



EFFECTIVE WRITING

Third Canadian Edition

University of Windsor

KEMPER / MEYER / VAN RYS / SEBRANEK / HOLDITCH

Effective Writing

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Effective Writing
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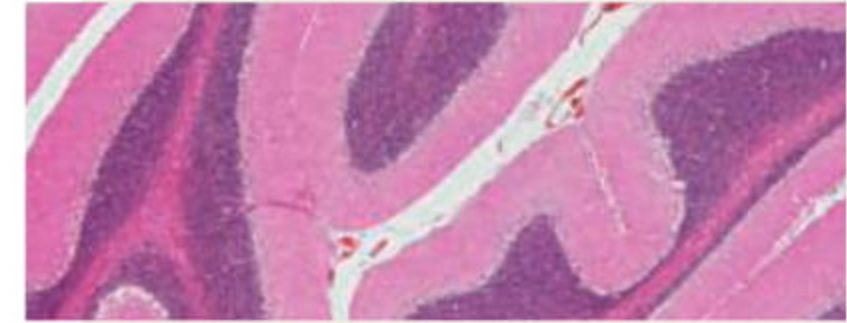
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Part 1 Writing and Reading for Success



"I write to discover what I think."

—Joan Didion

1

Writing and Learning

In college and university, the new concepts flooding your way can seem overwhelming. To succeed you must be able to retain new knowledge, connect it to other ideas and subjects, and communicate conclusions with your peers and instructors. Writing can help.

You may not think of writing as a learning tool, but writing can make you a better, more efficient learner. Think about it: Writing allows you to sort through your thoughts, form new and insightful opinions, and communicate what you've learned with others. And these skills translate directly to the workplace. It is no surprise that today's employers place a premium on effective writers.

This chapter is set up in two parts. The first half introduces you to writing as a learning tool, while the second half discusses writing as a means of sharing knowledge. Becoming an effective writer and learner isn't magic, but the result of focus and practice.

What do you think?

What does the quotation on the previous page say about writing? How does it match up with your opinion of writing?

Learning Outcomes

- LO1** Write to learn for yourself.
- LO2** Write to share learning.
- LO3** Consider the range of writing.
- LO4** Review writing and learning.

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Learning Outcome

Write to learn for yourself.

LO1 Writing to Learn

Gertrude Stein made one of the more famous and unusual statements about writing when she said, “To write is to write is to write is to write. . . .” The lofty place that writing held in her life echoes in this line. As far as she was concerned, nothing else needed to be said on the subject.

What would cause a writer to become so committed to the process of writing? Was it fame and recognition? Not really. The real fascination that experienced writers have with writing is the frame of mind it puts them in. The act of filling up a page stimulates their thinking and leads to exciting and meaningful learning.

Changing Your Attitude

If you think of writing in just one way—as an assignment to be completed—you will never discover its true value. Writing works best when you think of it as an important learning tool. Writing doesn’t always have to lead to an end product submitted to an instructor.

A series of questions, a list, or a quick note in a notebook can be a meaningful form of writing if it helps you think and understand. If you make writing an important part of your learning routine, two things will happen: (1) You’ll change your feelings about the importance of writing, and (2) you’ll become a better writer, thinker, and learner.

Reflect Write non-stop for five minutes about one of the three topics below. Don’t stop or hesitate, and don’t worry about making mistakes. You are writing for yourself. Afterward, checkmark something that surprises you or that you learned about yourself.

Speaking & Listening

As a class, discuss this writing experience: Did it help you focus your thinking on the topic? Did you surprise yourself in any way? Could you have written more? If so, about what?

What are my talents? OR Where do I want to go? OR Have I seized opportunities?

Keeping a Class Notebook

Keeping a class notebook or journal is essential if you are going to make writing to learn an important part of your learning routine. Certainly, you can take notes in this notebook, but it will also be helpful for reflecting on what is going on in the class. Try these activities:

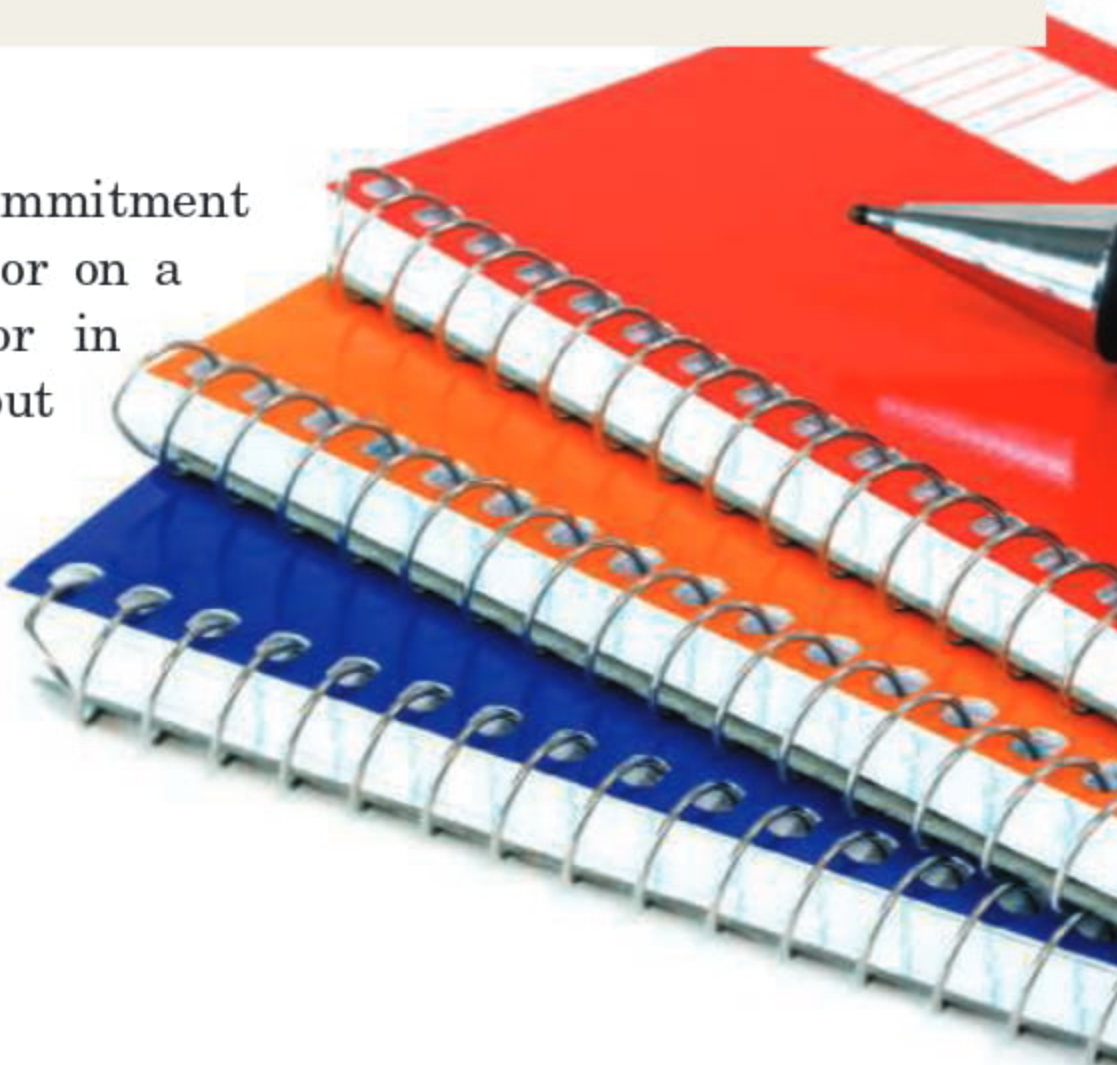
- Write freely about anything, from class discussions to challenging assignments to important exams.
- Discuss new ideas and concepts.
- Argue for and against any points of view that come up in class.
- Question what you are learning.
- Record your thoughts and feelings during an extended lab or research assignment.
- Evaluate your progress in the class.

Special Strategies

Writing or listing freely is the most common way to explore your thoughts and feelings about your course work. There are, however, specific writing-to-learn strategies that you may want to try:

- Sent or Unsent Messages** Draft messages to someone about something you are studying or reading.
- First Thoughts** Record your first impressions about something you are studying or reading.
- Role-Play** Write as if you are someone directly involved in a topic you are studying.
- Nutshelling** Write down in one sentence the importance of something you are studying or reading.
- Pointed Question** Keep asking yourself *why?* in your writing to sort out your thoughts about something.
- Debate** Split your mind in two. Have one side defend one point of view, and the other side, a differing point of view.

Practise For one month, make a commitment to writing to learn. In a notebook or on a laptop, take five minutes after or in between classes to write freely about what you just learned. Also, try a few of the strategies on this page as study tools. Afterward, evaluate how writing to learn worked for you. Did you retain more knowledge? Did you come to new conclusions or understandings?



Other Classes

Note taking is a common form of writing that is useful in most classes. Always try to record some of your thoughts and feelings alongside the basic notes. This makes note taking more meaningful. (See Chapter 2, LO2, Taking Effective Notes.)

Learning Outcome

Write to share learning.

Review

Writing is called a process because a piece of writing must go through a series of steps before it is ready to share. (See Part 2, The Writing Process and the Traits of Writing.)

Speaking & Listening

As a class, explore the following question: Why is writing often called “thinking on paper”?

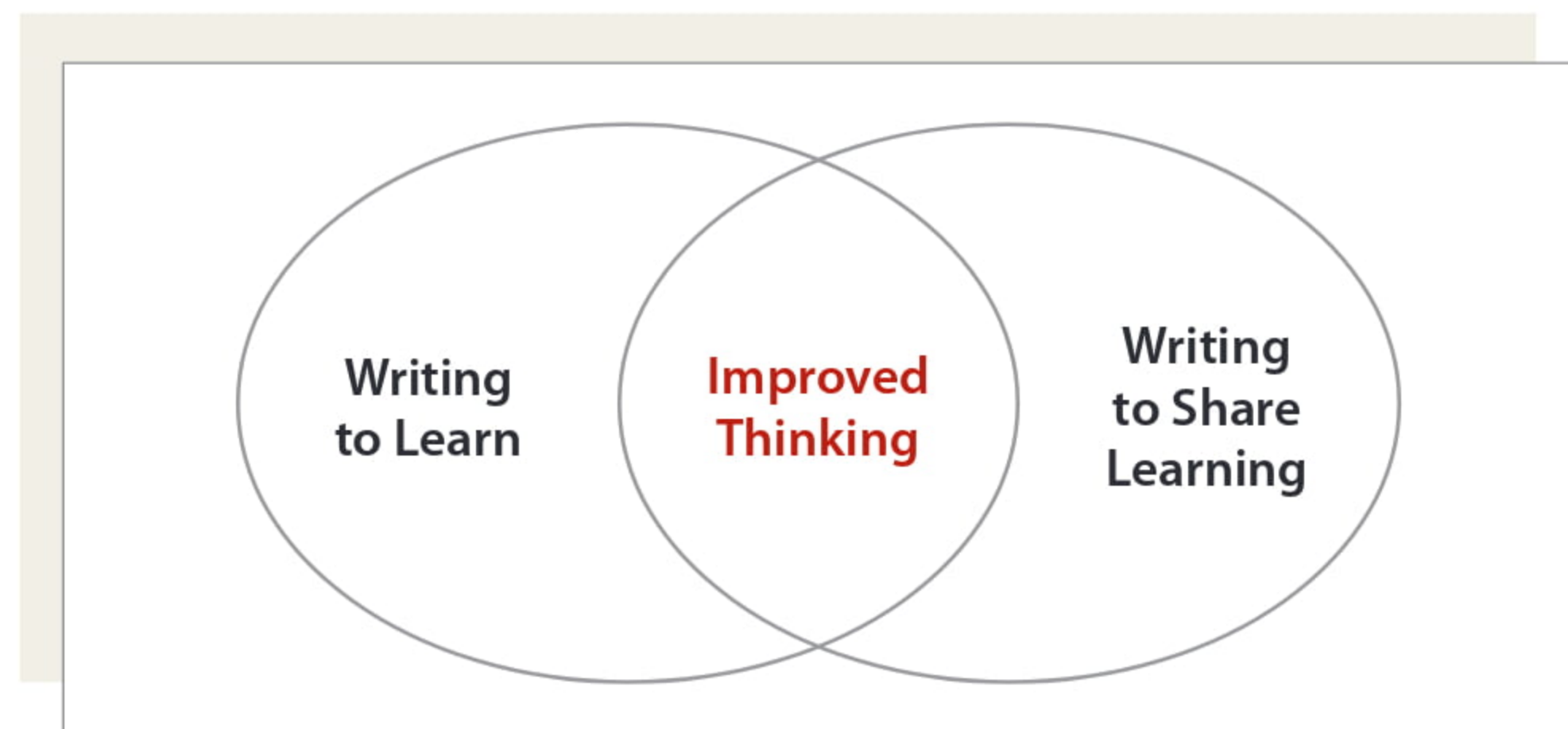
LO2 Writing to Share Learning

The other important function of writing is to share what you have learned. When you write to learn, you have an audience of one, yourself; when you write to share learning, you have an audience of many, including your instructors and classmates.

All writing projects (paragraphs, essays, blog entries) actually begin with writing to learn, as you collect your thoughts about a topic. But with a first draft in hand, you turn your attention to making the writing clear, complete, and ready to share with others.

A Learning Connection

As the graphic below shows, improved thinking is the link between the two functions of writing. Writing to learn involves exploring and forming your thoughts; writing to share learning involves clarifying and fine-tuning them.



Identify Label each scenario below as an example of writing to learn (WL) or writing to share learning (WSL).

- _____ 1. Evan freewrites on his laptop about a concept he just learned in his biology course.
- _____ 2. Paige writes a blog about last night's basketball game for her school's online newspaper.
- _____ 3. Liam lists the pros and cons of a political movement he learned about in a Russian and Eastern studies course.
- _____ 4. Brianna e-mails new notes from her book review to her study group.
- _____ 5. Mia is revising and editing her personal essay for her creative writing assignment.

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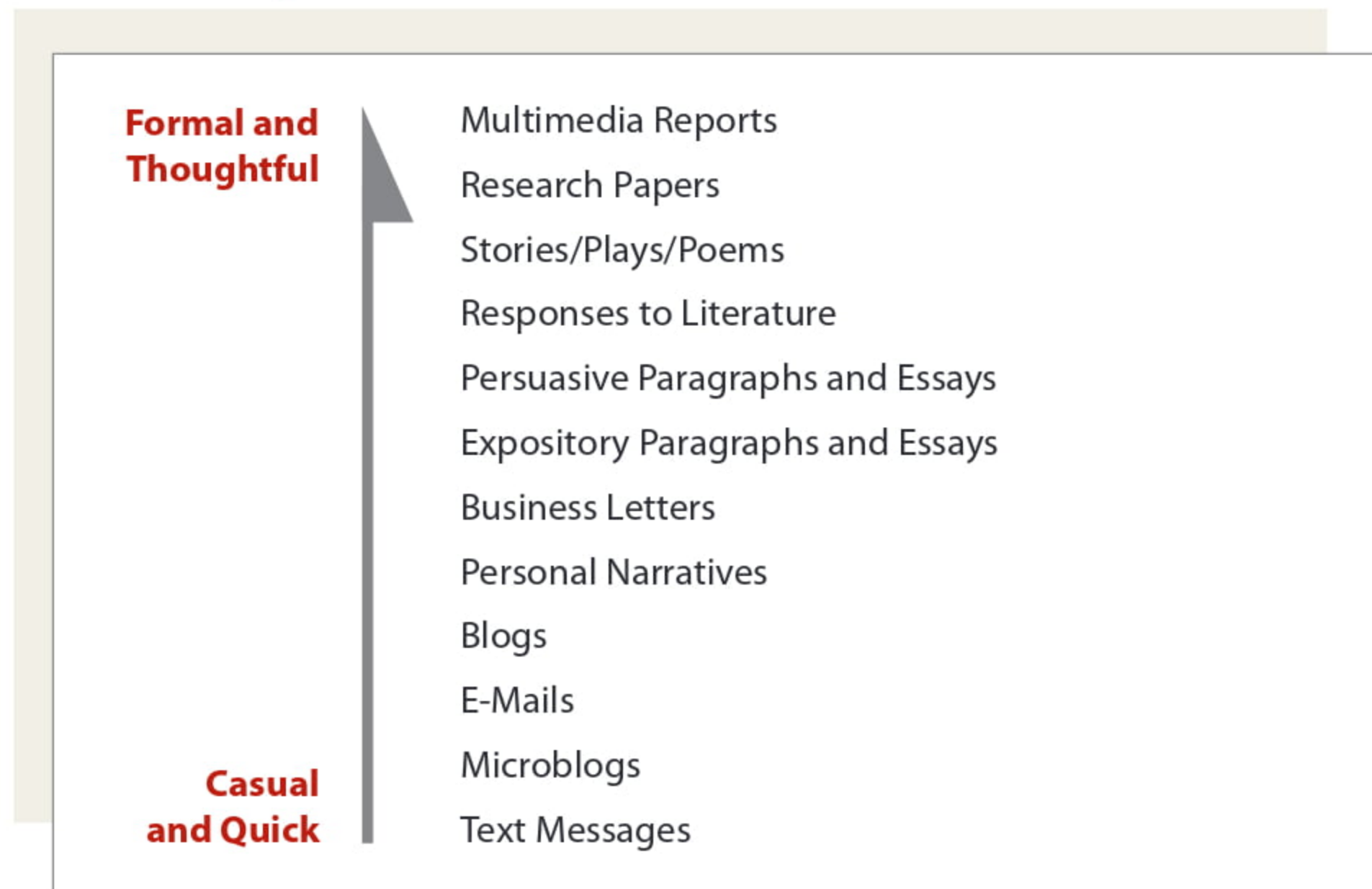
LO3 Considering the Range of Writing

The forms of writing to share cover a lot of territory as you can see in the chart below. Some of the forms are quick and casual; others are more thoughtful and formal. As a student, your writing may cover this entire spectrum, but the instruction you receive will likely focus on the more formal types.

Learning Outcome

Consider the range of writing.

The Writing Spectrum



Insight

Completeness and correctness are perhaps less critical in quick and casual writing, but they are important for all of the other forms on the chart.

React

After studying the chart, answer the following questions. Then discuss your responses as a class.

1. What form of writing do you most often engage in?

2. How might your writing approach change at different points on the writing spectrum?

3. What characteristics do you associate with casual and quick writing? How about formal and thoughtful?

Learning Outcome

Review writing and learning.

LO4 Reviewing Writing and Learning

Consider Answer the following questions about writing as a learning tool. (See LO1, Writing to Learn.)

1. How is writing to learn different from traditional writing assignments?

2. What are some ways you can write to learn using your classroom notebook or personal laptop?

3. How can pointed questions be used as a writing-to-learn strategy? What about debate?

Answer Answer the following questions about writing to share learning. (See LO2, Writing to Share Learning.)

1. How is writing to share learning different from writing to learn?

2. Why is improved thinking considered the link between writing to learn and writing to share?

Rank Rank the following forms of writing in order of casual and quick to formal and thoughtful, with 1 being the most casual. (See LO3, Considering the Range of Writing.)

_____ On your personal blog, you write a review of a new restaurant.

_____ You complete a research report on sports in ancient Greece.

_____ You send your friend a text message about your plans for the evening.

_____ You argue for a campus-wide smoking ban in a letter to the editor in your campus newspaper.

Learning Outcome

Read to learn.

“Some books are to be
tasted, others to be
swallowed, and some
few are to be chewed
and digested.”
—Francis Bacon

Traits

Effective writing has strong ideas, clear organization, appropriate voice, precise words, smooth sentences, correct conventions, and a strong design. Use these traits to understand what you read.

Vocabulary

context cues

the words surrounding an unfamiliar term that can help unlock its meaning

LO1 Reading to Learn

Thoughtful, active reading encompasses a number of related tasks: previewing the text, reading it through, taking notes as you go along, and summarizing what you have learned. Active reading gives you control of reading assignments and makes new information part of your own thinking.

Effective Academic Reading

Follow the guidelines listed below for all of your academic reading assignments. A few of these points are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

- 1. Know the assignment:** Identify its purpose, its due date, its level of difficulty, and so on.
- 2. Set aside the proper time:** Don't try to read long assignments all at once. Instead, try to read in 30-minute allotments.
- 3. Find a quiet place:** The setting should provide space to read and to write.
- 4. Gather additional resources:** Keep on hand a notebook, related handouts, Web access, and so on.
- 5. Study the “layout” of the reading:** Review the questions in the study guide. Then skim the pages, noting titles, headings, graphics, and boldfaced terms.
- 6. Use proven reading strategies:** See LO2, Using Reading Strategies.
- 7. Look up challenging words:** Also use **context cues** to determine the meaning of unfamiliar terms.
- 8. Review and paraphrase difficult parts:** Reread difficult sections of the assigned reading, write about them, and discuss them with your classmates.
- 9. Summarize what you learned:** Note any concepts or explanations that you will need to study further.

Reflect Which of the tips above do you follow? Which do you not follow? Reflect on one tip that could help you improve your reading.

Using a Class Notebook

To interact thoughtfully with a text, you need to write about it, so reserve part of your class notebook for responses to your readings. Certainly, you can take straight notes on the material (see LO2, Taking Effective Notes) but you should also personally respond to it. Such writing requires you to think about the reading—to agree with it, to question it, to make connections. The following guidelines will help you get started:

- **Write whenever you feel** a need to explore your thoughts and feelings. Discipline yourself to write multiple times, perhaps once before you read, two or three times during the reading, and once afterward.
- **Write freely and honestly** to make genuine connections with the text.
- **Respond to points of view** that you like or agree with and information that confuses you; make connections with other material and record ideas that seem significant.
- **Label and date your responses clearly.** These entries will help you prepare for exams and other assignments.
- **Share your discoveries.** Think of your entries as conversation starters in discussions with classmates.

Special Strategies

Here are some specific ways to respond to a text:

Discuss Carry on a conversation with the author or a character until you come to know him or her and yourself a little better.

Illustrate Use graphics or pictures to help you think about a text.

Imitate Continue the article or story line by trying to write like the author.

Express Share your feelings about a text in a poem.

Practise For one of your next reading assignments, carry out at least two of the reading-response strategies described on this page. When you have finished, reflect on the value of responding to the reading.



Insight

If you are a visual person, you may understand a text best by mapping or clustering its important points. (See Chapter 5, LO2, for a sample cluster.)

Learning Outcome

Use reading strategies.

LO2 Using Reading Strategies

To make sure that you gain the most from each reading assignment, employ these additional strategies: paraphrasing, annotation, note taking, and summarizing.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is the act of using your own words to restate an author's original meaning. The value of paraphrasing is difficult to overstate. If you can successfully state an author's ideas in your own words, then you have understood what that author is saying. Paraphrasing is the key skill in note-taking and in summarizing. Paraphrasing works best at the sentence (or very short paragraph) level. As with any skill, paraphrasing ability is developed through practice.

Paraphrasing Tips

- Read and reread the original until you are sure you understand it.
- Write your version of the material without looking at the original.
- Compare your paraphrased version against the original for correctness; pay close attention to numbers and dates, if any, in the original.
- Revise your version, if necessary.

Paraphrase Working with a friend or classmate, read the following sentences and then paraphrase each one. Review each other's paraphrases against the original for correctness.

1. The long process of walking a bill through the Canadian parliament involves three readings in the House of Commons, committee hearings, readings in the Senate, and a final vote in the House of Commons, a process that can take months.

2. Once a soldier in the Canadian infantry, American novelist Raymond Chandler is noted for writing some of the most influential "hard-boiled" detective fiction ever printed, mostly starring private eye Philip Marlowe, who first appeared in Chandler's debut novel, *The Big Sleep*.

3. Cryptozoologists, who search for creatures that most people do not believe exist, say Canada has several such fantastic creatures, one of which is Ogopogo, a water-dwelling creature similar to the Loch Ness monster and which supposedly makes its home in Lake Okanagan in British Columbia, and Champie, a similar creature found in Lake Champlain.

Vocabulary

paraphrasing

the process of using your own words to restate the author's meaning

Annotating a Text

Annotating a text allows you to interact with the writer's thoughts and ideas. Here are some suggestions:


- Write questions in the margins.
- Underline or highlight important points.
- Summarize or paraphrase key passages.
- Define new terms.
- Make connections to other parts.

Vocabulary

annotating
the process of underlining, highlighting, or making notes on a text

Annotating in Action

You've Got Hate Mail by Lydie Raschka

 **online** Check out the full version of this essay online.

First I expected it; now I'm scared.

Hate mail confirms a vague, nagging feeling that you've done something wrong. It's a firm tap on the shoulder that says, "The jig is up." So when the first letter came, it was expected. The second, however, was a shock. By the third I was a wreck. How did he know it would take exactly and only three?

So the hate mail is all coming from one person—a man.

I started writing a few years ago, after I had a baby. I haven't completely figured out what led me to writing, but it was probably tied up with my son's birth and the attendant emotions that needed sorting.

Def: related; associated

I like the solitary work life. I write at a table in the bedroom. I send my ideas out into the void. The bedroom seems a safe enough place. I have been told that I am an introvert. What on earth makes me want to communicate with strangers in this perilous way—standing naked in a field?

I can relate to this. Also, it exhibits her fear of people judging her.

"You have to expect these things when you are a writer," my father says about the hate mail. "When you're in the public eye, anyone can read what you write."

The letters are effective and unsettling, to say the least. I have an unusual name, so he thinks I'm foreign. He calls me "Eurotrash." It's a relief because it means he doesn't really know me—although he makes some pretty accurate guesses. He doesn't know that my parents simply like unusual names.

A shortsighted conclusion



Tyler Olson/Shutterstock.com

Annotate

Carefully read the excerpt below from an article by Don Tapscott. Then annotate the text, according to the following directions:

- Circle the main point of the passage.
- Underline or highlight one idea in each paragraph that you either agree with, question, or are confused by. Then make a comment about this idea in the margin.
- Circle all of the words that you are unsure of. Then define or explain these words in the margin.

Digital Generation Will Lead Change

by Don Tapscott

A lot of parents, employers and professors are angry about today's youth. They argue that young people are net-addicted, inattentive and losing their social skills. They are also narcissistic, and a new book even calls them the "Dumbest Generation." My research says none of this is true. I am optimistic about the potential of young people today. I call them the Net Generation, since these older teenagers and young adults are so bathed in bits that they think the Internet is part of the natural landscape. To them, digital technology is no more intimidating than a refrigerator or toaster. For the first time in history, children are more comfortable, knowledgeable and literate than their parents about an innovation central to society. And it is through the use of the digital media that the Net Generation will develop and superimpose its culture on the rest of society.

Evidence is mounting that kids can juggle multiple sensory inputs much more easily than older adults. Rather than our children having dysfunctional brains that can't focus, young people are developing brains that are more appropriate for our fast-paced, complex world. When baby boomers were young they spent many hours a day staring at a television screen, and this passive behaviour influenced the kind of brains they developed. Today, young people spend an equivalent amount of time with digital technologies—being the user, the actor, the collaborator, the initiator, the rememberer, the organizer—which gives them a different kind of brain.

The interactive games that young people play today require both team building and strategic skills. Learning a game and having died (virtually) a hundred times before winning makes them far more determined and more likely to try new ideas and take calculated risks. Young people collaborate constantly through online chats, multi-user video games, and more recently text messages, Facebook and Twitter. For teenagers today, doing their homework is a social and collaborative event involving text messages, instant messages and Facebook walls to discuss problems while the iPod plays in the background.

Already, these kids are learning, playing, communicating, working and creating communities very differently than their parents. They are a force for social transformation. The main interest of the Net Generation is not technology, but what can be done with that technology. I think they are smart, have great values, know how to use collaborative tools, and are well equipped to address many of the big challenges and problems that my generation is leaving them. Overall, their brains are more appropriate for the complex demands of the 21st century.

Taking Effective Notes

Taking notes helps you focus on the text and understand it more fully. It changes information you have read about into information that you are working with. Good notes help you paraphrase particularly important points; as discussed earlier, paraphrasing is a key tool used in understanding the text. Personalizing information in this way makes it much easier to remember and use.

Note-Taking Tips

- Use your own words as much as possible (paraphrase).
- Record only key points and details rather than complicated sentences.
- Consider boldfaced or italicized words, graphics, and captions as well as the main text.
- Employ as many abbreviations and symbols as you can (vs., #, &, etc.).
- Decide on a system for organizing or arranging your notes so they are easy to review.

Insight

Note taking should be more than writing down what you read. It should also be connecting with and questioning new information.

An Active Note-Taking System

To make your note taking more active, use a two-column system: one column (one-third of the page) is for comments, reactions, and questions, and the other (two-thirds of the page) is for your main notes.

Two-Column Notes

You've Got Hate Mail by Lydie Raschka		March 3	
Comments, reactions, questions	<p>At what point would police take action? →</p> <p>How do other authors and musicians react to hate mail? →</p> <p>This last bullet is interesting. It reminds me of Stockholm Syndrome—when hostages begin having positive feelings toward their captors. →</p>	<p>- The author has received multiple hate letters from the same person; the first included feces.</p> <p>- She has contacted the post office and the police, who say there is not much they can do.</p> <p>- The author admits she is vulnerable to people's opinions of her, so much so she takes what the hate mail says seriously.</p> <p>- Eventually, she admits she feels a connection to the accuser.</p>	Main notes

Practise Use the two-column note system for one of your next reading assignments. Use the left-hand column to react with questions, comments, and reflections about the information that you record.

Vocabulary

summarizing

the process of identifying and restating—in your own words—the thesis, main points, and conclusion of a document

Other Classes

In many classes, you'll find summarizing skills useful to help you understand and retain content.

Summarizing a Text

Summarizing is the process of identifying and restating—in your own words—the thesis, main points, and conclusion of a document. These points are usually written in the order they appear in the document; however, if the original work is disorganized, the main points can be organized in a more logical order. Main points are written objectively. The purpose of a summary is not to argue with an author's ideas; rather, it is to identify and understand the author's main ideas. (You can always argue the ideas in your own paper.) Although a summary may include a direct quotation from the original document, you should strive to restate the ideas in your own words. If you cannot do that, you likely do not fully understand the information.

Generally, a summary should range from about 5 percent to 30 percent of the length of the original. Summaries of shorter documents that do not include a lot of examples or extended commentary are likely to be closer to the 30 percent length while longer documents, with lots of examples, are likely to be closer to 5 percent of the length. However, completeness—identifying and restating all the main ideas—is more important than length.

Formal summaries, those that may be published or read by others, start with one or two sentences that do the following: name the author and the title; identify the source and date of publication; and present the thesis of the article. The main points are presented in your own words and in the author's order or in some logical order. Finally the author's conclusion is presented, in your own words.

Summarizing Tips

- Start with a clear statement of the main point or thesis of the text.
- Include only the essential supporting facts and details (names, dates, times, and places) in the next sentences. Leave out examples, redundancies, definitions, and so on.
- Present the main ideas in the original order, or, if necessary, in a more logical order.
- Remain objective: A summary presents the author's ideas, not what you think about them.
- Tie all of the main points together in a closing sentence.
- Remember to write the thesis, main points, and conclusion in your own words.

Example Summary

The example below summarizes Lydie Raschka's three-page essay concerning hate mail that she received.

Review

Check out Chapter 10, LO1, for more information on summarizing.

Main points
(underlined)

Three occurrences of hate mail from the same sender have left author Lydie Raschka consumed with fear and doubt. Even

Essential
supporting
facts

before the hate mail, Raschka, who admits to being an introvert, struggled with the vulnerability of sharing her writing. She expected hate mail, but, when new letters from the same man kept coming, Raschka contacted the post office and police. Neither helped much. As the unsettling feeling increased, Raschka was unable to continue writing. At some point, she became so consumed by the letters that she began relating to her enemy, even feeling some sympathy for him. For example, he talks in his letters about his aunt and disabled sister; Raschka has a sister and a disabled aunt. In the end, Raschka wishes the sender could realize how much he has in common with her.

Closing
sentence
(underlined)

Summarize

Summarize the information in one of the essays in Part 8 of this text or in an essay provided by your instructor. Use the tips and sample above as a guide.

Learning Outcome

Read graphics.

Vocabulary

graphic

a visual representation of information that reveals trends, makes comparisons, shows how something changes over time, and so on

horizontal

parallel to ground level, at right angles to the vertical

vertical

straight up and down, at right angles to the horizontal

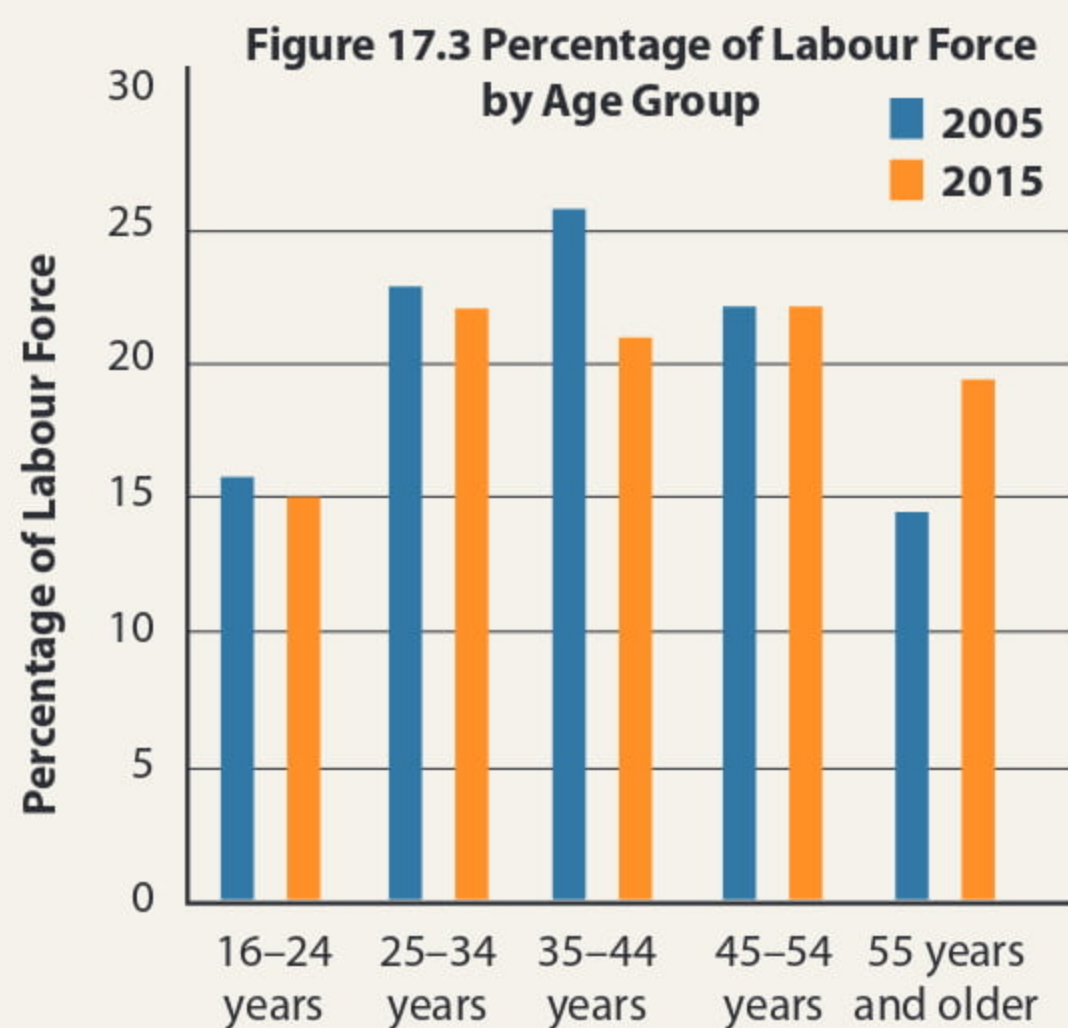
LO3 Reading Graphics

In many of your college or university texts, a significant portion of the information will be communicated via charts, graphs, diagrams, and drawings. Knowing how to read these types of graphics will help you become a more effective and informed student. Follow the guidelines listed below when you read a **graphic**.

- **Scan the graphic.** Consider it as a whole to get an overall idea about its message. Note its type (bar graph, pie graph, diagram, table, and so forth), its topic, its level of complexity, and so on.
- **Study the specific parts.** Start with the main heading or title. Next, note any additional labels or guides (such as the **horizontal** and **vertical** axes on a bar graph). Then focus on the actual information displayed in the graphic.
- **Question the graphic.** Does it address an important topic? What is its purpose (to make a comparison, to show a change, and so on)? What is the source of the information? Is the graphic dated or biased in any way?
- **Reflect on its effectiveness.** Explain in your own words the main message communicated by the graphic. Then consider its effectiveness, how it relates to the surrounding text, and how it matches up to your previous knowledge of the topic.

Analysis of a Graphic

Review the vertical bar graph below. Then read the discussion to learn how all of the parts work together.

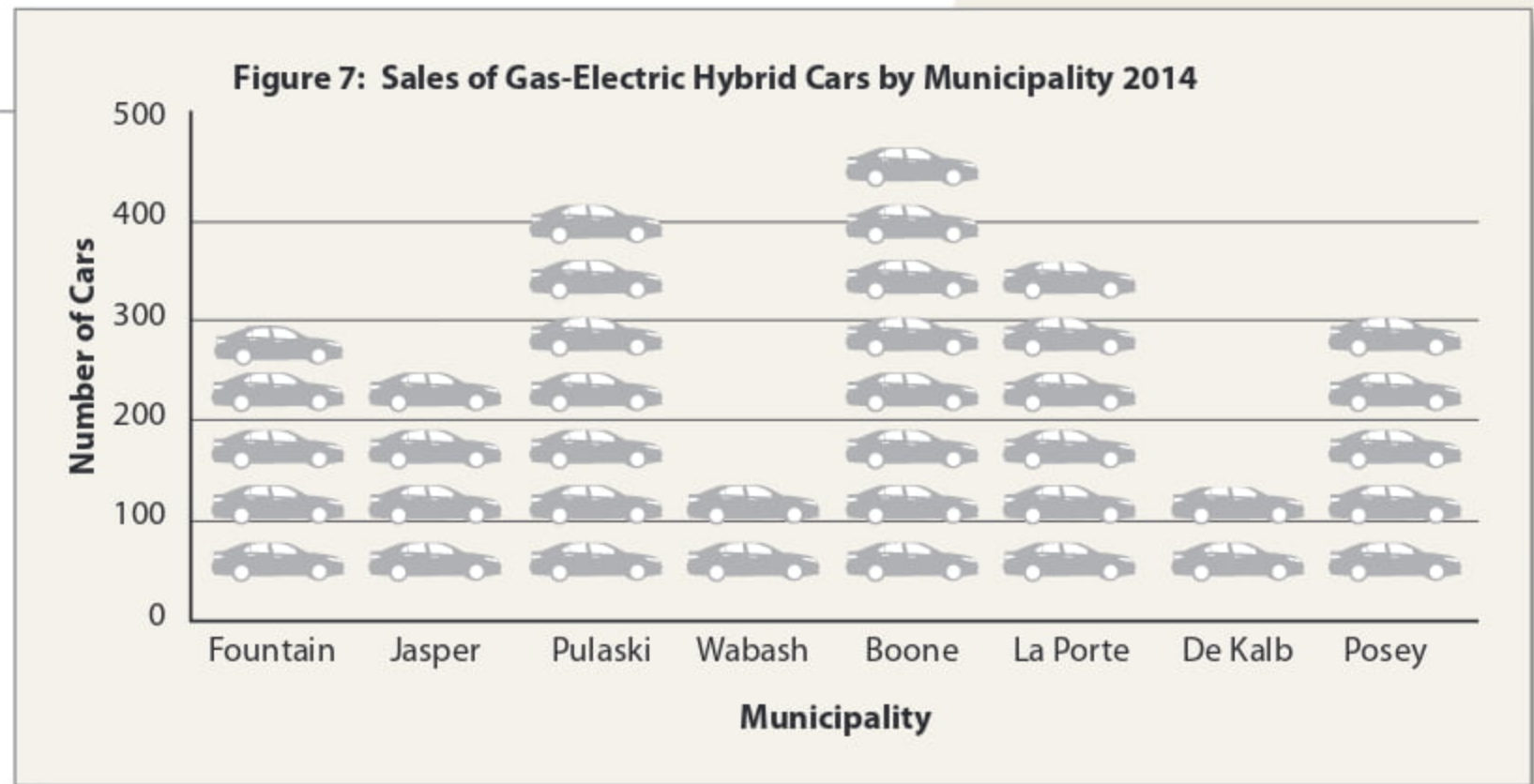


Discussion: This bar graph compares the labour force in 2005 to the labour force in 2015 for five specific age groups. The heading clearly identifies the subject or topic of the graphic. The horizontal line identifies the different age groups, and the vertical line identifies the percentage of the labour force for each group. The key in the upper right-hand corner of the graphic identifies the purpose of the colour coding used in the columns or bars. With all of that information, the graphic reads quite clearly—and many interesting comparisons can be made.

React

Read and analyze the following graphics, answering the questions about each one. Use the information in LO3, Reading Graphics, as a guide.

Graphic 1



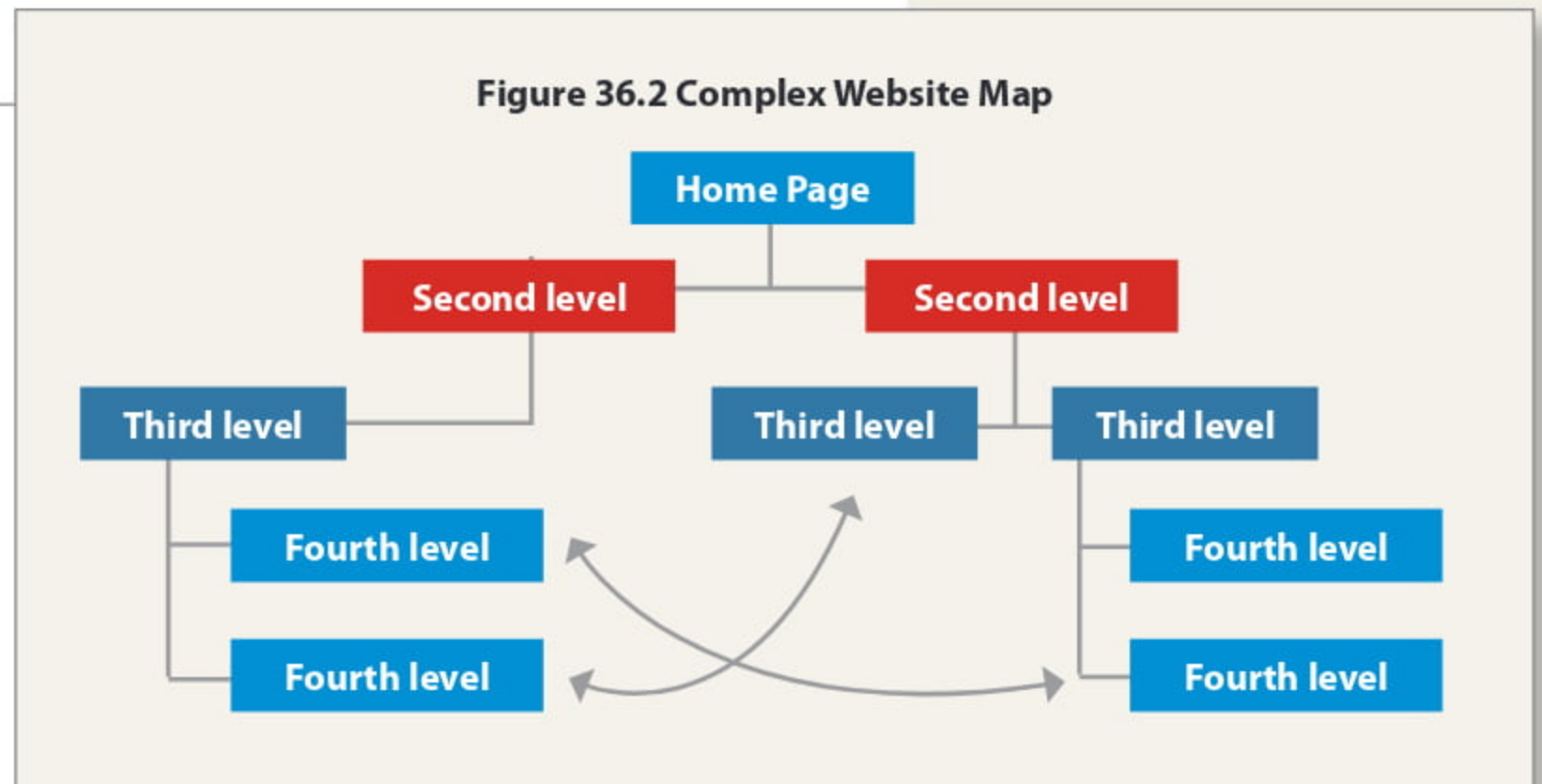
1. This graphic is called a pictograph rather than a bar graph. What makes it a “pictograph”?

2. What is the topic of this graphic?

3. What information is provided on the horizontal line? On the vertical line?

4. What comparisons can a reader make from this graphic?

Graphic 2



1. This graphic is called a line diagram, mapping a structure. What structure does this diagram map?

2. How are the different navigational choices on a complex website shown on this graphic? How might you improve the effectiveness of this graphic?

Learning Outcome

Review reading and learning.

LO4 Reviewing Reading and Learning

Complete these activities as needed to help you better understand the concepts covered in this chapter.

List Describe some activities you can do in your notebook to better engage with your reading assignments. (See LO1, Reading to Learn.)

Answer What is the purpose of annotating a text? (See LO2, Using Reading Strategies.)

Identify Identify three helpful note-taking tips. (See LO2, Using Reading Strategies.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

List Describe the steps you should take to evaluate the graphics you see in your reading assignments. (See LO3, Reading Graphics.)

“It’s good to rub and polish our brain against that of others.”

—Michel de Montaigne



ColorBlind Images/Getty Images

Making the Writing–Reading Connection

Professional writers are well aware of the special connection between writing and reading. Stephen King says, “Reading is the creative centre of a writer’s life.” Joan Aiken says, “Read as much as you possibly can.” William Faulkner said, “Read, read, read. Read everything. . . .” These successful authors know that reading stimulates writing, while their writing stimulates them to read more.

As a student, you need to make your own special connections between writing and reading. This chapter will get you started because it provides three important strategies to enrich your writing and reading.

What do you think?

How can you connect the de Montaigne quotation to the writing process, the reading process, or both?

Learning Outcomes

- LO1** Analyze the assignment.
- LO2** Use the traits of writing.
- LO3** Use graphic organizers.
- LO4** Review the writing–reading connection.