

Writing World Englishes

Writing World Englishes

A Guide for Multilingual Students

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Welcome to Writing World Englishes!

“Welcome to Writing World Englishes” by Elizabeth Baertlein,
YouTube.com



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No matter what languages you speak in addition to English, the very fact that you are now reading this shows that you have reached an advanced level in your English language studies. Congratulations!

In my career as a college-level English language teacher, I have often had students say to me, even at the advanced level, “I can’t speak English.” I’ve often joked with these students and said something in return like, “What do you mean? You’re speaking English right now!” But, in all seriousness, this statement makes me a bit sad as an English teacher. I can see students advance from the beginner level to a high level of English language proficiency, yet they still do not have enough confidence to proclaim themselves English speakers.

I ask myself why students do not have confidence, and I think that answer lies in how English learners are often judged in the United States. So many people who grew up in the United States are monolingual English speakers and have little understanding of the effort it takes to learn a new language. Those who have no experience learning a new language themselves may judge those

who learned English later in life harshly, focusing on an accent or grammar errors rather than focusing on the communicative accomplishment of the person speaking or writing in English. This negative judgment can lead to the conversation being shut down. Maybe rather than making the effort to understand, the monolingual English speaker claims that it is too difficult and stops listening or reading.

These types of negative interactions sink into the psyche of multilingual English speakers and lead them to believe that they do not really speak English well enough to proclaim themselves English speakers. I want this book to challenge this mindset. If you are reading this, you are an English speaker! Do not let anyone's reaction to you or the variety of English that you speak or write convince you otherwise.

This is part of the reason that I chose to title this book *Writing World Englishes*. Perhaps you found this title confusing. You may have wondered, "What does she mean by "Englishes"? Isn't there just one English language?"

This is where I'd like you to stop and reflect on your own experiences with English, and I bet that you will recognize that you have encountered at least several different Englishes in your life. To begin, many students gain exposure to both British and American Englishes when they are learning English. Maybe you learned British English at school but watched American English movies. Maybe since you've moved to the U.S. you've had interactions with Black American descendants of enslaved Africans, and maybe you've been surprised that the English that they speak doesn't match with the American or British English that you learned in school or saw in movies.

Those are all examples of Englishes from mainly English-speaking countries. But what about other countries where English is commonly spoken due to a history of British colonization, like India and Nigeria? Indian English and Nigerian English both have some unique pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical features. Other countries like China are also developing their own unique Englishes

creative and engage in what linguists call “code-meshing” or “translanguaging,” which means merging elements of various languages and varieties of language together in a single piece of writing. These decisions are up to you as a writer. Your teacher can guide you, but, ultimately, writing is a form of self expression, and I hope that as you work your way through this book you become increasingly confident in your ability to express yourself in English writing.

If you haven’t yet, I hope by the time you finish this course, you will proudly proclaim, “I am a writer and speaker of English,” or, better yet, “I am a writer and speaker of Englishes!”

I. Your Language Experience



As you learned about in the “Welcome” section of this book, there are many different Englishes spoken around the world and even within the United States. A single person may speak multiple different Englishes depending on who they are with and what they are trying to communicate. In this chapter you will watch a video and read a short story that illustrate some experiences of children of immigrants to the United States with various Englishes. You will then think about how these experiences are similar to or different from your own experiences and write a reflection on your own experience with Englishes and other languages.

Chapter contents:

“3 Ways to Speak English” by Jamila Lyiscott

“Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan

“3 Ways to Speak English” by Jamila Lyiscott

Jamila Lyiscott is the daughter of immigrants from Trinidad, and she grew up in Brooklyn, New York. She gave this speech when she was a doctoral student at Columbia University in New York, studying literature and race. Now she is a professor at University of Massachusetts, Amherst and the author of the book *Black Appetite. White Food: Issues of Race, Voice, and Justice Within and Beyond the Classroom*. She made this speech to illustrate how she is articulate in three different types of English: the English of American academia that she uses at college, the Black American English that she speaks with friends in New York, and the Trinidadian English that she speaks at home with her parents. As you watch the video, think about all of the Englishes and other languages you are familiar with in the various contexts of your own life.

“3 Ways to Speak English” by Jamila Lyiscott, TED.com



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here: <https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/writingworldenglishes/?p=5#oembed-1>

Hint: If you'd like to read the transcript of the video or read a

translation into a different language, go to the TED website to view the video along with these resources.

After watching the video, discuss or journal about these questions:

1. Jamila Lyiscott says, “I speak three tongues. One for each: home, school, and friends.” What kinds of language do you use at home, at school, and with friends? Why do you think you language use is different in these different contexts?
2. Jamila Lyiscott says, “Sometimes I fight back two tongues, while I use the other one in the classroom. And when I mistakenly mix them up, I feel crazy, like I’m cooking in the bathroom.” What do you think she means by this? Do you ever feel this way?
3. Jamila Lyiscott says, “I have decided to treat all three of my languages as equals.” Do you treat all of your languages as equals? Why or why not?”

“Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan

“Mother Tongue” is an essay by American author Amy Tan, who is the daughter of immigrants from China. Tan’s most famous novel is *The Joy Luck Club*, a story of the relationships between mothers and daughters in the Chinese American community. In “Mother Tongue,” Tan illustrates how her immigrant mother’s so-called “broken English” affected how her mother was judged and treated by others in the U.S.

Read Amy Tan’s essay, “Mother Tongue” below, and listen to the audio of the essay as you read, if you like. As you read and listen, think about whether your experience with the English language is more similar to Amy Tan’s experience or her mother’s experience.

“Tan: ‘Mother Tongue’” by American Lit Audio, YouTube.com



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/writingworldenglishes/?p=5#oembed-2>

“Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan

I am not a scholar of English or literature. I cannot give you much more than personal opinions on the English language and its variations in this country or others.

I am a writer. And by that definition, I am someone who has always loved language. I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language — the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth. Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all — all the Englishes I grew up with.

Recently, I was made keenly aware of the different Englishes I do use. I was giving a talk to a large group of people, the same talk I had already given to half a dozen other groups. The nature of the talk was about my writing, my life, and my book, *The Joy Luck Club*. The talk was going along well enough, until I remembered one major difference that made the whole talk sound wrong. My mother was in the room. And it was perhaps

the first time she had heard me give a lengthy speech, using the kind of English I have never used with her. I was saying things like, “The intersection of memory upon imagination” and “There is an aspect of my fiction that relates to thus-and-thus”—a speech filled with carefully wrought grammatical phrases, burdened, it suddenly seemed to me, with nominalized forms, past perfect tenses, conditional phrases, all the forms of standard English that I had learned in school and through books, the forms of English I did not use at home with my mother.

Just last week, I was walking down the street with my mother, and I again found myself conscious of the English I was using, the English I do use with her. We were talking about the price of new and used furniture, and I heard myself saying this: “Not waste money that way.” My husband was with us as well, and he didn’t notice any switch in my English. And then I realized why. It’s because over the twenty years we’ve been together I’ve often used that same kind of English with him, and sometimes he even uses it with me. It has become our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk, the language I grew up with.

So you’ll have some idea of what this family talk I heard sounds like, I’ll quote what my mother said during a recent conversation which I videotaped and then transcribed. During this conversation, my mother was talking about a political gangster in Shanghai who had the same last name as her family’s, Du, and how the gangster in his early years wanted to be adopted by her

family, which was rich by comparison. Later, the gangster became more powerful, far richer than my mother's family, and one day showed up at my mother's wedding to pay his respects. Here's what she said in part: "Du Yusong having business like fruit stand. Like off the street kind. He is Du like Du Zong — but not Tsung-ming Island people. The local people call putong, the river east side, he belong to that side local people. That man want to ask Du Zong father take him in like become own family. Du Zong father wasn't look down on him, but didn't take seriously, until that man big like become a mafia. Now important person, very hard to inviting him. Chinese way, came only to show respect, don't stay for dinner. Respect for making big celebration, he shows up. Mean gives lots of respect. Chinese custom. Chinese social life that way. If too important won't have to stay too long. He come to my wedding. I didn't see, I heard it. I gone to boy's side, they have YMCA dinner. Chinese age I was nineteen."

You should know that my mother's expressive command of English belies how much she actually understands. She reads the Forbes report, listens to Wall Street Week, converses daily with her stockbroker, reads all of Shirley MacLaine's books with ease—all kinds of things I can't begin to understand. Yet some of my friends tell me they understand 50 percent of what my mother says. Some say they understand 80 to 90 percent. Some say they understand none of it, as if she were speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct,

full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world.

Lately, I've been giving more thought to the kind of English my mother speaks. Like others, I have described it to people as 'broken' or 'fractured' English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than "broken," as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I've heard other terms used, "limited English," for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people's perceptions of the limited English speaker. I know this for a fact, because when I was growing up, my mother's "limited" English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty of empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.

My mother has long realized the limitations of her English as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on the phone to pretend I was she. In this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her. One time it was a call to her stockbroker in New York. She had cashed out her small portfolio and it just so

happened we were going to go to New York the next week, our very first trip outside California. I had to get on the phone and say in an adolescent voice that was not very convincing, “This is Mrs. Tan.”

And my mother was standing in the back whispering loudly, “Why he don’t send me check, already two weeks late. So mad he lie to me, losing me money. And then I said in perfect English, “Yes, I’m getting rather concerned. You had agreed to send the check two weeks ago, but it hasn’t arrived.” Then she began to talk more loudly. “What he want, I come to New York tell him front of his boss, you cheating me?” And I was trying to calm her down, make her be quiet, while telling the stockbroker, “I can’t tolerate any more excuses. If I don’t receive the check immediately, I am going to have to speak to your manager when I’m in New York next week.” And sure enough, the following week there we were in front of this astonished stockbroker, and I was sitting there red-faced and quiet, and my mother, the real Mrs. Tan, was shouting at his boss in her impeccable broken English.

We used a similar routine just five days ago, for a situation that was far less humorous. My mother had gone to the hospital for an appointment, to find out about a benign brain tumor a CAT scan had revealed a month ago. She said she had spoken very good English, her best English, no mistakes. Still, she said, the hospital did not apologize when they said they had lost the CAT scan and she had come for nothing. She said they did not seem to have any sympathy when she told them she was anxious to know the exact diagnosis, since her

husband and son had both died of brain tumors. She said they would not give her any more information until the next time and she would have to make another appointment for that. So she said she would not leave until the doctor called her daughter. She wouldn't budge. And when the doctor finally called her daughter, me, who spoke in perfect English — lo and behold — we had assurances the CAT scan would be found, promises that a conference call on Monday would be held, and apologies for any suffering my mother had gone through for a most regrettable mistake.

I think my mother's English almost had an effect on limiting my possibilities in life as well. Sociologists and linguists probably will tell you that a person's developing language skills are more influenced by peers. But I do think that the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child. And I believe that it affected my results on achievement tests, I.Q. tests, and the SAT. While my English skills were never judged as poor, compared to math, English could not be considered my strong suit. In grade school I did moderately well, getting perhaps B's, sometimes B-plus, in English and scoring perhaps in the sixtieth or seventieth percentile on achievement tests. But those scores were not good enough to override the opinion that my true abilities lay in math and science, because in those areas I achieved A's and scored in the ninetieth percentile or higher.

This was understandable. Math is precise; there is only one correct answer. Whereas, for me at least, the

answers on English tests were always a judgment call, a matter of opinion and personal experience. Those tests were constructed around items like fill-in-the-blank sentence completion, such as, “Even though Tom was _____, Mary thought he was -_____.” And the correct answer always seemed to be the most bland combinations of thoughts, for example, “Even though Tom was shy, Mary thought he was charming,” with the grammatical structure “even though” limiting the correct answer to some sort of semantic opposites, so you wouldn’t get answers like, “Even though Tom was foolish, Mary thought he was ridiculous.” Well, according to my mother, there were very few limitations as to what Tom could have been and what Mary might have thought of him. So I never did well on tests like that.

The same was true with word analogies, pairs of words in which you were supposed to find some sort of logical, semantic relationship — for example, “Sunset is to nightfall as _____ is to _____.” And here you would be presented with a list of four possible pairs, one of which showed the same kind of relationship: red is to stoplight, bus is to arrival, chills is to fever, yawn is to boring. Well, I could never think that way. I knew what the tests were asking, but I could not block out of my mind the images already created by the first pair, “sunset is to nightfall”—and I would see a burst of colors against a darkening sky, the moon rising, the lowering of a curtain of stars. And all the other pairs of words —red, bus, stoplight, boring—just threw up a mass of confusing images, making it impossible for me to sort out something as logical as saying: “A sunset precedes

nightfall” is the same as “a chill precedes a fever.” The only way I would have gotten that answer right would have been to imagine an associative situation, for example, my being disobedient and staying out past sunset, catching a chill at night, which turns into feverish pneumonia as punishment, which indeed did happen to me.

I have been thinking about all this lately, about my mother’s English, about achievement tests. Because lately I’ve been asked, as a writer, why there are not more Asian Americans represented in American literature. Why are there few Asian Americans enrolled in creative writing programs? Why do so many Chinese students go into engineering? Well, these are broad sociological questions I can’t begin to answer. But I have noticed in surveys — in fact, just last week — that Asian students, as a whole, always do significantly better on math achievement tests than in English. And this makes me think that there are other Asian-American students whose English spoken in the home might also be described as “broken” or “limited.” And perhaps they also have teachers who are steering them away from writing and into math and science, which is what happened to me.

Fortunately, I happen to be rebellious in nature and enjoy the challenge of disproving assumptions made about me. I became an English major my first year in college, after being enrolled as pre-med. I started writing nonfiction as a freelancer the week after I was told by my former boss that writing was my worst skill

and I should hone my talents toward account management.

But it wasn't until 1985 that I finally began to write fiction. And at first I wrote using what I thought to be wittily crafted sentences, sentences that would finally prove I had mastery over the English language. Here's an example from the first draft of a story that later made its way into *The Joy Luck Club*, but without this line: "That was my mental quandary in its nascent state." A terrible line, which I can barely pronounce.

Fortunately, for reasons I won't get into today, I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind—and in fact she did read my early drafts—I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as "simple"; the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as "broken"; my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as "watered down"; and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.

Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when

my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: “So easy to read.”

Tan, Amy. “Mother Tongue.” *The Threepenny Review*, vol. 43, Autumn, 1990, pp. 7-8, www.jstor.org/stable/4383908. (included on the basis of fair use)

After listening to and/or reading “Mother Tongue,” discuss or journal about these questions:

1. Amy Tan says that due to her mother’s “broken English,” “people at department stores, at banks, at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.” Have you or anyone you are close to ever experienced treatment like this because of the language that you speak?
2. Why did Amy Tan’s teachers steer her away from writing and into math and science? Do you think this was the right decision for her teachers to make?
3. Why was Amy Tan satisfied when her mother read her book and said it was, “So easy to read”? When you write, who do you usually envision as your reader? Do you think it is important to make your writing easy to read for other adult English learners?

Reflective Writing: Your Language Learning Experiences

Now that you have watched “3 Ways to Speak English” and read “Mother Tongue,” think about your own experience with speaking

different languages and learning English or Englishes. Write a short reflective essay about your experience with language learning.

Here are some questions you may consider in your essay, though you do not have to answer all of them, and you can include any other information that you like, too:



- What languages do you know? How did you learn these languages?
- What were your experiences with reading and writing as a child? How do those early experiences with language still affect you today?
- What languages have you spoken at home, at school, and with friends throughout your life?
- How have others judged you for the languages or variety of English you speak or write?
- Do you view yourself as an articulate person in any of your languages? How do you view yourself as a speaker and writer in English?
- Do you consider yourself a good writer in any of your languages? How do you view yourself as a writer in English?
- Would you use the term “broken English” to describe your English speaking or writing? Why or why not?
- Why did you decide to learn English? How do you hope knowing English will help you in your life?

Try to write your reflective essay like a story about your language learning. Include details that will interest the reader and help them empathize with your experiences. You should apply what you already know about the rules of academic English writing, but also feel free to get creative with your writing. You can include samples of dialogue from other languages or varieties of English that you speak, like we saw in “3 Ways to Speak English” and “Mother

Tongue.” Merging two languages or varieties of language together in a single piece of writing or communicative act is called code-meshing or translanguaging, and it is a valuable skill that multilinguals often use to communicate more effectively. Feel free to practice code-meshing or translanguaging in your essay to help your reader get a better sense of the multiple languages and Englishes that you know.

This essay will not be graded. Rather, it is a way for your teacher to better understand your past and present experiences with learning languages, including English, and to see a sample of your current English writing to get an idea of what you already can do with your writing and what you will need to work on improving in this course.

2. Audience, Purpose, and Your Writing Process

laptop, computer, business, table, paper, flowers, roses, bouquet of roses, bouquet, mobile phone, coolie, notepad, notes, sticky note, leave, air, background, blog, blogger, cafe, communication, connection, cookie, copy space, creative, device, digital, freelance, hand, tap, coffee, hobby, home, internet, keyboard, leisure, lifestyle, media, meeting, morning, network, note, notebook, office, pastel, person, priority, memory, routine, social media, social network, input, wireless, wooden table, work, product, netbook, brand

The previous chapter was all about valuing all types of language and using language creatively. This chapter focuses on a writing situation that often calls for more conventional language use: writing a professional email. An email is often a form of communication that we use to make requests in academic and professional settings, and an email is often the way we make a first impression on our professors and supervisors. We live in a world where some people may judge you negatively if you send a professional email that is filled with grammar, punctuation, or spelling that is confusing or unfamiliar. Therefore, in this chapter, we focus on using so-called “Standard English.”

Chapter contents:

“What Does ‘Proper English’ Mean” by Elizabeth Little

Genre: Knowing Your Audience

“How to Email Your Professor” by Laura Portwood-Stacer

Genre Analysis Activity

Writing Project: Email to a Professor

The Writing Process

Peer Review

Revision and Editing

Reflecting on Your Writing Process

“What Does ‘Proper English’ Mean?” by Elizabeth Little

Before you practice writing in Standard English, it is useful to consider what “Standard English” means and where this variety of English originated. The essay, “What Does ‘Proper English’ Mean?” by Elizabeth Little, printed below, gives some insight into these questions.

“What Does ‘Proper English’ Mean?” by Elizabeth Little

Listen to a podcast recording of this essay here.

What Is Standard English?

Today we're going to tackle an interesting question: When we talk about "Proper English," what exactly do we mean? Do we mean the English that you can take home to your grandmother? Do we mean the English that will impress your boss? Or do we mean the English that everyone will understand?

Most of the time, we mean all these things. When we go looking for grammar guidance, we're hoping to refine our tone, our sophistication, and our clarity. We want, at the end of the day, to be better writers.

But if we mean those things, then what we should really say is "Standard English"—although it would probably be even more accurate to say, "The English That a Very Few People Agreed Upon About 600 Years Ago and That We're Now Mostly Stuck With."

Because when we use the phrase "proper English," we're playing into a whole mess of stereotypes and misconceptions about language. All it takes is a quick look at the history of Standard English to see why this might be true.

Setting the Stage: The History of English

I like to think of a standard variety of language as the lingua franca for speakers of a single language. A speaker from West Texas, for instance, might have trouble understanding a speaker from South Boston, but neither one of them has any trouble watching the national news, which is conducted in Standard

English—the type of English that just about everyone will understand wherever it’s spoken.

English first flirted with written standardization back in the ninth century, when Alfred the Great noticed that everyone’s Latin wasn’t what it used to be (is it ever?) and requested Anglo-Saxon translations of “those books that are most necessary for all men to know.” (From the preface to Alfred’s Anglo-Saxon translation of Pope Gregory I’s *Pastoral Care*.)

When William the Conqueror showed up in 1066, however, he brought with him a slew of scribes and courtiers whose languages of choice were Latin and Norman French, and English was more or less exiled to the monasteries for the next few centuries.

Still, English never ceased to be a widely spoken language. So when England ultimately distanced itself from France, English was right there waiting, ready to reassert itself into official business and the written record.

It happened slowly at first, but by the time of Henry V, English had displaced French as a language of government almost entirely.

Soon the use of written English was spreading rapidly, from guild masters to merchants to churchmen, many of whom must have been wildly relieved to be able to conduct business in a version of their native language.

As English began to be used for increasingly important purposes, it became increasingly important to use a form of English that everyone could

understand—and that everyone would respect. But still, who determined the rules?

The Rules of the Game

At first standards were largely—though not exclusively—determined by the language of the royal clerks. The rise of the printing press also played a key role in standardizing language, particularly with regard to spelling. For instance, we have foreign compositors and typesetters to thank for the use of “gh” instead of “g” in certain words (such as “ghost”).

Soon enough, though, the subject of language standardization was taken up by dictionary writers, grammarians, and even general linguistic busybodies.

The Influence of Scholars

Many of the early English dictionaries and grammars ostensibly sought to describe prevailing usage—they were not meant to be prescriptive. But, of course, the selection of any one variety as a representative form is, in and of itself, a kind of prescription.

These early and influential dictionaries and grammars relied on a variety of criteria to determine their recommended words and rules. In his landmark *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson—a man who famously remarked that “the chief glory of a nation arises from its authors”—leaned heavily on citations from widely respected authors, a trend that continues to this day. Grammarians had their own guiding principles, often calling on logic (decrying double negatives and superlatives) or etymology (railing against the substitution of “nauseous” for “nauseated”).

Others rationales were more subjective. Some writers, for instance, believed that it was better to use one-syllable words whenever possible because they were closer to the language of Adam and Eve. And then there were those who felt so strongly about the linguistic virtues of Latin and Greek that they could come to believe, as John Dryden famously did, that a preposition at the end of a sentence is something to be strenuously avoided.

No matter how persuasive the scholarship, the facts remain the same: the variety that would become Standard English was based on the varieties of the political, economic, and intellectual elite—not because they were necessarily better, but because they were the ones who got to decide.

The Authority of Salesmen

This is when things start to get a bit tricky.

The literary market in the 17th and 18th centuries was not so different from our own. There wasn't much demand for linguistic observation—what readers wanted was linguistic guidance. And again and again, scholars and linguists from Johnson to Webster to Henry Higgins did their best to fill this need. Even Robert Cawdrey's 1604 *Table Alphabeticall*, the earliest English dictionary, makes explicit on its title page that it has been “gathered for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons. Whereby they may the more easilie and better understand many hard English words.”

But as social mobility increased, the standards of the

written language exerted more and more influence on the spoken language, which was looked to as a measure of refinement and “politeness.” Soon the demand for linguistic instruction outstripped the scholarly supply, and readers began to snap up handbooks and how-tos whose advice was justified not by years of study—or any study at all, for that matter—but rather by the ruthlessly efficient principle of “you should.”

Or, more accurately, “you shouldn’t.”

So it was that non-standard language became a nuisance to be dealt with (like troublesome household vermin, as in the 1878 volume *Enquire Within upon Everything*) or a bad habit to be frowned upon (like breathing through your mouth, as in 1888’s *Don’t: A Little Book dealing Frankly with Mistakes & Improprieties more or less Common to All*).

And when you teach that there is only one way to be right, it’s only natural to conclude that every other way is wrong. We can see next how that plays into stereotypes.

The Slippery Slope

As long as we’ve had language varieties, we’ve also had stereotypes about the people who speak those varieties. But the implementation of the standard form of a language—couched as it so often is in terms of elegance, propriety, and correctness—can take an otherwise unassuming us/them split and institutionally marry it to a set of pernicious value judgments: what is “right,” what is “educated,” what is “civilized,” what is “good.”

Linguists and philosophers, and just about anyone

who has ever stopped to think about it, have been doing battle with perceptions like these for centuries—just as they have been doing battle with similarly ingrained stereotypes relating to race, ethnicity, class, and gender. And they're having about as much luck with the former as they are with the latter. Today conspicuously non-standard varieties of English—particularly those spoken in the South and by African-Americans—are still routinely characterized as “defective,” “lazy,” and flat-out “wrong.”

But the truth is this: every variety of English is equally regularized and expressive—just as every language is equally expressive. They all have their own internal rules and grammar. Despite what the usage mavens of yesteryear might have us believe, proficiency with Standard English has nothing to do with innate linguistic superiority, or cognitive or moral superiority. Though the language we use in any given situation is surely a product of external circumstances, it is in no way a function of internal worth.

That doesn't mean that we shouldn't learn Standard English—quite the contrary, given the importance placed upon its usage, it would be irresponsible to suggest otherwise.

But surely there's room for one more standardization: that we all agree to do away with the idea that there's a single, objectively superior form we call “proper” English. It's much more accurate to refer to what many think of as proper English with the term language scholars use: “Standard English.”

Little, Elizabeth. "What does 'proper English' mean?" *Quick and Dirty Tips*, Episode #317, 12 April, 2012, www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/what-does-%E2%80%9Cproper-english%E2%80%9D-mean (included on the basis of fair use)

After reading "What Does 'Proper English' Mean?" by Elizabeth Little, discuss or journal about the following questions:

1. Little writes that "Standard English" could also be called "The English That a Very Few People Agreed Upon About 600 Years Ago and That We're Now Mostly Stuck With." What does she mean by this?
2. Little writes, "As long as we've had language varieties, we've also had stereotypes about the people who speak those varieties." What stereotypes have you encountered about people who speak various varieties of languages, including English? Have you ever experienced negative stereotyping because of the variety of language you were using?
3. Given the evidence that Little presents for all varieties of English being equally expressive and rule governed, do you think it is still important to learn the rules of Standard English? Why or why not?

Genre: Knowing Your Audience

As we think about when and how to use Standard English, it is useful to think about **genre**. Genre is a word we use to describe different types of communication for different audiences and purposes. For example, a professional email to your boss at work would be

considered one genre of writing, while a text message to your friend would be considered another genre of writing.

Just as we use different types of spoken English for different audiences and purposes, like different varieties of language for home and school, we also use different types of written English for different audiences and purposes. Most likely, when you are writing a professional email to your boss at work, you will want to use Standard English, while when you are texting with a friend, you may not care so much about using capitalization, spelling, or punctuation that is consistent with Standard English. In fact, if you obsess too much about capitalization and punctuation in your text messages, some people may even perceive this as overly formal or even cold.

As Elizabeth Little shared in her essay, it is not the case that one variety of English is superior to any other, but it is true that certain varieties are perceived as more appropriate for different genres, intended for different audiences and purposes. Just as you most likely would not wear a swimsuit to a formal event like a wedding, you also would not likely use non-Standard English in a professional context like an email to a boss or an academic publication.

Of course, there is room for creativity and pushing the boundaries in most genres. Maybe after you get to know your boss well, for example, you find out that she really likes to communicate with emojis. Even though emojis are not considered part of Standard English, you may start to use emojis in your emails with your boss because you know that your intended audience appreciates them. Similarly, there are certain academic journals and professional organizations that encourage the use of code-switching or translanguaging.

The most important thing when deciding what language variety to use is to consider your audience and purpose to decide which variety will most effectively communicate your message. You may

also find that as you progress in your career and become more familiar with the genres that you use regularly, you will have more confidence to bend those genres and use them creatively in new ways. Just like language, no genre is ever set in stone; rather, genres are always changing based on the communicative practices of the communities they are used in. There will be times when you seek to conform to conventions of genres, to avoid being negatively stereotyped, and there may be times when you feel comfortable pushing the edges of a genre by doing something more experimental with your language.

To learn more about genre, read “On Genre” by Clint Johnson, a chapter in *Open English @ SLCC*.

“How to Email Your Professor” by Laura Portwood-Stacer

Laura Portwood-Stacer is a published author and scholar who now works as a developmental editor and publishing consultant, helping other scholars go through the process of turning their ideas in to published books. She wrote the following essay to help college students understand the genre of email to a professor. Many professors complain when students write emails that they perceive as impolite or sloppy. Portwood-Stacer wants students to understand the typical requirements of this genre of writing before they fall victim to the negative judgement of professors who expect students to be familiar with this type of email writing.

“How to Email Your Professor (without being annoying AF)” by Laura Portwood-Stacer

Every semester, I see the tweets and Facebook posts. My professor friends, they are annoyed. Their students do not know how to write emails, they say. What they really mean is that their students don't know how to follow the conventions of email etiquette in the academy. I used to be exasperated by student emails too. Until I realized that there was a simple explanation for why they didn't know how to write them — they've never actually been taught how.*

blond, cellphone, coffee, communication, community, connecting, connection, data, device, digital, drink, electronic, email, gadget, global, information, innovation, internet, laptop, media, mobile, name, network, networking, online, phone, playing, screen, sharing, smartphone, social, startup, table, technology, telephone, texting, typing, wireless, woman, wooden, working, electronic device, product design, furniture, product

But now, clueless students have no excuse, because they can read this post. Profs, share it with your students. Students, share it with your friends. Or don't, and be the one person in the class your prof enjoys receiving email from.

10 Elements of an Effective, Non-Annoying Email

Here's a template you can follow in constructing your email to a professor. Each element is explained further below.

Dear [1] Professor [2] Last-Name [3], This is a line that recognizes our common humanity [4]. I'm in your Class Name, Section Number that meets on This Day [5]. This is the question I have or the help I need [6]. I've looked in the syllabus and at my notes from class and online and I asked someone else from the class [7], and I think This Is The Answer [8], but I'm still not sure. This is the action I would like you to take [9]. Signing off with a Thank You is always a good idea [10],
Favorite Student

Element #1: Salutation

Right off the bat, here's where you can establish that you view your relationship with your professor as a professional one. Use "Dear," or if that feels horrifically formal to you, you can use "Hello" or "Hi." ("Hi" is pushing it. See note about exceptions below.)

Element #2: Honorific

This is where a lot of students unwittingly poke right at their professor's sensitive ego and sense of justice in the world. You didn't think this little word was a super big deal, but it actually is to them. An honorific is a title used to communicate respect for a person's position. Whether or not you, as a student, *actually* respect your professor's authority or position, it's a good idea to act

like you do. The simplest way to do this is to address them as “Professor.” If they have a PhD, you can technically call them “Dr.” but you’re safer with “Professor.” Not all instructors have PhDs (and many won’t even have the word professor in their official job title), but if they are teaching a college class they are inhabiting the role of Professor and can be addressed as such. The bonus of “Professor” and “Dr.” is that they don’t require you to know anything about your professor’s gender identity or marital status. If you call your prof “Mrs.” or “Miss,” lord help you.

Element #3: Name

You might be surprised at how frequently students get their professor’s name wrong. This is not difficult information to look up, people. It’s on your syllabus, it’s on the department website, it’s probably Google-able too. Use their last name. Spell out the whole thing. Spell it correctly. If there’s a hyphen in it, use both names *and* the hyphen (this really falls under spelling out the whole thing and spelling it correctly, but I get it, it’s a special case and it causes a lot of confusion for some reason even though it is 2016).

Exceptions to #1–3 (do not attempt until you have leveled up to pro emailer status)

You may use a less formal salutation, and address your professor by something other than Professor Last-Name in your email, if, and only if, you have received an email from them where they use an informal salutation and sign it with something other than Professor Last-Name. For example, when I was a college professor, I would

often sign off on my emails “Prof. P-S” because I knew my last name was long and confusing for people. I then rather liked it when people sent me emails addressed to “Prof. P-S.” But don’t deviate from what they call themselves. NEVER try to use a first name unless you have been given explicit permission to do so. If the prof cryptically signs their emails with only initials, best to stick to Professor Last-Name. Do not under any circumstances begin an email with “Hey” because some people get real huffy about that.

Element #4: Meaningless Nicety

It never hurts to say something like “I hope you’re enjoying the beautiful weather today,” or “I hope you had a relaxing weekend,” to start off. It shows that you see your professor as a person who has some kind of life. Professors like it when you see them as people who have lives outside of their classroom (however remotely this may resemble the truth). It doesn’t really matter what you say here, it’s more the ritual of polite interest that counts. If you can make it come off like you genuinely mean it, bonus points for you.

Element #5: Reminder of how they know you

This one is key, especially if it’s the first time you are contacting your professor. You can’t count on them to remember your name from their rosters or to be able to put your face with your name. If there’s something distinctive about you that would jog their memory and make them look upon you fondly, include that. For instance, “I stayed after class to ask you about the reading that one time,” or “I sit in the front row and have

blue hair,” whatever. If you haven’t met them yet, explain your desired relationship to them, such as “I am interested in enrolling in your class next semester.” If you’re fairly certain they will know you by name, you can leave this out. But some profs are very bad at remembering names, so you might as well throw them a bone here. (If you are lucky, those profs will be self-aware and empathetic enough not to make you memorize any names for exams in their classes.)

Element #6: The real reason for your email

This is the whole reason you’re sending the email, so make it good. The important thing here is to get in and get out, while remaining courteous. Concisely state what it is you need from the professor without offering a bunch of excuses or going into excessive detail or sounding like you are making demands. If you can’t explain why you’re emailing in a sentence or two, consider making an appointment to meet with the professor in person, in which case your line here will be “I was hoping we could meet to talk about X. What would be a good time for that?” If they can’t meet and just want to discuss it over email, they’ll let you know.

Elements #7 and 8: This is where you prove you’re a wonderful person

There is a t-shirt for sale on the internet that says, “It’s in the syllabus.” Think for a second about why there is a market for this product. A vast number of emails sent to professors by students are seeking information that has already been communicated by the professor. Before even sending the email, you should actually

check the syllabus and your notes (and the class website if there is one) to see if your question has indeed been answered there. It doesn't hurt to ask someone else from the class too — this is why you should try to get at least one classmate's phone number or email address during the first week. If you've actually done all these things and you still have a question, then your contacting the professor will actually provide helpful information to them that they might not have been clear about something.

If you can try to answer your own question, and you turn out to be right, that saves them a little bit of time in their response. For instance, if you are writing to set up a meeting, you could say, "It says on the syllabus that your office hours are Tuesdays at 3pm. Could I come this Tuesday at 3:15?" This also shows that you thought about the whole thing for more than two seconds before deciding to take up their email-reading time.

Element #9: Super polite restatement of your request

If you're asking a question you need an answer to, you can say something like "If you could let me know at your earliest convenience, I'd really appreciate it." If you need them to fill out a form, or contact someone on your behalf, or do something that requires more action than just answering your email, state that very clearly here. This helps them put it on their to-do list and get it done.

Element #10: Sign-off

If you're not sure how to sign off an email, "Thank

you” is nearly always appropriate. You can do “Best,” or “All the best,” or “Sincerely,” or whatever, but some form of thanks here does double duty as both sign-off and expression of gratitude.

The hidden Element #11: The follow-up

If your professor hasn’t responded to your email, *and social cues tell you they probably meant to by now*, you can send a gentle follow-up. You can format the follow-up using all the elements here, but you can add in “Just following up on my previous email,” right before you get to Element #6. You don’t have to rub it in that they forgot to email you back, they will get the point (and if they genuinely forgot, they might feel bad). If they were not emailing you back on purpose, you probably already annoyed them the first time around, and you might as well be as polite as possible with the follow-up. When is it safe to send a follow-up reminder? You have to gauge this based on how quickly they usually respond to things and how dire your need for a response truly is. If it can wait a week, let it wait a week (or until you see them in person).

Why any of this matters

Learning how to craft professional emails is a skill you can take with you into the so-called real world. A courteous and thoughtfully constructed request is much more likely to receive the kind of response you want. And, let’s face it, professors are humans with feelings who just want to be treated as such.

You might think professors who are annoyed by student emails are over-sensitive and lazy (it’s their job

to handle this shit, right?). And you might be right. But consider that while you only have a few professors at any one time, they might have hundreds of students. They are possibly getting the same question from ten different people. They might be an adjunct professor who is actually only paid for the hours they spend in the classroom (and they're not paid very much for that even). They might have experienced a pattern of receiving less respect from people based on their gender or race. Make your email the one they don't gripe to their friends about. Now you know how.

**This was corroborated for me when I interviewed a bunch of my former students about how they figured out how to navigate electronic communication in their college careers. The ones who felt confident and effective were ones who'd had a lot of experience interacting electronically with adults outside their family before they ever got to college. We don't have to go into the sociological dimensions of who's most likely to have had such opportunities, but you can probably fill in the blanks.*

Portwood-Stacer, Laura. "How to email your professor (without being annoying AF)." *Medium*, 26 April, 2016, www.medium.com/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ae0e4087 (included on the basis of fair use)

After reading "How to Email Your Professor" by Laura Portwood-Stacer, discuss or journal about the following questions:

1. Which of the guidelines that Portwood-Stacer described for emailing your professor were new or surprising to you?

2. Do you think professors are justified at getting annoyed when students don't follow these guidelines in their emails?

Genre Analysis Activity

In order to better understand the genre of student emails to a professor, we will analyze some example emails, which are based on real emails from students. Read the emails below, and then answer the genre analysis questions about each email.

Example Emails:

Example 1:

Dear Ms. Smith,

I wish to apologize for not making it in to class to day. I have been bedridden since Friday afternoon I should be in by Thursday. If u have any questions please contact me at my cell (555) 555-5555 or my school email student@school.edu.

sincerely,Mohammed

Example 2:

Dear Professor Sarah,

I'm Miko Hakasawa, Elements of Writing, TTh at 12:20.

I'm witting because I don't understand the following question I should answer:

"Where do you see room for improvement in your writing strategies this semester?"

Is it asking about my preferred environment to focus on writing? Such as a library or cafeteria.

What do you mean by "room" in this sentence?

Thank you for your time.

Miko Hakasawa

Elements of Writing

Example 3:

hi sarah

I am sick today what is the homework please

thanks

paul

Example 4:

Dear teacher,

I hope you are doing well. I'm sorry I couldn't come to class. I was really sick. Could I please get your help before class on Wednesday? Is 6:15 okay?

Sincerely,

Larissa

Example 5:

Hi Sarah,

I need an advice about my grade.

Thank you.

Sincerely

Sammy McDonald

Genre Analysis Questions:

Content:

1. How does this email introduce the student? Find quotes or specific information from the email to support your answer.
2. How does this email make a specific request? Find quotes or

specific information from the email to support your answer.

3. Did the writer leave out any of the above topics? If so, why do you think the writer chose to leave out those topics?
4. Did the writer include any additional content beyond the above topics? If so, why do you think the writer chose to include additional content?

Structure:

1. How does the writer begin or introduce the email?
2. What kinds of transitions does the writer use to move between topics in the email?
3. How does the writer end or conclude the email?

Style:

1. What kinds of sentences does the writer mostly use (simple, compound, or complex)?
2. How would you describe the language that the writer uses? Does it seem like formal or informal language? Does the language seem polite? How can you tell?

Evaluation:

1. Do you think this email is an effective email to a professor? Why or why not?
2. If you could give this writer some advice to make their email stronger, what advice would you give?

Critical Genre Analysis:

1. Do you think that professors and supervisors in the workplace should judge the competence of students or employees based on how well they write an email? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of any situations in which it might make sense to send a professional or academic email that deviates from the

conventions of this genre?

Writing Project: Email to a Professor

Now that you have analyzed some examples and reflected on what makes a well-written email, you will write your own email to your professor.

Instructions: After completing the readings and analysis activities for this unit, you are ready to draft your email. Write an email to your professor introducing yourself. Your email should include:

- An address to your professor
- An opening greeting (“nicety”)
- An introduction to yourself—where you are from, how long you’ve lived in your current location, your academic goals, and any other relevant details
- A few sentences about how, specifically, you hope to develop your English writing skills in this course and how your professor might be able to help you with this
- A question or two for your professor about the course
- A closing signature

Write a draft of your email, but do not send your email yet. You will go through a process of *peer review* and revision before sending your email.

The Writing Process

Many students mistakenly think that the only step involved in

completing a writing assignment is sitting down at computer with a blank document and writing the assignment from start to finish. While this may work for some students for smaller assignments, it is unlikely to work as you get into longer assignments that require more complex thinking. And even if the strategy of sitting down and writing from start to finish does get the assignment done, your work is likely to be lower quality than it would be if you were to engage in the *writing process*. Writing as a process means taking time to think carefully and critically about your ideas even before you start writing them on paper, collecting more evidence from sources, creating and revising multiple drafts of your writing, and getting advice from teachers or classmates to help you improve your writing.

Read the article below by Chris Blankenship to understand the writing process more completely. This article originally appeared in the textbook *Open English @ SLCC*.

“Writing is Recursive” by Chris Blankenship

In a recent interview, Steven Pinker, Harvard professor and author of *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person’s Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*, was asked how he approaches the revision of his own writing. His answer? “Recursively and frequently.”

What does Pinker mean when he says “recursively,” though?

You’re probably familiar with the root of the word: “cursive.” It’s the style of writing that you may have been taught in elementary school or that you’ve seen in historical



U.S. Constitution

documents like the Declaration of Independence or Constitution.

“Cursive” comes from the Latin word *currere*, meaning “to run.” Combine this meaning with the English prefix “re-” (to do again), and you have some clues for the meaning of “recursive.”

In modern English, recursion is used to describe a process that loops or “runs again” until a task is complete. It’s a term often used in computer science to indicate a program or piece of code that continues to run until certain conditions are met, such as a variable determined by the user of the program. The program would continue counting upwards—running—until it came to that variable.

So, what does recursion have to do with writing?

You’ve probably heard writing teachers talk about the idea of the “writing process” before. In a nutshell, although writing always ends with the creation of a “product,” the process that leads to that product determines how effective the writing will be. It’s why a carefully thought-out essay tends to be better than one that’s written the night before the due date. It’s also why college writing teachers often emphasize the idea of process in their classes in addition to evaluating final products.

There are many ways to think about the writing process, but here’s one that my students have said makes sense to them. It involves five separate ways of thinking about a writing task:

Invention: Coming up with ideas.

This can include thinking about what you want to accomplish with your writing, who will be reading your writing and how to adapt to them, the genre you are writing in, your position on a topic, what you know about a topic already, etc. Invention can be as formal as brainstorm activities like mind mapping and as informal as thinking about your writing task over breakfast.

Research: Finding new information.

Even if you're not writing a research paper, you still generally have to figure out new things to complete a writing task. This can include the traditional reading of books, articles, and websites to find information to cite in a paper, but it can also include just reading up on a topic to learn more about it, interviewing an expert, looking at examples of the genre that you're using to figure out what its characteristics are, taking careful notes on a text that you're analyzing, or anything else that helps you to learn something important for your writing.

Drafting: Creating the text.

This is the part that we're all familiar with: putting words down on paper, writing introductions and conclusions, and creating cohesive paragraphs and clear sentences. But, beyond the words themselves, drafting can also include shaping the medium for your writing, such as creating an e-portfolio where your writing will be displayed. Writing includes making design choices, such as formatting, font and color use, including and positioning images, and citing sources appropriately.

Revision: Literally, seeing the text again.

I'm talking about the big ideas here: looking over what you've created to see if you've accomplished your purpose, that you've effectively considered your audience, that your text is cohesive and coherent, and that it does the things that other texts in that genre do.

Editing: Looking at the surface level of the text.

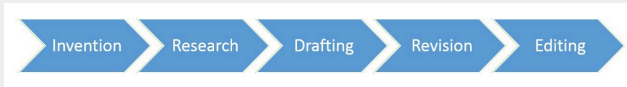
Editing sometimes gets lumped in with revision (or replaces it entirely). I think it's helpful to consider them as two separate ways of thinking about a text. Editing involves thinking about the clarity of word choice and sentence structure, noticing spelling and grammatical errors, making sure that source citations meet the requirements of your citation style, and other such issues. Even if editing isn't big-concept like revision is, it's still a very important way of thinking about a writing task.

Now, you may be thinking, "Okay, that's great and all, but it still doesn't tell me what recursion has to do with writing." Well, notice how I called these five ways of thinking rather than "steps" or "stages" of the writing process? That's because of recursion.

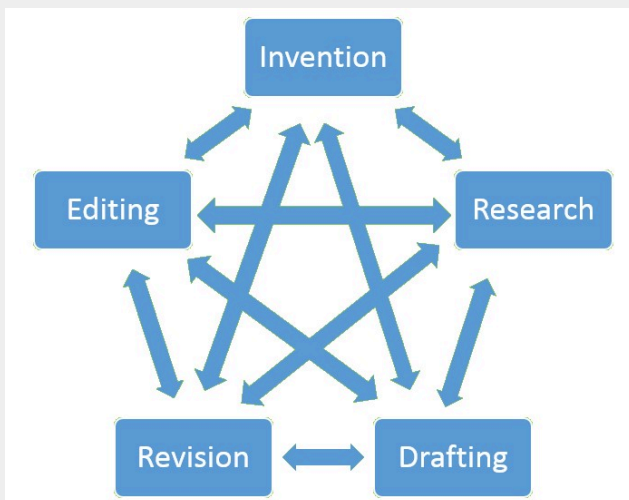
In your previous writing experiences, you've probably thought about your writing in all of the ways listed above, even if you used different terms or organized the ideas differently. However, Nancy Sommers, a researcher in rhetoric and writing studies, has found¹ that student writers tend to think about the

1. ²

writing process in a simple, linear way that mimics speech:



This process starts with thinking about the writing task and then moves through each part in order until, after editing, you're finished. Even if you don't do this every time, I'm betting that this linear process is probably familiar to you, especially if you just graduated high school. On the other hand, Sommers also researched how experienced writers approach a writing task. She found that their writing process is different from that of student writers:



Unlike student writers, professional writers, like Steven Pinker, don't view each part of the writing process as a step to be visited just once in a particular order. Yes, they generally begin with invention and end with editing, but they view each part of the process as a valuable way of thinking that can be revisited again and again until they are confident that the product effectively meets their goals. For example, a colleague and I wrote a chapter for a book on working conditions at colleges, a topic we're interested in.

- When we started, we had to come up with an idea for the text by talking through our experiences and deciding on a purpose for the text. **[Invention]**

- Although we both knew something about the topic already, we read articles and talked to experts to learn more about it. **[Research]**
- From that research, we decided that our original idea didn't quite fit with the research that was out there already, so we made some changes to the big idea. **[Invention]**
- After that, we sat down and, over several sessions on different days, created a draft of our text. **[Drafting]**
- When we read through the text, we discovered that the order of the information didn't make as much sense as we had first thought, so we moved around some paragraphs, making changes to those paragraphs to help the flow of the new order. **[Revision]**
- After that, we sent the rough draft to the editors of the book for feedback. When we got the chapter back, the editors commented that our topic didn't quite fit the theme of the book, so, using that feedback, we changed the focus of the ideas. **[Invention]**
- Then we changed the text to reflect those new ideas. **[Revision]**
- We also got feedback from peer reviewers who pointed out that one part of the text was a little confusing, so we had to learn more about the ideas in that section. **[Research]**
- We changed the text to reflect that new understanding. **[Revision and Editing]**
- After the editors were satisfied with those

revisions, we proofread the article and sent it off for final approval. **[Editing]**

In this process, we produced three distinct drafts, but each of those drafts represents several different ways that we made changes, small and large, to the text to better craft it for our audience, purpose, and context.

One goal of required college writing courses is to help you move from the mindset of the student writer to that of the experienced writer. Revisiting the big ideas of a writing task can be tough. Cutting several paragraphs because you find that they don't meet the purpose of the writing task, throwing out research sources and having to search for more, completely reorganizing a text, or even reconsidering the genre can be a lot of work. But if you're willing to put aside the linear steps and view invention, research, drafting, revision, and editing as ways of thinking that can be revisited over and over again until you accomplish your goal, you will become a more successful writer.

Although your future professors, bosses, co-workers, clients, and patients may only see the final product, mastering a complex, recursive writing process will help you to create effective texts for any situation you encounter.

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1. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers" in *College Composition*

and Communication 31.4, 378–88 ↵

Blankenship, Chris. “Writing is Recursive.” *Open English @ SLCC*, 1 August, 2016, <https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/openenglishatslcc/> (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License)

Peer Review

An important part of the writing process is *peer review*. To understand the meaning of this phrase, we can break it down into its parts. A peer is someone, like a classmate or coworker, who is at the same level as you. To “review” a text means to look it over and give suggestions to improve it so that it more clearly communicates its message to the desired audience. All levels of writers, including professional authors, use peer review to get feedback on their work and improve it.

Here is a video by writing professors at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to help you better understand the purpose of peer review for students as well as for professional researchers and scholars:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/writingworldenglishes/?p=66#oembed-1>

In the article below, which originally appeared in the textbook *Open English @ SLCC*, Jim Beatty gives some tips for successful peer review:

“Peer Review” by Jim Beatty

Peer review is a daunting prospect for many students. It can be nerve-racking to let other people see a draft that is far from perfect. It can also be uncomfortable to critique drafts written by people you hardly know. Peer review is essential for effective public writing, however. Professors often publish in “peer-reviewed” journals, which means their drafts are sent to several experts around the world. The professor/author must then address these people’s concerns before the journal will publish the article. This process is done because, overall, the best ideas come out of conversations with other people about your writing. You should always be supportive of your peers, but you should also not pull any punches regarding things you think could really hurt their grade or the efficacy of their paper.

How to Give Feedback

The least helpful thing you can do when peer reviewing is correct grammar and typos. While these issues are important, they are commonly the least important thing English professors consider when grading. Poor grammar usually only greatly impacts your grade if it gets in the way of clarity (if the professor cannot decode what you are trying to say) or your authority (it would affect how much readers would trust you as a writer). And, with a careful editing process, a

writer can catch these errors on their own. If they are convinced they have a good thesis statement and they don't, however, then you can help them by identifying that.

Your professor may give you specific things to evaluate during peer review. If so, those criteria are your clue to what your professor values in the paper. If your professor doesn't give you things to evaluate, make sure to have the assignment sheet in front of you when peer reviewing. If your professor provides a rubric or grading criteria, focus on those issues when giving advice to your peers. Again, don't just look for things to "fix." Pose questions to your classmate; let them know where they need to give you more to clarify and convince you.

How to Receive Feedback

Resist the powerful urge to get defensive over your writing. Try your best not to respond until your reviewer is finished giving and explaining their feedback. Keep in mind that your peers do not have all the information about your paper that you do. If they misunderstand something, take it as an opportunity to be clearer in your writing rather than simply blaming them for not getting it. Once you give a paper to another person, you cannot provide additional commentary or explanations. They can only evaluate what's on the page.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in peer review is deciding what advice to use and what to ignore. When in doubt, always ask your professor. They know how they will grade, so they can give you a more definitive

answer than anyone else. This holds true for the advice you get from a writing tutor too.

Make Peer Review Part of Your Life

Don't think of peer review as an isolated activity you do because it is required in class. Make friends in the class that can help you outside of it. Call on people outside the class whom you trust to give you feedback, including writing tutors. Integrate peer review into every step of your writing process, not just when you have a complete draft. Classmates, writing tutors, and your friends can be an invaluable resource as you brainstorm your ideas. Conversations with them can give you a safe, informal opportunity to work things out before you stare at a blank screen wondering what to write. A writing tutor can help you talk out your ideas and maybe produce an outline by the end of your appointment. A friend can offer another perspective or additional information of which you are initially unaware. Again, you can get the most direct advice by visiting your professor during office hours to go over ideas and drafts. Take advantage of all the formal and informal resources surrounding you at SLCC to help you succeed.

Conclusion

Far from being scary or annoying, peer review is one of the most powerful tools at your disposal in the life-long process of becoming a more effective public writer. No good writing exists in isolation. The best writing comes out of a communal effort.

Beatty, Jim. "Peer Review." *Open English @ SLCC*, 1 August, 2016,

<https://slcc.pressbooks.pub/openenglishatslcc/> (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License)

Now that you know the basics about the writing process and peer review, exchange emails with a classmate to try the peer review process.

Instructions for Peer Review of Emails

First reading: Read your peer's email completely. The first time you read it, just try to understand the meaning. Do not focus on providing comments or correcting anything.

Second reading: Read your peer's email again. This time read with these questions in mind:

- Are there any areas of the email that are confusing or unclear to you as the reader?
- Does your peer's email include all of the components described in the assignment instructions?
- What needs to be developed with more explanation or detail?
- Does the email seem polite and professional in tone?
- What areas of the email could be improved to make the email stronger or more clear?

- Did you notice any patterns of grammar errors?

After reading: Discuss your peer review observations with your partner. Remember that your purpose is not to criticize your partner but to help them improve their writing to more clearly express its reading for its intended audience and purpose. Avoid evaluative comments like, “This is bad” or “Everything is really good.” Instead, try to point to particular parts of the email that could be improved and explain how to improve them and point out particular parts of the email that are effective and explain why they work well for the intended audience and purpose.

Revision and Editing

Now that you have received peer feedback on your email draft, it is time to revise it and edit to make it the best you can before sending it. If you think about the word “revision,” there are two parts, “re-” and “vision.” “Re-” means “again,” and “vision” means “to see,” so “revision” means to see something again. When you revise your writing, try to look at it with new eyes. Think about whether any parts of the content or the way you organized it could be changed to more clearly express your meaning to your intended audience.

After you have made your larger-scale revisions, you are ready to edit. Editing is usually the last thing you do before submitting your writing. When editing, you want to look for sentence and word-level

changes that could help you express your meaning more clearly for your intended audience. If you are trying to write in Standard English, you may consult grammar resources or a dictionary to make sure you are using words correctly and with the correct spelling.

Once you have revised your email and edited it to make it the best you can, you are ready to send it to your professor.

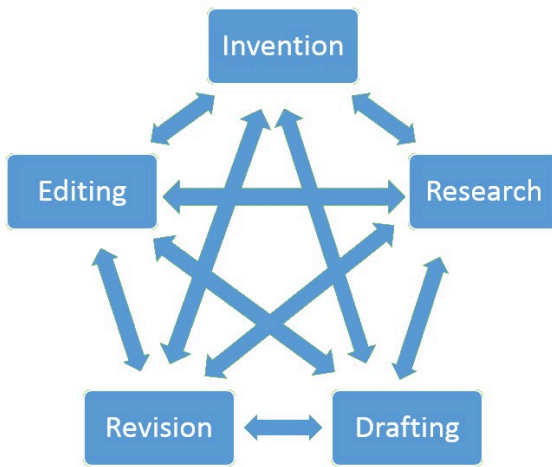
Reflecting on Your Writing Process

After you have completed this assignment, reflect on the process that you used to write your email, and think about how that process was similar to or different from your typical writing process. You can discuss these questions with your classmates:

1. What do the various stages of the writing process (invention, research, drafting, revising, editing) typically look like for you?
2. Do you usually follow a linear process, like a typical student writer, or a nonlinear process, like a professional writer, as described in the Blankenship article?



Linear writing process, typical of a student writer (Blankenship)



*Nonlinear
writing
process,
typical of a
professional
writer
(Blankenship
)*

3. What areas of your writing process would you like to improve or give more attention to? How do you think giving more attention to certain parts of your process would improve the quality of your writing?

3. Exploring the World through Writing

desk, notebook, watch, table, book,
wood, white, camera, vintage,
antique, retro, number, view, pen,
old, wall, photo, vacation, travel,
notepad, europe, journey, color,
desktop, holiday, traveler, business,
closeup, tourism, trip, paper, page,
map, world, note, painting, write,
wallet, blank, art, sketch, drawing,
illustration, design, glasses, wooden,
details, concept, style, image,
planning, classic, shape,
photocamera

In this chapter, you will apply what you have learned

in the previous chapter about genre and writing for a specific audience and purpose by writing a travel article. For your travel article you will choose a place to visit in your community. When you visit that place, you will take photos and notes on your experience and talk to other visitors or staff to get a variety of perspectives. You will then write a travel article that will be shared with your classmates and teacher. You may even choose to share your article on a personal website or social media. Reading travel writing can be a way to learn more about the world, both far away and near to home, and you can inspire others to explore by sharing your experiences in writing.

Chapter contents:

The Travel Writing Process

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Example Travel Writing

Genre Analysis

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Visiting Your Location

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Revising Your Travel Article

Formatting and Publishing Your Travel Article

The Travel Writing Process

In the video below, published travel writer, Elizabeth Baertlein (also the author of this book) describes the process that she went through to plan, write, and publish a travel article in *Iowa Outdoors* magazine. This video will help you to begin to think about the process that you will go through to write your own travel article.

“How to Write a Travel Article” by Elizabeth Baertlein, YouTube.com



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online

here: <https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/writingworldenglishes/?p=129#oembed-1>

“Travel Writing for Beginners” by Max Hartshorne and Paul Shoul

In the article, “Travel Writing for Beginners,” professional travel writer Max Hartshorne and professional travel photographer Paul Shoul share tips for new travel writers to make their writing interesting and engaging for readers. As you read this article, think about how you can apply these lessons on travel writing to your own writing.

“Travel Writing for Beginners” by Max Hartshorne and Paul Shoul



Max Hartshorne and photographer Paul Shoul at the 2016 NY Times Travel Show.

Find a hook. Start out with an exciting scene — don't meander. Use the inverted pyramid (a journalism idea), and put the most interesting part of your trip right at the beginning.

Everything else stems from that place. You can backtrack from there. It's like when you get back from a trip — the first information you share when people ask you how your trip went is the information that should be your lede. Below is how Bruce Northam set the scene for his piece about Annapolis, Maryland:

Annapolis, Maryland is an iconic, charming, thought-provoking destination, and with good reason—awesomeness tempts you from every angle. The Naval Academy (you don't get it until you take the tour), America's oldest state capitol in continuous legislative use (intimate, gorgeous, screams history), and the epic leisure-boat port vibe are just part of the appeal in America's Sailing Capital.

Get right to the point. Tell your reader where the story is set, where you're going, and what the story is about. Don't keep them guessing. If it takes three

paragraphs for the reader to find out where the story is set, you need an editor. Here is an excellent example of setting the time, place and scene written by Andrew Castillo, on GoNOMAD about Burlington VT.

It's after 9 p.m. and one of those nights when my feet are soaked, but my spirits aren't.

How can they be, when I'm in Burlington, Vermont, for the Discover Jazz Festival.

The raspy wail of an electric guitar floats out from under the awning of a tucked-away bar on Church Street. I push open the door and the full brunt of sad notes invade my emotions. It's like '90s grunge met smooth jazz and produced an offspring.

Or maybe John Bonham from Led Zeppelin reincarnated as a jazz drummer.

(Read the rest of his Burlington VT story)

The hardest part, the story arc—people want to see WHY a place is worth visiting, and they see it how you share what happened. Plot out what happened. “Finding the arc of the story. Some suspense. Something has to happen. Characters have to meet resistance and change, just as in any good short story or novel. Something has to be at stake. Otherwise, the piece is just a litany of “We saw this, then this.”

Use all the senses. Don't forget about smells, sounds, taste, sights. Your reader hasn't been to the places you've been to. Put them there with vivid, tantalizing

descriptions that fully immerse them into the environment.

Best advice: use dialogue from locals. Peter Heller, of *Outside Magazine*, said this about dialogue and details:

I met John McPhee once. He told me to carry a notebook and write everything down, everything everyone says, exactly as they say it. Even while you're climbing a mountain. Don't try to remember dialogue at the end of the day, it will all end up sounding like you, and will be inaccurate. So that's what I always did, on an eco-pirate ship in a storm, on a trail, I scribbled everything down as I heard it. Nothing can evoke a sense of character and authenticity better than letting the characters do it themselves. Write everything down. Save receipts, save business cards, use a composition book and glue stick to keep as many reminders of where you went and matches, details, etc.

Stick to one tense. The present tense is NOT GOOD. Use the past tense. Don't be tempted to use present tense, because most of the time it will have to change eventually. We all do it some times but keep it to a minimum.

Use simple language. Write conversationally. Maintain a personal, unique voice that has a distinct flavor. Talk the way you talk, use your own voice, but make it descriptive and don't use overused words boring words like great, awesome, beautiful, nice....**THINK HARDER.**

Narrow your focus. Don't try to write a guide if you visited for a few days, instead pick the event or local

attraction and write about that then build the story around it. Festivals are not usually worth the whole story but can be a basis to write about a destination, including more than just the festival because people might visit at different times of the year.

Be a reporter. Details details DETAILS! Be a reporter. Use visual descriptions and provide EXACT locations. Make sure you document, for instance, how much hotels cost. Travel writing has been described as part reporting, part dear diary and part providing information for the reader. Wikipedia is good place to start but also use tourism board materials, state dept info, and ask experts. It's harder being a reporter than a writer but if you want to get stories that people will want to read, ask more questions and dig deeper! Steve Szkotak, AP editor and reporter often says it's harder to be a reporter but way more valuable than a writer. Heller suggests finding experts, asking for experts and trusting their answers.

Take a fresh perspective. Writing from a different point of view makes the story more interesting.

Everyone is a local somewhere. You don't need to travel halfway around the world to be a good travel writer. Start local. Write about what you know. People are interested in **where you live**, more than you might be, and it's the perfect place to start. Look for things people can do, places you take friends—travelers would also be interested.

Write ironically. Be unusual. For instance: Skiing in the desert — be ironic! Surprise your readers with topics and ideas they don't expect. Monaco for the Average Joe. Wineries in Mexico....

Learn to see the world from a fresh perspective. Write about familiar places in unfamiliar ways. When writing about mundane experiences, pretend that they are new and exciting. Document your findings in vivid, immersive detail.

Use a narrative. Make it a story, don't make your travel article a checklist. Delve into what moved you, take out anything that's not really crucial to understanding the place you went.

Include emotion. Show how the trip affected or changed you. Human emotion is important to make the reader care about what you did and where you went.

Avoid clichés. Think harder for the right word, be more precise, don't be lazy.

Read other travel writers. Some of the greats are Bill Bryson, Rachael Friedman, and Paul Theroux. Get in the habit of reading the NY Times Travel Section, Washington Post features, Afar, Atlas Obscura. Find your own favorite travel writers and read them, enjoy them, be a reader to become a better writer. My favorite is Jeffrey Taylor, who travels to rough parts of the world like Siberia.

Create a blog. It will give you a place to practice your writing and showcase your work. Don't worry about making money from it, rather, use it as a place to introduce yourself. You can go back and use some of

what you wrote on a blog on a trip to include in the final story. Capture the in-the-moment quotes that you can use in the story later.

It's about their trip. Focus on what the readers can do, not what you did. Include events and places that anyone can visit, if you have an exclusive view to something, it's not that interesting. No one cares about your massage or big meal unless they can get one too. The fact that you went to a location isn't necessarily interesting. The fact that you're showing the reader how THEY could go, makes it interesting. Also, a story about a fascinating location can be boring, just as a story about a boring location can be fascinating. The location doesn't make the story, it's what happens and how they can relate.

Make your pitch. Be a salesman for yourself: Write about places that haven't received much attention from travel writers, such as the Middle East. Pitch your story to editors using a well written, succinct paragraph outlining what your story is about.

Surprise an editor. Include a CAPTIVATING photo in your query — that'll make your pitch stand out. When you do send in articles, be reliable. Submit working links, good images, and polished work. Tim Leffel, who's an editor and author said "Ask me which writers I like working with the best as editor of multiple websites and group blogs, and I'll tell you it's the ones I know I can depend on every time. They meet deadlines. They hand things in already formatted correctly. The links in their blog posts work because they've checked them. They don't give me excuses about why their photos are

crappy. They don't make the same stupid mistakes a half dozen times after being corrected twice.

Hartshorne, Max and Paul Shoul. "Travel writing for beginners." *Go Nomad*, 2016, <https://www.gonomad.com/6360-travel-writing-for-beginners> (included on the basis of fair use)

After reading "Travel Writing for Beginners" by Max Hartshorne and Paul Shoul, discuss or journal about the following questions:

1. Was any of the advice in the article surprising or confusing to you?
2. What advice in the article do you think will be easiest to apply in your writing, and what advice will be most difficult to apply in your writing?

Example Travel Writing

Now that you have some understanding of what travel writing is, it is time to look at some examples of travel writing. Try to find some travel articles about places that you are already familiar with, such as the city or town that you currently live in, the city or town that you are from, or a place that you have visited in the past. Local newspapers and magazines are good places to look. You can look for articles about your favorite restaurants, museums, festivals, or parks. Your teacher may help you find articles or even assign you to a particular article to read.

Here are several links to example articles from Eastern Iowa, where the author of this book is based:

[African American Museum Examines History, Culture of Black Hair](#)

[Cedar Rapids Juneteenth Celebration Offers Opportunity to Learn Tee's Liberian Dish Brings West African Cuisine to Cedar Rapids](#)

Genre Analysis

After you have chosen an example travel article to focus on, read the article carefully, and then answer the questions below, which will help you understand how your example article fits into the genre of travel writing.

Content:

1. How does the writer establish the setting (place and time) of the article? Provide a quote from the article to support your answer.
2. What sensory details (things you can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell) does the writer include in the article? Include specific quotes to support your answer.
3. What dialogue or quotes does the writer include? Why do you think the writer chose these quotes to include?
4. Are there any areas where the writer shows emotion in their writing? Why do you think they chose to use emotion in those areas? Provide specific examples.

Structure:

1. What kind of “hook” does the writer use to draw the reader into the article?
2. Is the article written as a narrative or as an exposition of factual information? How can you tell?
3. How does the writer end or conclude article?

Style:

1. What verb tenses are used in the article? Provide specific examples.
2. Does the writer use the first person (I) in the article? Why do you think the writer decided to include or not to include first person narration?
3. How would you describe the language that the writer uses? Does it seem like formal or informal language? How can you tell?

Evaluation:

1. Do you think this article is a good example of travel writing?

Why or why not?

2. If you could give this writer some advice to make their article even stronger, what advice would you give?

Critical Genre Analysis:

1. Some people do not have enough money to travel. How could travel writers present their article in a way that is inclusive to those who do not have much extra money to spend on travel?
2. Do you think the type of travel described in this article would be accessible to people on a tight budget? Why or why not?

Planning Your Travel Article

Now that you have a better understanding of the genre of travel writing, it is time to start planning your own travel article. To begin, research some possible places that you could visit in the coming weeks. It could be a new place for you or a place you've visited before. Choose a place that is accessible to you and is within your budget. If you don't want to spend money, there are plenty of free places to visit, like parks, public libraries, and some museums. After you have chosen a place to visit for your travel article, here are some questions to consider:

- How will you get to the place you are visiting?
- Will you go alone or with others? How will this affect your experience?
- Approximately how much will it cost you to visit this location?
- How much time do you plan to spend there?
- Who will you talk to when you are there?
- How will you take notes and photos?
- Are you nervous about visiting this location? Why or why not?

To get a better understanding of the planning and process of writing your travel article, watch the video below and think about how this process might apply to your own writing.

Visiting Your Location

Now that you have a plan, it is time to visit your location. This is the fun part! Make sure you bring something to record your observations and quotations from people you talk with. This can be a small notebook or your cell phone. It is important to record observations while you are there because it can be difficult to remember details later. Remember to record sensory details, such as smells, tastes, sounds, and sights. Including these types of details will help your reader to feel what it feels like to be there. Also be sure to record exact quotes from people who talk with, either in writing or on your phone or other recording device. Exact quotes will help show the personality of the people in your travel article. Make sure to also record practical details, such as where to park, how much it costs, etc. These details will help your reader plan their trip. Even as you record your experience, remember to have fun and enjoy your time. Your genuine excitement for the location you are writing about will show in your writing and make your article more engaging for readers.

Drafting Your Travel Article

After you have visited your location, it is time to start writing. It is best to write soon after your visit, while the details are still fresh in your mind. Use your notes, photos, recordings, and any other materials you gathered to help you plan for your article. As you

plan your article, review the advice from the “Travel Writing for Beginners” article. Be sure to include an attention-getting hook and introduction, include sensory details to help your reader feel like they are in the place you visited, include all the logistical details about how to visit the place, and include quotations from people you talked to in the place.

Revising Your Travel Article

Peer Review

As a first step to revising your travel article, you will engage in a peer review activity. Since you are already familiar with the place you visited, it is helpful to get another person’s impression of your article to see if your writing clearly conveys your experience of the place.

First reading: Read your peer’s travel article completely. The first time you read it, just try to understand the meaning and experience the writing as you would if you found it on a website or in a magazine. Do not focus on providing comments or correcting anything.

Second reading: Read your peer’s travel article again. This time read with these questions in mind:

- Does your peer’s article include a strong hook that draws you in?
- Does the writer establish the setting of the article clearly in the first few sentences?
- Do the sensory details help you feel like you are in the place they are describing? Where could the writer add additional descriptive details?
- Does the writer make effective use of quotes in the article? Does the writer provide enough context for the quote to be understood?

- Is there enough detail provided in the article to help you understand how to visit the place and what you can do or see there?
- Are there any areas of the article that are confusing or unclear to you as the reader?
- What areas of the article could be improved to make the article stronger or more clear?
- Did you notice any patterns of errors?

After reading: Discuss your peer review observations with your partner. Remember that your purpose is not to criticize your partner but to help them improve their writing to more clearly express its reading for its intended audience and purpose. Avoid evaluative comments like, “This is bad” or “Everything is really good.” Instead, try to point to particular parts of the travel article that could be improved and explain how to improve them and point out particular parts of the travel article that are effective and explain why they work well.

Tips for Revising Writing

After you finish the peer review activity, it is now up to you to revise and edit your travel article to make it the best you can before publication. Watch the video below to get some hints to help you revise your article.

“Tips for Revising Writing” by Ten Marks, YouTube.com



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online

here: <https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/writingworldenglishes/?p=129#oembed-2>

As the video says, try to imagine you are someone else and take an “airplane view” as you read through your article again. Try using

the “ARMS” checklist, which is introduced in the video, as you revise your writing:

- Add information, or explain your ideas more.
- Remove information that you don’t need.
- Move information to the right paragraph, or even move paragraphs around.
- Substitute words or sentences to improve your essay.

Once you have revised the content of your essay to be the best you can make it, then you should go through your essay again and edit it to fix any grammar, spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. Remember that being creative with your language use is a great way to engage your reader. It is important to be consistent and express your ideas clearly for your intended audience and purpose.

Formatting and Publishing Your Travel Article

Finally, now that you have revised and edited your article, you are ready to format it and submit it for publication (or to your teacher). There are many ways to format a paper, but one common formatting style for writing in academic courses is from the Modern Language Association (MLA). If you are writing for a publication, such as a newspaper, magazine, or website, you should always ask the editor about their preferred formatting style before you submit your article. Following a formatting and style guide for your writing will enhance the professional appearance of your writing and will give the editor (or your teacher) a good first impression of your work. MLA gives instructions for formatting a paper as well as for formatting citations within a paper and in the works cited list at the end of your paper. For your travel article, you do not need to

have a Works Cited page because your main source should be your own experience for this type of writing. However, if you did use any outside sources in your writing, you should cite them properly in the text of your article and list them on a Works Cited page, following MLA citation format. An excellent resource for all things MLA is the MLA Formatting and Style Guide on the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). On the OWL, you can find extensive information about paper formatting and citations in MLA as well as other writing styles you may encounter, such as APA, from the American Psychological Association. On the OWL you can view a sample MLA formatted paper with notes about the various features of this formatting style. You can watch the video below to see a demonstration of how to create an MLA formatted document in Microsoft Word.

“How to Format an MLA Paper” by US Represented, YouTube.com



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online

here: <https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/writingworldenglishes/?p=129#oembed-3>

Once you have properly formatted your travel article, now you get to experience the joy of having your article published. Traditionally, the word “publish” has been used to talk about print media, like books, newspapers, and magazines, but the internet gives writers so many more options for publishing. Even if you self-publish your writing on a personal website or on social media, it is still a form of publication, and you will still get to experience the joy of seeing others read your words and learn from them.

Other useful OERs and free online resources for developmental English academic writing:

Open English @ SLCC – An OER composition textbook by professors at Salt Lake Community College

Writing for Success – An OER textbook with a comprehensive grammar review with an introduction to paragraph writing and composition

Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) – A website with comprehensive style and formatting guides, including MLA and APA and other resources for academic writers