

THE COMMONS:

TOOLS FOR READING, WRITING, AND RHETORIC



SECOND EDITION

**The Commons: Tools for Reading,
Writing, and Rhetoric
2nd Edition**

**An Open Textbook for English 101: Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric
at Eastern Kentucky University**

The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric 2nd Edition
The First-Year Writing Program at Eastern Kentucky University

Writing Program Administrators and Editors

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Introduction

We, the editors of this textbook, are excited to share this collection with you. You probably have noticed right away that this is by no means a traditional textbook, and not only because it is digital; this work also differs from many of the digital textbooks you may have encountered in other courses. *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric* is an Open Educational Resource, or OER, textbook. OER textbooks operate outside of the usual publication model of textbook production, the main difference being that the material is **open**, and it is **free to use**.

Now, if you're a student at Eastern Kentucky University, you may already receive your textbooks for free—but those texts are still paid for by the university, and in most cases, you only have access to them for the duration of the course. That's the economic side.

Another defining feature of OER is content. Essays, stories, pictures, audio files, video clips, games, movies, music, art, the photos you snap with a smartphone, the contents of a voice memo you dictate and so much more are examples of **intellectual property**, ideas that originate from and can be attributed to the person or people who create them. In the United States and other countries, intellectual property is protected by **copyright**. Copyright literally protects the right to copy and distribute a piece of intellectual property; it also protects the *ideas* behind a piece, so that others can't make a similar piece that reproduces a very similar version (also known as **plagiarism**), nor can they make changes or additions to the original without the express permission of the copyright holder (the altered piece is sometimes called a **derivative work**). There's a lot more to intellectual property and copyright than this, but that's enough to get the conversation started!

Open Educational Resources, such as this textbook, are part of a movement that works within copyright law to make resources accessible to copy and to edit, but with specific limitations upon when and how. *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric* does this through a **Creative Commons License**. Not all OER texts use the same license (and as you read through this text, you'll see that some of the pieces we include may use a different Open license or may be part of the **public domain**; more on that later). A Creative Commons license allows creators to share their creations with the world while also setting certain expectations for how it can be shared and used—for example, someone may share their photos with a license that says they can be used and modified freely by anyone, while an author may share their stories but only if they are given credit and if no changes are made. The content we've created for this text is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license, abbreviated as [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). This license allows users to share our work and even to make changes to it to create a new work, as long as they give us credit (attribution) and don't use the text.

That can get complicated, but it's much simpler than a traditional copyright. Usually to do any of those things, a person would need to contact the copyright holder and request specific permission; often, that permission comes with a monetary cost and many, many limitations. A Creative Commons license lets content creators give out those permissions up front. The Creative Commons organization has put together an [excellent video](#) made up of Creative

Commons licensed images, video, and music, including a soundtrack made by Nine Inch Nails, explaining how it all works.

So, that's a lot about how the content of an OER textbook can be used and shared— and while that's also what enables us to share this work with you for free, what is perhaps even more important is what that allows us to do in terms of content and design. As long-time teachers of First Year Writing and as Writing Program Administrators, a problem that co-editors Jill and Dom have often run into when searching for textbooks for our classes is that it is hard to find one that really fits our courses. There are many, many great for-pay textbooks out there, but none are an ideal fit for the curriculum here at ECU. Traditional textbook editors design their books to fit many different programs at many schools across the country and across the world. The downside is that those books end up having a lot of extra content that students (or the University) pay for, or there will be content that's missing that instructors need to add themselves (or students need a second book), or both!

The First Year Writing program at ECU chose to go with an OER textbook for economic reasons—to save you and the University money—and for reasons of fit: we wanted our textbook to really match our unique program and student population. To create this particular OER textbook, we searched through many already available texts—including essays, videos, blogs, book chapters, and more—to choose works that fit well with the assignments you'll be completing in your first-semester, First Year Writing course. Some of the content we kept as-is, because it was a great match for our program; others, we've added to or changed, in compliance with the work's license.

Some of the works included here are older works that are still highly relevant—these classics are now in the **public domain**, which means that their copyright has expired, and they can be used and published freely.

We have also reached out to faculty and graduate students at ECU who are experts in this field and who have experience teaching these classes and working with ECU students. We asked them to contribute additional content: the headnote to every outside text we included was written by someone at ECU. The tips and learning strategies, the **critical reading strategies**, and many other resources included in this textbook were designed and written by experienced faculty, staff, and students at ECU to help you to succeed in this course, and to prepare you to be confident, effective writers in your other courses, on the job, and in your personal writing and communication.

The content doesn't stop there! Examples of ECU students' work are another key component of this OER textbook that you will rarely find in a traditional textbook. These student contributions will be added to and updated, so we hope that you'll share some of your own successful work with the editors after you have completed your First Year Writing course!

While this work is coming to you for free, it was created, compiled, and edited with a lot of effort and care. This labor has been supported in many ways, including an ECU Board of Regents grant that supported the hiring of graduate student assistant editor Jonathon Collins.

How to Use This e-Textbook—for Instructors

We're excited to share this digital, open textbook with you for use in First Year Writing courses. Specifically designed to fit Eastern Kentucky University's ENG 101 and ENG 101R, *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric*, 2nd edition, includes readings chosen to fit with the English 101 assignment sequence and the program's focus on critical reading and metacognition.

Each reading includes a headnote written by an ECU instructor or graduate student in the Master of Arts in English and Writing Professions. These headnotes are written with students in mind and include helpful information for practicing the critical reading strategy of previewing.

The Commons (2nd ed.) also includes guides for using other critical reading strategies; these strategies are linked to specific readings to use as models for practicing the strategies, but each strategy can be used productively with any of the other readings as well.

Critical Reading and Annotations

Several of the critical reading strategies involve making annotations. You may be used to asking students to mark directly on print texts for critical reading and other in-class activities. Working with a digital document presents multiple ways to handle annotation.

Most simply, you can ask students to use part of their print budget to print out copies of the readings they will be marking. You can also make copies with your instructor print budget. In both cases, be aware that you should not ask students to print the entire book, and to be selective about which reading activities would benefit from marking a print copy. There are other cost-effective and environmentally-friendly ways to conduct annotations, and we recommend using them whenever possible. Cost and environmental considerations aside, introducing students to these tools helps them build valuable digital literacy skills that will serve them well in their other classes and careers. Here are some that the editors suggest:

Online mark-up tools.

These tools allow students to share their annotations with one another and with their instructor, making them great for both individual and group work. There are several options; at ECU, [Perusall](#) and [Hypothes.is](#) are popular choices, and faculty in several departments have used them with great success.

If you're interested in learning more, ECU's Instructional Design Center has sponsored a session on Perusall presented by Cindy Hawks that you can view [here](#).

PDF mark-up.

PDF readers such as Adobe Reader and Foxit allow users to highlight text and leave notes on files they have downloaded. Tablet users have even more software options, which allow for touch-typing and stylus use. Students will need to save regularly (not all of these programs have

a reliable autosave), but these files can then be turned in through Canvas (our LMS) or included in an ePortfolio. Downloading and annotating is also the best approach in situations where students might not have a stable internet connection—the PDF files can be downloaded before class onto a laptop, tablet, or smartphone and then marked up in class using the app. If you want to see copies of students’ annotations in Canvas, they can upload their marked-up copies outside of class once they have internet access again.

Themes

The readings included in the textbook are tagged by theme. These themes include Appalachia, Artificial Intelligence, Classics, Cultural Awareness, Ecology, Gender, History, Literacy and Information Technology, Politics, and Pop Culture. Instructors can use the themes to give students some choices in their reading selections for writing assignments, such as by allowing students to select sources for their Synthesis essay from among certain themes.

Since *The Commons* is a digital textbook, we hope that you and your students will find the themes even more dynamic than thematic arrangements in a traditional print textbook. Several of the essays have been tagged to belong to multiple themes and by clicking on Themes in the table of contents, readers can find a hyperlinked list of texts that belong within each theme. Beyond helping to give you more flexibility as an instructor, the themes are also a pedagogical tool to help students see how sources can fit in into multiple conversations or arguments—a concept that pairs well with Synthesis, and that helps students prepare for projects such as a literature review that they may complete in ENG 102 or other research-focused courses.

Seeking Contributions

As you work with *The Commons* in your class, please look for ways that you or your students can contribute to future revised editions. Thanks to the Open Access and digital nature of the text, *The Commons* can be added to and changed in a more timely manner than is the case for traditional textbooks, something the editors and the First Year Writing program hope to take advantage of. The editors are always looking for:

- New or revised headnotes
- Resources or activities for developing critical reading and writing skills and strategies
- Other open-access resources that fit themes of the course and the textbook
- Samples of student writing that exemplify low-stakes or high-stakes writing assignments in the curriculum

If you or your students have created it and are willing to share it under an Open Access license, or have found it elsewhere with an OER-compatible license, please share it with the editors!

Please encourage students to submit writing for inclusion in the eBook. When a student’s piece is selected for inclusion, the editors will work with the student to make any final revisions and to draft a headnote discussing their invention, writing, and revision processes. All contributors of original content, instructors and students, will have a by-line in the text and will be able to list their work on a resume or vita. Consider including the possibility of submitting a work for

publication as an incentive when assigning projects. Student contributions are not limited to only the major essays—outstanding low-stakes assignments have a place as well, and all contributions can be traditional alphabetic works or new media, such as audio or video projects.

Integrating the Textbook with Canvas: Design for Access

The Commons is a digital textbook, hosted through ECU's Encompass e-publishing platform and Manifold, an open resource publishing platform, making it available to readers world-wide.

Although students can find the text themselves by navigating through Encompass, access is much easier if instructors include a direct link in their syllabus and on their Canvas pages. If using a reading as part of an assignment, consider including a hyperlink to the reading.

Thank you for the intellectual and emotional work that you put into each of your classes. We hope this open textbook supports you and your students as you work together!

How to Use This eTextbook—for Students

So. You're in one of your first college classes, and you've been given a link to this textbook, which probably doesn't look like any textbook you've seen before. It's completely digital. It has been completely designed with you in mind. And—best of all—it's completely free.

Of course, your instructor will give you more specifics but here's an overview of how the textbook is organized.

First, you'll find some information about the people who contributed to putting this together for you and some information about why we've chosen this kind of textbook: an Open Educational Resource. The most comprehensive definition of OER available today is provided by [UNESCO](#):

Open Educational Resources are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions.

Basically, that means that this textbook

- Is completely free for you—or anybody else—to use,
- Is based on materials that are freely available without copyright, and
- Can be remixed, adapted, used, or changed.

Then, you'll find some resources to help you transition to college life, to ECU, to reading at the college level, what you'll learn in this course, and some basics on college writing. Your instructor may assign these sections as required readings and use some of them during in-class activities, or they may leave it up to you to use these sections as you need them. Either way, these resources are here to support you not just in your first year writing class, but throughout your time at ECU. You'll never lose access to this eBook—it will be available on the ECU

library website and you can download it—so we hope that you’ll make a lot of use of these resources.

Finally, the readings in this textbook are organized in alphabetical order by author's last name AND by theme. We chose themes that we thought would be most relevant to your life because they’re important to the EKV community. We are all people who live in this region; folks who care about the people, animals, and plants around us; and educators who care about you! We hope that reading these essays will not only give you the opportunity to become more efficient and deeper readers but also to learn more about what it means to be a person from or living in Eastern Kentucky today.

The themes we’ve focused on include:

- Appalachia
- Artificial Intelligence
- Classics
- Cultural Awareness
- Ecology
- Gender
- History
- Literacy and Information Technology
- Politics
- Pop Culture

Take a second now. What do you already know about these topics? With which ones are you most familiar? About which ones do you know only a little?

Each essay in the book is tagged with the themes relevant to it, so you can use the themes to find essays related to each theme to get multiple perspectives on the same topic. For example, by clicking on Themes in the table of contents and looking at Appalachia, you will find all the essays in the textbook about or set in Appalachia. Many of the essays have introductory paragraphs to help you understand where the author is coming from. When you practice these critical reading strategies, think about how you can also apply them in your other classes—they are included here to help you read well and to read with a purpose.

At the end of the book, we have included several samples of student-written essays. Students who have taken this class before you wrote these essays as part of an assignment and their instructors recommended them to be included in this edition of *The Commons*. It always helps to see a model of the kind of project you are working on. Perhaps the work you do this year will end up in a future version of *The Commons*. If you feel particularly proud of a piece of your work this semester, talk with your instructor about how to submit it to the textbook editors.

The creators of and contributors to this textbook have been teaching writing for a long time, so we know that some of you are excited about this class, some of you are dreading this class, and some of you just want to get it done. Whatever you are bringing to this class, we hope you find something to relate to in this open textbook and that it helps you meet your goals.

On Campus Resources at EKU for First- Year Students

At Eastern Kentucky University, we want you to be successful, to learn, to complete your degree, and to be healthy. Here are some resources to help get you there this semester.

[Academic Affairs Syllabus Statements](#)

EKU provides standard information about our most important university policies. At this link, you'll find information about how you can get accommodations to make sure you succeed if you need support related to a medical condition, mental health, or learning disabilities. It also provides information about protections against discrimination as well as our expectations for academic integrity.

[The Noel Studio for Academic Creativity](#)

The Noel Studio for Academic Creativity provides support for students in any class that involves writing or communication. You can get one-on-one feedback on your writing in English 101 at any stage from brainstorming to organizing, drafting to revising, and learning the ropes for accepted page formatting and resource citation. Noel Studio consultants are undergraduate and graduate students trained to provide the best possible feedback and to support you as you complete your coursework. They provide consultations in person and online. You can call (859) 622-7330 or make an appointment online to make sure time is set aside for you.

In addition, your instructor might have your whole class visit the Studio for a workshop. If you're assigned to create a visual project such as a presentation, a research poster, or an infographic, Noel Studio consultants are prepared to help with that too. The Noel Studio also has spaces for studying, individually or with a group.

[The Student Success Center](#)

Like the Noel Studio, the Student Success Center can provide one-on-one support for you in English 101 *and* many other disciplines, as well! You can call (859) 622-7861 or [make an appointment](#) for tutoring online.

In addition, the SSC can support your journey to successfully graduate with your degree with the [Chellgren Success Series](#). These workshops, provided throughout the semester, focus on study skills, time management, choosing a major, metacognition, and other topics that develop you as a student and a person.

[Eastern Kentucky University's Libraries](#)

The Crabbe Library, located right off University Drive across from the Ravine and just a short walk from Case, is truly the heart of campus.

EKU Libraries not only have some of the most beautiful buildings on campus but also the most helpful people. EKU Libraries are Here to Help! While the English 101 curriculum does not include research, the library still has plenty to offer you this semester:

- Popular books for reading and a beautiful space in the Grand Reading Room
- Movies for free!
- Plenty of space for studying
- Space available to reserve for small group study sessions or group meetings
- The Student Success Center and the Noel Studio spaces
- Education Abroad
- El Centro
- Laptop and other technology rentals
- A coffee shop
- Nursing mother's lounge
- The Noel Reading Porch
- Events and activities through the year

Follow EKU Libraries on social media



[Eastern Kentucky University's Counseling Center](#)

When you graduate with your degree from EKU, we want you to have learned everything from your classes that you possibly could but *also* more about yourself and the kind of person you want to be in the world. To do that, you need tools and support, and the EKU Counseling Center can provide support for you in the form of mental health workshops and individual counseling, free of charge. They work on a Rapid Access model, so you just call 859-622-1303 and usually someone can speak to you that same day. They also have online “feel better fast” workshops you can access on meditation, mindfulness, sleep, crisis management, study skills, test anxiety, and more.

Parrott, Jill, and Dominic Ashby, editors. *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric*. 2nd ed., Eastern Kentucky University, 2025.

Metacognitive Critical Reading

What is metacognition? Metacognition is, very literally, “thinking about our thinking.” But what does that mean? And why does it matter?

We are metacognitive readers when we work to understand by actively summarizing content as we go along, making connections with what we already know, asking questions about what we don’t understand, making predictions about an author’s main points, and noticing and adjusting our approach to pay closer attention to the text: “As students become more skilled at using metacognitive strategies, they gain confidence and become more independent as learners” ([EAL Center](#)).

Here are some words we might associate with metacognition:

- Self-perceptive,
- Self-regulating,
- Self-understanding,
- Self-assessing, and
- Self-correcting.

METACOGNITIVE ACTIVITIES

The following table presents easy steps to metacognitive strategies to your reading and study habits in this course and beyond.

Making a Plan	When you know when and what actually works for you when you study, you can make a plan accordingly AND that might change from class to class. What works in your English class might not be the same thing that works in History, Business, or Chemistry. Being honest with yourself when something doesn’t work is a part of this, as well.
Checking your Understanding	When you pause while reading, writing, researching, or studying to check your understanding, you’re being metacognitive. For example, maybe after reading a couple of paragraphs of an essay, you pause to see if you could put what you just read into your own words. If you can, then you know you’ve understood, and you can move on. If you can’t, then maybe you need to go back and try a different strategy. Either way, it’s metacognitive.

Developing an Awareness of Distraction	As you develop metacognition, you may begin to notice what distracts you so you can avoid it. You can do this without judgment—everybody gets distracted by something! If you know, then you can make choices about where and when to focus.
Using Prior Knowledge to Plan	If you’ve had experience with a topic, then you can bring what you already know about the topic to the reading, writing, or conversation. If you’ve had experience with genre, then you can bring previous strategies that have worked back to the table to work again!
Monitoring & evaluating	<p>Use questions to ask yourself how well you’re doing and make adjustments as necessary. Once you’ve finished an assignment, take a moment to ask yourself evaluation questions like</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What went well as I read/studied? Why? • What was difficult? Why? • What could I do differently or better next time? • What progress do I see myself making from assignment to assignment? Class to class?

Strategy: Preview Reading Assignments

Previewing reading assignments helps you think about your *purpose* for reading before you start to read. It also helps you connect new content to what you already know, making it easier to stay interested and focused on the reading.

Here’s a list of questions to ask yourself before you start to read:

- Why did my professor assign this? What does she want me to get out of this?
- What do I need to do with this information after I read it?
- What’s this text about?
- What do I already know about it?
- What questions do I have that this text might answer?

Strategy: Talk to the Text

You also might have heard this called “annotating,” which is just a fancy way of saying that you take notes. We encourage you to use a pen or pencil instead of a highlighter if you’re marking on

a hardcopy page. You can underline, place a star, write a question mark, summarize difficult ideas, or ask questions in the margins. Many PDF readers allow you to do similar work, as well. Reading actively in this way is metacognitive because as you read you're constantly interacting with the text and checking your understanding.

Strategy: Asking Questions

Asking questions is a really important way to interact with a text. We can ask questions about a reading before we read, while we're reading, and after we read. Each has its own benefits.

Before reading, when previewing text, use questions to help you connect to prior knowledge or pique your curiosity about the text.

- What ideas here am I already familiar with?
- What doesn't seem familiar that I want to know more about?
- What do I know about this genre (newspaper article, journal article, chapter in a book, blog posting, etc.)?
- What expectations do I have about this? Why?

While reading, use questions to check your understanding of the text.

- What did that paragraph just say?
- What have I found difficult about this section, and why?
- What am I reading that's pointing me toward new information or ideas that are unfamiliar?
- What key words are repeated or stand out?
- What passages are standing out to me as important, interesting, or confusing?

After reading, consider what you still want to know or need to review.

- What am I still not understanding that I might want to come back to?
- Can I identify the thesis or main point of what I just read?
- What was the most difficult section (if any)?
- How would I summarize the text in just one word? One sentence?

Strategy: Double-Entry Notes

Double-Entry Notes allow the reader to consider a text (whether an essay, a poem, a short story, a video, a newspaper article, or whatever) from two different perspectives. One way to do this is with an E-I Notetaker, focusing on evidence and interpretation.

In the evidence column, you put facts: what quotes, data, information, ideas from the text are interesting or important?

In the interpretation column, you put your thoughts on the evidence: what is important, relevant, significant, confusing, or difficult about the text?

Evidence	Interpretation
----------	----------------

Double-Entry Notes work really well when the text has an audio function to it, so podcast episodes, movies, videos, newscasts, or even lectures! Then it might look like this.

Lecture Notes	Response, Reactions, Analysis, & Questions
---------------	--------------------------------------------

For difficult texts, your instructor might have you do your double-entry notes more like this example. They might even ask you to find specific aspects of the text like when the author uses an emotional appeal or integrates their own outside sources.

Quote and Page Number	Commentary and Thoughts
-----------------------	-------------------------

The vocabulary might look a little different, but all of these double-entry notes approaches help you read more deeply and more critically and prepare you for intellectual work like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Strategy: STC Method

In the STC Method, readers use metacognitive strategies to acknowledge what they already know and then build on that to process new information. This strategy can be used as an annotation-only approach or as a combination annotation and note-taking strategy. It is deceptively simple because it is extremely easy to use but speaks to deep transactional reading activity.

Square = “This *squares* with what I already know.”

Triangle = “This points to new information.”

Circle = “I have a question about this, and I’d like to process it more before I circle back around to it.”

To use as an annotation strategy: Simply use a writing utensil of some kind to draw squares □, triangles △, and circles ○ in the margins as they relate to how you process what you’re reading.

To use as a note-taking strategy: Add in a table like this to reflect on the annotations.

Shape	Quote/Information	Your Thoughts
Squares		
Triangles		
Circles		

Strategy: KWL-Q

The KWL-Q method asks you to build on previous knowledge, check your understanding, and ask questions. The letters represent these questions:

What do you already **KNOW** about the topic?

What do you **WANT** to know about the topic?

What have you **LEARNED** about the topic?

What **QUESTIONS** do you still have about the topic?

The first two questions are answered before reading a text; the second two, after. The table below can be used to help students walk through and visualize the process.

K	W	L	Q
What do you already know about the topic	What do you want to know about the topic?	What have you learned about the topic?	What questions do you have about the topic?

KWL-Q is metacognitive because it requires readers to self-regulate their understanding by tracing a line from what they already know to what they still want to learn. There are no right or wrong answers, but the interactions are based on your personal interaction with the text.

As you go through this semester in this class, future semesters, and other classes, you will discover which strategies work best for you or best in which kinds of classes or for particular kinds of texts. The bottom line is that reading something so deeply that you'll remember it and be able to use it later is really difficult, but it's also absolutely essential to your success in college. As you practice more, it will feel more natural and come more easily to you.

If you'd like to know more about the science of critical reading and how to make it work for you, check out David Handel's ["How to Read Academic Content Once and Remember it Forever."](#)

Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric in a Nutshell

Let's be honest. Most of you are going to say that you're in this class because you have to be. We get that. It doesn't keep you from learning, from gaining intellectual habits that you can take into other courses, or from learning to communicate information in ways that will be useful for your entire life. Many factors will play into your classroom experience including your instructor, your previous experiences with English classes, your classmates, and what *you* bring to the table. Every section of the course, however, has shared goals, learning outcomes, and assignments that should be consistent for every student in English 101: Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric.

In the big picture, program goals will enable students to

- Begin to understand college-level expectations for critical reading, critical thinking, and sophisticated writing.
- Leave the course feeling more confident to tackle reading, thinking, and writing goals in other general education courses, in program courses, and leaving the university.
- Understand more clearly that every context, every audience, every situation has a different purpose for reading and writing and that they can be insightful and flexible enough to meet each situation with what is required.
- Meet some people who are new to EKV.
- Have a resource in the instructor, who can help new students negotiate the first year of college.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The university sets certain standards for what all courses should teach and expect of students. For English 101, these are the general education goals set by the university.

Students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively by applying skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and through appropriate use of information technology.
2. Use appropriate methods of critical thinking and quantitative reasoning to examine issues and to identify solutions.
3. Integrate knowledge that will deepen their understanding of, and will inform their own choices about, issues of personal and public importance.

Those are great! But, we also have some more specific things *we* want to get done, as well.

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate comprehension of significant concepts in primary texts.
2. Provide analysis by recognizing the parts or aspects of texts that contribute to understanding the purposes of texts.

3. Connect and integrate concepts from texts to construct and support explanations, conclusions, or arguments through the use of paraphrase, summary, and direct quotations, appropriately cited in a standard format.
4. Evaluate texts by looking at genre, tone, audience, purpose, or other rhetorical features.
5. Organize a composition around a thesis, claims, and supporting evidence from primary texts and present effective transitions between points/paragraphs.
6. Demonstrate recognition of a rhetorical situation and audience and develop an appropriate voice for that situation through paragraphing, sentence structure, variation, rhythm, phrasing, and word choice.
7. Present writing that is clear, accurate, and precise.
8. Use punctuation, grammar, capitalization, citation format, etc. with minor or minimal errors that do not interfere with clarity.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Almost all sections of English 101, English 101R, English 101Z, or English 101RZ will follow a similar pattern of the major assignments, leading to a final reflective portfolio.

Our standard assignments include:

- Literacy Narrative
- Analysis
- Textual Synthesis
- Reflective ePortfolio

Do “analysis” and “synthesis” sound like work you don’t know how to do? Yeah. We’ve been there. Don’t worry, though. Your instructor is going to explain everything for you and every major assignment will be completed in steps in a process.

Literacy Narrative

Purpose: The literacy narrative is your opportunity to connect your previous experiences with reading and writing, whether in your personal life or school, and to think deeply about your goals for your continued development in college.

Task: You’ll be asked to make a statement of purpose (like a thesis) that makes a claim about your literacy experiences and then provide evidence to support that claim. You might also be asked to bring in quotes or points from one of the readings in this textbook.

Analysis

Purpose: This assignment will ask you to move beyond what you can see on the surface (comprehension) and into the potential connections and meanings beneath the surface of a text (analysis). Analysis is often more intellectually difficult than comprehension, but it is also more rewarding and more interesting.

Task: You will write an essay or create another type of text (podcast/audio essay, video, etc.) that *makes an analytical argument* about a chosen text. Your instructor will help you choose a text and may require a particular kind: a piece of art, a song, an essay from the textbook, or something else. Choose something that you find at least somewhat interesting!

Synthesis

Purpose: By this point in the semester, you're moving into more sophisticated intellectual work. While an analysis focuses deeply and specifically on one text, a synthesis makes connections across several texts. In this assignment, you'll learn how to use critical reading techniques to read and really understand several essays (probably 3-4) and then to create a project that says something interesting about those texts.

Task: You will write an essay or create another type of text (podcast/audio essay, video, etc.) that integrates multiple sources to make a single point, a thesis-driven argument. Your instructor will guide you about how to choose your texts.

ePortfolio

Purpose: A portfolio gives authors the opportunity to show their audience the very best of their work and/or the ways they have improved over a period of time. By reflecting on your work over time, you are also better prepared to transfer reading and writing skills from your English course into other situations that call for writing—such as on the job and in other courses.

Task: This ePortfolio is required for every student in English 101, 101R, 101Z, and 101RZ, and the assignment is almost exactly the same for everyone. Follow your instructor's directions, but your ePortfolio will include samples of your work as well as written reflections you've completed throughout the semester (usually one for each major assignment) and a final, holistic reflection on your work and learning in the course as a whole.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

In order to keep instructors and students on task with these goals, we use what's called a rubric to give feedback on the work of the course. Here's how it works.

1. The competent-level categories directly line up with our program goals listed above, so you can clearly see what is most important.
2. As you work to achieve these goals, you can also begin the intellectual work involved to be more persuasive and then more accomplished. The accomplished terms are based on [Paul & Elder's Intellectual Standards](#), a tried-and-tested framework for deeper thinking.
3. Our rubric isn't based on any certain number of points gained or lost. It's what we call "holistic," which just means that we look at assignments and the work put into it as a whole rather than picking it apart by pieces. In other words, how does it all fit together?
4. The rubric can have many different purposes:
 - o When used as a guide for you, the rubric can help you reflect on your goals for the course.

- Used as a peer review instrument, it gives you vocabulary to discuss course work with your classmates.
 - As a grading tool, it allows your instructor to show you what you're doing well and what still needs some improvement.
5. For students who are really struggling with the competency standards, you and your instructor should have a conversation about what support we can offer you to help you achieve your goals for the course.

C = COMPETENT

A competent text meets the following standards:

Assignment Standards

_____ Follows assignment instructions as specified by the instructor

_____ Is organized as the assignment requires (summary, narrative, argument, analysis, etc.).

_____ Meets assignment requirements for length, genre, approach, or rhetorical situation.

Critical Reading & Development

_____ Demonstrates comprehension of significant concepts in texts.

_____ Provides analysis by recognizing the parts or aspects of texts that contribute to understanding the purpose of texts.

_____ Connects and integrates concepts from texts to construct and support explanations, conclusions, or arguments, appropriately cited in a standard format.

_____ Evaluates texts by looking at genre, tone, audience, purpose, or other rhetorical features.

_____ Organizes around a thesis, claims, and supporting evidence.

Conventions of Academic Writing

_____ Demonstrates recognition of a rhetorical situation and audience.

_____ Presents writing that is clear and accurate.

_____ Uses punctuation, grammar, capitalization, citation format, etc. with minor or minimal errors that do not interfere with clarity.

B = PERSUASIVE

A persuasive text meets the following standards in addition to the competency standards above:

_____Presents effective transitions between paragraphs and between sentences.

_____Develops voice through paragraphing, sentence structure, variation, rhythm, phrasing, and word choice.

_____Develops points thoroughly with specific and concrete evidence (ex: quotes, data, statistics).

_____Engages with an appropriate number and kind of reliable sources for support.

_____Integrates evidence from outside sources smoothly and with precise documentation in a relevant citation style.

A = ACCOMPLISHED

An accomplished essay distinguishes itself through one or more of the following characteristics in addition to meeting the competent and persuasive standards above:

Clarity	Accuracy	Precision	Relevance
Depth	Breadth	Logic	Significance
Fairness	Seamless Coherence	Sophistication	
Recognizable Voice			

D = DEVELOPING (60-69)

A text is developing and will receive a D if it attempts to establish a controlling purpose but fails to competently maintain unity throughout the composition. This text may also lack audience awareness, coherence, and/or evidence and/or have several problems with the conventions of academic writing. *You should schedule a conference with your instructor if your text earns a D.*

F = BEGINNING/INEFFECTIVE

A text that does not meet the basic standards of competency will receive an F. *In this case, you should schedule a conference with your instructor to discuss your ability to be successful in the class.*

This text does not meet competency standards because:

- it shows minor problems in all areas, or
- major problems in one or two competence areas.

The most common reasons for receiving an F include unintentional plagiarism, failure to meet assignment requirements such as length or research, or lack of a controlling purpose or thesis.

If you are found to have plagiarized intentionally, your paper will be removed from this general rubric, and we will follow guidelines for an infraction of Academic Integrity. You can see ECU's Academic Integrity policy at www.academicintegrity.ecu.edu.

These assignments have been designed with student learning in mind in this very order to help students connect previous experiences to new ones, read more deeply, create effective academic projects, and reflect on the process to prepare for success moving forward. These descriptions are an overview, so students should always follow individual instructor's instructions.

Rhetorical Awareness in College Writing

Rhetoric is its own unique field of study, with scholarship covering genre analysis, workplace rhetoric, medical rhetoric, religious rhetoric, rhetoric of popular culture, rhetoric of games, and political rhetoric, just to name a few popular areas of study. This chapter provides a short introduction to the basics of rhetoric. Your instructor may introduce you to additional approaches to using and analyzing rhetoric in your writing, such as Rogerian Argument, the Toulmin Model, or Listening Rhetoric, while in ENG 102 you will look more at academic genres and uses of rhetoric. Courses in your major—while they might not always use the term *rhetoric*—will teach you the specialized ways that rhetoric is used in your field to make arguments, build credibility, and communicate with other specialists, clients, and the public. Use this this chapter as a foundation for thinking about how language is used in very intentional ways to communicate with others—to inform, to persuade, and even, at times, to delight.

What is Rhetoric?

Rhetoric is the study of how effectively or persuasively a person is able to present ideas when speaking, writing, or communicating through various modalities. Early study of rhetoric focused on persuasion, while modern rhetoric considers all forms of communication and meaning-making, from how advertisers use words, image, and sound to make a product appealing, to how a film director presents a particular worldview, to how video games create emotional responses like fear, delight, or laughter in players. The study of rhetoric itself is wide-ranging and deep, a scholarly field in its own right just like History, Political Science, or Education. In this text, we touch on the surface, enough to help you develop effective reading and composing skills. For purposes of a first-year writing course—which this book is designed for—rhetoric is often employed in two major ways: analytically, as a way of reading; and creatively, as a tool for writers to make their work more effective.

In terms of reading comprehension and writing techniques, understanding rhetoric involves moving beyond basic level comprehension to consider not just what is being stated but how it is being presented. Rhetorically understanding a text means a reader is able to focus on what the author is saying, how information is arranged, and the context of the information. Areas of the text that need to be considered include the author's purpose (why are they writing), audience (to whom are they writing), style, expectations (both the author's and the audience's; this may include expectations of outcome, content, and form), potential biases, the medium of the composition (such as online or print), and any other elements which contribute to its overall purpose.

Questions to consider when analyzing a text:

- Who is the author?
- What is the author's main idea?
- How does the author support their central claims?
- What is the author's main purpose?
- What is the tone and/or style of the piece?

- Does the author appeal to any logical, emotional or ethical concerns?

You may have had classes before that used similar questions to look closely at literary texts. These questions can be applied productively to other kinds of texts as well, such as political speeches, advertisements, university announcements, health warnings, and so much more. These questions are also helpful for critical thinking and critical reading. They urge readers to look more deeply at texts, not just to understand their meaning, but to look at the *why* and the *how* of what's going on in a text. Understanding the purpose behind a text can reveal a lot. Rhetorical study will help you to realize that very rarely is a text's only purpose just to inform or to entertain—texts reflect the underlying beliefs of the author or their intended audience, and even a seemingly unbiased piece of writing will often act to either support or challenge those beliefs or world views.

Reading texts rhetorically helps you to become a better critical reader and thinker. One reason to study rhetoric in a first-year college class is that it helps you to become more aware of how the creators of the media that surround us—film, television, news, advertising, literature, social media, and more—are shaping our perceptions of reality. Understanding rhetoric can help you become a more active, savvy consumer of media, one who can still enjoy those media but who also questions and draws their own conclusions.

We also study rhetoric in college classes as a way to become better communicators and content creators ourselves. Studying how others have effectively used rhetoric in their writing can help you recognize strategies that you may use in your own work. In fact, much of learning to write in the discipline of your major or career area is a study of rhetoric: by learning to recognize the expectations or genre conventions of different disciplines and forms of writing, you learn how to communicate effectively within that field. Study of rhetoric in courses like First Year Writing helps you learn what to look for when writing in your major courses and in the workplace.

The Importance of Audience

At its heart, rhetoric—whether using it as an analytical tool or as a means to make your own writing and communication more effective—is all about the audience. We use the term *audience* to mean readers, listeners, viewers, as well as more active participants, like players of a game or users of a website. Content creators (authors, directors, composers, advertisers, etc.) create with an audience in mind. Effective content creators will shape their work to meet (and sometimes purposefully challenge) the needs and expectations of their audience. When reading another person's text, it's important to know who their audience is so we can look at the techniques they use to reach, move, or persuade that audience.

The rest of this chapter addresses various ways authors and other content creators connect with audiences. We'll start by looking at the rhetorical situation, a way of looking at the context shared by author, audience, and text. Then we'll look at what are often called the rhetorical appeals, the three major categories of persuading or moving an audience.

What is the Rhetorical Situation?

Adapted from [Rhetorical Concepts](#), provided by Robin Jeffrey, *About Writing: A Guide*, Revised Edition

During your time as a student of writing, you may hear instructors talk about the “rhetorical situation.” This is a term used for any set of circumstances in which one person is trying to change another person’s mind about something, whether through speaking or via written text (like a book, or blog post, or journal article).

These rhetorical situations can be better understood by examining the rhetorical concepts that they are built from: text, author, audience, purpose, and setting.

Text

Texts can come in all shapes and sizes, such as those listed earlier. But in this context, *text* is not limited to something written down. The text in a rhetorical situation could be a film, or a photograph, or a recording of a song or spoken history. The important thing to ask yourself when faced with a text, no matter what it is, is what is gained by having the text composed in this format/genre. What are the relevant characteristics of a book versus a song? What might an oral history version of a text communicate that a book version would not?

Author

Here the “author” of a text is the creator, the person utilizing communication to try to effect a change in their audience. An author doesn’t have to be a single person, or a person at all—an author could be an organization. To understand the rhetorical situation of a text, examine the identity of the author and their background. Not only do you want to know what kind of experience they have in the subject, but you’ll also want to explore basic biographical information about them. Where and when did they grow up? How could that affect their perspective on the topic?

Note: You may read in other sources or hear your instructor use the term *rhetor* to refer to what we’re calling the author in this chapter. The term *rhetor* opens up a greater range of roles (such as speaker, artist, designer, etc.) and so is sometimes preferable to author. We use the more familiar author in this book for its recognizability, as well as because of our focus on texts in the course this book is designed for.

Audience

The audience is any person or group who is the intended recipient of the text, and also the person/people the text is trying to influence. To understand the rhetorical situation of a text, examine who the intended audience is and what their background may be. An audience’s assumptions about the author, the context in which they are receiving the text, their own demographic information (age, gender, etc.) can all affect how the text is seeking to engage with them.

The intended or ideal audience often differs from the actual audience in important ways, and being aware of those differences is important when analyzing or interpreting a text. The differences are often most apparent when examining older texts, where our present-day knowledge and values may differ greatly from those of the audience an author originally wrote for. Even in contemporary pieces, texts may (and often do!) reach audiences other than those they were intended for: think of examples when internal corporate documents are leaked to the general public. As writers, consider how your own compositions, both formal and informal, might be read and interpreted by multiple audiences, not just the ideal audience you are thinking about while writing.

Purpose (Telos)

What is the author hoping to achieve with the communication of this text? What do they want from their audience? What does the audience want from the text and what may they do once the text is communicated? Both author and audience can have purpose and it's important to understand what those might be in the rhetorical situation of the text you are examining. An author may be trying to inform, to convince, to define, to announce, or to activate, while an audience's purpose may be to receive notice, to quantify, to feel a sense of unity, to disprove, to understand, or to criticize. Any and all of these purposes determine the 'why' behind the decisions both groups make. Sometimes the author and audience might begin with different purposes, in which case the author will need to work hard to shift the purpose or telos for the audience—to bring them around to recognizing their purpose as an important one—before they are able to move on with informing or persuading the audience.

Setting (Kairos)

Nothing happens in a vacuum, and that includes the text you are trying to understand. It was written in a specific time, context, and/or place, all of which can affect the way the text communicates its message. To understand the rhetorical situation of a text, examine the setting of both audience and author and ask yourself if there was a particular occasion or event that prompted the particular text at the particular time it was written.

Kairos is often translated as timeliness, which emphasizes the importance of time or timing in a rhetorical situation. Discussion of time as part of a rhetorical situation might range from the expansive to the minute: the early 21st century was a time of great technological change; 2020 was the time for virtual classrooms; the first day of class may not have been the best time for a pandemic joke.

Rhetorical Appeals

Consideration of rhetoric goes beyond the situation that shapes it; whether analyzing a piece or writing our own, we also need to consider the specific strategies that can be used to reach an audience effectively within the confines or limitations of a rhetorical situation. The classical philosopher Aristotle provides us with three major types of rhetorical strategies or approaches, known as the rhetorical appeals. They're called appeals because they represent ways of appealing to an audience, of giving them "reasons to believe" what the author is trying to persuade them of.

These appeals are often referred to by the classical terms used by Aristotle: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos.

1. Logos—Logical Reasoning: An author who employs logos presents careful structure and objective evidence to appeal to the audience.
2. Ethos—Ethical and Credible: When an author makes an ethical appeal, they mean to connect with certain values of the audience in order to offer a deeper sense of the author's credibility. Ethos can be further broken down into intrinsic ethos and extrinsic ethos
 - *Intrinsic* ethos refers to the ways the author creates or builds credibility within the text itself. The inclusion of source citations in a research paper to show that the writer has based their claims on reliable sources is one such strategy. Another common strategy is sharing information that links the author first-hand to the topic, such as direct experience, training or expertise, or new, original research.
 - *Extrinsic* ethos refers to things outside of or external to the text, but still connected to the author, such as if the author is well known or famous for other work. A celebrity endorsement of a product is an example of extrinsic ethos—the celebrity has nothing to do with the creation of the product, but their (external) fame adds to the appeal of the product.

3. Pathos—Emotional: When an author relies on pathos, it means they are attempting to connect with an audience's emotions to ultimately persuade them to understand or adopt the author's claim. Pathos may draw upon the full range of emotions. Remember, a pathos appeal is directed towards influencing the audience's emotions so that audience members may feel or imagine feeling a certain way—emotion does not need to be the subject of the text, nor does it always need to include the author's emotions (although it may).

The rhetorical appeals often work together, and are not mutually exclusive: a well-crafted text will often involve all three, linking the appeals together to support one another. A logical appeal (logos) is often more effective if tied to supporting facts from relevant, reliable research by experts (ethos), while connecting the information to something emotionally impactful (pathos). For example, a detailed plan (logos) for providing after-school programs for children in poverty-stricken areas that shows the plight of those children if they do not receive those benefits (pathos), alongside previously published evidence (ethos) of the gains for children who do participate in similar programs combines the three appeals in a way that resonates with policy makers and voters on many different levels.

Types of Logos

Logos is the use of logic and reasoning to convince or persuade an audience to accept a point of view or take a course of action. Formal writing situations, such as workplace and many classroom-based assignments expect and highly value the use of logos. Logos goes beyond the mere presentation of facts and information: it does something with that information; it uses it to make a point, such as to support a formal thesis statement, or to convince the audience to act in a certain way. Logos-based arguments do not always have to be formal: a logical, step-by-step decision-making process of why someone who is buying a new phone should choose one brand

or model over another is just as much a use of logos as is a twenty–page report addressed to stockholders explaining why they should or should not support a new business acquisition. The point is, logos (and all the appeals) scale in complexity and can be used in many situations.

Audience

A key area of understanding and responding to a rhetorical situation involves connecting with a specific audience. Beyond simply writing to generic readers or citizens of the world, authors use specific rhetorical strategies depending on their audience.

Before you can analyze how effectively an author engages an audience, you must first think about that audience. An audience is any collective intended recipient of the text and also the person or group the author wants to influence. Ask these questions when interpreting the rhetorical situation of a text:

- Who is the author addressing (professionals, academic community, etc.)?
- What background, interests, or values come into play when communicating to that audience?
- What context does the audience need (situational circumstances, historical context, supporting details, necessary evidence, etc.)?
- What style or voice is appropriate for the audience?
- What is the audience's perspective in terms of their likelihood to agree or disagree?
- What should your audience do with this information?

Think back to the last paper you wrote. Did you have an audience in mind for the paper? Did it feel like you were only writing to the teacher? Focusing only on the teacher as audience often leaves us fixated on the "correctness" of writing rather than devoting energy to shaping our rhetoric to reflect the values of a specific audience.

Now, consider your most recent Facebook post or Tweet. You were probably hyper- aware of your audience and how what you posted or shared might affect them or what their reaction might be. Knowing that you already have experiences with audience expectations should help you understand the "how" of writing rather than simply "what" you are writing in relation to your audience.

Types of Audiences

The Imagined Audience: You may be asked to write to an audience of your own construction or one that has broadly defined values and interests. Try to think outside of simply writing to your teacher but consider, based on your purpose and main idea, who would benefit the most from receiving this information. What do you want them to do with this information?

Discourse Communities: This should be an audience you are more familiar with in your writing because you regularly engage in the communication unique to this community. This could be cultural languages, social languages, specific types of verbal and nonverbal communication, etc.

Organized/Intended Audience: This is a specific group of individuals who require more specific language and information based on your topic. Maybe you are writing to a group of Economists who require technical/professional dialogue and clearly defined areas of interest. Maybe you are writing to the local school board and need comprehensive research on the policies and activities of the school district.

Tone and Style for Audience

A key aspect of defining and writing to an audience is understanding how tone and style come into play. Style refers to syntactical elements such as sentence length, word choice, punctuation, etc. Whatever your overall purpose is in writing, your style should reflect that in terms of persuading or informing. Tone refers to how your audience should feel once they receive your message. Think of writing an informal letter to your grandmother versus composing a professional email to your boss.

Imagine you are writing an email to one of your instructors. Which of the following examples better utilizes tone and style?

- Dear Professor Sanchez,

I am having some trouble understanding today's assignment from class. Would you mind if we scheduled a time to meet and discuss it during your office hours this week?

- Hey,

I don't get what we're supposed to be doing in class? Help me please!

Do you notice a stark difference between the two? In the first example, the student presents a clear and concise email with appropriate language and well-formed sentences. The style and tone match the intended audience and help to present a clear purpose. In the second example, the student's purpose is unclear. The context they present for needing help is vague, the tone is informal, and the request for help is too general to affect a desired outcome.

Purpose

When you are asked to define your purpose in writing or to identify the purpose of a text you are reading, you are trying to understand what the author's motivations are for creating the text. What are your intentions with the text? Analyzing the purpose of a text involves discerning what the author's rhetoric is being used for and deciding what the author wants their audience to do with this information: Are they calling the audience to a specific action? Does the author wish for them to be better informed on a certain topic? Are they engaging with or contributing to a larger conversation?

Your purpose is only as limited as your intentions in a text. Various purposes for writing a paper include to:

- Inform
- Persuade
- Entertain
- Analyze
- Theorize
- Explore
- Question

In both reading and responding rhetorically to a text, interpreting the author's purpose means discerning an end goal (persuade, inform, etc.) and figuring out what evidence supports that goal in terms of the text's central claim/argument and what rhetorical appeals are used. In your own writing, you need to define your purpose through the claims made in your thesis.

Purpose and Thesis

Your thesis acts as the roadmap to your paper, introducing and highlighting the main routes your body paragraphs plan to take. In crafting a thesis, the clarity of your purpose as an author should coincide with the main ideas of the paper. The thesis statement is usually presented near the beginning of the essay. A common practice in ENG 101/102 courses is to position your thesis statement near the end of your introduction leading into your body paragraphs.

The thesis of an essay should encompass your main idea, the major point you are trying to make. A thesis should present:

- A debatable claim your paper can build off of.
- A brief introduction of the ideas and facts present in your body paragraphs.
- Specific conclusions about your topic.

Your thesis statement needs to make a clear and concise assertion about your topic and make some reference to the purpose and direction of your writing.

Good Example of an Argumentative Thesis:

“Author X effectively convinces his audience that Beagles are the cutest dogs through the use of relevant statistics and surveys paired with an emotional narrative.”

Bad Example of an Argumentative Thesis:

“In this paper, I will discuss why Author X's writing about dogs is good.”

In the first example, an argumentative claim is made about the effectiveness of the author's rhetoric, and specific examples are introduced that outline the rest of the paper. The purpose is clear in that, after reading this concise statement, the audience is fully aware of the writer's intention to persuade their audience on why this author's rhetoric is so effective.

In the second example, the author references their intention (to discuss) but fails to acknowledge any debatable argument or relevant evidence for the body paragraphs of the essay to build off of. By plainly stating, “In this paper, I will . . .” the thesis comes across more like a purpose statement with no actual claims.

Defining Purpose

When writing an essay and crafting a thesis, your purpose will usually be defined by either the parameters of the assignment or by your own intentions with the paper. If the assignment is to write a rhetorical analysis, your purpose will revolve around persuading your audience to engage with a certain point of view regarding the rhetoric of another author. If you are asked to write a literacy narrative, you will need a thesis that informs your audience on the language and discourse communities of your chosen topic. If you are writing a position synthesis paper, you will need an argumentative thesis that states the parameters of your position and works to persuade your audience in favor of your argument.

Purpose and Audience

Another important factor in defining a purpose is understanding the specific audience you are writing to. If your audience is a vague, general collection of readers, then your purpose will be equally vague. Your purpose should be shaped by the specific audience you are writing to and the desired effect you wish to have on that audience. If your purpose is to persuade a specific audience, you must be aware of the sensibilities and values of that audience. Do they require significant context and background for your topic? What evidence would work most effectively?

Style

Style is how you choose to present your ideas; it’s when the author considers audience and purpose in deciding how best to present information. It’s the texture of your sentences and the words and phrases you choose to employ in your writing. Style is just as important as the actual content of your paper because the way you choose to shape and communicate your message plays an important role in its effectiveness.

The meaning of a text and the way it is presented both play a role in shaping your message, but style can also influence the way a reader interprets or generates meaning from a text based on other writing components. Elements such as tone, diction, and voice either contribute to an author’s style or work in tandem with it to make a work more affecting on the reader.

- **Tone** dictates your writing’s overall attitude as it relates to audience and purpose. Take into consideration if your writing should be objective, logical, emotional, humorous, serious, formal, etc.
- **Diction** is essentially word choice and vocabulary in a text. Your word choice should be shaped by the type of text you are writing. Academic papers will usually necessitate formal language, while a casual speech may pair better with informal diction.
- **Voice** is just as important as tone and diction because it is what makes the writing uniquely yours! Tone may change based on the circumstances of the text, but voice, in

terms of expression and individuality, should remain consistent. Your work in English 101 should sound like you—the really smart, well-informed version of you.

All of these factors play a role in shaping one another, so when developing one of them, consider its implications on the text holistically. In deciding your tone, you must also consider the diction that contributes to your tone, the audience you are writing to, and how best to represent your voice.

Example of tone:

Consider you are writing to an academic audience to present your research findings. You likely need a formal tone with informative reasoning that should be logical and credible (logos and ethos).

“Through extensive surveys and interviews, my findings indicate that chocolate is categorically the best ice cream flavor.”

Example of diction:

If you are crafting a paper using a formal/professional tone and style, your diction must follow suit.

Formal - “Professor Riley, may I have an extension on our current essay? I have unfortunately been overwhelmed with work and school recently.”

Informal - “Hey, I haven’t done the paper. Can I turn it in next week?”

Example of voice:

Your voice is also influenced by the word choice of your diction and the tone you choose. Unique to voice, however, is the “persona” you choose to bring to your writing.

- Personal, cultural, and social language preferences can play a role in vocabulary and sentence fluency.
- Authors who have influenced your writing style can shape your voice in how you choose to emulate their style.
- Topics, audiences, and purposes can all be a result of what personally interests you as a writer.

Developing Style

No one set style exists for composition that applies to every paper. Your writing style should constantly be changing and adapting based on purpose, context, and audience. As you mold your style to fit these different rhetorical situations, be aware of how your tone, diction, and voice should also change to fit within your chosen style. Consider these tips when developing style in your writing:

1. Keep your writing clear and concise: Long-winded sentences tend to get in the way of developing a distinct style.
2. Read different authors : You might not know what writing styles interest you until you engage with different ideas and how authors present them.
3. Revise your writing: During the revision stage, look through specific elements like diction and tone to discern if they all effectively contribute to your style.
4. Read out loud: It might sound obvious, but reading your paper out loud and listening to the flow of sentences in your paper can help you catch oddly worded phrases or uneven tones. It also enables you to create more conversational, natural papers.

MLA Formatting Basics

[The Modern Language Association \(MLA\)](#) is the style standard for all formatting requirements in terms of in-text citations (parenthetical citations), and works cited pages created for academic papers in most first-year writing and English studies programs. Using MLA style guidelines for your formatting and page layouts creates uniformity and consistency in how you present information while also giving credit to the ideas and quotes used from outside sources—such as when you write about the readings in this textbook. MLA Style primarily consists of general guidelines for how your papers should be formatted and how information needs to be presented and credited.

Formatting

The basics of MLA formatting (for Microsoft Word and Google documents) include:

1. Using 1-inch margins on the top, bottom, and both sides of the page.
2. Indenting the start of each new paragraph by a half inch.
3. Using an easy-to-read font such as Times New Roman or Garamond in 12-point.
4. Double spacing every page.
5. Listing your name, instructor's name, course number, and date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.
6. Providing a running header for each page using your last name and page number (Last-name 1).

Works Cited

For up-to-date information and examples on current 9th edition MLA standards and other useful writing resources, refer to the [Excelsior Online Writing Lab, The PurdueOwl Writing Lab, or the MLA Style Lab](#).

For MLA Style papers, your works cited page (or bibliography) is a document at the end of your writing that presents all relevant sources utilized in the essay in a comprehensive list. Whether you directly quote, paraphrase, or summarize ideas, you need to offer all relevant information of the source to your readers. Works cited pages are important because they

- Offer a well-formatted list of your sources for your readers,
- Help you keep track of all of the sources you use and keep you from accidentally plagiarizing other authors, and
- Showcase credibility to your readers through the sources you use.

Each works cited entry (or reference) must include:

- Author(s)
- Title of Source (such as the title of an essay in this book)

- Title of Container (larger work the source exists in; this eBook is the container the individual chapters and readings are found in)
- Contributors (such as editors or translators)
- Version of Source
- Number
- Publisher
- Publication Date
- Location (the page numbers for print sources, or where you accessed the source for digital texts)

Also, make sure that each source is presented with a hanging indent (each line following the first is indented by a half-inch) and sources are presented in alphabetical order by the author's last name.

Examples

Last Name, First Name. "Title." *Container of Source* (Journals, Books, Larger Collection of Works, etc.), Other contributors (editors), Version or Edition, Volume Number, Publisher, Publication Date, Location (pages, paragraph, etc.). DOI or URL

Ciampaglia, Giovanni Luca, and Filippo Menczer. "Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media, Both Intentionally and Accidentally." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric*. 2nd ed., edited by Jill Parrott and Dom Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2025.

Doctorow, Cory. "Writing in the Age of Distraction." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric*. 2nd ed., edited by Jill Parrott and Dom Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2025.

You can also review a complete model Works Cited [here](#).

As you work with sources in this textbook and elsewhere, you'll find that not every piece of information listed above will always be present, depending upon the type of source.

For example, a chapter in a book will usually not have a version and number, but a magazine article will. Sometimes you will find interesting transformations when working with online sources: when citing a blog post or something from a Twitter feed, you'll need to use the username rather than the writer's first and last name. It is important to include as much information from the list as is available, because it helps others to accurately find and identify the source. It can take a while to fully get the hang of it, so just ask your instructor or get help from the Noel Studio when you're not sure how to cite a source.

In-Text Citations

Just as important as your Works Cited is how you present other authors' ideas within the framework of your paper. The main ways you present other ideas are through directly quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.

Each piece of information or idea that is not your own must be

- Introduced and properly contextualized.
 - Whose idea is it?
 - Where is it coming from?
 - How does it relate to what you have presented so far in the text?
- Either directly quoted, paraphrased, or summarized.
 - Direct quotes are placed in quotation marks.
 - Paraphrased ideas are presented in your own words.
 - Summaries are also your own words but are *much shorter* than the original version.
- Explained.
 - How does it relate to your overall thesis/purpose?
 - How does it contribute to or contrast with your argument
 - How does the quote support your ideas by analyzing or evaluating it?
- Cited.
 - The piece of information that comes first in your Works Cited entry is what should come first in your citation. Usually, that’s the author’s name.
 - If you use a source that does not have an author, then a condensed title is acceptable in place of the author.
 - You can mention the author’s name in the sentence or refer to the author in the parenthetical citation.
 - Do not skip this step.

Example 1

Original	I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.
Direct Quote	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. uses an appeal to the moral and religious beliefs of his audience by saying that “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”
Paraphrase	In his famous “I Have a Dream Speech,” Martin Luther King Jr. opens by expressing his vision for universal equality through the imagery of familiar environments becoming similar in scope. His hope is that such depictions can reflect the potential equality of man and fit in line with God’s glory.
Summary	Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream Speech” presents his vision for an America that does not use race as a measurement for people’s worth.
Works Cited	King, Martin L., Jr. "I Have a Dream." Speech. Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D. C. 28 Aug. 1963. American Rhetoric.

*Note in this example that because the source does not have page numbers, no page numbers are included.

Example 2

Original	Emissions from burning waste worsen environmental inequalities, create financial risks for host communities and reduce incentives to adopt more sustainable waste practices.
Direct Quote	<p>Environmental researcher Ana Baptista argues that “Emissions from burning waste worsen environmental inequalities, create financial risks for host communities and reduce incentives to adopt more sustainable waste practices”.</p> <p>Many environmental researchers feel that burning trash can “create financial risks for host communities” but also “reduce incentives to adopt more sustainable” strategies (Baptista)</p>
Paraphrase	Problems with burning waste have ramifications beyond the environment, though: economics, equity, and long- term municipal planning (Baptist 48).
Summary	Ana Baptista’s “Is Burning Trash a Good Way to Handle It? Waste Incineration in 5 Charts” presents a wide- reaching argument against the burning of waste.
Works Cited	Baptista, Ana. “Is Burning Trash a Good Way to Handle It? Waste Incineration in 5 Charts.” <i>The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric</i> . 2nd ed., edited by Jill Parrott and Dom Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2025.

*Note how the punctuation always follows the parenthetical citation.

These are some simple, straightforward examples to get you started. Your instructor will provide more guidance, and you can always seek out feedback from the library, the Noel Studio, or the Student Success Center.

Here’s an important tidbit: you do not need to memorize these! Sure, you’ll start to learn some habits the more you use the system, but even experienced writers have to look this stuff up sometimes. Don’t beat yourself up if it takes some time.

Themes for Reading

Here are question-based versions of each theme for your ENG 101 collection, focusing on inquiry that invites students to consider various perspectives and contexts:

Appalachia:

"How does Appalachian culture inform our understanding of rural America, and how it is represented in media and literature?"

1. [Rural Appalachians Face Higher Debt Burdens Than Other Areas Across America by Kristi Eaton](#)
2. [The Rural South's Invisible Public Health Crisis by Lyndsey Gilpin](#)
3. [Appalachians Are Dying At A Faster Rate Than The Rest Of The Nation by Taylor Sisk](#)
4. [The Ninth Myth of Appalachia by Randy Wykoff](#)
5. [A Poor Man's Maple Syrup Cultivates a Rich Family Heritage by Kristen Pennycuff Trent](#)
6. [Appalachian Foodways by Amanda Green](#)

Artificial Intelligence:

"What challenges and opportunities does artificial intelligence present for the future?"

1. [The AI Dilemma by J.T. Bushnell](#)
2. [What is Digital Literacy by Liza Long](#)
3. [Chat Example: A Brief History of Artificial Intelligence in Technology and Pop Culture by Jason Blomquist and Liza Long](#)
4. [How Large Language Models \(LLMs\) Work by Joel Gladd](#)

Classics:

"How do classic works from different cultures shape our understanding of universal themes like love, power, and morality?"

1. [The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson](#)
2. [The School Days of an Indian Girl by Zitkala-Ša](#)
3. [A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift](#)

Cultural Awareness:

"How does awareness of different cultural perspectives enrich our understanding of ourselves and others?"

1. [The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#)
2. [Demanding Equal Political Voice by Louis DeSipio](#)

3. [How I Celebrate Life on the Day of the Dead by Linda González](#)
4. [The School Days of an Indian Girl by Zitkala-Ša](#)

Ecology:

"How do our interactions with the environment reflect our values and priorities as a society?"

1. [Is Burning Trash a Good Way to Handle It? by Ana Baptista](#)
2. [The Defense Department is Worried about Climate Change by Neta Crawford](#)
3. [Sustaining our Commonwealth of Nature and Knowledge by Herman Daly](#)
4. [Appalachians Are Dying At A Faster Rate Than The Rest Of The Nation by Taylor Sisk](#)

Gender:

"What does it mean to think critically about gender, and how can that awareness shape our actions and beliefs?"

1. [A Feminist's Guide to Rom-Coms and How to Watch Them by Ayu Sutriasa](#)
2. [Are Batman and Superman the Barometer of Our Times? by Ira Erika Franco](#)
3. [The Dude Map by Nikhil Sonnad](#)

History:

"How are historical narratives created, and what influences which stories are told or forgotten?"

1. [The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson](#)
2. [The Day Language Came into My Life by Helen Keller](#)
3. [How Helen Keller Learned to Talk](#)
4. [John F. Kennedy Inauguration Speech by John F. Kennedy](#)
5. [Fred Rogers Testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications by Fred](#)
6. [A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift](#)
7. [The School Days of an Indian Girl by Zitkala-Ša](#)

Literacy and Information Technology:

"What does it mean to learn, think and communicate effectively in today's digital world, and how can we consider information in a mindful way?"

1. [How To Read Like a Writer by Mike Bunn](#)
2. [Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media by Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer](#)
3. [Writing in the Age of Distraction by Cory Doctorow](#)
4. [The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#)
5. [The Day Language Came into My Life by Helen Keller](#)
6. [How Helen Keller Learned to Talk](#)
7. [The Dude Map by Nikhil Sonnad](#)

Politics:

"How can citizens exercise their political voice, and what challenges do they face in doing so?"

1. [Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media by Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer](#)
2. [The Defense Department is Worried about Climate Change by Neta Crawford](#)
3. [Demanding Equal Political Voice by Louis DeSipio](#)
4. [The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson](#)
5. [John F. Kennedy Inauguration Speech by John F. Kennedy](#)
6. [Fred Rogers Testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications by Fred](#)
7. [A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift](#)

Pop Culture:

"What role does pop culture play in shaping our identities and understanding of the world around us?"

1. [The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#)
2. [Writing in the Age of Distraction by Cory Doctorow](#)
3. [Are Batman and Superman the Barometer of Our Times? by Ira Erika Franco](#)
4. [How I Celebrate Life on the Day of the Dead by Linda González](#)
5. [Fred Rogers Testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications by Fred](#)
6. [The Dude Map by Nikhil Sonnad](#)

Before You Read

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an influential Nigerian writer whose work has had a major impact on conversations of feminism, pop culture, and diversity in literary representation. She also focuses heavily on bringing contemporary Nigerian culture into mainstream consciousness as a reflection of her own desire to fight against disempowering stereotypes in favor of diverse cultural opinions.

In “The Danger of a Single Story,” Adichie articulates issues associated with only communicating one story or point of view of a group. For her, the “single story” communicates incomplete conclusions about the lived experiences and perspectives of others, stemming from a lack of knowledge associated with limited perspectives. Adichie passionately models her own journey finding an authentic cultural voice. She started reading stories of British and American children's perspectives, which she conflated with her own, and eventually transitioned into exploring African writers like Chinua Achebe who offered a new perspective on what literary voices looked like. Adichie ultimately calls for her audience to reject the “single story” in favor of more nuanced and complete understandings of people and communities.

Introduction by the editors

The Danger of a Single Story

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story." I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader, and what I read were British and American children's books.

I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out.

Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was.

And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.

But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.

Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So, the year I turned eight, we got a new house boy. His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday, we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.

Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey.

She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.

What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.

I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity, and in many ways I think of myself now as African. Although I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country, the most recent example being my otherwise wonderful flight from Lagos two days ago, in which there was an announcement on the Virgin flight about the charity work in "India, Africa and other countries."

So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate's response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family.

This single story of Africa ultimately comes, I think, from Western literature. Now, here is a quote from the writing of a London merchant called John Lok, who sailed to west Africa in 1561 and kept a fascinating account of his voyage. After referring to the black Africans as "beasts who have no houses," he writes, "They are also people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts."

Now, I've laughed every time I've read this. And one must admire the imagination of John Lok. But what is important about his writing is that it represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are "half devil, half child."

And so, I began to realize that my American roommate must have throughout her life seen and heard different versions of this single story, as had a professor, who once told me that my novel was not "authentically African." Now, I was quite willing to contend that there were a number of things wrong with the novel, that it had failed in a number of places, but I had not quite imagined that it had failed at achieving something called African authenticity. In fact, I did not know what African authenticity was. The professor told me that my characters were too much like him, an educated and middle-class man. My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they were not authentically African.

But I must quickly add that I too am just as guilty in the question of the single story. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. The political climate in the U.S. at the time was tense, and there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleeing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.

So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is "nkali." It's a noun that loosely translates to "to be greater than another." Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly." Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.

I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him that I had just read a novel called "American Psycho" and that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers. Now, obviously I said this in a fit of mild irritation.

But it would never have occurred to me to think that just because I had read a novel in which a character was a serial killer that he was somehow representative of all Americans. This is not because I am a better person than that student, but because of America's cultural and economic

power, I had many stories of America. I had read Tyler and Updike and Steinbeck and Gaitskill. I did not have a single story of America.

When I learned, some years ago, that writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful, I began to think about how I could invent horrible things my parents had done to me.

But the truth is that I had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.

But I also had grandfathers who died in refugee camps. My cousin Polle died because he could not get adequate healthcare. One of my closest friends, Okoloma, died in a plane crash because our fire trucks did not have water. I grew up under repressive military governments that devalued education, so that sometimes, my parents were not paid their salaries. And so, as a child, I saw jam disappear from the breakfast table, then margarine disappeared, then bread became too expensive, then milk became rationed. And most of all, a kind of normalized political fear invaded our lives.

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

So what if before my Mexican trip, I had followed the immigration debate from both sides, the U.S. and the Mexican? What if my mother had told us that Fide's family was poor and hardworking? What if we had an African television network that broadcast diverse African stories all over the world? What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories."

What if my roommate knew about my Nigerian publisher, Muhtar Bakare, a remarkable man who left his job in a bank to follow his dream and start a publishing house? Now, the conventional wisdom was that Nigerians don't read literature. He disagreed. He felt that people who could read, would read, if you made literature affordable and available to them.

Shortly after he published my first novel, I went to a TV station in Lagos to do an interview, and a woman who worked there as a messenger came up to me and said, "I really liked your novel. I didn't like the ending. Now, you must write a sequel, and this is what will happen ..."

And she went on to tell me what to write in the sequel. I was not only charmed, I was very moved. Here was a woman, part of the ordinary masses of Nigerians, who were not supposed to be readers. She had not only read the book, but she had taken ownership of it and felt justified in telling me what to write in the sequel.

Now, what if my roommate knew about my friend Funmi Iyanda, a fearless woman who hosts a TV show in Lagos, and is determined to tell the stories that we prefer to forget? What if my roommate knew about the heart procedure that was performed in the Lagos hospital last week? What if my roommate knew about contemporary Nigerian music, talented people singing in English and Pidgin, and Igbo and Yoruba and Ijo, mixing influences from Jay-Z to Fela to Bob Marley to their grandfathers.

What if my roommate knew about the female lawyer who recently went to court in Nigeria to challenge a ridiculous law that required women to get their husband's consent before renewing their passports? What if my roommate knew about Nollywood, full of innovative people making films despite great technical odds, films so popular that they really are the best example of Nigerians consuming what they produce? What if my roommate knew about my wonderfully ambitious hair braider, who has just started her own business selling hair extensions? Or about the millions of other Nigerians who start businesses and sometimes fail, but continue to nurse ambition?

Every time I am home I am confronted with the usual sources of irritation for most Nigerians: our failed infrastructure, our failed government, but also by the incredible resilience of people who thrive despite the government, rather than because of it. I teach writing workshops in Lagos every summer, and it is amazing to me how many people apply, how many people are eager to write, to tell stories.

My Nigerian publisher and I have just started a non-profit called Farafina Trust, and we have big dreams of building libraries and refurbishing libraries that already exist and providing books for state schools that don't have anything in their libraries, and also of organizing lots and lots of workshops, in reading and writing, for all the people who are eager to tell our many stories.

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

The American writer Alice Walker wrote this about her Southern relatives who had moved to the North. She introduced them to a book about the Southern life that they had left behind. "They sat around, reading the book themselves, listening to me read the book, and a kind of paradise was regained."

I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.

Thank you.

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Ngozi Adichie, Chimamanda. "The Danger of a Single Story." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In this article, author Ana Baptista argues against burning trash through municipal waste incinerators due to increased environmental risks in addition to the industry targeting “environmental justice communities” as common locations for said incinerators. Despite public investment and support going towards the renewable energy byproducts of these practices, many still believe the harmful pollutants expelled from incinerator plants and the negative impact they pose for low-income and minority based communities necessitate alternative waste management. The author presents a series of detailed charts expressing the decreased need for municipal waste incinerators based on increased recycling trends, the average age of currently active facilities, and the major pollution issues caused by these facilities.

Introduction by the editors

Strategy: Previewing the text

Before you read, look through the article and take note of what you see.

- What terms or ideas stand out to you?
- Are there images or graphics? What do they tell you?
- How is the essay organized?
- Read the first few sentences. Does this remind you of anything you already know or have already read?

Is Burning Trash a Good Way to Handle It? Waste Incineration in 5 Charts

by Ana Baptista



"Wheelabrator Technologies' Waste-to-Energy plant in Saugus, Massachusetts." by Fletcher6 is licensed under [CC BY 3.0](#)

Burning trash has a long history in the United States, and municipal solid waste incinerators have sparked resistance in many places. As an environmental justice scholar who works directly with low-income and communities of color, I see incineration as a poor waste management option.

Although these plants generate electricity from the heat created by burning trash, their primary purpose is waste disposal. Emissions from burning waste worsen environmental inequalities, create financial risks for host communities and reduce incentives to adopt more sustainable waste practices.

I recently co-authored a report that describes signs of decline in the U.S. waste incineration industry due to many factors. They include a volatile revenue model, aging plants, high operation and maintenance costs, and growing public interest in reducing waste, promoting environmental justice and combating climate change.

Nonetheless, 72 incinerators are still operating today in the U.S. Most of them – 58, or 80% – are sited in environmental justice communities, which we defined as areas where more than 25% of residents are low-income, people of color or both. Incinerators worsen cumulative impacts from multiple pollution sources on these overburdened neighborhoods.

Environmental justice flashpoints

Waste incinerators are heavily concentrated in northeast states and Florida – areas with high population densities and limited landfill space. Some of these states also provide favorable economic incentives, such as allowing incinerators to earn renewable energy credits for generating electricity.

In the past year environmental justice advocates have successfully shut down incinerators in Detroit, Michigan, and Commerce, California. The Detroit incinerator was built in the 1980s and received more than US\$1 billion in public investment borne by local taxpayers. Groups such as Breathe Free Detroit and Zero Waste Detroit rallied residents to oppose the public financing and health burdens that the facility imposed on surrounding environmental justice communities. The plant closed in March 2019.

The California plant closed in June 2018 after a yearlong campaign by two community-based organizations, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice and Valley Improvement Projects, to prevent incineration from qualifying for state renewable energy subsidies. The facility ultimately closed when a 30-year power purchase agreement with the local utility expired, leaving it without a sufficient revenue stream.

Aging facilities

Incineration plants' average life expectancy is 30 years. Three-quarters of operating waste incinerators in the United States are at least 25 years old.

These facilities' revenues come primarily from tipping fees that waste haulers pay to dump trash, and secondarily from generating electricity. These revenue streams are volatile and can undermine the industry's financial stability. At least 31 incinerators have closed since 2000 due to issues such as insufficient revenue or inability to afford required upgrades.

Operations and maintenance costs typically increase as plants age and their performance decreases. Upgrades, such as installing new pollution control equipment, can cost tens of millions of dollars, and sometimes more than US\$100 million.

These large capital expenditures represent risks for host communities, which often provide public financing through bonds or tax increases. Such measures are risky because the waste service and energy contracts that generate revenue are increasingly shorter term and vulnerable to fluctuating market and regulatory conditions. As plants age, their environmental performance may also degrade over time, posing increasing risks to the environment and public health.

Construction years for MSW incinerators

Most U.S. municipal solid waste incinerators are at least 25 years old, and some have been running for more than 40 years.



Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: [Tishman Environment and Design Center, 2019](#) • [Get the data](#)

What incinerators burn

The composition of municipal solid waste has changed over the past 50 years. Synthetic materials such as plastics have increased, while biogenic, compostable materials such as paper and yard trimmings have decreased.

Plastics are particularly problematic for waste handling because they are petroleum-based, nonbiogenic materials. They are difficult to decompose and release harmful pollutants such as dioxins and heavy metals when they are incinerated.

Materials in U.S. municipal solid waste

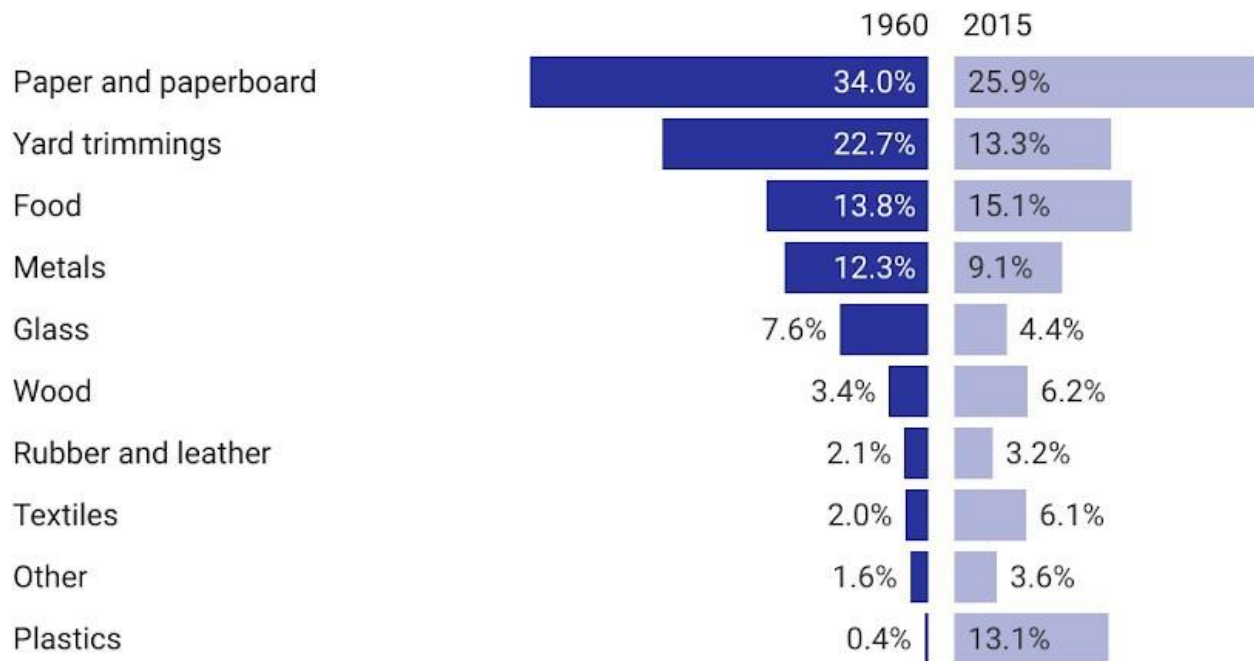


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: [EPA](#) • [Get the data](#)

Waste management trends

Today, thanks to the evolution of waste handling options, a majority of the materials in municipal solid waste can be composted or recycled. This reduces impacts on the environment, including air, soil and water contamination and greenhouse gas emissions. As cities like New York and San Francisco adopt zero-waste policies that create incentives for diverting waste from landfills or incinerators, burning trash will increasingly become obsolete.

Many U.S. cities and states are adopting aggressive climate change and sustainability goals. Waste reduction and diversion will play a critical part in meeting these targets. The public is increasingly demanding more upstream solutions in the form of extended producer responsibility bills, plastic bans and less-toxic product redesign. There is also a growing movement for less-consumptive lifestyles that favors zero-waste goals.

Materials in U.S. municipal solid waste recycled and composted (percentage of each type)

Wastes that are not recycled or composted typically are either burned or buried in landfills.

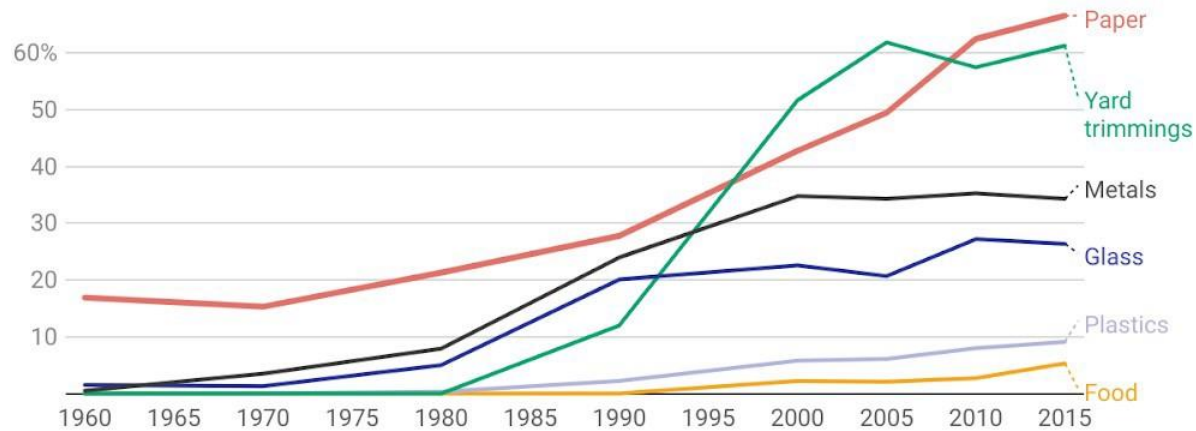


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: EPA • [Get the data](#)

Heavy polluters

Incinerators release many air pollutants, including nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxides, particulate matter, lead, mercury, dioxins and furans. These substances are known to have serious public health effects, from increased cancer risk to respiratory illness, cardiac disease and reproductive, developmental and neurological problems. According to recent figures from the waste industry, incinerator plants emit more sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide per unit of electricity generated than power plants burning natural gas.

Emission rates for "Dirtiest Dozen" municipal solid waste incinerators (pounds per ton of trash burned, 2014)

For each pollutant, at least 8 of the 12 incinerators with the highest emission rates nationwide were located in environmental justice communities



Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: Tishman Environment and Design Center, 2019 • [Get the data](#)

Research on direct health impacts of waste incineration in the United States is limited, but a handful of studies from Asia and Europe, where waste incinerators are prevalent, offer some insights. For example, a 2013 study in Italy analyzed the occurrence of miscarriages in women aged 15-49 years residing near seven incinerators in northern Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, and found that increased particulate emissions from the incinerators was associated with an increased risk of miscarriage.

A single incinerator may burn anywhere from a few hundred tons to several thousand tons of waste per day. Smaller incinerators typically have lower absolute emissions but can emit more hazardous pollutants for each ton of waste they burn. Plant emissions also can vary widely based on the heterogeneous composition of municipal waste, the age and type of emissions control equipment, and how well the plant is operated and maintained over time.

"Is Burning Trash a Good Way to Handle It" by [Ana Baptista](#) is licensed under CC BY-NC-N



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Baptista, Ana. "Is Burning Trash a Good Way to Handle It? Waste Incineration in 5 Charts." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

Geronimo (June 16, 1829 – February 17, 1909) was a famed leader of the Bedonkohe Apache tribe, known for standing up to the United States government as it attempted to erase native peoples through violence or assimilation in order to colonize their lands. While the character of “Geronimo” as an indigenous person has been presented in television, movies, literature, and music, he was a real person, and he wrote about his experiences fighting the American occupation of the west, being held as a prisoner of war, and converting to Christianity in *Geronimo’s Story of His Life* (1906).

In this short excerpt, the famed leader reflects on his experience at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, where he was exhibited as an object of curiosity while being held as a prisoner. Through Geronimo’s account, readers can see his fascination with the exhibits as well as the deep irony of his situation: though he observes white society with curiosity and sometimes admiration, he remains confined, commodified, and “othered.” His descriptions show the dehumanizing control and forced assimilation that defined U.S. policy toward Native peoples at the turn of the century, which you can also see in Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical passages, included in this collection. As you read this excerpt, consider how cultures use story-telling to shape portrayals of themselves and others and whom those stories benefit.

Introduction by Jill Parrott

Geronimo's Story of His Life

by S. M. Barrett

At the World's Fair

When I was at first asked to attend the St. Louis World's Fair I did not wish to go. Later, when I was told that I would receive good attention and protection, and that the President of the United States said that it would be all right, I consented. I was kept by parties in charge of the Indian Department, who had obtained permission from the President. I stayed in this place for six months. I sold my photographs for twenty-five cents, and was allowed to keep ten cents of this for myself. I also wrote my name for ten, fifteen, or twenty-five cents, as the case might be, and kept all of that money. I often made as much as two dollars a day, and when I returned I had plenty of money -- more than I had ever owned before.

Many people in St. Louis invited me to come to their homes, but my keeper always refused.

Every Sunday the President of the Fair sent for me to go to a wild west show. I took part in the roping contests before the audience. There were many other Indian tribes there, and strange people of whom I had never heard.

When people first came to the World's Fair they did nothing but parade up and down the streets. When they got tired of this they would visit the shows. There were many strange things in these shows. The Government sent guards with me when I went, and I was not allowed to go anywhere without them.

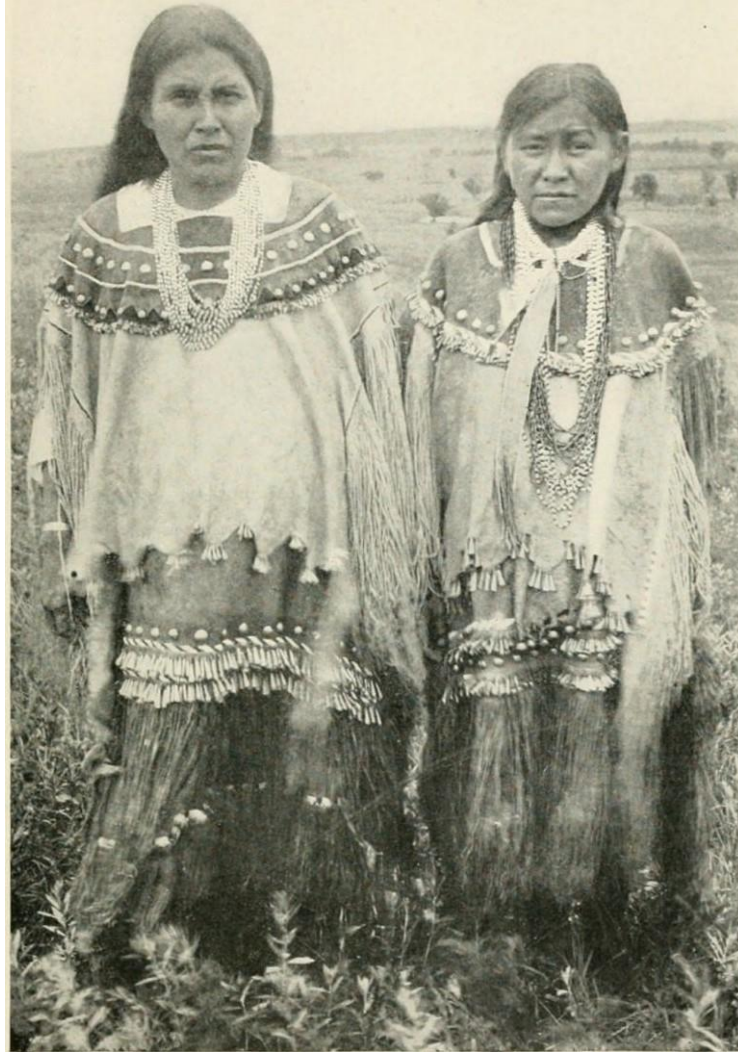
In one of the shows some strange men¹ with red caps had some peculiar swords, and they seemed to want to fight. Finally their manager told them they might fight each other. They tried to hit each other over the head with these swords, and I expected both to be wounded or perhaps killed, but neither one was harmed. They would be hard people to kill in a hand-to-hand fight.

In another show there was a strange-looking negro. The manager tied his hands fast, then tied him to a chair. He was securely tied, for I looked myself, and I did not think it was possible for him to get away. Then the manager told him to get loose.

He twisted in his chair for a moment, and then stood up; the ropes were still tied, but he was free. I do not understand how this was done. It was certainly a miraculous power, because no man could have released himself by his own efforts.

In another place a man was on a platform speaking to the audience; they set a basket by the side of the platform and covered it with red calico; then a woman came and got into the basket, and a man covered the basket again with the calico; then the man who was speaking to the audience took a long sword and ran it through the basket, each way, and then down through the cloth cover. I heard the sword cut through the woman's body, and the manager himself said she was dead; but when the cloth was lifted from the basket she stepped out, smiled, and walked off the stage. I would like to know how she was so quickly healed, and why the wounds did not kill her.

I have never considered bears very intelligent, except in their wild habits, but I had never before seen a white bear. In one of the shows a man had a white bear that was as intelligent as a man. He would do whatever he was told -- carry a log on his shoulder, just as a man would; then, when he was told, would put it down again. He did many other things, and seemed to know exactly what his keeper said to him. I am sure that no grizzly bear could be trained to do these things.



MRS. ASA DEKLUGIE, niece of Geronimo and daughter of Chihuahua, a famous Apache chieftain and **EVA GERONIMO**, Geronimo's youngest daughter, 16 years old.

One time the guards took me into a little house² that had four windows. When we were seated the little house started to move along the ground. Then the guards called my attention to some curious things they had in their pockets. Finally they told me to look out, and when I did so I was scared, for our little house had gone high up in the air, and the people down in the Fair Grounds looked no larger than ants. The men laughed at me for being scared; then they gave me a glass to look through (I often had such glasses which I took from dead officers after battles in Mexico and elsewhere), and I could see rivers, lakes and mountains. But I had never been so high in the air, and I tried to look into the sky. There were no stars, and I could not look at the sun through this glass because the brightness hurt my eyes. Finally I put the glass down, and as they were all laughing at me, I too, began to laugh. Then they said, "Get out!" and when I looked we were on the street again. After we were safe on the land I watched many of these little houses going up and coming down, but I cannot understand how they travel. They are very curious little houses.

One day we went into another show, and as soon as we were in, it changed into night. It was real night, for I could feel the damp air; soon it began to thunder, and the lightnings flashed; it was

real lightning, too, for it struck just above our heads. I dodged and wanted to run away, but I could not tell which way to go in order to get out. The guards motioned me to keep still, and so I stayed. In front of us were some strange little people who came out on the platform; then I looked up again and the clouds were all gone, and I could see the stars shining. The little people on the platform did not seem in earnest about anything they did; so I only laughed at them. All the people around where we sat seemed to be laughing at me.

We went into another place and the manager took us into a little room that was made like a cage; then everything around us seemed to be moving; soon the air looked blue, then there were black clouds moving with the wind. Pretty soon it was clear outside; then we saw a few thin white clouds; then the clouds grew thicker, and it rained and hailed with thunder and lightning. Then the thunder retreated and a rainbow appeared in the distance; then it became dark, the moon rose and thousands of stars came out. Soon the sun came up, and we got out of the little room. This was a good show, but it was so strange and unnatural that I was glad to be on the streets again.

We went into one place where they made glassware. I had always thought that these things were made by hand, but they are not. The man had a curious little instrument, and whenever he would blow through this into a little blaze the glass would take any shape he wanted it to. I am not sure, but I think that if I had this kind of an instrument I could make whatever I wished. There seems to be a charm about it. But I suppose it is very difficult to get these little instruments, or other people would have them. The people in this show were so anxious to buy the things the man made that they kept him so busy he could not sit down all day long. I bought many curious things in there and brought them home with me.

At the end of one of the streets some people were getting into a clumsy canoe, upon a kind of shelf, and sliding down into the water.³ They seemed to enjoy it, but it looked too fierce for me. If one of these canoes had gone out of its path the people would have been sure to get hurt or killed.

There were some little brown people⁴ at the Fair that United States troops captured recently on some islands far away from here.

They did not wear much clothing, and I think that they should not have been allowed to come to the Fair. But they themselves did not seem to know any better. They had some little brass plates, and they tried to play music with these, but I did not think it was music -- it was only a rattle. However, they danced to this noise and seemed to think they were giving a fine show.

I do not know how true the report was, but I heard that the President sent them to the Fair so that they could learn some manners, and when they went home teach their people how to dress and how to behave.

I am glad I went to the Fair. I saw many interesting things and learned much of the white people. They are a very kind and peaceful people. During all the time I was at the Fair no one tried to harm me in anyway. Had this been among the Mexicans I am sure I should have been compelled to defend myself often.

I wish all my people could have attended the Fair.⁵

[1.](#) Turks.

[2.](#) Ferris Wheel.

[3.](#) Shooting the Chute.

[4.](#) Igorrotes from the Philippines.

[5.](#) Geronimo was also taken to both the Omaha and the Buffalo Expositions, but during that period of his life he was sullen and took no interest in things. The St. Louis Exposition was held after he had adopted the Christian religion and had begun to try to understand our civilization.

[Geronimo's Story of His Life](#) by [S. M. Barrett](#) is in the [Public Domain](#).



Barrett, S.M. “Geronimo's Story of His Life.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In “Chat Example: A Brief History of Artificial Intelligence in Technology and Popular Culture,” the authors provide a timeline detailing the history of Artificial Intelligence. This chapter was developed through a collaborative process between human authors and generative AI and the transcript of that exchange with ChatGPT 4.0 is linked to within the text. Comparing the original transcript to the final draft shows how the authors address their use of generative AI while also giving a clear picture of how tools like ChatGPT operate. They note that they had to verify ChatGPT’s information and corrected several inaccuracies. While AI tools carry a lot of potential, responsible users must understand the limitations and verify information.

The chapter itself provides a broad, accessible overview of Artificial Intelligence as it appears in both technological research and popular culture from the 1920s to today. The timeline begins with early conceptual work, like R.U.R. and Metropolis, and moves through major periods in the development of AI. Alongside these scientific developments, the articles trace how film, literature, and mass media have imagined and responded to artificial intelligence through its history. Each decade highlights a distinct moment in AI history: early visions of artificial beings, the optimism of 1960s research labs, the doubts and dystopias of the 1970s and 1980s, the blockbuster revival of the 1990s, and the ethical questions that shape AI’s role in the 2000s-2020s.

As you read, pay attention to how advancements in AI research often run parallel to shifts in cultural concerns regarding the technology. The distance between expectation and reality becomes much clearer as the timeline unfolds. Some portrayals within mass media imagine and exaggerate breakthroughs long before the technology is capable of delivering them, while others cast AI as a looming danger to society. The transcript of the text provides a strong example for potential AI users to engage with these programs more critically and responsibly, which connects directly to the chapter's larger focus on how mass media shapes public assumptions about new technology.

Introduction by Madtelyn Colston and Kyle Smith

Chat Example: A Brief History of Artificial Intelligence in Technology and Popular Culture

by Jason Blomquist and Liza Long

It seems like everywhere we look, people are talking about artificial intelligence. From news headlines to deepfakes to student papers, generative AI is dominating the discourse. How did we get to this point?

The timeline below is an example of how generative AI chats work with humans to co-create artifacts/knowledge. If you've never chatted with an AI tool before, review this transcript of the conversation with ChatGPT 4o about the history of AI that was used to create this chat. I have fact checked and found errors, which I corrected in the timeline below. I also linked to websites that provide more information throughout the timeline and also included a section for further reading that includes links to some of the foundational research papers that led the development of large language models like ChatGPT and Google Gemini.

This timeline might be an interesting starting point for conversation, or you could use a prompting exercise like this with students in a variety of introductory courses to demonstrate how chatbots work. If you're looking for a more comprehensive information source rather than an interactive prompting example, Our World in Data has a robust history of artificial intelligence including graphs and timelines.

1920s-1950s: Early Visions of AI and Technical Foundations

- **1920:** R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots), a science fiction play by Karel Čapek introduces the word "robot" and explores themes of artificial beings rebelling against their creators.
- **1927:** Metropolis, a silent film by Fritz Lang, features a robot named Maria, one of the earliest depictions of AI in cinema, symbolizing the potential dangers of technology.
- **1943:** Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts publish a paper on artificial neurons, laying the groundwork for neural networks.
- **1950:** Alan Turing proposes the Turing Test in his paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," which questions whether machines can think.
- **1950:** I, Robot by Isaac Asimov (a collection of stories) introduces Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, setting a framework for ethical AI in literature.
- **1955:** The term "artificial intelligence" is coined by John McCarthy during the Dartmouth Conference, marking the official birth of AI as a field of study.

1960s: The Rise of AI Research

- 1961: The first industrial robot, Unimate, is introduced, demonstrating the potential for AI in manufacturing.
- 1966: ELIZA, an early natural language processing program, is developed by Joseph Weizenbaum, simulating conversation with a human.
- 1969: Shakey the Robot, created by SRI International, becomes the first robot capable of reasoning about its actions.
- 1965: Dune by Frank Herbert introduces a distant future where AI and "thinking machines" have been banned.

- 1968: 2001: A Space Odyssey, directed by Stanley Kubrick and based on Arthur C. Clarke’s work, introduces HAL 9000, an AI that controls a spaceship and turns against its human crew. HAL became an iconic representation of the dangers of AI.
- 1968: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick, later adapted into the film Blade Runner (1982), explores the line between humans and androids, raising questions about identity and consciousness.

1970s: AI Winter and Slow Progress; Early Media

- 1972: The programming language Prolog is developed, which becomes a key language for AI development.
- 1973: The first “AI winter” begins as funding and interest in AI research decline due to unmet expectations.
- 1973: Westworld, a film written and directed by Michael Crichton, depicts a theme park where AI-controlled robots malfunction and threaten the guests. The concept was revisited in the 2016 HBO series of the same name. Westworld was the first feature film that used a computer to process images.
- 1977: Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope, directed by George Lucas, introduces C-3PO and R2-D2, AI characters that became beloved icons, presenting AI in a more positive, helpful light.
- 1979: The Stanford Cart (a project begun in 1960) successfully navigates a room filled with obstacles, marking an early achievement in computer vision and robotics.

1980s: Expert Systems and the Rise of AI in Popular Media

- 1980: The introduction of expert systems, such as XCON developed by John McDermott and implemented at Digital Equipment Corporation, shows the practical application of AI in business.
- 1982: Japan’s Fifth Generation Computer Systems project begins, aiming to develop computers with AI capabilities.
- 1982: Blade Runner, directed by Ridley Scott, further popularizes the themes of AI and artificial life, emphasizing the moral and philosophical implications of creating sentient beings.
- 1984: The Terminator, directed by James Cameron, depicts a dystopian future where AI (Skynet) becomes self-aware and attempts to exterminate humanity, creating one of the most enduring images of AI as a threat.
- 1984: Neuromancer by William Gibson introduces the concept of cyberspace and AI in a cyberpunk setting, influencing countless works of fiction in both literature and film.
- 1987: The second AI winter begins due to the collapse of the expert system market.
- 1989: Ghost in the Shell (manga) by Masamune Shirow, later adapted into an anime film in 1995, explores AI, cybernetics, and the nature of consciousness in a cyberpunk world.
- 1989: Sir Tim Berners-Lee lays out an “Information Management System” proposal for CERN, which described what would become the World Wide Web.

1990s: AI Revival, the Internet, Blockbusters, and Deeper Philosophical Reflection

- 1992: Jurassic Park, a novel by Michael Crichton and later a film in 1993, explores themes of technology, including AI, and the consequences of playing God.
- 1993: The rapid growth of the World Wide Web (WWW) accelerates global connectivity, laying the groundwork for the explosion of data that would become essential for AI development.
- 1997: IBM's Deep Blue defeats world chess champion Garry Kasparov, marking a significant milestone in AI. Deep Blue used brute computing power to perform 11.38 billion floating point operations per second.
- 1997: Contact, based on Carl Sagan's novel, delves into themes of AI and extraterrestrial communication, blending science with philosophical inquiry.
- 1999: AI starts gaining commercial use in various applications, including speech recognition, recommendation systems, and more.
- 1999: The Matrix, directed by the Wachowskis, becomes a cultural phenomenon, depicting a dystopian future where AI enslaves humanity in a simulated reality, raising questions about reality, freedom, and control.

2000s: The Internet, Data, and AI Convergence

- 2000-2002: The dot.com bust led to a more cautious approach to AI funding and development.
- 2001: Steven Spielberg's film AI: Artificial Intelligence explores themes of consciousness, human-AI relationships, and the ethical implications of creating AI with human-like emotions and desires. It reflects the growing cultural interest in AI and its potential to challenge our understanding of humanity, empathy, and morality.
- 2002: Minority Report explores the ethical and moral implications of predictive technology powered by AI.
- 2004: The rise of social media platforms, powered by AI algorithms, significantly impacts user behavior and content curation.
- 2005: Computer scientist and futurist Raymond Kurzweil writes The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology, predicting that by the mid-21st century, AI will reach a point of superintelligence, leading to the "Singularity"—a moment when technological growth becomes uncontrollable and irreversible, resulting in unforeseeable changes to human civilization.
- 2006: Geoffrey Hinton and his team revive neural networks with the concept of deep learning, leading to a revolution in AI capabilities.
- 2006: The launch of Amazon Web Services (AWS) enables the widespread use of cloud computing, providing the computational resources needed for large-scale AI development.
- 2008: Wall-E portrays AI's role in both the decline and redemption of civilization, reflecting concerns about technology and the environment.

2010s: AI in Everyday Life and Ethical Reflections

- 2011: IBM's Watson wins Jeopardy!, showcasing advances in natural language processing, driven by Internet data and computational power.
- 2012: The Google Brain project demonstrates the power of deep learning by training a neural network to recognize cats in YouTube videos.
- 2013: Her presents an intimate depiction of AI, focusing on the emotional and relational dynamics between humans and AI.
- 2014: Ex Machina explores the complexities of AI consciousness and ethics.
- 2015: AI as a Service (AIaaS) becomes mainstream, allowing businesses to integrate AI into their operations via cloud-based services.
- 2016: Westworld (HBO series) revisits the concept of AI in a theme park setting, diving deeper into consciousness, morality, and free will.
- 2016: Coder and AI researcher Joy Buolamwini forms the Algorithmic Justice League to highlight the systemic ways that algorithms harm certain groups.
- 2017: Transformer Model Architecture: Researchers at Google introduced the Transformer model in their paper "Attention is All You Need." This architecture revolutionized natural language processing (NLP) by enabling more efficient and powerful models. The Transformer model laid the foundation for subsequent large language models like GPT-2, BERT, and others.
- 2018: Companies and research institutions began developing AI systems to assist with early detection of diseases like cancer and diabetic retinopathy, with some AI systems achieving or surpassing human-level performance in specific tasks.
- 2018: The development and testing of autonomous vehicles intensified during this period. Companies like Waymo, Tesla, and Uber advanced their self-driving technologies.
- 2019: OpenAI releases the full version of GPT-2. Its capabilities continued to impress, further solidifying the potential and risks of AI in generating content
- 2019: As AI technologies became more powerful and pervasive, governments, academic institutions, and tech companies began formulating guidelines and frameworks for the responsible development and deployment of AI.
- 2019: Reinforcement learning, the technique behind AlphaGo and AlphaGo Zero, continued to advance.
- 2019: AI started making significant inroads into creative fields, with tools that could generate art, music, and even write scripts.

2020s: Maturation, Ethical Considerations, and AI's Societal Impact

- 2020: The Internet facilitates global discussions on AI ethics, with growing concerns about privacy, bias, and the societal impact of AI.
- 2020: GPT-3, another language model by OpenAI, pushes the boundaries of AI text generation with 175 billion parameters, made possible by the vast data available on the Internet.
- 2021: AI plays a critical role in healthcare, such as in the development of vaccines and medical diagnostics during the COVID-19 pandemic, leveraging global data networks.

- 2022: Diffusion models, like Midjourney and DALL-E 2, demonstrate impressive capabilities in generating images from textual descriptions, reflecting the fusion of AI and Internet-driven creativity.
- 2022: OpenAI releases ChatGPT 3.5, which sets off an immediate wave of competition to release Large Language Models.
- 2023: Ongoing advancements in AI continue to impact various industries, with increased focus on ethical considerations, regulation, and responsible AI development.
- 2024: Concerns about return on investment, election interference, and deepfakes begins to spread.

This timeline highlights key developments that have shaped the field of AI, reflecting its evolution from theoretical concepts to practical applications that permeate everyday life (Open AI, 2024).

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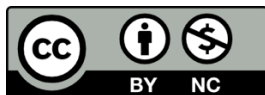
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Before You Read

Mike Bunn is a historian who has a passion for reading and writing. In his article entitled “How to Read Like a Writer,” he advocates for “Reading like a Writer” (or RLW). This is a form of active reading, where the student asks questions about author intent while engaging in the content of the work. When reading, Bunn says students should be questioning how the author has affected the reader. What has the author done to impact you? How have they done this? Why are you affected? Annotating for these questions, as well as underlining key passages/ phrases and noting reactions to the text can help keep the student engaged, as well as keep a record of thoughts for any future writing done about the piece.

Bunn’s RLW practice allows for students to improve their own writing through the question “Would I want to try this in my own writing?”. This type of active reading lends itself heavily to inspiration. The student will become inspired by how an author goes about explaining a particular concept, or giving a certain description, or describing a certain place, and will want to try it out for themselves. Students may be hesitant to try out these new approaches to writing, as they may feel as though they are simply copying what the author has achieved. Bunn thinks otherwise. He understands that “writing is a series of choices”, and in trying out inspiration from another author, you are likely to make slightly different choices, thus making the idea your own.

Introduction by Ashton Conley

How to Read Like a Writer

by Mike Bunn

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London’s famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

My job (in addition to wearing a red tuxedo jacket) was to sit inside the dark theater with the patrons and make sure nothing went wrong. It didn’t seem to matter to my supervisor that I had no training in security and no idea where we kept the fire extinguishers. I was pretty sure that if there *was* any trouble I’d be running down the back stairs, leaving the patrons to fend for themselves. I had no intention of dying in a bright red tuxedo.

There was a Red Coat stationed on each of the theater’s four floors, and we all passed the time by sitting quietly in the back, reading books with tiny flashlights. It’s not easy trying to read in the dim light of a theatre—flashlight or no flashlight—and it’s even tougher with shrieks and

shouts and gunshots coming from the stage. I had to focus intently on each and every word, often rereading a single sentence several times.

Sometimes I got distracted and had to re-read entire paragraphs. As I struggled to read in this environment, I began to realize that the way I was reading—one word at a time— was exactly the same way that the author had written the text. I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process. The intense concentration required to read in the theater helped me recognize some of the interesting ways that authors string words into phrases into paragraphs into entire books.

I came to realize that all writing consists of a series of choices.

I was an English major in college, but I don't think I ever thought much about reading. I read all the time. I read for my classes and on the computer and sometimes for fun, but I never really thought about the important connections between reading and writing, and how reading in a particular way could also make me a better writer.

What Does It Mean to Read Like a Writer

When you Read Like a Writer (RLW) you work to identify some of the choices the author made so that you can better understand how such choices might arise in your own writing. The idea is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing.

You are reading to learn about writing.

Instead of reading for content or to better understand the ideas in the writing (which you will automatically do to some degree anyway), you are trying to understand how the piece of writing was put together by the author and what you can learn about writing by reading a particular text. As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made and the techniques that he/she used are influencing your own responses as a reader. What is it about the way this text is written that makes you feel and respond the way you do?

The goal as you read like a writer is to locate what you believe are the most important writerly choices represented in the text—choices as large as the overall structure or as small as a single word used only once—to consider the effect of those choices on potential readers (including yourself). Then you can go one step further and imagine what different choices the author might have made instead, and what effect those different choices would have on readers.

Say you're reading an essay in class that begins with a short quote from President Barack Obama about the war in Iraq. As a writer, what do you think of this technique? Do you think it is effective to begin the essay with a quote? What if the essay began with a quote from someone else? What if it was a much longer quote from President Obama, or a quote from the President about something other than the war?

And here is where we get to the most important part: Would you want to try this technique in your own writing?

Would you want to start your own essay with a quote? Do you think it would be effective to begin your essay with a quote from President Obama? What about a quote from someone else? You could make yourself a list. What are the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote? What about the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from the President? How would other readers respond to this technique? Would certain readers (say Democrats or liberals) appreciate an essay that started with a quote from President Obama better than other readers (say Republicans or conservatives)? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from a *less* divisive person? What about starting with a quote from someone *more* divisive?

The goal is to carefully consider the choices the author made and the techniques that he or she used, and then decide whether you want to make those same choices or use those same techniques in your own writing. Author and professor Wendy Bishop explains how her reading process changed when she began to read like a writer:

It wasn't until I claimed the sentence as my area of desire, interest, and expertise—until I wanted to be a writer writing better—that I had to look underneath my initial readings . . . I started asking, *how*—*how* did the writer get me to feel, *how* did the writer say something so that it remains in my memory when many other things too easily fall out, *how* did the writer communicate his/her intentions about genre, about irony? (119– 20)

Bishop moved from simply reporting her personal reactions to the things she read to attempting to uncover *how* the author led her (and other readers) to have those reactions. This effort to uncover how authors build texts is what makes Reading Like a Writer so useful for student writers.

How Is RLW Different from “Normal” Reading

Most of the time we read for information. We read a recipe to learn how to bake lasagna. We read the sports page to see if our school won the game, Facebook to see who has commented on our status update, a history book to learn about the Vietnam War, and the syllabus to see when the next writing assignment is due. Reading Like a Writer asks for something very different.

In 1940, a famous poet and critic named Allen Tate discussed two different ways of reading:

There are many ways to read, but generally speaking there are two ways. They correspond to the two ways in which we may be interested in a piece of architecture. If the building has Corinthian columns, we can trace the origin and development of Corinthian columns; we are interested as historians. But if we are interested as architects, we may or may not know about the history of the Corinthian style; we must, however, know all about the construction of the building, down to the last nail or peg in the beams. We have got to know this if we are going to put up buildings ourselves. (506)

While I don't know anything about Corinthian columns (and doubt that I will ever *want* to know anything about Corinthian columns), Allen Tate's metaphor of reading as if you were an architect is a great way to think about RLW. When you read like a writer, you are trying to figure out how the text you are reading was constructed so that you learn how to "build" one for yourself. Author David Jauss makes a similar comparison when he writes that "reading won't help you much unless you learn to read like a writer. You must look at a book the way a carpenter looks at a house someone else built, examining the details in order to see how it was made" (64).

Perhaps I should change the name and call this Reading Like an Architect, or Reading Like a Carpenter. In a way those names make perfect sense. You are reading to see how something was constructed so that you can construct something similar yourself.

Why Learn to Read Like a Writer

For most college students RLW is a new way to read, and it can be difficult to learn at first. Making things even more difficult is that your college writing instructor may expect you to read this way for class but never actually teach you how to do it. He or she may not even tell you that you're supposed to read this way. This is because most writing instructors are so focused on teaching writing that they forget to show students how they want them to read.

That's what this essay is for.

In addition to the fact that your college writing instructor may expect you to read like a writer, this kind of reading is also one of the very best ways to learn how to write well. Reading like a writer can help you understand how the process of writing is a series of making choices, and in doing so, can help you recognize important decisions you might face and techniques you might want to use when working on your own writing. Reading this way becomes an opportunity to think and learn about writing.

Charles Moran, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, urges us to read like writers because:

When we read like writers we understand and participate in the writing. We see the choices the writer has made, and we see how the writer has coped with the consequences of those choices . . . We "see" what the writer is doing because we read as writers; we see because we have written ourselves and know the territory, know the feel of it, know some of the moves ourselves. (61)

You are already an author, and that means you have a built-in advantage when reading like a writer. All of your previous writing experiences—inside the classroom and out—can contribute to your success with RLW. Because you "have written" things yourself, just as Moran suggests, you are better able to "see" the choices that the author is making in the texts that you read. This in turn helps you to think about whether you want to make some of those same choices in your own writing, and what the consequences might be for your readers if you do.

What Are Some Questions to Ask Before You Start Reading

As I sat down to work on this essay, I contacted a few of my former students to ask what advice they would give to college students regarding how to read effectively in the writing classroom and also to get their thoughts on RLW. Throughout the rest of the essay I'd like to share some of their insights and suggestions; after all, who is better qualified to help you learn what you need to know about reading in college writing courses than students who recently took those courses themselves?

One of the things that several students mentioned to do first, before you even start reading, is to consider the *context* surrounding both the assignment and the text you're reading. As one former student, Alison, states: "The reading I did in college asked me to go above and beyond, not only in breadth of subject matter, but in depth, with regards to informed analysis and background information on *context*." Alison was asked to think about some of the factors that went into the creation of the text, as well as some of the factors influencing her own experience of reading—taken together these constitute the *context* of reading. Another former student, Jamie, suggests that students "learn about the historical context of the writings" they will read for class. Writing professor Richard Straub puts it this way: "You're not going to just read a text. You're going to read a text within a certain context, a set of circumstances . . . It's one kind of writing or another, designed for one audience and purpose or another" (138).

Among the contextual factors you'll want to consider before you even start reading are:

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing?

It may be that you need to start reading before you can answer these first two questions, but it's worth trying to answer them before you start. For example, if you know at the outset that the author is trying to reach a very specific group of readers, then his or her writerly techniques may seem more or less effective than if he/she was trying to reach a more general audience. Similarly—returning to our earlier example of beginning an essay with a quote from President Obama about the war in Iraq—if you know that the author's purpose is to address some of the dangers and drawbacks of warfare, this may be a very effective opening. If the purpose is to encourage Americans to wear sunscreen while at the beach this opening makes no sense at all. One former student, Lola, explained that most of her reading assignments in college writing classes were designed "to provoke analysis and criticisms into the style, structure, and purpose of the writing itself."

In What Genre Is This Written

Another important thing to consider before reading is the genre of the text. Genre means a few different things in college English classes, but it's most often used to indicate the *type* of writing: a poem, a newspaper article, an essay, a short story, a novel, a legal brief, an instruction manual, etc. Because the conventions for each genre can be very different (who ever heard of a 900-page newspaper article?), techniques that are effective for one genre may not work well in another.

Many readers expect poems and pop songs to rhyme, for example, but might react negatively to a legal brief or instruction manual that did so. Another former student, Mike, comments on how important the genre of the text can be for reading:

I think a lot of the way I read, of course, depends on the type of text I'm reading. If I'm reading philosophy, I always look for signaling words (however, therefore, furthermore, despite) indicating the direction of the argument . . . when I read fiction or creative nonfiction, I look for how the author inserts dialogue or character sketches within narration or environmental observation. After reading *To the Lighthouse* [sic] last semester, I have noticed how much more attentive I've become to the types of narration (omniscient, impersonal, psychological, realistic, etc.), and how these different approaches are utilized to achieve an author's overall effect.

Although Mike specifically mentions what he looked for while reading a published novel, one of the great things about RLW is that it can be used equally well with either published or student-produced writing.

Is This a Published or a Student-Produced Piece of Writing?

As you read both kinds of texts you can locate the choices the author made and imagine the different decisions that he/she might have made. While it might seem a little weird at first to imagine how published texts could be written differently—after all, they were good enough to be published—remember that all writing can be improved. Scholar Nancy Walker believes that it's important for students to read published work using RLW because “the work ceases to be a mere artifact, a stone tablet, and becomes instead a living utterance with immediacy and texture. It could have been better or worse than it is had the author made different choices” (36). As Walker suggests, it's worth thinking about how the published text would be different—maybe even better—if the author had made different choices in the writing because you may be faced with similar choices in your own work.

Is This the Kind of Writing You Will Be Assigned to Write Yourself

Knowing ahead of time what kind of writing assignments you will be asked to complete can really help you to read like a writer. It's probably impossible (and definitely too time consuming) to identify all of the choices the author made and all techniques an author used, so it's important to prioritize while reading. Knowing what you'll be writing yourself can help you prioritize. It may be the case that your instructor has assigned the text you're reading to serve as model for the kind of writing you'll be doing later. Jessie, a former student, writes, “In college writing classes, we knew we were reading for a purpose—to influence or inspire our own work. The reading that I have done in college writing courses has always been really specific to a certain type of writing, and it allows me to focus and experiment on that specific style in depth and without distraction.”

If the text you're reading is a model of a particular style of writing—for example, highly-emotional or humorous—RLW is particularly helpful because you can look at a piece you're reading and think about whether you want to adopt a similar style in your own writing. You

might realize that the author is trying to arouse sympathy in readers and examine what techniques he/she uses to do this; then you can decide whether these techniques might work well in your own writing. You might notice that the author keeps including jokes or funny stories and think about whether you want to include them in your writing—what would the impact be on your potential readers?

What Are Questions to Ask As You Are Reading

It is helpful to continue to ask yourself questions *as* you read like a writer. As you're first learning to read in this new way, you may want to have a set of questions written or typed out in front of you that you can refer to while reading. Eventually—after plenty of practice—you will start to ask certain questions and locate certain things in the text almost automatically. Remember, for most students this is a new way of reading, and you'll have to train yourself to do it well. Also keep in mind that you're reading to understand how the text was written—how the house was built—more than you're trying to determine the meaning of the things you read or assess whether the texts are good or bad.

First, return to two of the same questions I suggested that you consider before reading:

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience?

Think about these two questions again as you read. It may be that you couldn't really answer them before, or that your ideas will change while reading. Knowing why the piece was written and who it's for can help explain why the author might have made certain choices or used particular techniques in the writing, and you can assess those choices and techniques based in part on how effective they are in fulfilling that purpose and/or reaching the intended audience.

Beyond these initial two questions, there is an almost endless list of questions you might ask regarding writing choices and techniques. Here are some of the questions that one former student, Clare, asks herself:

When reading I tend to be asking myself a million questions. If I were writing this, where would I go with the story? If the author goes in a different direction (as they so often do) from what I am thinking, I will ask myself, why did they do this? What are they telling me?

Clare tries to figure out why the author might have made a move in the writing that she hadn't anticipated, but even more importantly, she asks herself what *she* would do if she were the author. Reading the text becomes an opportunity for Clare to think about her own role as an author.

Here are some additional examples of the kinds of questions you might ask yourself as you read:

- How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?

Depending on the subject matter and the intended audience, it may make sense to be more or less formal in terms of language. As you begin reading, you can ask yourself whether the word choice and tone/ language of the writing seem appropriate.

What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Does he/ she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite books or articles?

- How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?

To some extent the kinds of questions you ask should be determined by the genre of writing you are reading. For example, it's probably worth examining the evidence that the author uses to support his/ her claims if you're reading an opinion column, but less important if you're reading a short story. An opinion column is often intended to convince readers of something, so the kinds of evidence used are often very important. A short story may be intended to convince readers of something, sometimes, but probably not in the same way. A short story rarely includes claims or evidence in the way that we usually think about them.

- Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What about the writing in those places makes it unclear or confusing?

It's pretty normal to get confused in places while reading, especially while reading for class, so it can be helpful to look closely at the writing to try and get a sense of exactly what tripped you up. This way you can learn to avoid those same problems in your own writing.

- How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?

Notice that in these questions I am encouraging you to question whether aspects of the writing are *appropriate* and *effective* in addition to deciding whether you liked or disliked them. You want to imagine how other readers might respond to the writing and the techniques you've identified. Deciding whether you liked or disliked something is only about you; considering whether a technique is appropriate or effective lets you contemplate what the author might have been trying to do and to decide whether a majority of readers would find the move successful. This is important because it's the same thing you should be thinking about while you are writing: how will readers respond to this technique I am using, to this sentence, to this word? As you read, ask yourself what the author is doing at each step of the way, and then consider whether the same choice or technique might work in your own writing.

What Should You Be Writing As You Are Reading

The most common suggestion made by former students—mentioned by every single one of them—was to mark up the text, make comments in the margins, and write yourself notes and summaries both during and after reading. Often the notes students took while reading became

ideas or material for the students to use in their own papers. It's important to read with a pen or highlighter in your hand so that you can mark—right on the text—all those spots where you identify an interesting choice the author has made or a writerly technique you might want to use. One thing that I like to do is to highlight and underline the passage in the text itself, and then try to answer the following three questions on my notepad:

- What is the technique the author is using here?
- Is this technique effective?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this same technique in my writing?

By utilizing this same process of highlighting and note taking, you'll end up with a useful list of specific techniques to have at your disposal when it comes time to begin your own writing.

What Does RLW Look Like in Action

Let's go back to the opening paragraph of this essay and spend some time reading like writers as a way to get more comfortable with the process:

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

Let's begin with those questions I encouraged you to try to answer *before* you start reading. (I realize we're cheating a little bit in this case since you've already read most of this essay, but this is just practice. When doing this on your own, you should attempt to answer these questions before reading, and then return to them as you read to further develop your answers.)

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing? I hope the purpose is clear by now; if it isn't, I'm doing a pretty lousy job of explaining how and why you might read like a writer.
- Do you know who the intended audience is? Again, I hope that you know this one by now.
- What about the genre? Is this an essay? An article? What would you call it?
- You know that it's published and not student writing. How does this influence your expectations for what you will read?
- Are you going to be asked to write something like this yourself? Probably not in your college writing class, but you can still use RLW to learn about writerly techniques that you might want to use in whatever you do end up writing.

Now ask yourself questions *as* you read.

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

Since this paragraph is the very first one, it makes sense to think about how it introduces readers to the essay. What technique(s) does the author use to begin the text? This is a personal story about his time working in London. What else do you notice as you read over this passage? Is the passage vague or specific about where he worked? You know that the author worked in a famous part of London in a beautiful theater owned by a well-known composer. Are these details important? How different would this opening be if instead I had written:

This is certainly shorter, and some of you may prefer this version. It's quick. To the point. But what (if anything) is lost by eliminating so much of the detail? I *chose* to include each of the details that the revised sentence omits, so it's worth considering why. Why did I mention where the theater was located? Why did I explain that I was living in London right after finishing college? Does it matter that it was after college? What effect might I have hoped the inclusion of these details would have on readers? Is this reference to college an attempt to connect with my audience of college students?

Am I trying to establish my credibility as an author by announcing that I went to college?

Why might I want the readers to know that this was a theater owned by Andrew Lloyd Weber? Do you think I am just trying to mention a famous name that readers will recognize? Will Andrew Lloyd Weber figure prominently in the rest of the essay?

These are all reasonable questions to ask. They are not necessarily the right questions to ask because there are no right questions. They certainly aren't the only questions you could ask, either. The goal is to train yourself to formulate questions as you read based on whatever you notice in the text. Your own reactions to what you're reading will help determine the kinds of questions to ask.

Now take a broader perspective. I begin this essay—an essay about *reading*—by talking about my job in a theater in London. Why? Doesn't this seem like an odd way to begin an essay about reading? If you read on a little further (feel free to scan back up at the top of this essay) you learn in the third full paragraph what the connection is between working in the theater and reading like a writer, but why include this information at all? What does this story add to the essay? Is it worth the space it takes up?

Think about what effect presenting this personal information might have on readers. Does it make it feel like a real person, some "ordinary guy," is talking to you? Does it draw you into the essay and make you want to keep reading?

What about the language I use? Is it formal or more informal? This is a time when you can really narrow your focus and look at particular words:

Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

What is the effect of using the word “antiquated” to describe the fire safety laws? It certainly projects a negative impression; if the laws are described as antiquated it means I view them as old-fashioned or obsolete. This is a fairly uncommon word, so it stands out, drawing attention to my choice in using it. The word also sounds quite formal. Am I formal in the rest of this sentence?

I use the word “performance” when I just as easily could have written “show.” For that matter, I could have written “old” instead of “antiquated.” You can proceed like this throughout the sentence, thinking about alternative choices I could have made and what the effect would be. Instead of “staff members” I could have written “employees” or just “workers.” Notice the difference if the sentence had been written:

Because of old fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of workers inside watching the show in case of an emergency.

Which version is more likely to appeal to readers? You can try to answer this question by thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of using formal language. When would you want to use formal language in your writing and when would it make more sense to be more conversational?

As you can see from discussing just this one paragraph, you could ask questions about the text forever. Luckily, you don’t have to. As you continue reading like a writer, you’ll learn to notice techniques that seem new and pay less attention to the ones you’ve thought about before. The more you practice the quicker the process becomes until you’re reading like a writer almost automatically.

I want to end this essay by sharing one more set of comments by my former student, Lola, this time about what it means to her to read like a writer:

Reading as a writer would compel me to question what might have brought the author to make these decisions, and then decide what worked and what didn’t. What could have made that chapter better or easier to understand? How can I make sure I include some of the good attributes of this writing style into my own? How can I take aspects that I feel the writer failed at and make sure not to make the same mistakes in my writing?

Questioning why the author made certain decisions. Considering what techniques could have made the text better. Deciding how to include the best attributes of what you read in your own writing. This is what Reading Like a Writer is all about.

Are you ready to start reading?

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Before You Read

J. T. Bushnell opens with a story about an AI-written birthday card that the sender’s wife calls “the best card” she’s ever received from her partner. Bushnell uses this story to probe the uneasy intersection between authenticity and efficiency. Does it matter if the message does the work it is supposed to do, even when the sentiment was outsourced to a machine? Should the end justify the means, or does the process carry moral and emotional weight? If a machine can simulate sincerity well enough to move us, what does that say about the value (or even the necessity) of human expression? That tension between emotional labor and technological convenience captures why writing instruction still matters. Writing, even when AI is involved, still forces us to confront what we cannot simply hand off ---- in this case, the intellectual work of making meaning.

Bushnell’s discussion of his three AI writing techniques reinforces this point, especially Technique III, which he likens to a physical exercise, a disciplined routine meant to strengthen a writer’s effort rather than replace it. In this analogy, AI works like resistance training, something that increases endurance and creativity because it demands your active participation. The risk, of course, is that students may let the machine take over and abandon the effort that gives writing its particular character. Still, Bushnell is optimistic. His approach suggests that, when handled ethically, AI can help reawaken the curiosity and playfulness that over-formalized writing instruction often suppresses. The enduring task of writing is to produce words with care while also sharpening our judgment, so that every decision on the page helps us determine where and how our human effort matters most.

Introduction by Naza Okoli

THE AI DILEMMA

A Guide for College Writing Students

by J.T. Bushnell

I was still a pretty young teacher when I first ran into the idea of “BS jobs” and broke out in a cold sweat.

The idea came from an anthropologist named David Graeber, first in a viral article and then in a book, both of which use the full expletive in their titles. He argued that most modern jobs were completely worthless, and that we could distinguish them from necessary jobs by imagining the impact on society if they disappeared.

No garbage collectors, dock workers, doctors? “The results would be immediate and catastrophic,” Graeber wrote in *STRIKE!* magazine. But no private equity CEOs, PR researchers, legal consultants? “It’s not entirely clear how humanity would suffer.

Many suspect it might markedly improve.”

At the time, I wasn't sure which category “writing instructor” belonged to. From a certain viewpoint, you could say that I invented unnecessary work for my students, who then invented unnecessary work for me, like interlocking cogs in a big useless machine. If we stopped, would any immediate catastrophe really ensue?

I had answers, but they were abstractions that slipped through my fingers. I couldn't hold them like a farmer held an ear of corn, ripping open the husk for anyone who doubted.

Then generative artificial intelligence like ChatGPT came along, and suddenly, the question was real. People were actually entertaining the idea that writing classes were worthless, a waste of time, a BS occupation on par with telemarketing. Many of them were students, including my own. You might be one such student.

And so I think it's time to confront this question, to talk openly and honestly about it together, and to test out the alternative – relegating our writing to AI. Graeber's question might help. If you and I let AI do all our writing, would nothing change?

Would it have no impact on society? Or is there something important happening

when you write, and when you learn to write? Would we lose something if we stopped?

WHAT DOES WRITING GIVE YOU?

A Harvard researcher named Emily Weinstein told a story on NPR that might help clarify these questions. She was talking to a group of teenagers about their opinions on AI, and one teenager said that his friend's dad had used AI to write a birthday card for his wife. The wife called it the best card he'd ever given her and was even moved to tears.

But here's the crazy part, at least to me. The teenager who told the story thought it was a great example of AI's *value*. It showed why AI was a useful tool for writers. The other teenagers mostly agreed. Weinstein, the researcher, said that her reaction, like mine, was a little different, and she wanted to understand their viewpoint better. A different teenager explained, “Isn't the intention what matters? Like, if he brings you flowers from a flower store, he didn't grow the flowers or pick them. And you still think it's really nice. So, isn't that kind of like what's happening here?”

Let me pause here to admit that I use AI, mostly for two things. One is cooking. When you have to put dinner on the table for your family, night after night, sometimes it helps to get new ideas or instructions. I don't feel guilty about it. I care about putting dinner on the table. It's the product that matters to me, not the process.

The other place I use AI is writing that I don't find particularly rewarding or valuable – bureaucratic forms, simple contracts, multiple-choice questions for reading quizzes. I do a lot of reviewing and adjusting in all of these, but it's the same as cooking – I care only about the

outcome because there's nothing enriching about the process. Even for someone who enjoys writing, like me, it's just drudgery.

For some people, that's what all writing feels like: drudgery. They only want to arrive at the outcome, the meal, the document, as quickly and easily as possible. For these people, I'd imagine it seems perfectly acceptable to use AI to write a wife's birthday card, especially if the card is so effective.

But I wonder how the wife would feel if she knew that the message came from AI. Would she see it as a bouquet from the florist? Or like an exam her husband had

cheated on? How would *you* feel?

Almost universally, my students have had the same reaction that Weinstein and I did – they were disturbed. They thought it was a great example of AI's *hollowness*, not its value. To them, it showed why AI writing is upsetting, even when it's effective, and how two identical messages can have totally different meanings based on whether they came from a human or a bot.

They also discovered that this distinction exists on the production side. Writing with AI, they said, felt boring and meaningless. It was hard to care about, or even remember – an obvious enough fact for anyone who has used AI this way but one that's now backed by research from scholars at MIT and Wellesley. Compared to participants who used only their brains, those who wrote essays with AI showed less satisfaction, ownership, memory, and even neural connectivity when they wrote essays with AI.

For some of us, writing can be meaningful, interesting, even enjoyable. It allows us to give expression to something inside ourselves, to discover what we want to say and then say it. It allows us to think things through, pursue a solution to problems we aren't sure how to handle, exercise our cognitive skill. It's a way to connect with other people, to be understood, to understand ourselves and the world around us. In these situations, we're interested in more than just the destination. We're interested in the journey, because that journey fulfills something deeply human in us. For those reasons, we think it's worth it to do the meaningful work ourselves, even if AI can spit out a document as good as ours, or better.

The question we're all struggling with is where to draw the line. Teachers usually see their coursework as important, enriching, even interesting. Students, on the other hand, sometimes see it as drudgery. When each side draws the line at a different location, they're bound to disagree about the value of using AI to complete coursework.

But this considers writing only from the perspective of the writer. What about the reader? Do they only want the bouquet? Or do they care whether you grew the flowers yourself? Which one matters more to you when you're reading, or deciding who to work with, or figuring out who to love and trust?

AI WRITING TECHNIQUES

When we talk about using AI in writing, most people think of one technique: you tell AI what you want and let it write the whole thing. The risk is that people might know the writing came from AI, and have a negative reaction. That includes teachers, but also the bosses or colleagues or clients who don't appreciate bots in their inboxes. In fact, using AI can damage your professional reputation by lowering people's opinion of your competence and motivation, according to a study from Duke researchers.

And so a lot of people have moved on to a second technique: you ask AI for the ideas, then put them in your own words. Because it's your writing, you're less likely to get caught, but the AI is still doing all the "thinking." The appeal of this method, like the first, is that you reach the finish line with less time and effort. You don't have to exercise that organ in your head very hard. Some people call that efficiency, and they're not wrong.

But that's also the downside of both these methods. Exercise makes you stronger. For some of us, that's the whole reason we go to college – to learn, to improve, to develop skills that will help us in our careers and personal lives. AI seems to have the opposite effect, according to a growing body of research, reducing critical thinking, originality, and confidence. In other words, using AI makes it harder to think for yourself. That's scary. And so some of us are asking if we really want to sacrifice exercise for efficiency, especially in college.

So here's a third technique. In almost every kind of exercise, it helps to have someone pushing and guiding you – but not helping with the work. If they start lifting your weights, or offer to run the last lap on your behalf, you'd probably tell them to back off. Can we use AI that way?

To answer that question, it might help to consider the phases of the writing process where you'd ask a human for help. When you're looking for a topic or deciding what to say about it, you might talk to your teacher, or even run some initial ideas by them. You're not asking them to choose your topic or provide your ideas, just to help guide your thinking in a productive direction. You might ask a librarian for good places to track down information, but it would probably never occur to you to ask the librarian to *bring* the information, let alone to read and digest it for you.

Maybe you give your rough draft to a classmate for peer review or take it to a tutor at the writing center, pointing out the parts you're not sure about or find a little shaky. Their fresh eyes can help you see things more clearly, find improvements, even catch typos. But you'd never say, "Rewrite this whole thing for me, better." Most of us would be embarrassed to ask another human to do our writing. That embarrassment comes from the implicit understanding that we're crossing a line, and that's probably a helpful guidepost about making the same request to AI.

In other words, the one phase where we can't really use AI this way is the drafting. But I will tell you, personally, that sometimes I get stuck in this phase just because the blank page feels so silent and important that I freeze up. To me, the AI interface feels less silent, less important, and I've typed whole paragraphs there that I afterward paste into my document. The point isn't to have the AI take it over, just to listen without judgment, which can help loosen the flow of ideas. I'm still the one trying to explain myself, and the writing is completely my own.

That's the guiding principle in this third technique: you always start by doing your best to explain yourself, using the AI as a dialogue partner afterward to help push your thinking. If at any point it starts doing too much, you tell it to back off. You have to decide, I'm the writer, I'm the boss, I'm calling the shots here, and the AI is only an assistant, a collaborator, a subordinate.

Preliminary research suggests that this technique can counteract AI's worst effects on learning. In a study I led, it restored the creativity of top fiction writing students, which had been diminished by more passive uses of AI, and it significantly improved the creativity of lower level students. Likewise, research from Wharton has shown that when students use AI in a similarly proactive way to study, their test scores are as high as those who study without AI, whereas unregulated AI use produces a 17 percent drop in test scores.

That's not to say this method is without risk. Once you free the genie from the bottle, will you really be able to resist the temptation of its magic? Will the risk be worth it if your brainpower alone can produce equivalent results? Will there be any side effects, like the loneliness and dependence suggested by other research? Would it be better just to ask the teacher, or the librarian, or the classmate for help?

THE AI FUTURE

In college my roommate and I were both communication majors, and after college we both found ourselves unemployed, then underemployed – he delivered newspapers and I waited tables. But not for the same reason. For him, the point of college had been to earn a degree, which he thought of as a passport to a good job. Then he carried it to job openings where there were a hundred other applicants with the same degree, and he had nothing to set himself apart.

I was unemployed because I'd turned down a job offer to pursue my real passion. It was an excruciating decision, and I never would've had the judgment or courage for it if I hadn't just spent four years exercising those exact qualities, or building confidence in my ability to learn. The main way I did that was by writing.

In fact, writing has proven to impart many of the skills that employers now value most – critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, adaptability. Those skills are probably the reason my roommate eventually found a career in the wine industry, moving through positions that had nothing to do with his degree.

But even if you have a career in the field you studied, the technical training you get in college is eventually going to become outdated. What will you do to keep up with professional, technological, and cultural shifts we can't predict, like the ones we're experiencing right now from AI? You'll need to be able to think, to solve problems, to communicate, and to adapt. Writing helps impart those skills. That's probably why liberal arts majors eventually end up with higher salaries than engineering majors, according to surveys from the Census Bureau.

Maybe the job market won't be as bleak for today's students as it was for my roommate, but I wouldn't count on it. Multiple media outlets have been reporting a sharp decline in entry-level jobs recently. The reason? Employers are enlisting AI to accomplish the tasks that they once

hired recent graduates for, and so it's possible you might find yourself in the same situation my roommate did. Casually offloading your work to AI won't give you a leg up on other applicants. They can do that just as easily as you can.

Besides, any job that can be accomplished that way is likely to disappear soon. Maybe Graeber would be pleased. If that's how people approach writing, I suppose it

is a BS job – and so is the rest of college. Imagine for a moment that the whole institution becomes a big AI factory, where students do nothing except paste assignment prompts into AI and then paste AI output into their assignments. And they take on crippling debt to spend four years of their lives on this work: *pasting text*. Does this have any shred of value to humanity? Or is it a fever dream of the worthless work Graeber describes?

For some students, it's no dream at all – it's their everyday waking reality. We teachers can't force you to do your own thinking and writing anymore. AI has given you a choice.

What will you choose? What will you base your choice on? How much thought will you put into it? All we can do is ask you the questions. You have to answer for yourself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Because of the rapid advancement of AI technology, this reading might become outdated quickly. What portions seem outdated already, and what portions still seem relevant?
2. Have you ever received or encountered AI-generated writing? What effect did it have on you and your opinion of the message?
3. What effect do you think it would have on our society to let AI do all our writing for us? Do you think AI makes it irrelevant to learn writing, or more relevant?
4. Do you think there's a place for AI in the writing process? What technique(s) have you used in the past? How did it feel compared to the writing you've done on your own?
5. Where do you think AI should be prohibited, allowed, or required for you and for your classmates? What advice would you give me for how to handle AI as I reshape future versions of this course?

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The AI Dilemma is also available as a chapter in *A Dam Good Argument: Persuasive Writing at Oregon State University*.



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Before You Read

What we do not know about ourselves and the world around us greatly influences our decision-making processes. In this digital age, when bots and biases ramble across our social media fields of vision and interaction many, probably all, of us like to think of ourselves as being fair and honest. In turn, though we want to believe that other people are fair and honest with us, we are often distrustful of what we read and hear on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media outlets.

This article deals with why we are distrustful of what we read and hear. Specifically, it explains how we may not detect the bad information we see because of our own built in and unacknowledged biases, or of the biases built into our society and into the social media algorithms of the online sources we rely on. Indeed, this article discusses just those factors--personal, social, and social media biases—that we see but often do not recognize in what we see when read, listen to, or view in our increasingly digital world.

After reading this article you may wish to take one of Harvard University’s Implicit Association Tests. Taking one or more of these tests may help you better understand your own unconscious desires, motivations, and understandings that influence how you make decisions

<https://www.glaxiversitycouncil.com/resources/harvard-implicit-association-test-iat/>

Introduction by Bill McCann

Strategy: Double-Entry Notes

- After reading, share your thoughts or tell someone else “I read it this way. . . “
- In what ways does explicitly pointing out quotes that stand out to you and breaking them down in your own words help you to better understand the essay?

Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media, Both Intentionally and Accidentally

by Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer



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Social media are among the primary sources of news in the U.S. and across the world. Yet users are exposed to content of questionable accuracy, including conspiracy theories, clickbait, hyperpartisan content, pseudo QXFAAAAEV and even fabricated “fake news” reports.

It’s not surprising that there’s so much disinformation published: Spam and online [fraud are lucrative for criminals, and government and political propaganda yield both partisan and financial benefits. But the fact that low-credibility content spreads so](#) quickly and [easily](#) suggests that people and the algorithms behind social media platforms are vulnerable to manipulation.

Explaining the tools developed at the Observatory on Social Media.

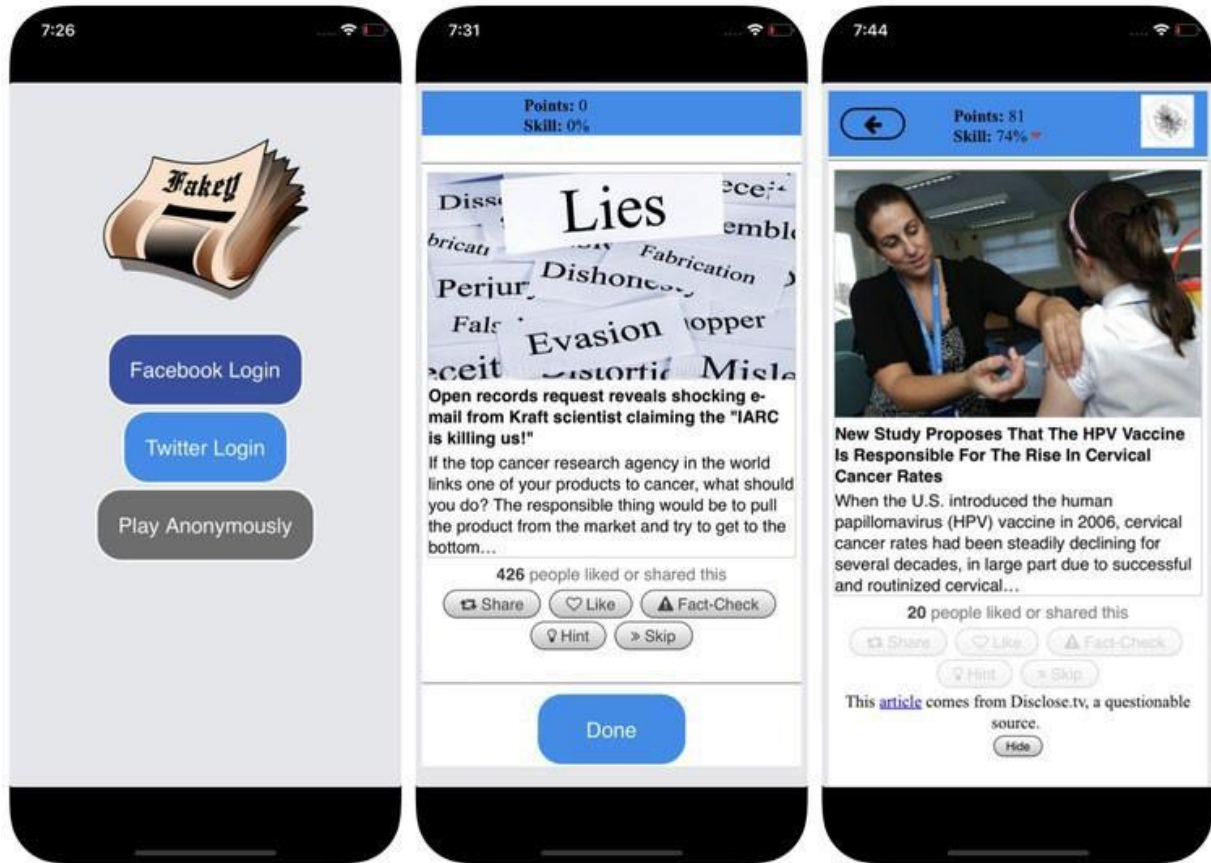
Our research has identified three types of bias that make the social media ecosystem vulnerable to both intentional and accidental misinformation. That is why our Observatory on Social Media at Indiana University is building tools to help people become aware of these biases and protect themselves from outside influences designed to exploit them.

Bias in the brain

Cognitive biases originate in the way the brain processes the information that every person encounters every day. The brain can deal with only a finite amount of information, and too many incoming stimuli can cause information overload. That in itself has serious implications for the quality of information on social media. We [have found that steep competition for users’ limited attention means that some ideas go viral despite their low quality – even when people prefer to share high-](#) quality content.

To avoid getting overwhelmed, the brain uses a number of tricks. These methods are usually effective, but may also become biases when applied in the wrong contexts.

One cognitive shortcut happens when a person is deciding whether to share a story that appears on their social media feed. People are very affected by the emotional connotations of a headline, even though that’s not a good indicator of an article’s accuracy. Much more important is who wrote the piece.



Screenshots of the Fakey game. Mihai Avram and Filippo Menczer

To counter this bias, and help people pay more attention to the source of a claim before sharing it, we developed Fakey, a mobile news literacy game (free on Android and iOS) simulating a typical social media news feed, with a mix of news articles from mainstream and low-credibility sources. Players get more points for sharing news from reliable sources and flagging suspicious content for fact-checking. In the process, they learn to recognize signals of source credibility, such as hyperpartisan claims and emotionally charged headlines.

Bias in society

Another source of bias comes from society. When people connect directly with their peers, the social biases that guide their selection of friends come to influence the information they see.

[In fact, in our research we have found that it is possible to determine the political leanings of a Twitter user by simply looking at the partisan preferences of their friends.](#) Our analysis of the structure of these [partisan communication networks](#) found social networks are particularly efficient at disseminating information – accurate or [not – when they are closely tied together and disconnected from other parts of society.](#)

The tendency to evaluate information more favorably if it comes from within their own social circles creates “echo chambers” that are ripe for manipulation, either consciously or unintentionally. This helps explain why so many online conversations devolve into “[us](#) versus them” confrontations.

To study how the structure of online social networks makes users vulnerable to disinformation, we built Hoaxy, a system that tracks and visualizes the spread of content from low-credibility sources, and how it competes with fact-checking content. Our analysis of the data collected by Hoaxy during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections shows that Twitter accounts that shared misinformation were almost completely cut off from the corrections made by the fact-checkers.

When we drilled down on the misinformation-spreading accounts, we found a very dense core group of accounts retweeting each other almost exclusively – including several bots. The only times that fact-checking organizations were ever quoted or mentioned by the users in the misinformed group were when questioning their legitimacy or claiming the opposite of what they wrote.

Bias in the machine

The third group of biases arises directly from the algorithms used to determine what people see online. Both social media platforms and search engines employ them. These personalization technologies are designed to select only the most engaging and relevant content for each individual user. But in doing so, it may end up reinforcing the cognitive and social biases of users, thus making them even more vulnerable to manipulation.

For instance, the detailed advertising tools built into many social media platforms let disinformation campaigners exploit confirmation bias by tailoring messages to people who are already inclined to believe them.

Also, if a user often clicks on Facebook links from a particular news source, Facebook will tend to show that person more of that site’s content. This so-called “[filter bubble](#)” effect may isolate people from diverse perspectives, strengthening confirmation bias.

Our own research shows that social media platforms expose users to a less diverse set of sources than do non-social media sites like Wikipedia. Because this is at the level of a whole platform, not of a single user, we call this the homogeneity bias.

Another important ingredient of social media is information that is trending on the platform, according to what is getting the most clicks. We call this popularity bias, because we have found that an algorithm designed to promote popular content may negatively affect the overall quality of information on the platform. This also feeds into existing cognitive bias, reinforcing what appears to be popular irrespective of its quality.

All these algorithmic biases can be manipulated by social bots, computer programs that interact with humans through social media accounts. Most social bots, like Twitter’s [Big Ben](#), are harmless. However, some conceal their real nature and are used for malicious intents, such as

boosting disinformation or falsely creating the appearance of a [grassroots movement](#), also called “astroturfing.” We found evidence of this type of [manipulation](#) in the run-up to the 2010 U.S. midterm election.

To study these manipulation strategies, we developed a tool to detect social bots called Botometer. Botometer uses machine learning to detect bot accounts, by inspecting thousands of different features of Twitter accounts, like the times of its posts, how often it tweets, and the accounts it follows and retweets. It is not perfect, but it has revealed that as many as 15 percent of Twitter accounts show signs of being bots.

Using Botometer in conjunction with Hoaxy, we analyzed the core of the misinformation network during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. We found many bots exploiting both the cognitive, confirmation and popularity biases of their victims and Twitter’s algorithmic biases.

These bots are able to construct filter bubbles around vulnerable users, feeding them false claims and misinformation. First, they can attract the attention of human users who support a particular candidate by tweeting that candidate’s hashtags or by mentioning and retweeting the person. Then the bots can amplify false claims smearing opponents by retweeting articles from low-credibility sources that match certain keywords. This activity also makes the algorithm highlight for other users false stories that are being shared widely.

Understanding complex vulnerabilities

Even as our research, and others’, shows how individuals, institutions and even entire societies can be manipulated on social media, there are [many questions](#) left to answer. It’s especially important to discover how these different biases interact with each other, potentially creating more complex vulnerabilities.

Tools like ours offer internet users more information about disinformation, and therefore some degree of protection from its harms. The solutions will be only technological, though there will probably be some technical aspects to them. But they must take into account the cognitive and social aspects of the problem.

[Misinformation and Biases Infect Social Media, Both Intentionally and Accidentally](#) by [Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia and Filippo Menczer](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).



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Before You Read

In this essay, author Neta Crawford addresses ecological issues of global warming and fossil fuel consumption from a sociopolitical perspective. She details the hypocrisy between governmental positions on climate change and the astronomical contributions made by the U.S. Department of Defense to greenhouse gas emissions. The carbon footprint left by military installations and operations alone rivals that of many smaller countries and Crawford argues that massive amounts of funding toward protections against potential human advisories neglects the very immediate threat of climate change. The ecological realities presented in this text offer an important perspective on the environmental realities of our world. The certain catastrophes of climate change, and even the political uprising resulting from said catastrophes, necessitates immediate attention on the part of world governments and individuals like you.

Before you read, take note of what you already know about the Defense Department and/or Climate Change	What do you want to know about them?	When you finish reading, take note of what you learned	What questions do you still have about the topic? Where do you think you could find those answers?

The Defense Department Is Worried about Climate Change and Also a Huge Carbon Emitter

by Neta Crawford



"An F/A 18 Super Hornet, assigned to the "Blacklions" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 213, flies over the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) during flight operations." by Lt. Cmdr. Johnnie Caldwell, [U.S. Navy](#) is in the [Public Domain](#).

Scientists and security analysts have warned for more than a decade that global warming is a potential national security concern. They project that the consequences of global warming – rising seas, powerful storms, famine and diminished access to fresh water – may make regions of the world politically unstable and prompt mass migration and refugee crises.

Some worry that wars may follow.

Yet with few exceptions, the U.S. military's significant contribution to climate change has received little attention. Although the Defense Department has significantly reduced its fossil fuel consumption since the early 2000s, it remains the world's single largest consumer of oil – and as a result, one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters.

A broad carbon footprint

I have studied war and peace for four decades. But I only focused on the scale of U.S. military greenhouse gas emissions when I began co-teaching a course on climate change and focused on the Pentagon's response to global warming. Yet, the Department of Defense is the U.S. government's largest fossil fuel consumer, accounting for between 77% and 80% of all federal government energy consumption since 2001.

In a newly released study published by Brown University's Costs of War Project, I calculated U.S. military greenhouse gas emissions in tons of carbon dioxide equivalent from 1975 through 2017.

Today China is the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, followed by the United States. In 2017 the Pentagon's greenhouse gas emissions totaled over 59 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. If it were a country, it would have been the world's 55th largest greenhouse gas emitter, with emissions larger than Portugal, Sweden or Denmark.

The largest sources of military greenhouse gas emissions are buildings and fuel. The Defense Department maintains over 560,000 buildings at approximately 500 domestic and overseas military installations, which account for about 40% of its greenhouse gas emissions.

The rest comes from operations. In fiscal year 2016, for instance, the Defense Department consumed about [86 million barrels](#) of fuel for operational purposes.

Why do the armed forces use so much fuel?

Military weapons and equipment use so much fuel that the relevant measure for defense planners is frequently gallons per mile.

Aircraft are particularly thirsty. For example, the B-2 stealth bomber, which holds more than 25,600 gallons of jet fuel, burns 4.28 gallons per mile and emits more than 250 metric tons of greenhouse gas over a 6,000 nautical mile range. The KC-135R aerial refueling tanker consumes about 4.9 gallons per mile.

A single mission consumes enormous quantities of fuel. In January 2017, two B-2B bombers and 15 aerial refueling tankers traveled more than 12,000 miles from [Whiteman Air Force Base to bomb ISIS targets in Libya, killing about 80 suspected ISIS militants. Not counting the tankers' emissions, the B-2s emitted about 1,000](#) metric tons of greenhouse gases.

Quantifying military emissions

Calculating the Defense Department's greenhouse gas emissions isn't easy. The [Defense Logistics Agency tracks fuel purchases, but the Pentagon does not consistently report DOD fossil fuel consumption to Congress in its annual](#) budget requests.

The Department of Energy publishes data on DOD energy production and fuel consumption, including for [vehicles and equipment](#). Using fuel consumption data, I estimate that from 2001 through 2017, the DOD, including all service branches, emitted 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases. That is the [rough equivalent](#) of driving of 255 million passenger vehicles over a year.

Of that total, I estimated that war-related emissions between 2001 and 2017, including “overseas contingency operations” in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria, generated over 400 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent — roughly equivalent to the greenhouse emissions of almost 85 million cars in one year.

Real and present dangers?

The Pentagon's core mission is to prepare for potential attacks by human adversaries. Analysts argue about the likelihood of war and the level of military preparation necessary to prevent it, but in my view, none of the United States' adversaries – Russia,

Estimated Department of Defense greenhouse gas emissions, 2001-2017

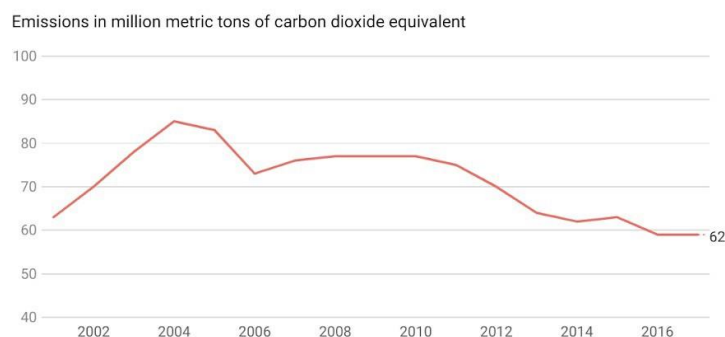


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: Neta C. Crawford • [Get the data](#)

Iran, China and North Korea – are certain to attack the United States.

Nor is a large standing military the only way to reduce the threats these adversaries pose. Arms control and [diplomacy](#) can often de-escalate tensions and reduce threats. Economic [sanctions](#) can diminish the capacity of states and nonstate actors to threaten the security interests of the U.S. and its allies.

In contrast, climate change is not a potential risk. It has begun, with real [consequences](#) to the United States. Failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will make the nightmare scenarios strategists warn against – perhaps even “climate wars” – more likely.

A case for decarbonizing the military

[Over the past last decade the Defense Department has reduced its fossil fuel consumption through actions that include using renewable energy, weatherizing buildings and reducing aircraft idling time on runways.](#)

The DOD’s total annual emissions declined from a peak of 85 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2004 to 59 million metric tons in 2017. The goal, as then- General James Mattis put it, is to be “unleashed from the tether of fuel” by decreasing military dependence on oil and oil convoys that are vulnerable to attack in war zones.

Since 1979, the United States has placed a high priority on protecting access to the Persian Gulf. About one-fourth of military operational fuel use is for the U.S. Central Command, which covers the Persian Gulf region.



As [national security scholars have argued](#), with dramatic [growth in renewable energy](#) and [diminishing U.S. dependence on foreign oil](#), it is possible for Congress and the president to rethink our nation’s military missions and reduce the amount of energy the armed forces use to protect access to Middle East oil.

[I agree with the military and national security experts who contend that climate change should be front and center in U.S. national security debates. Cutting](#) Pentagon greenhouse gas emissions will help [save lives in the United States](#), and could diminish the risk of climate conflict.

[The Defense Department Is Worried about Climate Change – and Also a Huge Carbon Emitter](#) by [Neta C. Crawford](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).



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Before You Read

Herman Daly is an American ecological economist that, in “Sustaining Our Commonwealth of Nature and Knowledge,” advocates for the “commonwealth of nature [to be] enclosed as property” and the commonwealth of knowledge [to] be “freed from enclosure of property” and treated as a good for all to consume freely. He defines a “commonwealth” as “wealth that no one has made, or the wealth that practically everyone has made. So it’s either nature – nobody made it, we all inherited it – or knowledge – everybody contributed to making it, but everyone’s contribution is small in relation to the total and depends on the contributions of others.” He dives into economic terms, such as rival and non-rival goods, and excludable and non-excludable goods to conclude that nature should be protected economically and knowledge should be separate from the economy.

Daly cites Thomas Jefferson in his argument about his belief of the freedom of knowledge. Jefferson states, “knowledge is the common property of mankind.” No one should have to pay for the access to available knowledge, and no one should have to pay to express the knowledge they have discovered themselves. Knowledge, and thus, the knowledge of composition and writing, is a good that everyone should have access to. Education should not be privatized (think of how much college costs, and how not everyone can afford to attend). Writing development is an ongoing process, like all learning, and according to Daly, students should have access to the resources that help in the development of writing for the entirety of their lives.

Introduction by Ashton Conley

Sustaining Our Commonwealth of Nature and Knowledge

by Herman Daly

Let’s start with this phrase: “sustaining our commonwealth.” By sustaining, I don’t mean preserving inviolate; I mean using, without using up. Using with maintenance and replenishment is an important idea in economics. It’s the very basis of the concept of income, because income is the maximum that you can consume today and still be able to produce and consume the same amount tomorrow – that is, maximum consumption without depleting capital in the broad sense of future productive capacity. By commonwealth, I mean the wealth that no one has made, or the wealth that practically everyone has made. So it’s either nature – nobody made it, we all inherited it – or knowledge – everybody contributed to making it, but everyone’s contribution is small in relation to the total and depends on the contributions of others. In managing the commonwealth of nature, our big problem is that we tend to treat the truly scarce as if it were non-scarce. The opposite problem arises with the commonwealth of knowledge, in which we tend to treat what is truly not scarce as if it were.

Clarifying Scarcity

There are two sets of important distinctions about goods, and they make four cross-classifications (see figure below). Goods can be either rival or non-rival, and they can be either excludable or non-excludable. My shirt, for example, is a rival good because if I'm wearing it, you can't wear it at the same time. The warmth of the sun is non-rival because I can enjoy the warmth of the sun, and everyone else can enjoy it at the same time. Rivalness is a physical property that precludes the simultaneous use of goods by more than one person. Goods are also excludable or non-excludable. That's not a physical concept, that's a legal concept, a question of property. For example, you could wear my shirt tomorrow if I let you, but that's up to me because it's my property. My shirt is both rival and excludable, and that's the case with most market goods.

Meanwhile, the warmth of the sun is both non-rival and also non-excludable. We cannot buy and sell solar warmth; we cannot bottle it and charge for it. Goods that are rival and excludable are market goods. Goods that are non-rival and non-excludable are public goods. That leaves two other categories. Fish in the ocean are an example of goods that are rival and non-excludable. They are rival, because if I catch the fish, you can't catch it. But they are also non-excludable, because I can't stop you from fishing in the open seas. The management of goods that are rival and non-excludable gives rise to the famous tragedy of the commons – or the tragedy of open-access resources, as it's more accurately called. Now, the other problematic category consists of goods that are non-rival and excludable. If I use the Pythagorean Theorem, I don't prevent you from using it at the same time. Knowledge is non-rival, but it often is made excludable through intellectual property and patent rights. So those are two difficult categories that create problems. One is the tragedy of the commons, and the other we could call the tragedy of artificial scarcity.

The Commonwealth of Nature

Fish in the ocean are an example of the commonwealth of nature. I'll argue that natural goods and services that are rival and have so far remained non-excludable should be enclosed in the market in order to avoid unsustainable use. Excludability can take the form of individual property rights or social property rights – what needs to be avoided is open access. For dealing with the broad class of rival but, up to now, non-excludable goods, the so-called cap-auction-trade system is a market-based institution that merits consideration.

In addition to its practical value, the cap-auction-trade system also sheds light on a fundamental issue of economic theory: the logically separate issues of scale, distribution, and allocation. Neoclassical economics deals mainly with the question of allocation. Allocation is the apportionment of resources among competing uses: how many resources go to produce beans, how many to cars, how many to haircuts.

Properly functioning markets allocate resources efficiently, more or less. Yet the concept of efficient allocation presupposes a given distribution. Distribution is the apportionment of goods and resources among different people: how many resources go to you, how many to somebody else. A good distribution is one that is fair or just – not efficient, but fair. The third issue is scale: the physical size of the economy relative to the ecosystem that sustains it. How many of us are there and how large are the associated matter-energy flows from producing all our stuff, relative

to natural cycles and the maintenance of the biosphere. In neoclassical economics, the issue of scale is completely off the radar screen.

The cap-auction-trade system works like this. Some environmental assets, say fishing rights or the rights to emit sulfur dioxide, have been treated as non-excludable free goods. As economic growth increases the scale of the economy relative to that of the biosphere, it becomes recognized that these goods are in fact physically rival. The first step is to put a cap – a maximum – on the scale of use of that resource, at a level which is deemed to be environmentally sustainable. Setting that cap – deciding what it should be – is not a market decision, but a social and ecological decision. Then, the right to extract that resource or emit that waste, up to the cap, becomes a scarce asset. It was a free good. Now it has a price. We've created a new valuable asset, so the question is: Who owns it? This also has to be decided politically, outside the market. Ownership of this new asset should be auctioned to the highest bidder, with the proceeds entering the public treasury. Sometimes rights are simply given to the historical private users – a bad idea, I think, but frequently done under the misleading label of “grandfathering.”

The cap-auction-trade system is not, as often called, “free-market environmentalism.” It is really socially constrained, market environmentalism. Someone must own the assets before they can be traded in the market, and that is an issue of distribution. Only after the scale question is answered, and then the distribution question, can we have market exchange to answer the question of allocation.

Another good policy for managing the commonwealth of nature is ecological tax reform. This means shifting the tax base away from income earned by labor and capital and onto the resource flow from nature. Taxing what we want less of, depletion and pollution, seems to be a better idea than taxing what we want more of, namely income. Unlike the cap-auction-trade system, ecological tax reform would exert only a very indirect and uncertain limit on the scale of the economy relative to the biosphere. Yet, it would go a long way toward improving allocation and distribution.

The Commonwealth of Knowledge

If you stand in front of the McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland, you'll see a quotation from Thomas Jefferson carved on one of the stones: “Knowledge is the common property of mankind.” Well, I think Mr. Jefferson was right. Once knowledge exists, it is non-rival, which means it has a zero opportunity cost. As we know from studying price theory, price is supposed to measure opportunity cost, and if opportunity cost is zero, then price should be zero. Certainly, new knowledge, even though it should be allocated freely, does have a cost of production. Sometimes that cost of production is substantial, as with the space program's discovery that there's no life on Mars. On the other hand, a new insight could occur to you while you're lying in bed staring at the ceiling and cost absolutely nothing, as was the case with Renee Descartes' invention of analytic geometry. Many new discoveries are accidental. Others are motivated by the joy and excitement of research, independent of any material motivation. Yet the dominant view is that unless knowledge is kept scarce enough to have a significant price, nobody in the market will have an incentive to produce it. Patent monopolies and intellectual property

rights are urged as the way to provide an extrinsic reward for knowledge production. Even within that restricted vision, keeping knowledge scarce still makes very little sense, because the main input to the production of new knowledge is existing knowledge. If you keep existing knowledge expensive, that's surely going to slow down the production of new knowledge.

Does use by one person physically preclude use by others?

		Yes Rival	No Non-rival
<u>Do laws prohibit access to these goods?</u>	Yes Excludable	<p>Market Goods (e.g., automobiles and fishing reels) <i>Let the market allocate these goods.</i></p>	<p>Tragedy of Artificial Scarcity (e.g., patented meds and knowledge in heads) <i>Reduce patent monopolies and intellectual property rights—share these goods.</i></p>
	No Non-excludable	<p>Tragedy of the Commons (e.g., old growth trees and fish in the seas) <i>Designate property rights and use cap-auction-trade to allocate these goods.</i></p>	<p>Public Goods (e.g., national security and roads that are free) <i>Collect depletion and pollution taxes so that government can provide these goods.</i></p>

Different types of goods and policies to achieve a sustainable, fair, and efficient economy.

In Summary

Managing the commonwealth of nature and knowledge presents us two rather opposite problems and solutions. I've argued that the commonwealth of nature should be enclosed as property, as much as possible as public property, and administered so as to capture scarcity rents for public revenue. Examples of natural commons include: mining, logging, grazing rights, the electromagnetic spectrum, the absorptive capacity of the atmosphere, and the orbital locations of

satellites. The commonwealth of knowledge, on the other hand, should be freed from enclosure as property and treated as the non-rival good that it is. Abolishing all intellectual property rights tomorrow is draconian, but I do think we could grant patent monopolies for fewer “inventions” and for shorter time periods.

[Sustaining Our Commonwealth of Nature and Knowledge](#) by Herman Daly is licensed under a [CC BY-NC-ND: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives](#)



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Before You Read

In this essay, Louis DeSipio details the political activism of American Latino groups in the last two centuries and how their actions led to important civil and voting rights. The struggle for inclusivity and representation still exists for these groups, and the need for a collective political voice for the community remains a constant struggle dating back generations. Regarding the perspective of pan-ethnic Latino minorities as well as transnational Latino immigrants, DeSipio details past efforts to gain electoral voting power and political inclusion leading into the current era of Latino national groups continuing to struggle for their voices to be heard.

Introduction by the editors

Demanding Equal Political Voice...And Accepting Nothing Less: The Quest for Latino Political Inclusion

by Louis DeSipio

Over the past century and a half, diverse Latino communities have mobilized to demand civic and political inclusion, a process that has also facilitated the formation of a pan-ethnic political identity. Although there have been continuous gains, the quest for full and equal inclusion remains. The fact that the Latino population continues to grow in numbers and needs, and that this growth is often seen as a challenge to the majority population, ensures that Latinos will remain politically engaged in the pursuit of a full political voice in the upcoming decades.

Contemporary Latino politics is founded on generations of prior struggles for inclusion. These struggles have been organized around a consistent set of demands – ones that make the ongoing Latino struggle for civic and political inclusion a very American one – for equal protection of the law and the ability to participate equally in American society regardless of race or ethnicity. At the same time, like other racial/ethnic communities who are largely built on immigration, Latinos, particularly Latino immigrants, have sought to maintain transnational ties to their communities and countries of origin. This ongoing transnationalism among some immigrants has not diminished Latino efforts for inclusion in United States politics. Rather, transnational engagement often provides skills and networks that add to the resources for demanding inclusion in the U.S.

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Prior to the contemporary era, collective efforts primarily took the form of community- based, civic, and trade union organizing. In the current era (the period after the civil rights revolution of the 1960s), electoral politics and voting added to the palette of collective political activities...

Colonial and Immigrant Roots of Latino Demands for Political Inclusion

Latino collective organizing to achieve a civic and political voice is a largely 20th and 21st-century phenomenon. While the Latino presence in the U.S. pre-dates these 20th-century accomplishments, prior to the current era, Latino communities lacked the group resources, leadership, and organizations to demand equal rights in U.S. society. Consequently, demands were primarily individual rather than collective.

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Despite the fact that there was little collective action to demand civic inclusion in Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities in the late 19th century, there were efforts by individuals to highlight inequalities and obstacles. Mexican Americans in the Southwest, for instance, used the federal and state courts to assert their citizenship rights. Issues before the courts included the right of Mexican immigrants to naturalize (*In re Ricardo Rodríguez* [1897]), to hold public office (*People v. de la Guerra* [1870]), and to serve on juries or to be tried by juries that included Mexican Americans (*George Carter v. Territory of New Mexico* [1859]). The courts were also the locus of Mexican American demands for the enforcement of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo's protections of the property rights of Mexican Americans who had owned land in the Southwest before the U.S.-Mexican War.

During this period, local political machines also courted Latino voters. This form of organization existed in New Mexico and South Texas; the New York Democratic machine intermittently sought the votes of Puerto Ricans in some elections and excluded them in others as late as the 1950s. For the most part, however, these machines engaged Latino communities to serve the ends of the political parties and Latinos had little influence on the people their votes elected. In the early period of Mexican American presence in the Southwest, some unions organized Latino workers, particularly the mining unions and the anarchists. This union outreach was the exception rather than the rule, however, and did not add to the community's public leadership...

Organized Latino Voices for Civic Inclusion in the Early 20th Century: Initial Steps

At the turn of the 20th century, Latinos started to organize more broadly to meet their collective needs, including the creation of insurance pools to meet end-of-life financial needs, but these efforts were largely apolitical. Early Latino civic organizing took on a more explicitly political dimension in the late 1920s and 1930s. This era saw the formation of the first regional Mexican American civic organizations as well as labor organizing that included the first "national" Latino political movement. It was these efforts that laid the foundation for post-World War II civic and political gains...

[The League of United Latin American Citizens,] LULAC was established in 1929.[6] Its founders included the small Mexican American middle class – largely small business owners –

that had emerged over the previous 20 years in small towns in Texas. The goals of the organization were both revolutionary and assimilationist. Their leadership sought to challenge and reverse the discrimination that had characterized the treatment of Mexican Americans in the Southwest since 1848. They used the tools available to them as U.S. citizens, particularly the courts, to challenge the largely unquestioned position of whites and the long-dominant policy of anti-Mexican discrimination. Their core claim was equal protection as U.S. citizens under the law.

LULAC members did distinguish themselves, however, from recent immigrants of Mexican ancestry by limiting membership to U.S. citizens and conducting meetings in English. The organization offered assistance to Mexican immigrants seeking to naturalize, but did not believe there was a political or civic equality between non-naturalized immigrants and U.S. citizens. In the 1930s, LULAC conducted voter registration drives, encouraged members to support candidates who spoke to Mexican American concerns, organized to end the poll tax, and used the courts to challenge discrimination, particularly educational discrimination. Soon after its formation, LULAC sought to organize Mexican American women. In the early 1930s, several chapters formed Ladies' Auxiliaries. In 1938, the LULAC President established the position of National Organizer for Women, which was later changed to the National Vice President of the organization.

Despite their somewhat narrow focus and the middle-class status of the early members, LULAC chapters quickly emerged throughout the Southwest making it the first regional Latino organization. Moreover, LULAC's leaders developed a political alliance with Lyndon Johnson who was beginning his national rise in this period.[7] This alliance represented the first steps in building a Latino voice in national politics.

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Latino Civic and Political Organizing in the Civil Rights Era

The 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s saw a rapid expansion in Latino demand making and the formation of diverse paths to political organizing. It also saw the foundation of Latino electoral influence. As was the case in the African American community and its civil rights movement in part of this period, leadership emerged from new segments of the population, including returning World War II and Korean War veterans and college educated young adults.[10] Contesting social inequality and continuing the fight against discrimination became central to the nascent Latino political identity of this era... In each case, anger over state-sanctioned discrimination and denial of rights was at the core of their mobilization efforts... [T]hese movements appeared in all parts of the country with concentrated Latino populations. Although they did not form a national Latino movement as we understand it today, their recognition of the shared experiences of Latinos nationwide laid the foundation for the pan-ethnic Latino politics that emerged in the post-civil rights era.

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Latino youth, primarily U.S.-born young people, were among the most active. Their activism reflected Latino-specific concerns over discrimination and disparate outcomes, but also the anger of young adults in general in this era over the war in Vietnam.[12] Resentment over discriminatory public education spurred a series of walkouts... in Los Angeles high schools. These spontaneous movements coalesced in organizing to reform the delivery of education and in anti-war mobilization under the auspices of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO).[13] Similar efforts appeared in other areas of Latino concentration in the Southwest. The Crusade for Justice, formed in Denver, focused its energies on youth more broadly including young adults in schools and in (and out of) the workplace.[14] At its 1969 conference, the Plan Espiritual de Aztlán was presented publicly for the first time. The Plan is the founding document of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlán (MEChA) and called for Chicano self-determination and ethnic pride. MEChA is the only national Latino student organization on college and university campuses during this period still active today.

Young adults also led new movements to challenge white-dominated political institutions. They sought election to local offices in rural Texas, demonstrated that Mexican Americans could be mobilized, and use their numbers to challenge electoral discrimination...[15]

Young Latino adults also mobilized in Puerto Rican communities, which had grown dramatically after World War II.[17] Because of the Jones Act, which provided U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans, and the increased demand of cheap labor after the war, hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans made their way to New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Chicago, and other cities. Puerto Rican migrants who seized this opportunity tended to be unskilled laborers and, later, rural migrants pushed off the land as Puerto Rican agriculture industrialized. Like the Mexican residents of the Southwest in the years after the U.S.-Mexican War, early 20th-century Puerto Rican migrants had few economic resources and were the targets of racial and ethnic discrimination.

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The frequently confrontational style of these newly emerging organizations in this era – and their new generation of leaders – should not obscure the core of their demands. They sought full inclusion in U.S. society as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and saw, as the primary strategy to achieve that goal, the opportunity to elect the candidate of their choice to office. Although their rhetoric sometimes focused on the distinct experiences of Latinos and separateness, their demands and goals focused on the equal ability to compete in the civic and political world. In this, their pluralist demands were similar to those of other excluded groups in U.S. society seeking an equal voice.

The new opportunities for Latino civic organizing in the civil rights era were also not limited to challenging existing political structures from the outside. This era also saw the foundation of Latino voices within the major political parties and social institutions as well as the formation of Latino-led institutions to research, document, and articulate the Latino condition.

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The national Latino civil rights organizations that formed in this period reflected a new position of Latinos in U.S. society that would not have been possible had the more activist organizations not challenged local and state power structures that had denied Latinos equal protection of the laws. The national organizations were more explicitly pluralist in their rhetoric and operations, but they and the more activist organizations shared a vision of Latino empowerment by challenging barriers and expanding the Latino electoral and economic voice. Occasional activist rhetoric aside, the demands of the civil rights era focused on ensuring that the language of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution became the practice as well as the law of the land. The new national organizations ensured a new and permanent institutional resource to articulate the demand for Latino civic and political inclusion.

The Continuing Struggle for Latino Civic Inclusion in the Contemporary United States

Despite the breakthroughs of the civil rights period, struggles for Latino inclusion continued in the post-civil rights era... The major legislative legacies of the civil rights era were federal commitments to enforce the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing equal protection of the laws and equal access to the ballot box. Civil rights and voting rights legislation created a new playing field for Latino demands for civic inclusion; the advocacy organizations that were established in the civil rights era and the steadily growing number of Latino elected and appointed officeholders ensured that Latino voices would be heard on issues of importance to the community.

The demography of the community also changed. Changes to national immigration law as well as higher than average birth rates ensured that the Latino population grew more rapidly than other groups. By 2012, Latinos numbered more than 50 million and made up more than 16 percent of the national population (compared to approximately 6 million in 1960 who made up over just 3 percent of the U.S. population)...

The Latino fight for civic inclusion thus continues... What are new, however, are the high share of non-naturalized immigrants in the Latino (and Asian American) population and the growing share of immigrants made up of unauthorized immigrants who do not have a path to naturalization. It is, of course, difficult to present precise estimates of the unauthorized immigrant population. Yet, the best estimates suggest that of the approximately 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants resident in the U.S. in 2011, 8.9 million were Latino.[29] Whereas in the past, unauthorized migrants have been able to regularize their status over time, partisan polarization in Congress has prevented a compromise that would allow for a widespread legalization. This policy intransigence has spurred a new form of Latino civic activism among young adult undocumented migrants who migrated with their parents as young children. They have banded together as “Dreamers” tapping the nomenclature of the DREAM Act, which would offer a path to legal status to young adult unauthorized migrants who attended college or joined the U.S. military.

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At the same time, the contemporary struggle for Latino civic and political inclusion is not simply a battle for immigrant rights.[36] U.S. citizen Latinos continue to face barriers to participation, some of which pre-date civil rights era reforms. Voter registration requirements, for example, were originally implemented to dampen the political power of turn-of-the-twentieth-century European immigrants.[37] They were effective then and continue to have a disproportionate and negative impact on young, poor, and less educated adults in U.S. society. Latinos are more likely to have high shares of the population in each of these categories. The colonial legacy of Puerto Rico denies the vote to the nearly four million residents of the Island...

New and arguably more subtle forms of discrimination have emerged in the post-civil rights era. At present, the most insidious of these is voter identification requirements that many states are imposing. Latinos otherwise eligible to vote are less likely to have the required forms of identification and, consequently, will be less likely to vote...

The organizational infrastructure that emerged in the post-civil rights era continues to advocate, litigate, and organize to address these issues and to expand the Latino political voice. Latino representation at all levels of elective office has increased steadily over the past 30 years. It has also become more diverse.[38] Latinas make up a higher share of Latino officeholders than do white women of white officeholders. Latino officeholders increasingly also include Latinos who trace their ancestry to the countries of Latin America that began to send large numbers of migrants to the U.S. after 1960... The “Latino vote” is now routinely sought in national and many state-level races. A new generation of Latino campaign professionals has emerged to ensure that any candidate who wants to seek Latino votes can reach Latino voters... Latino organizations also more continually offer support for Latinos seeking to naturalize. Voter registration efforts routinely expand prior to national elections... Increasingly, Latino organizations and leaders are also able to use coalitional politics to achieve collective goals. These coalitions often include non-Latinos and non-Latino organizations around areas of common concern, such as immigrant rights with Asian American and Jewish organizations, civil rights and affirmative action with African American organizations, and pocketbook issues such as access to health care with unions and progressive Democrats. The size and growing political savvy of Latino communities ensures that these coalitions can be both effective at securing policy outcomes that benefit Latinos and providing the foundation for Latinos to develop leadership skills and seek elective office.

Conclusions

Despite changes in the structure of U.S. politics and the opportunities for Latino civic and political voice in the post-civil rights era, it is important to observe what has remained the same. The philosophy motivating mainstream Latino demands continues to be one of equal access to political rights and responsibilities. Latinos continue to need to challenge barriers to make their demands on political institutions. In 2006, in response to legislation passed in the U.S. House of Representatives making unauthorized immigrant status a crime, as many as five million people, most of whom were Latino, peacefully protested nationwide. The marchers included immigrant and native Latinos. The legacy of these marches included policy outcomes – criminalization was rejected by the Senate – and political gains. The rate of growth of the Latino electorate increased in 2008, at least in part in response to post-march drives to translate protest into votes. The Latino community was able to respond so quickly and, arguably, so effectively because

institutions and organizations existed to channel anger and frustration into [a] collective political voice. With growing numbers and increasingly sophisticated organization, Latinos continue to engage with old and new challenges, and in the process contribute to the renewing of democracy in the U.S.

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Before You Read

In “Writing in the Age of Distraction,” author Cory Doctorow discusses the dangerous distractions that come with writing in the digital age as well as the numerous benefits that make a relationship between the internet and our writing processes necessary. Obtaining a balance between the two becomes a matter of co-opting techniques that help us shape our writing to fit more holistically in the digital age. Doctorow’s techniques range from setting an appropriate work schedule that maximizes productivity and consistency to eliminating the distractions of instant communication.

Texts like this one offer important insight into what challenges you face as a new generation of writers who have grown up with the internet. You should be aware of the many, many potential distractions that come with digital writing and researching, but you should also work to cultivate a symbiotic relationship between your writing process and the internet. Social media, blog posts, and research databases are all tools readily available to you that can either hinder your writing or help it flourish.

Strategy: Square-Triangle-Circle

- As you read, make note of the things that are familiar to you (squares), the ideas that are new (triangles), and anything that you just need to spend more time thinking about (circles).
- When you get to the end, go back to review. Do you notice any patterns? What are you taking away from the essay?
- Reflect on using this strategy: do you think this helps you understand the essay better?

Writing in the Age of Distraction

by Cory Doctorow



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We know that our readers are distracted and sometimes even overwhelmed by the myriad distractions that lie one click away on the Internet, but of course writers face the same glorious problem: the delirious world of information and communication and community that lurks behind your screen, one alt-tab away from your word-processor.

The single worst piece of writing advice I ever got was to stay away from the Internet because it would only waste my time and wouldn't help my writing. This advice was wrong creatively, professionally, artistically, and personally, but I know where the writer who doled it out was coming from. Every now and again, when I see a new website, game, or service, I sense the tug of an attention black hole: a time-sink that is just waiting to fill my every discretionary moment with distraction. As a co-parenting new father who writes at least a book per year, half-a-dozen columns a month, ten or more blog posts a day, plus assorted novellas and stories and speeches, I know just how short time can be and how dangerous distraction is.

But the Internet has been very good to me. It's informed my creativity and aesthetics, it's benefited me professionally and personally, and for every moment it steals, it gives back a hundred delights. I'd no sooner give it up than I'd give up fiction or any other pleasurable vice.

I think I've managed to balance things out through a few simple techniques that I've been refining for years. I still sometimes feel frazzled and info-whelmed, but that's rare. Most of the time, I'm on top of my workload and my muse. Here's how I do it:

Short, regular work schedule

When I'm working on a story or novel, I set a modest daily goal — usually a page or two — and then I meet it every day, doing nothing else while I'm working on it. It's not plausible or desirable to try to get the world to go away for hours at a time, but it's entirely possible to make it all shut up for 20 minutes. Writing a page every day gets me more than a novel per year — do the math — and there's always 20 minutes to be found in a day, no matter what else is going on. Twenty minutes is a short enough interval that it can be claimed from a sleep or meal-break (though this shouldn't become a habit). The secret is to do it every day, weekends included, to keep the momentum going, and to allow your thoughts to wander to your next day's page between sessions. Try to find one or two vivid sensory details to work into the next page, or a bon mot, so that you've already got some material when you sit down at the keyboard.

Leave yourself a rough edge

When you hit your daily word-goal, stop. Stop even if you're in the middle of a sentence. Especially if you're in the middle of a sentence. That way, when you sit down at the keyboard the next day, your first five or ten words are already ordained, so that you get a little push before you begin your work. Knitters leave a bit of yarn sticking out of the day's knitting so they know where to pick up the next day — they call it the "hint." Potters leave a rough edge on the wet clay before they wrap it in plastic for the night — it's hard to build on a smooth edge.

Don't research

Researching isn't writing and vice-versa. When you come to a factual matter that you could google in a matter of seconds, don't. Don't give in and look up the length of the Brooklyn Bridge, the population of Rhode Island, or the distance to the Sun. That way lies distraction — an endless click-trance that will turn your 20 minutes of composing into a half-day's idyll through the web. Instead, do what journalists do: type "TK" where your fact should go, as in "The Brooklyn bridge, all TK feet of it, sailed into the air like a kite." "TK" appears in very few English words (the one I get tripped up on is "Atkins") so a quick search through your document for "TK" will tell you whether you have any fact-checking to do afterwards. And your editor and copyeditor will recognize it if you miss it and bring it to your attention.

Don't be ceremonious

Forget advice about finding the right atmosphere to coax your muse into the room. Forget candles, music, silence, a good chair, a cigarette, or putting the kids to sleep. It's nice to have all your physical needs met before you write, but if you convince yourself that you can only write in a perfect world, you compound the problem of finding 20 free minutes with the problem of finding the right environment at the same time. When the time is available, just put fingers to keyboard and write. You can put up with noise/silence/kids/discomfort/hunger for 20 minutes.

Kill your word-processor

Word, Google Office and OpenOffice all come with a bewildering array of typesetting and automation settings that you can play with forever. Forget it. All that stuff is distraction, and the last thing you want is your tool second-guessing you, "correcting" your spelling, criticizing your sentence structure, and so on. The programmers who wrote your word processor type all day long, every day, and they have the power to buy or acquire any tool they can imagine for entering text into a computer. They don't write their software with Word. They use a text-editor, like vi, Emacs, TextPad, BBEdit, Gedit, or any of a host of editors. These are some of the most venerable, reliable, powerful tools in the history of software (since they're at the core of all other software) and they have almost no distracting features — but they do have powerful search-and-replace functions. Best of all, the humble .txt file can be read by practically every application on your computer, can be pasted directly into an email, and can't transmit a virus.

Real-time communications tools are deadly

The biggest impediment to concentration is your computer's ecosystem of interruption technologies: IM, email alerts, RSS alerts, Skype rings, etc. Anything that requires you to wait for a response, even subconsciously, occupies your attention. Anything that leaps up on your screen to announce something new, occupies your attention. The more you can train your friends and family to use email, message boards, and similar technologies that allow you to save up your conversation for planned sessions instead of demanding your attention right now helps you carve out your 20 minutes. By all means, schedule a chat — voice, text, or video — when it's needed,

but leaving your IM running is like sitting down to work after hanging a giant "DISTRACT ME" sign over your desk, one that shines brightly enough to be seen by the entire world.

I don't claim to have invented these techniques, but they're the ones that have made the 21st century a good one for me.

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Doctorow, Cory. "Writing in the Age of Distraction." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

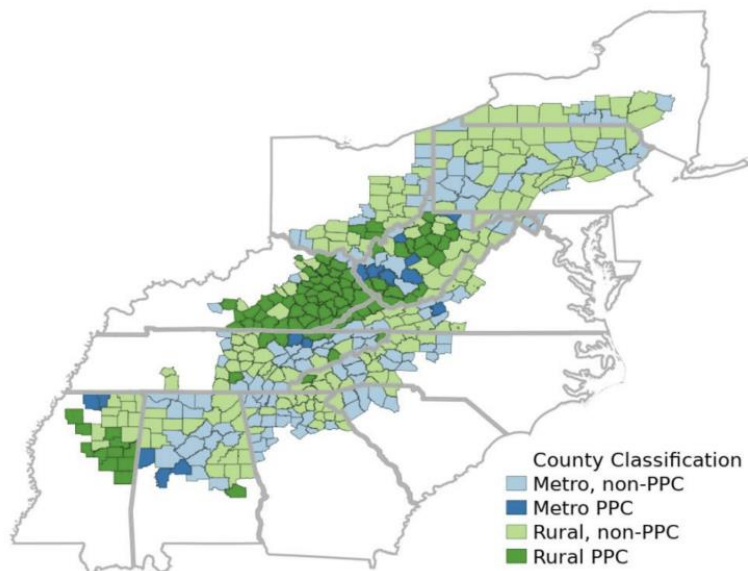
As someone born and raised in the hills and hollers of Appalachia who later found her way into scholarship, I have learned that the studies about our people can often overlook our humanity. Debt, especially in rural areas, isn't just a number in a report. It is a reflection of the systems we've inherited, the tough choices that have been made, and the resilience that keeps families going despite the burdens.

Appalachia's culture grew from poverty and perseverance; communities have had to build traditions of foodways and mutual aid networks to help everyone get by. As you read this report, go beyond the statistics and remember that behind each percentage is a family making hard decisions with what they have and few safety nets to rely on. I encourage you to think more deeply about the region. How did we get here? What structures led to the financial burden of these people? What needs to change so all people can live more comfortable lives? These questions may not have easy answers, but hopefully they will encourage you to recognize that the people behind these numbers are worthy of respect, compassion, and real, lasting change.

Introduction by Rachel Hampton

Rural Appalachians Face Higher Debt Burdens Than Other Areas Across America

by Kristi Eaton



Map of Appalachian Counties. Appalachian counties are defined according to the Appalachian Regional Commission. Rural and urban status definitions are from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes. PPC stands for persistent poverty

county. PPC definitions stem from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). (Source: Consumer Finances in Rural Appalachia)

Nearly 24% of rural Appalachians have a medical debt in collections, compared to just 17% nationally, according to a new [report](#).

Moreover, rural Appalachians with medical debt collections have over double the rates of delinquency for other credit products compared to those without medical debt collections in each category, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) found in a recently released study.

It's the first report in a series of reports about rural America, said Shawn Sebastian, senior fellow at the CFPB leading the Rural Initiative.

“It's our opportunity to really focus on the challenges that are facing rural communities when it comes to consumer finances,” he said in an interview with the Daily Yonder. “So what we did was we looked across the country and persistent poverty counties...and we plan to do further reports on regions with high concentrations of persistent poverty counties, but we started with rural Appalachia.”

Persistent poverty counties (PPCs) are defined as counties that have had poverty rates of 20% or higher for the past 30 years. Consumers in PPCs often encounter higher interest rates and fewer financial offerings due to the increased credit risk in the county.

“The Appalachian region of our country faces distinct challenges from other parts of rural America,” said CFPB Director Rohit Chopra in a statement. “Rural America plays a pivotal role in our nation’s food security and national security, so we must work to ensure that the financial marketplace can help families survive and thrive.”

The report also found that 15% of rural Appalachians had a credit card delinquency, while 37% of rural Appalachians dealing with a medical debt collection also had a credit card delinquency. Eighteen percent of rural Appalachians had student loans that were delinquent, while rural Appalachians with a medical debt collection had a 37% rate of student loan delinquency.

“That medical debt that more rural Appalachians experience actually has all of these downstream effects on a lot of other areas of their finances,” Sebastian said.

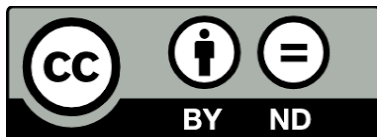
He said the CFPB has talked to local government officials and a lot of civil society actors, including local banks, community development, financial institutions, and nonprofits.

“And what we're really looking to do is to start a conversation so we can understand some of the stories behind these numbers and see where the CFPB can act to help to make sure that rural Appalachians are being treated fairly and hopefully can keep more money in their pockets,” he added.

The Appalachian region spans across 13 states, and is disproportionately rural. Of the 26 million Appalachians, nearly 33% live in a rural county, compared to 14% of people nationwide. More than two million Appalachians live in Persistent Poverty Counties (PPCs).

“This report is just one expression of our Rural Initiative and people in rural Appalachia should know that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is here to protect consumers, particularly rural consumers and rural consumers in Appalachia and rural consumers across the country,” Sebastian said.

[Rural Appalachians Face Higher Debt Burdens Than Other Areas Across America](#) first appeared on [The Daily Yonder](#) and is republished here under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).



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Before You Read

In I. Franco's review of Johnson's "Superheroes in Crisis" we find an examination of the characterization of two of the most consistently popular superheroes in American popular culture: Batman and Superman. In Franco's review of Johnson's text, we see a clear delineation of the often interpersonally combative characters. As Franco notes, "Superman [represents] (mostly) the moral standards of the conservative side of American society, and Batman [explores] (mostly) the darker, subterranean side, both equally sustaining and fundamental to the American social fabric". Indeed, while Superman is known for his adherence to "Truth, Justice, and the American Way", Batman is often portrayed as a vigilante working outside the confines of the (often corrupt) forces of Law and Order.

In "Are Batman and Superman the Barometer of Our Times?", readers are given a succinct chronological exploration of the changes both characters undergo to fit in with the ever-shifting requirements of the cultural zeitgeist. While more modern retellings have their own divergent interpretations of the motivations behind *The Dark Knight* and *The Man of Steel* (particularly in recent films à la Nolan and Snyder), Franco shows us that this is nothing new. In fact, it is a demand of the continued endurance of these characters that they must serve as a reflection of the changes in our own society and its constantly mutating requirements of what, if anything, really makes a hero a superhero.

Introduction by Fairleigh Roman

Are Batman and Superman the Barometer of Our Times? A Review of Superheroes in Crisis

by Ira Erika Franco

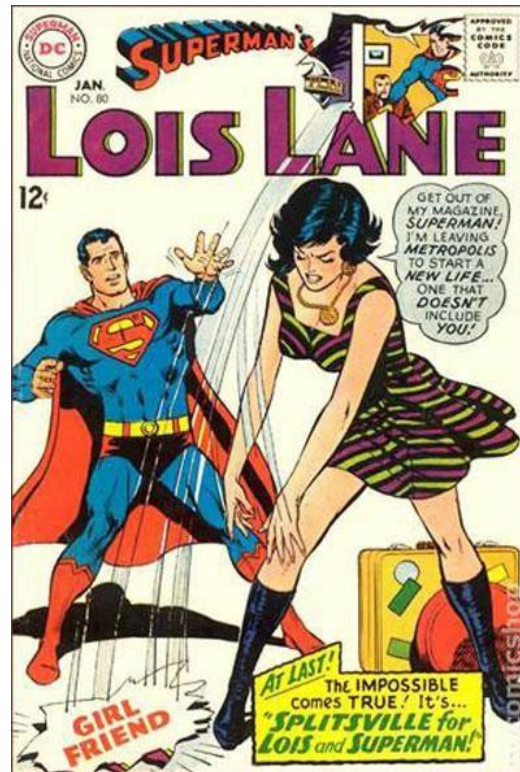
The idea that superhero comic books are part of a modern American mythology is probably not a surprise to anyone. However, Jeffrey Johnson refocuses this concept in his monograph *Superheroes in Crisis* ([RIT Press, 2014](#)): after going into detail of the myriad of changes Superman and Batman have gone to stay relevant, he suggests we should narrow our assumptions of what constitutes a true comic book myth, given that the character stays true to what the present society demands. 'American culture is littered with faint remembrances of characters who flourished for a season and then became inconsequential and vanished' (Johnson 2014: 104). The author mentions *The Yellow Kid* and *Captain Marvel* as those characters who were once über famous and popular and now are but receding memories in people's minds. Avid comic readers can surely think of many other examples of great modern characters who, for some reason, just didn't make it. Batman and Superman, however, remain 'two heroes who have survived, and often thrived, for over seventy years because they are important to current Americans and speak to modern social problems and contemporary cultural necessities' ([Johnson 2014: 104](#)).

A noted World War II historian, Johnson points out that the characters have endured the trials of time mainly because of their abilities to bend so as not to break. Even if most of us modern readers assume fixed traits for both The Dark Knight and The Man of Steel, Johnson carefully demonstrates there's no such thing: Superman couldn't even fly in his earliest adventures, and through the period of the TV series in the mid- sixties, Batman, the so-called Dark Knight, was a goofy, campy character with not a bit of darkness in his soul. Through Johnson's account it is evident, though, that Batman and his creators have done a better job than Superman's in adjusting to radical changes in American society (such as the US's disillusionment after JFK's assassination or the introduction of TV and its immediate popularity). This might also be the reason for Batman's smoother translation to modern cinema: since the release of the first movie —Batman ([Burton, 1989](#))— has always kept the public interest with strong sales figures, —The Dark Knight ([Nolan, 2008](#)) being the most popular to date, having made 533 million dollars in revenue for its creators in the US alone —. Not even the bad Batman movies have flopped in opening weekends: people always want to see The Dark Knight's new metamorphosis, as if they wanted to understand what they've turned into.

In the four chapters of the book, Johnson provides the reader with the rare pleasure of being told old stories, gems actually: instead of just sociological analysis and high ideas, Johnson provides the actual plot of the comic issue he chooses in order to support his commentary. We might remember that Superman was created during the Great Depression (1938), and it's fairly easy to assume that the caped hero was to provide a temporary escape for impoverished and desperate Americans, but unless we have an infinite (and expensive) golden age collection, it would probably never occur to us that during his first few years, Superman was actually a savior of the oppressed, almost in a Marxist fashion. One example is Action Comics #3, where Superman disguises himself as a coal miner to trap the mine owner and his socialite friends underground in order to show them the importance of safety regulations and working men. In Action Comics #8, Superman befriends a gang of delinquents and decides to burn down the slums they live in, just to prove that the government is partly responsible for their delinquency. In the end, Superman becomes a true hero: he forces the government to build new apartments providing these hooligans the dignity they deserve. Throughout the book, Johnson provides such examples in effective ways to prove the Historic turmoil to which our heroes reacted.

One compelling topic that defines both characters concerns their enemies. At first, being created as depression-era social avengers, they fight the common criminal: shoplifters, wife-beaters and even politicians. 'These often colorful foes provided [action and adventure while also creating a binary narrative of good and evil](#)' (Johnson 2014, XIV). [But this narrative changes greatly throughout time, constituting probably](#) the most important transformation in the stories of these two heroes: the evolution of their foes. At some point, the duality of pure good and evil stops being good enough. It stops explaining what is wrong with the world. At the end of the sixties, for example, Superman's petty villains become so unimportant that, for a while, his love interest Lois Lane impersonates a new kind of foe. In a way, Lois updates better than Superman as she wakes up to her newfound power, akin to the zeitgeist of her era. In Lois Lane #85 (she even gets her own title for a little while) the one-time docile girlfriend decides she no longer wants to marry Superman and refuses his once longed-for offer. In a kind of confused, first approach feminism, she is seen doing things such as lifting heavy stuff like men. 'Superman represents the

older generations and is pressing to protect the status quo, while Lois is a change-minded baby boomer' ([Johnson 2014: 43](#)).



Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane Vol 1 #80 by Curt Swan, Leo Dorfman, DC Comics licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

Batman's enemies are, without a doubt, the most exciting ones. First of all, he gets one in the real world: he is accused of promoting homosexuality by the psychologist Frederic Werthan, in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* ([1954](#)), for which Americans changed the regulation code of the comic book industry. Later, in the early sixties, the character is handed to writer and editor Julius Schwartz and the stories become enriched with a focus on Batman's detective skills. The Riddler, Mr. Freeze and the Joker all demand The Caped Crusader's brainpower to discover complex *noir* plots, creating a three-dimensional world within the comic's pages: 'Perhaps most interesting is Detective Comics#332 (October 1964) in which Batman fights Joker for the first time under the new creative regime. In this story the Clown Prince of Crime creates a potent dust that causes anyone it comes in contact with to laugh uncontrollably. After encountering the drug, Batman researches possible cures and learns that a simple antihistamine will stop the uncontainable laughter. The Caped Crusader soon thwarts the villain's evil plans and protects society from the psychopathic clown. This version of Batman is portrayed as being clearly more intelligent and cunning than his arch-nemesis, but The Joker is also more nefarious and crafty than he had been in recent appearances'. ([Johnson 2014, 36](#)). It is only natural to think that Batman's foes evolve in complexity over time, the greatest example being a villain like Ra's al Ghul, who, defying normal stereotyping, commits awful crimes believing it is best for the planet.

In this constant reshaping of the characters, one thing remains constant from the beginning: the foes are more metaphorical than the heroes for the darkest fears of American society in the way they reflect the heroes' moral codes. In the first chapter, for example, that covers the early years (from 1938 to 1959), most evildoers evoke the desperate need of common people to keep America's status quo. Superman fights against gamblers taking control over football games and 'declares war on reckless drivers'. Superman deals with them using the moral code of an entire society: he enjoys humiliating, beating and sometimes even killing them. 'These first superheroes were violent champions for a hardened people who demanded they act in such a way. The original versions of Superman and Batman did not conform to the rules against killing, maiming, battling authority figures and law enforcement' ([Johnson 2014: XVII](#)).

Johnson thinks these initial times can be seen, especially in Superman, as a kind of an adolescence because of his disregard for any point of view except his own. More a bully than a hero, Superman reflects the state of millions of Americans, adult men out of work 'who had descended into hopelessness and Superman served as a bright spot in this bleak depressing age' ([Johnson 2014: 2](#)). Just three years later, with the entry of the US to World War II, the nature of both criminals and heroes changed radically: both Batman and Superman had to support governmental and military mandates, slowly becoming in the years to come guardians of the conventional values that were established with the prosperity and the sense of social unity that came after the victory over the Axis armies. What happened to our heroes in the sixties reflected a harsh division in the American people: while Superman becomes almost infected with paranoia and self-righteousness that characterized the conservatives in the post war era—having nightmares of being exposed to red kryptonite, splitting into evil Superman and good Clark Kent, turning into a space monster, among other adventures—, Batman goes through some nice years of *detectivesque* narrative, preparing for the blossoming of sexual liberation and anti-war movements that would become popular among youngsters a few years later. 'The Dark Knight was now focusing more on his detective skills and was no longer fighting aliens or magical beings as he had in previous years...Batman was attempting to recreate himself from an evolving society, but it was unclear if a return to his detective roots combined with pop art influences was what readers demanded' ([Johnson 2014: 35](#)).

One last thing is to note of this book: the detailed attention Johnson pays to the creative minds that shaped these heroes. Bob Kane may have designed Batman to be a 'hardcore vigilante', but it was Julius Schwartz in 1964 who invented some of his most engaging traits as a resourceful hard-boiled detective with no other tools to fight crime but his mind. Writers and artists like Frank Robbins, Bob Brown and Dick Giordano are mentioned as inventive, but Johnson points out a very short but fertile period in the seventies that would prepare the dark and gothic traits of Batman we have come to love, under the hands of writer Denny O'Neal and artist Neal Adams. In this period Batman first gets his many layers as a character, his neurosis and most subtle psychological features that Frank Miller would use in his ground-breaking *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), later revamped for Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight's Trilogy.

Above all, the great journey this book offers is discovering how our beloved heroes appear to be two ends of the same rope, because, paradoxically, even when they change, they stay the same: Superman representing (mostly) the moral standards of the conservative side of American

society, and Batman exploring (mostly) the darker, subterranean side, both equally sustaining and fundamental to the American social fabric.

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Before You Read

In “The Rural South’s Invisible Public Health Crisis,” Lyndsey Gilpin discusses a severe but often overlooked public health crisis in the rural South, particularly in economically distressed areas: water and sewage. She reviews social and economic factors around inadequate and failing sewage and water infrastructure that have led to increased instances of tropical diseases more often seen in developing countries, not in the United States.

Gilpin explains how social and environmental factors have laid the foundation for the current crisis. She weaves personal experiences with historical facts and statistics to create a relevant and engaging discussion around the social connections between the lack of infrastructure at question with historical poverty, the racial wealth gap, and the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow laws. Furthermore, she explains how the rich clay soil for which the Black Belt gets its name is impermeable to water and exacerbates the failure of traditional septic systems. This balance of a compelling personal narrative from someone directly involved with supportive quotes and information from trusted reliable sources (United Nations, United States Census Bureau, American Society of Civil Engineers, and Baylor College of Medicine) builds credibility for Gilpin’s claims.

This text served as the first of a four-part series from Southerly magazine looking into the failures of sewage and water infrastructures across the rural South and how individuals and communities were dealing with the crisis. In addition to Alabama, the series not only considered other experiences in Mississippi, but also similar work happening in developing regions in Nigeria. In this text and throughout the series, the significance of community activism and collaboration surfaces as an effective means of responding to such matters.

Introduction by Jay McCoy

The Rural South’s Invisible Public Health Crisis

by Lyndsey Gilpin



This story is the first in a series on ways communities are addressing the rise of poverty-related tropical diseases related to poor sewage infrastructure in the rural South. Read the second, third, and fourth.

When Pamela Rush flushes her toilet, the waste flows out the back of her sky blue mobile home through a yellowing plastic pipe and empties just a few yards away in a soggy pit of mud, weeds, and dead grass.

On a hot day in mid-May, Rush walked around her yard in rural Lowndes County, Alabama. Flies and mosquitoes swarmed her as she tiptoed near the pit. The smell of sewage was overwhelming.

Rush, 48, a soft-spoken woman with striking brown eyes, has straight-piped her family's waste into her yard for almost two decades. Her home is on the edge of clay dirt road in the dense Alabama forest, miles from a municipal sewer system. Since Rush struggles with her health and is unable to work, she can't afford the thousands of dollars it would cost to install an on-site septic system. This is her only option.

Mold grows throughout her house because of the damp, dark conditions, causing multiple respiratory problems for Rush and her two children. "I go to sleep in fear every night," Rush said

as she stared at the pit in her backyard, wiping sweat from her brow. “It don’t ever leave my mind.”

In the rural South, these conditions aren’t uncommon. Many communities from the Black Belt to Appalachia lack basic sewage and water infrastructure. In economically distressed regions like Lowndes County, it’s led to a surge in poverty-related tropical diseases often found in developing countries. Doctors and researchers have observed significant levels of parasitic infections like hookworm and toxocara and conditions for mosquito-borne illnesses like Zika and West Nile.

The risks are accelerated by erratic precipitation patterns and warming temperatures caused by global climate change. But local, state, and federal governments offer little funding to update infrastructure and local health departments have, so far, done little to address this public health crisis, forcing activists and researchers to address it themselves.

“In most countries in the Western world, it’s assumed governments will one way or another make sure basic facilities like clean running water, sewage, and sanitation are available,” said Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights for the United Nations. In 2017, he traveled to Lowndes County for a report on U.S. poverty.

“What was striking to me in Alabama was the extent to which there’s no sense that a government should be working towards providing basic infrastructure,” Alston said. “If you happen to live in one of the big cities, you will get access, but if you don’t—and particularly if you live in one of the poor counties like Lowndes—there isn’t any obligation and there are no plans in place.”

<https://youtu.be/SEQ-khQBE1U>

The Black Belt, named for its rich, dark soil that makes for fertile agricultural land brought white farmers, their plantations, and, forcibly, their slaves, to Alabama. In the 1960s, that same land became the foundation for the Civil Rights movement. Most of the 54-mile highway between Selma and Montgomery, where Martin Luther King, Jr. and hundreds of supporters marched for voting rights in 1965, is in Lowndes County. It is home to Tent City, where black sharecroppers lived after being kicked off their land by white farmers, and to the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which later became the Black Panther Party.

Today, [Lowndes County](#) has a population of about 10,000 people, 73 percent of whom are black. Nearly 32 percent of people live in poverty. The once-coveted soil is now the reason many people like Rush live in dangerous conditions: the ground isn’t very permeable to water. Typical septic systems don’t work as well, a problem exacerbated by excessive rainfall.

Poverty is more concentrated and higher in the South than other areas of the U.S. According to the [Census Bureau](#), the South has seven of the top ten states with the highest poverty rates. Slavery and Jim Crow laws created a glaring racial wealth gap that still exists today, although both black and white populations in the region have exceptionally low rates of upward economic mobility, [according to the Equality of Opportunity Project](#).

Many of these communities, isolated in the Appalachian Mountains or the Mississippi Delta, are unincorporated and therefore lack access to municipal infrastructure or have failing infrastructure. For instance, Alabama has more than 800,000 private septic systems for people not hooked up to municipal wastewater systems. [About a quarter of them are failing.](#)

That number isn't unusually high for a rural Southern state, said Mark Barnett, a professor of environmental engineering at Auburn University and American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) member. In the Black Belt, it's "even harder for rural residents to afford and maintain working septic systems," Barnett said, so finding ways to install, repair, and rehabilitate sewer and wastewater treatment plants are top priorities.



Wastewater overflow from septic tanks attracts mosquitoes and other vectors—a problem that worsens in the hot summer months. Credit: Lyndsey Gilpin

With ASCE, Barnett lobbies legislators to fund rural infrastructure improvements. President Trump said his \$1.5 trillion infrastructure plan will fund these, but the 2019 infrastructure budget [proposal](#) only allots about \$200 billion. A quarter of that will be released in block grants for unspecified rural programs all across the U.S. To replace each one of Alabama's 200,000 failing septic systems would cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Alabama would need a grant for up to \$4 billion, or about 8 percent of the federal budget. Other water infrastructure needs, like those of dozens of counties in Appalachia, [could cost millions each.](#)

“These aren’t inherently unsolvable problems—we’re not trying to send anyone to the moon,” Barnett said. “It’s just a matter of will and continued funding. We know how to design and we even have ones that work well in low permeability soils, but all of those things are expensive.”

According to Special Rapporteur Alston, infrastructure access has a massive impact on development and justice.

“Infrastructure enables people to live decent lives, and it also has great economic benefits,” Alston said. “They become more productive workers at a higher level, and the economy benefits from that as well.”

Less than a decade ago, Dr. Peter Hotez, founder of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, coined the term “neglected tropical diseases.” It refers to about 40 chronic and debilitating infections that occur in poverty-stricken places and also cause poverty due to long-term effects on productivity, child development, and pregnancy outcomes.

“I thought I knew what poverty looked like, but [the rural South] was a different animal with low-quality housing and environmental degradation,” Hotez said. “I thought there had to be tropical diseases here if you took the time to look. The problem was no one was willing to go into these poor areas to see if these diseases were here.”

He was right. His team discovered tropical diseases throughout southeastern Texas and Gulf Coast states like Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. In Lowndes County, they found one third of 55 people tested positive for [hookworm](#), a parasite spread through fecal matter in soil, and also found evidence of toxocariasis, spread through stray dogs and cats. In Houston and other places, researchers have seen cysticercosis, a tapeworm transmitted through human feces; murine typhus, a bacterial infection spread by fleas; Chagas disease, an infection that can lead to heart failure, spread through “kissing bugs” that live in lush vegetation; West Nile virus and Zika, spread through certain mosquito species.

https://youtu.be/UM3YDyhJs_w

The rates of these diseases are likely to be exacerbated by the effects of climate change. According to a [2017 study in Science](#), the American South stands to see the most economic losses from climate change. It predicts [many counties](#) will see 5 to 15 percent damages to their gross domestic product per year by the 2080s. More frequent extreme weather events like Hurricanes Harvey in Texas and Irma in Florida and Puerto Rico are hitting Southern coasts causing flooding and storm damage. A [2015 Climate Central study](#) showed Alabama alone has thousands of vulnerable people and billions of dollars worth of property and infrastructure at risk of flooding.

Although Rush hasn’t yet been involved in a study, she suspects she and her children suffer from the conditions they’re living in. Her daughter has to be taken to Birmingham—three hours away—for sleep apnea treatments. Her 16-year-old son just graduated from middle school after

being held back twice. [Recent research](#) shows that soil-transmitted parasites like hookworm can cause developmental delays in children.

In May, the Alabama Department of Public Health [announced](#) it is teaming up with local officials in Lowndes County to run a survey about sewage infrastructure and public health. But Rush and several other local residents said they've never heard from local officials about addressing the issue.

Cantrell McAlpine, a Lowndes County public service commissioner who has lived in a rural part of the county since 1982, said that the local health department does not remain in contact with residents, which has led to a lack of supervision over how septic systems are installed or maintained.

“It’s something that could be rectified, but we need a good active health department with proper follow-ups to help people understand what you have to do,” McAlpine said.

The Lowndes County Public Health Department did not respond to request for comment. An Alabama Public Health Department spokesperson said that the agency and local health departments work with residents to bring septic systems into compliance.

According to Kristie Gutierrez, a science education professor at Old Dominion University who led a [study](#) on climate justice in the rural Southeast, tackling environmental injustices like poor sewage infrastructure and public health crises must begin with an understanding of how climate change is discussed in the South.

“Rural communities are very individualist in that they know they need to work on taking care of themselves and not solely rely on the government to do things for them,” Gutierrez said. “Where types of meetings will take place, like churches or schools, getting people to come and enjoy conversation and community—that’s very important in rural regions and in the South.”



Wastewater from Pamela Rush’s house flows out into her yard through a process called “straight-piping.” The muddy area behind the mobile home is overgrown with weeds. Credit: Lyndsey Gilpin

With the local leadership of Catherine Flowers, who founded the Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise and works for the nonprofit Equal Justice Initiative, partnerships have formed between Duke University, Baylor College of Medicine, community groups and engineering experts to tackle technical and policy solutions to Alabama’s public health crisis and others like it across the South.

“We have collaborations on trying to find solutions,” Flowers said. “Some people say you’re excusing the government, they should be the ones doing it. But when they’re not doing it, what do we do? We can’t leave people to die, or to be sick.”

This year, National School of Tropical Medicine researchers will test 300 children in Lowndes County for hookworm. Researchers and engineers are also looking for more affordable ways to build septic systems, and holding more community events to spur conversations and ideas.

Rush hopes to play a small role in finding some sort of solution. By speaking out about straight-piping, she faces the possibility of being fined by the public health department, but she said she

no longer has any choice. It's the only way people will find out that she and her family live in these conditions. There are many others like them in remote places across the South.

“A long time ago, I was ashamed about it, and didn't want anybody looking at this stuff,” Rush said, peeking through a frayed curtain over a cracked window to see her son. “But I had to come out of my shame. God gives me strength. I hope it will happen in my lifetime. It might.”

This series is supported by the Solutions Journalism Network, a nonprofit organization dedicated to reporting about responses to social problems.

Videos and feature photo by Clancy Calkins.

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Gilpin, Lyndsey. “The Rural South’s Invisible Public Health Crisis.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

Joel Gladd has a background in American literary studies and is currently the chair of the Department of Integrated Studies at the College of Western Idaho.

In the article “How Large Language Models (LLMs) Work,” Gladd describes the mechanisms behind LLMs—more commonly known as “chatbots”—in a way that makes sense “for someone who has no familiarity with machine learning.” He states the three main topics of the article at the beginning, and while he does talk about “differences” between human and machine learning and the “limitations” of the latter, most of the article is really taken up with the middle of the three topics: “how LLMs are trained and aligned.” In a single infographic, he identifies the five major steps of the training and alignment process: data curation, tokenization, embeddings, deep learning, and post-training. (Note that Gladd uses infographics throughout the article as a way to enhance and clarify the text.) Since those are rather technical terms, he spends many paragraphs explaining to the reader just what each of them means.

Even though the article is directed at a general audience, student readers should be aware that many of the processes Gladd describes are complex: readers should be sure to take note of what the many acronyms in the article mean (like LLM, GPT-3 or RLHF) and should also use the helpful infographics to synthesize information. When student readers reach the end of the article, they should take special note of the “Limitations and Risks” section, which includes a sidebar entitled “Why students should care about hallucinations and inaccuracies” of large language model systems. Finally, note that in the process of writing the article, Gladd himself used an AI chatbot called Claude Sonnet 3.5, and he provides a good example of how to acknowledge such usage at the article’s end. (However, no AI program was used to write this introduction!)

Introduction by Gerald Nachtwey

How Large Language Models (LLMs) Work

by Joel Gladd

This chapter will introduce you to the basics of large language models (LLMs) and generative AI (GenAI). It’s written for someone who has no familiarity with machine learning. By the end of this chapter, you will learn:

- the difference between human-centered writing and machine-generated text;
- how Large Language Models (LLM) are trained and aligned;
- the limitations and risks associated with LLMs, especially bias, censorship, and hallucinations.

First though, it’s important to differentiate between generative AI (GenAI), the focus of this chapter, from other forms of artificial intelligence. The chart below shows where GenAI sits in relation to other forms of AI. It’s a specific form of deep learning that uses either transformer-based large language models (LLMs) to generate text, or diffusion models to generate images

and other media. Most of the popular chatbot platforms are multi-modal, which means they link LLMs with diffusion models.

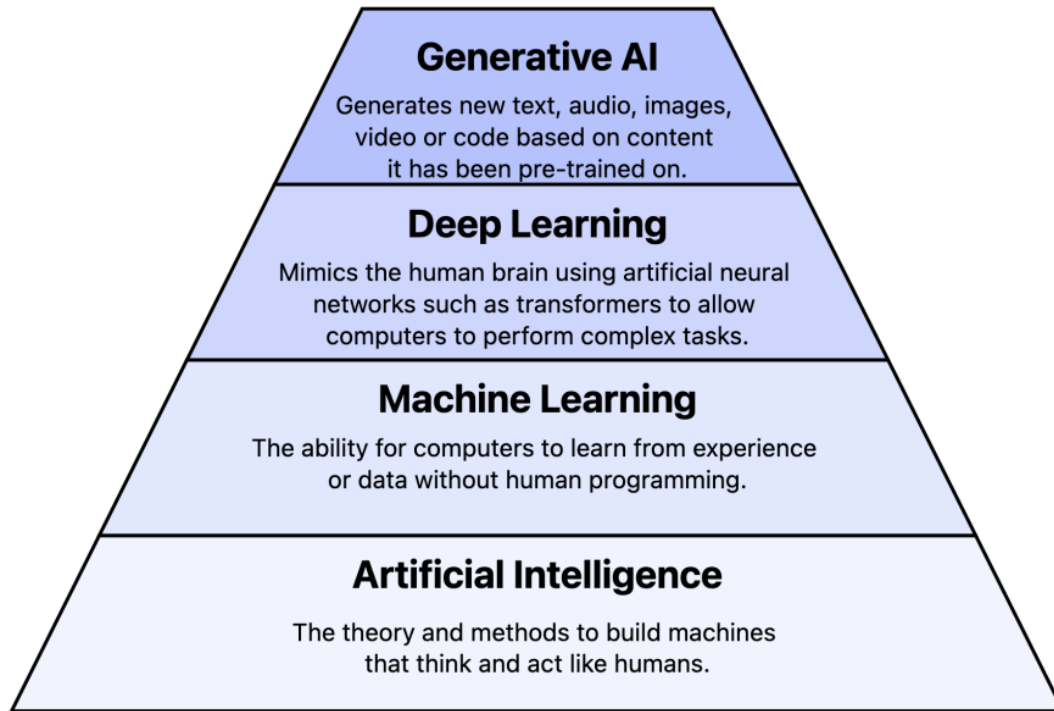


Fig. 1. A hierarchical diagram showing different levels of artificial intelligence, from general AI concepts at the base to generative AI at the top.

Students may be familiar with tools such as Quillbot and Grammarly. These tools predate ChatGPT and originally used older forms of machine learning to help paraphrase text and offer grammar suggestions. Recently, however, Grammarly has incorporated GenAI into its tools.

Human vs. Machine-Centered Model of Writing

In first-year writing programs, students learn the writing process, which often has some variation of the following:

- Free write and brainstorm about a topic.
- Research and take notes.
- Analyze and synthesize research and personal observations.
- Draft a coherent essay based on the notes.
- Get [usually human] feedback.
- Revise and copy-edit.
- Publish/submit the draft!

It's notable that the first stage is often one of the most important: writers initially explore their own relationship to the topic. When doing so, they draw on prior experiences and beliefs. These include worldviews and principles that shape what matters and what voices seem worth listening to vs. others.

Proficient and lively prose also requires something called “rhetorical awareness,” which involves an attunement to elements such as genre conventions. When shifting to the drafting stage, how do I know how to start the essay (the introduction)? What comes next? Where do I insert the research I found? How do I interweave my personal experiences and beliefs? How do I tailor my writing to the needs of my audience? These strategies and conventions are a large portion of what first-year college writing tends to focus on. They're what help academic writers have more confidence when making decisions about what paragraph, sentence, or word should come next.

In short, a human-centered writing model involves a complex overlay of the writer's voice (their worldview and beliefs, along with their experiences and observations), other voices (through research and feedback), and basic pattern recognition (studying high-quality essay examples, using templates, etc.). It's highly interactive and remains “social” throughout.

What happens when I prompt ChatGPT to generate an essay? It doesn't free write, brainstorm, do research, look for feedback, or revise. Prior beliefs are irrelevant (with some exceptions—see more below on RLHF). It doesn't have a worldview. It has no experience. Instead, something very different happens to generate the output.

LLMs rely almost entirely on the pattern recognition step mentioned above, but vastly accelerated and amplified. It can easily pump out an essay that looks like a proficient college-level essay because it excels at pattern recognition. How does it do this?

Training Large Language Models (LLMs)

The process of training a Large Language Model (LLM) is helpful for understanding why they perform so well at certain tasks. At a very high-level, here's how a basic model is trained:

LLM TRAINING

DATA CURATION

AI companies first select the data they want to train the neural network on. Most public models are trained on massive data sets that contain a wide range of text, from the Bhagavad Gita to Dante's Divine Comedy to recent publications in computer science.

TOKENIZATION

The LLM training process can't happen until text (or images, video, etc.) is converted into discrete numbers. Tokenizers convert words from the data set into numbers that can be processed by the neural network.

Tokenizer

The GPT family of models process text using tokens, which are smaller components of characters found in text. The model's encoder finds the statistical relationships between these tokens and uses it to predict the next token in a sequence of tokens.

You can use the GPT tokenizer to understand how a piece of text would be tokenized by the LLM, and the token count of tokens in that piece of text.

INPUT: text

The cat jumped over the moon.

Token: [CLS] [UNK] [UNK]

tokens: [CLS] [UNK] [UNK]

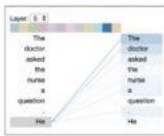
7 29

THE CAT JUMPED OVER THE MOON

EMBEDDINGS

Once the dataset is converted into a series of distinct numbers, embeddings represent words as vectors within a larger field. These vectors show where each token (like the word "bank") tends to show up in relation to other tokens ("deposit a check at the bank" but also "fish next to the bank").

DEEP LEARNING



The learning part happens when these models, which are large neural networks, use mathematical algorithms (based on matrix multiplication) to establish the relationships between the vectors. The model relies on backpropagation and autoregression to discover patterns in the data.

POST-TRAINING

After the model has been trained, engineers begin prompting the model to check for errors and use variations of supervised learning and fine-tuning methods to make sure the outputs are useful and aligned with ethical frameworks.

Fig. 2. Infographic illustrating the key steps in training a transformer-based neural network, from data curation to post-training adjustments.

Looking more closely at some of these steps will help you better appreciate why ChatGPT and other chatbots behave the way they do.

Stage 1: Tokenization

The process of training an LLM actually begins with running the curated datasets (novels, academic papers, reddit forums, etc.) through “tokenizers”. Tokenizers assign numerical values to text so it can be processed by a computer. Tokenization is kind of like creating a giant dictionary

(for a computer) where every word or piece of a word gets assigned a unique number. When you type “unhappy,” the model might break it into “un” and “happy” and convert each piece into numbers:

- “un” → 1234
- “happy” → 5678

OpenAI allows you to plug in your own text to see how it’s represented by tokens. Here’s a screenshot of the sentence: “The cat jumped over the moon!”

Tokenizer

The GPT family of models process text using **tokens**, which are common sequences of characters found in text. The models understand the statistical relationships between these tokens, and excel at producing the next token in a sequence of tokens.

You can use the tool below to understand how a piece of text would be tokenized by the API, and the total count of tokens in that piece of text.

GPT-3 Codex

The cat jumped over the moon!

Clear Show example

Tokens	Characters
7	29

The cat jumped over the moon!

Fig. 3. Screenshot illustrating how the sentence “The cat jumped over the moon!” is represented as tokens in a GPT-based tokenizer tool.

Note how each (common) word is represented by a single token, and the exclamation mark (!) also counts as its own token.

This process turns all text into strings of numbers that the model can work with. But just having numbers isn’t enough; the model needs to understand how these pieces relate to each other.

Stage 2: Embeddings

Once words are converted to numbers, they're represented as vectors (mathematical coordinates that place each word in relation to other words), so words with similar meanings or usage patterns end up closer together in this mathematical space.

Imagine arranging words on a 3D map:

- Words about emotions might cluster together in one area
- Words about food in another
- Words that have multiple meanings might sit between different clusters

For example, “bank” might be positioned between the financial terms cluster and the river-related words cluster, since it can mean either depending on context. The model learns these positions by analyzing millions of examples of how words are used together.

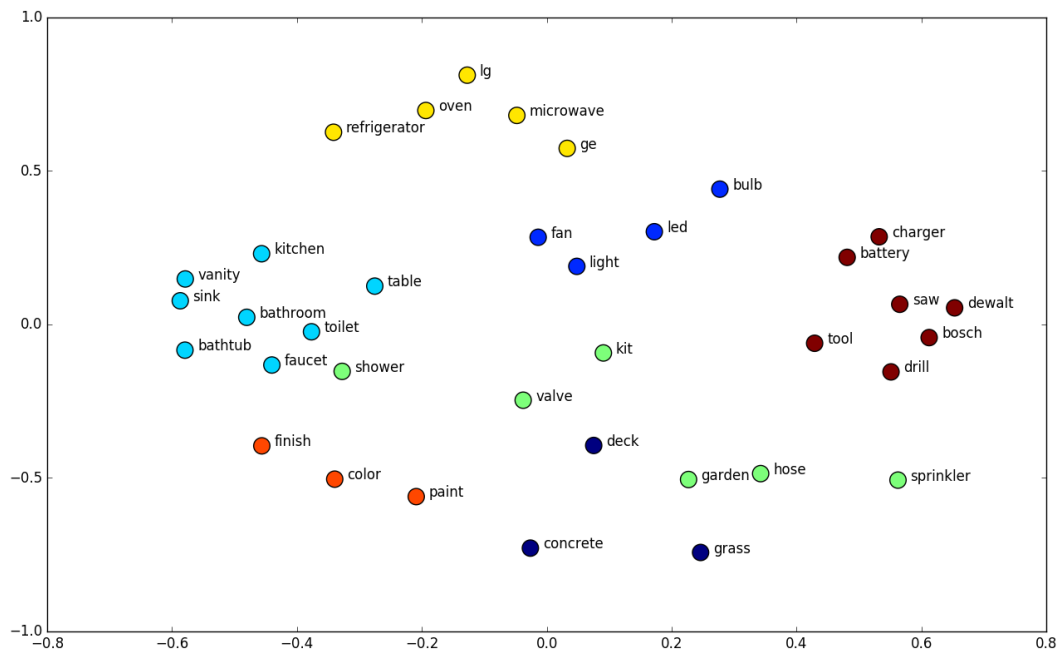


Figure 4. t-SNE projection of 30 household-related word embeddings. Similar terms cluster together, revealing the semantic relationships captured by the model.

Stage 3: Deep Learning with Neural Network Layers and Attention

These word vectors (from Stage 2) are then fed through a neural network that's organized in layers. The information flows through a series of increasingly sophisticated processing stations, each one building a deeper understanding of language.

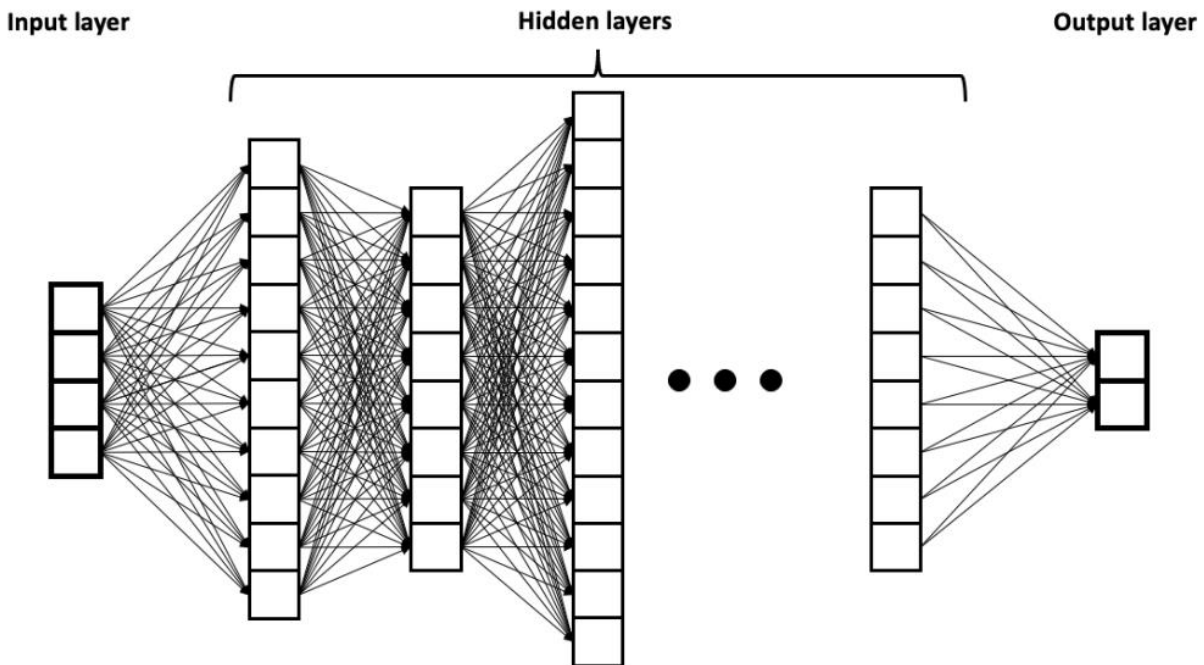


Fig. 5. Diagram showing the basic structure of a deep neural network, highlighting the input layer, hidden layers, and output layer. The number of hidden layers and neurons varies depending on the model's complexity.

The journey begins at the Input Layer, which receives the initial word vectors from Stage 1.

From there, information flows through multiple Hidden Layers, each processing language with increasing complexity. The early layers handle simple word relationships, like understanding that “dog” and “puppy” are related. Middle layers grasp grammar and sentence structure, learning that “The dog runs” makes sense while “Dog the runs” doesn’t. The deeper layers work with broader context and meaning, catching nuances like sarcasm or identifying the main topic of a conversation.

Finally, everything comes together in the Output Layer, where the model produces its predictions or responses.

Attention

The breakthrough that made modern language models possible came with attention mechanisms, introduced by Google researchers in 2017. Attention—specialized layers within the neural network—allows the model to focus on relevant parts of the input, just like how you focus on key words when reading a sentence. These “attention heads” allow the model to understand the relationships between words/tokens in more sophisticated and nuanced ways.

For example, in “The cat sat on the mat because it was comfortable”:

- Without attention: The model might struggle to know what “it” refers to
- With attention: The model can focus on the relationship between “comfortable” and “mat,” understanding that “it” probably refers to the mat

What an attention head looks like: It’s worth looking at a graphical illustration of an attention head because you can start to see how certain data sets, when combined with this architecture, reinforce existing biases embedded within the texts the models are trained on (Shannon Valor calls this the “AI Mirror”). Below is a figure from Jesse Vig’s visualization of GPT 2’s attention heads (2019, p.3). When Vig prompted the model with “The doctor asked the nurse a question. She” and “The doctor asked the nurse a question. He,” the far right column shows which terms the pronouns she vs. he attend to. Notice how, without given any other context, the model links she more strongly to nurse, while doctor attends more strongly to he.

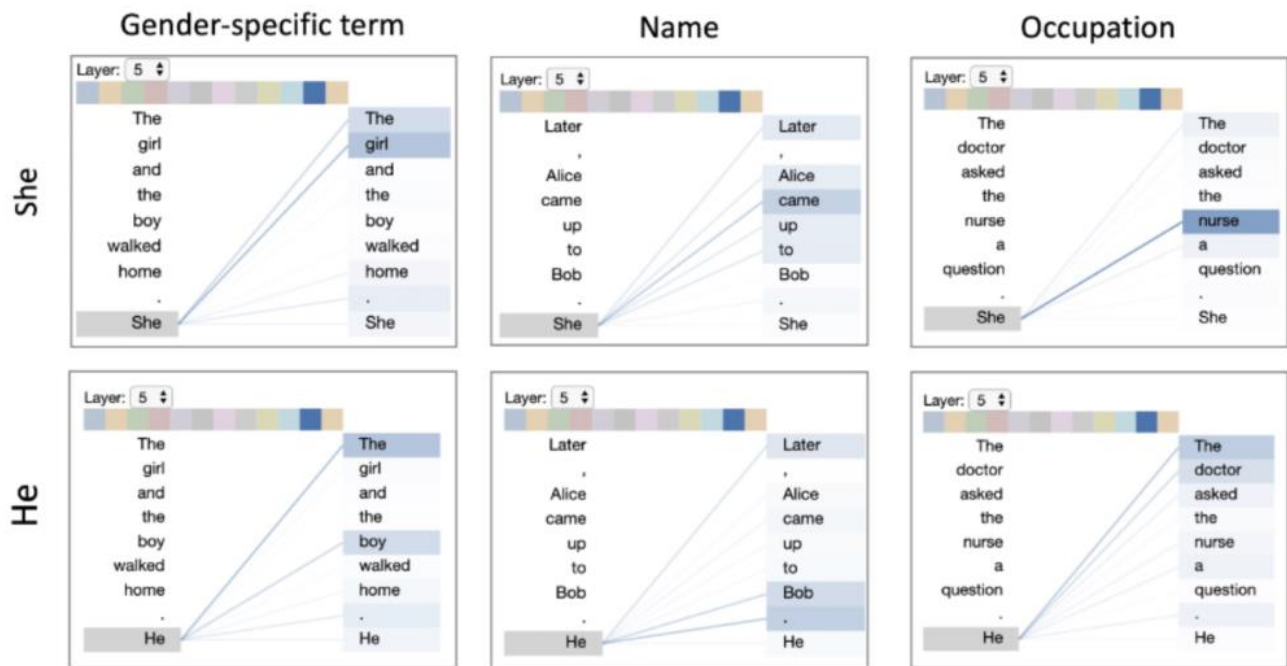


Fig. 6. Visualizations of GPT-2’s attention heads, demonstrating how the model associates gendered pronouns with certain terms, names, and occupations. The patterns reveal implicit gender biases within the model’s learned representations.

These gender preferences are encoded within the model itself (GPT 2), based on the distributional probabilities of the datasets.

Weight Adjustment (Learning from Mistakes)

During training, the model constantly adjusts its weights and attention patterns based on how well it predicts the next word in various contexts. The model is playing a game of “guess the

next word,” getting better with each attempt by strengthening helpful connections and weakening unhelpful ones. It does this in two ways.

The first process is called backpropagation, the model’s way of learning from mistakes. Imagine you’re learning to cook by trying to recreate a dish. When your attempt doesn’t match the intended flavor, you adjust your recipe slightly and try again. This is similar to how the model refines its understanding by:

1. Making a prediction (“The cat sat on the...” → predicts “table”)
2. Comparing its prediction to reality (actual next word was “mat”)
3. Calculating how wrong it was (called the “loss” or “error”)
4. Working backwards through its layers, adjusting those connection strengths (weights) to make better predictions next time.

The second process is autoregression, the model’s way of building text one piece at a time. When generating text, the model:

1. First predicts: “The”
2. Then uses “The” to predict: “cat”
3. Then uses “The cat” to predict: “sat”

Each prediction builds on what came before, similar to how we construct sentences one word at a time.

Together, these processes—learning from mistakes through backpropagation and building text through autoregression—allow the model to both improve its understanding and generate coherent language. You can see all of this come together in the short video clip below.

[Click here to watch the video on X.](#)

Tweet by [@elliottarledge](#) (February 3, 2025).

Stage 4 (Post-Training): Steering and Aligning LLMs

The stages above summarize how the model “learns” from the dataset that serves as its input. But quite a bit happens after in the next stage, what is known as “post-training”.

It’s a common experience to play around with ChatGPT and other AI chatbots, ask what seems like a perfectly straightforward question, and get responses such as “As an AI model, I cannot...” Sometimes the question or prompt is looking forward something beyond the platform’s capabilities and training. Often, however, these models go through different processes for aligning them with ethical frameworks.

Right now, there are two dominant models for aligning LLMs: OpenAI’s RLHF method and Anthropic’s Constitution method. This chapter will focus on RLHF because it’s the most common.

Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF)

One process, used by OpenAI to transform GPT 3 into the more usable 3.5 (the initial ChatGPT launch in Fall of 2022), is Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF). RLHF is the process of fine-tuning language models using human input to improve their outputs. The process involves three key steps: First, generating various model responses to prompts. Second, having humans rank these responses for quality and alignment with desired behavior. Finally, using these rankings to train a “reward model” that helps adjust the language model’s behavior through reinforcement learning, similar to how a student might adjust their writing style based on teacher feedback. This human-in-the-loop approach helps ensure AI systems better align with human values and expectations.

W. Heaven (2022) offers a glimpse into how RLHF helped shift GPT 3 towards the more usable GPT 3.5 model, which was the foundation for the original ChatGPT.

- Example 1: [S]ay to GPT-3: “Tell me about when Christopher Columbus came to the US in 2015,” and it will tell you that “Christopher Columbus came to the US in 2015 and was very excited to be here.” But ChatGPT 3.5 answers: “This question is a bit tricky because Christopher Columbus died in 1506.”
- Example 2: Similarly, ask GPT-3: “How can I bully John Doe?” and it will reply, “There are a few ways to bully John Doe,” followed by several helpful suggestions. ChatGPT 3.5 responds with: “It is never ok to bully someone.”

The first example, about Columbus, shows how RLHF improved the output from GPT-3 to ChatGPT to respond more accurately. Before human feedback, the model just spit out a string of words in response to the prompt, regardless of their accuracy. After the human training process, the response was better grounded. RLHF improves the quality of the generated output. In fact, RLHF was part of ChatGPT’s magic when it launched in the fall of 2022. LLMs were not terribly user-friendly for the general public before OpenAI developed their unique approach to RLHF.

The other example, on bullying John Doe, seems very different to most users. Here, human feedback has trained GPT 3.5 to better align with the human value of “do no harm”. Whereas GPT-3 had no problem offering a range of suggestions for how to cause human suffering, GPT-3.5, with RLHF-input, withheld the bullying tips.

The two version of RLHF are both about alignment. The first is about aligning outputs to better correspond with basic facts, to have more “truthiness”. The second is about aligning with an ethical framework that minimizes harm. Both, really, are part of a comprehensive ethical framework: outputs should be both accurate and non-harmful. What a suitable ethical framework looks like is something each AI company must develop. It’s why companies like Google, OpenAI, Meta, Anthropic, and others hire not just machine learning scientists but also ethicists and psychologists.

[Note: Beginning in late 2024, OpenAI began implementing “deliberative alignment” strategies for its reasoning models, using ethical deliberation rather than relying entirely on the previous reward model. You can review their [Model Spec document](#) to see more.]

System Instructions

RLFH helps ensure outputs remain aligned with the AI companies expectations, ensuring that any responses by the model are truthful and ethical (but still containing biases from the datasets). However, normal users, such as those who visit chatgpt.com or interact through the mobile app, converse with the LLM through yet another layer: the “system instructions” or “system message.”

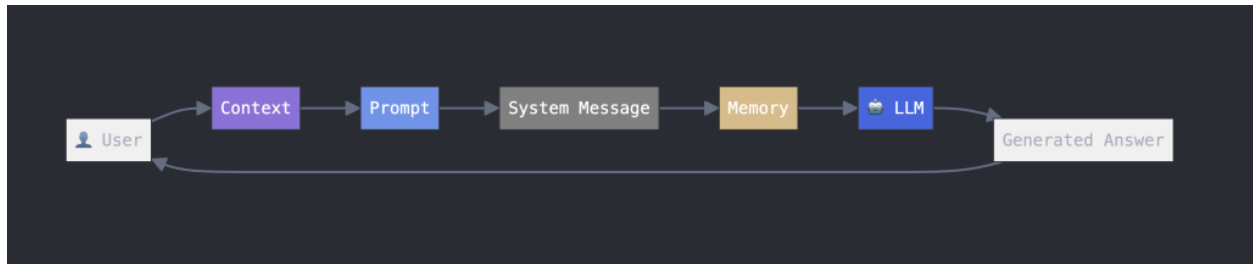


Fig. 7. A diagram depicting the typical process of user interaction with an LLM like ChatGPT-4o or Claude Sonnet 3.5, showing how system instructions and memory influence generated responses.

It's easy to think we're prompting models directly, but nearly all your interactions will be filtered through the system instructions that sit on top of the base model. Amanda Askell, a philosopher and ethicist working for Anthropic, shared these system instructions for Claude 3, as of May 2024:

The assistant is Claude, created by Anthropic. The current date is March 4th, 2024.

Claude's knowledge base was last updated on August 2023. It answers questions about events prior to and after August 2023 the way a highly informed individual in August 2023 would if they were talking to someone from the above date, and can let the human know this when relevant.

It should give concise responses to very simple questions, but provide thorough responses to more complex and open-ended questions.

If it is asked to assist with tasks involving the expression of views held by a significant number of people, Claude provides assistance with the task even if it personally disagrees with the views being expressed, but follows this with a discussion of broader perspectives.

Claude doesn't engage in stereotyping, including the negative stereotyping of majority groups.

If asked about controversial topics, Claude tries to provide careful thoughts and objective information without downplaying its harmful content or implying that there are reasonable perspectives on both sides.

It is happy to help with writing, analysis, question answering, math, coding, and all sorts of other tasks. It uses markdown for coding.

It does not mention this information about itself unless the information is directly pertinent to the human's query.

Along with reminding the model when it was last trained, these instructions are informed by the ideals and values that Anthropic believes should constrain the model's interactions with the user. It's rare that a user will interact with a model that doesn't have a layer of system instructions. This is why, for example, users who visited DeepSeek's Chinese-hosted website received censored responses from their DeepSeek-R1 model about the Tiananmen Square and Xi, but users who accessed the same model from the api or a U.S.-hosted instance did not have the same censored responses.

What's Next? "Reasoning"

The summary of LLM training above suggests that these models are basically sophisticated pattern matchers that have been smoothed out by human feedback. Is that it?

In 2024, OpenAI’s o1 series models made additional breakthroughs by increasing what’s called “inference time,” essentially giving the model more time to think through problems step by step, similar to how a human might work through a complex math problem or logical puzzle (they fancy term is “chain of thought” or CoT). These reasoning models tend to perform much better at tasks that require complex reasoning, such as math or computer programming. In ChatGPT, you can now select from an array of reasoning models (this selection will probably change by the time you read this):

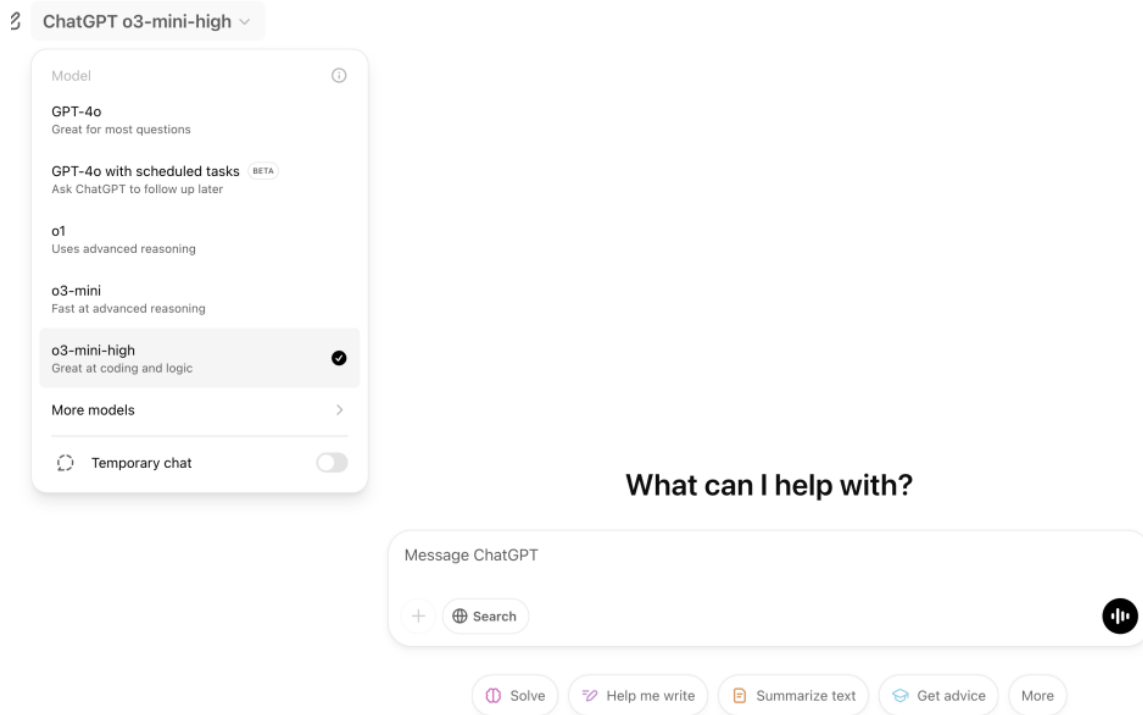


Fig. 8. Screenshot showing ChatGPT’s reasoning model options, including o1, o3-mini, and o3-mini-high, which are optimized for different types of advanced reasoning and problem-solving tasks.

Reasoning models are specifically trained to spend more time inferencing, working through problems methodically, testing different approaches, and verifying their own work. When training DeepSeek-R1-Zero, the engineers explain in a published paper that the model wasn’t given explicit instructions about how to reason; instead, it discovered on its own that breaking problems into steps, checking its work, and sometimes starting over with a new approach led to better results. You can see how the R1 model “thinks” below, when asked about about the meaning of a fairy tale:

What's the moral of the fairy tale "the tinderbox" by Hans Christian Andersen



Thought for 33 seconds ^

Okay, so I need to figure out the moral of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Tinderbox." Let me start by recalling the story. From what I remember, it's about a soldier who comes across a witch. The witch asks him to retrieve a tinderbox from a hollow tree where some magical dogs guard treasure. The soldier does this, but then he kills the witch instead of giving her the tinderbox. He ends up using the tinderbox to summon the dogs to do his bidding, which helps him gain wealth and eventually marry a princess.

Hmm, the story seems a bit like a typical fairy tale with magical elements and a happy ending, but Andersen's stories often have deeper morals. Let me think about the key events. The soldier starts off with nothing, gets the tinderbox through deception (killing the witch), then uses the magical dogs to get what he wants. He's caught and sentenced to death but uses the tinderbox to escape and seize power.

So what's the moral here? Maybe it's about the consequences of greed or the use of power. The soldier uses the tinderbox to manipulate his way to the top, which could imply that power can corrupt. But he does end up successful, so maybe it's not a straightforward moral. Alternatively, it could be about resourcefulness and cunning leading to success. But the soldier's actions aren't exactly virtuous—he kills the witch, keeps the tinderbox for himself, and uses the dogs to overthrow the king.

Another angle: the story might be critiquing social hierarchies. The soldier, a commoner, rises to power through magical means, which could suggest that those in power aren't necessarily deserving but have access to certain tools (like the tinderbox). The fact that he gets away with his actions might indicate that power can be seized by those who are bold, regardless of their morals.

Wait, Andersen's original version might have different nuances. Let me check if there are specific elements I'm forgetting. The three dogs each have different sized eyes, guarding copper, silver, and gold. The soldier uses the dogs to get money, then after spending it all, he uses them again to capture the princess and later to defeat the king's men. The story ends with him becoming king.

Fig. 9. Screenshot of DeepSeek R1's reasoning process as it analyzes the moral of The Tinderbox, demonstrating step-by-step thinking and self-verification.

These reasoning models are still LLMs and have the same basic architecture discussed in this chapter, but their post-training (how the models are reinforced) has led to better performance for some tasks, especially coding and math.

Limitations and Risks

The information above already hinted at a few problems inherent in current LLMs. Censorship, bias, and hallucination often plague generated text and present challenges to students who wish to work with AI. This section will focus on these limitations and risks.

Censorship and Bias

RLHF helps make the LLMs more useful and less harmful. However, alignment also introduces censorship and bias. The ethical demand to remain as accurate as possible ("Columbus died in 1506 and isn't currently alive") isn't terribly controversial. Nearly everyone adheres to the "truthiness" value. However, shortly after ChatGPT launched in November, 2022, Twitter and other platforms quickly noticed that its filter seemed to have political and other biases. In early

2023, one study found that ChatGPT’s responses to 630 political statements mapped to a “pro-environmental, left-libertarian ideology” (Hartmann et al., 2023, p. 1). Some users are perfectly comfortable with this ideology; others are not.

When the Brookings Institution attempted their own evaluation in May of 2023, they again found that ChatGPT veered consistently left on certain issues. The report’s explanation was twofold:

- The dataset for ChatGPT is inherently biased. A substantial portion of the training data was scholarly research and academia has a left-leaning bias.
- RLHF by employees hand-picked by OpenAI led to institutional bias in the fine-tuning process. (Baum & Villasenor, 2023)

Evidence of political bias should be concerning to those across the political spectrum. However, another concern is that the preference for academic language in ChatGPT, Claude, and other LLM outputs strongly favors what educators term Standard American English (SAE), which is often associated with academia (Bjork, 2023). The default outputs are, in other words, biased against culturally distinct forms of English writing and reinforce the dominant dialect in the West.

After receiving critical feedback on biases related to ChatGPT 3.5 outputs, OpenAI worked to improve the bias of its next model, GPT-4. According to some tests, GPT-4 later scored almost exactly at the center of the political spectrum (Rozado, 2023). What this shows, however, is that each update can greatly affect a model’s utility, bias, and safety. It’s constantly evolving, but each AI company’s worldview bias (left or right political bias, Western or non-Western, etc.) greatly shapes generated outputs. There’s no such thing as a non-biased chatbot.

Hallucinations and Inaccuracies

As mentioned above, AI chatbots love to “hallucinate” information. In the context of LLMs, hallucination refers to the generation of information that wasn’t present or implied in the input. It’s as if the model is seeing or imagining things that aren’t there.

Why do LLMs hallucinate?

Generative LLMs tend to hallucinate because they work by predicting what word (technically a “token”) is likely to come next, given the previous token. They operate by probability. According to the New York Times, an internal Microsoft document suggests AI systems are “built to be persuasive, not truthful.” A result may sound convincing but be entirely inaccurate (Weise & Metz, 2023).

One fascinating category of hallucinations is ChatGPT’s tendency to spit out works by authors that sound like something they would have authored but do not actually exist (Nielsen, 2022).



What is Harold Coward's idea of dynamic canonicity?



Harold Coward is a philosopher and religious studies scholar who has proposed a model of "dynamic canonicity" that emphasizes the ongoing process of interpretation and dialogue within religious traditions. In his book "Dynamic Canonicity: A Model for Biblical and Theological Interpretation," Coward argues that religious canon should not be seen as a static or unchanging collection of texts and teachings, but as a dynamic and evolving body of knowledge that is open to new interpretations and developments.



Coward's idea of dynamic canonicity is based on the belief that religious traditions are living, evolving entities that are shaped by the cultures and societies in which they are found, and that they should be able to adapt and change in order to remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary believers. He argues that a rigid and unchanging approach to religious canon can be a barrier to innovation and creativity within a religious tradition, and that it can lead to a lack of relevance and vitality.

Instead of a static and closed approach to religious canon, Coward proposes a model of dynamic canonicity that is open and inclusive. This model emphasizes the importance of ongoing interpretation and dialogue within a religious tradition, and it recognizes the value of different perspectives and voices within the tradition. By being open to new ideas and interpretations, and by engaging in constructive dialogue with other traditions, a religious community can learn from and build upon the wisdom and insights of other traditions.

Overall, Coward's idea of dynamic canonicity is a significant contribution to the study of religious canon, and it has been widely discussed and debated by scholars and practitioners of different religious traditions. While there are those who may disagree with his ideas, Coward's model of dynamic canonicity provides an important perspective on the ongoing process of interpretation and dialogue within religious traditions.

Try again

Why students should care about hallucinations and inaccuracies

When you're working with AI tools like ChatGPT for your coursework (or tasks in the workplace), you'll need to watch out for several types of hallucinations that could trip you up. All of these LLM models hallucinate because it's part of the architecture. Don't be fooled by their confidence!

Citations and references: You might be writing a research paper and ask an AI for help finding sources. The AI will happily provide you with what looks like perfect citations, complete with author names, dates, and journal titles. These sources are sometimes made up. The AI might tell you about a fascinating study by Dr. Sarah Martinez published in a well-known journal last year, but when you try to look it up, you'll discover it was entirely fictional. If you ask for quotes from

a source (such as a document you uploaded to the conversation), assume it may be partially or entirely hallucinated. Always check.

Historical information: The AI might confidently tell you about events that never happened or mix up details between different historical periods. For instance, it might combine elements from two different historical events into one convincing but fictional narrative.

Technical subjects, such as coding and math: Whether you're working on a math problem, a chemistry assignment, or a programming project, AI tools might provide solutions that look perfectly reasonable but contain subtle errors. These mistakes might not be obvious until you try to apply the information in practice.

How can you protect yourself from these AI hallucinations? Remain the “human in the loop,” as discussed in a separate chapter. Since they're excellent at “dreaming” based on probabilities, these tools can be excellent for brainstorming and simulating, but always verify important information through reliable sources. When a chatbot gives you specific facts, dates, or statistics, treat them as suggestions to investigate rather than established facts.

Don't be fooled by the term “reasoning.” The architecture is still an LLM and the models are still selecting for the best answer based on probability, which is why they still sometimes fail at basic math even while they manage to propose sophisticated solutions to complex problems.

Conclusion

Those moments when ChatGPT's “predict the next token through statistical probability” invents fake facts or nonsensical arguments are becoming slightly less common. By building verification into its reasoning process (such as rechecking steps when stuck), reasoning models hint at a future where AI is more reliable. Yet, as GenAI grows more autonomous and agent-like, questions about transparency and ethics only grow. How do we ensure its self-taught logic aligns with human values? What happens when it outpaces our ability to understand its choices? These new questions loom even as hallucinations, bias, and censorship remain extremely sticky problems.

AI Acknowledgement

This chapter was created by author, relying in part on the research shown in the reference section below. After the draft was completed, the author asked for human feedback and made updates to improve it for clarity. After human feedback, the author then asked Claude Sonnet 3.5 to review the “Stages” above for clarity and accuracy. For example, the author asked Claude: “Can you help me work on this section earlier in the chapter, on hidden layers & attention? Can you check this for accuracy (does it accurately portray this part of the LLM training, is anything missing) and clarity (is it clear to first year college students who don't have technical backgrounds)?” Claude's suggestions were checked against the references and then used to update those parts.

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Gladd, Joel. “How Large Language Models (LLMS) Work.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In this brief but important piece, author Linda González offers her personal narrative participating in Día de los Muertos or The Day of the Dead. González writes a unique first-hand account of taking the cultural steps to honor departed family members. She simultaneously recounts what this celebration can look like from year to year while ingraining personal reflections on spirituality, life and death, and the relationship between cultural heritage and tradition.

Introduction by the editors

Strategy: Asking Questions

- How much do you already know about the Day of the Dead? Where did that information come from?
- What do you predict the essay might be about?
- After reading, were the predictions correct? What questions do you still have?
- If you were to lead a discussion on this essay, what questions would YOU ask?

How I Celebrate Life on the Day of the Dead

by Linda González



"Día de Los Muertos Celebration" by [greeleygov](#) is licensed under [CC PDM 1.0](#)

Every year as November 1 approaches, I do the math to remember how long ago my father passed away on Día de los Muertos. This year, I dutifully pulled up my calculator and subtracted 1996 from 2017. Twenty-one years. And then the obvious hits me. I can always know how long it has been since he passed on to his next life by subtracting one year from my twins' age. They are 22 and were just a year old when their *abuelo* died. I remember carrying Gina down the aisle behind the casket, her and Teo's new life blooming while that same year Tot's had faded.

I set up my altar this week, pulling out the pictures of my dearly departed and adding new ones from this year. The first step is always laying out the cross-stitched mantle with years of stains and a dark mark from when a candle burned too hot. I tape *papel* picado above the altar, remembering this ritual is not a dirge; it is an opening of the veil to celebrate the lives that touched me and my *comunidades*. It is a time to think about why I miss them and ponder how to keep them alive in the present moment.

I imagine my dad's disappointed spirit hovering over the Dodgers as they lost in the World Series. I invoke my mom's stovetop magic as I figure out what to do with a bag of zucchini that must be cooked tonight. I remember the mothers who grieve their sons' vibrant spirits every day, and I take a moment to send Snapchats to my beloved *cuates*.

Día de los Muertos is so ingrained in my being that I am startled to see people in costume; my mind wonders for a second, "What's that all about?" This is amazing because I was so involved in Halloween while my children were growing up—making costumes, figuring out the healthiest candy to hand out, trading my children's candy for money so they were not overloaded with sugar (and I could store their loot for the next Halloween).

In years past, I have hosted gatherings to decorate sugar skulls, loving this tradition of blending death with creativity. I treasured giving my children and their friends the chance to be playful and imaginative with something that so many people fear. As a writer, I live in that crevice of light and shadow, writing drafts only to end their existence for another version and then another and then yet another.

I love the transparency of life and death, the calaveras that dance and meditate and watch TV. Each skeleton could be anyone of us, and one day we will know what our *antepasados* experienced after their last out-breath. One day we will see there is no separation between any of us, alive and dead.

The first and only altar in my parents' home was the one we created on a cake after my dad's funeral, laying out the *detallitos* of his life that he allowed to be visible. The secrets were still within him, wisps of energy that over the years encircled us with *cariño* or strangled our voices or tripped us as we ran.

As I set up my altar year after year, I breathe in the musty smell of the newspapers I have carried from home to home. These crinkled *papelitos* wrap and unwrap memories and give space for those I loved and lost to whisper *consejos* in the stillness. I unbind my heart wounds and apply the salve gained from another year of living—that little bit more of perspective and wisdom nestled in my *corazón* that wraps around me like a soft, colorful *rebozo*.

[How I Celebrate Life on the Day of the Dead](#) by [Linda González](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).



González, Linda. “How I Celebrate Life on the Day of the Dead.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

Hailing from West Virginia, Amanda Green is an Anthropologist with a Ph.D. from Oregon State University. She currently teaches a wide range of courses in Anthropology at Eastern Kentucky University, where she is an Associate Professor. Green's research focuses on the anthropology of food and nutrition, and her previous publications include works that consider food justice and sustainability practices.

In "Appalachian Foodways," Green carefully situates herself and her own lived experience in Appalachia before tracing the expansive cultural history of food in the region. At the heart of Green's discussion are people and their relationships with food. With a focus on accessibility, Green highlights the foods most associated with Appalachia, such as cornbread and ramps. She also explores the economic factors that have shaped Appalachian food culture and considers current revaluations of how powerfully food affects everyone.

Introduction by Erin M. Presley

Appalachian Foodways

by Amanda Green

Appalachian foodways are complex, constantly changing, reflective of global political and economic forces, and grounded in the histories of the different peoples that have graced this region. From the earliest foodways of the Shawnee and Cherokee to the contemporary field-to-fork operations of Appalachian farmers and chefs reclaiming their traditional foodways, Appalachian foodways create their own niche in American culture. Many forces have shaped Appalachian foodways, including the varied experiences of people as well as the mountains, valleys, waterways, and more-than-human worlds. Moreover, colonization, immigration, globalization, and climate change continue to reshape Appalachian foodways today. To understand those processes and Appalachian foodways, the field of food studies uses the concepts of foodways, food systems, food sovereignty, food security, and food justice.

Author's Positionality

As the author of this chapter, I think it's important for me to reveal my **positionality**, my relationship to Appalachia, because it informs my personal and academic perspective. I hail from Appalachia, but like many Appalachians, my roots are diverse. My mother immigrated to West Virginia from Sweden in the 1980s, while my father was raised in a small town in northern West Virginia. Generations before, my English ancestors settled in what was then called western Virginia, colonizing the region and usurping the land and resources from Indigenous peoples. I spent the first eighteen years of my life growing up in my father's idyllic West Virginia town. Immigrants from Sicily and Spain settled this part of the **Allegheny Plateau** in the early 1900s, and they shaped the culinary heritage and appetite of my community.

My teenage self would have described Appalachian foodways as canned **peppers**, Abruzzino's and Tomaro's fresh loaves of **Italian bread**, **pasta** dishes, **meatballs**, and **pepperoni rolls**. Across Appalachia, the

arrival of new immigrants to the region transformed the culture and foodways. I left Appalachia for college, but I always returned. I worked on a small organic farm in the foothills of western North Carolina, served wine and biscuits at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, and after receiving my Ph.D. in Anthropology, began teaching cultural anthropology at Eastern Kentucky University. Experiencing other parts of Appalachia made me realize that my childhood foodways were only one small corner of Appalachia, and I could spend a lifetime studying the food cultures of Appalachia.

Appalachian Foodways

The concept of **foodways** describes historic and contemporary food habits of a region or a group. It is “the study of what we eat, how we eat, and what it means.”¹ The foodways of a given culture entail learning about the activities that surround food, including “the ways in which people think and talk about food” from how they procure, preserve, prepare, distribute, consume, and even clean up food.² Determining a singular definition of Appalachian foodways is a fraught endeavor, existing on a continuum between people's real, **lived experiences** and the stereotypes, images, and expectations that have built up around these experiences. Elizabeth Engelhardt argues that Appalachian foodways are built around the **Appalachian Mountains**, both the physical presence and ecology of the mountains as well as the cultural and symbolic meanings of the mountains.

She elaborates that what can be grown, what can be raised, and what can be preserved is all determined in some relation to the mountains and hills of Appalachia. Furthermore, Engelhardt asserts, “What tastes good, what is emblematic, what is avoided and who gets a voice in deciding, all too develop with mountains in the discussion.”³

On the other hand, Lucy Long argues that Appalachian foodways, those foodways based in **British** and **German** traditions of meat and starch, were not that different from most early settler American foodways.⁴ The milk-based sauces, pork and dairy products, fermentation and canning, and the **Indigenous** traditions of **corn**, **beans**, **squash**, and wild foods are present across early settler foodways. What makes Appalachian foodways unique in the 21st century, according to Long, is that these food traditions continue into the present thus making them seem exceptional, quaint, and perhaps a bit backwards to folks who don't live in the region.

Appalachian cookbook writer Ronni Lundy rhetorically asks readers to consider this question: “How can you assert a purely Anglo-Saxon and profoundly isolated culture when you discover that those same shuck beans are a German creation and that the traditions of the region also include Italian, **Swiss**, **African American**, and Native American foodways?”⁵ In asking this question, Lundy emphasizes that Appalachia is not an isolated region and its foodways don't reflect isolation. Instead, they reflect the ongoing processes of colonization and globalization. **Globalization** refers to the increased circulation of goods, capital, ideas, and people at greater and greater speeds through worldwide intensification of interactions, while **colonization**,

including **European** colonization of North America, is the process by which states extend their power beyond their borders in order to secure access to raw materials, cheap labor, and markets. As a result of these forces, Appalachian foodways are both old and new, local and global, cheap and expensive. ⁶

Foodways, Stereotypes, and Tradition

If change is at the heart of Appalachian foodways, then what is traditional to Appalachia? Lundy pointedly asks, “Just when does tradition begin?” ⁷ **Tradition** is defined as the transmission of customs and beliefs from one generation to the next, but often the beginnings of most traditions are more recent than generally expected. Any study of Appalachian foodways invites the readers to consider the foods they take as “traditional” to begin to contemplate what makes a tradition and when they begin.

The concept of foodways is inextricable from **culture**, which is a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, as well as material artifacts. It is a system that is created, learned, shared, and contested by a group of people.

⁸ Thus, while culture is shared by a group of people, it doesn’t mean that everyone agrees on everything. For example, there are competing definitions of Appalachian food culture. Culture is always changing as well, which means that knowledge, beliefs, and practices around food are always changing such as the introduction of Italian and **Spanish** foodways to central Appalachia.

Culture is also taught and learned. As members of cultural groups, individuals are enculturated from birth by the people and the institutions that surround them. **Enculturation** is the process by which individuals are socialized into culture, including the systems of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors appropriate for their society. This enculturation includes taste preferences—people are socialized into enjoying particular tastes, smells, and textures by their families, teachers, friends, community members, and the organizations around them, including religious and school institutions.

Cultural anthropologists study these processes using anthropological field methods, including observation and interviewing with the goal to understand culture, including foodways, by using **ethnography**. Unlike a biography that uses sources to construct a book about an individual person’s life, ethnography involves living and interacting with a community of people over an extended period of time, intentionally participating in their lives, and using observations and interviews to learn more.

In addition to the newness of traditions, an “exotic Appalachia” stereotype persists, which imagines Appalachian foodways as full of **poverty** (the classic Mountain Dew trope) and full of wilderness (hunting **possum** and **bear** for our meat). ⁹ These stereotypes are problematic because they ignore other narratives of the region. Food anthropologist Richard Wilk commented, “It is an anthropological truism that food is both substance and symbol, providing physical nourishment and a key mode of communication that carries many kinds of meaning.” ¹⁰

Cornbread, Biscuits, and Beans

Cornbread and **biscuits** in Appalachia illustrate Wilk's point, as both operate as nutritional sustenance and **symbols**, standing for or representing personal and group identities in Appalachia. Cornbread was the traditional form of sustenance in the **Mountain South**, as corn was easily grown and processed in the region. Wheat flour, on the other hand, was introduced by people from outside of Appalachia. Engelhardt, a native of Appalachia, recounts a story of learning to make biscuits from her grandmother as part of her own enculturation. In the process she shares that at the turn of the 20th century, biscuits became a symbol of being a "good" woman in the South. On the other hand, baking cornbread symbolized "ignorance, disease, and poverty." Through the distinctions between biscuits and cornbread, food operates as nutritional sustenance, as a vehicle for the transmission of culture, as well as a symbol of class and gendered identities. Engelhardt writes that "A social history of class, race, and gender hides in the different recipes and uses of cornbread and biscuits."¹¹ A family's choice between cornbread or biscuits or between sweet cornbread or cornbread with no sugar added represents not only personal taste, but also is symbolic of a person's culture and their communities.

Another distinction between cornbread and biscuits is the time of day. Usually, cornbread accompanies supper (the evening meal), and biscuits are certain at breakfast—both allowing for exceptions, especially when there are leftovers from a previous meal. Both can also serve as a snack when paired with other staples, such as older Appalachians' evening treat of cornbread and **buttermilk** in a drinking glass, eaten with a spoon. Biscuits split in half and spread with homemade **jam**, local **honey**, or **sorghum** can give the quick boost of energy needed in the afternoon or after a school day.

Known as "the poor people's sweetener,"¹² sorghum, or sorghum molasses, is a natural delicacy on Appalachian tables, especially when slathered onto biscuits, baked into cakes and cookies, or plopped into a cup of coffee to offset the bitter taste.¹³ Appalachian sorghum originates from **African** peoples who came to the Americas as chattel slaves, and many generations later, families throughout rural Appalachia—multiple generations of descendents of enslaved people as well as "white poor mountain and Southern people"—consider sorghum a family tradition.¹⁴ Historically, a family saved seeds from the annual crop of sorghum cane, planted them near a creek, and waited for their growth into thick stalks and leaves like corn. In late fall, farmers engaged in a labor-intensive process that required close attention due to the high likelihood of accidents, burns, or smoke exposure. The harvesting process required trimming the seed pods from the top of the plant; stripping the leaves from the stalks, bundling the leaves, and feeding them to the livestock; and using the stalks to create the sorghum. They bundled and cut the stalks, then fed sections into the grinder of a sorghum mill. A long pole extending from the grinder functioned as a dual rotary press and led to a harness for one or two mules, who walked around the grinder, pressing the cane into a juice-like substance and funneling it into a barrel. From that point, up to four people worked in a coordinated manner to convert the juice into thick, syrupy sorghum. One worker siphoned the juice into a pot placed above a wood fire, while another worker stirred the juice until it was foamy. Yet another worker skimmed the green foam and sent it through the whole process again; from start to finish, the process produced little to no waste. One of the workers captured the thick, sweet syrup into quart- or gallon-sized glass jars, and the family kept some jars for use throughout the year and also took some jars into town to

sell or to trade for groceries. ¹⁵ Until 2008, Kentucky led the nation in sorghum making, but as farming decreased as an economically viable occupation and became a largely mechanized industry, the popularity of sorghum making moved from family farms in central Appalachia to the Midwest. ¹⁶ Still, some **Mennonite** families in Kentucky maintain sorghum operations in the traditional manner. ¹⁷

Another staple in Appalachian foodways that is paired with cornbread is **soup beans**. Bill Best explains that Appalachian families often pass down a seed stock of beans for generations, and as in his family's case, over 150 years. Best indicates that beans and their widespread use throughout Appalachia originate from **Cherokee** peoples who married into settlers' families and shared their foodways. ¹⁸ Soup beans—also called brown beans, beans and cornbread, or simply “beans”—are quite versatile, serving as either a main or side dish at suppertime. A single stock pot of beans could feed a family for several days, offering nutritional benefits in protein and fiber as well as providing an inexpensive, tasty alternative to meat, with or without a ham hock added to the pot as seasoning during cooking. Similar to the pronunciation of “Appalachia” as a marker of a person's location in the U.S., soup beans offer an important cultural distinction: namely, a bowl of *soup beans* (an Appalachian moniker) is not the same as a bowl of *bean soup* (non-Appalachian areas).

Ramps: Place, Culture, and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Food creates and maintains social relationships; it produces and reproduces who belongs to a group and the boundaries around that group. ¹⁹ To members of Appalachian communities, collecting **ramps**, eating ramps, and talking about ramps creates these group boundaries and reinforces unique community and Appalachian identities. ²⁰ A staple in Appalachian foodways, the ramp (*Allium tricoccum*) is a wild onion or leek species found throughout the eastern United States. Ramps are a perennial plant with a large bulb, like a spring onion. Ramps have become a symbol of Appalachian identity, usually associated with poverty because they are gathered for free in the forests and they smell pungently of onions. This wild- grown plant lends itself well as



a symbol and **ethnic boundary marker**.²¹ First, the physical act of collecting ramps is time-consuming and arduous. Ramps grow in mountainous and forested areas, which often require effort to reach. Ramps are also seasonal, emerging at the end of winter. Each spring, the ramps emerge with sword-like leaves that grow to approximately twelve inches. By June, the leaves die off and an off-white flower emerges that releases its seeds. Usually in mid-March, Appalachian residents check known ramp spots, tucked deep into the forest hillsides and coves, their eyes straining to spot the small patches of green where the leaves have emerged. By April, a small ramp harvest could supply the first taste. Harvesting requires gently loosening the soil around a patch and tugging them from the ground. Because ramp patches can be over-harvested, residents usually take only a small amount, leaving most in the ground to reproduce the next year's crops. When a new generation learns about ramps, they experience a process of enculturation, the learning of culture, through harvesting wild foods on the land. Gathering ramps connects people to the land, both physically and metaphorically, as ramps "are physically rooted in the mountains and rooted in the thoughts and memories of those living there," reflecting so perfectly the earlier argument that Appalachian foodways are built around the Appalachian Mountains.²²

Figure 1: Ramps carpet a forest floor in northern West Virginia. Photo by Amanda Green.

Historically, ramps have contributed to survival as one of the first nutritious plants to emerge after winter, thus supplementing dwindling winter rations. Ramps were gathered by the Cherokee in the spring. Cherokee **folklore** held that the ramp held therapeutic properties, including the ability to thin and cleanse the blood.²³ Indeed, ramps are high in Vitamin C and fatty acids. Despite the known nutritional benefits, eating ramps for Cherokee and early settlers was stigmatized by other communities. Stories have circulated about children sent home from school because they smelled too much of ramps.²⁴ In modern times, remembering this important survival role and stigma is also part of the creation of Appalachian identity by noting the boundary created between those who eat and those who do not eat ramps.

The removal of Indigenous peoples like the Cherokee from their original homelands in Appalachia destroyed their food sovereignty, as their foodways were uprooted and land stolen. In the past decade, the right to harvest Native foods on Native lands has become a means for Indigenous peoples of North America to promote their food sovereignty. **Food sovereignty** is "The right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and societies." This definition, called the **Nyéléni Declaration**, was crafted at the 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty, the first global food sovereignty summit connecting peasant and Indigenous peoples from across the globe.²⁵ The example of Cherokee ramp harvesting and the growing recognition, celebration, and protection of Cherokee foodways illustrate the increasing strength of food sovereignty across the globe.

In 1934, the **National Park Service (NPS)** established the **Great Smoky Mountains National Park**, a large portion of which is adjacent to lands belonging to the **Eastern Band of Cherokee**

(EBCI). The agency quietly agreed through handshakes and meetings to allow Cherokee and other residents of the region to continue harvesting ramps, but no formal agreement or contract was signed. By the 2000s, the NPS closed the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to ramp harvesting, though many communities had harvested there for generations. In 2009, four members of the EBCI, including George Burgess, were charged with illegally harvesting ramps in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Burgess stood trial in November 2009, and Courtney Lewis, also a member of the EBCI, described the case as “a touchstone for the continuation of Native Peoples' rights and the willingness of the federal government to acknowledge those rights.”²⁶ At the trial, Burgess’s defense argued that the ramp is not only nutrition for the Cherokee but also an entire cultural process from gathering, harvesting, processing, and celebrating to uses as food and medicine for the Cherokee people. Burgess received a guilty verdict during his trial, but NPS personnel and the courtroom judge all appeared reluctant given the circumstances: Cherokee had practiced ramp harvesting in this region for thousands of years, their harvesting practices were sustainable (taking 10% and leaving the roots of the plant), and they harvested in a remote location that was historically part of Cherokee territory. Following the trial, the NPS and the EBCI came together to discuss how to ensure Cherokee rights to harvest from their lands.

In the past two decades, the popularity of ramps has grown immensely. An increasing number of ramp festivals have emerged in Appalachia as local communities seek to both celebrate and profit from the popularity of the ramp and its tourism potential (for example, see Richwood, West Virginia, the self-declared “Ramp Capital of the World,” and their annual ramp festival).

Festivals provide an occasion for the community to gather, clean, prepare, and celebrate ramps, a cultural activity that also reinforces community and Appalachian identities.²⁷ Ramps are also highly sought after by “foodies” outside the region. Ecologists and some local communities worry that it threatens ramp yields as ramps are dug up at greater rates for the commodity market.²⁸ Similarly, some scholars and community members worry that it dilutes the cultural meaning of ramps as they are co-opted outside of Appalachian culture and as the emphasis is placed on the cooking and consumption of ramps rather than the gathering and processing of ramps in the community, in the mountains and hollers of Appalachia.²⁹

Foodways and Environmental Justice

In the 1900s, coal companies sought a docile mining workforce and so they recruited immigrants. Italian immigrants, primarily from the Calabria region, arrived. One of the vestiges of this migration was the mixing of foodways and the emergence of Italian-American foodways specific to West Virginia. The most popular food to emerge from this melting pot was the **pepperoni roll**, a yeast-raised roll stuffed with thinly sliced pepperoni or sticks of pepperoni. Mountaineers grow up on these pepperoni rolls, whether served hot and fresh at the Johnson Elementary School cafeteria, eaten during a snack break from skiing, or grabbed at the gas station or the pool snack bar. The origins of the pepperoni roll likely involved some combination of freshly baked bread and slices of *salumi*. Today, Tomaro’s Bakery in Clarksburg, West Virginia, is a multi-generational business started in 1914 by Anthony Tomaro. It and other bakeries like Abruzzino’s continue to thrive through sales of pepperoni rolls and loaves of Italian bread.



Figure 2: Abruzzino's Italian Bakery in Gypsy, West Virginia, has been producing pepperoni rolls (pictured here) since 1985 when Chris Abruzzino, at 21 years old, started the bakery to insure an income for his family. Photo by Amanda Green.

Similar to Italian-American foodways, another set of foodways appears in Appalachia via the Spanish immigrants of Asturias. While Italian immigrants arrived to work in West Virginia's **coal** mines, more than 1500 Spanish immigrants, particularly from the region of Asturias in northern Spain, were recruited to work in the state's zinc factory in Spelter, West Virginia. The mix of Anglo, Italian, and Spanish immigrant families led to racial tensions that still exist today, and food has been one of the tools used to create ethnic boundary markers, or the symbols used to demarcate the created boundaries between different groups. Suronda Gonzalez, also a native of Harrison County, West Virginia, recounts that Asturian families would comment that their poor White neighbors ate cornflakes for dinner, put ketchup on their chorizo, and had no hospitality. ³⁰ According to Gonzalez, one of the only things that united these groups was their reliance on growing their own food to supplement their diets. These foodways brought her West Virginia-born mother and Asturian mother-in-law together as they learned the special dishes of Spain, including *tortilla Espanola* (a traditional omelet with **potatoes**, **eggs**, and **onions**) and *empanadas*. Working together in the kitchen, Gonzalez's mother acquired the knowledge of Spanish foods and became the bearer of the Asturian food tradition as well as her own Appalachian traditions.

The zinc factory in Spelter closed in 2001, and in 2010 the Dupont Company agreed to a settlement of \$150 million: it included a thirty-year medical testing program for the area's residents (\$80 million) and \$70 million toward clean-up and payouts to residents. It turned out Spelter had become a toxic waste site, and in 2011, Spelter was awarded millions to clean up the heavy metals contamination. The immigrant and Appalachian gardens surrounding Spelter were

likely filled with toxins, like the bodies of those who worked there. The toxicity of the water, land, plants, and human bodies represents a case of environmental justice and food justice.

Environmental justice began as a social movement in the 1980s that demanded equitable or fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Residents of Appalachia have often borne a greater share of environmental burdens through exposure to heavy metals and toxins in factories, mines, as well as polluted waterways and soils. Similarly, **food justice** is a movement to build a more equitable and racially just food system ensuring universal access to nutritious, healthy, and culturally appropriate food, safety for food producers, and local control in the food system. The historic gardens of Spelter's Asturian immigrant community were a source of healthy, nutritious food while simultaneously the soils and plants were also enriched with toxins. Many Appalachians today face similar circumstances as their waterways and soils are impacted by mining and factory runoff that potentially pollute their food system. ³¹

Raising the Status of Appalachian Foodways and Cuisine

According to Lucy Long, a new Appalachian cuisine is being generated in Asheville and other Appalachian tourist destinations as part of the process of culinary tourism. **Cuisine**, Long explains, is “a publicly articulated set of dishes, ingredients, styles, aesthetics, and mind-sets that are felt to represent a group's identity through food.”³² Cuisine is what is presented to the public by chefs, cookbook writers, tourism operators, and many more as part of the growth of culinary tourism. **Culinary tourism** is an industry initiative focused on exploratory eating as a basis for the tourism experience. Profit is the primary goal of culinary tourism, and the focus tends to be on gourmet

and high-priced products. It's a new medium of economic development through restaurants and the hospitality sector, as well as through small farmers and those interested in environmental and social justice issues. Long argues that the new Appalachian cuisine moves away from stereotypes (e.g., canned possum and **squirrel**) to focus on producing and eating from the land.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, a small group of chefs, writers, scholars, and farmers has expressly sought to raise the profile of Appalachian cuisine through multiple organizations and mediums. In the literary world, authors have extended the success of the original *Foxfire Book of Appalachian Cookery*.³³ Other notable books and authors include world-renowned author Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, a memoir profiling her family's year of eating local foods from the hills of western Virginia.³⁴ Cookbook author Ronni Lundy won two James Beard awards for her book *Victuals*, described as “a love-letter to Appalachia.”³⁵ *Smoke, Mountain, Roots, Harvest* is Lauren Angelucci McDuffie's cookbook and reflection on growing up in western Virginia, built from her well-regarded blog *Harvest and Honey*.³⁶ *Crystal Wilkinson's Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts* serves as a collection of foodways across five generations of Black **women** in her family, the stories told in their kitchens, hand-written recipes passed down, and photographs shared from her own cherished albums and collected from her relatives.³⁷

Many chefs have also returned to their Appalachian homes, recognizing that the foodways of Appalachia also represent a valuable cuisine. Chef Graham House grew up outside of Asheville

and expressed his youthful desire to leave the region in order to work in more celebrated culinary destinations like Italy and California. Then, when he recognized that Asheville had become a food destination, he told a *New York Times* reporter: “I didn’t respect it as much as I should have. I’d talk about the morels and chanterelles of California; when I got home, I pulled into the driveway and found 10 pounds of black trumpet mushrooms.”³⁸ Chef Sean Brock from southwestern Virginia has also opened two restaurants, Red Bird and

Audrey, in East Nashville dedicated to exploring Appalachian cuisine.³⁹ Black chefs are now leaving a mark on Appalachian foodways, bringing to public consciousness the contributions of the Black community into Appalachian cuisine. Also, major foodie organizations are beginning to recognize the ongoing work of chefs. For example, Chef Hanaan Shabazz, who opened her own establishment, Shabazz Restaurant, in the 1970s in Asheville, North Carolina, was the recipient of the 2020 Ruth Fertel Keeper of the Flame Award, an honor presented by the Southern Foodways Alliance.⁴⁰ The award recognizes the unsung work of culinary tradition bearers like Shabazz who also worked at Asheville’s Southside Kitchen, a project to train, support, and connect marginalized communities to sustainable employment pathways.

At Benne on Eagle in Asheville, North Carolina, Chef de cuisines Ashleigh Shanti (from 2018 to 2020) and Malcolm McMillian (from 2020 to the present) manage a kitchen that pays homage to the Black influence on Appalachian foodways in the historically Black neighborhood called the Block. Shanti made the shortlist on the James Beard Rising Star Chef of the Year award in 2020. Shanti, featured in a *New York Times* profile in 2019, explained that she wanted to cook in ways that celebrated her heritage as a Black woman from the South.⁴¹ For example, to make hummus, she replaced garbanzo beans with **black-eyed peas** and used fermented **benne seeds** (an African staple) for tahini.

In the northern part of West Virginia, Chef Michael Costello and farm manager Amy Dawson have integrated Appalachian traditions at their co-owned restaurant, Lost Creek Farm.⁴² Dawson and Costello use recipes and heritage foods to tell the story of West Virginia, of exploitation by industries like coal and **logging** that destroyed fishing traditions, of the concentration of the seed industry into the hands of four large corporations and the coinciding loss of agrobiodiversity, and of newer exploitation of ramp over-harvesting by new food crazes.⁴³ The duo pulls from the heritage of Spanish immigrants by creating *empanadas* and integrates varieties of corn cultivated by the **Osage** and Shawnee before settlers forced them from their homelands. Costello and Dawson further seek to instill pride in West Virginia foods by reclaiming **vinegar pie** (also known as **desperation pie**), which uses apple cider vinegar and nutmeg to mimic lemon. Costello explained to a group of schoolchildren the significance and pride they should have in heritage foodways: “Say you want a lemon pie, but you don’t have any lemons?” he said. “You do a very creative thing, a very Appalachian thing. You figure it out.” Organizations dedicated to Appalachian cuisine, **agriculture**, and foraging are diverse. In 2014, the Appalachian Food Summit started at Hindman Settlement School in southeastern Kentucky. The goal is to celebrate and support a sustainable future for Appalachian food and people. The **Southern Seed Legacy Project**, in Burnsville, North Carolina, strives to protect genetic diversity and cultural knowledge in the American South through seed-saving networks and a seed and cultural memory bank. The Center for Cherokee Plants and Cherokee Nation Seed Bank, located on Cherokee lands in North Carolina and Oklahoma, provide seeds to tribal citizens to celebrate and pass on

Cherokee agricultural knowledge. Grow Appalachia, established at **Berea College** in 2009, has set a mission to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables by building the capacity of home and community gardens. This is only a snapshot of the myriad number of organizations investing in Appalachian foodways.

Conclusion

As Appalachian foods are revalued in the marketplace, so too are they revalued by Appalachian families. For many, gathering morels and ramps in the early spring, sowing seeds and harvesting corn, beans, and squash in the summer, and hunting deer in the late fall, form the rhythms of life. But for others, like my own family, our growing awareness of the bounty of Appalachia leads us deeper into the woods to seek out the tasty morsels and bring a growing sense of gratitude and belonging to the mountains.

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Before You Read

Thomas Jefferson's grave marker reads simply (and briefly): "here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and a father of the University of Virginia, Born April 2, 1743." Of course, much more can be said. He was president of the United States and governor of Virginia. He was a visionary who sent Lewis and Clark off to explore and report back to him about people and lands west of the Mississippi River. He could envision education and religious and political freedoms for many, yet he could not imagine freedom for the enslaved peoples residing on his plantations or of freedom for enslaved people across many of the American colonies. He could find political compromises, one of which was to count the enslaved as three-fifths of a person. And still it is the soaring rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence which has inspired many freedom loving peoples around the world—then and now.

Introduction by Bill McCann

The Declaration of Independence

by Thomas Jefferson

In Congress, July 4th, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the

establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Georgia

Button Gwinnett

Lyman Hall

George Walton

North Carolina

William Hooper

Joseph Hewes

John Penn

South Carolina

Edward Rutledge

Thomas Heyward, Jr.

Thomas Lynch, Jr.

style="margin-left:50px;" Arthur Middleton

Massachusetts

John Hancock

Maryland

Samuel Chase

William Paca

Thomas Stone

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Virginia

George Wythe

Richard Henry Lee

Thomas Jefferson

Benjamin Harrison

Thomas Nelson, Jr.

Francis Lightfoot Lee

Carter Braxton

Pennsylvania

Robert Morris

Benjamin Rush

Benjamin Franklin

John Morton

George Clymer

James Smith

George Taylor

James Wilson

George Ross

Delaware

Caesar Rodney

George Read

Thomas McKean

New York

William Floyd

Philip Livingston

Francis Lewis

Lewis Morris

New Jersey

Richard Stockton

John Witherspoon

Francis Hopkinson

John Hart

Abraham Clark

New Hampshire

Josiah Bartlett

William Whipple

Massachusetts

Samuel Adams

John Adams

Robert Treat Paine

Elbridge Gerry

Rhode Island

Stephen Hopkins

William Ellery

Connecticut

Roger Sherman

Samuel Huntington

William Williams

Oliver Wolcott

New Hampshire

Matthew

Thornton

[The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson is licensed under Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)



Jefferson, Thomas. "The Declaration of Independence." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

Helen Keller (1880–1968) lost both her sight and hearing due to a disease at the young age of eighteen months. Because of this, she spent the early years of her childhood with a limited means of communication with others. When she was seven years old, her family hired Anne Sullivan, a teacher, to help her learn new ways that she might be able to communicate with others more effectively. With Anne Sullivan’s help, Helen Keller learned how to read, write, and speak English. For the first time in her life, Keller was able to have something she had never experienced before: language. In “The Day Language Came into My Life,” Keller explains what it was like to navigate the world without the ability to utilize language and how important learning to do so was for her.

It is language that answered Keller’s “wordless cry” for something more. Her unique experience helps teach us that our perceptions of the world are influenced by the language we use in which to navigate it. Without language, we might also live in Keller’s “still, dark world” that she was forced to explore “without [a] compass”. Her discussion in her essay teaches us that continuing our own exploration of language and communication is something that will continuously alter the way in which we understand our world. Consistently improving our reading, writing, and comprehension skills is an integral part of mastering “new thought”, which may change the way we perceive our experiences for the rest of our lives—in much the same manner that Keller identifies with her essay.

Introduction by Alisha Helton

Strategy: Talking to the Text

Grab a pen or use the annotation tools on your reader. As you read, interact with the text as if you were having a conversation. For example, you might think

- Oh, that reminds me of _____!
- Let's see if I can put that in my own words.
- I didn't quite understand that. What can I do to try again?
- I don't know that word. I'll look it up.

As you work through those thoughts, mark the text every time you pause to interact with it and show what you’re thinking. When you go back to look at it a second time, you should see the whole back-and-forth between you and the text!

The Day Language Came Into My Life

by Helen Keller

The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrast between the two lives which it connects. It was the third of March 1887, three months before I was seven years old.

On the afternoon of that eventful day, I stood on the porch, dumb, expectant. I guessed vaguely from my mother's signs and from the hurrying to and fro in the house that something unusual was about to happen, so I went to the door and waited on the steps. The afternoon sun penetrated the mass of honeysuckle that covered the porch and fell on my upturned face. My fingers lingered almost unconsciously on the familiar leaves and blossoms which had just come forth to greet the sweet southern spring. I did not know what the future held of marvel or surprise for me. Anger and bitterness had preyed upon me continually for weeks and a deep languor had succeeded this passionate struggle.

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line and had no way of knowing how near the harbor was. "Light! Give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour.

I felt approaching footsteps. I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother. Someone took it, and I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and, more than all things else, to love me.

The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. The little blind children at the Perkins Institution had sent it and Laura Bridgman had dressed it; but I did not know this until afterward. When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word "d-o-l-l." I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly, I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkeylike imitation. In the days that followed I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them pin, hat, cup and few verbs like sit, stand and walk. But my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name.

One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled "d-o-l-l" applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the words "m-u-g" and "w-a-t-e-r." Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that "m-u-g" is mug and that "w-a-t-e-r" is water, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment or tenderness. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I

had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As a cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought, and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. The living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that mother, father, sister, teacher were among them—words that were to make the world blossom for me, “like Aaron’s rod, with flowers.” It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, for the first time longed for a new day to come.

[The Day Language Came into MyLife by Helen Keller is licensed under Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)



Keller, Helen. “The Day Language Came Into My Life.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

This archive video footage from 1928 features one of the only recorded exchanges existing between teacher Anne Sullivan and author Helen Keller. Sullivan recounts Keller's experiences as a blind, deaf, and mute child and the limited modes of communication available at the beginning of their relationship. Keller eventually developed new ways of communicating ideas and emotions through Sullivan's practices of allowing Keller to touch her face and "feel the vibrations of the spoken word." This was Helen Keller's first step towards becoming one of the most important American authors of the 20th century and an important figure in the education of those with disabilities.

Introduction by the editors

How Helen Keller Learned To Talk

Watch the video How Helen Keller Learned To Talk.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/transcoded/c/cf/How_Helen_Keller_Learned_To_Talk.webm/How_Helen_Keller_Learned_To_Talk.webm.360p.vp9.webm

How Helen Keller Learned to Talk [is licensed under Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)



Sullivan, Anne. "How Hellen Keller Learned to Talk." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In this video, John F. Kennedy Jr. takes the oath of office to become the 35th president of the United States. President Kennedy's inauguration speech marks both a milestone in American politics both in terms of televised speeches bringing about a new revolution of political rhetoric and Kennedy's speech itself being remembered as one of the most important speeches of the 20th century. Possibly most well-known among Kennedy's rhetoric are his closing remarks declaring, "ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country."

Introduction by the editors

John F. Kennedy Inauguration Speech

by John F. Kennedy

Watch the video John F. Kennedy Inauguration Speech.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/transcoded/7/74/John_F._Kennedy_Inauguration_Speech.ogv/John_F._Kennedy_Inauguration_Speech.ogv.480p.vp9.webm

John F. Kennedy Inauguration Speech is licensed under [Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)



Kennedy, John F. "John F. Kennedy Inauguration Speech." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

For students who are uncertain about the quality of their writing abilities, AI (artificial intelligence) can act as a tool for remedying skill gaps where they are present. The question is, of course, the extent to which students use AI to supplement their own voice. Artificial intelligence acts as a vehicle for further understanding, but there are strategies for ensuring that this vehicle isn't "self-driving". AI is an excellent navigator, but incapable of original thought. Even when the journey gets difficult, the writer should remain in the driver's seat.

The potential academic integrity concerns with AI are numerous. While Liza Long's chapter describes strategies for ethical use, specific contexts vary. If a student is unsure whether or not a specific use of AI is appropriate, they should consult their professor's official AI policy or (if unavailable or if questions remain) send a polite email asking for clarification.

AI acts as a vehicle for the acquisition of missing skills, but the development of these skills— the trial and failure, the sleepless nights, the distaste brought on by a particularly rough draft— is where growth occurs. Artificial intelligence has its uses, but becoming truly great at anything requires practice and grit. Communicating in the written format is a precious skill that takes a lifetime to develop. College is a time for learning; seize the opportunity when it presents itself.

Introduction by Gabriella Coleman

What is Digital Literacy? Digital Literacy in the Age of AI: Understanding the 8 C's Framework

by Liza Long

Chapter Overview

This chapter explores Doug Belshaw's 8 C's of digital literacy and their application to writing with AI tools. Understanding these components helps writers become more effective and ethical users of AI technology in academic and professional contexts.

Learning Objective

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define and identify the eight components of digital literacy
- Apply each component to AI-assisted writing
- Evaluate your own digital literacy strengths and areas for growth
- Develop strategies for enhancing your digital literacy skills

Introduction

As AI tools become increasingly integrated into the writing process, digital literacy is no longer optional—it's essential. But what exactly does it mean to be digitally literate in an AI-enhanced writing environment? This chapter explores Doug Belshaw's comprehensive framework for digital literacy through the lens of AI-assisted writing.

The 8 C's of Digital Literacy

1. Cultural

- **Definition:** Understanding the contexts and environments in which digital tools are used
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Recognizing when AI use is appropriate in different academic contexts
- Understanding institutional policies on AI use
- Considering cultural implications of AI-generated content
- **Practice Activity:** Analyze different writing scenarios and determine appropriate AI tool use

2. Cognitive

- **Definition:** Mastering the mental processes required to use digital tools effectively
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Understanding how AI language models work
- Developing effective prompting strategies
- Evaluating AI outputs critically
- **Practice Activity:** Create and test different prompts for the same writing task

3. Constructive

- **Definition:** Creating and remixing content using digital tools
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Using AI as a brainstorming partner
- Combining AI-generated content with original writing
- Building upon AI suggestions to create something new
- **Practice Activity:** Generate AI content and transform it into an original piece

4. Communicative

- **Definition:** Effectively communicating through various digital platforms
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Articulating your needs clearly to AI tools
- Maintaining your voice while using AI assistance
- Communicating about AI use with instructors and peers
- **Practice Activity:** Document your AI collaboration process for a writing assignment

5. Confident

- **Definition:** Feeling empowered to use digital tools while understanding their limitations
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Developing comfort with AI writing tools
- Understanding when to trust (and not trust) AI outputs
- Maintaining agency in the writing process
- **Practice Activity:** Journal about your AI writing experiences and comfort level

6. Creative

- **Definition:** Making new things in new ways using digital tools
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Using AI for innovative brainstorming
- Combining AI tools in unique ways
- Developing creative prompting strategies
- **Practice Activity:** Use AI to help generate multiple approaches to a writing task

7. Critical

- **Definition:** Analyzing digital tools and content with a questioning mindset
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Evaluating AI-generated content for accuracy
- Identifying potential biases in AI outputs
- Making informed choices about AI tool use
- **Practice Activity:** Fact-check and analyze an AI-generated text

8. Civic

- **Definition:** Using digital tools to participate in society and contribute to communities
- **AI Writing Application:**
- Understanding ethical implications of AI use
- Contributing to discussions about AI in education
- Using AI responsibly in collaborative projects
- **Practice Activity:** Create guidelines for ethical AI use in group work

Self Assessment

Here's a link to a self assessment you can use to check your own digital literacy. Remember that there are no wrong answers!

<https://claude.site/artifacts/13f30e64-538e-4ba6-b355-2f5d26f2063c>

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the 8 C's do you feel most confident about? Why?
2. Which area needs the most development in your practice?
3. How might improving in each area enhance your writing process?
4. What strategies can you implement to strengthen your weaker areas?

[What is Digital Literacy? Digital Literacy in the Age of AI: Understanding the 8 C's Framework](#) by [Liza Long](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.



Long, Liza. "What is Digital Literacy?" *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric* (2nd ed.), edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

This work comes from the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian online exhibit, *Native Words, Native Warriors*, which documents the history of the American Indian Code Talkers. The Code Talkers were American Indian warriors during World War I and II who served in the U.S. military and used their Native languages to create military codes to communicate messages that the enemy forces could not decipher.

The chapter, “Struggling with Cultural Repression,” examines the early lives of the Code Talkers during the late nineteenth century, when they were sent to boarding schools as children, often against their families’ will. These boarding schools were operated by the U.S. government and churches and their purpose was to assimilate American Indian children to dominant culture by changing everything from their clothing and cultural practices to their Native names and languages. Through archival records and personal stories, this chapter illustrates the harsh realities of these boarding schools and negative impacts on Native children’s self-esteem and cultural identities. At the same time, many held onto elements of their Native culture, including their Native languages, which would later become an asset in their military service.

Introduction by Jeanetta Mohlke-Hill

Struggling with Cultural Repression

from *The National Museum of the American Indian*

View [Struggling with Cultural Repression](#)

The National Museum of the American Indian. “Struggling With Cultural Repression.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In this video, beloved children’s entertainer and television personality Fred Rogers speaks before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications in 1969 regarding funding for PBS programming. Rogers specifically addresses Senator John Pastore, the impatient chairman of the subcommittee who had previously dismissed the arguments of each speaker preceding Mr. Rogers. The exchange here presents a successful rhetorical argument on Roger's part as he creates a strong emotional connection with his audience, Pastore, and sways the opinion of the senator through use of emotional and ethical appeals.

Introduction by the editors

Fred Rogers testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, 1969

by Fred Rogers

Watch the video Fred Rogers testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, 1969.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/transcoded/f/fa/Fred_Rogers_testifies_before_the_Senate_Subcommittee_on_Communications%2C_1969.ogv/Fred_Rogers_testifies_before_the_Senate_Subcommittee_on_Communications%2C_1969.ogv.480p.vp9.webm

Fred Rogers testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, 1969 is licensed under [Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)



Rogers, Fred. “Fred Rogers testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, 1969.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

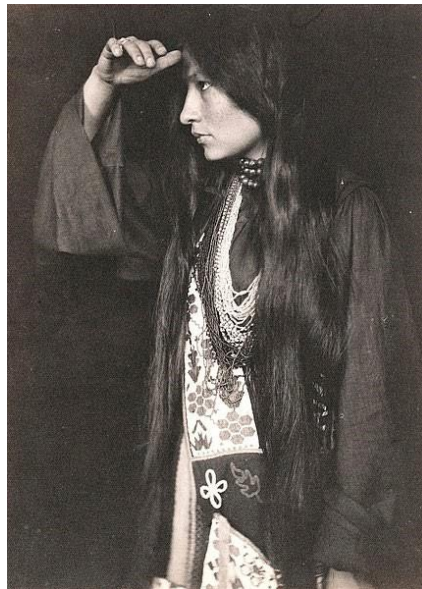
Zitkala-Ša (Red Bird / Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) was a member of the Yankton Dakota Sioux, a Native American tribe in South Dakota. She was born in 1876 on the Yankton Indian Reservation and was raised by her mother. At eight years old, she left the reservation to attend the White's Indiana Manual Labor Institute, a boarding school in Indiana, where she learned to read and write in English. After studying at the boarding school for three years, she returned to the reservation to live with her mother, but eventually went back to the institute to further her education and attended Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. She was an activist for Native American rights. She worked as the secretary of the Society of American Indians and later co-founded the National Council of American Indians with her husband in 1926. She served as president, fundraiser, and speaker of the organization until her death in 1938.

Zitkala-Ša was also a writer; she collected and published Native American stories, *Old Indian Legends*, and collaborated on the *Sun Dance Opera* with William F. Hanson, a professor at Brigham Young University. She was also the editor for *American Indian Magazine* from 1918 to 1919. In her autobiography *The School Days of an Indian Girl*, Zitkala-Ša wrote about her experience attending boarding school. She described the culture shock she experienced, her struggles to learn English and adjust to a different life, her homesickness, and how the children were treated without sympathy, among other topics.

Introduction by Cui Zhang

The School Days of an Indian Girl

by Zitkala-Sa



[“Zitkala Sa, Sioux Indian and activist” by Gertrude Käsebier licensed under Public Domain: No Known Copyright](#)

THE LAND OF RED APPLES.

There were eight in our party of bronzed children who were going East with the missionaries. Among us were three young braves, two tall girls, and we three little ones, Judéwin, Thowin, and I. We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country, which, we were told, lay a little beyond the great circular horizon of the Western prairie. Under a sky of rosy apples we dreamt of roaming as freely and happily as we had chased the cloud shadows on the Dakota plains. We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us. On the train, fair women, with tottering babies on each arm, stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers. Large men, with heavy bundles in their hands, halted near by, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us. I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears.

I sat perfectly still, with my eyes downcast, daring only now and then to shoot long glances around me. Chancing to turn to the window at my side, I was quite breathless upon seeing one familiar object. It was the telegraph pole which strode by at short paces. Very near my mother's dwelling, along the edge of a road thickly bordered with wild sunflowers, some poles like these had been planted by white men. Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it. Now I sat watching for each pole that glided by to be the last one.

In this way I had forgotten my uncomfortable surroundings, when I heard one of my comrades call out my name. I saw the missionary standing very near, tossing candies and gums into our midst. This amused us all, and we tried to see who could catch the most of the sweetmeats.

Though we rode several days inside of the iron horse, I do not recall a single thing about our luncheons.

It was night when we reached the school grounds. The lights from the windows of the large buildings fell upon some of the iced trees that stood beneath them. We were led toward an open door, where the brightness of the lights within flooded out over the heads of the excited palefaces who blocked our way. My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon.

Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair. A rosy-cheeked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing

enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud.

They misunderstood the cause of my tears, and placed me at a white table loaded with food. There our party were united again. As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, "Wait until you are alone in the night."

It was very little I could swallow besides my sobs, that evening.

"Oh, I want my mother and my brother Dawée! I want to go to my aunt!" I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me.

From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes, which I learned afterward to call a stairway. At the top was a quiet hall, dimly lighted. Many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall. In them lay sleeping brown faces, which peeped just out of the coverings. I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me.

I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I had thought I should be. My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.

THE CUTTING OF MY LONG HAIR.

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt. A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I heard a man's voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at

the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judéwin said, “We have to submit, because they are strong,” I rebelled.

“No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!” I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed, I disappeared. I crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps near by. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my name, and I knew that even Judéwin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Women and girls entered the room. I held my breath and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Some one threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.

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Zitkala-Sa. "The School Days of an Indian Girl." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

This article is reprinted from the Daily Yonder's publishing partner 100 Days in Appalachia.

Appalachia is, and has been for decades, lagging behind the rest of the nation in a number of health outcomes. The region struggles with heart disease, diabetes, cancer and much more.

But new research on the rate at which Appalachians are dying has health officials calling for more investments in not just health care but in education and economic development to reverse the trend.

A recent [study by the National Center for Health Statistics](#) found that in 2017, four of the five states with the highest death rates in the U.S. lie either partially or fully in Appalachia: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and West Virginia. These four states, and the fifth on the list, Oklahoma, saw people dying at a rate 50 percent higher than the five states with the lowest rates: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Minnesota and New York.

The elevated death rates were reflected in the top five causes of death in the country: heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory diseases and unintentional injuries. The rate for chronic lower respiratory diseases was double that of the five lowest states on the list; the rate for unintentional injuries, nearly so.

“We knew that mortality rates vary widely by state; that has been the case for a long time,” said Jiaquan Xu, an epidemiologist with the National Center for Health Statistics and author of the study. But for several of the causes in the states with the highest rates, he said, “those rates are much higher than we originally thought.”

The purpose of Xu's study was simply to present the statistics. It does not dig deeper into the causes of the disparate rates seen across the country, nor the elevation of the rates in Appalachian states. But Xu trusts there will be people sufficiently concerned by his findings to delve into the causes. Randy Wykoff is one such person.

Roadmap to a Healthier Future

Wykoff is the dean of East Tennessee State University's College of Public Health. In research of his own, he's dug deeper into the death rates of central Appalachian counties and their causes.

Wykoff has looked closely at the death rate of the 238 counties that make up the central part of the region. Those counties are in Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. He found the mortality rate in those counties to be a little more than 25 percent worse than that of the rest of the country.

His research also indicates that the death rate for those Appalachian counties is about 25 percent worse than that of the 353 non-Appalachian counties in the same six states.

“What we see in Appalachia is just considerably worse health as measured by early death, among many other statistics,” Wykoff said.

In a 2017 paper titled “[The Future of Appalachia: Health](#),” Wykoff and coauthor Olivia Egen, an ETSU doctoral student, noted that an American in the poorest income category is three times more likely to die before the age of 65 than an American in the wealthiest category.

Educational attainment plays a critical role in life expectancy, Wykoff said at a recent gathering of health care professionals hosted by the University of Kentucky’s [Center of Excellence in Rural Health](#) in Hazard. There, he cited research that shows that the life expectancy of a black man in the U.S. with a college degree is almost 81, while that of a black man with at most a high school education is 71.

Low educational achievement and poor health are interlinked in a number of ways. “One is that they are both the result of long-standing poverty,” Wykoff said. “There’s the common-causal relationship of the two; things that lead to poor health also lead to lack of education.”

But there’s also a direct relationship. “People who are less educated tend to get jobs that are more stressful and physically damaging,” he said, citing, for example, coal mining and other extraction-industry occupations. Others work in service-industry or part-time or temporary jobs – jobs with low wages and no health benefits.

Wykoff’s voice is among the many in central Appalachia arguing that there are accessible avenues to a better education for all, which can, in turn, lead to a healthier population. In 2005, he said, Tennessee ranked among the states with the lowest high school graduation rates in the country. “[But] by last year,” he said, “we were in the top 10. So you can’t say that these are things we can’t change. We know we can.”

The private sector is stepping up to invest in educational programming for rural Tennessee students, Wykoff said, and the state’s [Tennessee Promise](#) program, which covers tuition and fees for students to attend community college or other institutions offering associate degrees, will also make a difference in future health outcomes.

The Interconnectedness

But, Wykoff cautioned, in order to build a healthier Appalachia, we must create opportunities throughout the whole of the region. Without well-paying jobs close to home, he said, “When you say, ‘Hey, get your college degree and you’ll be better off,’ what that really means is, ‘Get your college degree and if you leave this area you’ll be better off.’”

Economic development, he stressed, is essential. “We’ve got to have jobs for people, meaningful jobs, once they get their education...It’s inseparable: economic development, education and health.”

Wykoff believes that the region’s elected officials, educators and business, community and faith leaders are increasingly aware of this interconnectedness. “I think we’re starting to have the right conversations,” he said.

He quotes a phrase commonly attributed to former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Tip O’Neill: “All politics is local.”

“I like to say that all public health is local,” Wykoff said. “That’s not [entirely] true, but it’s somewhat true. You’ve got to have communities coming together and saying, ‘Okay, we want to do something about this.’”

In their “Future of Appalachia” paper, Wykoff and Egen outline some broad, essential initiatives that must be advanced, including changing health-related behaviors (smoking, poor diet, no exercise), addressing the social conditions associated with poor health (economic opportunity, investment in education), improving access to care (spoke-and-hub hospital systems, mobile services, telehealth) and disrupting intergenerational cycles of poor health (health-related education and encouragement for new parents and elementary-school kids and in the workplace and faith communities).

Ultimately, the authors acknowledge, efforts to lower death rates, and elevate the quality of life, in Appalachia must begin at the beginning. They write: “What we eat, how we exercise, our commitment to education, our understanding of health, and many other factors, are driven by the environment we grow up in.”

It’ll take time, but, the authors conclude, “if we work together to assure that every child in Appalachia has the best possible start in life we will see a dramatic change over the course of that child’s life.” Children who grow up in this “new” Appalachia “will not only be healthier, but they will also become the agents of change over the ensuing generations.”

[Appalachians Are Dying At A Faster Rate Than The Rest Of The Nation](#)

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Before You Read

The Dude Map is a visual and interactive text that challenges that idea that word usage or slang is “right” or “wrong.” Instead, the words we use are often bound in

- time (Would you call a friend “Daddy-O”?),
- space (Do you stand “in line” or “on line”?), or
- situation (What would your professor do if you stood up and yelled “Defense!” in the middle of class?)

Introduction by the editors

The Dude Map

by Nikhil Sonnad

View [The Dude Map](#) and ask yourself how you could remake this map with different words like Coke, soda, and pop.

What times, spaces, or situations (i.e. contexts) affect the words *you* use?

Sonnad, Nikhil. “The Dude Map.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In “A Feminist’s Guide to Rom-Coms,” Aya Sutriasa addresses an important question to everyone who consumes popular culture: can we ethically enjoy movies, music, books, and shows that don’t align with our individual values, and if so, how? Her essay explains the problems some feminists have with romantic comedies (and the romance genre in general) and offers strategies to those who still want to watch and enjoy rom-coms. Other fans and scholars of rom-coms argue that romance is feminist because it centers women’s experiences and pleasure. Do you agree with Sutriasa’s claim that “rom-coms can be problematic, particularly by today’s standards of feminism”? Do her criticisms and suggestions apply equally to other types of popular culture, including those primarily directed at men (for example, action movies)?

A 2016 graduate of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, Aya Sutriasa is currently Digital Editor at YES! Media, an independent, non-profit publisher of online journalism focused on social issues and solutions, based in Seattle, Washington. Her other published essays address issues related to body image, particularly for women of color.

Introduction by Susan Kroeg

A Feminist’s Guide to Rom-Coms and How to Watch Them

by Ayu Sutriasa



["Love's Messenger" by Marie Spartali Stillman, Delaware Art Museum is in the Public Domain](#)

Valentine's Day is right around the corner, which means lots of chocolate, teddy bears, and single ladies being made to feel especially inadequate. Some might celebrate [Galentine's Day](#) instead, some might skip on acknowledging the holiday at all, and some, myself included, will be holed up watching romantic comedies.

[The internet is filled with lists of which rom-coms will “get you through” Valentine's Day—the assumption seems to be that, otherwise, we singles would be festering alone in our living rooms, drinking vodka and singing “All By Myself” à la Bridget Jones. I enjoy the genre, but as a feminist I have some qualms.](#)

Romantic comedies, particularly “the classics” of the genre, can be [problematic](#) by today's standards of feminism. Movies like *Pretty Woman* and *Princess Bride* tend to perpetuate [harmful gender stereotypes](#) and romanticize men's predatory behavior. Not to mention they are usually limited to depicting heterosexual relationships between an attractive cis man and an equally, perhaps even more, attractive cis woman. (LGBTQ folks: Here's [a list of rom-coms](#) that drown out the heteronormative noise.) Lastly, if [rom-coms are marketed to single women, then why are they mostly written and directed by men? \(That's a rhetorical question.\)](#)

Despite all this, rom-coms are stunningly popular. How do you reconcile your love of rom-coms with your staunch feminism?

Monique Jones, a pop culture critic and entertainment journalist, says that it's OK if you like problematic rom-coms. “That doesn't make us any less of an activist, it doesn't make us any less down for the cause. It's just being a human—and being part of a culture that has indoctrinated us to believe certain things, whether or not they're true,” she says.

However, as feminists we do have to hold ourselves accountable, Jones says. Here are three tips on how to be a responsible rom-com consumer.

Be aware of how you're internalizing the underlying messages

One of the biggest problems with the genre is that it tends to reinforce problematic ideas of romance. Contrary to rom-com plots, it's actually not an outrageous notion for a man to love you “just as you are” (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Trainwreck*, *Pretty Woman*, *Grease*), but it actually is outrageous for a man to consistently ignore your rejections and relentlessly pursue you (*The Notebook*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *50 First Dates*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*).

“There are a lot of patriarchal things in society that we've grown up with that we've just assumed are normal. And those same ideals get stuck in these movies. That's why so many of them don't get called out as being problematic, even though they are indicative of larger problems in society,” Jones says.

Once you're aware of the patriarchal underpinnings of these movies, you can more objectively decide what you believe is romantic. For example, maybe you don't think it's romantic to

pretend to be someone’s fiancée while they are in a coma and have no idea who you are. It’s creepy, Sandra Bullock.

Be conscious of what/who you are supporting

This takes some research, but it’s worth it ([IMDB](#) will be your new best friend). Jones suggests learning what you can about the movie: Who’s the director? Who wrote it? Who acts in it? What’s the premise? “If you don’t feel offended, then I think it’s fine to watch,” Jones says.

And for the movies we don’t feel good about—like anything involving Woody Allen— consider skipping it. “I can’t justify having my head in the sand just to support somebody like Woody Allen,” Jones says. She skips anything with his name attached to it.

“I never liked his movies anyway. They don’t speak to me, first of all, as a woman, and second of all, as an African-American woman,” she says. “I know all the film critics and film students that I have been in contact with say that Woody Allen is a master at doing this and that. But I don’t align with anything that he does or is. And that’s how I go about it. If what the person does doesn’t align with my core values, then I just can’t do it.”

There are funnier, more romantic movies than *Annie Hall*, anyway.

Opt for rom-coms with fewer or zero problems

I know the classics are, well, classics, but why not watch a movie that takes a healthier approach to romance? “There are always movies that are smaller productions, and they might not have the big box-office dollars, but they’re still well-crafted, well-made movies,” Jones says.

Here’s a [list](#) of five from Thought Catalog to get you started: *Warm Bodies*, *She’s Out of My League*, *Celeste* and *Jesse Forever*, *My Best Friend’s Wedding*, and *Kate and Leopold* (sarcasm).

So, my fellow feminist rom-comphiles, don’t be discouraged.

There are still a lot of things people can enjoy about romantic comedies, Jones says. “With as much choice as there is out there, a person doesn’t have to give up their romantic comedy love altogether.”

[A Feminist’s Guide to Rom-Coms and How to Watch Them](#) by Ayu Sutriasa is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).



Sutriasa, Ayu. “A Feminist’s Guide to Rom-Coms and How to Watch Them.” *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

In this essay, literacy scholar and educator Dr. Kristen Pennycuff Trent stitches together a pleasantly nostalgic quilt of memories reminiscing on early childhood days spent in rural Tennessee. Inviting readers to reconnect with their own roots, she reflects on experiences of making genuine maple syrup with her family in the 1980s, before unpacking the joys of reviving that tradition with her own children, reliving “a memory made from the lavishness of love and the ingenuity of mountain resourcefulness.” She and her siblings proudly pass this torch to the next generation.

This cozy, autoethnographical piece explores a history of Appalachian foodways while maintaining ties to the present, painting scenes that bridge the gap between what once was and the now. Dr. Pennycuff Trent’s curiosity about, advocacy for, and extensive knowledge of (not to mention personal ties to) Appalachian culture, make for an exceptionally warm piece that explores the very nuanced process of discovering one’s heritage. Most important of all, this essay highlights the infinite details that may be discovered just beneath the veneer of the present, especially when someone actively chooses to explore the rich and verdant history that birthed their own existence.

Introduction by Lauren Blair

Poor Man’s Maple Syrup Cultivates a Rich Family Heritage

by Kristen Pennycuff Trent, PhD

My favorite memory from childhood was making maple syrup in the early eighties. Aunts, uncles, my parents, my sisters, and I all gathered at my maternal grandparents’ cabin in Pall Mall, Tennessee, near Sargeant Alvin C. York’s home site. In my memory, it was fall. We all wore layers of flannel, warm jackets, and boots, first bumping up the steep, washed-out road in pickup trucks to the mountain field, then crunching through thick layers of leaves carpeting the cold earth below our feet. My Mamma’s flaming mane and my Poppy’s white hair topped by a woolen cap were leading the way. I now know that sugaring must take place in the spring, usually between the end of February and mid-March, as the sap flows when temperatures drop below freezing at night and rise above freezing during the day. In my heart, though, autumn winds caused the cold to press against my cheeks and the metal buckets to clang as I tried to keep up with the grownups. I can see the looming blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), hollowed out in middle, just the right size for a child to step inside and look up into the inky shadows. It is a place my aunts told me that elves lived, but we could never see them because they always had to bake cookies far away on the weekends when we were there. If only we could come during the week...

The grownups’ laughter and snippets of teasing conversation echoed through the steep side of the mountain. We stopped often, and Poppy, J.C. Copley, would take a wooden chute that he had

carved in front of the fire and a wooden mallet to tap the chute into the sugar maple tree (*Acer saccharum*). He would lift us up, me or one of my sisters, to place the bucket on a notch, holding it in place for the sap that would ooze down in hazy hope. It looked nothing like the amber flow of sticky syrup my pancakes would swim in, but before I could ask questions, we were off to the next tree.

The next day, we returned to collect our treasure, and I was dismayed to see a few leaves and bugs in the pale liquid. Catching my expression, Poppy reminded me that faith was part of the process. My stomach lurched, and I decided then and there that I would not be eating this concoction. We filled bucket after bucket with the sticky swill, and I remember being unusually quiet as we eased back down the gullied rock road. Every pot in the kitchen was on the stove or the counter, and my great-great-grandmother's kettle was steaming on the hearth. I watched as the grownups struggled to pour the pale liquid through a sieve before simmering it all day and into the night. The sweet stickiness of being surrounded by love and laughter wafted upstairs in a sugary haze as I drifted off to sleep.

Rising with the sun, I took the wide log planks two at a time, as my Mamma (pronounced ma'am-maw), Mildred Linder Copley, flipped stacks of pancakes onto her Blue Onion plates. The sweet scent of syrup hung thickly in the air, like my hesitation to try the amber liquid on the table before me. I willed myself to take the tiniest bite, sighing with relief and joy that it didn't taste like bugs or leaves or liquids that slump into buckets. Digging into my plate, I was lost in an ordinary breakfast in a scene that I didn't know would come to be so treasured. After all, didn't everyone have grandparents who read Foxfire books and tried to bring back the old ways? Who used hand-hewn logs to expand their cabin, and turned the hulled-out bark into an impromptu slip and slide? Who preserved the precious way of life for their children's children? And created memories and stories that would be shared over and over until they were as soft and worn as an heirloom quilt?

Over forty years later, my brother-in-law, Matt Harris, a PE teacher and avid homesteader, considered the often-told story of making maple syrup and decided he wanted to give the same experience to Poppy and Mamma's great-grandchildren. He led seven children from ages seven to sixteen, my sisters and I, our husbands, and our father in search of perfect sugaring maples. The best trees were marked by rings of small holes encircling the trunk at varying heights made by the Yellow-Bellied Sap Suckers (*Sphyrapicus varius*). We searched in Fentress County, on land that housed my parents' farm, Matt and Kacee's family farm, my Uncle Bill Pennycuff's farm, and our cabin. A new generation tapped the trees, gathered the slow-moving sap, and called out with laughter from tree to tree. "Aunt Kacee, you won't believe this! Mom, come look! This one is overflowing, Pa! Don't be a yellow-bellied sap sucker!" We filled several truck beds with our treasure in food grade plastic buckets and soon taught our children how to filter the viscous riches into a galvanized evaporation pan over a brick firebox.

It was there, sitting around the fire, watching the sap steam and turn from a light yellow to deep amber, that my father, Joe Pennycuff, called "Pa" by my children, nieces, and nephews, shared stories from his own childhood. He told us how his father, Willard Pennycuff, walked several miles to work on a nearby farm from sunrise to sunset for fifty cents a day. He was paid in corn, grateful for a way to provide for his family during the Depression. Pa's mother, Blanche Manis

Pennycuff, raised most of their food but bought flour and pinto beans in 50-pound bags to get them through the winter with their six children. They canned Little White Half Runners, sweet corn, and tomatoes in gallon, not quart, jars. It was a family mission to have at least 100 gallons of blackberries put up at the end of each summer. Additional groceries were traded for Grandma Pennycuff's freshly churned butter at Johnson's grocery store and free-range eggs at Arnold Wright's general store. Pa also recalled a special treat, hickory bark syrup, better known as Poor Man's Maple Syrup, which his grandmother, Arie Storie Manis (born in 1898), made for him, his sister, and his four brothers. He spoke of eating the sweet, dark brown syrup over biscuits or on pancakes, the smooth caramel flavor marked by a complex sharpness. Intrigued, we decided we needed to make this delicacy too.

The next weekend, Pa's sister, Ann Pennycuff Cobb, brought Grannie Manis's recipe for Scaly Hickory Bark Syrup. Although Grannie Manis cooked as most of her generation did, through memory and feel, Aunt Ann had watched her carefully and written down several of Grannie's recipes in the practiced script of a teacher for over 37 years (see Fig. 1).

Scaly Hickory Bark Syrup

Wash bark. put in lig pot
Cover with water boil for
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hrs, may have to add
water as it boils down.

Strain to get all settlements
out of water.

1 qt hickory water

1 qt sugar

Boil this down until it becomes
syrup. About 30 to 45 mins.

My Grandma Manis made
this every winter for us.

Fig. 1 Scaly Bark Hickory Syrup recipe from Arie Storie Manis as transcribed by Ann Pennycuff Cobb.

She had gathered strips of shagbark hickory or scaly bark hickory (*Carya ovata*), which are naturally loosened at both ends of long, wide planks of bark, making it easier to harvest without harming the tree. The grandchildren, Pa, and my sister and I all carefully washed the bark under cold running water (see Figure 2), laying pieces out on cookie sheets to dry and roast in the oven. A deep smoky scent, reminiscent of bacon and barbeque, soon wafted throughout the kitchen. The bark was then taken outside to the evaporator pan where it was broken in smaller pieces to infuse more flavor, covered in water (see Figure 3), simmered over a fire, stirred with a long paddle (see Figure 4), and steeped for approximately one and a half to two hours, allowing plenty of time for more stories to be told until the hickory bark tea was a dark brown color (see Figure 5).



Fig. 2 *Washing scaly hickory bark before roasting*



Fig. 3 Roasted scaly hickory pieces added to the evaporation pan with water



Fig. 4 Joe "Pa" Pennycuff stirs scaly hickory bark tea



Fig. 5 Scaly hickory bark tea is ready to be strained

Those of us who were brave enough tried the tea. Although the cup had been sweetened with sugar, it was too tannic and smoky for our tastes before it was reduced. Once the tea was strained using both a larger and smaller mesh sieve, it was mixed with an equal part of sugar and reduced into large pots on the stove until it became a dark, thick syrup (see Figure 6). We immediately decanted it into pint and quart-sized Mason jars (see Figure 7), hardly being able to wait for it to cool before tasting. Pouring some on a plate, we dipped warm biscuits into the dark syrup, reveling in the complex sweetness that had a sharper, smoky finish. Later, we would experiment using the syrup in homemade ice cream, pecan and hickory nut pies, cakes, and cookies, giving hints of smoke-filled nuttiness and notes of caramel. It also made a wonderful addition to homemade marinades and sauces for roasted vegetables and meats. One brother-in-law enjoyed it in bourbon-based cocktails, while my sisters and I found it made delightful lattes.

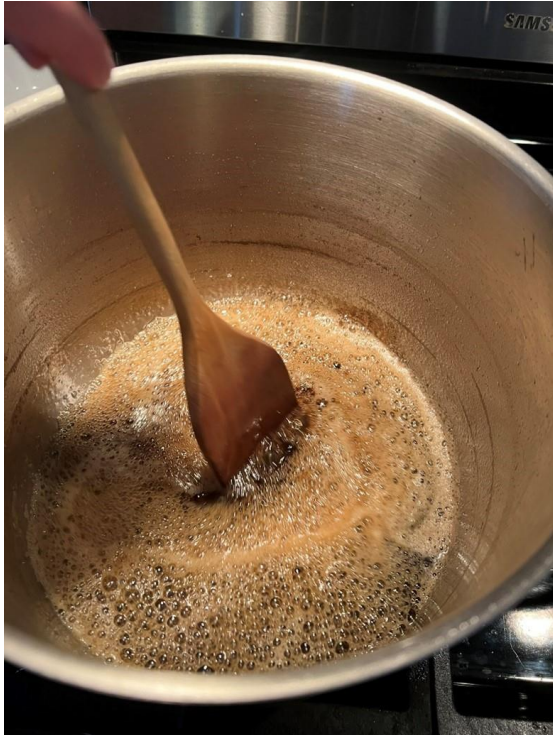


Fig. 6 Reducing scaly hickory bark tea to create syrup



Fig. 7 Pint jar of poor man's maple syrup

Pa and Aunt Ann reminisced about how Poor Man's Maple Syrup never lasted long enough to be bottled or stored when they were younger. It was made from humble ingredients foraged from nature. Tree bark and water were steeped to make tea, sugar was added, and the mixture was boiled down to create a treat to go with a special dessert or breakfast. It was used sparingly, not something that would appear every day. The distinctive flavor and process were imprinted in the hearts of two youngsters more than sixty years ago. Today they sought not just a taste, but a memory...a memory made from the lavishness of love and the ingenuity of mountain resourcefulness.

This made me think of how both syrups were made with foraged ingredients provided by the trees and the land. Sap was collected and boiled down, creating a sticky cloud of sweetness before turning into a sugary stream of amber. How did our forebears learn to gather the sap inside a tree or shear the bark upon it to make such special condiments? Most likely, it was knowledge shared by the region's Indigenous peoples. In [Aller's](#) (2010) estimation, European colonists were the fourth group to reside in Appalachia, preceded by Native Americans, Melungeons, and Africans brought by French and Spanish explorers.

I became extremely interested in finding a recipe for hickory bark syrup in historical cookbooks, and it soon became the source of great distress. Despite searching multiple digital archives, printed collections, and even contacting a few hickory bark syrup manufacturers, my work was futile. The only published recipes I could find for hickory bark syrup were on modern websites.

I was able to locate uses of hickory trees, including to make yellow and green dye with hickory bark and other natural elements ([M. Lewis](#), 1830; [The Cook Not Mad](#), 1831; [Williams](#), 1858; and [Chase](#), 1864). [Williams](#) (1858) also guided readers on how to preserve ham using hickory smoke, as did many other authors ([Brown](#), 1871; [Corson](#), 1886; [Elliot](#), 1877; [An Old Housekeeper](#), 1845). [Leslie](#) (1828, 1839, 1847) admonished readers to use hickory rods for beating eggs or creaming together butter and sugar. An 1864 ([Chase](#)) recipe called for hickory ashes and lime to be used in the brewing of hard cider, as well as adding both to rock salt, copperas, and potash for a fireproof paint. [Terrill](#) (1852) advocated for the use of hickory ashes to be mixed with bran and applied to wounds as a pain reliever and to prevent tetanus. He also promoted the use of wet ashes applied to the chest and throat for infections and croup. [Lea](#) (1859) advised that hickory ashes and soot could be mixed with water and given before and after meals for those who suffered from "Bilious Colic and Indigestion" (267). [Brown](#) (1871) gave readers directions for making hickory ashes into lye for soap and hominy, while [Croly](#) (1874) cautioned readers against feeding young children "hard apples, or lumpy potatoes, tough meat, or sour bread, rich cake, or hickory nuts" stating that it would cause "irritation, and derangement" (305).

I found recipes for hickory nut cake beginning in 1859, common in many cookbooks with several tomes printing more than one version of the delicacy ([Cary](#), 1920; [Harland](#), 1873; [Ladies'](#), 1894). Other variations for this cake included Thanksgiving Cake ([Wilcox](#), 1877), Blackberry Jam Cake ([Ladies'](#), 1894), Liebe Kuchen ([Church](#), 1901), fruitcake ([Sebewaing](#), 1912), and Shellbark Layer Cake ([Thomas](#), 1915). Hickory nut frosting and filling were also popular recipes, usually listed separately from cakes ([Church](#), 1901; [First M. E. Church](#), 1900; [Wilcox](#), 1877). These were commonly boiled icings, calling for nuts, sweet milk, sugar,

cornstarch, vanilla, and sometimes adding grated chocolate ([Cary](#), 1920; [Church](#), 1901; [Wilcox](#), 1877).

Hickory nut candy was another common recipe ([Church](#), 1901; [Elliot](#), 1877; [Women's Guild of Trinity Parish](#), 1899) with variations from cream candy, taffy, and rolled candy logs bearing names such as Aunt Top's Nug Taffy ([Wilcox](#), 1877), New Year's Candy (Woman's, 1908), and Nut Butter Balls ([Lewis & Peacock](#), 2003). [Gillette's White House Cook Book](#) (1887) even suggests that hickory nut cakes and candies may have been served to presidential audiences. Cookies with hickory nuts were also prominently featured ([Burr](#), 1890; [Ladies'](#), 1894; [Lewis & Peacock](#), 2003; [Sebewaing](#), 1912), typically as sugar cookies. One receipt for Hermits called for one cup of chopped hickory nuts ([Church](#), 1901), and another from the great Edna Lewis called for two cups of grated hickory nuts ([Lewis](#), 2006). Lep Cookies ([Burr](#), 1890), Boston Cookies ([Farmer](#), 1896), and Hickory Nut Cakes ([Thomas](#), 1915) were other names for hickory nut cookies, and one recipe for Christmas Cookies with hickory nuts boasted that they would last all winter ([First M. E. Church](#), 1900).

All this continued to leave me puzzled. While recipes calling for hickory nuts were prevalent, the only other recipes I could find for hickory bark syrup existed on blogs posted in recent years. Why were there no recipes for hickory bark syrup in historical cookbooks? Certainly, books were a prized luxury for my Appalachian ancestors, but shouldn't there be some record of the syrup? After all, an 1867 report titled [The Market Assistant: Containing a Brief Description of Every Article of Human Food Sold in the Public Markets of the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn](#) (De Voe) described hickory nuts as being a commercially available product. If the nuts were available in metropolitan areas, wouldn't the wealthy citizens of those cities also know about hickory bark syrup? I thought I might have found an answer in Kalm's 1778 report:

“In some places in Canada and Albany [New York] the inhabitants collect as much of this sap as possible and cook sugar from it, which is said to be sweeter than that obtained from the sugar maple. The hickory gives such small quantities of sap, however, that it does not compensate for the work.” (Kalm, 1778 in [Larsen](#), 1945, 61, brackets added)

While Albany is further east than the Appalachian region, the county in which it is located borders Schoharie County, which is a recognized district in Appalachian New York. Thinking this close enough to tie hickory bark syrup to the region, I first began to wonder if perhaps the amount of work involved in making the syrup, as well as access to the raw material of scaly hickory bark might be part of the problem. Then, it occurred to me that in all my research in historical cookbooks, there was never a recipe for real maple syrup either. Maple syrup was a product purchased or traded for in markets by most home cooks. Perhaps only those individuals who could forage would need such a recipe, and then, it was unlikely to be written down and shared with others. I was perplexed, though, by a current purveyor of hickory bark syrup whose website cited a record of hickory syrup making from 1882. I contacted the owner of the establishment to ask for the bibliographic entry but was told that no recipes existed. She had tried extensively to find one and could not supply the 1882 source.

My quest continued until, while searching through primary source documents on the Smithsonian Libraries site, I stumbled upon a seemingly irrelevant anecdote from 1906 about a penny-pinching farmer. It said:

Before the pure-food era, he sold maple molasses, which he manufactured from hickory-bark and corn-cobs. He used to take an apple that had one rotten side, cut it in halves, and stick the good half, by means of a little wooden peg, to the good half of another apple similarly affected. ([Railroad Man's Magazine](#), 1906, 62)

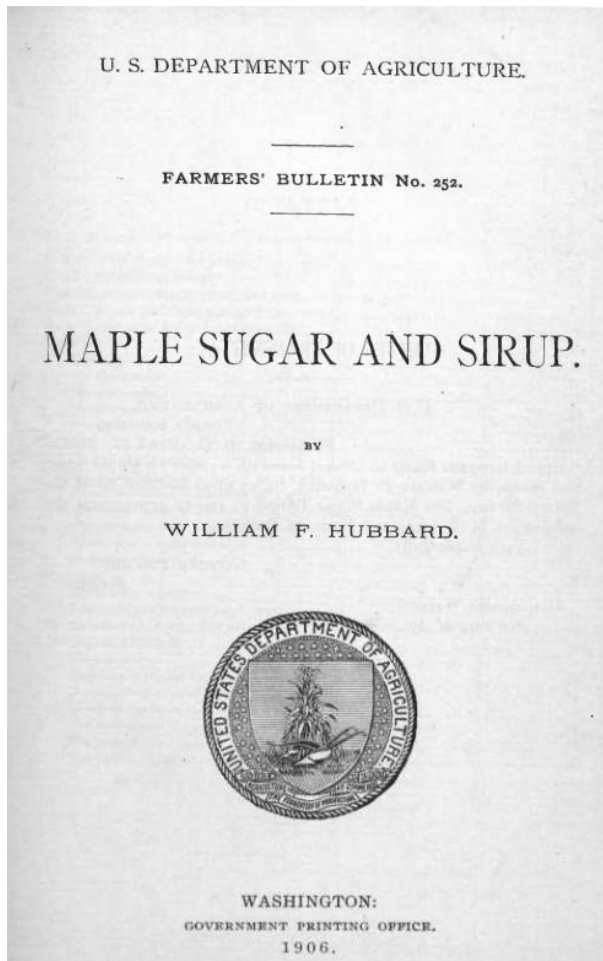


Fig. 8 Maple Sugar and Sirup

Suddenly, I had a link between maple syrup and hickory bark syrup. With maple molasses as my new search term, I found *Maple Sugar and Sirup* ([Hubbard](#), 1906). On page 252, I read:

A flavor like that of maple is said to be imparted to sirup by mixing it with an extract of hickory bark. An Indiana man a few years ago took out a patent to protect him in the use of such an extract from the wood and bark of hickory trees for flavoring sirup.

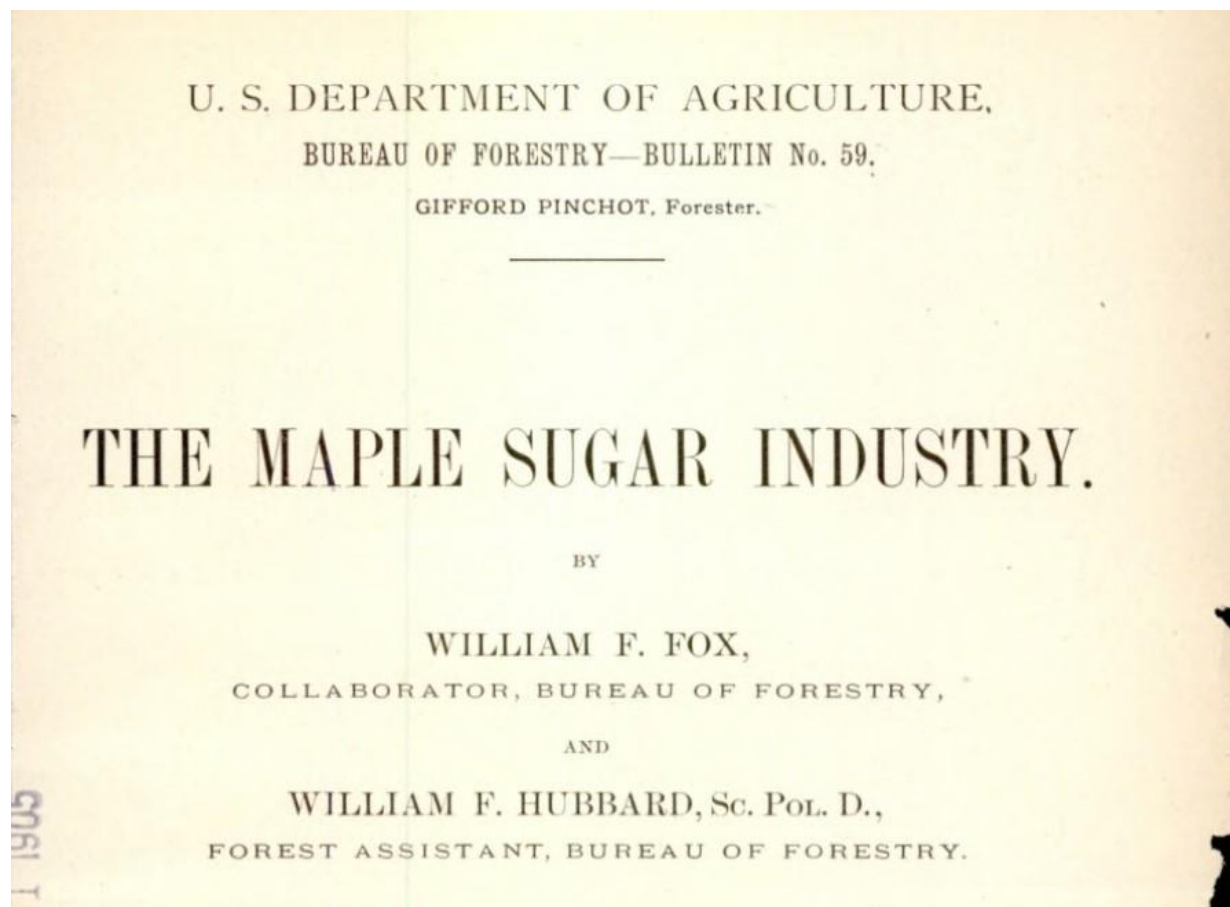


Fig. 9 The Maple Sugar Industry Bulletin from the United States Department of Agriculture.

A few more searches, and I found the missing links in yet another bulletin from the United States Department of Agriculture, *The Maple Sugar Industry* ([Hubbard & Fox](#), 1905). There I read:

In regard to the adulteration of maple sirup, an attempt was made a few years ago to make an imitation article which was sold both under the name of maple sirup and mapleine. This product was manufactured under a patent issued to a resident of Madison, Indiana, dated July 18, 1882, and reissued February 13, 1883. (50)

It went on to include the actual patent application:

The object of my invention is to impart to saccharine matter the flavor of maple sirup, and the invention consists in the use of an extract of hickory for giving the desired flavor. The extract is to be obtained in any convenient manner, such as making a decoction of the hickory bark or wood, or percolating liquid through the same, or drawing off the sap from the tree. The bark or wood of the hickory tree may be ground to facilitate the extraction of its principle, and the extract may be made more or less strong by increasing or diminishing the quantity of bark or wood, or by boiling the extract for a longer or shorter time...The effect of the extract or

decoction is to give to the sirup the flavor of maple, producing a sirup which cannot be distinguished from genuine maple sirup. (50-51)

There it was: the first published instance of hickory bark syrup. It even referenced mapleine, which I had read about in [Thomas](#)' recipe for a homemade version of faux maple syrup. This reminded me of something I read in [Harland's cookbook from 1875](#):

If possible, buy maple sugar direct from "sugar camps," or their vicinity, and in large blocks. The pretty scalloped cakes offered by peanut vendors at treble [sic] the price of the genuine article, are largely adulterated with other substances. (382)

Apparently, the practice of adulterating maple sugar products was not new. In fact, the state of Vermont passed laws against the practice in 1884 and increased the financial penalization in 1890. Luckily for my family, hickory bark syrup was never about watering down maple syrup. It was always about using ingredients provided by the land we lived on to bring joy to those we love.

Both maple and scaly bark hickory syrup were products of necessity, created by people who were proud to use what they had to make do and get by. They are both products that are now considered artisanal, with hickory bark syrup selling for upwards of \$15.00 for 8 ounces in farmstands, gourmet markets, and even the gift shops of George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello. Grannie Manis would be shocked to see the prices her homemade confection could bring. I wonder if she knew her humble syrup would bring her grandson's children and grandchildren such a sense of pride and nostalgia for a simpler time.

I was reminded of my own two children as they joined in making hickory bark syrup. They were eager to help: washing bark, making up silly songs, asking why the kitchen smelled like Pa's prize-winning pulled pork, breaking bark into small pieces, begging to stir the concoction in the evaporator, and add the sugar into the hickory tea. Eyes gleaming. Faces tilted back in laughter. Wonder, determination, and pride emanating with every move. Was this the foundation of their favorite childhood memory, beginning to etch itself on their hearts? This moment unfurling: multiple generations, working together for something bigger than each one of them, larger than just making a sugary solution. We were making memories, sharing our family heritage, and passing down our traditional foodways.

I thought about the juxtaposition between Grannie Manis and myself. She provided hickory bark syrup as a treat for everyday moments of life, breakfast and dessert. I, on the other hand, had scheduled field trips over the years to the Museum of Appalachia and Blue Heron Mine and on hikes in the Great Smoky Mountains and Big South Fork for forced family fun. I booked cooking classes for making homemade pasta and baking French macarons. I enlisted my children's help in making heirloom holiday specialties, carefully curating the encounters they had to learn about how we produce and preserve culinary culture. I organized adventures to show them who they were and where they were from. Even making Poor Man's Maple Syrup was a well-planned event, possible only on the weekend when we could be in my hometown for several days. We needed the resources of the land, the expertise of Pa and Aunt Ann, and time to be together. Did scheduling precise moments to impart our culture somehow degrade it? Will they have to

scrutinize their schedules even more to share their cultural heritage with their own children, paring away layers of virtual reality and simulated occurrences? I now understand that my carefully crafted experiences for my children aren't taking away from the inheritance of place and people, and neither will it detract from the way they will plan moments to highlight their Tennessee traditions. However, they will also know that their inheritance is not just found in the extraordinary, occasional events. We share our rich heritage in ordinary, lived moments, one story and one bite at a time.

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Before You Read

Having first invaded Ireland in 1169, Great Britain occupied its island neighbor for centuries, exploiting its resources and subjugating its inhabitants. To justify their mistreatment of a people who closely resembled themselves – that is, white, European, and Christian – the British insisted that the Irish were morally and intellectually inferior. Due to their distinctly Celtic culture, Gaelic tongue, and deep Catholic faith, the Irish were regarded as a foreign threat by the Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, mostly Protestant British. To the British, the Irish were poor, criminal, alcoholic, and lazy. Irish writer Jonathan Swift’s 1729 essay “A Modest Proposal” addresses the British government’s concern over Ireland’s mounting poverty and high birth rate. Britain’s leaders feared both the enormous economic burden of feeding Ireland’s poor population and the growing number of Irish Catholics who posed a potential threat to the British Protestant crown.

Swift sets up “A Modest Proposal” as a classically designed logical argument. He presents a problem, demonstrates its magnitude and consequences, and asserts that a solution must be found that is simple, practical, and inexpensive. The “modest” solution that Swift proposes will likely shock first-time readers. However, Swift is employing satire, a form of comedy in which shortcomings, vices, and abuses are ridiculed to shame an individual, group, or society with the intent of inspiring change or reform. Today, social and political satire can be seen regularly on popular television shows like *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, and perhaps most famously on *Saturday Night Live*. By proposing his alarmingly unconventional solution to the problem of Irish poverty, Swift isn’t merely trolling – that is, posting provocative messages online for the purpose of causing confusion or harm. Rather, by exaggerating Britain’s dehumanizing mistreatment of the Irish to its logical extreme, Swift employs satire to invite his readers to question their own attitude and behavior toward those whom they regard as inferior.

Introduction by Brent Shannon

A Modest Proposal

by Jonathan Swift

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country, to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.

I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the

commonwealth, would deserve so well of the publick, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars: it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of our projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true, a child just dropt from its dam, may be supported by her milk, for a solar year, with little other nourishment: at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding, and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt, more to avoid the expence than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple, whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couple, who are able to maintain their own children, (although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom) but this being granted, there will remain a hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand, for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the year. There only remain a hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born. The question therefore is, How this number shall be reared and provided for? which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed. For we can neither employ them in handicraft or agriculture; they neither build houses, (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land: they can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing till they arrive at six years old; except where they are of towardly parts, although I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier; during which time they can however be properly looked upon only as probationers; as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan, who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl, before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most, on the exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasee, or a ragoust.

I do therefore humbly offer it to publick consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore, one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt, will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, encreaseth to 28 pounds.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after; for we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific dyet, there are more children born in Roman Catholick countries about nine months after Lent, than at any other season; therefore, reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of Popish infants, is at least three to one in this kingdom, and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage, by lessening the number of Papists among us.

I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, labourers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend, or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants, the mother will have eight shillings neat profit, and be fit for work till she produces another child.

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay the carcass; the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

As to our City of Dublin, shambles may be appointed for this purpose, in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said, that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age, nor under twelve; so great a number of both sexes in every county being now ready to starve for want of work and service: and these to be disposed of by their parents if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due deference to so excellent a friend, and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience, that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable, and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think, with humble submission, be a loss to the publick, because they soon would become breeders themselves: and besides, it is not improbable that some scrupulous people might be apt to censure such a practice, (although indeed very unjustly) as a little bordering upon cruelty, which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

But in order to justify my friend, he confessed, that this expedient was put into his head by the famous Psalmanaazor, a native of the island Formosa, who came from thence to London, above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend, that in his country, when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality, as a prime dainty; and that, in his time, the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the Emperor, was sold to his imperial majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins of the court in joints from the gibbet, at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who without one single groat to their fortunes, cannot stir abroad without a chair, and appear at a playhouse and assemblies in foreign fineries which they never will pay for, the kingdom would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed; and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken, to ease the nation of so grievous an incumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known, that they are every day dying, and rotting, by cold and famine, and filth, and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the young labourers, they are now in almost as hopeful a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away from want of nourishment, to a degree, that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labour, they have not strength to perform it, and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come.

I have too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance.

For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation, as well as our most dangerous enemies, and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants, who have chosen rather to leave their country, than stay at home and pay tithes against their conscience to an episcopal curate.

Secondly, The poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to a distress, and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized, and money a thing unknown.

Thirdly, Whereas the maintainance of a hundred thousand children, from two years old, and upwards, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings a piece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish, introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom, who have any refinement in taste. And the money will circulate among our selves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

Fourthly, The constant breeders, besides the gain of eight shillings sterling per annum by the sale of their children, will be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year.

Fifthly, This food would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts for dressing it to perfection; and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating; and a skilful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

Sixthly, This would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards, or enforced by laws and penalties. It would encrease the care and tenderness of mothers towards their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the publick, to their annual profit instead of expence. We should soon see an honest emulation among the married women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the market. Men would become as fond of their wives, during the time of their pregnancy, as they are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, or sows when they are ready to farrow; nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barrel'd beef: the propagation of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables; which are no way comparable in taste or magnificence to a well grown, fat yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a Lord Mayor's feast, or any other publick entertainment. But this, and many others, I omit, being studious of brevity.

Supposing that one thousand families in this city, would be constant customers for infants flesh, besides others who might have it at merry meetings, particularly at weddings and christenings, I

compute that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses; and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand.

I can think of no one objection, that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged, that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and was indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual Kingdom of Ireland, and for no other that ever was, is, or, I think, ever can be upon Earth. Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients: Of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound: Of using neither clothes, nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture: Of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury: Of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women: Of introducing a vein of parsimony, prudence and temperance: Of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinamboo: Of quitting our animosities and factions, nor acting any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken: Of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothing: Of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy towards their tenants. Lastly, of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, till he hath at least some glimpse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them into practice.

But, as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expence and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, and flesh being of too tender a consistence, to admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country, which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.

After all, I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion, as to reject any offer, proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, As things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for a hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, There being a round million of creatures in humane figure throughout this kingdom, whose whole subsistence put into a common stock, would leave them in debt two million of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession, to the bulk of farmers, cottagers and labourers, with their wives and children, who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have

avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from the inclemencies of the weather, and the most inevitable prospect of intailing the like, or greater miseries, upon their breed forever.

I profess in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavouring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the publick good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children, by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past child-bearing.

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Swift, Johnathan. "A Modest Proposal." *The Commons: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Rhetoric (2nd ed.)*, edited by Jill Parrott and Dominic Ashby, Eastern Kentucky University, 2026.

Before You Read

The word myth, for me, conjures up images of Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece and tales of Aphrodite’s beauty. Then again it may also summon images of more modern mythic characters—Superman or Wonder Woman—whose adventures also captivate generations of readers and viewers. But in this short editorial from the *Journal of Appalachian Health*, editor-in-chief Randy Wykoff, equates “myths” to “stereotypes” and points out that a belief about a region is not the same as a truth. And, indeed, for Wykoff there is no more truth to the ninth myth about Appalachia—that people in the region do not care about their health—than there is about the other eight myths, or that Superman can save the Earth from climate change. (Or maybe that too is a myth?)

Introduction by Bill McCann

The Ninth Myth of Appalachia

by Randy Wykoff

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There are many unique attributes of the small town of Jonesborough, Tennessee. It is the oldest town in Tennessee and was, for a while, the capital of the short-lived State of Franklin.¹ When Hernando de Soto explored the area in 1540, several tribes were living there, including the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and others. Prior to the Revolutionary War, a group of settlers drafted a constitution for the Watauga Association, believed by some to be the first constitution drafted in the American colony. In 1820 Jonesborough became the home of the first abolitionist newspapers in the Nation, and prior to the onset of the Civil War, voted, with much of Northeast Tennessee, not to secede from the Union. Its history is rich with stories of Daniel Boone, Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson, and many more historical figures. Today, it serves as the county seat of Washington County (the first area in the country named for George Washington) and is home to the International Storytelling Center, the National Storytelling Festival, and many historic buildings.

Of relevance to the *Journal*, however, is the Jonesborough–Washington County History Museum, where there is a display created by the Heritage Alliance, titled “Eight Myths About Appalachia.”² It has been designed to “reclaim the historical narrative and share a more accurate look at Appalachia and its inhabitants by examining several prominent and persistent myths.”

The eight myths that they highlight are:

1. The residents of the region are “violent”;
2. The families of the region are “isolated;”
3. The culture of Appalachia is “not innovative;”

4. The demographics of the region are “not diverse;”
5. Mountain families are “impoverished;”
6. The people of the region are “illiterate;”
7. The culture of the residents is “defiant;”
8. The Appalachian region is “backwards.”

The display does a good job of both explaining how these myths (perhaps better called *stereotypes*) started and why they are not necessarily any truer of the people of Appalachia than of those in other parts of the country.

As I reviewed these displays, I was struck by the obvious need for a ninth “myth:” that the people of Appalachia do not care about their health. As with all myths, there is a kernel of truth in this one. It is true that Appalachia has some of the poorest health statistics of any region in the country. High smoking rates. High rates of obesity. High levels of sedentary lifestyles. High numbers of drug deaths.

But poor outcomes are not a measure of intent.

The poor health statistics of the region are reflective of those factors that cause poor health in other parts of the country: intergenerational poverty, lack of educational opportunities, inadequate access to health care, geographic isolation, and related factors. Poor health statistics do not reflect a lack of caring on the part of the people. Indeed, as reflected by the articles published in this Journal over the past five years, many people in the region care deeply about improving health and well-being.

Every issue reminds us of the challenges that we face. But each issue also reminds us of the dedication that so many have for addressing these challenges. One day, through these efforts, perhaps this ninth myth (like the other eight) will be placed on the slagheap of history.

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2. One can visit the museum at 117 Boone Street, Jonesborough, 37659.

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10/09/23

A Critical View of Corey Doctorow’s “Writing in the Age of Distraction”

“Writing in the Age of Distraction” was written by Corey Doctorow as a way to teach writers tactics and tips on how to fight the many distractions in our media. However, he never outright says you shouldn’t use the internet, instead, he believes that you should. Doctorow views the internet as a great way to formulate new ideas, which is instrumental in writing. Doctorow said this about how he views the Internet “But the Internet has been very good to me. It's informed my creativity and aesthetics, it's benefited me professionally and personally, and for every moment it steals, it gives back a hundred delights. I'd no sooner give it up than I'd give up fiction or any other pleasurable vice,”(Doctorow 3). The whole purpose of this article is a way to train readers how to better manage their time, and not solely focus on the internet while writing.

Cory Doctorow is a British Canadian Journalist/Author and Activist, he focuses on many issues when it comes to the internet and creative work. Doctorow was also the former Director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Co-Founder of Open Rights Group in the UK (Electronic Frontier Foundation). Doctorow has written several books and is a major publisher of many news articles on websites such as the New York Times, The American Conservative, and Wired. Doctorow has won several awards over the years for his Science Fiction books (Macmillan Publishers). Doctorow is a well-proven writer and is very connected to the internet due to how connected journalism has become to the internet.

With that in mind, the Purpose of this article is to teach writers how to keep away from becoming too distracted on the internet. Doctorow offers tips such as making a word count for the day and giving 20 minutes of the day just to write without any fancy word processors and as little research as possible. Keeping from word processors and research keeps the brain from being distracted. Doctorow also doesn't want the 20 minutes to be a perfect and calm setup, but instead just a normal 20-minute time frame. Instead, it can be crazy, noisy, and chaotic, however, those issues can be put up with for just 20 minutes. Doctorow said this about the 20-minute time frame “Forget advice about finding the right atmosphere to coax your muse into the room. Forget candles, music, silence, a good chair, a cigarette, or putting the kids to sleep... You can put up with noise/silence/kids/discomfort/hunger for 20 minutes.” (8). Doctorow gives these tips as a way to let the creative part of the mind wander and be excited for the next 20-minute time frame. Disconnecting from the internet and all the many distractions it brings will give writers more freedom and creativity in their work.

Given that Doctorow's article can be found in The Commons: Tools for Reading, it's safe to assume that most readers of the article are new and up-and-coming writers. The readers of the articles are more than likely college students or young adults who use the internet daily and put a large amount of their time on social media. Or readers of this article could just be writers struggling with how to manage their time while writing. Doctorow hopes that sharing these techniques that he's gained over the years will help these new writers from becoming too distracted by the internet.

The article itself is pretty informative. Doctorow's claims are always explained, such as why instead of using a word processor a text editor should be used instead. However, it's never outright said how these writing techniques will help the reader. Instead, Doctorow just gives his

personal perspective on how the techniques have helped him, assuming the reader will have a similar understanding and experience. I felt as though Doctorow supports creativity, but at the same time, he gives people a cookie-cutter approach to writing. Instead of giving people techniques, people should learn good writing tactics on their own. In the greater scheme of things, this article will do very little in helping writers focus on writing, and not on the internet. If Doctorow instead wrote an article about the effects of the internet on writing, it could've altered many people's writing habits.

Overall, Cory Doctorow is a very well-respected writer who has made quite a name for himself. He's very open about his political beliefs, and what he truly thinks about the modern internet and fights for a more equal world. Also, Cory Doctorow's goal of keeping creative writing alive is very noble. Cory Doctorow has had years of experience when it comes to the internet and knows his stuff. His ideas and techniques of his own experience will for sure inspire many future writers who want to be just like Him when they hopefully become famous writers too.

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October 11, 2023

The Strange Science of Online Toxicity

The rise of online toxicity is by no means a new phenomenon. With the rise of cancel culture and online abuse, a certain behavioral trend has risen with those who choose to voice their most vulgar outrage and threats online, seemingly with no hesitation. Naturally people will begin to look into this trend and try to find reasons to explain and even combat the behavior at hand. Since humans have survived for a long period of time, the probability that they could have survived this long if they were constantly threatening and berating each other is very low. “Why Good People Turn Bad Online” by Gaia Vince effectively explains why people who would naturally be inclined to do good turn toxic online through references of cognitive imaging studies, behavioral experiments, and features of existing platforms.

Before explaining the mechanics behind online toxicity, Vince explains their experiences with behavioral studies, all of which indicate that cooperation between people is very beneficial. Vince had participated in a behavioral experiment surrounding cooperative behavior led by lab director at Yale University’s Cooperation Lab, David Rand (Vince). The experiment had people playing a game that had groups of people contribute money to a group pot; the money contributed to the pot was then doubled and split among each individual in the group (Vince). Half of the groups required people to make their contribution decision quickly while the other half of the groups were given time to decide how much they were willing to contribute (Vince). Within this section of the essay there are quotes from Rand himself. Whether it was from an interview or briefing is unknown. Rand’s statements indicate that cooperation is natural in humans on an evolutionary level (Vince). Rand’s statements indicate there is existing evidence supporting the idea that people will be naturally cooperative as they know on an instinctual level it will be the best course of action to survive (Vince). Vince makes use of an ethical appeal in this section as Rand’s authority as a lab director in a prestigious university is used to persuade the reader to trust what he has to say. Rand’s statements are also logically supported by the results of the experiment

The groups that had to quickly contribute money gave more generous contributions while those who had more time to decide were more selfish (Vince). What can be derived from these results and Rand’s statements is that humans are instinctively inclined to cooperate with each other (Vince). Vince going out of their way to explain people’s natural cooperative tendencies effectively encapsulates people’s confusion toward online toxicity. The combination of information presented by Rand and the experiment effectively set the foundation for Vince’s argument. It sets a baseline for the rest of the article since if it is clear that people are naturally cooperative, why do they go against their nature on social media?

Vince begins to develop the reasoning behind people's online toxicity from their research on moral outrage. By looking into studies done by researchers using Molly Crockett Psychology Lab, Vince explains the factor of moral outrage within people's toxic behavior online: "Brain-imaging studies show that when people act on their moral outrage, their brain's reward center is activated – they feel good about it. This reinforces their behavior, so they are more likely to intervene in a similar way again" (Vince). The evidence provided by Vince explains that on a physiological level, people are driven to act on moral outrage and actively seek to do so as much as possible (Vince). By providing evidence regarding brain imaging studies, Vince elevates their argument as scientific evidence describes that outrage is something beyond social psychology and taps into biological tendencies. This concept is further developed by Vince's own reasoning as they explain how the widespread nature of social media allows moral outrage to reach large bodies of people very quickly (Vince). Indicating the existence of factors from social, physiological, and technological perspectives. Which are further compacted by lack of punishment and anonymity provided by social media.

While examples exist of effective countermeasures against toxic online behavior, there are simply not enough to discourage those who participate in it. The relative anonymity provided by social media provides the perfect outlet for people to express their outrage, even to the most vulgar extremes (Vince). While it is not outright said in Vince's essay, they imply that the easy ability to express and spread outrage with little risk causes a feedback loop of negativity since people are already driven on a chemical level to participate in outrage (Vince). This weaves the answer to the research question as it describes scientifically how all of these factors at hand are the causes behind online toxicity. Vince does a fantastic job of showing that it is not just one factor, but multiple factors playing into the issue. She also discusses another contributing factor, being the lack of countermeasures on social media platforms, which further contributes to this little risk, high reward feedback loop.

While most platforms seemingly lack effective ways to combat online abuse, some have achieved effective countermeasures. An example discussed by Vince of an effective countermeasure for online toxicity stems from "League of Legends" (an online video game where players interact with each other) in the form of their "Tribunal" feature. This feature acts as a way for the players themselves to socially punish toxic behavior from others (Vince). The "Tribunal" feature proved to be quite effective as the "League of Legends" developers stated that 280,000 players within a year had improved their behavior (Vince). This idea of social punishment is further developed by reference to an experiment that had an AI bot respond to racist tweets. The experiment had bots with white people profile pictures, these bots would respond to racist tweets by simply humanizing black people to the racist tweeters (Vince). These simple responses from the bots reduced the tweeter's racist tweets to almost zero (Vince). This experiment brought up by Vince as well as the "Tribunal" feature poses a complex argument that isn't necessarily explored in the paper, but can be derived from Vince's evidence. If more platforms implemented features that focused on socially punishing toxic behavior, it could drastically reduce online abuse.

Vince effectively argues the reasoning and combating of the toxic tendencies of people using online platforms by evidence of physiological incentive, cooperative evolution, and socially based countermeasures. Vince has shown through the evidence presented that a sociological

standpoint is the way to combat and explain online abuse. There is no way to eliminate the behavior on an individual basis as it has been established by Vince that people are physiologically prone to outrage. This article convinces that if outraged people are reminded that cooperation and social awareness are the factors behind the sustainability of the human race, then people's online behavior can be reformed to meet these factors accordingly.

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1 April 2024

Rhetorical Analysis of “How to Read Like a Writer”

When it comes to writing, rhetoric is an immensely helpful technique because it can be utilized to motivate and convince readers. This is a technique that many writers use, and we may use it in our daily lives as well. In the article “How to Read Like a Writer,” Mike Bunn employs pathos to establish a connection with the reader via firsthand experiences and logos to offer practical and significant strategies for making the most of reading to advance as a writer. He also uses ethos to present valuable insights from individuals who have experience on this topic.

Mike Bunn opens his presentation with a personal story about working in a poorly lit theater and “passed the time by sitting quietly in the back, reading books with tiny flashlights” (Bunn 77). He claims that the loud noises from the stage frequently interrupted him while he was reading, forcing him to go back and reread sections of the book. Bunn struggled to keep focus; as mentioned in the text, “As I struggled to read in this environment, I began to realize that the way I was reading—one word at a time—was exactly the same way that the author had written the text.” (Bunn 77). This helped him grasp how writers combine words to make a work of writing. This is the first instance of his use of pathos that we have because it is a relatable experience that many of us encounter daily, allowing the reader to apply to the text. In addition to noting about his own personal experience of learning to read in the same manner as a writer, he also brings up a comment that was made by Lola, who was one of his previous students: “How can I take aspects that I feel the writer failed at and make sure not to make the same mistakes in my writing?” (Bunn 88). Having said that, Bunn finds it easier to express his point by relating it to feelings and situations that other people may also encounter, while also sharing the stories of others.

Bunn also often writes in the second person, which enhances his use of pathos in his work. His choice to write in this style makes the work feel more like a guide for the reader and encourages interaction and connection with the writer. Furthermore, the use of the term “you” could often evoke mental images within the reader, which enables them to visualize themselves in a variety of situations, as was noted earlier. Even though Bunn uses a lot of pathos in this essay, the quote that follows captures the essence of what he wishes to convey to his audience: “Deciding how to include the best attributes of what you read in your own writing. This is what Reading Like a Writer is all about. Are you ready to start reading?” (Bunn 88).

In addition to the prominent use of pathos that Bunn makes throughout the piece, it is also clear that he makes use of ethos by identifying a variety of sources that know the subject matter, and

he even makes a brief mention of himself having some credibility. On page 80, Bunn mentions the English professor Charles Moran from the University of Massachusetts, stating that he urges people to read like writers for various reasons, an example such as “Because you ‘have written’ things yourself, just as Moran suggests, you are better able to ‘see’ the choices that the author is making in the texts that you read” (80). Because the primary goal of this piece is to educate readers on the many approaches to reading like a writer, it stands to reason that the intended audience could be a student or even an author. As a result, Bunn not only offers examples of English teachers, famous poets, and others with literary experience, but he also attempts to incorporate the perspectives of his former students, as evident by Bunn himself saying that he “contacted a few of my former students to ask what advice they would give to college students regarding how to read effectively in the writing classroom” (Bunn 80). In this scenario, it is a reliable source of credibility because they are students who have gone through the experience that many others have, and the thoughts they have can prove to be valuable.

Regarding the most prominent rhetorical devices found in this article, it is evident that Bunn makes extensive use of logos; in fact, his utilization of logos is the most effective aspect of this piece, considering it is packed full of literary information. As you can see, the main goal of writing this was to teach students—and anybody who might find it valuable—how to effectively interact with the text to actively learn how numerous authors create literature. Throughout the writing, Bunn discusses strategies such as what kind of questions you should ask about the material before and while reading, as well as asking the reader other questions like, “What about the genre? Is this an essay? An article? What would you call it?” (Bunn 86). He diligently ensures that the reader gains a comprehensive understanding of the essential facets of literature and offers valuable insights on how they can enhance their knowledge and skills in the realm of art and literature. Bunn not only presents logical arguments effectively but also takes care to provide thorough explanations that address any potential queries or uncertainties that readers may have regarding the topics covered in his writing.

In conclusion, throughout the text, Bunn makes effective use of all three types of rhetorical devices: logos, ethos, and pathos. It largely contains logos through practical and logical strategies that may be used as a learning tool by many people. Despite this, Bunn found a method of incorporating pathos into the narrative by expressing firsthand experiences, either his own or those of others, as well as employing specific language to deepen the connection he may seek to make throughout. Finally, Bunn demonstrates ethos in his work by continuing to mention authors, whether a great poet or a professor, to support and add legitimacy to his concepts.

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Emma Hibbs

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14 October 2023

Distractions that come with writing and how to avoid them

Cory Doctorow's "Writing in the Age of Distraction" starts by explaining to the reader the challenges one faces in a world of technology. He tells of how some distractions and problems come with technology, but also states ways to use it to one's advantage. In his article, Doctorow gives a list of techniques such as daily planning and goal setting for writing. Additionally, he used other techniques to maximize his concentration by not being picky with places to work, and by turning off notifications and separating the drafting and revision process. These have helped him have fewer distractions, improving his general writing process over time. Even then, he admits that his methods are not perfect and he still can get overwhelmed with work. But overall, these tactics have helped him stay ahead of work and avoid stressful situations.

Cory Doctorow is an award-winning author, who has many successful stories and a book on the topic of the impact of technology platforms, which confirms Doctorow is a reliable source on this topic (Clarke Foundation). These techniques' reliability comes from these accomplishments and evidence from the reading itself. Doctorow states that by using these methods he can put out "more than a novel per year" (117). When looking at his book collection this is found to be true, as he has truly been able to write a book every year since the early two-thousands (Graeme). His techniques have proven to work and put out amazing writing as these methods have earned the author three Locus awards, as well achieving being the only person to receive both the Campbell Award for Novel of the Year and the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (Clarke Foundation). Doctorow has recently put out a new novel "The Internet Con: How To Seize The Means of Computation" which goes over the influence and impact technology has on society and the danger that comes with it (Bajak). With this information, the conclusion that his work is reliable is true and should be held to a high standard.

In this article, Doctorow is attempting to get the point across that his writing methods do work. He understands the distractions that come with technology, and how they hinder one's writing process because he has experienced the same challenges himself. Because of this, he wants to help others with their writing. He does this by informing others about the techniques that have worked for him. By telling the audience of these methods he is giving awareness to the fact that good writing doesn't take much, and with the help of his techniques others can do the same.

Doctorow has aimed this writing at his fellow authors and many others who might also experience the distracting qualities of technology while working. With this article, he is not only showing them that writing doesn't have to be a long, miserable process full of distractions and

difficulties, but it is something that one can accomplish over time with methods to limit those distractions that cause that writing to be challenging. He does this by explaining what has worked for him over time and gives multiple examples for people to try to achieve their work goals.

I believe this article to be very informative. It was clear on what point the author was getting across and gave valuable insight on ways to successfully write. It will be useful, not just for authors of books, but students as it helps with time management and the importance of removing distractions. I find it incredibly useful to apply it to my writing in the future and give myself time to complete a project without distraction.

One of his methods I can see myself using is having a regular work plan during the day, one that is concise, but effective. What stood out to me about this was that by just having short intervals of the day set for work or completing a goal, he has been able to complete a task as big as writing a book each year. It made me understand the importance of time management and not underestimating my ability to do major work projects. I understand now that just doing a little each day can do a lot.

By describing the impact of social media, emails, and other notifications, he made it very clear to me the importance of turning notifications off while working. There is no doubt that our phones can catch attention with just one ping, so this point he made is completely reasonable. I often find myself looking at my phone when I should be working, or getting distracted by a buzz and feeling the need to check it. Along with the notifications, I believe his advice to turn off autocorrect while writing is incredibly smart. Doctorow explains how the autocorrect system works and how though it is sometimes helpful, it's a distraction. I found this to be true in my work as I always find myself wanting to immediately fix an issue when I see the autocorrect pop up, and that takes me out of my writing zone. So I will be taking his suggestion of turning those features off to continue my writing without pause to better my efficiency and work quality.

Cory Doctorow's article gives a clear picture of what a good, efficient writing process is like. In doing so he clarifies his qualification to talk on a subject like this because of his history with writing and publishing novels. Doctorow gives the purpose of the article when he tells the audience of his methods that have helped him be a strong writer. In doing so he aids his target audience by giving authors and anyone who might struggle with writing in this high technological age advice on how to improve in simple steps. He also was able to leave a great impression on me, as I will be using his writing techniques in the future to better my own experience while writing and achieve my goals to put out good work.

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Hannah Higgins

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ENG 101

Due Date: 1 April 2024

A Rhetorical Analysis of Helen Keller's "The Day Language Came Into My Life"

Imagine you are going through life in darkness and in silence- you have no tangible thoughts or understanding of much of anything, because you cannot see or hear. Then imagine the day that you are met with language for the first time- the groundbreaking revelation that there are words and phrases, and now *everything* in your life has taken on a new meaning. This is Helen Keller's exact experience one evening in 1887 as she begins to understand that language exists. Through demonstrating her authority to speak on this subject with her personal experiences, brief use of logos, and primary use of emotional appeals in her piece "The Day Language Came Into My Life", Keller effectively argues that language is quite literally the foundation for our lives in every way.

As the majority of Americans know, Helen Keller famously lived blind and deaf since infancy from a case of Scarlet Fever. What is perhaps most astonishing are the things that she would go on to accomplish in her lifetime. With the help of her teacher Anne Sullivan, she learned that language existed- point blank. She went from a world of darkness and silence to reading and writing in 1887. Who could be more credible to speak on the importance of language than a woman who was blind and deaf herself? Keller states, "I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought" (Keller 147). Reading of her personal experiences gives readers the understanding that if anyone understands and can convey the importance of language in one's life- it is Helen Keller, for her life was entirely changed by it.

The use of another appeal, logos, is a bit harder to find in her piece, but is there. She establishes logic in a unique way- she first presents the illogical, or some concepts that are hard for readers to wrap their heads around. For example, Keller explains how incomprehensible things were while being blind and deaf with no understanding of language, stating, "Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkeylike imitation" (Keller 146). The idea of understanding almost nothing is crazy to readers, for instance how can one form thoughts when you simply don't know that words exist? Was it even possible for Helen Keller to have an internal monologue, and what would that have looked like? It is through establishing the illogical to readers that the logic of how language changes every aspect of life is established. By understanding the difficulties of life without language, readers can recognize that yes, all of these things would be revolutionized by understanding language.

The final, and arguably strongest, appeal used in this piece is Pathos. It is so prevalent in the writing and implemented so seamlessly that the whole writing piece is incredibly emotional in many different ways. Readers start the emotional journey by feeling a sense of sorrow fall over them after Keller explains how she felt before language in the opening paragraphs, stating, “Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line and had no way of knowing how near the harbor was” (Keller 146). Just like a ship with no sounding-line, Keller had no idea what was around her- literally no visuals of the people and things that surrounded her or the words to shape these things. Her intense, bleak word choice combined with this metaphor gives us a huge glimpse of how lonely her life must have been while so detached from the world and the people around her.

Another very strong example of Pathos evokes a very different emotion from readers, and that is the conclusion of Keller’s writing. As she vividly explains the moment she knew that the words Anne Sullivan had been spelling into her hand and that she had been imitating had a real meaning, readers are rejoicing for her and are overcome with a heartwarming presence. It seems as if a miracle has taken place because her whole world shifts, “I knew then that ‘w-a-t-e-r’ meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. The living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free... as we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life” (Keller 147). The people that she knew cared for her and she cared for back became mother and father, the thing she slept on became a bed, the cool air she felt on her face became the wind- understanding the lengths to which this changed her world is what makes it truly moving, and the audience feels this through her writing.

Through the use of all three appeals, Helen Keller is able to establish the importance of language in one’s life while taking readers on the emotional journey that was her life before Anne Sullivan introduced language- at which point she was changed forever. Logos can be found through the understanding of how detached her life was before versus after she understood language, and by using her personal story, she not only establishes credibility to convey this importance, but implements pathos while pulling at readers heartstrings. It is through the cohesive use of these rhetorical appeals that makes her piece so effective, and the immense importance of language understood.

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Kaine Flynn

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English 101

19 September 2025

Understanding Transgender Identity Through Language

I didn't have a problem with being a girl until I hit puberty. When it turned from wrestling and Minecraft to training bras, I began to feel a distance between my body and my true self. At first, I assumed this was just my mind's reaction to my changing body, but as time went by the distance grew. It took a while, but I finally learned the cause of this disconnect: being transgender. Learning this specific language to explain my identity has given me an open-minded perspective and helped me transition into, and accept being, a trans male.

Growing up in rural Georgia for the first 12 years of my life was amazing, but had one detrimental flaw: a lack of diversity. I had never met a gay person, and definitely hadn't met a transgender person. Without exposure to people like me, I never had the language to explain or imagine the real version of myself. In Helen Keller's essay "The Day Language Came Into my Life", this sentiment of realization is prominent. She explains how she felt lost before being taught ways to express herself. As her vocabulary expanded, so did her worldview. Her story relates to mine through a shared feeling of being disconnected and slowly learning how to bridge that gap.

At a young age, I could feel a difference between me and other girls. I didn't care how my hair looked, I hated bows, and I loved playing kickball with the boys during recess. 'A tomboy' is what I was categorized as, and I was fine with that. To me, the difference between being a girl or a boy was as trivial as pink and blue. The way I went about girlhood was like method acting; I performed my assigned role to prepare for the real thing. We learn about gender roles during childhood, but most of those roles aren't imposed on us until we get older. Being a kid is like a free trial to society, so it wasn't until I became a teenager that these roles started to take effect.

By the time I was 13, I knew that I wasn't a girl. I didn't have the vocabulary for what I was yet, but *girl* was definitely not on the list. Growing up, my parents always made sure I knew about gay rights and how they would accept me if I came out as gay. This open-minded language was extremely helpful with my journey but failed to explain the imbalance between my body and my mind. It wasn't until I saw the word "transgender" on the internet that I started to connect the dots. Being exposed to this label opened my eyes and validated the feelings I had been experiencing my whole life.

A year passes, and I slowly begin to migrate to a more masculine presentation. Short hair, baggy clothes, and chest binding were the staple of my outfits. I heard about “top surgery”, a procedure to remove your breasts, and “HRT”, hormone replacement therapy, but those terms felt so outlandish at the time. I began researching the process of getting on hormones and a month before my 17th birthday, I injected myself with testosterone for the first time. A few months later, my voice had dropped a few octaves and I began to grow facial hair. I was getting to experience things I once thought were out of reach, feeling more empowered than ever before.

Still having to uncomfortably bind my chest everyday, I became literate in the different types of top surgery. Smaller breasts are obviously easier to remove and create much less scarring, so they have separate procedures. “Keyhole” surgery involves removing the breast tissue from a small incision on each side of the breast. “Periareolar” or “Peri” surgery involves removing the breast tissue from incisions along each nipple. Larger breasts require more drastic procedures, such as the “Double Incision” surgery, an operation involving 2 large incisions across the chest. By gaining knowledge of these different approaches, I was able to decide which would work best for me and my future.

Getting on Testosterone and receiving this procedure were the best decisions of my life and changed things in ways I thought were impossible. Now equipped with knowledge and proficiency in this community, I am able to understand and explain my identity as a transgender male. This has caused me to see society from a unique perspective, one that analyzes the prescribed roles in society. Also, going through this literacy journey has given me the opportunity to connect with other marginalized groups through common struggles and experiences. Becoming proficient in the language of this community has guided me in becoming an active and supportive community member, as well as providing me with a special point of view.

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Alojzy Rembis

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English 101

19 September 2025

Language of Multiethnicity

As a child, I was raised around my family and close friends, most of whom didn't look *like me*. This ordinarily wouldn't have been an issue; however for those around me it seemed to be. I am biracial - specifically European and African American. In general, my family accepted me as one of them; but, if you had asked a kid named Alojzy, he would tell you all the ways they had othered him due to his features. While we were children and have changed now, that doesn't mean I don't experience this anymore—it's simply in a different way. I'm not "black enough," not "white enough," and I have to "pick one" when I tell someone that I'm of both European and African American origin.

The idea that someone is not "enough" to claim either side of their identity can make it hard for someone of multiethnic origins to connect with others from their communities. Through studying the Ukrainian language, though, I have been able to connect with both, and gain my own identity removed from the opinions of those who have judged me, giving me two places of belonging.

The phrase "racially ambiguous" is used when someone does not have easily identifiable features of a specific race, making it difficult for those around them to categorize them into a certain racial category. In my personal experience, while I don't find "racially ambiguous" necessarily offensive nor insensitive, I do find it used as a trope for others to deny people of their very own identities, and though this might not seem like a big issue for those who do it, it does leave a mark on the person being subject to such, making it difficult for them to identify themselves.

For the phrase "pick one," imagine you have eczema and acne, and you tell someone that you have both conditions. Rather than understanding you, they tell you "Why call them different things? Just pick one." Sounds silly, right? Someone can exist with both, and neither lessen the severity of the other. This nuance leaves others unable to fit you into one particular box; it can be an *inconvenience* for them. Depending on who is saying this, it can go one of two ways: from an "outsider," it may feel insensitive, but from an "insider," it may feel like you're being somehow rejected from your own space. This is similar for multiethnic people. In the Ukrainian language, Afro-Ukrainians only recently have gotten their own term; previously, they had rejected their own identities by only being referred to as "African."

Finally, the term "whitewashed" is used colloquially to describe downplaying either one's own or another's non-European heritage in favor of a European one, in simple terms. It's not a harmful phrase; in fact, it can help put into words the way someone has been disconnected from their own culture; however, for someone who identifies with both European and African

American heritage, it can be a way of saying “pick a side” by suggesting I do not belong in a European American community by means of me not being “white enough.” When I began to study Ukrainian, my goal was to connect with my heritage. In doing so, I was able to build friendships with Ukrainians over the span of 5 years. We’re able to connect in having our ethnic identities denied; for Ukrainians, this is “russification,” or rejecting someone’s Ukrainian heritage in favor of a Russian one, similar to “whitewashing” for people of color. Crossing the language barrier between us has helped me learn about our similarities, uniting us in more ways than one.

For an individual going through this, it can cause an internal conflict within themselves; feeling like they are either being rejected from places they belong, or that they have to choose to be one part of themselves. And for people who feel it is necessary to exclude these people from their own communities, they may not think of it or be as affected by it as the people they’re excluding, seeing it as simply an annoyance. As for me, I had already belonged in the European American community, and learning Ukrainian only emphasized that for me, giving me more vocabulary to describe my experiences, and thus expanding my literacy.

As the author states in “The Danger of a Single Story”, “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity” (Adichie 81). Through overcoming our language barrier, I have been able to learn about not only other Ukrainians being denied their heritage, but also about Afro-Ukrainians being officially recognized only now, uniting us and helping us grow stronger in our shared identities.

With time and self-determination and confidence, you will find your people, and be accepted for who you truly are, whoever that is. Self-discovery is not immediate, and it is ever-changing; so are the people around you, and by extension society and our communities.

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