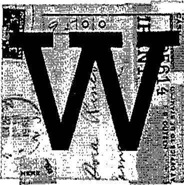
# Is Everyone an Author?



**WE'VE CHOSEN A PROVOCATIVE TITLE** for this book, so it's fair to ask if we've gotten it right, if everyone is an author. Let's take just a few examples that can help to make the point:

- A student creates a *Facebook* page, which immediately finds a large audience of other interested students.
- A visitor to the United States sends an email message to a few friends and family members in Slovakia—and they begin forwarding it. The message circles the globe in a day.
- A professor assigns students in her class to work together to write a number of entries for *Wikipedia*, and they are surprised to find how quickly their entries are revised by others.
- An airline executive writes a letter of apology for unconscionable delays in service and publishes the letter in newspapers, where millions will read it.
- A small group of high school students who are keen on cooking post their recipe for Crazy Candy Cookies on their *Cook's Corner* blog and are overwhelmed with the number of responses to their invention.
- Five women nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress prepare acceptance speeches: One of them will deliver the speech live before a national audience.

- You get your next assignment in your college writing class and set out to do the research necessary to complete it. When you're finished, you turn in your twelve-page argument to your instructor and classmates for their responses—and you also post it on your webpage under "What I'm Writing Now."

All of these examples represent important messages written by people who probably do not consider themselves authors. Yet they illustrate what we mean when we say that today "everyone's an author." Once upon a time, the ability to compose a message that reached wide and varied audiences was restricted to a small group; now, however, this opportunity is available to anyone with access to the internet.

The word *author* has a long history, but it is most associated with the rise of print and the ability of a writer to claim what he or she has written as property. The first copyright act, in the early eighteenth century, ruled that authors held the primary rights to their work. And while anyone could potentially be a writer, an author was someone whose work had been published. That rough definition worked pretty well until recently, when traditional copyright laws began to show the strain of their 300-year history, most notably with the simple and easy file sharing that the internet makes possible.

In fact, the web has blurred the distinction between writers and authors, offering anyone with access to a computer the opportunity to publish what they write. Whether or not you own a computer, if you have access to one (at school, at a library), you can publish what you write and thus make what you say available to readers around the world.

Think for a minute about the impact of blogs, which first appeared in 1997. As this book goes to press, there are more than 156 million public blogs, a trend that shows no sign of slowing down. Add to blogs the rise of *Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+,* and other social networking sites for ever more evidence to support our claim: Today, everyone's an author. Moreover, twenty-first-century authors just don't fit the image of the Romantic writer, alone in a garret, struggling to bring forth something unique. Rather, today's authors are part of a huge, often global, conversation; they build on what others have thought and written, they create mash-ups and remixes, and they practice teamwork at almost every turn. They are authoring for the digital age.



## Redefining Writing

If the definition of *author* has changed in recent years, so has our understanding of the definition, nature, and scope of *writing*.

Writing, for example, now includes much more than words, as images and graphics take on the job of conveying an important part of the meaning. In addition, writing can now include sound, video streaming, and other media. Perhaps more important, writing now often contains many voices, as information from the web is incorporated into the texts we write with increasing ease. Finally, as we noted above, writing today is almost always part of a larger conversation. Rather than rising mysteriously from the depths of a writer's original thoughts, a stereotype made popular during the Romantic period, writing almost always responds to some other written piece or to other ideas. If "no man [or woman] is an island, apart from the main," then the same holds true for writing.

Writing now is also often highly collaborative. You work with a team to produce an illustrated report, the basis of which is used by members of the team to make a key presentation to management; you and a colleague carry out an experiment, argue over and write up the results together, and present your findings to a class; a business class project calls on you and others in your group to divide up the work along lines of expertise and then to pool your efforts in meeting the assignment. In all of these cases, writing is also performative—it performs an action or, in the words of many students we have talked with, it "makes something happen in the world."

Perhaps most notable, this expanded sense of writing challenges us to think very carefully about what our writing is for and whom it can and might reach. Email provides a good case in point. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Tamim Ansary, a writer who was born in Afghanistan, found himself stunned by the number of people calling for bombing Afghanistan "back to the Stone Age." He sent an email to a few friends expressing his horror at the events, his condemnation of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, and his hope that those in the United States would not act on the basis of gross stereotyping. The few dozen friends to whom Ansary wrote hit their forward buttons. Within days, the letter had circled the globe more than once, and Ansary's words were published by the Africa News Service, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer,* the *Evening Standard* in London, the *San Francisco Chronicle,* and many other papers in the United States, as well as on many websites.

Authors or writers whose messages can be instantly transported around the world need to consider those who will receive those messages. As the example of Tamim Ansary shows, no longer can writers assume that they write only to a specified audience or that they can easily control the dissemination of their messages. We now live not only in a city, a state, and a country but in a global community as well—and we write, intentionally or not, to speakers of many languages, to members of many cultures, to believers of many creeds.

## Everyone's a Researcher

Since all writing responds to the ideas and words of others, it usually draws on some kind of research. Think for a moment of how often you carry out research. We're guessing that a little reflection will turn up lots of examples: You may find yourself digging up information on the pricing of new cars, searching *Craigslist* or the want ads for a good job, comparing two new MP3 players, looking up statistics on a favorite sports figure, or searching for a recipe for tabbouleh. All of these everyday activities involve research. In addition, many of your most important life decisions involve research—what colleges to apply to, what jobs to pursue, where to live, and more. Once you begin to think about research in this broad way—as a form of inquiry related to important decisions—you'll probably find that research is something you do almost every day. Moreover, you'll see the ways in which the research you do adds to your credibility—giving you the authority that goes along with being an author.

But research today is very different from research of only a few decades ago. Take the example of the concordance, an alphabetized listing of topics and words in a work that gathers up every instance of that topic or word in the work. Before the computer age, concordances were done by hand: the first full concordance to the works of Shakespeare took decades of eye-straining, painstaking research, counting, and sorting. Some scholars spent years, even whole careers, developing concordances that then served as major resources for other scholars. As soon as Shakespeare's plays and poems were in digital form—voilà!—a concordance could be produced automatically and accessed by writers with the click of a mouse.

To take a more recent example, first-year college students just twenty years ago had no access to the internet. Just think of how easy it is now to check temperatures around the world, track a news story, or keep up to the minute on stock prices. These are items that you can *Google*, but you may also have many expensive subscription databases available to you through your school's library. It's not too much of an exaggeration to say that the world is literally at your fingertips.



What has *not* changed is the need to carry out research with great care, to read all sources with a critical eye, and to evaluate sources before depending on them for an important decision or using them in your own work. What also has not changed is the sheer thrill research can bring: While much research work can seem plodding and even repetitious, the excitement of discovering materials you didn't know existed, of analyzing information in a new way, or of tracing a question through one particular historical period brings its own reward. Moreover, your research adds to what philosopher Kenneth Burke calls "the conversation of humankind," as you build on what others have done and begin to make significant contributions of your own to the world's accumulated knowledge.

## Everyone's a Student

More than 2,000 years ago, the Roman writer Quintilian set out a plan for education, beginning with birth and ending only with old age and death. Surprisingly enough, Quintilian's recommendation for a lifelong education has never been more relevant than it is in the twenty-first century, as knowledge is increasing and changing so fast that most people must continue to be active learners long after they graduate from college. This explosion of knowledge also puts great demands on communication. As a result, one of your biggest challenges will be learning how to learn and how to communicate what you have learned across wider distances, to larger and increasingly diverse sets of audiences, and using an expanding range of media and genres.

When did you first decide to attend college, and what paths did you take to achieve that goal? Chances are greater today than at any time in our past that you may have taken time off to work before beginning college, or that you returned to college for new training when your job changed, or that you are attending college while working part-time or even full-time. These characteristics of college students are not new, but they are increasingly important, indicating that the path to college is not as straightforward as it was once thought to be. In addition, college is now clearly a part of a process of lifetime learning: you are likely to hold a number of positions—and each new position will call for new learning.

Citizens today need more years of education and more advanced skills than ever before: Even entry-level jobs now call for a college diploma. But what you'll need isn't just a college education. Instead, you'll need an education that puts you in a position to take responsibility for your own learning and to take a direct, hands-on approach to that learning. Most of us learn best by *doing* what we're trying to learn rather than just being told about it. What does this change mean in practice? First, it means you will be doing much more writing, speaking, and researching than ever before. You may, for instance, conduct research on an economic trend and then use that research to create a theory capable of accounting for the trend; you may join a research group in an electrical engineering class that designs, tests, and implements a new system; you may be a member of a writing class that works to build a website for the local fire department, writes brochures for a nonprofit agency, or makes presentations before municipal boards. In each case, you will be doing what you are studying, whether it is economics, engineering, or writing.

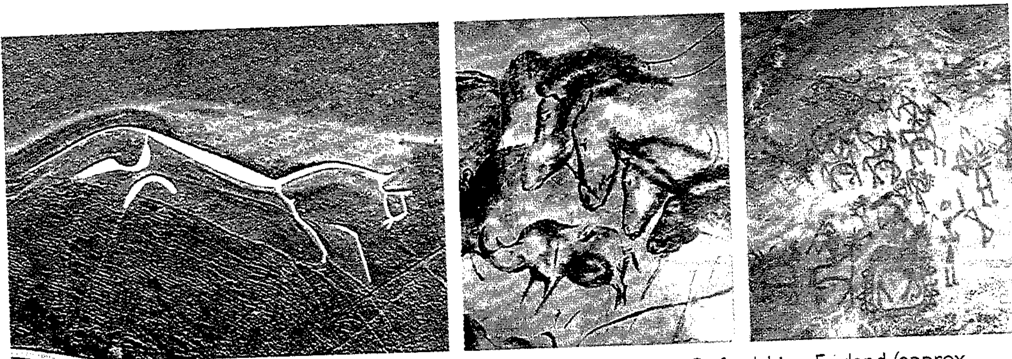
Without a doubt, the challenges and opportunities for students today are immense. The chapters that follow try to keep these challenges and opportunities in the foreground, offering you concrete ways to think about yourself as a writer—and yes, as an author; to think carefully about the rhetorical situations you face and about the many and varied audiences for your work; and to expand your writing repertoire to include new genres, new media, and new ways of producing and communicating knowledge.

PART I

# The Need for Rhetoric and Writing

CLOSE YOUR EYES and imagine a world without any form of language—no spoken or written words, no drawings, no mathematical formulas, no music—no way, that is, to communicate or express yourself. It's pretty hard to imagine such a world, and with good reason. For better or worse, we seem to be hardwired to communicate, to long to express ourselves to others. That's why philosopher Kenneth Burke says that people are, at their essence, "symbol-using animals" who have a basic need to communicate.

We can look across history and find early attempts to create systems of communication. Think, for instance, of



Horses in prehistoric art: Uffington White Horse, Oxfordshire, England (approx. 3,000 years old); Chauvet Cave, near Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, France (approx. 31,000 years old); rock paintings, Bhimbetka, India (approx. 30,000 years old).

the chalk horses of England, huge figures carved into trenches that were then filled with white chalk some 3,500 years ago. What do they say? Do they mark the territory in some way? Are they celebratory? Whatever their original intent, they echo the need to communicate to us from millennia away.

Cave paintings, many of them hauntingly beautiful, have been discovered across Europe, some thought to be 30,000 years old. Such communicative art—all early forms of writing—has been discovered in many other places, from Africa to Australia to South America to Asia.

While these carvings and paintings have been interpreted in many different ways, they all attest to the human desire to leave messages. And we don't need to look far to find other very early attempts to communicate—from makeshift drums and whistles to early pictographic languages to the symbols associated with the earliest astronomers.

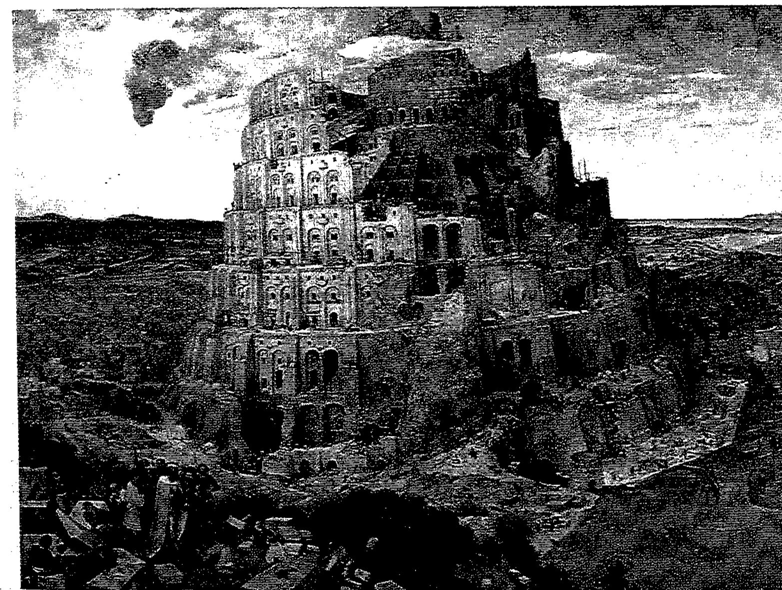
As languages and other symbolic forms of communication like our own alphabet evolved, so did a need for ways to interpret and organize these forms and to use them in new and inventive ways. And out of these needs grew rhetoric—the great art, theory, and practice of communication. In discussing rhetoric, Aristotle says we need to understand this art for two main reasons: first, in order to express our own ideas and thoughts, and second, to protect ourselves from those who would try to manipulate or harm us. Language, then, can be used for good or ill, to provide information that may help someone—or that may be deliberately misleading.

We believe the need for understanding rhetoric may be greater today than at any time in our history. At first glance, it may look as if communication has never been easier. We can send messages in a nanosecond, reaching people in all parts of the world with ease. We can broadcast our thoughts, hopes, and dreams—and invectives—on email, blogs, *Facebook* status updates, tweets, text messages, and a plethora of other means.



So far, perhaps, so good. But consider the story of the Tower of Babel, told in different ways in both the Qur'an and the Bible. When the people sought to build a tower that would reach to the heavens, God responded to their hubris by creating so many languages that communication became impossible—and the tower had to be abandoned. As with the languages in Babel, the means of communication are proliferating today, bringing with them the potential for miscommunication. From the old game of passing a message around a circle by whispering it to the person next to you—only to see it emerge at the end of the exercise bearing little if any resemblance to its original—to the challenge of trying to communicate across vast differences in languages and cultures, we face challenges that our parents and grandparents never did.

In a time when new (and sometimes confusing) forms of communication are available to us, many are looking for ways to aid in the process of



Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Tower of Babel*, 1563.

YAHOO! BABEL FISH Search

日本語

修辞のための必要性

Search the web with this text

Translate again ( Enter up to 150 words )

the need for rhetoric

English to Japanese Translate

*Babel Fish*'s translation of "the need for rhetoric" from English to Japanese.

communication. *Google Translate* and *Yahoo! Babel Fish*, for example, are attempts to offer instant translation of texts from one language to another.

Such new technologies and tools can certainly help us as we move into twenty-first-century global villages. But they are not likely to reduce the need for an art and a theory that can inform them—and that can evaluate their usefulness, calculate their pros and cons, and improve on them. Rhetoric responds to this need. Along with writing, which we define broadly to include speaking and drawing and performing as well as the literal inscription of words, rhetoric offers you solid ground on which to build your education as well as your communicative ability and style. The chapters that follow will introduce you more fully to rhetoric and writing—and engage you in acquiring and using their powers.

ONE

# Thinking Rhetorically

*The only real alternative to war is rhetoric.*

—WAYNE BOOTH

ROFESSOR WAYNE BOOTH made this statement at a national conference of scholars and teachers of writing held only months after 9/11, and it quickly drew a range of responses: Just what did Booth mean by this stark statement? How could rhetoric—the art and practice of persuasion—act as a counter to war?

Throughout his long career, Booth explored these questions, identifying rhetoric as an ethical art that begins with deep and intense listening and that searches for mutual understanding and common ground as an alternative to violence and war. Put another way, two of the most potent tools we have for persuasion are language and violence: When words fail us, violence often wins the day. Booth, a noted critic and scholar, sees the careful, ethical use of language as our best approach to keeping violence and war at bay. Years later, Booth's words echoed again, during the start of the Arab Spring of 2011 as a vast gathering of Egyptian citizens protested in Cairo's Tahrir Square, using rhetorical means of persuasion—including posters, tweets, *Facebook* status updates, songs, and more—to eventually persuade President Hosni Mubarak to step down.

So how can you go about developing your own careful, ethical use of language? Our short answer: by learning to think and act rhetorically, that is, by developing habits of mind that begin with listening and

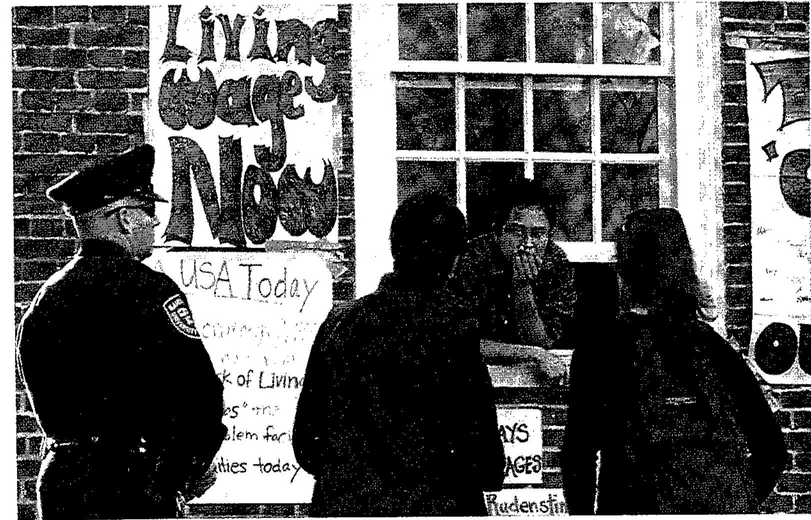
Protestors in Cairo's Tahrir Square use banners, flags, raised fists, and their own voices to communicate their positions.

searching for understanding before you decide what you yourself think and try to persuade others to listen to and act on what you say.

Learning to think rhetorically will serve you well as you negotiate your way through the complexities of life in today's world. In many situations in your everyday life, you'll need to communicate successfully with others in order to get things done, and done in a responsible and ethical way. On the job, for example, you may need to bring coworkers to consensus on how best to raise productivity when there is little, if any, money for raises. Or in your college community, you may find yourself negotiating difficult waters. When a group of students became aware of how little the temporary workers on their campus were paid, for example, they met with the workers, listening hard and gathering information. They then mounted a campaign using flyers, newsletters, photographs, speeches, and sit-ins—in other words, using the available means of persuasion—to win attention and convince the administration to raise the workers' pay. These students were thinking and acting rhetorically, and doing so responsibly and ethically.

Note that these students, like the protesters in Tahrir Square, worked closely together, both with the workers and with each other. In other words, none of us can manage such actions all by ourselves; we need to engage in






Students use posters and face-to-face conversation to protest the low wages paid to campus workers at Harvard.

conversation with others. Perhaps that's what philosopher Kenneth Burke had in mind when he created his famous "parlor" metaphor for life:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.
>
> —KENNETH BURKE, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

In this parable, each of us is much like the person arriving late to a room full of animated conversation; we don't understand what is going on. Yet instead of butting in or trying to take over, we listen closely until we catch on to what people are saying. Then we join in, using language and rhetorical strategies to engage with others as we add our own voices to the conversation.

This book aims to teach you to *think and act rhetorically*—to listen carefully and then to "put in your oar," join conversations about important issues, and develop strong critical and ethical habits of mind that will help

you engage with others in responsible ways. In this chapter, you'll learn more about several specific practices that will help you develop the habit of thinking rhetorically.

## First, Listen

> We have two ears and one mouth so we may listen more and talk less.
> —EPICTETUS

Thinking rhetorically begins with listening, with being willing to hear the words of others in an open and understanding way. It means paying attention to what others say *as a way* of getting started on your own contributions to the conversation. Think of the times you are grateful to others for listening closely to you: when you are talking through a conflict with a family member or even when you are trying to explain to a salesperson just what it is you are looking for. On those occasions, you want the person you are addressing to really listen.

## Hear What Others Are Saying—and Think about Why

When you enter any conversation, whether academic, professional, or personal, take the time needed to understand what is being said rather than rushing to a conclusion or a judgment. Listen carefully to what others are saying and consider what motivates them to do so: Where are they coming from?

Developing such habits of mind will be useful to you almost every day, whether you are participating in a class discussion, negotiating with friends over what film is most worth seeing, or studying a local ballot issue to decide how you'll vote. In each case, thinking rhetorically means being flexible and fair, able to hear and consider varying—and sometimes conflicting—points of view.

In ancient Rome, Cicero argued that considering alternative points of view and counterarguments was key to making a successful argument, and it is just as important today. Even when you disagree with a point of view—perhaps especially when you disagree with it—allow yourself to see the issue from the viewpoint of its advocates before you reject their positions. You may be convinced that hydrogen fuel will be the solution to global warming—but check your enthusiasm for it until you have thought hard about others' perspectives and carefully considered alternative solutions.

Thinking hard about others' views also includes considering the larger



context and how it shapes what they are saying. This aspect of rhetorical thinking goes beyond the kind of close reading you probably learned to do in high school literature classes, where you looked very closely at a particular text and interpreted it on its own terms, without looking at secondary sources or outside influences. When you think rhetorically, you take a step further and put that close analysis into a larger context—historical, political, or cultural, for example.

See how carefully Brent Staples considers the positions and reasoning that he is opposing, p. 935.

In analyzing the issue of gay marriage, for instance, you would not merely consider your own thinking or do a close reading of texts that address the issue. In addition, you would look at the whole debate in context by considering its historical development over time, thinking about the broader political agendas of both those who advocate for and oppose gay marriage, asking what economic ramifications adopting—or rejecting—gay marriage might have, examining the role of religion in the debate, and so on. In short, you would try to see the issue from as many different perspectives and in as broad a context as possible before you formulate your own stance. When you write, you draw on these sources—what others have said about the issue—to support your own position and consider counterarguments to it.

## What Do You Think—and Why?

Examining all points of view, all angles, on any issue will engage you in some tough thinking about your own stance—literally, where you are coming from on an issue—and why you think as you do. Such self-scrutiny can eventually clarify your stance or perhaps even change your mind; in either case, you stand to gain. Just as you need to think hard about the motivations of others, it's important to examine your own motivations in detail, asking yourself what influences in your life lead you to think as you do or to take certain positions. Then you can reconsider your motivations and reflect on their relationship to those of others, including your audience—those you wish to engage in conversation or debate.

In your college assignments, you probably have multiple motivations and purposes, one of which is to convince your instructor that you are a serious and hardworking student. But think about additional purposes as well: What could you learn from doing the assignment? How can doing it help you attain goals you have?

Beyond the classroom, examining your own stance and motivation is

equally important. Suppose you are urging fellow members of a campus group to raise money for AIDS research. On one level, you are dedicated to helping science find a means of eradicating this disease. But when you think a bit harder, you might find that you have additional motivations: to oppose those who would rather raise money for a social event, to be able to list this fund-raising for science on your résumé, perhaps to change the organization's direction. As this example shows, examining what you think and why helps you to challenge your own position—and to make sure that your approach to the topic is appropriate and effective.

## Do Your Homework

Rhetorical thinking calls on you to do some homework, to find out everything you can about what's been said about your topic, to **ANALYZE** what you find—and then to **SYNTHESIZE** that information to inform your own ideas. To put it another way, you want your own thinking to be deeply informed, to reflect more than just your own opinion.

To take an everyday example, you should do some pretty serious thinking when deciding on a major purchase, such as a new car. You'll want to begin by considering the purchase in the larger context of your life. What motivates you to buy a car? Do you need one for work? Do you want it in part as a status symbol? Are you concerned about the environment and want to switch to an electric vehicle? Who besides you might be affected by this decision? A thoughtful analysis of the context and your specific motivations and purposes can guide you in drawing up a preliminary list of cars to consider.

Then you'll need to do some research, checking out reports on safety records, efficiency, cost, and so on. Sometimes it can be hard to evaluate such sources: How much should you trust the mileage statistics provided by the carmaker, for example? For this reason you should consult multiple sources and check them against one another.

You will also want to consider your findings in light of your priorities. Cost, for instance, may not be as high on your priority list as energy efficiency. Such careful thinking will help you come to a sound decision, and then to explain it to others. If your parents, for instance, are helping you buy the car, you'll want to consider what their responses to your decision will be, anticipating questions they may ask and how to respond.

Doing your homework also means taking an analytic approach, focus-



**THINK BEYOND WORDS**

*TAKE A LOOK at the 2011 Super Bowl Chrysler ad at wwnorton.com/write/everyone links. You'll see many scenes from Detroit, and here are some of the words in the ad: "What does this city know about luxury? What does a town that's been to hell and back know about the finer things in life? I'll tell you, more than most!" What kind of rhetorical thinking did the ad writers do? Who was their target audience, and how did they go about appealing to them? This was an award-winning ad—but how successful do you think it was as an ad? In other words, did it sell a lot of cars? If you were going to write an ad for a car you like, what words would you use, and why?*

ing on *how* various rhetorical strategies and appeals work to persuade you. You may have been bowled over by a powerful advertisement for a new car—one you saw on Super Bowl Sunday that has been in your mind ever since. So what made that advertisement so memorable? To answer that question, you'll need to study the ad closely, determining just what qualities—a clever script? memorable music? celebrity actors? a provocative message?—worked to create the effect the ad had on you. This is the kind of analysis and research you will do when you engage in rhetorical thinking.

## Give Credit

As part of engaging with what others have thought and said, you'll want to give credit where credit is due. Acknowledging the work of others will help build your own **ETHOS**, or character, showing that you have not only done your homework but that you want to credit those who have influenced you. The great physicist and astronomer Isaac Newton demonstrated the art of giving credit when he wrote to his rival Robert Hooke in 1676, saying:

> What Descartes did was a good step. You have added much in several ways, and especially in taking the colours of thin plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.
> —ISAAC NEWTON, letter to Robert Hooke

In this letter, Newton acknowledges the work of Descartes as well as of Hooke before saying, with a fair amount of modesty, that his own advancements were made possible by their work. In doing so, he is thinking—and acting—rhetorically.

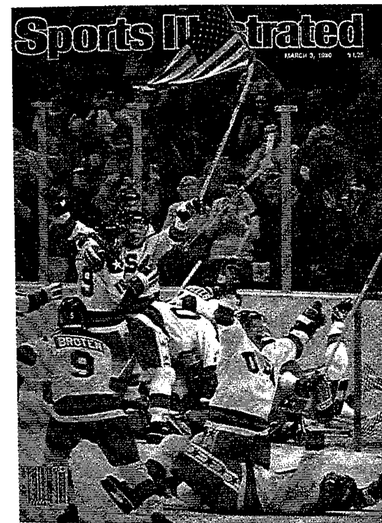
You can give credit informally, as Newton did in this letter, or you can do so formally with a full citation. Which method you choose will depend on your purpose and context. Academic writing, for instance, usually calls for formal citations, but if you are writing for a personal blog, you might embed a link that connects to another's work—or just give an informal shout-out to a friend who contributed to your thinking. In each case, you'll want to be specific about what ideas or words you've drawn from others, as Newton does in referring to Hooke's consideration of the colors of thin plates. Such care in crediting your sources contributes to your credibility—and is an important part of ethical, careful rhetorical thinking.

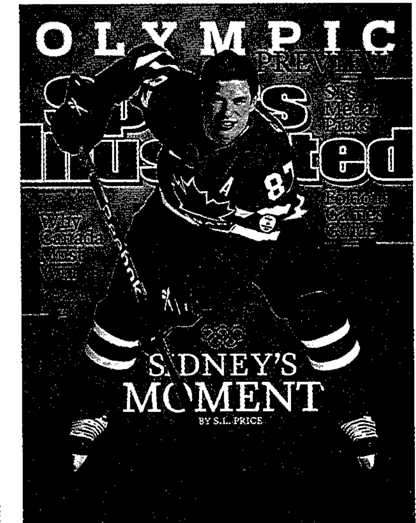


## Be Imaginative

Remember that intuition and imagination can often lead to great insights. While you want to think analytically and carefully, don't be afraid to take chances. A little imagination can lead you to new ideas—about a topic you're studying and about how to approach the topic in a way that will interest others. Such insights and intuitions can often pay off big-time. One student athlete we know was interested in how the mass media covered the Olympics, and he began doing research on the coverage in *Sports Illustrated* from different periods. So far, so good: He was gathering information and would be able to write an essay showing that the magazine had been a major promoter of the Olympics.

While looking through old issues of *Sports Illustrated*, however, he kept feeling that something he was seeing in the early issues was different from current issues of the magazine . . . something that felt important to him






Two *Sports Illustrated* covers depicting hockey players in the Winter Olympics. The cover on the left, from 1980, showcases the U.S. team's "miracle on ice" victory win over the heavily favored USSR team. The one on the right, from 2010, pictures Canada's superstar Sidney "Sid the Kid" Crosby, who scored the game-winning shot in the gold medal game against the United States.

though he couldn't quite articulate it. This hunch led him to make an imaginative leap, to articulate for himself what that difference was. Excited that he was on to something, he returned to his chronological examination of the magazine. On closer inspection, he found that over the decades of its Olympics coverage, that magazine had slowly but surely moved from focusing on teams to depicting *only* individual stars. This discovery led him to make an argument he would never have made had he not paid attention to his imagination, to his creative hunch—that the evolution of sports from a focus on the team to a focus on individual stars is perfectly captured in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*. It also helped him write a much more interesting—and more persuasive—essay, one that captured the attention not only of his instructor and classmates but of a local sports newsmagazine, which reprinted his essay along with a picture of its author. Like this student, you can benefit by using your imagination and listening to your inner hunches. They can pay off for you as they did for him.

## Put in Your Oar

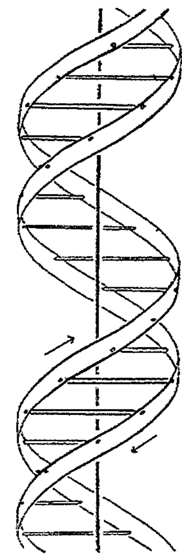
So rhetorical thinking offers a way of coming to any situation with a tool kit of strategies that will help you understand that situation and "put in your oar" to act effectively within it. When you think rhetorically, you ask yourself certain questions:

- How do you want to come across to your audience?
- How can you appear knowledgeable, fair, and well informed?
- What can you do to represent yourself in a positive way?
- What can you do to show respect both for your audience and for those whose work and thinking you engage with?
- How can you demonstrate that you have your audience's best interests at heart?

This kind of rhetorical thinking will help ensure that your words will be listened to and taken seriously.

We can find examples of such a rhetorical approach in all fields of study and in all walks of life. Take, for instance, the landmark essay by James Watson and Francis Crick on the discovery of DNA, published in *Nature* in 1953. This essay shows Watson and Crick to be thinking rhetorically throughout, acutely aware of their audience (major scientists throughout the world) as well as of competitors who were simultaneously working on the same issue.





The original sketch showing the structure of DNA that appeared in Watson and Crick's article.

Here is Wayne Booth's analysis of Watson and Crick's use of rhetoric:

> In [Watson and Crick's] report, what do we find? Actually scores of *rhetorical* choices that they made to strengthen the appeal of their scientific claim. (Biographies and autobiographies have by now revealed that they did a lot of conscientious revising, not of the data but of the mode of presentation; and their lives were filled, before and after the triumph, with a great deal of rhetoric-charged conflict.) We could easily compose a dozen different versions of their report, all proclaiming the same scientific results. But most alternatives would prove less engaging to the intended audience. They open, for example, with
>
> "*We wish to suggest* a structure" that has "*novel* features which are of *considerable* biological *interest*." *(My italics, of course)*
>
> Why didn't they say, instead: "We shall here demonstrate a *startling, totally new structure* that will *shatter* everyone's conception of the biological world"? Well, obviously their rhetorical choice presents an ethos much more attractive to most cautious readers than does my exaggerated alternative. A bit later they say
>
> "We have made the *usual chemical assumptions*, namely . . ."
>
> Why didn't they say, "*As we all know*"? Both expressions acknowledge reliance on warrants, commonplaces within a given rhetorical domain. But their version sounds more thoughtful and authoritative, especially with the word "chemical." Referring to Pauling and Corey, they say
>
> "They *kindly* have made their manuscript available."
>
> Okay, guys, drop the rhetoric and just cut that word "kindly." What has that got to do with your scientific case? Well, it obviously strengthens the authors' ethos: we are nice guys dealing trustfully with other nice guys, in a rhetorical community.
>
> And on they go, with "*In our opinion*" (rather than "We proclaim" or "We insist" or "We have miraculously discovered": again ethos—we're

not dogmatic); and Fraser's "*suggested*" structure is "*rather ill-defined*" (rather than "his structure is stupid" or "obviously faulty"—we *are* nice guys, right?)

And on to scores of other such choices.

—WAYNE BOOTH, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*

Booth shows in each instance how Watson and Crick's exquisite understanding of their rhetorical situation—especially of their audience and of the stakes involved in making their claim—had a great deal to do with how that claim was received. (They won the Nobel Prize!)

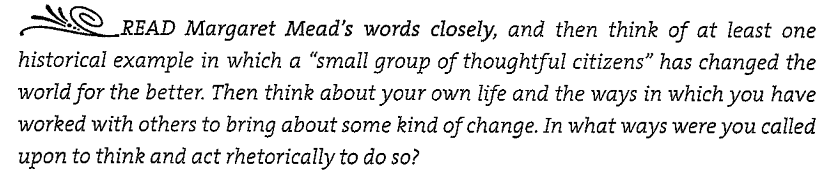
As the example of Watson and Crick illustrates, rhetorical thinking involves certain habits of mind that can and should lead to something—often to an action, to making something happen. And when it comes to taking action, those who think rhetorically are in a very strong position. They have listened attentively and thought carefully and methodically; viewed their topic from many alternate perspectives; done their homework; and engaged with the words and thoughts of others. This kind of rhetorical thinking will help you to get in on conversations—and will increase the likelihood that your ideas will be heard and will inspire actions that take root and prosper.

Indeed, the ability to think rhetorically is of great importance in today's global world, as Professors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein explain:

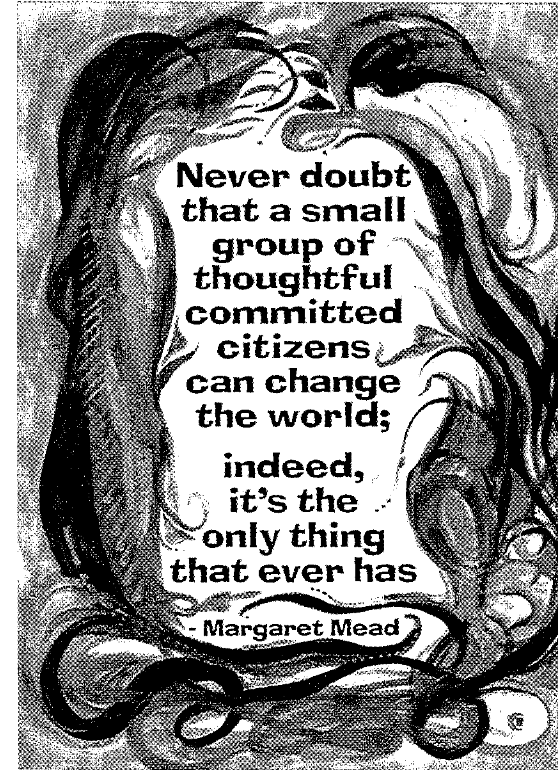
> The ability to enter complex, many-sided conversations has taken on a special urgency in today's diverse, post-9/11 world, where the future for all of us may depend on our ability to put ourselves in the shoes of those who think very differently from us. Listening carefully to others, including those who disagree with us, and then engaging with them thoughtfully and respectfully . . . can help us see beyond our own pet beliefs, which may not be shared by everyone. The mere act of acknowledging that someone might disagree with us may not seem like a way to change the world; but it does have the potential to jog us out of our comfort zones, to get us thinking critically about our own beliefs, and perhaps even to change our minds.
>
> —GERALD GRAFF AND CATHY BIRKENSTEIN, "*They Say / I Say*"

In the long run, if enough of us learn to think rhetorically, we just might achieve Booth's goal—to use words (and images) in thoughtful and constructive ways as an alternative to violence and war.





*READ Margaret Mead's words closely, and then think of at least one historical example in which a "small group of thoughtful citizens" has changed the world for the better. Then think about your own life and the ways in which you have worked with others to bring about some kind of change. In what ways were you called upon to think and act rhetorically to do so?*

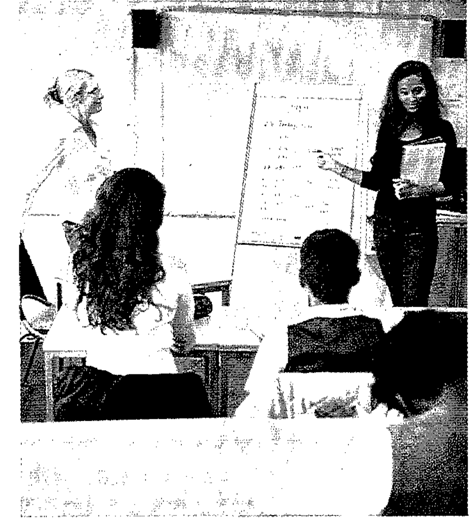


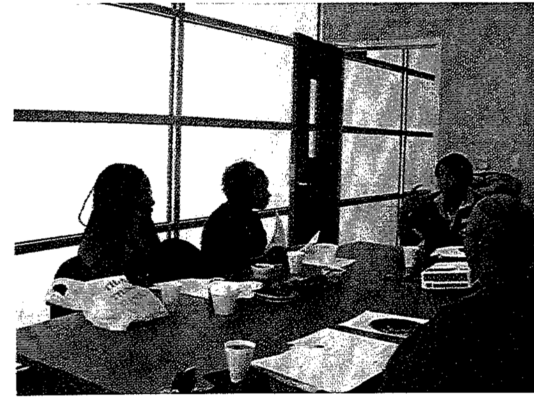
# TWO

# Rhetorical Situations

**As part of a college application**, a high school student writes a personal statement about what she plans to study, and why. A baseball fan posts a piece on a New York Yankees blog analyzing data to show why a beloved pitcher probably won't be elected to the Hall of Fame. Eighty-seven readers respond, some praising his analysis, others questioning his conclusions and offering their own analyses. The officers of a small company address the annual shareholders' meeting to report on how the firm is doing, using *PowerPoint* slides to call attention to their most important points. They take questions afterward, and two people raise their hands. Our baseball fan sees on *Twitter* that the Yankees have signed a star pitcher he thinks they don't really need—and fires off a tweet saying so. The student in our first example takes a deep breath and logs on to the website of the college she wants to attend to see if she's been accepted. Good news: She's in. Come September she's at the library, working on an essay for her first-year composition course—and texting her friends as she works.

In each of these scenarios, an author is writing (or speaking from written notes) in a different set of specific circumstances—addressing certain audiences for a particular purpose, using certain technologies, and so on. So it is whenever we write. Whether we're texting a friend, outlining an oral presentation, or writing an essay, we do so within a specific rhetorical situation. We have a purpose, an audience, a stance, a genre, a medium, a design—all of which exist in some larger context. This chapter covers each of these elements and provides prompts to help you think about some of the choices you have as you negotiate your own rhetorical situations.





Three different rhetorical situations: a lone writer texting (*top left*); a student giving an oral presentation in class (*top right*); and members of a community group collaborating on a group project (*bottom left*).

Every rhetorical situation presents its own unique constraints and opportunities, and as authors, we need to think strategically about our own situation. Adding to a class wiki presents a different challenge from writing an in-class essay exam, putting together a résumé and cover letter for a job, or working with fellow members of a campus choir to draft a grant proposal to the student government requesting funding so the choir can go on tour the following year. A group of neighbors developing a proposal to present at a community meeting will need to attend to both the written text they will submit and the oral arguments they will make. They may also need to create slides or other visuals to support their proposal.

The workplace creates still other kinds of rhetorical situations with their own distinctive features. Reporters, for instance, must always consider their deadlines as well as their ethical obligations—to the public, to the persons or institutions they write about, and to the story they are reporting. A reporter working for six months to investigate corporate wrongdoing faces different challenges from one who covers local sports day to day. The medium—print, video, radio, podcast, blog, or some combination of these or other media—also influences how reporters write their stories.

## Think about Your Own Rhetorical Situation

Lynne Truss writes in a large-circulation newspaper about her own personal habits with the medium of texting. See how she navigated that complicated rhetorical situation on p. 939.

It is important to start thinking about your rhetorical situation early in your writing process. As a student, you'll often be given assignments with very specific guidelines—to follow the conventions of a particular genre, in a certain medium, by a specific date. Nevertheless, even the most fully developed assignment cannot address every aspect of any particular rhetorical situation.

Effective writers—whether students, journalists, teachers, or your mom—know how to analyze their rhetorical situation. They may conduct this analysis unconsciously and instinctively, drawing upon the rhetorical common sense they have developed as writers, readers, speakers, and listeners. Particularly when you are writing in a new genre or discipline, though—a situation that you'll surely face as a college student—it can be helpful to analyze your rhetorical situation more systematically.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR GENRE

- ***Have you been assigned a specific genre?*** If not, do any words in the assignment imply a certain genre? *Evaluate* may signal a review, for example, and *explain why* could indicate a causal analysis.
- ***If you get to choose your genre,*** consider your purpose. If you want to convince readers to recycle their trash, you would likely write an argument. If, however, you want to explain how to go about recycling, your purpose would call for a process analysis.
- ***Does your genre require a certain organization?*** A process analysis, for instance, is often organized chronologically, whereas an annotated bibliography is almost always organized alphabetically.



- ***How does your genre affect your*** **TONE*****?*** A lab report, for example, generally calls for a different tone than a film review.
- ***Are certain design features expected in your genre?*** You would likely need to include images in a review of an art show, for instance, or be required to use a certain font size for a research paper.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

- ***Who is your intended audience?*** An instructor? A supervisor? Classmates? Members of a particular organization? Visitors to a website? Who else might see or hear what you say?
- ***How are members of your audience like and unlike you?*** Consider demographics such as age, gender, religion, income, education, occupation, or political attitudes.
- ***What's your relationship with your audience?*** An instructor or supervisor, for example, holds considerable authority over you. Other audiences may be friends, coworkers, or (especially online) complete strangers. What expectations about the text might they have because of your relationship? You'd need to be careful not to sound too informal to a committee considering you for a scholarship, or too bossy to a group of friends.
- ***If you have a choice of medium,*** which one(s) would best reach your intended audience?
- ***What do you want your audience to think or do*** as a result of what you say? Take your ideas seriously? Respond to you? Take some kind of action? How will you signal to them what you want?
- ***Can you assume your audience will be interested*** in what you say, or will you need to get them interested? Are they likely to resist any of your ideas?
- ***How much does your audience know about your topic?*** How much background information do they need? Will they expect—or be put off by—the use of technical jargon? Will you need to define any terms?
- ***Will your audience expect a particular genre?*** If you're writing about Mozart for a music class, you might analyze something he wrote; if, however, you're posting comments on *Amazon* about a new CD, you'd be more likely to write some kind of review.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR PURPOSE

- ***How would you describe your own motivation for writing?*** To fulfill a course assignment? To meet a personal or professional commitment? To express your ideas to someone? For fun?
- ***What is your primary goal?*** To inform your audience about something? To persuade them to think a certain way? To call them to action? To entertain them? Something else? Do you have other goals as well?
- ***How do your goals influence your choice of genre, medium, and design?*** For example, if you want to persuade neighbors to recycle, you may choose to make colorful posters for display in public places. If you want to inform a corporation about what recycling programs accomplish, you may want to write a report using charts and examples.

### THINK ABOUT YOUR STANCE

- ***What's your attitude toward your topic?*** Objective? Strongly supportive? Mildly skeptical? Amused? Angry?
- ***What's your relationship with your audience?*** Do you know them? Are they teachers? friends? strangers? How do you want to be seen by them—as a serious student? an effective leader? an informed citizen?
- ***How can you best convey your stance in your writing?*** What TONE do you want it to have?
- ***How will your stance and tone be received by your audience?*** Will they be surprised by it?

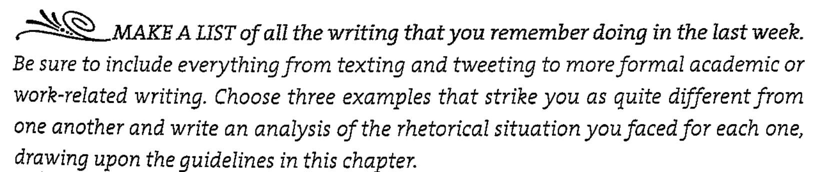
### THINK ABOUT THE LARGER CONTEXT

- ***What else has been said about your topic,*** and how does that affect what you will say? What would be the most effective way for you to add your voice to the conversation?
- ***Do you have any constraints?*** When is this writing due? Given your current to-do list and the nature and significance of this project, how much time and energy can you put into it?
- ***How much independence do you have as a writer*** in this situation? To what extent do you need to meet the expectations of others, such as an instructor or supervisor? If this writing is an assignment, how can you approach it in a way that makes it matter to you?



### THINK ABOUT YOUR MEDIUM AND DESIGN

- ***If you get to choose your medium,*** which one will work best for your audience and purpose? Print? Spoken? Digital? Some combination?
- ***How will the medium determine what you can and cannot do?*** For example, if you're writing on *Facebook*, how might the medium influence your TONE? If you're submitting an essay online, you could include video, but if you were writing the same essay in print, you'd only be able to include a still shot from the video.
- ***Does your medium favor certain conventions?*** Paragraphs work well in print, but *PowerPoint* presentations usually rely on bulleted phrases instead. If you are writing online, you can include links to sources and background information.
- ***What's the look most appropriate to your rhetorical situation?*** Serious? Warm and inviting? Whimsical? What design elements will help you project that look?
- ***Should you include visuals?*** Is there anything in your text that would benefit from them? Will your audience expect them? What kind would be appropriate—photographs? video? maps? Is there any statistical material that would be easier to understand as a table, chart, or graph?
- ***If you're writing a spoken or digital text,*** should you include audio or video?



*MAKE A LIST of all the writing that you remember doing in the last week. Be sure to include everything from texting and tweeting to more formal academic or work-related writing. Choose three examples that strike you as quite different from one another and write an analysis of the rhetorical situation you faced for each one, drawing upon the guidelines in this chapter.*

Strong writing and speaking skills are essential in the workplace—from finding (and landing) a job to performing the tasks that job will require.



## Consider Your Rhetorical Situation

Whether you have a job or are searching for one, you'll be communicating with many different audiences for many different purposes—and so you should get in the habit of thinking systematically about your rhetorical situation. Here are some questions that can guide you:

- ***What's your* PURPOSE*?*** Are you seeking information? an interview? a specific job? Are you asking someone to do something for you? Are you discussing a possible job, plan, or project? Are you presenting a proposal? negotiating a salary?
- ***Who's your* AUDIENCE*?*** Someone you know or have been referred to? A human resources director? A colleague? A person you would report to? Someone you know nothing about? If it's someone you don't know, what do you know about him or her—and what can you find out by looking on a company website?
- ***What's your* STANCE*?*** How do you want to present yourself—as eager? curious? confident? knowledgeable? professional? friendly? earnest? If you're looking for a job, what experience do you bring—and how can you demonstrate what you could contribute?
- ***What's the* CONTEXT*?*** Are you responding to an ad? writing a cover letter to go with an application or a proposal or some other document? presenting to a large group? If you're applying for a job, how many steps are involved? What can you find out about the organization by doing some research online?
- ***What* GENRES *should you use?*** Are you writing a letter? composing a résumé? reporting information? arguing a position or for some kind of action? reviewing someone's work (or being reviewed)?
- ***What* MEDIA *will you use?*** If you're sending a letter or résumé, should you use email or U.S. mail? If you're participating in a discussion or interview, will it be face-to-face? on the phone? over *Skype*? in a webinar? If you're giving a presentation, should you include slides or handouts?

well positioned to prepare yourself for this future—which is in fact not the future at all but our present moment. Rather than taking your online writing for granted as "just fun," learn from it. Take advantage as well of the opportunities that your school provides to learn with and from people with diverse cultural backgrounds. Such collaborative interactions are intrinsically satisfying, and they can also help prepare you to communicate effectively in the twenty-first century.

## Some Tips for Collaborating Effectively

As a college student, you will often be asked to work collaboratively with others. Sometimes that collaboration will be fleeting and low risk—for example, to work with a group to respond to questions about a reading and then to share the group's ideas with the class. Other collaborations are more extended and high risk, as when you have a major group project that will count for a significant percentage of everyone's final grade.

Extended collaborative assignments can be a challenge. Members of the group may have differing goals—for instance, if two members will accept nothing less than an A and others are just hoping for a C. Other problems can result as well, such as with domineering members of the team or those who don't participate at all. And the logistics of collaborating on a major project can be a challenge. Here are some tips that can help ensure efficient, congenial, and productive team relationships when you are working on an extended collaborative project.

- ***Find ways of recognizing everyone.*** For example, each group member could talk about a strength that he or she can contribute to the project.
- ***Listen carefully***—and respectfully—to every group member.
- ***Establish some ground rules.*** Whether online or face-to-face, the way your group runs its meetings can make or break your collaborative effort. Spend part of your first meeting exploring your assignment and figuring out how often the group will meet, the responsibilities of each member, and so on.
- ***Make an effort to develop trust and group identity.*** To get started, everyone could share some pertinent information, such as their favorite spots for writing or their typical writing processes. Remember, too, that socializing can play an important role in the development of group identity. Sharing a pizza together while brainstorming can pay off down the road. However, remember to stay focused on the project.



- ***Get organized.*** Use an agenda to organize your meetings, and be sure that someone takes notes. Don't count on anyone's memory, and don't leave all the note-taking to one person! You may want to take turns developing the agenda, reminding everyone of upcoming meetings via email or text message, maintaining written records, and so on.
- ***Develop nonthreatening ways to deal with problems.*** Rather than telling someone that their ideas are unclear, for instance, you might say, "I'm having trouble making the connection between your suggestion and my understanding of what we're discussing." Just a simple shift from *your* to *my* can defuse difficult situations. And remember that tact, thoughtfulness, and a sense of humor can go a long way toward resolving any interpersonal issues.
- ***Build in regular reality checks*** to nip any potential problems in the bud—for example, to reserve some time to discuss how the group is working and how it could be better. Try not to criticize anyone; instead focus on what's working and what could be improved.
- ***Encourage the free play of ideas,*** one of the most important benefits of working collaboratively. Think carefully about when your group should strive for consensus and when you should not. You want to avoid interpersonal conflicts that slow you down.
- ***Expect the unexpected.*** Someone's computer may crash, interlibrary loan materials may arrive later than expected. Someone else may be sick on the day when she was supposed to write a key section of your text. Try to build in extra time for the unexpected.
- ***Be flexible about how you meet.*** If getting together in person poses problems, use online chat or *Google Docs* to meet and work. Your school might provide a course management system that includes discussion forums, wikis, and file-sharing folders—all of which will prove helpful for collaborative work.

Remember that when you engage in group work, you need to attend to both the task and the group. And keep in mind that each member of the group should be valued and that the process should be satisfying to all.