the People  
 An Authority on Molluska  
 Monet  
 James Monroe and the Era of Good Feeling  
 Toni Morrison  
 Zero Mostel  
 Mother Jones  
 Mother Teresa  
 A Movie "Dynasty" (e.g., the Fondas, the Redgraves)  
 A Figure behind the Scenes in the Movie World  
 The Childhood Genius of Mozart  
 James Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary  
 Ralph Nader  
 V. S. Naipaul—Literary Great or Colonial Messenger?  
 Napoleon as General  
 John Nash's Beautiful Mind—Fact and Fiction

- Carry Nation's War Against Drink  
 Nefertiti, Egyptian Queen  
 Nero and the Burning of Rome  
 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o  
 Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Activist  
 The Last Czar Nicholas  
 Florence Nightingale  
 Richard Nixon  
 Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prizes  
 The O'Higgins Family of Chile  
 Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis  
 Paracelsus  
 Mungo Park, Explorer of the Niger  
 The Fall of Parnell  
 Pasteur before His Discoveries  
 Robert Peel and the Bobbies  
 Samuel Pepys and His Diary  
 Frances Perkins, First Woman Cabinet Member  
 Eva Peron as icon  
 Pershing and Pancho Villa  
 Petain in the Second World War  
 Peter the Great  
 Philip II of Macedon  
 King Philip of Spain  
 The Piccard Brothers and Underwater Exploration  
 Pickett's Charge  
 The Plantagenets  
 Poe at West Point  
 Polk: Why Is He Considered One of Our Great Presidents?  
 Polk's Acquisition of California  
 Marco Polo in China  
 Katherine Anne Porter in Mexico  
 Wiley Post  
 Chaim Potok, Rabbi and Writer  
 Colin Powell  
 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger  
 An Obscure President  
 \_\_\_\_\_ before the Presidency  
 \_\_\_\_\_ after the Presidency  
 Elvis Presley—Legend of the King  
 Sergei Prokofiev  
 Pythagoras  
 Ayn Rand  
 Rapp the Harmonist  
 Ronald Reagan as the Teflon President  
 Connie Douglas Reeves and the National Cowgirl  
 Museum  
 Paul Robeson  
 Robespierre and the Reign of Terror  
 Will Rogers and Congress
- Will Rogers and the Presidency  
 Eleanor Roosevelt as a Public Figure  
 Franklin Roosevelt's First Term  
 Teddy Roosevelt's Failed Campaign for the Presidency  
 Anwar Sadat  
 J. D. Salinger and Privacy  
 José San Martín's Last Revolution  
 Charles M. Schulz and the Popularity of *Peanuts*  
 Albert Schweitzer  
 Georges Seurat  
 Shackleton and the *Endurance*  
 Tupac Shakur  
 George Bernard Shaw's Alphabet  
 M. Night Shyamalan's Film Treatment of the Occult  
 Leslie Marmon Silko—Native American and Feminist  
 Sitting Bull  
 Death of Socrates  
 Stephen Sondheim and American Musical Theater  
 Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* (graphic novels about the  
 Holocaust)  
 De-Stalinization of Russian History  
 Robert Louis Stevenson on Samoa  
 Martha Stewart as both Id and Superego of American  
 Housekeeping Concerns  
 Harriet Beecher Stowe and the American Civil War  
 August Strindberg and Modern Drama  
 Amy Tan's Sense of Chinese American Identity  
 The Phenomenon of Shirley Temple  
 Margaret Thatcher's Political Career  
 Marshal Tito, President of the Former Yugoslavia  
 Arnold Toynbee  
 The Mystery of B. Traven, Author  
 Truman's First Weeks as President  
 Nat Turner  
 Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee  
 Booker T. Washington  
 Young George Washington's Military Defeats  
 Cornel West and *Race Matters*  
 George Westinghouse and Transportation  
 Elie Wiesel  
 Simon Wiesenthal: Hunter of Men  
 Oscar Wilde in America  
 The First King William of England  
 Wilson's Wife as Acting President  
 Oprah Winfrey  
 Women Nobel Peace Prize Winners (Aung Sang Suu  
 Kyi, Rigoberta Menchu)  
 Frank Lloyd Wright  
 Zapata as a Revolutionary  
 Zola in Support of Dreyfus

**Places, Events, Conditions**

- Aberdeen Shipping  
 Acapulco Tourism  
 Addis Ababa  
 Aegean Islands and Early Civilization  
 The Aegean Sea and Early Commerce  
 The History of Conflict in Afghanistan  
 The Purchase of Alaska  
 Alexandria, Egypt  
 Alsace-Lorraine and World War I  
 Recent Amazon Exploration  
 Travel on the Amazon  
 Andersonville Prison  
 The Central Andes  
 Peruvian Andes  
 The Temples of Ankor Vat  
 Human Life in Antarctica  
 Arden Forest  
 Atlantic City and Gambling  
 Atlantis: What Do We Know of It?  
 The Australian Outback  
 From Austria-Hungary to Austria and Hungary  
 The Government of Barbados  
 Basel as a 15th-Century Religious Center  
 Bath, England, during the 14th Century  
 The Belgian Congo  
 The Government of Belize  
 Bergen, Norway  
 Bhopal, India, and the Union Carbide Catastrophe  
 The "Black Hole" of Calcutta  
 Branson, Missouri  
 Brasilia: The Foundation  
 Britain as It Appeared to the Roman Conquerors  
 Buckingham Palace  
 The Island of Capri  
 Chesapeake Bay  
 Chinatown in a Major U.S. City  
 The Congo and Colonialism  
 Constantinople to Istanbul  
 Political History of Costa Rica  
 Cypress  
 From Czechoslovakia to Czech Republic and Slovakia  
 Darjeeling—Land of Mists and Tea Plantations  
 Devil's Island  
 The Kingdom of East Anglia  
 Easter Island: Its Care and Operation  
 El Salvador Population Problem  
 The Equator of Ecuador  
 The Faeroe Islands  
 The Falkland Islands: The Quarrel Over Their Ownership  
 Fiji Islands and Progress  
 The Government of Finland  
 Flanders and the Flemish Language  
 Florida Keys  
 The Government of French Guiana  
 The French Quarter in New Orleans  
 Mt. Fujiyama and Religion  
 The Gadsden Purchase  
 Administering the Galápagos Islands  
 Giant's Causeway  
 Granada as a Separate Country in Spain  
 The Grand Canyon  
 The Great Divide  
 Great Lakes Shipping  
 Great Salt Lake  
 The History behind the Great Wall of China  
 Guadalajara Architecture  
 Guam and the Military  
 Gulf War  
 The Government of the Hague  
 The Unity of Hawaii  
 Hawaii and the Pineapple Industry  
 The Hebrides  
 Helsinki  
 The Heptarchy of England  
 The Himalayas  
 Hollywood  
 Indigenous Honduras  
 Hong Kong  
 Volcanoes of Iceland  
 The Intracoastal Waterway of the Atlantic Coast  
 Volcán Irazú  
 Isle of Man  
 Tourism and the Local Economy in Jamaica  
 Japanese Economy  
 Japanese Government during American Occupation  
 Game parks in Kenya  
 Klondike  
 Krakatoa  
 The Political Status of Labrador  
 Lhasa—City on "the Roof of the World"  
 Liechtenstein  
 Lithuania and Relations with Russia  
 Battle of Little Big Horn  
 London and Taxation  
 Londonderry  
 Machu Picchu  
 Mammoth Cave of Kentucky  
 The Mississippi River during the Civil War

Montreal and Its Two Major Languages  
 Exploration of the Moon  
 Mount Rainier as a Training Center  
 Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument  
 Mumbai and Commerce  
 Nepal as Tourist Attraction  
 Makeup of the Netherlands  
 Nevada: Not Just Divorce and Gambling  
 New York City's "Ground Zero"  
 New Zealand Government  
 Indigenous Peoples of New Zealand  
 New Zealand's Topography  
 Niagara Falls  
 Nicaragua and Earthquake Recovery  
 Nicaragua's Politics  
 Northwest Territories and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
 Norway and Neutrality  
 Inhabitants of Nova Scotia  
 Habitat of Okefenokee Swamp  
 The Founding of "Old Town" in \_\_\_\_\_  
 U.S. Invasion of Panama  
 Panama Canal  
 The Papal States  
 The (Disappearing) Petrified Forest of Arizona  
 Philippine Government Since World War II  
 Poland as a Satellite  
 Prince William Sound, before and after the Exxon Valdez Spill  
 Puerto Rico: What Is Its Political Status?  
 Puget Sound: Steps toward Ecological Control  
 Quito, Ecuador: Two Cities in One  
 The Mystery of Roanoke Island  
 South Africa before and after Apartheid  
 Sumatra  
 Switzerland and the European Union  
 The Republic of Texas  
 U.S. Involvement in the Vietnam War  
 Wales: Its Origins  
 The West Bank  
 Yellowstone National Park—Threatened by Development?  
 Yosemite National Park  
 The Former Yugoslavia  
 The Yukon and Adventure  
 Government of Zaire  
 Zululand's Birding Routes  
 Zurich as Center of the Reformation

## **World Peoples, Ancient and Modern**

The Acadian People  
 The Aleuts  
 The Amish and Their Way of Life  
 Apaches in the Nineteenth Century  
 The Arabian Nomads  
 The Armenian Genocide  
 The Basques: A People Apart  
 The Bedouin  
 The Celts  
 Central American Indians  
 The Civilization at Chichen-itzá  
 The Druids and Sun Worship  
 Early Humans in the Bering Strait  
 Ebla People, 2400–2250 BC  
 The Last of the Etruscans  
 A European People in Argentina  
 The Hittites  
 The Hopi Indians  
 Huns  
 Hutus vs. Tutsis  
 The Iberi People  
 The Incas  
 Who Were the Indo-Europeans?  
 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict  
 Mayan Civilization  
 Mediterranean Cultures and What They Share  
 The Pennsylvania Dutch  
 Pueblo Indians  
 The Roma People—Their Origins and Migrations  
 The Serbs  
 Stonehenge  
 The Tarahumaras  
 The Tasaday Indians: Then as Now  
 What Civilization Was at Tikal?  
 The Visigoths  
 The Walloons

## **War, Political Strife, Wartime Conditions and Operations**

The Admiralty of Great Britain during World War II  
 The Battle of Agincourt  
 The "Alabama Claims"  
 After the Famous Battle of the Alamo  
 American Expeditionary Force  
 American Neutrality in World War II

Angola's Civil War  
 The Battle of Antietam  
 Bacon's Rebellion  
 Barcelona and the Spanish Civil War  
 Anti-Aircraft Defense during the Battle of Britain  
 Bikini Atoll  
 Blackouts during World War II  
 A Famous Blockade  
 The Boer War  
 War in Bosnia  
 The Boxer Rebellion  
 Burma Death March  
 Cambodian Blood Purges, 1970s  
 Cavalry of the Middle Ages  
 The Cheyenne Wars  
 The CIA: Its Early Operation  
 Conflicts in Chile  
 Civil War in \_\_\_\_\_  
 Coxe's Army  
 Dachau during World War II  
 Delaware during the Civil War  
 The First Democratic Struggle  
 Desertion during Wartime  
 Dunkirk (Dunquerque) during World War II  
 Espionage  
 Occupation of Ethiopia by Italy  
 "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight"  
 The French and Indian War  
 French Revolution: The Bastille  
 Galveston in War Defense  
 What Happened at Guernica?  
 Gulf War Syndrome  
 Battle of Hastings  
 Hiroshima  
 Holy Alliance  
 The Hundred Years' War  
 Hungarian Revolution, 1956  
 British Intelligence Operations during World War I  
 Ireland: The Easter Uprising  
 War of Jenkins's Ear  
 Battle of Jutland  
 Kashmir—Paradise Torn by War  
 A Famous Liberation Struggle  
 The *Lusitania*  
 The Mercenary Soldier of Early Times  
 The Mexican War  
 Neo-Nazi Movements

The October Revolution  
 The Office of Price Administration  
 Paraguay and the Gran Chaco  
 The United States Patriot Act  
 Pearl Harbor: What Did the Americans Know Before?  
 Potsdam Agreement  
 Prisoner-of-War Agreements  
 Sarajevo  
 September 11, 2001, and the War on Terrorism  
 The Six-Day War  
 The Soccer War  
 Soldiers as Viewed by Walter Bagehot  
 Taiwan and Mainland China  
 Andrew Jackson and the Trail of Tears  
 Post-Vietnam Stress Syndrome  
 Radio and World War II  
 Yalta: What Happened There?  
 Yokohama

### **Philosophical, Political, and Religious Groups or Movements**

AIM (American Indian Movement)  
 The Anabaptists  
 Anthroposophy and Its Connection to Fascism  
 The Baptists  
 The John Birch Society: Where and How Is It Now?  
 What Was Bolshevism?  
 The Brook Farm Experiment  
 Christianity Comes to (Ireland, England, or the United States)  
 Christianity 100 AD  
 Civil Rights Movement  
 Where Does the Idea of a Constitution Originate?  
 The Counter Reformation  
 The Greek Origin of Democracy  
 Ecumenical Government  
 An Evangelical Movement  
 Early Feminism  
 The Decline of Feudalism  
 The Geneva Convention  
 The Greenback Party  
 Islamic Fundamentalism  
 Early References to Jesus, Mohammad, and Buddha Not in Religious Books  
 Is the Concept of Liberty New?  
 The MacDowell Colony  
 Mahayana Buddhism

Marriage and Courtship in \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mayan beliefs  
 Monogamy and Polygamy in Religious Groups  
 The Mormons  
 The NAACP  
 Old-Time Religion, BC  
 Polygamy  
 The Protestant Reformation  
 Quakers  
 The Shia Sect of Islam  
 Early Sikh Settlements in the Pacific Northwest  
 The Sunni Sect of Islam  
 The Supreme Court and FDR  
 Theosophy and Its Connections to Eastern Religions  
 The Underground Railroad  
 UNESCO  
 Wicca

### **Nonhuman Creature Life**

Aardvark/Aardwolf  
 Albatross  
 An Amphibious Creature  
 Anaconda  
 Ant Colony  
 Appaloosa  
 Baboon  
 The Badger in Defense  
 Barracuda  
 The Bear in Hibernation  
 The Beaver's Engineering Skills  
 Killer Bees  
 Beetle Invasions  
 Bird Migration  
 A Bird Type  
 Boar  
 The Boll Weevil and Cotton  
 The Bumblebee—How Does It Fly?  
 Canadian Wild Goose  
 Chachalaca Bird  
 Cobra—"King" of Snakes  
 Creatures of the Deep  
 The Dingo of Australia  
 Dinosaurs  
 Dogs with Herding Instincts  
 Dolphins and Intelligence  
 Dung Beetle  
 The Exciting Life of the Earthworm  
 Everglades Bird Life  
 Firefly

Flamingo  
 The Frog—Prince/Princess of Amphibians  
 The Guidance System of \_\_\_\_\_ (a certain insect, bird, or reptile)  
 Hornbill  
 Hummingbird  
 Insect Colonies  
 Kangaroo  
 King Snake  
 Locusts  
 Magpies  
 Meerkat  
 Minnows as Mosquito Controls  
 The Migration and Survival of the Mysterious Monarch Butterfly  
 Mongoose  
 Monkeys—Almost Human  
 Mosquitoes and the Spread of Diseases  
 The Nest of the \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Behavior of Opossums  
 Oyster Beds  
 Parrots  
 Pigs—Brainiacs of the Barnyard  
 Piranha  
 Praying Mantis  
 Pterodactyl  
 Raven—Genius among Birds  
 "Roadkill"  
 Salamander  
 Scorpion  
 The Truth about Sharks  
 The Shrike  
 Spring Peeper  
 Squids  
 Stick Insects  
 The Virginia White-Tailed Deer  
 Eating Habits of the Whale  
 The Wolverine—Does It Kill for "Fun"?

### **Language-Related Subjects**

African American Vernacular English  
 Origin of Anglo-Saxon  
 Borrowings in English from Other Languages  
 "Code Switching"  
 How the Computer Has Changed Our Vocabulary  
 How the Connotation and Value of Certain Words Has Expanded or Narrowed (e.g., *rainbow*, *gay*, *cool*)  
 Creole  
 Origin of the English Alphabet

A Study of a Single Letter in the English Alphabet  
 The Major Periods of English Language Change  
 Esperanto, World Language  
 On “Passing Away,” “Expectorating,” and “Issuing  
 Forth”—A Study of Victorian Euphemisms  
 The Gullah Language  
 The Language of Hawaii  
 Icelandic Language  
 Indo-European Language  
 The Internet and Its Effect on Language  
 Jargon: Its Uses and Abuses  
 The Language of Wider Communication (aka Standard  
 English)  
 Code Languages  
 Computer Language  
 Constructed Languages  
 Dead Languages  
 Endangered Languages  
 Language on the Isle of Skye  
 A New Language in the Old  
 Any Language Family and Its Offspring, e.g., Afro-  
 Asiatic, Indo-European, Iroquoian, Niger-Congo,  
 Sino-Tibetan, Uto-Aztec  
 The State of the Language at the Time of the American  
 Revolution  
 Programming Computers to Understand Human  
 Language  
 Current Slang  
 Slang of Past Generations  
 Varieties (or Dialects) of a Particular Language

### **Medical Subjects**

Acupuncture  
 Addiction and Recovery  
 AIDS  
 Alchemy  
 Allergies  
 Alzheimer’s  
 The First Anesthetic  
 Angioplasty  
 Anthrax Contamination  
 Arthroscopic Surgery  
 The Artificial Heart  
 Aspirin  
 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)  
 Autism  
 Cause of the Black Death  
 Botox Treatments  
 Cancer Treatments  
 Carpel Tunnel Syndrome  
 Cloning Technology

The Common Cold—Comforts and Cures  
 Computer Technology to Assist People with Disabilities  
 Contamination  
 Crohn’s Disease  
 Danger Symptoms of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Depression and Its Treatment  
 Dermatology  
 Down Syndrome  
 Eating Disorders  
 E. Coli Infections  
 Epstein-Barr Virus  
 Euthanasia  
 Extraterrestrial Biology  
 Fertility Drugs and Multiple Births  
 General Health  
 Genetic Research  
 Grafting as a Medical Technique  
 Heart Disease(s)  
 Successful Heart Transplanting  
 Hemophilia  
 The Unknown in Human Behavior  
 Hypnotism  
 Hypochondria  
 Inoculation  
 Legionnaire’s Disease  
 Liposuction  
 Mad Cow Disease  
 Magnetic Resonance Imaging  
 Mental Illness  
 Obesity in Americans  
 Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder  
 Osteoporosis  
 Out-of-Body Experiences  
 Prosthetics  
 Pulsed Electro-Magnetic Technology  
 Quack Medicine  
 Revascularization  
 Reynaud’s Condition  
 Schizophrenia  
 Self-Injury (Cutting)  
 Sickle Cell Anemia  
 Sleep Disorders  
 Sleepwalking  
 Sports Injuries  
 Trepanning  
 Ultrasound Imaging  
 Water Therapy  
 West Nile Virus  
 X-Ray Dangers



## **Inventions, Devices, Operations**

Abacus  
 Agricultural Machinery  
 Air Bags  
 Air Conditioning  
 Air Vessels Before the Plane  
 The First Automobile  
 The First Bathysphere  
 Automobile Brakes  
 Computer Technology  
 The Cosmotron  
 Electric Car  
 The Elevator  
 Flat-Screen Technology  
 The Flywheel  
 The Gutenberg Press  
 Sikorsky's Helicopter  
 The *Hindenburg* Airship  
 Laser Technology  
 Motion Detectors  
 Paper Shredders  
 The Pinhole Camera  
 Pneumatic Tools  
 Refrigerators  
 Rocket Launching  
 Seat Belts  
 Self-Stick Notes  
 Solar Power  
 Sound Systems  
 Submarines  
 Synthesizers  
 Synthetic Dyes  
 The Toilet  
 The Ultimate Weapon  
 Wind Power  
 Use of X-Rays in the Oil Industry

## **Natural Phenomena**

Canyons  
 The Dead Sea  
 Earthquakes  
 Eclipses  
 The Results of Glaciation  
 Global Warming (Natural or Unnatural)  
 Gravity: What It Is, How It Works  
 The Gulf Stream  
 Holes in Space  
 Eye of the Hurricane  
 Icebergs

Magnetism  
 Migration  
 Moon Mysteries  
 El Niño  
 Outerspace Life  
 Plate Tectonics  
 Sand Dunes  
 Saturn  
 Seasons  
 The Truth about Snowflakes  
 Sunspots  
 Waterfalls  
 Winds  
 Zephyr

## **Written Media, Special Books**

Early Egyptian Almanacs  
 Astrology Books  
 Audiobooks  
 Publishing: The Creation of Bestsellers  
 Book Design  
 Electronic Books  
 The First Book  
 The Change of the Calendar to Its Present Form  
 The Egyptian Calendar  
 The Roman Calendar  
 Consumer Complaints through Newspaper Columns  
 The Dead Sea Scrolls  
 A particular epic  
 Hornbook  
 Illuminated Manuscripts  
 Library of Congress  
 Poor Richard's Almanack  
 Pulitzer Prizes: Origin and Definition  
 Sacred Texts of (a particular culture)  
 Translation(s) of the New Testament

## **Education**

Adjunct Faculty and Gender  
 Teaching in the Alaskan Wilderness  
 Bilingual Education Programs  
 Boarding Schools  
 Chautauqua and Early Education  
 Cherokee Education  
 Culinary Institutes  
 Curriculum Content Decisions  
 John Dewey's Theories of Education  
 Distance Learning

The Entertainer as Educator: Medieval Minstrels, Scops, and Troubadours  
 Paolo Freire and the Cultures of Silence  
 The GED (General Educational Development) Diploma as an Option  
 Home Schooling  
 Educational Institutions in Ancient Cultures  
 Correctional Systems for Juvenile Offenders  
 Knighthood Training  
 Learning as Critical Thinking  
 Learning as Transmitted Wisdom in Traditional Cultures  
 Literacy and Its Many Interpretations  
 Medieval Monks and Education  
 The Montessori Method  
 Multicultural Education  
 John Henry Cardinal Newman's Opinion about the Purpose of the University  
 The One-Room Schoolhouse  
 Education through the Oral Tradition in a Particular Culture  
 Oxford or Cambridge—The College System  
 Plato's School  
 Public School Funding  
 Theories on the Purpose of Education  
 Segregation: Reappearing in U.S. Schools?  
 High-Stakes Standardized Testing  
 Substitute Teachers—Expectations and Performance  
 Teacher Certification Requirements  
 Teaching for the Twenty-First Century  
 Textbook Selection Processes  
 The Founding of the First American University  
 Recruiting of University Athletes  
 Urban Education—a New Emphasis  
 The Founding of West Point

### **Professions, Occupations, Employment**

Air Traffic Control  
 "Big Blue"—the IBM Image  
 The Boat People of Asia  
 Book Editor  
 Canadian Fishers  
 The Canadian Mounted Police  
 Carpet Weavers in India  
 Chinese Workers as Producers of U.S. Consumer Goods  
 Chiropractic Care  
 Civilian Conservation Corps  
 Corporate Espionage  
 Equal Opportunity Employment  
 Firefighting  
 The Glass Ceiling

Hiring Practices and the Americans with Disabilities Act  
 Hmong Settlement in the Upper Midwest  
 The Industrial and Professional Role of Women during World War II  
 Internet-Related Jobs  
 Labor Unions  
 "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit"—a Changing Image  
 Market Week in \_\_\_\_\_  
 Midwives  
 Mining in Chile  
 The Operation of an Ocean Liner  
 Peonage  
 Pirates  
 Quacks  
 Right-to-Work Laws  
 School Board Member  
 School Counselor  
 School Social Worker  
 Seafolk of the Sub-Arctic  
 American Seaman/Seawoman Occupations  
 Siberian Occupations  
 Silk Industry in China  
 Snake-Oil Salespeople  
 The State with the Best Unemployment Benefits  
 The U.S. Mint System  
 Unemployment in History  
 The WPA

### **Human-Made Constructions and Designs**

Any abandoned city (e.g., Bagan, Fatehpur Sikri, Machu Picchu, Mesa Verde, Pompeii, Tiahuanaco, Vijayanagar)—reasons for the abandonment  
 The Ajanta Cave Temples  
 The Alcan Highway  
 The Building of the Alhambra  
 Teatro Amazonas  
 The First American East-West Trains  
 Angkor Vat  
 Pressed-Metal Ornamentation in Architecture  
 The Atlantic Cable  
 The Great Aztec Temple  
 The Tower of Babel  
 The Battle Helmet in \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Bayeaux Tapestry  
 Bell Founding  
 The Borobudur Temple  
 Bridge Building  
 Testing Bridge Strengths

Canal Building  
 Notre Dame Cathedral  
 Cathedrals of Sir Christopher Wren  
 Covered Wagon  
 The Crystal Palace of Queen Victoria  
 Deep Sea Submersible Vehicles  
 Construction of the Eiffel Tower  
 Brunelleschi and Florence's Duomo  
 Egyptian Obelisks (e.g., Cleopatra's Needle)  
 Elgin Marbles  
 The Empire State Building  
 Erie Canal  
 Buckminster Fuller's Geodesic Dome  
 The Gold Museum of Bogotá  
 The Golden Gate  
 The Great Hedge of India  
 The Great Wall of China  
 The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao  
 The Hanging Gardens of Babylon  
 Hollywood Bowl  
 Making of Hoover Dam  
 Houston Ship Channel  
 The International Space Station  
 The Interstate Highway System  
 The Leaning Tower of Pisa  
 Mount Rushmore  
 New Mexico Fort of the 19th Century  
 The Orient Express  
 The Panama Canal Locks  
 The Parthenon  
 The Pentagon  
 The Petronas Towers  
 Philae  
 The Original Puppets  
 Pyramid Construction  
 Early Railroad Building  
 Jungle Railroads: Costa Rica or Panama  
 The Richest Street in the World  
 Robots and the History of Robotics  
 Showboats  
 The Sphinx  
 The Statue of Liberty  
 Stonehenge  
 Stradivarius Violins  
 The Taj Mahal  
 Tikal Pyramids: How They Are Uncovered  
 Trails at the Grand Canyon  
 The Trans-Canada Railroad  
 The London Underground

A Viking Boat  
 The Washington Monument  
 The Construction (or Reconstruction) of Westminster Abbey  
 The World Trade Center Towers  
 World's Fair in Chicago, 1893  
 The Dam of the Zuider Zee

### **Sports, Entertainments, Recognitions**

The First Automobile Race  
 Women's Baseball  
 Boogie Woogie  
 Break Dancing  
 The Circus  
 Classical Dance from a Particular Culture  
 English Channel Swims  
 ESPN  
 Figure Skating  
 The Baseball Hall of Fame: Its Operation  
 Hockey  
 Ice Skating—Venue for Grace and Fury  
 The Kentucky Derby  
 Kung Fu  
 The Olympic Games  
 Rap Music  
 Taekwondo  
 Tai Chi  
 Teenage Dancing  
 The Triple Crown  
 Women Breaking the Barriers into the Sports World  
 The X Games  
 Yacht Racing

### **Sciences, Studies, Skills, Inquiries, Observations of the Universe**

Acoustics  
 Aerial Photography  
 Determining the Age of the Earth  
 Anthropology: One Way of Studying the History of Humanity  
 Timing the Ages of Humanity by Archaeology  
 Archimedes' Principle  
 Artificial Intelligence  
 The Use of Astronomy to Measure Time  
 Black Holes and Beyond  
 Carbon Dating  
 Chaos Theory  
 Research in Egyptology  
 Extrasensory Perception

Fingerprinting  
 Futuristics  
 Tracing Genealogy  
 Stephen Hawking's History of Time  
 Hieroglyphics  
 Hymnology  
 Number Theory and Ramanujan  
 Oceanography  
 Theories of the Origin of the Universe  
 Paleontology  
 Psychology  
 Einstein's Relativity Theory  
 Telepathy  
 Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle  
 Worship of the Heavens  
 Yoga

### **Flora and Derivatives**

Banyan Tree  
 The Big Thicket of Texas  
 The Black Forest  
 Cocoa  
 Cotton History  
 Cranberries  
 Dandelions  
 Deforestation  
 Ethanol  
 Giant Ragweed  
 Gingko  
 Ginseng  
 Kudzu  
 Marijuana  
 Poppies  
 Preserving the Rain Forests  
 Protection of Crops without Insecticides  
 Reforestation  
 Soybean Oil as a Processed Food Ingredient

### **Media and Media Events**

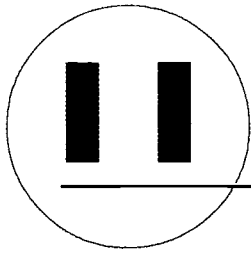
The Abbey Theatre of Dublin  
 The Academy Awards  
 Early Advertising Slogans That Have Survived  
 The First Advertising  
 The Alternative Press  
 Amateur Filmmaking  
 The Appeal of Radio Shows, Past and Present  
 Beauty Pageants  
 Cannes Film Festival  
 Confessional TV Shows

CNN  
 How the Comics Began  
 Dramatic Film Critiques of War  
 Game Shows  
 The Evolution of Headlines in Newspapers  
 Famous Hoaxes  
*Life* Magazine and Photography  
 Media Conglomerates: Deciding What the News Is  
 Napster  
 Newscasters and Anchorpersons—Their Personalities and Persona  
 The Persian Gulf War and CNN  
 The First Photography  
 Political Conventions as Media Events  
 The History of Public Television  
 Quiz Show Scandals  
 The Origin of Radio Broadcasting in the United States  
 Early Radio Technique  
 Reality TV  
 The O. J. Simpson Trial  
 Subliminal Advertising  
 The Sundance Film Festival  
 Tabloids—Their Content and Their Appeal  
 Great Television Debates  
 The Origin of Television News in the United States  
 How War Can Become a Media Event  
 The Watergate Hearings  
 Orson Welles's Report of an "Invasion," October 30, 1938  
 The Woodstock Festival, 1969  
 Yellow Journalism

### **Miscellaneous**

The Aa River  
 Absorption and Osmosis  
 Adenoids  
 The Complexity of Adoption Procedures  
 The Albany Congress  
 The Alien and Sedition Laws  
 Chronological History of Integration in America  
 How to Become an American Citizen  
 Theories about the Anasazi  
 Annexation of Territory  
 April Fools' Day  
 "Arctic Hysteria"  
 Arlington Cemetery  
 Auctions of Famous Peoples' Belongings  
 Aztec Priests  
 The Case That Ended "Blacklisting" on Television  
 Carpetbaggers

- Cave Paintings of Vallon Pont d'Arc  
 Caviar  
 Chaco Canyon—Record of Lost History?  
 A Cheese Type  
 Chic Europe: Mainly American?  
 Collectibles—Fads and Obsessions and What People Do to Acquire Their Collectibles  
 Is There Consciousness before Birth?  
 Ancient Cosmetics  
 Criminal Reform  
 The Deirdre Legend  
 Can You Spare a Dime?—The Conditions of the Average Citizen during the Depression  
 Divorce among Royal Members  
 The Welsh *Eisteddfod*  
 Emancipation Proclamation  
 The Last Emperor of China  
 The “Eternal” City  
 The Belief in the “Evil Eye”  
 Expeditions  
 The Fair Deal  
 Farm Aid  
 History of Fasting  
 Fata Morgana  
 Ancient Financial Credit  
 The First Labor Union  
 Get-Rich Quick Schemes  
 Great Lakes  
 Hairstyles Past and Present—Different Aesthetics  
 Hairstyles Past and Present—Different Cultural Interpretations  
 Hairstyles Past and Present—What Kinds of Statements They Make  
 The Origin of Halloween  
 Heraldry  
 The Holy City of Banaras  
 The Holy City of Mecca  
 The Holy City of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Holy Roman Empire  
 House of Commons, House of Lords  
 The Huguenots  
 The Ice Age  
 The Industrial Revolution  
 Inheritance Taxes  
 The Iron Age  
 The Italian Renaissance  
 Juvenile Court  
 The Real King of Siam (as opposed to the one in *Anna and the King of Siam*)  
 Law Enforcement  
 A Legal System in Elizabethan Times for Protecting the Writer  
 Marriage-Ceremony Traditions  
 May Day  
 The “Miss Saigon” Controversy  
 The New Copyright Laws  
 The New Deal  
 Nuremberg Trials  
 The Historical Limits of America’s Open Door Policy  
 Care of Orphaned Children  
 What We Know about Ourselves  
 What We Don’t See in Ourselves until Others Tell Us  
 Paintings as History  
 The Canadian Parliament  
 The Parliament of India  
 Popular Songs during the Civil War  
 Culture during the Restoration Period  
 Riverboat Journeys  
 How Do/Did Members of the Royalty View Commoners?  
 Runaways  
 Salem Witchcraft Trials  
 Seven: The Magic Number of the Ancients  
 Small States—Israel, Athens, Florence, Elizabethan England—as Great Influences  
 Snake Worship  
 The Spanish Inquisition  
 The State Lottery  
 The Stonewall Riots  
 U.S. Aid to Other Countries  
 Voodoo in Haiti  
 Voting Rights of Blacks in the Post–Civil War South  
 Women’s Suffrage Fights in Great Britain  
 World Trade  
 Yugoslavia during and after the Reign of Slobodan Milosevic  
 The Ancient Yule  
 The Zambezi River  
 Zanzibar—Best-Kept Tourist Secret  
 An Aspect of Zuni Culture



# CREATIVE WRITING

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## What Creative Writing Is

Creative writing is essentially imaginative. It most often takes the form of drama, fiction, or poetry (including songs). But given that imaginative reach, along with the language tools and techniques needed to realize it, keep in mind that any form of writing discussed in this book can become creative. In fact, a piece of simple exposition or an essay on cause and effect may be greatly enriched by creative examples, analogies, or brief accounts of personal experience that bring the topic to life.

For example, in *My Family and Other Animals* (Viking Press, 1956), Gerald Durrell, the British naturalist and zoologist, writes about his childhood years on the Greek island of Corfu, recreating not only the vibrant natural life of the island, but also the eccentricities of his family, including his famous novelist brother Lawrence Durrell. Appealing to readers of all ages, this memoir captures the world as seen through a young boy's eyes—his wide-eyed delight in nature, his hilarious observations of his eccentric family, and his instinctive love of the local culture. Although not a work of fiction, drama, or poetry, the book lays claim to all these modes, serving as a felicitous example of creative writing.

In this chapter, however, the focus is on the imaginative. One might call this type of writing *full-blooded*—nourished, as it must be, with an abundance of heart.

## How to Write Creatively

In creative writing, following a format can cramp a writer's style. At bottom, there is no way one can tell another person *how* to write creatively. Probably no teacher can do much more than inspire students with high-quality rhetorical tools, an open atmosphere, a love of language, and a sense of possibil-

ity, then let the newborn beast have its head and hope for the best.

The natural element of creative writing is freedom. This is the place to let go, to let the student *be*. Of course that does not mean that the teacher abandons any new writer to a miasma of self-indulgence. Rather, the student should be guided and encouraged through the certain failures, through try after try and endless errors and those very few quiet triumphs, until he or she begins to realize that dreams can indeed come alive, take shape and grow, stand full and real as any creature of bone, flesh, blood.

Here again is where we call up every writing mode and device we can think of—not only the modes touched upon in this book, but other more literary devices as well. We bring to bear the full force of metaphor, alliteration, repetition, rhyme, rhythm, meter, and so on—with the understanding that nothing is sacred if it holds the student back from creative expression. It can be instructive and fun simply to experiment with such devices. But in the end they will probably be used less for their own sake than because they are evoked, called up out of the material itself, whatever it may be.

So it is indeed clear that this is not the time to worry too much about sentence fragments, erratic punctuation, or many of the other grammatical elements that must necessarily concern us in more formal types of composition. There is at least one handy rule-of-thumb for creative writing: If it works, use it.

## Locating Subjects for Creative Writing

The subjects listed in this section do not pretend to be anything more than suggestions, ideas for approaching various forms of creative writing. They could inspire almost anything—a play, a story, a poem or song, a character sketch, a writing experi-

ment. It hardly matters. More important than the image or idea is the imagination it fires.

It is in many ways apparent from the above that any section in this book may be used to fire that creative imagination. Special attention might well be paid, though, to the chapters on narrative and description. Some narrative element is often important,

even essential, in creative writing. Crafting more or less footloose material to the demands of a narrative line, making it fit, making it belong, can lift a common piece of descriptive or expository writing towards something larger, give it form, harmony—turn it, that is to say, towards art.

**Brainstorming Fictional Themes**

saved by the bell  
 the computer and me  
 memories in smoke  
 one more, too many  
 due unto others  
 eating around a campfire  
 homeless people eating around a barrel fire  
 smashing taboos  
 barbarians at the gates  
 deprivation of the mind  
 knowing how to keep company away from the door  
 living on borrowed time  
 moving in reverse into the future  
 vowing a new fight  
 toughest break  
 expectations fulfilled/unfulfilled  
 a decent interval  
 mislaid values  
 tar-and-feathering  
 losing battle(s)  
 still not enough  
 daring/not daring to do  
 second chance  
 on solid ground  
 duplication(s)  
 at the corner store  
 something due  
 expecting the unexpected  
 almost famous  
 unexpected celebrity  
 a short, sharp shock  
 marking the spot  
 a tinkling cymbal  
 the forgotten year/hour/day  
 the day everything changed  
 prisoner at home  
 any reasonable offer  
 suspension/suspense  
 new world  
 a goodbye to \_\_\_\_\_  
 final questions of commencement  
 seizing the day  
 open to suggestions  
 trying to hold on  
 not able to face it  
 carrying on  
 impetuosity  
 repeating history

“Oh, the places you’ll go!” (Dr. Seuss)  
 in the interim  
 hocus pocus  
 head over heels  
 bankruptcy  
 life in TV commercials  
 frustration(s) of the final hour  
 being tempted to do something one doesn’t want to do  
 expression of love  
 dehumanization of sex  
 searching for Atlantis  
 the kindness of strangers  
 holocaust  
 promise, no delivery  
 born every minute  
 repository of records found 1,000 years from now  
 never made public until now  
 the perfect arrangement  
 best in the West  
 acquiring a new name  
 an old (or ancient) mystery solved  
 unrecognized, unrewarded  
 short reflection(s), long ideas  
 private hall of fame of local characters  
 “Et tu, Brute?”  
 surprising discoveries about one’s ancestry  
 genetic destiny  
 the death or decline of \_\_\_\_\_  
 walking away from the impossible  
 out o’ sight  
 a historian of the \_\_\_\_\_ building  
 the last challenge  
 admitting the truth at last  
 seeing the light  
 my own crystal ball  
 third chance  
 three wishes  
 witness to \_\_\_\_\_  
 making history  
 monkey business  
 tourist trap  
 walking tall/walking short  
 slinking away  
 crawling back  
 individualism as defined in the future  
 being told to leave home  
 whitewashing  
 backfire of ploy  
 lights, camera, action  
 beyond the limits



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the dignity of independence  
recognition at last  
switching over  
challenge of the spirit  
unauthorized biography  
oversympathetic, considering what happened  
the real beginnings of humanity  
not by choice  
the white(d) sepulcher  
early responsibilities  
bitter truth(s)  
just between friends  
a house divided  
mission/vision accomplished  
brief encounter(s)  
a voice still heard  
controlling destiny  
cabbages and kings  
memoirs  
easy way out  
the price of glory  
best rival, best friend  
last refuge  
too awed to do anything about it  
long-distance dating  
giving away secrets  
keeping secrets  
those forgotten by time  
afraid to let go/afraid not to let go  
still at large  
born exile  
all shook up  
darkness, my old friend  
behind the wheel/behind the eight ball  
shadow-boxing  
my doppelganger  
armed and dangerous  
history as it happens  
heaven-sent  
no closed doors  
unwanted  
curiosity about \_\_\_\_\_  
the wrong person  
secret life/double life/secret lives  
war between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
rescue squad  
\_\_\_\_\_’s mad idea  
my Oedipus complex  
a report from \_\_\_\_\_  
the last hurrah

the last fling  
looking backward and forward  
the secret word  
discovery of the first wheel  
discovery of fire  
discovery of speech  
stay of execution  
forgone but not forgotten  
before I was five  
due to circumstances beyond our control  
conversation about a movie, a book, a show on television  
going forward  
disowned, disinherited  
disappearing ships, planes, persons  
when I was old  
surrendering  
on a quest  
hunkering down  
turning the tables  
bystander  
returning  
king of the hill  
short but glorious career  
hair on end  
but waking up  
sour grapes  
lifeline  
the flesh and the spirit  
long journey, bad roads  
marked man/woman  
unsigned  
riders to the sea  
witch watch  
parents and children  
seeking a long-lost relative  
first sighting  
tracking someone, as in a spy movie  
the three strangers  
if I were not alive  
a thousand miles of mountain road, a thousand miles of  
desert sand  
“Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair.” (Shelley)  
conversation between clerks in a department store  
going backward  
taking the plunge  
doing what is expected of you, not doing what is  
expected of you  
covering an escape  
letting off steam  
the beginning of consciousness

the learning tree  
 captive of time  
 bull ring  
 the search for a missing letter, notebook, diary, etc.  
 for auld lang syne  
 the wrong connection  
 a moment's surrender  
 cross-conversation confusing the main point  
 family reunion requiring introductions  
 Melchior's telling about following the star  
 words, thoughts, and feelings of the first people on earth  
 ancient astronauts  
 the road to \_\_\_\_\_  
 morally right, legally wrong  
 night in a \_\_\_\_\_  
 not even for money  
 outlaw with a cause  
 rebel without a clue  
 conversation in a barber shop or a beauty shop  
 for whom the bell gongs  
 one day late  
 a tortoise that lost the race  
 desire or will power that goes beyond death  
 the incredible journey  
 the ringing phone  
 overnight  
 returning home after many generations away  
 first theme  
 a rock speaking of its history  
 a homeless person insulted by someone for his or her  
 dress, manner, or mere presence  
 prehistoric hunt  
 consequence of someone's not reading a letter in time  
 a dream of someone who helps carry the crucifixion  
 crosses up a hill only to find that he is among those  
 to be crucified  
 Socratic dialogue in a fictional piece  
 appointment/date/liason  
 account by a prisoner of the last day in a concentration  
 camp, after the Germans had fled  
 conditions of an island prison  
 having a party of one  
 paradise lost/regained  
 a criminal sentenced to be someone's butler  
 a friendly relationship between a millionaire and his/her  
 chauffeur  
 gold fever  
 invisible people  
 trouble between the weatherperson and the movie critic  
 on the TV news  
 money in the mattress

sibling against sibling  
 a "now" story  
 coming back to life  
 coming back as another person or thing  
 the crazy mirror (title of a children's book)  
 getting through somehow  
 something to win over  
 birds of a feather  
 a fascination for the abominable  
 the switch/the sting  
 a child's trip unaccompanied by adults  
 a thousand years, a thousand days  
 falling in love against one's will  
 awake in the dark  
 prolonged attack(s)  
 without benefit of clergy  
 the seasons of \_\_\_\_\_  
 deadlines  
 leave cancelled  
 getting out after a long time  
 together again  
 going home  
 the first meeting in the Garden of Eden  
 asking the unaskable  
 parent talking to child  
 rematch  
 once upon a time  
 guests of the \_\_\_\_\_  
 things that set off memories  
 the world according to \_\_\_\_\_  
 someone at the door  
 as up they grew  
 long, dark night  
 an experience remembered more often than any other  
 one  
 any way the wind blows  
 rites of passage—birth, first love, maturity, death  
 carnival of souls  
 a reprieve after many years of being wronged  
 surprise ending  
 rewriting a narrative poem as narrative prose  
 a tent meeting  
 a medicine show  
 facing a hard race  
 from the files  
 if I should die before I wake . . .  
 a kind of glory  
 futureworld  
 instant fame  
 a thankless child, as in Shakespeare's *King Lear*

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snowstorm  
dialogue including a portrait of someone who makes a threat to leave someone else  
making the first phone call  
special cruise  
eternity versus the moment  
out of time  
omen  
preaching fire and brimstone  
forbidden alliance  
the source of a proverb  
the Mexican legend of “La Llorona”  
the relationship between good fortune and ignorance  
a talk with someone who has lived the history  
cameo  
the reader over your shoulder  
the star in a grain of dust  
scenes from next (week’s/month’s/year’s) (book/movie/TV show)  
diving for treasure, real or metaphorical  
a peculiar case  
maze(s)  
coming in, going out  
coming out  
the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle  
someone in a story absorbed by a mirror, a book, or a piece of music  
a single subject treated in various ways and for different purposes  
same story, different points of view  
a day, a dog, an argument, and a reunion  
writing a story from the theme of a poem  
close to, but not a part of, nature  
out of season  
short stay in \_\_\_\_\_  
the mind’s eye  
the mind’s I  
inside the universe of a snowflake  
behind the sealed (tomb, door, passage)  
#309  
ghost story  
a fable/parable for our time  
a touch of class  
rooms without floors  
in touch with the sublime  
hunting with a camera instead of a rifle  
refusing to leave the solitary places  
something seen in early England by one of Caesar’s legions  
the Ouija board  
the Will of the Wind  
out past curfew  
costly encounter  
police officer taking a report from a witness and from the accused  
never giving up  
getting to know the world by walking  
making a deal  
link with eternity  
wandering all our ways (phrase from Sir Walter Raleigh)  
just an act, not the real thing  
a proverb refuted  
unraveling lies  
foundling at the doorstep  
legend of the Blarney Stone  
no room at the inn  
a feeling of place  
the pattern in the mosaic  
friendship between human and animal  
looking at what \_\_\_\_\_ has done/is doing  
something seen on the road  
standing on the head  
interest in the news  
local witches  
born into the same life again  
misunderstanding causing humorous results in a foreign country  
first day of school  
first day at a new school  
last day of school  
the hour that stretches  
forgiveness  
breaking away  
setting forth  
coming back  
“How could you?!”  
three’s a crowd  
any day now  
keepin’ on keepin’ on  
deer in the headlights  
finding strength  
reason to believe  
a hard-earned day  
with or without you  
the great divide  
bridging the gap  
only connecting  
a conversation that changed everything  
if I’d lived in the \_\_\_\_\_ century  
if I lived in \_\_\_\_\_ (another country)  
atonement

losing my religion  
 overheard  
 drive on  
 ain't no stoppin'  
 same as it ever was  
 new day dawning  
 when the going gets tough  
 meeting the day  
 overcome by events  
 blind spot  
 here and now  
 undelivered letter  
 busted!  
 wrongly accused  
 "Guilty, Your Honor"  
 keeping up appearances  
 telling it like it is  
 in the nick of time  
 outside looking in  
 inside looking out  
 reaching out  
 reaching in  
 story in real-time  
 any objections?  
 honest I do  
 beast of burden  
 blood, sweat, and tears  
 like a butterfly  
 coming to blows  
 cleaning up the mess  
 at last  
 behind bars  
 working it out  
 walking the walk  
 peace is every step  
 keepin' the faith  
 ships passing in the night  
 close encounters  
 on the brink  
 The End Zone is Near!  
 The End Times Are Near!  
 Step right over here, folks!  
 Do Not Disturb  
 It started with . . .  
 The door swung open . . . .  
 Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow  
 It Happened One Night  
 "The Road Not Taken" (Robert Frost)  
 The Way It Should Have Been  
 A Long Way from Home

"Here Lies the World: RIP"  
 out-of-body experience  
 "heaven lies about us" (William Wordsworth)  
 some enchanted evening  
 leaving "Footprints in the sands of time" (Longfellow)  
 Time Stands Still  
 Five Ways to Simplify Your Life  
 meeting on the Net  
 trucking on  
 the good soldier  
 rock on  
 Stepping into the Time Machine  
 I was there when \_\_\_\_\_ happened and this is what  
 I saw (e.g., at the Great Chicago Fire, the Great  
 Plague in London, the Allied landing in Normandy).  
 When I was born as \_\_\_\_\_ . . .  
 our eyes met across a crowded room  
 if only . . . .  
 in the shadow of \_\_\_\_\_  
 waiting in vain  
 riding on the subway  
 a funny thing happened  
 "Cast your bread upon the waters." (Bible)  
 a "magnificent obsession"

### **Questions, Titles, Assignments, and Brainstormers for the Short Story, Novel, Novella, and Fiction Sketch**

Write as if you were someone else, e.g., someone who has had an experience in a prisoner-of-war camp.

Such love, so well-expressed, is rather unusual in these times.

\_\_\_\_\_ is paradise enough.

Fictionalize an event as seen by different eyes' views, for example, by a detective, a small child, a judge, a newspaper reporter.

Begin a story with the picture of a family walking along the dusty road during the Depression. The mother and father have a pole which they are carrying mounted on their shoulders; on the pole their clothes and the clothes of their four children are drying in the sun. Take the story wherever it goes.

How useful is a hunch?

The more problems you have, the more alive you are, it has been said.

Imagine where humanity can go after our current evolution.

No one escapes feeling guilty about something.

Space explorers may not find the earth inhabited on their return.

What would a space visitor to the earth most want to talk about? What would we most want to ask him/her/it?

The journey is more important than the destination.

"It is better to remain silent and appear dumb than to speak and remove all doubt."—popular proverb

"I do not believe in using women in combat, because females are too fierce."—Margaret Mead

"An event has happened, upon which it is difficult to speak, and impossible to be silent."—Edmund Burke

What will it be like if/when you graduate/join the Peace Corps/enlist in the military/get married/make a million dollars?

What would you have done if you had been a young adult during World War II?

"O holy simplicity!" said John Huss the martyr while at the stake.

"We are always the same age inside."—Gertrude Stein

"You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you."—Mary Tyler Moore

"War is the unfolding of miscalculations."—Barbara Tuchman

What will be found in the time capsule for the year 2788?

How would you live if you had great personal wealth?

What did you miss out on when you were young?

"When I am an old woman I shall wear purple" says writer Jenny Joseph. What will you do?

"Phenomenal Woman, / That's me" (Maya Angelou). Write about yourself as a phenomenal person.

Is all well that ends well?

She was so confused she didn't know if she was going to bed or getting up.

Seeing \_\_\_\_\_ again brought back the memory of \_\_\_\_\_.

Whatever happened to \_\_\_\_\_?

Write about someone who has developed a self-image that clashes with his or her hometown.

"Hometown boy [or girl] makes good." Write about a celebrity returning home.

Write a story about the Clementine of the song.

Write a narrative of someone happy with natural learning rather than formal learning.

Write a fictional narrative about a young person having a first experience of doubt.

Write a fictional account of a young person covering up what he or she really feels.

Write about a fearful moment, such as a close call or a brush with death.

Write a tall story intended to sound convincing.

Show fictionally how a common danger brings people together.

"Where the arrow falls, bury me."—Robin Hood

"You can't rob me," said the grocer to the young man

with the gun held shakily in his hand. "Your buddy there with you robbed me two hours ago."

Waving at the train was one of the delights of my childhood.

Trace the history of someone found alone and injured at the side of the road.

The hotel Maid squinted against the coarse daylight, and, shading her eyes with a white hand spotted with huge, burnt-brown freckles, said, "Sorry, no strangers allowed here."

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." (Charles Dickens)

"Call me Ishmael" (Herman Melville). Choose any mythic figure and write creatively about that person.

Falling asleep for five years and waking up to find \_\_\_\_\_.

I (would, would not) like to look into the future.

Dip into a dictionary of folklore and write a story suggested by one of the motifs you find there.

Many things might happen between now and then.

Write a fictional narrative developed by dialogue that reveals cause and effect.

"My life's an open book. Time and again I have had things happen to me that belong in the pages of a best-selling novel. I will tell you about one of these earth-shaking incidents." (The writer may want to entitle this story or novel with the title of a famous book or movie. The possibilities of writing with comic irony—that is, saying humorously precisely the opposite of what is meant—should be explored.)

Not being there—that was the story of my life at the moment.

"What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?" (Langston Hughes). Write a story of a dream deferred.

Write a progression, outline, or frame for a long narrative.

Where would you like to explore?

Find an appropriate news story in a newspaper or magazine and rewrite it as a first-person narrative.

Take the title of a song and use it as the title of a story having the same theme. Examples: "All Apologies," "Spirits in the Material World," "My Baby Just Cares for Me," "Delia's Gone," "Harvest Moon," "Man on the Corner," "Me and Bobby McGee," "Yesterday," "When I'm Sixty-Four," "Starry, Starry Night," "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

The man at the table in the corner began to answer his own question.

Every day is (opening day/the first day/the last day).

He hesitated, then said, "No sir."

Write a story in which the sequence of events is critically important. Possible subjects: a student demonstration, a certain process in which you participated, or an important cultural or historical event.

The truest kind of courage comes from defeating a mountainous fear.

I find happiness in the simplest things.  
 Put together with other writers—each one taking a certain part—a novel on a certain historical incident.  
 “I want what I want when I want it.”—Henry Blossom  
 There I was, right in the middle of \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Then I got to thinking, and I decided that maybe he was right after all.  
 There wasn’t a thing I could do about it . . .  
 No way was I going to let this happen . . .  
 Then, in my peripheral vision, I saw it, and things would never be the same again.  
 It was too late—you can’t unfire a gun.  
 Prom night wasn’t the best or worst night of my life. But it gave me this story that I will never stop telling . . .  
 It was the first time I’d talked to my father that way in months, maybe longer.  
 I would have told my mother, but I thought she would never understand. Now I see it a little differently.  
 I guess fences don’t always make good neighbors, after all.  
 I always knew there was something about her.  
 I never would have guessed he would do something like that.  
 An urgent knock startled me from my newspaper. When I opened the door, I could hardly believe my eyes.  
 You wouldn’t have known it from looking at us, or listening to us, but we were brothers, and that meant I had to do something to help.  
 I could feel it in the air that night.  
 At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do.  
 My advice to you: Never win the lottery.  
 I had never been outside my own country. I was scared, but I told myself I’d meet the challenge. I turned to face my hosts . . .  
 Each decision had been logical, justified. And yet the whole thing had ended in disaster. Why?  
 There’s no single day on which I “grew up.” But that Saturday was a definite step in the process.  
 It’s never too late.  
 I was standing on a street corner in Budapest; I didn’t know the language and I’d just lost my Hungarian-English dictionary.  
 “The rebels are attacking,” someone shouted.  
 “I could have sworn the gas station was here.”

### **Human Beings and Types for Creative Writing Subjects**

fictional self-portrait  
 a born eccentric  
 someone quaint  
 the class clown  
 narrative of Thomas Jefferson’s trying to decide on the wording of the Declaration of Independence

caricature of a character out of a famous movie or book  
 interview with the president (when he/she is ten years old)  
 narrative about someone who garners automatic respect from individuals and groups  
 the hunter  
 Coleridge’s Kubla Khan, the person (not the poem)  
 tomorrow’s (hero/friend/enemy/stranger)  
 duel between Hamilton and Burr  
 stranger in a strange land  
 show-off  
 merchant  
 out-of-towner  
 God in the process of Creation—God as living character, perhaps an artist, who needs to create for fulfillment  
 someone who knows only penitentiary life  
 “I regained my freedom with a sigh” (Byron). Write about someone adjusting to life outside prison.  
 someone who is lucky, told about so as to suggest that more than luck is involved  
 someone who unknowingly reveals oneself while telling someone else’s story  
 someone brought to life by way of a secret diary  
 a character from an ad  
 a remarkable person  
 a modern-day Icarus  
 the death of Socrates  
 a person feeling compelled to tell his or her story  
 a human being’s first meeting with another human being  
 my roots  
 buccaneer  
 shadow-seeker(s)  
 practical joker  
 Lord Randall, the figure in the ballad  
 an animal-like person  
 a person-like animal  
 a novelistic character transplanted from the novel to a story by you  
 someone, real or imaginary, that the world ought to know about  
 someone who becomes associated both in name and behavior with what he/she does  
 a character from literature placed in an unc customary context: Humpty Dumpty as a decathlon hero, for example  
 the widow(er) of \_\_\_\_\_  
 the leader of the expedition  
 your life as a movie (perhaps with you watching it)  
 keeper(s) of the flame  
 martyr

dual role/multiple masks  
 a mother or father, presented as a character in a story  
 a legacy from \_\_\_\_\_  
 someone of your invention who is involved in public life, whether in politics, entertainment, military, sports, or teaching—told about in a long comic history beginning, “The truth about \_\_\_\_\_ has yet to be told.”  
 characters having dialogue drawn from their separate books  
 a well-known person, in a story having nothing to do with what he or she is famous for  
 your best friend  
 the person you like least, in a story sympathetic to him or her  
 your sibling  
 a favorite uncle or aunt  
 your favorite grandparent  
 your most difficult relative  
 a young adult who is dying  
 a young adult who has narrowly averted a tragic death  
 a high school student who has just become a parent  
 a student who abstains from sex before or outside of marriage  
 a curious child  
 a curious grandmother or grandfather  
 a courageous parent  
 a police officer  
 a teacher  
 a social worker in a troubled part of town  
 a student whose family has fallen on hard times  
 a rich boy or girl  
 a student whose family has known nothing but hard times  
 your boyfriend or girlfriend  
 your parent(s)  
 a school principal  
 your family’s plumber  
 how Dave Barry might describe a family gathering

### **Creative Language**

advertising voice of a person not seen  
 a letter from jail, camp, college, the army  
 a prize-winning essay with nothing but clichés  
 hackneyed proverbs rewritten with fresh language and depth  
 pastoral(s)  
 book epigraph or dedication  
 the dozens  
 signifying  
 talking and testifying  
 “leaning and depending”

The Play (on Words) is the Thing  
 winged words  
 singing telegram  
 stand-up comedian  
 TV theme song  
 scene from your life rendered in Shakespearean dialogue  
 scene from your life rendered in rap  
 conversation(s) in the closet  
 famous people arguing with one another from their quotations on a certain issue  
 a parody of a superintendent telling what *curriculum* means  
 spoonerism(s)  
 witty words  
 deliberate gobbledygook or double-talk  
 rap song (or parody of the genre)  
 country song (or parody of the genre)  
 punk rock song (or parody of the genre)  
 operatic aria (or parody of the genre)  
 children’s song (or parody of the genre)  
 note found in a bottle  
 note found in the trash  
 satire on sightings of UFO’s or Bigfoot  
 a letter to a newspaper thanking someone for helping you in your campaign  
 a parody of a scandal sheet  
 an exam spoof  
 infomercial spoof (selling something most people already own)  
 “Think before you hit send”: Story of an E-mail Indiscretion  
 parody of an e-mail exchange between friends with emotions running high  
 the discrepancies between movie subtitles and sound tracks  
 useless words passed off as useful ones  
 writ of “habeas escapus” as if written by fleeing inmate  
 a letter to the editor about being ripped-off  
 speeches each consisting of one long sentence  
 a narrative constructed as a series of images presented in haiku form  
 a narrative in which pseudo-learning shows itself by pseudo-language  
 a parody of self-conscious purple prose  
 a parody imitating the language and mannerisms suggested by popular self-help psychology books  
 a parody using advertising language to sell Zen, pragmatism, Christianity, or another tradition . . .  
 a parody of “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”  
 a pompous speech by a politician, a school superintendent, a head of a fraternal organization, or a business executive

- a report of an incident in various modes: in the style of newspaper journalism, in elaborate diction, in oversimplified expression
- a parody of psychoanalytical language explaining body language
- a parody of language that says nothing, used for writing a book report or book review for a book you have not read
- a story, poem, or song using an invented vocabulary of nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives
- Write a comic-satiric advertisement for someone who sells term papers over the Internet.
- Describe a non-Biblical scene with Biblical language.
- Parody of a product recall letter intended to fulfill the company's legal obligation to notify customers of a dangerous defect without actually worrying them or even letting them understand clearly what you are saying.
- Offer proof of Santa Claus in extremely scientific jargon.
- Write a sketch showing the language of righteous indignation—especially to show how impressive, and therefore effective, such language can be.
- Read a certain notable style of writing and parody it. You might, to begin, want to read James Thurber's parody of Henry James—"The Beast in the Dingle"—and write your own parody of James.
- Choose a common subject for parody and parody some famous lines from various poets.
- Read passages from several authors—e.g., George Orwell, J. D. Salinger, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ernest Hemingway, Emily Dickinson, William Faulkner, or Sandra Cisneros—and imitate them in their methods of moving along in their narrative writing.
- Rework a number of proverbs around a certain theme. The following example is a reworking of one of the most familiar proverbs: "You can send a student to school, but you can't make him or her learn."

## Song and Poetry

- Spoon River epitaph
- Untitled
- a song of myself
- a song of butterflies
- a song using the theme from a folktale or an old religious book
- a translation of a poem into English from a second language you know
- haiku
- a ballad
- An Ode to My Shoestrings
- a ballad of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (John Keats) using personal experience
- a song of everyone
- a song about a song

- a song using the music of an old hymn
- a song about not singing anymore
- a poem about a poem that tells of something you might have thought of yourself
- A New Song
- a song about singing
- a song with new verses consistent with the theme and form of an old ballad
- a poem *not* about love/hate/beauty
- a song of pride in \_\_\_\_\_
- a song to mourn the passing of something
- a commemorative poem
- a song of the open road
- a song about the call of the faraway hills
- a comic song about what's at the end of the rainbow

## Creative Writing for a Children's Audience

- Your version of a story from *The Jungle Book*.
- children and the stars
- Circus at Dawn
- Day of the Rotten Tomatoes
- Runaway!
- Run Away!
- rectangles and circles
- an oversized mole residence for human beings
- There's Nothing Under the Bed After All
- There *Is* Something Under the Bed, and It's Really Cool!
- a trickster story in which the trickster is tricked
- a story or poem about what happens when one enters a fairy tale
- a story that responds to the question, "What do you like stories to be about?"
- The Orange Eggplant
- The Day the Number 3 Went Missing
- The Private Kingdom
- The Enchanted Forest
- A Dog's Devotion
- In the Cloud(s)
- The Woman or Man in the Moon
- A Living Camera
- a view of what happened when the world began
- an experience of *déjà vu*
- a story of a dollar
- an independent excursion
- moving to the city
- moving to the country
- moving to a new country
- a glove as a character



a mischievous turtle  
 a monster's story (titled "Monstory") told by the monster  
 a fantasy in which concrete details are used  
 a story about a hat that has feelings and does not want to be discarded  
 The Big Bad Bully Learns a Lesson  
 Keshia Goes to Kindergarten  
 Nasser's Nightmares  
 Henry's First Haircut  
 a story about a dream house (into which one goes in order to have dreams)  
 a poem that responds to the question, "What do you like poems to be about?"  
 In the Sky  
 a story or poem telling how a certain person got his name/her name  
 a view of what happens when the world ends  
 a story or poem answering the question, "Where were you the year before you were born?"  
 a story or poem affirming there were, and are, unicorns  
 variation on a nursery rhyme  
 a haircut misadventure  
 trouble with pinking shears  
 Saturday cartoon(s)  
 baskets as characters  
 a story about the king of the barnyard  
 a story about a dream into which one can enter at will  
 a story or poem about a comic-strip character  
 a cat is lost, then found  
 A Hairy, Scary Hallowe'en  
 The Unwise Owl  
 a pet's life story in a story or poem  
 a day when the little things made all the difference  
 a day when something big didn't make a difference after all  
 Life of a Tumbleweed  
 A Legend Relived  
 an unconventional letter to Santa Claus  
 fair-minded letter from Santa Claus to a child who has behaved very badly  
 a story or poem putting fairy tale or folktale characters in unfamiliar roles  
 new ending, old story  
 unfinished story to be completed  
 a collaboration in which you and a fellow student (or several) each write a segment of the story  
 The Little Engine That Couldn't  
 The Little Engine Whose Friends Helped Out  
 The Little Engine That Could But Chose Not To  
 The House That Went to Sea

a stowaway on a ship  
 The Dog on the Airplane  
 And then, guess what happened?  
 The mouse peeped out of the cupboard . . .  
 Adapt a children's story from another culture to your context.  
 Take a fairy tale and give it a twist, e.g., the story of Cinder Fella.

### **Other Creative Exercises**

Write spontaneously and without direction on one of these: dog, brick, tree, mountain stream.  
 See how many words you can write—without stopping, without thinking of order, without worrying about a grade—in fifteen minutes.  
 Write a fictional piece or a poem that severely cuts out details but still evokes a purpose.  
 Write a character sketch using understatement or overstatement.  
 Write about the process of writing a short story—the original impression, inspiration, and thought, the talking to the mirror or computer to push you along, and so forth.  
 Live what you write about (but in writing). That is, become the person you write about or re-create; this, as better to understand her/him as a character or a subject.  
 Write a new proverb (one that is suggested by an old one) and accompany it with an explanation of its origin and meaning.  
 For various basic techniques of creative writing, study and imitate one or more of the following: Chinua Achebe, Lord Byron, Miguel de Cervantes, Anton Chekhov, Stephen Crane, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Jonathan Edwards, T. S. Eliot, , Thomas Hardy, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Langston Hughes, Barbara Kingsolver, Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Flannery O'Connor, Edgar Allan Poe, Katherine Anne Porter, William Shakespeare, Salman Rushdie, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Leo Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Eudora Welty, Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf.  
 Write an annoyingly happy stream of consciousness.  
 Write a heartbreaking stream of consciousness.  
 Write an angst-filled stream of consciousness.  
 Write a stream of consciousness that is confident without being boastful.  
 Write a highly dramatic and self-consciously profound discussion of a very ordinary item or event—for example, the existence of facial tissue, the placing of a letter in a mailbox, or a dog scratching its ear.  
 Write an egregiously understated account of a truly dramatic event.  
 Write a profile of the person whom you imagine created this book of topics.

Write a press release announcing a new television program (sitcom, drama, or reality show) based on your daily life.

### **Fun with the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest**

When writing creative fiction, watch out for opening lines that are melodramatic or overblown. A classic example of this is the famous (or infamous) “It was a dark and stormy night.” This line has in fact inspired a fiction contest on the subject—just how dreadful can an

opening line be? See the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest <<http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>>\*, and just for fun, try writing your own preposterous opening line for your turbid novel, effulgent with purple prose. Doing so will help you to reflect critically on your choice of words and on writing creatively.

\* Web sites are likely to change or disappear. If you cannot find the contest at this URL, a name search will help you locate it. Otherwise, hard copy versions may be available through your local library.

### **What Critical Writing Is**

Generally, critical writing sets out to evaluate or to analyze a work of art. This analysis may be attempted in any number of ways, but for our purposes here we will divide critical writing into its two basic types—the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical concerns itself with general notions about the value of art as a whole (see Aristotle’s *Poetics*, to cite one classic example), while the practical evaluates particular works, writers, styles, and so forth, in terms of whatever aesthetic theory the critic may hold.

Critical writing and theories of criticism have been articulated in many different ways by many civilizations. In English studies, literary theory in the last century alone has undergone radical transformations, resulting in a whole spectrum of approaches that range from the textual and structural to those grounded in culture, gender, or political ideology. In fact, the whole notion of what constitutes literature or a text has come into question, so that, as literary critic Terry Eagleton says, “literary theory can handle Bob Dylan just as well as John Milton” (*Literary Theory: An Introduction*).

Teachers are encouraged to suggest different approaches to their students when they analyze a text. As Deborah Appleman puts it, “literary theories can sharpen one’s vision and provide alternative ways of seeing”; indeed, “these multiple ways of seeing have become vital skills in our increasingly diverse classrooms as we explore the differences between and among us, what separates us and what binds us together” (*Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*).

### **How to Write Criticism**

It will be evident from the preceding discussion that critical writing is yet another mode that is complex

because of the many approaches it opens up to the writer. Probably the beginning critic should settle for a simple analysis of the content and form of a given piece of writing and an evaluation of how the form and content work, or fail to work, together to achieve the desired effect. He or she would do well to stick close to the work at hand and to document rigorously from that text any criticisms made. This disciplined approach should eventually make for concrete, vigorously thought out, and fully felt critical writing, and it proves valuable for other types of writing as well.

It might also be wise to let the specific critical approach—or combination of approaches—be dictated in part by the work itself. For an obviously autobiographical novel, e.g., James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a biographical tack might be of some value. On the other hand, Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* would call for a feminist reading. And studying Toni Morrison’s novels would demand a consideration of race and identity.

### **Locating Subjects for Critical Writing**

The topics in this section were listed primarily with literary criticism in mind. However, many of them may be applied to criticism in other disciplines—music, painting, film, architecture, photography, almost anything. Indeed, such works can be viewed as “texts” of their own sort which can be approached through the same kinds of critical lenses (to use Appleman’s metaphor) that one might use to explore a work of literature. The themes presented here generally lend themselves to practical criticism rather than to the theoretical. This is the type of criticism most students are called upon to write and also the type they are most likely to come upon in newspapers and magazines.

We have seen many times over how thoroughly the kinds of writing outlined in this book are related. This is especially true of critical writing. Surprisingly, even research-and-report writing assumes an important place here—a survey of almost any library's collection of critical works will reveal that some of the most exacting and often vitally written criticism has been scholarly. Process, classification/division, exposition, argumentation, definition, creative writing—any one of these is of rudimentary

value in writing criticism. In fact, critical writing seems an appropriate place to end this book. A working familiarity with the kinds of writing dealt with before will cement a reliable foundation on which to write critically—not, one would hope, to mock and tear, but to carry forward for us all the wonder and love of language, and to enable students to look critically at the world they live in and to be constructively engaged with that world.

## Common Themes in Literature for Critical Analysis

- adventure
- adversity
- aging and the aged
- alcoholism
- alienation
- ambiguity/ambivalence
- ambition
- angst
- animals
- appearance versus reality
- aristocracy
- art and artists
- beauty
- beliefs and customs
- betrayal
- Biblical types
- birth, fertility, and rebirth
- borders and border crossings (cultural, physical, political, psychological, social)
- boredom and malaise
- bribery
- bureaucracy
- capital punishment
- change and progress
- chaos
- charity
- childlikeness, childishness, and immaturity
- children
- choice and decision
- Christ, Christ complex, Christianity, and martyr complex
- civilization
- class conflict, class relations
- clergy
- collectivity
- colonialism
- colonization
- coming of age
- common destiny
- communication (or lack of it)
- community (or lack of it)
- complacency
- comprehensiveness and infinity
- confession
- conflict
- conscience
- conservatism
- consolation
- convention
- conversion
- counterparts and counterpoints
- country versus city
- courage and cowardice
- crime and punishment
- cruelty and violence
- cultural concerns (traditions, differences, relations)
- cultural politics
- curse
- dance
- danger
- death
- deconstruction
- deduction
- defeat and failure
- demons and devils
- dependence
- depression, despair, discontent, and disillusionment
- despair
- destruction and destructiveness
- determinism, chance, fortune, fate, and indifferent universe
- devotion
- difference
- discovery, including self-discovery
- diversity
- divorce
- domination, enslavement, and suppression
- double-character, analogue, and reflection of self in others
- dreaming, dreams, imaginings, and fancies
- drug addiction
- duty
- emotional disturbance
- empowerment
- emptiness
- endurance
- enlightenment
- ennui
- entitlement
- envy
- epiphany
- escape
- essentialism
- ethnic identity
- ethos
- evil eye
- the examined (or the unexamined) life
- exile

existential angst  
 expediency  
 exploitation  
 faith and loss of faith  
 falsity, pretense, and artificiality  
 fame  
 family, fatherhood, and motherhood  
 fanaticism  
 farming  
 Faust(ianism)  
 fear and terror  
 feminism  
 folly  
 forgiveness  
 freedom  
 free will and willpower  
 Freudianism  
 friendship  
 frugality  
 fulfillment  
 gambling  
 games, contests, sports, competition, and trickery  
 gender (individual identity, limitations of social concep-  
 tions of gender)  
 God and creation  
 God and Humanity  
 Godliness  
 good and evil  
 government  
 greed  
 grief and remorse  
 grotesquerie  
 group behavior  
 guilt  
 happiness  
 heaven, including paradise on earth  
 hell  
 helplessness  
 heroes, heroines, and leaders  
 holiday  
 home  
 hope  
 hospitality as a social custom  
 hubris  
 human and animal  
 the human condition  
 human frailty  
 humanity and human understanding  
 human limitation/human potential  
 hunting  
 hypnotism  
 hypocrisy and duplicity  
 ideality, perfection, and exemplariness  
 identity  
 identity politics  
 illusion and innocence  
 immorality  
 imperialism  
 imprisonment  
 independence  
 individuality  
 initiation, experience, manhood, and womanhood  
 innocence; the loss of innocence  
 instinct versus reason and heart versus reason  
 jealousy  
 journey, travel, excursion, and voyage, including  
 psychological journey  
 joy  
 justice  
 killing  
 law  
 learning, schooling, and knowledge  
 leave-taking  
 liberation  
 life, *joie de vivre*, and life spirit  
 life (the meaning of)  
 loneliness and aloneness  
 loss  
 love and affection  
 loyalty  
 luck  
 machine versus humanity  
 macrocosm  
 manhood  
 marginalization  
 marriage  
 master/servant and employer/employee  
 materialism  
 maturation  
 memory  
 mercy  
 metaphysical experience  
 militarism and military life  
 mind and matter  
 miracle  
 mischief  
 mob psychology  
 moral code  
 mortality  
 multiculturalism

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music and song  
the mysterious stranger  
mystery  
mystical experience  
natural force and natural disaster  
nature and humanity  
obsession, monomania, compulsion, and habit  
oppression  
optimism  
origins of the world, universe  
pacifism  
parent/child relationship, adult/child relationship  
past, present, future  
patriotism  
persistence and perseverance  
pessimism  
playing God  
pleasure  
politics  
postcolonialism  
postmodernism  
poverty  
power relationships  
prejudice  
pride  
primitivism  
profession  
promise  
prophecy  
prostitution  
quest  
race and racial attitudes  
reality and realness  
rebellion  
redemption  
reincarnation and immortality  
relativism  
religion  
repentance  
rescue  
resistance, rebellion, and revolution  
resolution  
respectability  
responsibility  
return  
revenge and retribution  
revising history  
revolution  
ritual  
rivalry  
sacrifice  
sadism/masochism  
sanity, insanity, and senility  
scapegoat and victim  
science as savior or downfall  
seafaring  
search  
secrecy and secret world  
self-assertion  
self-awareness  
self-deception  
self-empowerment  
selfishness  
sexuality and sexual conquest  
sickness  
silence  
social criticism  
social status  
societal or cultural differences  
societal pressures  
society in change  
sophistication  
soul and soul mate  
spiritual crisis  
stoicism  
suffering  
suicide  
supernatural, magic, fairies, and ghosts  
survival  
suspicion  
technology's benefits and limitations  
theft and ransom  
time and circumstances, timelessness, eternity, time and space  
tolerance  
tradition and insularity  
understanding  
uniqueness  
unity and human solidarity  
universality and microcosm  
value/value system  
verbal traditions of specific communities/cultures  
visions  
voice in the wilderness  
voice(s) of the self  
war  
the wasted life, the empty life  
wealth and the wealthy  
womanhood, feminism, and the rights of women  
youth

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Substantially updated for today's world, this second edition of *What Can I Write About?* offers chapters on 12 different categories of writing, each of which is briefly introduced with a definition, notes on appropriate writing strategies, and suggestions for using the book to locate topics. Types of writing covered include description, comparison/contrast, process, narrative, classification/division, cause-and-effect writing, exposition, argumentation, definition, research-and-report writing, creative writing, and critical writing. Ideas range from the profound to the everyday to the topical—e.g., describe a terrible beauty; write a narrative about the ultimate eccentric; classify kinds of body alterations. With hundreds of new topics, this book is a valuable resource for teachers and students alike.

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