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1

Writing as Inquiry

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, you'll learn to

- 1.1** Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.
- 1.2** Identify and practice the habits of mind that are the foundation of academic inquiry.
- 1.3** Reflect on your own writing process and apply a problem-solving approach.
- 1.4** Apply creative and critical thinking to a writing process that will help you generate ideas.
- 1.5** Describe what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.
- 1.6** Distinguish between “open” writing situations that invite inquiry and less exploratory “direct” writing.

What Do We Mean by Inquiry?

This is a book about inquiry and writing. But what do we mean by “inquiry?” Rather than explain it to you, let's start by jumping right in and inquiring about something very ordinary: a water bottle. What is there to say about a water bottle? A lot, it turns out, if you begin with questions. Good questions have the power to open doors to discovery, even with things you at first never considered that interesting (like water bottles). And questions are the fuel that powers academic inquiry, which begins, of course, with something quite simple but under-appreciated: Curiosity.



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If you don't have a water bottle available, use the picture here to help you brainstorm a quick list of relationship questions. For example, *What's the relationship between heavy use of water bottles and income levels?* Or, *Is there a relationship between the purity of the water in water bottles and their source?*

1. Which of these questions stand out? Which are particularly interesting?
2. What question might be the focus of an article that you would want to read?

Rediscovering your curiosity, and learning to use it to sustain inquiry into the things that interest you, is a major goal of *The Curious Writer*. But so is harnessing writing to help you do it. If the motive behind inquiry is to *find out*, then we write to discover and to learn. If you've mostly used writing in school to simply get down what you already think, then this book proposes a new way to use your writing: *To find out what you think*. We'll show you how, but it will require that you reassess your writing habits and assumptions. That's where this book begins.

Beliefs About Writing and Writing Development

1.1 Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.

Most of us have been taught about writing since the first grade. We usually enter college with beliefs not only about what makes a good paper and what “rules” of writing to follow, but also about how we can develop as writers. The three of us have learned a lot about writing since our first years in college, and a big part of that learning involved unraveling some prior beliefs about writing. In fact, we'd say that our development as writers initially had more to do with *unlearning* some of what we already knew than it did with discovering new ways to write. But you have to make your beliefs explicit if you're going to make decisions about which are helpful and which aren't. So, take a moment to find out what your beliefs are and to think about whether they actually make sense.

Unlearning Unhelpful Beliefs

You won't be surprised when we say that we have a lot of theories about writing development; after all, we're supposedly the experts. But we are *all* writing theorists, with beliefs that grow out of our successes and failures as people who write. Because you don't think much about them, these beliefs often shape your response

to writing instruction without your even knowing it. For example, we've had a number of students who believe that people are born writers. This belief, of course, would make any kind of writing class a waste of time, because writing ability would be a matter of genetics.

A much more common belief is that learning to write is a process of building on basics, beginning with words, and then working up to sentences, paragraphs, and perhaps whole compositions. There are those who still argue that the reason people supposedly don't write well is that English teachers don't teach enough formal grammar, despite considerable evidence that it makes little difference. It's also easy to infer from our experiences that all school writing follows a basic structure (#10); that seems to be the lesson of the five-paragraph theme. But as you'll learn later, how we organize writing depends very much on the genre we're working with and the situation we're writing in.

Some of these beliefs, even if unhelpful, strike us as common sense. This brings up an important point: Unlearning involves rejecting common sense *if* it conflicts with what actually works. Throughout this book, we hope you'll constantly test your beliefs about writing against the experiences you're having with it. Pay attention to what seems to work for you and what doesn't. Mostly, we'd like you, at least initially, to play what one writing instructor calls the *believing game*. Ask yourself: *What will I gain as a writer if I try believing this is true?* For example, even if you've believed for much of your life that you should never write anything in school that doesn't follow an outline, you might discover that abandoning this "rule" sometimes helps you use writing to *discover* what you think.

Unlearning involves rejecting common sense if it conflicts with what actually works.

Tools for Inquiry-based Writing: Fastwriting and Journaling

As you begin to imagine yourself as a writer—your habits, beliefs, and typical practices—you may recall keeping a diary or journal, something that may prompt you to remember late nights in your room, furiously writing about what happened that day. Most of us, however, never kept a journal, and the whole idea of using it in an academic class seems weird. We hope to convince you otherwise. A premise of *The Curious Writer* is that we can think *through* writing, not just before we write. There are two conditions that make this easier to do.

1. You have someplace to write where *you* are the audience, a writing space that won't be evaluated by anyone else.
2. You find a way to call a truce with your internal critic, silencing the voice in your head that tells you that everything you write is stupid, or some variation of that theme.



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An ungraded journal or notebook, physical or digital, is a really good way to create these two conditions. But you have to use it. As you work your way through this book, we'll invite you to do a lot of journal work, generating material for an assignment, reflecting on your writing practices, and exploring your reaction to readings. One of the things we'll often ask you to do in your journal is what we call "fastwriting." You may have done something like this before, especially in English classes, where it's often called "freewriting." We like the term "fastwriting" a little better because it emphasizes speed.

You may resist this kind of writing. Sometimes it seems pointless. Or maybe you can't bear to write badly. But it's an extraordinarily useful method because it is much more likely you'll say what you don't expect to say, and in turn, discover what you didn't know you knew. The key, however, is to accept that writing like this, which is sometimes messy, unfocused, grammatically incorrect, and disorganized, can be really useful. You'll learn to believe this because often enough you experience surprise: "Wow, I hadn't remembered that!" or "That's an important question that hadn't occurred to me before!" or "That's what I was trying to say!"

As we already noted, the key to fastwriting is to write as fast as you can, not bothering to "fix" things or meditate on them. You just follow along with the words to see where they take you. This takes some practice. As you're developing your own approach to fastwriting, consider the following:

- Where do you write faster? In a physical notebook or on a screen?
- Inevitably, you will run out of things to say. Don't panic. Just skip a line, wait a moment, and get started with a new thought. Sometimes, just to keep your pen or fingers moving, you might talk to yourself about being stuck until you find a groove again. Or if you're responding to a text, go back and find a new passage to get you going again.
- Sometimes, you are asked to do focused fastwrites (see an example below). In those, you generally try to stay on topic, though digressions can be super interesting. In a focused fastwrite, when you run out of one idea, skip a line and start another.
- Fastwriting doesn't always work in every situation. Don't fret if a session just doesn't seem to go anywhere. That happens. Just don't lose the faith that it can!

Here's part of a focused fastwrite that Bruce did during the pandemic, as he was trying to sort through his thoughts about warnings by experts that it would cause serious mental health problems:

Experts are unsure what the mental fallout will be from the pandemic, but after studying disasters and wars they estimate that about a third of those living through trauma will suffer from mental health problems, especially those who are predisposed to it.

I told Karen yesterday that I was feeling depressed, or that I was "edging" toward it. She was surprised. "You seemed happy this morning," she said. I think I was, but as

the day wore on—a bright and pleasant Sunday—I felt more adrift, going through the motions, and looking forward to an afternoon nap. In a few short months, the world has shrunk...

In this example, Bruce started with an idea gleaned from something he read, and began to try to explore it through his own experience, ultimately ending with a new idea: One response to the psychological stresses of the pandemic was that the world shrinks, and that has implications. It was a little discovery that wouldn't have occurred to him unless he'd written his way to it, following behind—not ahead—of the writing.

Exercise 1.1

What Is Your Process?

Before going further, take a moment to think about your own beliefs about writing, and the practices you usually follow when you're given a school writing assignment. The following self-evaluation survey should give you a good baseline to identify your writing process as you enter this course.

STEP ONE: Complete the Self-Evaluation Survey.

Self-Evaluation Survey

1. When you're given a school writing assignment, do you wait until the last minute to finish it?
Always——Often——Sometimes——Rarely——Never
2. How often have you had the experience of learning something you didn't expect through writing about it?
Very often——Fairly often——Sometimes——Rarely——Never
3. Do you generally plan out what you're going to write before you write it?
Always——Often——Sometimes——Rarely——Never
4. *Prewriting* describes activities that some writers engage in before they begin a first draft. Prewriting might include such invention activities as freewriting or fastwriting, making lists, brainstorming or mapping, collecting information, browsing the web, talking to someone about the essay topic, reading up on it, or jotting down ideas in a notebook or journal. How much prewriting do you tend to do for the following types of assignments? Circle the appropriate answer.
 - A personal narrative:
A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't written one

- A critical essay about a short story, novel, or poem:
A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't
written one
 - A research paper:
A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't
written one
 - An essay exam:
A great deal——Some——Very little——None——Haven't
written one
5. At what point(s) in writing an academic paper do you often find yourself getting stuck? Check all that apply.
- Getting started
 - In the middle
 - Finishing
 - I never/rarely get stuck (go on to question 9)
 - Other: _____
6. If you usually have problems getting started on a paper, which of the following do you often find hardest to do? Check all that apply. (If you don't have trouble getting started, go on to question 7.)
- Deciding on a topic
 - Writing an introduction
 - Finding the time to begin
 - Figuring out exactly what I'm supposed to do for the assignment
 - Finding a purpose or focus for the paper
 - Finding the right tone
 - Other: _____
7. If you usually get stuck in the middle of a paper, which of the following cause(s) the most problems? Check all that apply. (If writing the middle of a paper isn't a problem for you, go on to question 8.)
- Keeping focused on the topic
 - Finding enough information to meet page-length requirements
 - Following my plan for how I want to write the paper
 - Bringing in other research or points of view
 - Organizing all of my information
 - Trying to avoid plagiarism
 - Worrying about whether the paper meets the requirements of the assignment
 - Worrying that the paper just isn't any good

- Messing with citations
- Other: _____
8. If you have difficulty finishing a paper, which of the following difficulties are typical for you? Check all that apply. (If finishing isn't a problem for you, go on to question 9.)
- Composing a last paragraph or conclusion
- Worrying that the paper doesn't meet the requirements of the assignment
- Worrying that the paper just isn't any good
- Trying to keep focused on the main idea or thesis
- Trying to avoid repeating myself
- Realizing I don't have enough information
- Dealing with the bibliography or citations
- Other: _____
9. Rank the following list of approaches to revision so that it reflects the strategies you use *most often to least often* when rewriting academic papers. Rank the items 1–6, with the strategy you use most often as a 1 and the strategy you use least often as a 6.
- ___ I just tidy things up—editing sentences, checking spelling, looking for grammatical errors, fixing formatting, and performing other proofreading activities.
- ___ I look for ways to reorganize existing information in the draft to make it more effective.
- ___ I try to fill holes by adding more information.
- ___ I do more research.
- ___ I change the focus or even the main idea, rewriting sections, adding or removing information, and changing the order of things.
- ___ I rarely do any revision.
10. Do you tend to impose a lot of conditions on when, where, or how you think you write most effectively? (For example, do you need a certain pen? Do you always have to write on a computer? Do you need to be in certain kinds of places? Must it be quiet or noisy? Do you write best under pressure?) Or can you write under a range of circumstances, with few or no conditions? Circle one.
- Lots of conditions——Some——A few——No conditions
- If you impose conditions on when, where, or how you write, list some of those conditions here:
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

11. From the following list, identify the one belief about writing that you agree with most strongly and the one that you think isn't true.
- a. People get better at writing by learning the basics first, starting with grammar, then composing sentences and paragraphs before attempting whole compositions.
 - b. The best way to develop as a writer is to imitate the writing of the people you want to write like.
 - c. People are born writers like people are born good at math. Either you can do it or you can't.
 - d. It's important to nail most things down in the first draft so that revision mostly involves fixing the small things.
 - e. Practice is the key to a writer's development. The more a writer writes, the more he or she will improve.
 - f. It's essential to know what you want to say before you say it in writing.
 - g. Developing writers should start with simple writing tasks, such as telling stories, and move to harder writing tasks, such as writing a research paper.
 - h. The most important thing that influences a writer's growth is believing that he or she can improve.
 - i. The key to becoming a better writer is finding your voice.
 - j. All school writing has a basic structure that you're supposed to follow.

Belief I think is true: ____

Belief I think isn't true: ____

STEP TWO: On the class discussion-board, or in class, discuss the results of the survey.

- Are there patterns in the responses? Do most group members seem to answer certain questions in similar or different ways? Are there interesting contradictions?
- Based on these results, what "typical" habits or challenges do writers in your class seem to share?
- What struck you most?

The Beliefs of This Book

Allatonce. One of the metaphors we very much like about writing development is offered by writing theorist Ann E. Berthoff. She said learning to write is like learning to ride a bike. You don't start by practicing handlebar skills, move on to pedaling practice, and then finally learn balancing techniques. You get on the bike

and fall off, get up, and try again, doing all of those separate things at once. At some point, you don't fall and you pedal off down the street. Berthoff said writing is a process that involves allatonce-ness (all-at-once-ness), and it's simply not helpful to try to practice the subskills separately. This book shares the belief in the allatonce-ness of writing development.

Believing You Can Learn to Write Well. Various other beliefs about writing development—the importance of critical thinking, the connection between reading and writing, the power of voice and fluency, and the need to listen to voices other than your own—also help to guide this book. One belief, though, undergirds them all: *The most important thing that influences a writer's growth is believing that he or she can learn to write well.* Faith in your ability to become a better writer is key. From it grows the motivation to learn how to write well.

Faith isn't easy to come by. Bruce didn't have it as a writer through most of his school career, because he assumed that being placed in the English class for underachievers meant that writing was simply another thing, like track and math, that he was mediocre at. For a long time, he was a captive to this attitude. But then, in college he wrote a paper he cared about; writing started to matter, because he discovered something he really wanted to say and say well. This was the beginning of a belief that he could become a better writer, despite all those C minuses in high school English. Belief requires motivation, and one powerful motivator is to approach a writing assignment as an opportunity to learn something—that is, to approach it with the spirit of inquiry.

Habits of Mind

1.2 Identify and practice the habits of mind that are the foundation of academic inquiry.

If you were trying to design a curriculum to prepare athletes to play a range of sports like basketball, baseball, and soccer, would you begin with a general “ball-handling” class? In other words, are there basic ball-handling skills that will help prepare students to play all those sports? What would that course look like? That was a question that writing expert David Russell asked as he wondered whether a course like this one—composition—would adequately prepare students for all the different kinds of writing they would face inside and outside of school. Russell was really asking this question: Are there “generalizable” writing skills that students can learn and apply in all kinds of situations?

This is a great question. One answer—the one at the foundation of *The Curious Writer*—is that while there may not be a set of generalizable writing skills that are always



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relevant, there are certain ways of thinking about writing tasks that *can* be extremely useful in many writing situations. We call these *habits of mind*. Here are some of the most important habits of mind for your college classes that involve writing.

Starting with Questions, Not Answers

A lot of people think that writing is about recording what you already know, which accounts for those who choose familiar topics to write on when given the choice. “I think I’ll write about _____,” the thinking goes, “because I know that topic really well and already have an idea what I can say.” Writers who write about what they know usually start with answers rather than questions. In some writing situations this makes a lot of sense, because you’re being asked, specifically, to prove that you know something, like in an essay exam. But more often, writing in a university is about discovery, not reporting information, and this always begins with finding the questions that ultimately lead to interesting answers.

Making the Familiar Strange. Starting with questions rather than answers changes everything. *It means finding new ways to see what you’ve seen before.* For example, in the opening writing exercise of this chapter, you were asked to consider the commonplace plastic water bottle and imagine some relationship questions that help you to see it in a new way. What started as simply a water bottle can, with the right question, be transformed into inquiry into the branding claims of a bottler about purity of spring water.

Questions open up the inquiry process, while quick answers close it down. When you discover what you think, you don’t cook up a thesis before you start—you discover the thesis as you explore. But for this to work, the inquiry process demands something of us that most of us aren’t used to: suspending judgment.

Suspending Judgment

We jerk our knee when physicians tap the patellar tendon. If everything is working, we do it reflexively. We’re often just as reflexive in our responses to the world:

- “What do you think of American politicians?”
“They’re all corrupt.”
- “Is it possible to reconcile economic growth with the preservation of natural resources?”
“No.”
- “Isn’t this an interesting stone?”
“It’s just a rock.”

We make these judgments out of habit. But this habit is, in fact, a way of seeing based on this premise: Some things are really pretty simple, more or less

black-and-white, good or bad, boring or interesting. Academic inquiry works from another, very different premise: The world is really a wonderfully complex place, and *if we look closely and long enough*, and ask the right questions, we are likely to be surprised at what we see. A condition of inquiry is that you *don't* rush to judgment; you tolerate uncertainty while you explore your subject. Academic inquiry requires that you see your preconceptions as hypotheses that can be tested, not established truths. It is, in short, associated with a habit of *suspending* judgment.

**It's okay to write badly.
Resist the tendency to
judge too soon and too
harshly.**

Being Willing to Write Badly

In a writing course such as this one, the challenge of suspending judgment begins with how you approach your own writing. What's one of the most common problems we see in student writers? Poor grammar? Lack of organization? A missing thesis? Nope. *It's the tendency to judge too soon and too harshly.* A great majority of our students—including really smart, capable writers—have powerful internal critics, or, as the novelist Gail Godwin once called them, “Watchers at the Gates.” This is the voice you may hear when you're starting to write a paper, the one that has you crossing out that first sentence or that first paragraph over and over until you “get it perfect.”

The only way to overcome this problem is to suspend judgment. In doing so, you essentially tell your Watcher this: *It's okay to write badly because I need to get something down.* Godwin once suggested that writers confront their internal critics by writing them a letter.

Dear Watcher,

Ever since the eighth grade, when I had Mrs. O'Neal for English, I've been seeing red. This is the color of every correction and every comment (“awk”) you've made in the margins on my school writing. Now, years later, I just imagine you, ready to pick away at my prose every time I sit down to write. This time will be different....

It might help to write your internal critic a letter like this. Rein in that self-critical part of yourself, and you'll find that writing can be a tool for *invention*—a way to generate material—and that you can *think through writing* rather than waiting around for the thoughts to come. You need your internal critic. But you need it to work with you, not against you. Later in this chapter, we'll show you how to do this.

One way to tame your internal critic so that it's helpful rather than an obstacle to writing is to identify all the ways your Watcher gets in the way. If your critic is anything like ours (yes, we do still struggle with this), he or she is cunning, coming up with all sorts of diversions and tricks to keep us from writing. Make a list of some of your Watcher's tactics.

Expecting Surprise

If, when you sit down to write, you don't expect to learn something, then you probably won't. But when you *expect* surprise, and look forward to what your writing might tell you every time you sit down to do it, then you'll find surprise happens more and more. Writing to learn is far more likely when you practice the habits of mind suggested here: Start with questions, suspend judgment, and tolerate writing that, at first, may seem pretty "bad."

Reflecting Often

When we first learn how to do something—make a TikTok video, dribble a basketball, play the guitar—we naturally spend a lot of time thinking about *how* we're doing it. Later, as we feel more competent, we typically reflect less. We start to trust that we know what we need to know. You've been writing for much of your life, and by now, you've developed a set of routines, or "workflows" to use a current term, that are often automatically triggered whenever you're faced with a writing task. These may include where and when you sit down to write, how you typically start, whether you write with a pen or on a computer, how you imagine what you're supposed to do, and how you feel about certain kinds of writing tasks—maybe you hate writing research papers, or love writing stories; you find rewriting your work frustrating, or you're afraid of sharing your work. We don't usually think much about these routines. We simply live with them.

The thing is, when you stop reflecting on how you do something—even something you've done for a long time—you stop getting better at it. There's all kinds of research that confirms this idea, including recent studies on writing that suggest that frequent reflection—or metacognition (thinking about thinking)—on how you approach writing tasks significantly improves "transfer," or your ability to apply what you know to new writing situations. The instinct to reflect—and reflect often—about what you're doing and how you're doing it is one of the most important habits of mind. We'll prompt you to do this a lot, beginning with helping you to tell the story of your history as a writer later in this chapter. But first, in the writing exercise that follows, you can practice some of these habits of mind. Pay attention to what feels new or different about this writing experience, and we'll ask you to reflect on that.

Exercise 1.2

A Roomful of Details

STEP ONE: Spend six minutes fastwriting in response to the following prompt. Write down whatever comes into your mind, no matter how silly. Be specific and don't censor yourself.

Try to remember a room you spent a lot of time in as a child. It may be your bedroom in the back of your house or apartment, or the kitchen where your

grandmother made thick, red pasta sauce or latkes. Put yourself back in that room. Now look around you. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Write in the present tense. (*I am standing in my grandmother's kitchen,...*). Write fast and immerse yourself in the details.

For example, *I am standing in my grandmother's kitchen, and through the window the pear tree is blooming. On the stove, the pasta sauce bubbles and the earthy smell of tomatoes mingles with the smell of my grandfather's cigar...*

STEP TWO: We'll write again for five minutes, but this time think about what you're going to say before you say it in writing, following the new prompt below:

Keeping in mind some of what you wrote in Step One, finish this sentence: *What I understand now that I didn't understand then is...* After you finish that sentence, follow the thought with more writing until you've drafted a fuller paragraph.

Read over your writing in Step One. Did anything surprise you?

STEP THREE: Take a moment to reflect on what happened in the first two steps of the exercise, particularly how they relate to the habits of mind discussed earlier. Think and write about your experience with this exercise. What were your takeaways?

In particular, did anything surprise you? What did you notice about the differences between steps one and two? What were the relationships between each step? Did you find yourself writing differently than you usually do? As a writer, what were your takeaways from this exercise, if any? Draft a full paragraph. When you're done, discuss in class or post your paragraph to the class discussion-board and discuss what happened.

One Student's Response

Bernice's Journal

EXERCISE 1.2

STEP TWO

STAINLESS STEEL COUNTERS

When I was five or six my father and I made cookies for the first time. I don't remember what prompted him to bake cookies, he liked to cook but he didn't read very well so he didn't like to use cook books. I remember sitting on the cold stainless steel, the big red and white cook book splayed over my lap. I was reading it out loud to my dad. The kitchen was warm but everything gleamed; it was industrial and functional. It was the only room in our house that still looked like it belonged to the "Old Pioneer School." My dad and uncles had renovated every other room into

bedrooms, playrooms, family rooms. The place was huge but cozy, it was home. I remember reading off ingredients until I got to the sugar. It called for $\frac{3}{4}$ cup and I didn't understand the fraction. I thought it meant three or four cups. We poured so much sugar into the bowl. The cookies were terrible. Hard and glassy, too sweet and brittle. It wasn't until years later that I understood that my dad didn't understand the measurement either. He was persistent though. We pulled down every cook book in the house until we found one that described the measuring cups and what they meant. We started all over and our second batch was perfect. My dad is one of the smartest people I know, inventive, imaginative but he only has a rudimentary education. He can read and write enough to get by, he's gifted with numbers, but I can't help looking back and wondering what he could have been, what he could have done for the world if just one person had taken him by the hand and showed him what he showed me. If just one person had told him not to give up, to keep trying, that in the end it will be worth all the work, I wonder who he could have been if one person had seen his curiosity and imagination and fostered it instead of seeing his muscles and capable hands and putting him to work. If just one person had told him that his mind was the greatest tool he possessed. If just one person baked cookies with him.

The Power of Reflection

1.3 Reflect on your own writing process and apply a problem-solving approach.

In Exercise 1.2, you may have been surprised by how much you could write about the mundane details of a room from your childhood, especially if you allowed the writing to run ahead of you, even if the prose wasn't that great. You may have even come to some new, little understanding about the significance of that room or the things that happened there. That's how writing to learn works—it offers up a feast of little surprises that encourage you to see the possibilities in a blank page.

Why is it then that so many of us are so rarely that motivated to write or even dread it? Part of the answer is we rarely think much about how we do it—a point we made a few pages ago. When we write, we tend to focus just on *what* and not on *how*, just on the product and not on the process. And then, when problems arise, we don't see many options for solving them—we get stuck, and we get frustrated. If, however, we start to pay attention to how we write in a variety of situations, two things happen:

- We become aware of our old habits that don't always help and may actually hinder our success with writing.
- Second—and this is most important—we begin to understand that there are actually *choices* we can make when problems arise, and we become aware of what some of those choices are. In short, *the more we understand the writing process, the more control we get over it*. Getting control of the process means the product gets better. Here's an example of what we mean.

A Case Study

Chauntain, one of Bruce's students, summarized her process this way: "Do one and be done." She always wrote her essays at the last minute and only wrote a single draft. She approached nearly every writing assignment the same way: Start with a thesis, and then develop five topic sentences that support the thesis, with three supporting details under each. This structure was a container into which she poured all her prose. Chauntain deliberated over every sentence, trying to make each one perfect, and as a result, she spent considerable time staring off into space searching for the right word or phrase. It was agony. The papers were almost always dull—she thought so, too—and just as often she struggled to reach the required page length. Chauntain had no idea of any other way to write a school essay. As a matter of fact, she thought it was really the *only* way. So when she got an assignment in her economics class to write an essay in which she was to use economic principles to analyze a question that arose from a personal observation, Chauntain was bewildered. How should she start? Could she rely on her old standby structure—thesis, topic sentences, supporting details? She felt stuck.

Because she failed to see that she had choices related to both process and this particular writing situation, she also had no clue what those choices were. That's why we study process. It helps us solve problems such as these. And it must begin with a self-study of your own habits as a writer, identifying not just how you tend to do things, but the patterns of problems that might arise when you do them.

Telling Your Own Story as a Writer

You will reflect on your writing and reading processes again and again throughout this book, so that by the end you may be able to tell the story of your processes and how you are changing them to produce better writing more efficiently. The reflective letter in your portfolio (see Appendix A) might be where you finally share that story in full. Now is a good time to begin telling yourself that story.

What do you remember about your own journey as a writer both inside and outside of school?

Suspending judgment
feels freer, exploratory....
Making judgments
shifts the writer into an
analytical mode.

Exercise 1.3

Literacy Narrative Collage

Create a collage of moments, memories, and reflections related to your experience with writing. *For each prompt, write fast for about three minutes. Keep your pen or fingers on the keyboard moving, and give yourself permission to write badly.* After you've responded to one prompt, skip a line and move on to the next one. Set aside about twenty minutes for this generating activity.

1. What is your earliest memory of writing? Tell the story.
2. We usually divide our experiences as writers into private writing and school writing, or writing we do by choice and writing we are required to do for

a grade. Let's focus on school writing. Tell the story of a teacher, a class, an essay, an exam, or a moment that you consider a *turning point* in your understanding of yourself as a writer or your understanding of school writing.

3. Writing is part of the fabric of everyday life in the United States, and this is truer than ever with Internet communication. Describe the roles that writing plays in a typical day for you. How have these daily roles of writing changed in your lifetime so far?
 4. What is the most successful (or least successful) thing you've ever written in or out of school? Tell the story.
 5. Choose one of your stories (or combine several of them) and draft two or three paragraphs to post to the class discussion-board or to discuss in class.
-

“Dialectical” Writing: Harnessing Your Creative and Critical Thought

1.4 Apply creative and critical thinking to a writing process that will help you generate ideas.

What do we mean when we say that you can think *through* writing? Usually, when we imagine someone who is “deep in thought,” we see him staring off into space with a furrowed brow, chin nested in one hand. He is not writing. He may be thinking about what he's *going* to write, but in the meantime the cursor is parked on the computer screen or the pen rests on the desk. Thinking like this is good—we do it all the time. But imagine if you also make thought external by following your thinking on paper or screen and not just in your head. Here is some of what happens:

- You have a record of what you've thought that you can return to again and again.
- As you *see* what you've just said, you discover something else to say.
- Because the process of thinking through writing is slower than thinking in your head, you think differently.
- Because externalizing thought takes mental effort, you are more immersed in thought, creating what one theorist called a state of “flow.”

As we've already mentioned, thinking through writing is most productive when you suspend judgment, reining in your internal critic. You may actually do some pretty good thinking with some pretty bad writing.

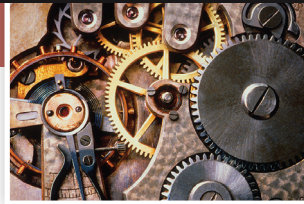
What is “Dialectical” Writing and Reading?

For all the reasons we just mentioned, making your thoughts external by writing them down can be a powerful way to discover what you think. But it's even more effective if you have a system for doing it, one that makes it more likely you'll

Inquiring into the Details

Invention Strategies

Invention is a term from rhetoric that means the act of generating ideas. While we typically think of *rhetoric* as something vaguely dishonest and often associated with politics, it’s actually a several-thousand-year-old body of knowledge about speaking and writing well. Invention is a key element in rhetoric. It can occur at any time during the writing process, not just at the beginning in the “prewriting” stage. Some useful invention strategies include:



Sandra Baker/Alamy Stock Photo

- **Fastwriting:** The emphasis is on speed, not correctness. Don’t compose, don’t think about what you want to say before you say it. Instead, let the writing lead, helping you discover what you think.
- **Listing:** Fast lists can help you generate lots of information quickly. They are often in code, with words and phrases that have meaning only for you. Let your lists grow in waves—think of two or three items and then pause until the next few items rush in.
- **Clustering:** This nonlinear method of generating information, also called *mapping*, relies on *webs* and often free association of ideas or information. Begin with a core word, phrase, or concept at the center of a page, and build branches off it. Follow each branch until it dies out, return to the core, and build another. (For an example, see p. 86.)
- **Questioning:** Questions are to ideas what knives are to onions. They help you cut through to the less obvious insights and perspectives, revealing layers of possible meanings, interpretations, and ways of understanding. Asking questions complicates things but rewards you with new discoveries.
- **Conversing:** Conversing is fastwriting with the mouth. When we talk, especially to someone we trust, we work out what we think and feel about things. We listen to what we say, but we also invite a response, which leads us to new insights.
- **Researching:** This is a kind of conversation, too. We listen and respond to other voices that have said something, or will say something if asked, about topics that interest us. Reading and interviewing are not simply things you do when you write a research paper, but activities you use whenever you have questions you can’t answer on your own.
- **Observing:** When we look closely at anything, we see what we didn’t notice at first. Careful observation of people, objects, experiments, images, and so on, generates specific information that leads to informed judgments.

generate useful insights. In *The Curious Writer*, we’ll encourage you to use a “dialectical” system for writing, including writing about reading, something you’ll explore in the next chapter.

“Dialectical” thinking is an attempt to reconcile two opposing thoughts through dialogue. It’s an old idea, one that reaches back to Socrates. But our application in

this book is a little different. The opposing thoughts in “dialectical writing” are the *creative* and the *critical*, and the dialogue is the writer talking with herself through writing. Creative and critical are opposed in the following four ways:

1. Creative thinking is freer, more open-ended, and frequently exploratory. Critical thinking is more focused, closed, and evaluative. It helps you to make *choices* about what to use in your writing and what not to use.
2. Creative thinking is closer to fastwriting, or what we sometimes call “bad” writing. Critical thinking is closer to composing, or when you more carefully craft your thoughts to capture what you already think.
3. Creative thinking often feels more expressive and more honest. When we think critically, we are more aware of another audience judging what we say.
4. Creative thinking is generative, often helpful in producing more information. Critical thinking involves judging what seems important in the information we’ve generated.

If we can harness *both* ways of thinking and seeing through writing, we have a powerful way of getting writing done *and* discovering new ideas about the subject of that writing. *We need both kinds of thinking to work together, shifting our gaze back and forth between them.*

Seeing creatively and critically is like looking through the lenses of a pair of binoculars. Our vision is amplified by looking through both lenses (see Figure 1.1).

So far in this chapter, the focus has been on the creative side, the generating activities called “writing badly” that restrain your internal critic. But you need that critical side. You need it to make sense of things, to evaluate what’s significant and what’s not, to help you figure out what you might be trying to say. If you use both kinds of thinking, “dialectically” moving back and forth from one to the other, then you’re using a method that is at the heart of the process

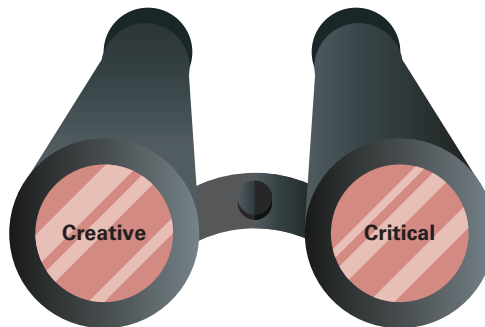


Figure 1.1 When writing and reading “dialectically,” you look through both the creative and critical lenses as you try to get the fullest view of your subject. Write creatively to explore the subject and generate information about it. Write critically to evaluate what you’ve found, looking for what’s important.

you’ll use throughout *The Curious Writer*. Let’s look a little more closely at how to apply creative and critical thinking.

Applying Creative and Critical Thinking Through Writing

How does dialectical writing work in practice? Well, you’ve already had some experience with it. Remember Exercise 1.2, “A Roomful of Details”? In the first part of the exercise, you explored a room that you spent time in as a child, writing down what you remembered about it by drawing on all of your senses. Many of our students find this fun as the details come rushing back. It’s often full of surprises. In the second part, we asked you to look back on this place and time, prompting you with this initial phrase: “What I understand about this time and place now that I didn’t understand then is...” Here the writing is more reflective, and often more abstract. Many students start to have insights about what that time in their lives meant to them: “I realized that my grandparents instilled in me that passion for justice that is now a big part of who I am.”

The first part of the exercise engaged creative thought and the second critical. When you saw through both, you not only summoned the details of your experience in an open-ended way but then looked at that information more critically to see if there are patterns of meaning you hadn’t noticed before.

Another metaphor for this is that in creative thinking we jump into the sea of experience/information, and in critical thinking, we climb out of the water, ascend the mountain of reflection with its higher vantage point, and see what’s significant about where we’ve swum (see Figure 1.2). Creative thinking creates the conditions for discovery by

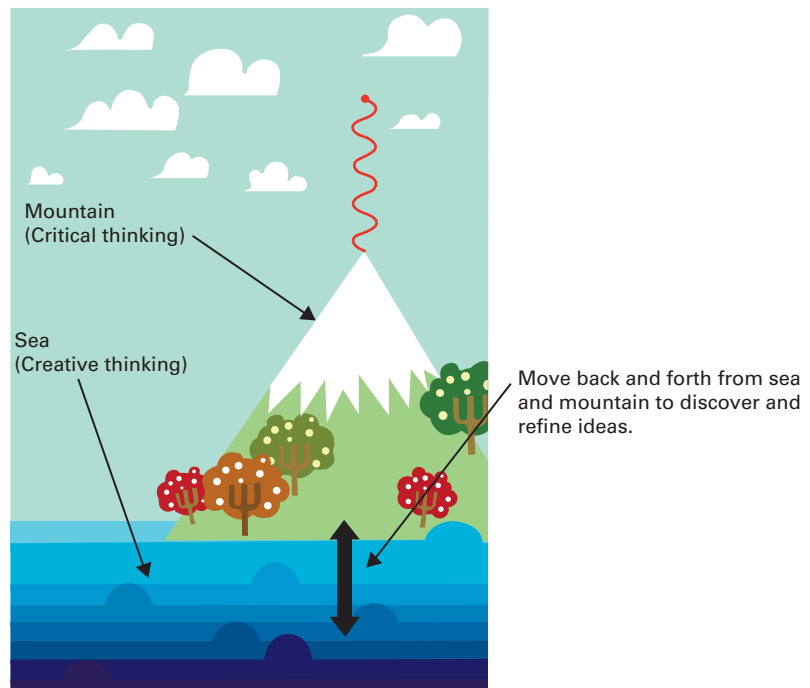


Figure 1.2 Generating insight using critical and creative thinking. Here’s another way to understand the dialectical method of writing. Thinking to inquire is like the movement back and forth from the sea of information to the mountain of reflection. In one, you explore and collect, and on the other, you evaluate and analyze. Insight develops when you continually move back and forth; as you refine your ideas, when in the sea, you swim in ever smaller circles with a stronger sense of purpose.

generating material to analyze, while critical thinking helps writers establish what ideas about the material seem most significant, and why. Behind all of this is the effort to answer a simple question: *So what?* What is the purpose behind our writing on a subject, and why should readers care about what we have to say?

This may be a big break with how you've done academic writing in the past. In "A Roomful of Details," you used creative and critical thinking to write about personal experience. But you can apply dialectical writing to explore and analyze nearly anything—a work of art, a controversial issue, data about a social trend, and so on. In the next chapter, you'll learn how to use it to respond to what you read.

Problem Solving in Your Writing Process

If you took the survey, you probably uncovered some problems with your writing process. The great news for those of us who struggle with certain aspects of writing—and who doesn't?—is that you can do something about it. As you identify the obstacles to doing better work, you can change the way you approach writing tasks. For instance, consider some of the more common problems students struggle with and some ideas about how *The Curious Writer* can help you with them.

Table 1.1 Common Problems

Writing Problem	Possible Cause	A Solution
Consistently writes short. Often can't meet page requirements for assignments.	Writer works from scarcity. Begins the draft with too little information on the topic.	Focus on invention. Generate more material <i>before</i> you begin the draft, through research, fastwriting, etc. (see "Inquiring into the Details: Invention Strategies" in this chapter).
Dislikes revision, especially if it involves more than "tidying" things up.	Writer spends a great deal of time writing the first draft and trying to make it "perfect." Gets overcommitted to the initial approach to the topic.	Write a fast draft and then do deeper revision. Attack the draft physically (see Revision Strategy 14.18 in Chapter 14).
Writer's block.	Internal critic is too harsh too early in the writing process. Often involves anxiety about audience.	Find a place where you can write badly without it feeling like a performance. A journal or notebook often works (see "Tools for Inquiry-based Writing: Fastwriting and Journaling" in this chapter).
Dislikes open-ended assignments. Would rather be told what to write about.	Writer may be unused to valuing own thinking. Little experience with assignments in which writer must discover own purpose.	Use your own curiosity and questions to drive the process. Craft questions that are useful guides for exploration and promise discovery and learning (see "Starting with Questions, Not Answers" in this chapter).

Writing Problem	Possible Cause	A Solution
Struggles with focus. Able to write a lot but can't seem to stay on topic.	Writer doesn't exploit key opportunities to look at writing critically, to evaluate and judge what she has generated.	Effectively combine invention with evaluation, generating with judging, by using a process that makes room for both as you write.

Inquiry Is Driven by Questions

1.5 Describe what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.

The inquiry approach is grounded in the idea that the writing process depends, more than anything else, on finding good questions to address. But what are *good* inquiry questions? Obviously, for a question to be good, you have to be interested in it. Furthermore, others must also have a stake in the answer, because you'll be sharing what you learn.

This chapter began with an exercise on a water bottle. We asked you to generate a short list of questions about water bottles (the category of thing) to demonstrate how good questions can make even the most ordinary things potentially interesting. You can do this with anything—a lemon, a rock, a comb. Let's try it again.

Exercise 1.4

Myth of the Boring Topic

Study the lemon picture just to get you thinking. When you're ready, brainstorm as many questions as you can about *lemons*. Don't censor yourself. Anything goes, at least to start. Try listing for five full minutes. For example, "Where do most lemons come from?" and "How are they harvested and who harvests them?" and "How are those workers treated?" You'll find the questions feed off each other until they don't. Then find a new angle.



Andrea Ravasio/Shutterstock

Kinds of Questions

Look over your list.

How many of them are *questions of fact*? These are questions that ask what is known about a topic, things like "Where do lemons come from?" or "What are some household uses of lemons?" (See Table 1.2.) These are the kinds of questions we

almost always ask first about anything we want to learn more about. That's how we get a "working knowledge" of something.

But questions of fact are not particularly good inquiry questions. Good inquiry questions have two qualities:

1. They can sustain an investigation over time.
2. They lead writers to make *judgments* about the thing they're investigating.

Here's a good inquiry question about a lemon: *What do lemons symbolize in Latino art?* Here's another: *What are the most environmentally sustainable ways to grow lemons?* Both questions go beyond what is known about lemons—something

Table 1.2 Types of Questions

Type	Question	Example	Writing Genres
Fact	What is known about _____?	How many people watch reality TV in the U.S.? What are the demographics of the viewing audience?	Report
Definition	What is ____ called, and what do key people think that means?	What is "reality" TV?	Definition Argument
Policy	What should be done about _____?	What might be ethical guidelines for how participants are treated in reality TV shows?	Proposal
Hypothesis	What is the best explanation for ____?	Is the popularity of reality TV another sign of the breakdown of community in the U.S.?	Analytic, Factual Argument, Research Essay
Relationship	What is the relationship between ____ and _____? What might be the cause (or consequence) of ____?	Does watching reality crime shows affect viewers' attitudes towards police?	Causal Argument, Research Essay
Interpretation	What might _____ mean?	How might we interpret the politics of race relations on <i>Survivor</i> ?	Analytic, Personal Essay
Value	How good is _____?	Which reality crime show provides the most realistic portrait of police work?	Review
Claim	What's the problem, where is the disagreement, what's at stake, and what should we do?	Do shows like <i>Intervention</i> help viewers develop more sympathetic attitudes towards addiction?	Argument, Proposal, Review

that simply requires the reporting of fact—and challenge the writer to analyze the answers and arrive at conclusions.

Searching for good questions also ties back to creative and critical thinking. In your initial brainstorm, you openly entertained as many questions as you could think of, even if some of them seemed dumb. As you look more critically at that list of lemon questions, you shift into more analytical mode, asking: “Which of these questions are any good?” Without the creative phase, you wouldn’t have as many questions to analyze. Without the analysis, it would just be a list of sometimes amusing question about lemons.

Different types of questions lead to different kinds of judgments. And it’s landing on the appropriate type of question for your project that will launch you into meaningful inquiry. For example, here’s how different types of questions yield different ways of inquiring into the topic of reality television:

A good question not only lights your way into a subject but may also illuminate what form you could use to share your discoveries. Certain kinds of writing—reviews, critical essays, personal essays, and so on—are often associated with certain types of questions, as you can see in Table 1.2. In Part 2 of *The Curious Writer*, which features a range of inquiry projects from the personal essay to the research essay, you’ll see how certain questions naturally guide you towards certain kinds of writing.

A Strategy for Inquiry: Open Rather than Direct

1.6 Distinguish between “open” writing situations that invite inquiry and less exploratory “direct” writing.

Starting a writing project with questions rather than answers changes everything. First, it takes you into unknown territory. Instead of seizing on a thesis at the beginning, your thesis is a product of your investigation. Your initial goal is to *find out* rather than to prove something. That’s why having a process of using writing to think about your topic is key.

Another way of looking at this is that when we write we often have two different problems to solve:

1. How to explain what you already know.
2. How to discover what you think.

The first problem, typified by a genre like the essay exam, mostly involves questions of arrangement—how to logically present information that makes what you think both clear and convincing. We call this *direct* writing, and most of us do a lot of it in the workplace and in school. In many classes, short writing assignments focus on demonstrating what you already know (or should know). The second problem is a quite different one to solve. First, you have to decide what exactly you want to find out—what are the questions at the heart of your investigation of a writing topic? And then, you have to devote time to learning about your topic and then discovering what you want to say about it. This process

is much more *open*, and it's a process at the heart of academic inquiry. It's also at the heart of this book.

Now that you've got a better idea of how to find these inquiry questions, and a method for using writing to help you both generate material on a question and help you think about it, let's try to apply the techniques in a mini-inquiry project.

Exercise 1.5

A Mini-Inquiry Project: Cell Phone Culture

More than 95 percent of us now have cell phones, and more than 40% of us say we can't live without them. One study reports that 81% of U.S. adults use them daily, and nearly a third of those use them "almost constantly." None of this may surprise you. Cell phones make us feel safer, and of course, they're an enormous convenience. But they've also introduced new annoyances into modern life, like the "halfalogue," the distracting experience of being subjected to one half of a stranger's conversation with someone on their cell phone. It's a technology that is fundamentally changing our culture—our sense of community and connection, our identities, the way we spend our time. But how? Try exploring that question for yourself to see if you can discover what *you* find interesting about the topic.

Creative

STEP ONE: Let's first take a dip in the sea of information. Recent research on "cell phone addiction" suggests that, as with Internet addiction, "overuse" of the technology can result in anxiety, depression, irritability, and antisocial behavior. This research also suggests that college students are particularly vulnerable to cell phone addiction. One survey to determine whether someone is cell phone addicted asks some of the following questions:

- Do you feel preoccupied about possible calls or messages on your phone, and do you think about it when you can't look at your phone?
- How often do you anticipate your next use of the cell phone?
- How often do you become angry and/or start to shout if someone interrupts you when you're talking on a cell phone or texting?
- Do you use a cell to escape from your problems?

Start by exploring your reaction to this list in a fastwrite in your journal, print or digital. Write for at least three minutes but write longer if you can. What do you make of the whole idea of "cell phone addiction?" What does this make you think about? And then what? And then?



Sylvie Bouchard/Shutterstock

Critical

STEP TWO: Reread your fastwrite, underlining anything that you find interesting, surprising, or possibly significant. Pay particular attention to anything that might have surprised you. Then thoughtfully finish the following sentence.

One interesting question that this raises for me is: _____?

Creative

STEP THREE: Focus on the question you came up with in step 2. Return to the sea and write about specific *observations, stories, people, situations, or scenes* that come to mind when you consider the question you posed. Don't hesitate to explore other questions as they arise as well. Let the writing lead. Write fast for *at least* another three minutes without stopping.

Critical

STEP FOUR: Review what you just wrote. Thoughtfully complete the following sentence, and then follow that first sentence for as long as you can compose here, thinking about what you're going to say before you say it, rather than fastwriting.

So far, one thing I seem to be saying is that we...

Finding a Question

STEP FIVE: You haven't generated much writing on cell phone culture yet, but if you've written for ten minutes or so, you should have enough information to take a stab at writing a tentative inquiry question. Using the question categories in Table 1.2, try to draft a question about cell phones, cell phone culture, cell phone addiction, or any other topic suggested by your writing. Remember, the question should be one of the following:

- A value question: Is it any good?
- A policy question: What should be done?
- A hypothesis question: What is the best explanation?
- A relationship question: What is the relationship between _____ and _____?
- An interpretation question: What might it mean?
- A claim question: What does the evidence seem to support?
 - A definition question: What is ____ called? What do people think it means?
 - A fact question: What is known about _____?

Inquiry, Academic Writing, and the Thesis

What we've described to you here is probably a quite different way of approaching school writing. Most of our students are accustomed to writing thesis-driven

essays, and the rush to prove a point typically short-circuits the kind of invention and exploration that we've described here. You pick a topic (or are assigned one), quickly come up with a thesis, and then collect relevant evidence (see Figure 1.3).

This isn't always a bad way to approach school writing tasks, but it's not the way academic inquiry works. Because the motive of academic writers is discovery—to find out new things about the world or new ways of seeing it—the work is initially driven by questions. Then there's the often messy phase of collecting evidence, looking for patterns, revising the questions, collecting more evidence, finding new patterns, and so on. It usually involves the habits of mind that we described earlier in the chapter, especially a willingness to suspend judgment.

While inquiry-based projects often do in fact work towards a thesis, a claim, a big idea, much like conventional school writing, that thesis emerges later from what writers have discovered in their investigations. The inquiry process may sound inefficient. After all, it's a lot simpler to just cook up a thesis early on and avoid all that uncertainty. But academic writers learn something that we hope you'll experience, too, as you work through the projects in Part 2 of *The Curious Writer*: Surprise and discovery are fun. It's often pleasurable to pursue topics about which you are curious. Through writing and thinking about them, you *learn something new*. Even better, as you learn about your topic through inquiry, you learn about yourself, discovering new ways of seeing along with new ways of thinking.

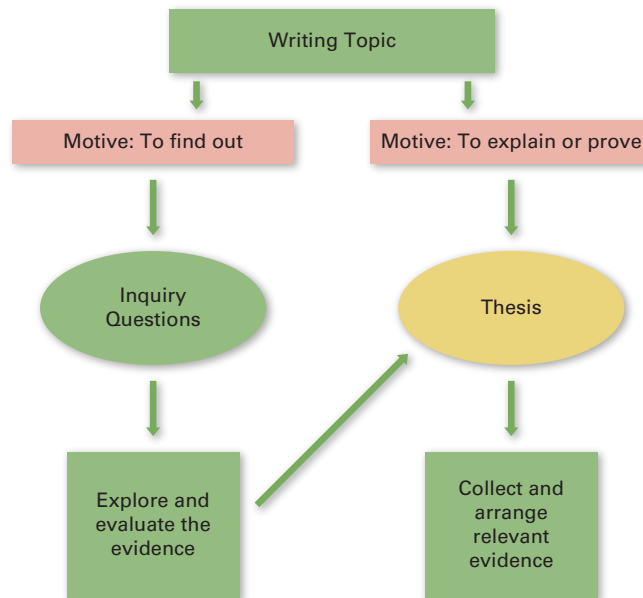


Figure 1.3 Exploring and Evaluating Evidence. Much academic writing is organized around a controlling idea—a thesis—in an attempt to prove or explain something. Inquiry-based projects also work towards a thesis, but because they begin with a different motive—to find out—there's another purpose: exploring and evaluating evidence in hopes of discovery.

Final Reflective Inquiry About Your Writing

Earlier in this chapter, we invited your first thoughts on your history as a writer. Let's end the chapter with some final ones. Again, the reason these kinds of reflections are so important is that they will speed up your learning, help you to adapt more easily to a range of writing situations, and make writing less frustrating when things go wrong. Experts call this “reflective inquiry,” and they observe that experienced professionals in many fields often do this kind of thinking. In a way, reflective inquiry is thinking *about* thinking. It isn't easy. But it is also one of the most important ways in which we *transfer* what we know from one situation to another. Reflective thinking is key to making the most of your learning in this writing course.

Exercise 1.6

Scenes of Writing

Think about the writing and thinking you've done about yourself as a writer in this chapter. Review your notes from all of the exercises you tried. Now imagine the kind of writer *you would like to be*.

Scene 1

A month ago, you got a writing assignment in your philosophy course: a twelve-page paper that explores some aspect of Plato's dialogues. It's the night before the paper is due. Describe the scene. What are you doing? Where? What's happening? What are you thinking? If you can, make use of the various types of writing that can convey scene: setting, action, description, narration, dialogue.

Scene 2

Rewrite scene 1. This time, script it as you *wish* it would look.

Finally, imagine that each scene is the opening of a film. What would they be titled?

Reflective Inquiry

Think about the terms we've used in this chapter to talk about the writing process—terms such as these:

- *Fastwriting*
- *Revision*
- *Inquiry*
- *Critical and creative thinking*
- *Invention*
- *Reflection*
- *Exploration*
- *Inquiry questions*

- *Habits of mind*
- *Suspending judgment*
- *Genre*
- *Alternating currents of thought*
- *Open writing and direct writing*
- *Writing badly*

Draft a 200- to 250-word essay or discussion-board post about your own writing process—past, present, or future—that uses as much of the terminology of the writing process as you find relevant and useful to your essay or post.

The Organization of TCW

This chapter has introduced you to how you can use writing for discovery; the next chapter will show you how you can use reading to do the same. Both chapters provide you with inquiry strategies you can apply to every assignment in TCW.

In Part 2 of *The Curious Writer*, you will get to work doing inquiry. This book will help you to find the topics and questions you want to explore and introduce you to a range of genres that will help you to explore them. These include genres like the personal essay, review, ethnography, proposal, argument and documented research essay. Though the overall aim of Part 2 is to help you become a more flexible, imaginative writer, it's also an introduction to how these writing genres help you to see subjects in different ways. We put these genres in two groups—those that focus on “interpretive” inquiry, and those that involve “persuasive” inquiry. Interpretive genres analyze the meanings of things, while persuasive genres typically involve a call to action.

Imagine that these genres are lenses that influence what we see and how we see it. Writing a personal essay turns your gaze inward, while an argument turns it outward. One directs your attention to the particulars of personal experience, and the other to certain kinds of evidence that best make a case. Knowing how each genre influences your purposes and perceptions is powerful knowledge for a writer, and a good way to learn that is to see how different genres approach the same inquiry question. That's why each chapter in Part 2 includes a reading focused on this inquiry question: “*How will a changing climate influence how we live?*” *The icon shown here will indicate the reading in each chapter focused on this question.*



Every chapter of Part 2 of *The Curious Writer* will feature a reading that addresses this inquiry question: *How will a changing climate influence how we live?* Look for this picture to find each reading.

As you work through the following chapters, notice how the treatment of that inquiry question shifts with each genre. For example:

- **Impact.** Some genres create opportunities for writers to explore the impact of climate change in very personal ways, others seem especially effective for influencing behavior or policy, while others seem like excellent vehicles for sharing information, making arguments, or interpreting the behavior of those impacted by a warming planet.
- **Audience.** Genres were invented not only because writers sought new forms of expression but because of the rhetorical needs of particular audiences. Twitter was invented to reach users who scroll. Academic articles use citations because its readers want to see how new findings are connected to what we already know. The personal essay thrived because readers sipping coffee in English coffee shops wanted to read something that would keep them busy for a cup or two. What do you notice about how a writer's choice of a genre to address the climate change question might reflect his or her interest in appealing to a certain audience?
- **Rhetorical strategies.** Earlier we introduced you to the rhetorical concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos. These three elements of persuasion are at work in nearly every genre, but the emphasis on each might vary. Understanding this will certainly help you compose an essay, but the balance between ethos, pathos, and logos is also a function of who you're writing for and why. Notice how the authors of the climate change readings handle that balance.

Part 3 of *The Curious Writer* focuses on researched writing. It's organized around writing research essays—more extended writing projects that combine features of both interpretive and persuasive genres. In a sense, this project pulls together many of the things you've learned in Part 2. Of course, you've been writing research papers in school for a while now, but we think you'll be surprised by our approach. The inquiry goal of discovery changes why and how you do research.

Finally, in Part 4, we explore revision. There you'll find an entire chapter devoted to revision techniques that will help you solve typical problems with your drafts. We know of no other book like this that offers such an extensive toolbox for revision. Chapter 13 takes things even further by introducing the concept of “re-genre,” a form of radical revision. In that chapter, we invite you to take one of your written assignments and “re-genre” it into a multimedia genre like a podcast or social media campaign. The act of re-genre may teach you more than anything about how genres shift your ways of seeing. Throughout the text, you will be offered examples of “re-genres,” multimedia “essays” that range from cartoons to short videos. Chapter 13 will teach you how to do them.

As you work your way through *The Curious Writer*, we'll be right there along with you, showing you that writing involves making a series of choices rather than following rules. We hope that you will learn, as we have, that if you write with the spirit of inquiry you'll be treated to a feast of surprises. Expecting the unexpected becomes a part of your writing life, inside and outside of school.

Using What You Have Learned

This chapter should lay groundwork for the rest of the text in the following ways:

- 1.1 Articulate how you think of yourself as a writer.** Now that you've started to tell the story of how you write, use that story as a baseline for the reflection you do throughout the text as you develop new knowledge about how to approach a range of writing tasks. Refer back to the stories you told here. Be alert to how that story is changing.
- 1.2 Identify and practice the habits of mind that are the foundation of academic inquiry.** As a college student, you'll encounter all different kinds of writing assignments, and write in many different genres. Each discipline has its own way of writing and researching. But there are certain habits of mind described here that you can use whenever you're invited to discover your own ideas about the subjects you learn about, no matter what the discipline or genre of writing.
- 1.3 Reflect on your own writing process and apply a problem-solving approach.** Reflecting on *how* we do something is the key to getting better at it, from basketball to writing. When you do, you can name the problems that are obstacles to improvement. Then they become problems to solve, rather than problems that you have to live with.
- 1.4 Apply creative and critical thinking to a writing process that will help you generate ideas.** You can *think through* writing, and we've shown you a method for doing it. By tapping both a creative and critical mind, and alternating between the two, you can discover new ideas. "Bad" writing, or writing where you're less concerned about writing perfectly and more about exploring what you think, unlocks the creative mind. Applying questions and finding critical distance allows you to see what might be significant in the mess your creative mind has made. You can use this method throughout *The Curious Writer* whenever you want to figure out what you think or what you want to say. Adapt the method in ways that make sense to you. Will you use a notebook for "bad" writing? Is there someone who can read your work who will give voice to your critical mind? What types of questions do you find most helpful as you revise your work?
- 1.5 Describe what kinds of questions will sustain inquiry into any subject.** Curiosity is the engine of inquiry, and it's powered by questions. You've learned that not all questions have equal power, and that some are related to certain kinds of writing. With each inquiry project in Part 2, you'll be searching for the right question. Apply what you've learned here about the *types* of questions that will sustain your work and lead to new ideas.
- 1.6 Distinguish between "open" writing situations that invite inquiry and less exploratory "direct" writing.** Though you'll encounter a whole range of writing assignments in college, it's helpful to know which invite inquiry and which don't. More "open" assignments will invite the kind of exploratory writing we focus on in this book. "Direct" assignments still involve invention and exploration, but tend to focus more quickly on establishing your purpose and organizing a structure around it. This distinction is something you can use to decide how to approach most writing assignments in college.