Academic writing, reading, and inquiry are inseparably linked; and all three are learned by not doing any one alone, but by doing them all at the same time.

—James Reither

Imagine the following scenario: It’s early evening on a Thursday night, and you are planning your weekend’s study schedule. Besides being assigned a chapter in your chemistry textbook for Monday, you also have some writing assignments due next week. Consider this hypothetical list of reading and writing assignments that you need to get started on over the weekend:

• Analyze an editorial for a Political Science class according to concepts laid out in a textbook chapter on “Interest Groups and the Media”
• Summarize and write a critical reflection on a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article assigned for your Environmental Studies class
• Identify points of difficulty in a Platonic dialog for a Humanities seminar and formulate questions about them for discussion
• Begin work on a major research paper for Environmental Studies, due next month

In each case, your ability to meet your instructor’s goals for these assignments would depend not only on your ability to craft clear, grammatical sentences but also on your ability to read insightfully and analytically. Note that each assignment asks students to read in a particular way. Professors design assignments that help students learn the academic methods and subject matter that are central to their disciplines. Thus, assignments for different classes necessitate reading with different purposes and types of awareness. Each assignment on our list invites (and expects) students to do something different with what they read—in these four cases, to understand and apply con-

cepts about interest groups, to distill the key ideas in a magazine article and apply them reflectively to course ideas, to spot ambiguities and patterns of expression in a philosophical dialog, and to find and integrate research sources into your own argument that will address a research question that you formulate.

It is the purpose of this book to help you develop the reading and writing skills needed for success at these tasks. Many college students are surprised, even overwhelmed, by the heavy reading they are assigned and by the need to use that reading in their own writing, not only in English and other humanities classes but in natural science, social science, and pre-professional classes such as introductions to accounting or nursing. Along with textbook chapters and other assigned readings in a course, your college reading will include specialized Web sites, books, and articles that you will select and research as you prepare papers and reports for a wide variety of classes.

For the most part, students adapt to these new demands and gradually learn what academic reading entails, so that by the time they are juniors and seniors within their major fields they know how to do the reading and writing demanded in their disciplines and future professions. But the process is often slow and frustrating, marked by trial and error and the panicky feeling that reading this way is like hacking through a jungle when there might be a path nearby that could make the journey easier.

We hope this book will help you find that path and thus accelerate your growth as a strong academic reader and writer. It aims to describe the special demands and pleasures of academic reading, teach you the reading strategies used by experts, and show you the interconnections between reading and writing in almost all college courses.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “READING RHETORICALLY”? 

To read rhetorically, a concept that informs every chapter of this book, is to read with attention to how your purposes for reading may or may not match an author’s purposes for writing and to recognize the methods that authors use to try to accomplish those purposes. Remember this: All authors have designs on their readers; they want those readers to see things their way, to adopt their point of view. But rhetorical readers know how to maintain a critical distance from a text and determine carefully the extent to which they will go along with the author. This book explains how to do that. As you move into your college majors, your writing assignments will ask you to write about your reading in a way that shows that you are “doing” a discipline, for example, doing political science or doing philosophy. That is why we stress throughout these chapters the importance of doing more with a text than just understanding what it says. In your college courses, reporting about what you have read will be only
The Demands and Pleasures of Academic Reading

a beginning point. You will be asked to find meaning, not merely information, in books and articles. You will be asked to respond to that meaning—to explain it, to analyze it, to critique it, to compare it to alternative meanings that other writers have created or that you create yourself in your own writing.

To fulfill such writing and reading assignments, you will need to analyze not just what texts say but how they say it. This double awareness is crucial to reading rhetorically. By analyzing both the content and the technique of a given text this way, a rhetorical reader critically considers the extent to which he or she will accept or question that text.

To explain strategies for handling the demands of reading and writing assignments in college, we have organized this book as follows: In the first four chapters, we explain the concept of reading rhetorically by examining various ways that texts strive to engage readers.

- **Chapter 1** offers an overview of what is meant by “reading rhetorically.”
- **Chapter 2** suggests strategies for establishing a purpose and context for reading a text.
- **Chapter 3** provides strategies for “listening” carefully to what that text has to say and writing summaries of content and descriptions of rhetorical strategy.
- **Chapter 4** lays out strategies for questioning that text, for noting its strengths and weaknesses (including what the author might have left unsaid), and for writing a rhetorical analysis of a text.

The strategies covered in Chapters 2, 3, and 4—contextualizing, listening, and questioning—will enable you to decide how you might use any text in your own writing (and in the case of selecting material for a research paper, whether you will use a given text at all). In the last two chapters, we focus on ways to apply your rhetorical reading strategies to doing research writing.

- **Chapter 5** explains techniques for using rhetorical reading to plan your research and to evaluate sources.

THE DEMANDS AND PLEASURES OF ACADEMIC READING

Once you get immersed in the academic life—caught up in the challenge of doing your own questioning, critical thinking, analysis, and research—you’ll discover that academic reading has unique demands and pleasures. If you ask an experienced academic reader engaged in a research project why she reads, her answer may be something like this: “I’m investigating a problem, and much of my research requires extensive reading. As part of my investigation, I am doing a close analysis of several primary sources. Also I read to see what other researchers are saying about my problem and to position myself in that conversation.”
This may seem a curious answer—one that you might not fully understand until you have had more experience writing papers that require analysis or research. To help you appreciate this answer—and to see how it applies to you—consider that most college courses have two underlying goals:

1. **Conveying conceptual knowledge.** This first goal is for you to learn the body of information presented in the course—to master the key concepts and ideas of the course, to understand its theories, to understand how the theories try to explain certain data and observations, to learn key definitions or formulas, and to memorize important facts. Cognitive psychologists sometimes call this kind of learning conceptual knowledge—that is, knowledge of the course’s subject matter. Transmitting conceptual knowledge is the primary aim of most college textbooks. Ironically, even textbooks designed for beginners present challenging reading assignments because their pages are packed with specialized terminology that students need to know if they are to follow lectures, pass exams, and, more generally, understand how chemists, for example, think about, label, and measure the physical world.

2. **Conveying procedural knowledge.** A second goal of most college courses is for you to learn the discipline’s characteristic ways of applying conceptual knowledge to new problems. What questions does the discipline ask? What are its methods of analysis or research? What counts as evidence? What are the discipline’s shared or disputed assumptions? How do you write arguments in this discipline, and what makes them convincing (say in literature, sociology, engineering, or accounting)? Thus, in addition to learning the basic concepts of a course, you need to learn how experts in the discipline pose problems and conduct inquiry. Cognitive psychologists call this kind of learning procedural knowledge—the ability to apply conceptual knowledge to new problems by using the discipline’s characteristic methods of thinking.

Teachers focus on procedural knowledge when they assign readings beyond the typical textbook—newspaper or magazine articles, scholarly articles, or primary sources such as historical documents or literary texts—and ask you to analyze these readings or use them in other discipline-specific ways. Consider the Political Science assignment in our opening scenario. The professor who assigned analysis of the editorial undoubtedly wants students to learn what the textbook says about interest-group politics (conceptual knowledge), and then to apply those concepts to analyze current events (procedural knowledge). As you read a variety of editorials looking for one to analyze, you would need to read them through the lens of your political science textbook. A different kind of challenge is presented by the Platonic dialog. Not only does it contain complex ideas, but it also demonstrates a form of discourse and a philosophical way of thinking that has had a lasting impact on European traditions. The professor’s decision to start by asking students to raise questions about difficult passages provides a way for students to start exploring the text without being intimidated by it.
As you read the various kinds of texts assigned in your courses and write
different kinds of papers, you will discover that academic disciplines are not
inert bodies of knowledge but contested fields full of uncertainties, disagree-
ments, and debate. You will see why college professors want you to do their
discipline rather than simply study it. They want you not just to study chem-
istry or political science or history, but to think like a chemist or a political scien-
tist or an historian. As you learn to read rhetorically you will learn to recognize
different authors’ purposes and methods, the ways that claims are typically
asserted and supported in different disciplines, and the types of evidence that
are valued by those disciplines. For example, historians value primary sources
such as letters and diaries, government records, and legal documents.
Psychologists gather quite different kinds of research data, such as empirical
observations of an animal’s learning behaviors under different diet conditions,
statistical data about the reduction of anxiety symptoms in humans after dif-
ferent kinds of therapy, or “think aloud” transcripts of a person’s problem-
solving processes after varying amounts of sleep. Your accumulating
knowledge about disciplinary discourses will teach you new ways of think-
ing, and you will learn to use those methods in your own writing.

The challenges of college reading will vary in different classes and for dif-
ferent people because we all have different backgrounds, learning styles, and
interests. It is important to realize that even students with considerable back-
ground knowledge and high interest in a subject will probably find course
readings daunting when they are dense with new concepts, vocabulary, and
information. With so much unfamiliar material, each new sentence can seem
just as important as the one before. When it is difficult to separate key con-
cepts from supporting details, you may feel overwhelmed, thinking, “I’ve got
to know all of this—how will I ever write anything about it?” This book is
designed to help you meet that challenge. In the next two sections we invite
you to think of academic reading and writing in metaphorical terms: as con-
versation and as acts of composing meaning. We then demonstrate the power
of reading rhetorically as an academic strategy and describe a variety of aca-
demic assignments that ask college students to write in different ways and for
different purposes about texts they have read.

READING AND WRITING AS CONVERSATION

Consider again how our experienced researcher at the beginning of the last
section answered the question, “Why do you read?” It is obvious that she is
immersed in doing her discipline and that she sees reading as central to her
work. But she also says that she is reading “to position herself in a conversa-
tion.” What does she mean by that? How is reading part of a “conversation”?

To understand reading as joining a conversation, think of writers as talk-
ing to readers—and of readers as talking back. For example, suppose our
researcher’s investigation leads her to new insights that she would like to
share with others. If she is a professional scholar, she may write an academic
article. If she is an undergraduate, she may write a research paper. In both cases, her audience would be academic readers interested in the same research problem. Her aim is to present the results of her research and try to persuade readers to accept her argument and claims. Her motivation for writing is her belief that she has produced something new or challenging or otherwise useful to add to the conversation—something that extends or improves upon the work of others who have investigated the same problem.

Whenever you write, it is helpful to think of yourself as asserting your voice in a conversation. To prepare yourself for joining this conversation, you must read. As you read, you need to understand not only the text you are reading but also the conversation that it joins. One of the reasons that a particular reading might seem difficult to you is that you might not yet be familiar with the conversation its author intends for it to join. That conversation is a multi-voiced conversation. The first voice is that of the article’s author; a second voice (actually a set of voices) is the network of texts the writer refers to—previous participants in the conversation. The third voice is yours as you respond to the article while you read, and then later when you write something in response to it.

This broad view extends the metaphor of “conversation” to say that texts themselves are in a conversation with previously published texts. Each text acts in relationship to other texts. It asserts a claim on a reader’s attention by invoking certain interests and understandings, reminding readers of what has been previously written about the subject. For example, articles in scientific journals typically present a summary called a literature review of important research already conducted on the problem. Similarly, political commentators will summarize the views of others so that they can affirm, extend, or take issue with those views. Music, film, and book reviewers are likely to refer not just to the item under review but to the given artist’s reputation, which, of course, was established not just by word of mouth but by other texts, texts with which the current reader may or may not be familiar, and may not need to be in order to understand the current reviewer’s points.

The reasons any of us engage in conversation, oral or written, will vary widely according to the occasion and our individual needs. In school and workplace writing, we read so that we can make informed contributions to a conversation that is already in progress. Indeed, we are expected to join in. Entering an oral conversation can sometimes be a simple process of responding to a question. (“Have you seen the new film at the Ridgemont?”) But if a conversation is already well underway, finding an opening can sometimes be a complex process of getting people’s attention and staking claim to authority on a subject. (“Um, you know, I’ve seen all of John Woo’s films, and I think . . . .”) The challenge is even greater if the goal is to redirect the conversation or contradict the prevailing opinion. (“Yes, but, listen! The reading I’ve done for my cinematography class tells me that his action films are not as innovative as the ads claim.”) When we take up writing as a way of entering the conversation, we don’t have to worry about interrupting, but we do have to review the conversation for our readers by laying out introductory background.
To explore the similarities between your motives for joining a conversation and your motives for reading, consider how the influential twentieth-century rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke uses conversation as a metaphor for reading and writing.

Imagine you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.¹

For Writing and Discussion

To explore the implications of Burke’s parlor metaphor for your own reading processes, consider the following questions.

On Your Own

1. In what ways does Burke’s parlor metaphor fit your experience? Freewrite for a few minutes about an oral conversation in which you managed to assert your voice—or “put in your oar,” as Burke says—after listening for a while, or about a situation where reading helped you gather a sense of the general flow of ideas so that you could have something to say about a topic.

2. Consider a community that you belong to where you feel that you can quickly catch the drift of an in-progress oral conversation (e.g., other triathlon athletes, or regulars on Second Life). What are some “hot topics” of conversation in these communities? What might exclude someone from these conversations? If you wanted to address a general audience about this issue, how much background information would you need to supply?

3. Now let’s reverse the situation. Have you ever listened to a conversation in which you were a baffled outsider rather than an insider? Describe an experience where you had to work hard to get inside an ongoing conversation. Then consider how that experience might be an appropriate analogy for a time when you were frustrated by trying to

read a book or article addressed to an insider audience rather than to someone with your background.

With Your Classmates

Share your responses with other members of your class. See if others have had experiences similar to yours. What have been the topics of conversations where they were in “insider” and “outsider” roles? Help each other appreciate the concepts of insider and outsider audiences and of reading as joining a conversation.

READING AND WRITING AS ACTS OF COMPOSING

The give and take of oral conversation and the inevitable creativity of interpersonal exchange and response connect naturally to our second metaphor, reading and writing as acts of composing. The idea that writing is an act of composing is probably familiar to you. Indeed, the terms *writing* and *composing* are often used interchangeably. Originally associated with fine arts such as painting, music, or literary writing, the term *composing* still carries with it the idea of originality or creativity even though it has come to mean the production of any kind of written text, from a memo to a prize-winning novel. Unlike the term *writing*, the word *composing* suggests more than just the transcription of a preexisting meaning or idea; it suggests a creative putting together of words and ideas to make a new whole. Except for literally recopying what someone else has written, all writing, even memo writing, is a matter of selecting and arranging language to accomplish a purpose that is unique to a particular situation and audience.

The idea that reading is an act of composing, however, may be less familiar. The ancients thought of reading as a passive activity in which the author, via the text, deposited meaning in a reader; the text was metaphorically (or even literally) “consumed.” The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, for example, has a vision in which he is instructed by the Lord to open his mouth and literally consume a book that gives him the knowledge he needs to speak to the rebellious Israelites. Commenting on the consumption metaphors associated with reading, Alberto Manguel, in *A History of Reading*, notes the parallels between the cooking metaphors associated with writing—the author “cooks up” a plot or “spices” up her introduction—and the eating metaphors associated with reading—the reader “devours” a book, finds “nourishment” in it, then “regurgitates” what he has read. While the image of Ezekiel’s eating a text seems fantastic, the mistaken idea persists that reading is a one-way transaction: author → text → reader. To illustrate the flaws in this model of

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the reading process, let’s try a simple experiment described by reading researcher Kathleen McCormick. Read the following passage and jot down your interpretation of its meaning:

Tony slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the charge against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong but he thought he could break it. . . . He was being ridden unmercifully. . . . He felt that he was ready to make his move.3

There are two common interpretations: readers assume that Tony is either in jail or in a wrestling match. Unless you are familiar with wrestling, you probably thought Tony was a prisoner planning a jailbreak. However, if this paragraph appeared in a short story about a wrestler, you would immediately assume that “mat,” “escape,” “charge,” “being held,” and “lock” referred to wrestling even if you knew very little about the sport. This experiment demonstrates two important aspects of the reading process: (1) readers use their previous experiences and knowledge to create meaning from what they read; and (2) context influences meaning.

Research such as McCormick’s shows that readers make sense of a text not by passively receiving meaning from it but by actively composing a reading of it. This composing process links the reader’s existing knowledge and ideas with the new information encountered in the text. What the reader brings to the text is as important as the text itself. In other words, reading is not a process in which an author simply transfers information to the reader. Rather, it is a dynamic process in which the reader’s worldview interacts with the writer’s worldview; the reader constructs meaning from the text, in effect creating a new “text” in the reader’s mind—the reader’s active interpretation of the read text.

When college writing assignments ask you to explain and support your reading (or interpretation) of a text, it is important to distinguish between private associations that are only loosely related to a text and interpretations that are publicly defensible in terms of textual evidence. Private associations are one-way responses in which a certain word, image, or idea in a text sends you off into your own world, causing you to lose track of the network of cues in the text as a whole. While such private responses are natural, and indeed one of the pleasures of reading, if you are to offer a public interpretation, you must engage in a two-way interaction with a text, attending both to the text’s network of cues and to your personal responses and associations with the text. In short, “good” or sound interpretations are those that are supported by textual evidence and thus are understandable and persuasive to other readers, whose experiences and beliefs may differ from yours.

READING RHETORICALLY AS A STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

The metaphors of conversation and composing bring out the essential rhetorical nature of reading and writing. By rhetorical we mean “related to an intended effect.” Invoking the term “rhetoric” always draws attention to a writer’s relationship to and intentions toward an audience. Consider Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as the art of discovering the available means of persuasion in a given situation. Although the word “persuasion” focuses on an audience, Aristotle’s definition highlights discovery along with persuasion. From this pairing we can understand that writers must thoroughly understand their subject in order to discover the best methods for presenting their material to others. (By “best,” we mean the most ethically responsible as well as the most persuasive.) Rhetoric’s partnership of discovery and persuasion makes it clear why reading rhetorically is a powerful academic strategy in all disciplines. By reading rhetorically, we mean reading with awareness of both the purposes of the author whose text you are reading and your own purposes as a reader and writer.

The Purposes of the Author Whose Text You Are Reading

When we introduced the term reading rhetorically early in this chapter, we described authors as having designs on their readers. That phrasing underscores the fact that writers want to change readers’ perceptions and thinking, and that they use both direct and indirect means to do so. Typically, a writer’s goal is to change a reader’s understanding of subject matter in some way. Sometimes the change might simply confirm what the reader thought beforehand—readers typically enjoy music and film reviews that affirm their own opinions and political columns that echo their views. At other times the change might involve an increase in knowledge or in clarity of understanding (an article explains how bluenose dolphins use whistling sounds to converse with each other, increasing your awe of sea mammals). Sometimes the change might radically reconstruct a reader’s whole view of a subject (an article convinces you to reverse your position on legalization of medical marijuana). How much change occurs? The reader decides.

Your Own Purposes as a Reader/Writer Who Will Use a Text

When an assignment calls you to respond in some way to texts that you have read, you must take on the role of an active reader who composes meanings. Your responses might range from writing marginal notes on the text itself (something that expert readers do) to writing a major research paper. These decisions about the way you will read a text and think critically about it will depend upon your own purposes as a writer. In the chapters that follow, we’ll
explore more fully ways to establish purposes for reading and ways you might respond to a text. For now, we’d like to give you an extended example to help you see our point that your purposes as a reader/writer help shape the way that you read.

An Illustrated Example:
Researching the Promise of Biofuels

Imagine that you are assigned a major research paper in a history or politics class that requires you to select sources from among what may be hundreds of possibilities. These potential sources will pose reading challenges different from those of your course textbooks because they will be written for many different audiences and purposes. On any given topic—let’s take the development of biofuels as a broad example—it’s likely your research will turn up books, scholarly articles, popular magazine articles, news reports, and a range of politically charged editorials, op-ed columns, blogs, and Web sites, all of them published in different contexts for readers with a range of different concerns: experts and nonexperts, theorists and researchers, farmers and automakers, local and national politicians, and ordinary citizens. As a reader who is planning to write, you will need to determine what, among all this material, suits your needs and purposes.

Your own purposes may grow out of personal interests and questions. Let’s take as an example a first-year student we’ll call “Jack” who has become interested in biofuels because holiday dinners with relatives who farm in the Midwest have produced many heated arguments about the wisdom of raising corn for ethanol production. One uncle recently switched a significant proportion of acreage from soybeans to feed corn with the intention of selling the corn crop to ethanol producers. He supports political candidates who favor federal subsidies for ethanol production. But another uncle is certain that the market for corn ethanol will disappear within a couple of years as other, more efficiently produced biofuels are developed. He is sticking with the strains of corn that food producers want to buy, and he favors political candidates who promise to support development of clean, green energy. Motivated by curiosity about which of his uncles is right, when he receives an assignment for an analysis paper in his composition class, Jack decides to research the pros and cons of growing corn for ethanol production. (You will find more about his work on this subject in Chapter 5.)

Now imagine another first-year student, active with environmental groups at her small New England college and enthusiastic about ethanol as an automobile fuel because she has heard it referred to as “clean energy.” She decides to investigate the pros and cons of ethanol production not from a farmer’s perspective but from the perspective of its end users—is it really a clean fuel?

Despite a wealth of readily available materials on the subject, both students will eventually find themselves hard pressed to find definite answers to their questions. Quick searches of the Internet and periodicals databases
will uncover a wealth of materials on ethanol, materials that bring up a number of issues that stir controversy:

- The amount of carbon-based energy necessary to produce ethanol
- Competition for agricultural land around the globe
- Alternatives to corn that might be used for “cellulosic” ethanol
- Questionable fuel efficiency for ethanol
- Difficulties of transporting ethanol to consumers
- Ethanol’s questionable impact on reducing U.S. oil imports

Furthermore, even a quick scanning of headlines and article titles indicates that the writers are as likely to be influenced by politics and profits as by science or by food and fuel prices around the world. Internet searches turn up a wide range of perspectives on ethanol, from industry groups that favor expanded ethanol production (such as the American Coalition for Ethanol Web site in Figure 1.1) to environmental organizations (such as the Rain Forest Action Network site in Figure 1.2) that oppose the development of biofuels.
in general on the grounds that land used for fuel crops takes away land for food crops and rain forests. In doing research, the students will soon learn that, as yet, there is no clear answer about the wisdom of developing ethanol as an automotive fuel, nor about the trade-offs of using agricultural land for developing biofuels. Indeed, research on ethanol developed from different types of crops suggests different promises and problems for each type in matters as basic as fuel economy and carbon emissions.

Consider the multiple points of view about ethanol in just one article on the New York Times Web feature called “Green Inc.—Energy, the Environment, and the Bottom Line.” In a brief spring 2009 article headlined “A Slugfest Over Higher Ethanol Blends,” writer Kate Galbraith reported a range of responses to a proposal from the corn ethanol industry that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) raise the limit for ethanol added to gasoline from 10% to 15%. Environmentalists opposed the proposal, however, arguing that ethanol production increases greenhouse gases. Small-engine manufacturers also opposed the proposal by predicting

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that gasoline with 15% ethanol would damage chain saws, lawn mowers, and the like. An engineering professor granted that 15% ethanol would bring “a very modest reduction in the miles per gallon,” but that this would not be a “show stopper.”

This report from the “Green Inc.” feature demonstrates an important truth about the public conversation concerning ethanol: there is not one “ethanol debate.” There are many, depending on the interests and values of the debaters. Farmers and environmental organizations have different perspectives and concerns; university scientists are interested in chemical and physical evidence. Consumers are concerned about the miles-per-gallon value of fuel that will get them from Point A to Point B. To research and report on the conversation, one must recognize and investigate these multiple perspectives.

Our larger point is that only careful reading will lead to a good academic paper on a complex subject. The reader needs to focus not only on what a given text says but on its rhetorical strategies for making its case. To illustrate, let’s return to the “ethanol.org” Web site in Figure 1.1, the home page of the American Coalition for Ethanol. Given the organization’s goals, we would expect that material on the site would support ethanol production and that the “All About Ethanol” tab would lead to information favorable to ethanol, which it does. But our student researching corn ethanol knows that there are other crop sources for ethanol, which might be discussed on the site as well. He needs to explore. As it turns out, the first link is entitled “U.S. Corn Growers Producing Food and Fuel,” phrasing that counters the “Food vs. Fuel” slogan of activists opposed to further development of corn ethanol. The link leads to an appealingly designed PDF “paper” published by the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA). It features a border of colorful photographs of cornfields, the top one with a fluttering American flag photoshopped above it. The article, which features scientific-appearing graphs and charts, announces that it seeks to disabuse readers of the “fallacy” that we must choose between growing corn for fuel versus food. While the NCGA appears to be an organization with reliable information about corn, careful reading reveals that this article’s presentation of the “food vs. fuel” debate is one-sided. Its use of data amounts to advocacy, not science. Not only does it refer dismissively to nameless “skeptics” who claim that corn production for ethanol has resulted in food shortages and increased food costs, but it also cites as a source for factual information the Ethanol Producer Magazine, the title of which reveals the interests of its writers and readers. In short, this is a reliable source only for someone researching what the ethanol industry has to say about corn ethanol. This example demonstrates that a student who wants to research a topic ethically and responsibly must examine the language, rhetorical strategies (including visuals), and sources used by a given text as a means of actively seeking out sources that represent differing points of view. (In Chapter 5, we discuss in detail the importance of rhetorical reading for doing research.)
As the above example illustrates, rhetorical reading is a powerful academic skill that helps you recognize the persuasive strategies built into a text. Inevitably, no text tells the whole story. To promote an argument, some texts will distort opposing perspectives; others will make certain perspectives invisible. Eventually, after you have read enough materials from sources you have learned to trust, by writers you have learned to respect, you will be able to fill in background that you perhaps did not even notice was missing when you first started reading in a given subject area.

How can you tell whether a text seeks to give you a full picture in a fair and reliable manner or is simply making another one-sided argument in a hotly contested debate? By learning to read rhetorically. Doing so will enable you to read—then write—successful college papers.

Questions Rhetorical Readers Ask

You can begin training yourself to read rhetorically by asking the eight analytical questions below. These questions will help you discover how a writer’s purpose and worldview become evident in a text. This discovery will in turn help you to analyze how a text works and to determine how you want to respond to it.

1. What questions does the text address? (Why are these significant questions? What community cares about them?)
2. Who is the intended audience? (Am I part of this audience or an outsider?)
3. How does the author support his or her thesis with reasons and evidence? (Do I find this argument convincing? What views and counterarguments are omitted from the text? What counterevidence is ignored?)
4. How does the author hook the intended reader’s interest and keep the reader reading? (Do these appeals work for me?)
5. How does the author make himself or herself seem credible to the intended audience? (Is the author credible for me? Are the author’s sources reliable?)
6. Are this writer’s basic values, beliefs, and assumptions similar to or different from my own? (How does this writer’s worldview accord with mine?)
7. How do I respond to this text? (Will I go along with or challenge what this text is presenting? How has it changed my thinking?)
8. How do this author’s evident purposes for writing fit with my purposes for reading? (How will I be able to use what I have learned from the text?)
TYPICAL READING-BASED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

In college, a reading assignment is often only the first step in a complex series of activities that lead toward writing something that will be graded. What you write will naturally vary from situation to situation and can range from a quick answer on an essay exam to an extensive source-based paper. In this section, we discuss five common college writing assignments in which reading plays a major role:

1. Writing to understand course content more fully
2. Writing to report your understanding of what a text says
3. Writing to practice the conventions of a particular type of text
4. Writing to make claims about a text
5. Writing to extend the conversation

These roles can be placed along a continuum, starting with writing tasks in which the ideas in the readings predominate and moving to assignments in which the readings are subordinated to your own ideas and aims. The first two assignment types focus on using writing to learn course subject matter and to practice careful listening to texts. The last three focus on writing your own analyses and arguments for academic audiences. Writing teachers sometimes distinguish these two categories of assignment goals by referring to them as “writing to learn” and “learning to write.”

Writing to Understand Course Content More Fully

“Writing-to-learn” assignments aim to deepen your understanding of the reading material by asking you to put the author’s ideas into your own words or to identify points of confusion for yourself. The primary audience for these types of writing is often yourself, even though teachers sometimes ask you to submit them so that they can check on your understanding and progress. The style is informal and conversational. Organization and grammatical correctness are less important than the quality of your engagement with the content of the reading. These assignments typically take one of the following forms.

In-Class Freewriting

The point of freewriting is to think rapidly without censoring your thoughts. Freewriting is often done in class as a way to stimulate thinking about the day’s subject. A typical in-class freewrite assignment might be this:

Choose what for you personally is the single most important word in the text we read for today. You need not speculate about which word the author or your instructor or any other classmate would choose. Just choose the word that seems most important to you. This word may...
Typical Reading-Based Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum

occur only once, a few times, or perhaps it appears frequently. Then explore in writing why you chose the word as the most important word in the essay.5

Reading or Learning Logs
Reading or learning logs are informal assignments that ask you to record your understanding, questions, and responses to a reading. Some teachers give specific prompts to guide your entries while others just ask that you write entries with a certain regularity and/or of a certain length. A typical question about a text might be “How would you describe the author’s voice in this essay?” If a teacher asks you simply to write your own reflections in a log, you might use some of the questions rhetorical readers ask (presented on p. 17) to examine the text’s method and your response to it.

Double-Entry Notebooks
Double-entry notebooks are a special kind of reading log in which you conduct an ongoing dialogue with your interpretations and reactions to the text. Here is how they work: Divide a notebook page with a line down the middle. On the right side of the page, record reading notes—direct quotations, observations, comments, questions, objections. On the left side, record your later reflections about those notes—second thoughts, responses to quotations, reactions to earlier comments, answers to questions or new questions. Rhetorician Ann Berthoff, who popularized this approach, says that the double-entry notebook provides readers with a means of conducting a “continuing audit of meaning.”6 In keeping a double-entry journal, you carry on a conversation with yourself about a text.

One-Page Response Papers or Thought Pieces
Written for an instructor, one-page response papers or “thought” pieces are somewhat more formal than the previous writing-to-learn assignments but are still a great deal more informal than essay assignments. They call for a fuller response than the previous types of writing-to-learn assignments, but the purpose will be similar—to articulate an understanding of a text and to respond to it, often within the context of major themes or concepts being addressed in a particular course. Usually, a teacher will give students a specific question as a prompt for these papers. Here is a sample thought piece written in response to a prompt from a freshman seminar in psychology. The teacher asked the students to write about the insights they gleaned regarding obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) from reading Lauren Slater’s essay “Black Swans,” in which the author narrates the onset of her ongoing battle with OCD.

5We thank Joan Ruffino, an instructor at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, for this freewriting assignment.
Reading Lauren Slater’s “Black Swans” taught me some basic information about OCD, but more importantly, it taught me how terrifying this disease can be. It begins with a single obsessive thought that leads to a cycle of anxiety, repetitive behaviors such as repeatedly washing one’s hands, and avoidance of situations that produce the obsessive thoughts. In severe cases, like Slater’s, the person completely avoids life because the obsessive thought invades every aspect of one’s life. The essay also makes it clear that experts understand very little about the causes for this disease or about how to treat it.

What impressed me most about this essay, however, was Slater’s ability to put me in her shoes and make me feel some of the terror she felt. She vividly describes her experience at being stricken with this condition without warning. A single thought—“I can’t concentrate”—suddenly blocked out all other thoughts. Ordinary surroundings like the blue floor of her room appeared strange and frightening. Even her own body seemed foreign to her and grotesque: “the phrase ‘I can’t concentrate on my hand’ blocked out my hand, so all I saw was a blur of flesh giving way to the bones beneath, and inside the bones the grimy marrow, and in the grimy marrow the individual cells, all disconnected. Shattered skin.” To me, this was the most frightening description in the essay. I can’t imagine being disconnected from my own body. I think the most terrifying aspect of this disease is the sense of being completely out of control of your mind. Slater describes it as, “My mind was devouring my mind.” While one can never really know what the disease feels like without actually experiencing it, this essay gives us a disturbing glimpse of what it might be like.

Effective response papers or thought pieces, like this one, identify significant points in the reading and offer a personal response or interpretation of those significant points. In this book there are numerous places where we present short writing-to-learn tasks designed to help you understand and apply key concepts of rhetorical reading.

Writing to Report Your Understanding of What a Text Says

Another common reading-based assignment asks you to report your understanding of what a text says. Such reports are necessary, for example, when essay exam questions ask students to contrast the ideas of several authors. You might also need to provide such a report in an annotated bibliography summarizing sources related to a particular topic or question, or in a literature review at the beginning of a report for a science class. (We offer guidelines for writing summaries for a variety of purposes, including a rhetorical précis, in Chapter 3.) A summary might be short; for example, you might write a one-sentence summary to provide context for quotations you want to use. Or you might want to present a fairly detailed summary of an author’s argument in an important statement on a controversial issue. Sometimes an entire paper can be a sequence of summaries, as in an assignment to review current literature about a particular topic—for example, about new treatments for
obsessive-compulsive disorder in a psychology course or about scientific studies of the relationship between pesticides and cancer in a biochemistry course. Although summaries or reports of your understanding of a text will vary in length and purpose, they are always expected to be accurate, fair, and balanced. In short, they require you to listen carefully to the text.

Writing to Practice the Conventions of a Particular Type of Text

Assignments that ask you to analyze and practice the conventions of a particular type of writing—its organizational format, style, ways of presenting evidence, and so on—use readings as models. Such assignments are common in college courses. In a journalism class, for example, you would learn to write a news report using the inverted pyramid structure; in a science course you might be asked to write up the results of a lab assignment in the form of a scientific experimental report. Frequently repeated types or forms of writing are called genres, and each discipline has its own characteristic genre and format. Examples include marketing proposals, patient intakes, ethnographies, and so forth. Novices in a discipline learn to write in these genres by reading examples and practicing their formats and rhetorical "moves."

Generally, using readings as models of a genre involves the following activities:

* Identifying the features that characterize a particular type of text
* Noting the ways in which a rhetorical situation affects the features identified in model texts
* Coming up with your own topic and reason for writing this particular type of text
* Using the features of the model text (or texts) and your own rhetorical situation to guide your writing

Let’s say, for example, that you’ve been asked to write a proposal argument. Proposals typically include three main features: description of the problem, proposal of a solution, and justification of that solution. As you read sample proposals, you will find that in different contexts authors deal with these features differently, depending on their audience and purpose. In some cases, for example, there is a great deal of description of the problem because the intended audience is unfamiliar with it; in other cases, there is very little description because it is presumed that the intended reading audience already knows a lot about the problem. The key to success is to adapt the model’s structural and stylistic characteristics to your own rhetorical purpose, not to follow the model slavishly.

In courses across the curriculum, your ability to analyze and adopt the conventions particular to a given discipline’s ways of writing will help you write successful papers. For example, when you are asked in a philosophy class to write an argument in response to Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure
Reason, you are primarily being asked to engage with the ideas in the text. But secondarily, you are also being asked to practice the conventions of writing a philosophical argument in which counterexamples and counterarguments are expected. Thus, in any field of study, it pays to be alert not only to the ideas presented in material you are assigned to read but also its structure and style.

Writing to Make Claims About a Text

Assignments in this category ask you to analyze and critique readings. These papers must go beyond a summary of what a text says to make claims about it and draw conclusions. Many academic writers take as their field of study the texts produced by others. Literary critics study novels, poems, and plays; cultural critics analyze song lyrics, advertisements, cereal boxes, and television scripts; historians analyze primary source documents from the past; theologians scrutinize the sacred texts of different religions; lawyers analyze the documents entered into court proceedings, the exact wording of laws and statutes produced by legislators, or the decisions of appellate court judges. In all these cases, the analysis and critique involve examining small parts of the whole to understand, explain, and perhaps object to, its overall points and success.

Many college composition courses ask students to write rhetorical analyses of texts. These assignments ask you to analyze—a word that at its root means “take apart”—texts by identifying specific rhetorical methods and strategies used by the author, showing how these rhetorical choices contribute to the text’s impact, and evaluating those choices in light of the author’s evident purpose. In these types of assignments, the text and your ideas about the text are of equal importance. Assignments asking for analysis or critique are not invitations for you to refer briefly to the text and then take off on your own opinions about the topic, nor are they invitations merely to summarize or rehearse what the text has said. Rather, these assignments expect you to engage critically with a specific text. On the one hand, you will be expected to represent what the text said accurately and fairly. On the other hand, you will be expected to offer your own analysis, interpretation, or critique, one that enables readers to see the text differently. Further guidance about engaging with texts this way appears in Chapter 4, which includes guidelines for writing a rhetorical analysis along with a sample assignment and student paper as illustration: Abby’s rhetorical analysis of Atul Gawande’s proposal for reducing infections that result from surgical procedures, “A Lifesaving Checklist” (printed at the end of that chapter).

Writing to Extend the Conversation

These assignments treat texts as voices in a conversation about ideas. They typically call for you to read and synthesize material from several sources.
Here, your own ideas and aims take center stage; your source texts play important but less prominent backup roles. The most familiar form this assignment takes is the research or seminar paper. What distinguishes such college work from high school research paper assignments is instructors’ expectation that the paper will present your own argument, not the arguments provided by the sources. In other words, you are expected to articulate a significant question or problem, investigate relevant data, research what published authors have said about it in print or on the Web, and then formulate your own argument. To write these multisource papers successfully, you must use your source texts primarily to position yourself in the conversation and to supply supporting data, information, or testimony. The argument—your main points—must come from you.

A helpful way to approach these assignments is to treat the texts you have read as springboards for further research and discovery. Think of the readings you encounter in your research as voices in a conversation that your essay will join. By giving you the opportunity to define your own purposes for writing in dialogue with other texts, such assignments prepare you for the research assignments typical of many college courses, where your goal is to synthesize material from a number of sources and then produce your own paper, inserting another voice—your own—into the ongoing conversation.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter we have provided a brief overview of this book; we have defined the concept of reading rhetorically, and we have explained how it can help you approach a wide variety of college writing assignments. In the preceding pages, we

- Defined rhetorical reading as paying attention to both the content of a text (“what”) and the author’s method of presenting that content (“how”)
- Described the special demands and pleasures of academic reading, which often requires recognizing how different academic disciplines value evidence and report research
- Used the metaphors of conversation and composing to describe how academic reading and writing are both active processes through which readers construe a text’s meaning by bringing their own values and experiences to a text and articulating their own ideas in response
- Showed the value of rhetorical reading as an academic strategy through which a reader analyzes a text’s content and strategies in order to decide how to respond—whether to assent to the writer’s ideas, modify them, or resist them
• Provided a list of eight questions rhetorical readers use to judge how a text works and how to respond to it
• Explained five different ways that assignments across the curriculum might ask you to use readings

In the chapters that follow, we will offer you a variety of strategies that are likely to bring you success as you respond to assignments like these by using rhetorical reading skills to work with the texts upon which your writing will be based.
Analyzing Your Reading and Writing Context

It is like the rubbing of two sticks together to make a fire, the act of reading, an improbable pedestrian task that leads to heat and light.
—Anna Quindlen

In Chapter 1 we stressed that reading is not a passive activity, like consuming and regurgitating words from the page would be, but a dynamic activity in which the reader interacts with a text to construct meaning. This dynamic activity occurs, as we will show, in a rhetorical context—both the writer’s and the reader’s. Our purpose in this chapter is to explain more fully what we mean by rhetorical context and to persuade you that your ability to understand and use this concept will make you a stronger reader and writer.

We’ll begin by putting this chapter’s point in a nutshell: Writers write for a purpose to an audience within a genre. These three factors—purpose, audience, and genre—create what we mean by “rhetorical context.” When you read a text, you’ll need to analyze the writer’s rhetorical context through the lens of each of these factors. Then, when you write in response to the text you have just read, you’ll need to consider your own rhetorical context: What will be your own purpose, audience, and genre? As we’ll explain, your rhetorical context as a writer will influence the way you read and use other texts. The first main section of this chapter focuses on the rhetorical context of the author whose text you are reading. We then switch to your own rhetorical context as a writer using that text. Finally, we’ll look at some experts’ strategies for using rhetorical knowledge to make reading more efficient.

ANALYZING A TEXT’S ORIGINAL RHETORICAL CONTEXT

When skilled writers compose a text, their rhetorical context informs their decisions about content, structure, and style. We define rhetorical context as the combined factors of purpose, audience, and genre. Recognizing the influence of these factors helps rhetorical readers reconstruct the strategy behind an author’s choices about content (for example, where to focus, what to include and
exclude); structure (for example, what to say first, when to reveal the thesis, how to arrange the parts, how to format the document); and style (big words or ordinary words, complex or easy sentence structure, lots of jargon or no jargon, and so forth).

Analyzing an Author’s Purpose

In Chapter 1 we noted that writers have designs on readers—that is, writers aim to change their reader’s view of a subject in some way. As we explained, they might aim to enlarge the reader’s view of a subject, clarify that view, or restructure that view. An author is inevitably motivated by some problem or flaw she or he wishes to remedy by reaching out to an audience through language. Rhetorician Lloyd F. Bitzer used the term exigence for a flaw an author believes can be altered by a text presented to an audience. This flaw might be a circumstance that is other than it should be, a situation in need of attention, perhaps an occasion in need of special recognition. Your ability to pinpoint an author’s sense of a flaw, problem, or situation in need of change will enable you to zero in on that author’s purpose. Furthermore, as we will show in Chapter 5, when you are ready to write about what you have read, your sense of the flaw to be remedied by your own writing will help you focus sharply on your own purpose. Such “flaws” or problems may be as simple as the need to provide information or as complex as the need to advocate for standardizing a set of medical procedures in order to reduce infections. (You will see surgeon Atul Gawande make this argument in the reading at the end of Chapter 4.) For example, a potential employer needs to know of your availability and qualifications for a particular job, so you submit a letter and résumé. Or a history professor needs to know that you do, indeed, have a good grasp of the economic system that dominated during China’s Ming dynasty, so you answer an exam question with careful detail.

A set of categories for conceptualizing the ways that writers aim to change readers’ minds is summarized in Table 2.1. (See pp. 27–29.) Based on a scheme developed by rhetoricians to categorize types of discourse in terms of a writer’s aim or purpose, the table identifies eight rhetorical aims or purposes that writers typically set for themselves. This framework offers a particularly powerful way of thinking about both reading and writing because each row zeroes in on how a writer might envision the connection between subject matter and audience in a given situation. In the table, we describe how texts in each rhetorical category work, what they offer readers, and the response their authors typically aim to bring about. We illustrate the differences among the aims with examples of texts that a college student might compose in response to assignments in a variety of courses.

By labeling the table’s fourth column “Desired Response,” we emphasize that a writer can only desire a certain response from a reader, but cannot force that response. The reader is in charge because it is the reader who decides

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whether to accede to the writer’s intentions or to resist them. Because writers try to persuade an intended audience to adopt their perspective, they select and arrange evidence, choose examples, include or omit material, and select words and images to best support their perspective. But it is readers who decide—sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately—whether the presentation is convincing. Your awareness of how a text is constructed to persuade its intended audience will enable you to decide how you want to respond to the text and use it in your own writing.

**TABLE 2.1  A Spectrum of Purposes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Aim</th>
<th>Focus and Features</th>
<th>Offers Readers</th>
<th>Desired Response</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Express and Reflect  | **Focus:** Writer’s own life and experience  
**Features:** Literary techniques such as plot, character, setting, evocative language | Shared emotional, intellectual experience | Readers can imagine and identify with writer’s experience.  
Success depends on writer’s ability to create scenes, dialog, and commentary that engage readers. | Nursing student reflects on her semester of Service Learning at a school for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. |
| Inquire and Explore  | **Focus:** Puzzling problem seen through narration of writer’s thinking processes  
**Features:** Delayed thesis or no thesis; examination of subject from multiple angles; writer’s thinking is foregrounded | Shared intellectual experience, new information, new perspectives | Readers will agree question or problem is significant, identify with writer’s thinking, and find new insights.  
Success depends on writer’s ability to engage readers with question or problem and the exploration process. | Students in an honors seminar taught by a physicist and philosopher write papers that explore the question: "What makes study of the origins of the universe significant to daily life in the 21st century?" |
| Inform and Explain (also called expository writing) | **Focus:** Subject matter  
**Features:** Confident, authoritative stance; typically states point and purpose early; strives for clarity; provides definitions and examples; uses convincing evidence without argument | Significant, perhaps surprising, new information; presentation tailored to readers’ interest and presumed knowledge level | Readers will grant writer credibility as expert, be satisfied with the information’s scope and accuracy.  
Success depends on writer’s ability to anticipate reader’s information needs and ability to understand. | Economics intern is assigned to track 10 years of the rise and fall of mortgage interest rates and report on experts’ current explanations of the trends. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Aim</th>
<th>Focus and Features</th>
<th>Offers Readers</th>
<th>Desired Response</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analyze and Interpret</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Phenomena that are difficult to understand or explain</td>
<td>New way of looking at the subject matter</td>
<td><strong>Readers</strong> will grant writer credibility as analyst and accept insights offered, or at least acknowledge value of approach. <strong>Success</strong> depends on writer’s ability to explain reasoning and connect it with phenomena analyzed.</td>
<td>Literature student analyzes the definition of justice employed by various characters in <em>Antigone</em> with the goal of interpreting Sophocles’ understanding of the concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasion:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Question that divides a community</td>
<td>Reasons to make up or change their minds about the question at issue</td>
<td><strong>Readers</strong> will agree with writer’s position and reasoning. <strong>Success</strong> depends on writer’s ability to provide convincing support and to counter opposition without alienating readers.</td>
<td>For his ethics class, an architecture student decides to write an argument in favor of placing certain buildings in his community on the historic preservation register, thus preserving them from demolition or radical remodeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Take a Stand</strong></td>
<td><strong>Features:</strong> States firm position, provides clear reasons and evidence, connects with readers’ values and beliefs; engages with opposing views</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasion:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus:</strong> Question about worth or value of a phenomenon</td>
<td>Reasons to make up or change their minds about the focal question regarding worth or value</td>
<td><strong>Readers</strong> will accept writer’s view of the worth or value of the phenomenon. <strong>Success</strong> depends on writer’s ability to connect subject to criteria that readers accept.</td>
<td>Political theory students are asked to evaluate and choose between the descriptions of an ideal ruler embodied in Plato’s philosopher king and Machiavelli’s prince.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluate and Judge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Features:</strong> Organized around criteria for judgment and how phenomenon matches them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continues*
One effective way to analyze an author’s purpose is to articulate the kind of change the author hopes to bring about in the reader’s mind. Try using this formula to quiz yourself about the author’s desire to change your mind:

At the beginning of the text, the writer assumes that the reader believes ____________

By the end of the text, the writer hopes that the reader believes ____________

These questions will help you, as a rhetorical reader, to analyze your own response to the text—whether you are going to think or do what the writer apparently hopes you will.
For Writing and Discussion

To explore the spectrum of aims presented in Table 2.1, choose an issue or situation that interests you and fill in the grid of a similar table with sample writing scenarios and purposes for each of the table’s eight rows of rhetorical aims. Working alone or with others, fill in as many cells in the example column as you can. Choose among the following hypothetical writers or another writer-reader combination that intrigues you.

* College students in different courses
* A single writer (perhaps an entertainment columnist or a sports writer) seeking publication in a variety of venues, including the Web, about the same subject matter
* People in a variety of roles writing with different aims about the same topic (perhaps a family matter such as pets or divorce, or a public matter such as green energy or human rights)

Identifying an Author’s Intended Audience

Audience plays a major role in guiding an author’s choices. As you analyze a text, watch for cues in the author’s language and use of detail that reveal assumptions about the intended audience.

For example, suppose a writer wants to persuade legislators to raise gasoline taxes in order to reduce fossil fuel consumption. Her probable strategy would be to persuade different groups of voters to pressure their congressional representatives. If she writes for a scientific audience, her article can include technical data and detailed statistical analyses. If she addresses the general public, however, her style will have to be less technical and more lively, with story-like anecdotes rather than tabular data. If she writes for an environmental publication, she can assume an audience already supportive of her pro-environment values. However, if she writes for a business publication such as the Wall Street Journal, she will have to be sensitive to her audience’s pro-business values—perhaps by arguing that what is good for the environment will be good for business in the long run.

Analyzing a Text’s Genre

Besides adapting content, structure, and style to different purposes and audiences, writers also adapt their work to the conventions of a text’s genre such as magazine article, newspaper op-ed piece, blog, scholarly article, Web site, or brochure. The term “genre” refers to a recurring category or type of writing based on identifiable features such as structure (a thesis-driven argument versus a short story), style (formal versus informal), or document design (newspaper versus brochure). You may be familiar with the concept of genre from literature classes where you studied an assortment of genres, such as plays, novels, and poems. Within each of these broad literary genres are subgenres such as the
sonnet and haiku or tragedy and comedy. Similarly, workplace writing has a number of subgenres (memo, marketing proposal, financial report, progress report) as does academic writing (laboratory report, field notes, article abstract, literature review). As the descriptions of typical writing assignments in Chapter 1 showed, even familiar academic assignments have subgenres (informal response papers, essay exams, article summaries, researched arguments that present a semester’s worth of work).

Consider one commonly encountered genre: a news article, in print or online. Even someone who has never written one has probably learned from experience that these reports begin with the key facts of the story and then broaden out to offer background information and additional details. This structure is called an inverted pyramid based on an initial, or lead, paragraph that reports the essential details—*who, what, when, where, why,* and *how* of the news event—which is then followed by the bulk of details of the story. Someone in a hurry or with only a passing interest in the subject matter can usually glean the gist of the news by reading just the first paragraph and skipping further details.

Genre differences in written texts are typically made evident through visual cues. When readers encounter cues that typify a particular genre or subgenre, they expect different kinds of content. If you were browsing publications in the current periodicals rack at a library, you could quickly distinguish popular magazines such as *Popular Science* and *Business Week* from scholarly journals such as the *American Journal of Human Genetics* or the *Journal of Marketing Research*. The glossy covers of the magazines, often adorned with arresting photographs, distinguish them from sober, academic-looking scholarly journals, the covers of which typically display the table of contents of the articles within. (These genre distinctions are less apparent when you do research in a computerized periodicals database, a potential problem we take up in Chapter 5.) As you develop your ability to recognize genres and the ways that their conventions shape content, you will also sharpen your ability to decide whether and how to use particular texts for your own purposes.

Consider, for example, how readers would distinguish the different genres of the two articles about napping introduced in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Figure 2.1 is an online screen shot of the opening paragraphs of an online article from *Newsweek*. Figure 2.2 is a screen shot of the opening paragraphs of an article from *Nature Neuroscience*. This screen appears when one clicks the *Newsweek* article’s hyperlinked phrase “productivity and alertness in the workplace” in the sentence about research findings.

Even a quick glance at these screens shows that the genres of these two texts are quite different. The first article, written to be read casually by a general, multiage audience, is a numbered self-help list presented in a playful, “feel good” tone. In contrast, the second article, with its scientific style and structure, is a serious scholarly article presenting significant research. Consider how the titles themselves suggest the difference in genre: “Seven Secrets to a Great Nap” (casual, friendly, inviting) versus “The Restorative Effects of Naps on Perceptual Deterioration” (formal, scientific, perhaps daunting). In each case, the authors’
Analyzing Your Reading and Writing Context

And editors’ knowledge about the genre—its demands, constraints, and readers’ expectations— influenced their decisions about content, structure, and style. As we explain later in this chapter, understanding the genres of given texts will also help you develop strategies for reading them, even if they at first appear daunting.

For Writing and Discussion

We have reprinted the full text of “Seven Secrets to a Great Nap” at the end of this chapter (pp. 41–42). The scholarly text from *Nature Neuroscience* should be available through your college library as well as through the Newsweek site. As you look at the full texts of both articles, what additional genre differences do you note?

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**FIGURE 2.1** *Newsweek* Online Article About Napping

- **Title:** The restorative effect of naps on perceptual deterioration
- **Authors:** Rebecca J. Hofsten, Esmeralda Gonzalez, Anna J. Van Dyck, and RobertStickgold
- **Publication:** *Nature Neuroscience*
- **Abstract:** Preview abstract text.

**FIGURE 2.2** *Nature Neuroscience* Research Article About the Effects of Napping

- **Title:** The restorative effect of naps on perceptual deterioration
- **Authors:** Rebecca J. Hofsten, Esmeralda Gonzalez, Anna J. Van Dyck, and Robert Stickgold
- **Publication:** *Nature Neuroscience*
- **Abstract:** Preview abstract text.
Reconstructing Rhetorical Context:
An Extended Example

This brief section presents an extended example of how you might establish a sense of a text’s original rhetorical context by using external clues.

Suppose you are enrolled in a philosophy class and have been assigned to read the Anthony Weston book, *Toward Better Problems: New Perspectives on Abortion, Animal Rights, the Environment, and Justice*. The title and subtitle suggest that the book will address the question, “How can we find better ways to define difficult social problems such as abortion, animal rights, the environment, and justice?” The words “better” and “new” in the title also imply that this book is a response to other books on the subject and that the author’s purpose is to propose a change in outlook. The phrase “better problems” is intriguing—is there such a thing as a “good” or “better” problem? This strange notion, along with the promise of “new” perspectives on thorny social issues, seems designed to pique readers’ curiosity.

To place the book in a larger context, however, and to identify the intended audience, we need further information. A quick perusal of the back cover tells us that the publisher, Temple University Press, has categorized the text as “Philosophy/Applied Ethics,” so we might predict that this book belongs to the genre “academic book” and was written for an academic audience (faculty and students), or at least a well-educated one, and that Weston will deal with ethical issues from a philosophical perspective (as opposed to a theological, sociological, or political one). This conclusion is further confirmed by information on the cover that Weston teaches philosophy at Stony Brook University in New York, a note that establishes his academic credentials. If you don’t have a strong background in philosophy, this information may further lead you to conclude that this text may be difficult to read—all the more reason to devote time to investigating its context and purpose. After all, by virtue of enrolling in the philosophy course, you have become part of Weston’s intended audience.

ANALYZING YOUR OWN RHETORICAL CONTEXT AS READER/WRITER

When you are assigned to read texts of any type (a textbook, a newspaper article, data on a Web site, historical documents, or other kinds of readings), think not only about their authors’ rhetorical context, but also about your own.

Determining Your Purpose, Audience, and Genre

When you write about these texts or use them in your own arguments, you, too, will be writing for a purpose to an audience within a genre. Your purpose will derive from the kind of assignment given by your professor. (See the section on
“Typical Reading-Based Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum” in Chap. 1, pp. 18–23.) Your audience may range from yourself to your professor and your classmates, to readers of a certain newspaper or blog, to participants in an undergraduate research conference. Your assigned genre might come from a wide range of possibilities: summary, Web posting, rhetorical analysis, reader-response reflection, source-based argument, or a major research paper. As we’ll see in the next sections, thinking about your own rhetorical context in these ways will affect the way you read texts and write about them.

Identifying your purpose at the outset helps you set goals and plan your reading accordingly. Your purpose for reading may seem like a self-evident matter—“I’m reading Chapter 1 of this sociology book because it was assigned for tomorrow.” That may be, but what we have in mind is a more strategic consideration of your purpose. How does the reading assignment tie in with themes established in class? How does it fit with concepts laid out on the course syllabus? Is this your first course in sociology? If so, then you might set a purpose for yourself of gathering definitions for the concepts being laid out as a foundation for the course and the special vocabulary sociologists use. This basic but strategically stated goal might lead you to allow extra time for the slowed-down reading that is usually necessary for students to get their bearings at the beginning of introductory courses.

To illustrate the importance of setting clear goals for your reading, let’s assume you are skimming articles to select some to read more closely for possible use in an annotated bibliography for the same introductory sociology course. Further, imagine that your assignment is to choose and summarize articles that demonstrate how sociological research can shed light on a current public controversy. As we discuss in detail in Chapter 5, an important first step in an assignment like this is to identify a clear and compelling research question. A strong research question will enable you to know what you’re looking for, and it will guide you to read more purposefully and productively. Let’s say you are interested in whether pop culture has a negative effect on family values. You want to think that it doesn’t, but from sometimes intense discussions among family and friends, you realize that the answer might be “it depends.” Maybe sociological research can reveal better ways of thinking about this issue.

Following the demands of your research question, you will need to find articles that are related to your controversy. In the process, you will need to find and read articles reporting research findings contrary to your own views as well as articles that tend to confirm your views. To summarize them fairly, you will have to pay careful attention to the way these authors articulate their goals and present their results. If the assignment were different, if you were asked, for example, to critique the methods of a research article (a common assignment in more advanced social science classes), your purpose for reading would be at odds with an author’s purpose for writing. Setting goals ahead of time for both your writing and your reading will help you know what to look for both as you select articles and as you read them. Our point, then, is that articulating your purpose for reading will make your reading more efficient and productive.
Matching Your Reading Strategies to Your Purpose as Reader/Writer

Although all readers change their approach to reading according to their purpose, the situation, and the genre of the text at hand, most readers do so without thought or reflection, relying on a limited set of strategies. By contrast, experienced readers vary their reading process self-consciously and strategically. To see how one accomplished undergraduate, Sheri, contrasts her “school” reading with her “reading-for-fun” process, see the box below. You will no doubt notice that her strategies combine idiosyncratic habits (the blue pen and cold room) with sound, widely used academic reading habits (looking over chapter headings, checking for study guide questions, and so on). Your own reading processes probably also combine personal habits or rituals with more purposeful reading behaviors. The awareness and flexibility evident in the way Sheri talks about her reading are important because planning the way she does will enable you to work efficiently, maximizing the use of your time. Furthermore, thinking about your purpose as Sheri does will help you maintain a sense of your own authority as you read, a notion that is very important for college writing.

Sheri’s self-awareness and deliberate reading strategies are not typical. When we ask students to describe the behaviors of good readers, many

**PREPARING TO READ: SHERI’S PROCESS**

“When I am reading for class, for starters I make sure that I have all of my reading supplies. These include my glasses, a highlighter, pencil, blue pen, notebook paper, dictionary, and a quiet place to read, which has a desk or table. (It also has to be cold!) Before I read for class or for research purposes I always look over chapter headings or bold print words and then formulate questions based on these. When I do this it helps me to become more interested in the text I am reading because I am now looking for answers.

“Also, if there are study guide questions, I will look them over so that I have a basic idea of what to look for. I will then read the text all the way through, find the answers to my questions, and underline all of the study guide answers in pencil.

“When I read for fun, it’s a whole other story! I always take off my shoes and sit on the floor/ground or in a very comfortable chair. I always prefer to read in natural light and preferably fresh air. I just read and relax and totally immerse myself in the story or article or whatever!”

initially say “speed” or “the ability to understand a text in a single reading.” Surprisingly, most experienced readers don’t aim for speed reading, nor do they report that reading is an easy, one-step process. On the contrary, experienced readers put considerable effort into reading and rereading a text, adapting their strategies and speed to the demands of the text at hand and to their purpose for reading. As we noted when we introduced rhetorical reading as an academic strategy, your purposes for reading academic assignments will vary considerably. So must your academic reading strategies. You will read much differently, for example, if your task is to interpret or analyze a text than if you are simply skimming it for its potential usefulness in a research project. Contrary to popular myth, expert readers are not necessarily “speed” readers. Experienced readers pace themselves according to their purpose, taking advantage of four basic reading speeds.

- **Very fast**: Readers scan a text very quickly if they are looking only for a specific piece of information.
- **Fast**: Readers skim a text rapidly if they are trying to get just the general gist without worrying about details.
- **Slow to moderate**: Readers read carefully in order to get complete understanding of an article. The more difficult the text, the more slowly they read. Often difficult texts require rereading.
- **Very slow**: Experienced readers read very slowly if their purpose is to analyze a text. They take elaborate marginal notes and often pause to ponder over the construction of a paragraph or the meaning of an image or metaphor. Sometimes they reread the text dozens of times.

As your expertise grows within the fields you study, you will undoubtedly learn to vary your reading speed and strategies according to your purposes, even to the point of considering “efficient” reading of certain texts to involve slowing way down and rereading.

**HOW EXPERT READERS USE RHETORICAL KNOWLEDGE TO READ EFFICIENTLY**

In this last section, we will show you two strategies used by expert readers to apply rhetorical knowledge to their reading process.

**Using Genre Knowledge to Read Efficiently**

Besides varying reading speed to match their purpose, experienced readers also adjust their reading strategies to match the genre of a text. Consider, for example, the different approaches you might take to reading the two articles about napping presented in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 (p. 32). Our guess is that you would find the *Newsweek* article inviting to read and the *Nature Neuroscience* article a bit intimidating. The numbered list from the Web site is easy to glance through...
quickly and respond to, perhaps even to put into action. The scientific article looks more difficult—but is it? You might be surprised to learn that many scientists wouldn’t read the scholarly article straight through from beginning to end; instead, they would read different sections in different order, depending on their purpose. The material in the box below describes how a group of physicists were guided both by their purpose for reading and by their familiarity with the genre conventions of scientific research reports. We invite you to read the material in the box before proceeding to the next paragraph.

Considering how scientists with different interests read specialized articles in their discipline, we can surmise that a sleep specialist might read the results section of the *Nature Neuroscience* article very carefully to learn the exact details and consider how to apply them for patient care. In contrast, a neuroscientist interested in replicating the study might read it primarily for details about its experimental design. Still another reader, perhaps a graduate student interested in finding a thesis topic, might read it to see what research the authors say still needs to be accomplished. With sharply narrow interests and purposes, these readers would probably not find the article difficult to read. In contrast, experienced readers who are not specialists might find it daunting but would recognize that it is not necessary to understand all the details in order to understand the article’s gist. These readers might read the abstract and the introduction’s explanation of the research problem, then skip directly to the discussion section, where the authors analyze the meaning and the significance of their results.

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**PHYSICISTS’ TECHNIQUES FOR EFFICIENT READING**

Researchers who studied the way that physicists read articles in physics journals found that the physicists seldom read the article from beginning to end but instead used their knowledge of the typical structure of scientific articles to find the information most relevant to their interests. Scientific articles typically begin with an abstract or summary of their contents. The main body of these articles includes a five-part structure: (1) an introduction that describes the research problem, (2) a review of other studies related to this problem, (3) a description of the methodology used in the research, (4) a report of the results, and (5) the conclusions drawn from the results. The physicists in the study read the abstracts first to see if an article was relevant to their own research. If it was, the experimental physicists went to the methodology section to see if the article reported any new methods. By contrast, the theoretical physicists went to the results section to see if the article reported any significant new results.³

As you take general education courses across the arts and sciences, you will encounter many genres that will initially be unfamiliar to you. Once you declare your major, you will learn to read and write in the genres valued by that discipline. For example, business majors learn to read and write business proposals and reports; philosophy majors learn to read and write philosophical arguments; anthropology majors learn to read and write ethnographic narratives, and so forth.

Using a Text’s Social/Historical Context to Make Predictions and Ask Questions

As we have suggested, experienced readers understand that a text is more than just information. They understand that the text is part of a larger conversation about a particular topic, and they use textual cues—such as format, style, and terminology—as well as their own background knowledge to speculate about the original context, to make predictions about the text, and to formulate questions.

These strategies for actively identifying a text’s social or historical context, making predictions, and formulating questions are illustrated in Ann Feldman’s report of interviews with expert readers reading texts within their own areas of expertise. For example, Professor Lynn Weiner, a social historian, describes in detail her behind-the-scenes thinking as she prepared to read a chapter entitled “From the Medieval to the Modern Family” from Philippe Aries’ Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, written in 1962. Quotations from Professor Weiner’s description of her thinking are shown in the box below. As Professor Weiner reads, she continues to elaborate this context, confirming and revising predictions, asking new questions, evaluating what Aries has to say in light of the

BUILDING A CONTEXT FOR READING

“This work isn’t precisely in my field and it is a difficult text. I also know it by its reputation. But, like any student, I need to create a context in which to understand this work. When the book was written, the idea of studying the family was relatively new. Before this time historians often studied kings, presidents, and military leaders. That’s why this new type of social history encouraged us to ask, ‘How did ordinary people live?’ Not the kings, but the families in the middle ages. Then we have to ask: Which families is [Aries] talking about? What causes the change that he sees? . . . For whom is the change significant? . . . I’ll want to be careful not . . . to assume the old family is bad and the new family is good. The title suggests a transition so I’ll be looking for signs of it.”

evidence he can provide, and assessing the value of his ideas to her work as a social historian. She concludes by saying, “A path-breaking book, it was credited with advancing the idea that childhood as a stage of life is historically constructed and not the same in every culture and every time. In my own work I might refer to Aries as I think and write about families as they exist today.”

Professor Weiner’s description of creating a context for understanding the Aries book suggests that the ability to recognize what you do not know and to raise questions about a text is as important as identifying what you do know and understand. Sometimes readers can reconstruct context from external clues such as a title and headings; from a text’s visual appearance (as we saw in the contrasting appearances of the Newsweek and Nature Neuroscience articles); from background notes about the author, including the date and place of publication; or from what a book’s table of contents reveals about its structure and scope. But readers often have to rely on internal evidence to get a full picture. A text’s context and purpose may become evident through some quick spot reading (explained in the next chapter), especially in the introduction and conclusion. Sometimes, however, the full rhetorical and social context can be reconstructed only through a great deal of puzzling as you read. It’s not unusual that a whole first reading is needed to understand exactly what conversation the writer is joining and how she or he intends to affect that conversation. Once that context becomes clear, rereading of key passages will make the text easier to comprehend.

For Writing and Discussion

Even when a text is about an unfamiliar or difficult subject, you can use textual cues to uncover a surprising amount of information that will help you build a context for reading. Imagine that you are enrolled in an introductory philosophy course and have been asked to read philosopher Anthony Weston’s Toward Better Problems: New Perspectives on Abortion, Animal Rights, the Environment, and Justice. The passage below excerpts key sentences from the opening of Chapter 1, “Practical Ethics in a New Key.” In it, find textual cues that might help you build a context for reading. After you have read the passage, answer the questions on the following page.

Many other “practical ethics” books take up the same topics as this one: abortion, other animals, the environment, justice. Peter Singer covers much the same ground in a book called simply Practical Ethics.

The actual practicality of the usual brand of practical ethics, however, is somewhat partial. What we are usually offered is the systematic application of some ethical theory to practice. Singer’s book represents an admirably lucid application of utilitarianism. Others apply theories of rights to the same set of issues. . . .

In these well-known kinds of practical ethics, moreover, there is a natural tendency toward a certain kind of closure. The project is to sort out the practical questions at stake in a way that finally allows one or a few facts—one or a few kinds of issues, one or a few aspects of value—to determine the answer. . . .
CHAPTER 2  Analyzing Your Reading and Writing Context

It is possible, however, to take up practical problems in a radically
different spirit, a spirit associated in particular with the work of the
American pragmatist John Dewey. This book is an attempt to do so.

On Your Own

Jot down brief answers to the following questions:

1. What, if any, background knowledge do you bring to this text?
2. Given your level of background knowledge, how would you go about
   reading the chapter?
3. What questions can you pose for getting as much as possible from your
   first reading?
4. What terms or references are unfamiliar to you? Where might you find
   out more about these terms and references?
5. What do you understand so far about the text’s meaning? What don’t
   you understand? What do you predict that Weston will say next?
6. What seems to be Weston’s purpose for writing? How will his text be
   different from other texts?

With Your Classmates

Compare your responses with those of your classmates to discover

1. What strategies for reading did various people offer? Can you agree on
   a recommended strategy?
2. What questions were recommended for getting as much as possible
   from the reading?
3. How similar and different were the predictions about what will follow
   in the text? What are the points of agreement and disagreement based
   upon? Try to clarify any confusion by sharing perspectives.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The key takeaway point of this chapter is that writers write for a purpose to
an audience within a genre. These three factors—purpose, audience, and
genre—make up a writer’s rhetorical context. In the first part of the chapter
we explained how to analyze these three factors for a text that you are read-
ing. We then showed you how to analyze your own rhetorical context as a
reader/writer. In particular, we showed you how

* To analyze a text’s original rhetorical context
* To determine your own rhetorical context (purpose, audience, and
genre) and to match your reading strategies to your own purposes
To use rhetorical knowledge to make your reading more efficient
° By using genre knowledge to read more efficiently
° By making predictions and asking questions
° By analyzing historical context

What follows is the full text of the *Newsweek* Web exclusive article first mentioned on page 31.

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### Seven Secrets to a Great Nap
**by Sarah Kliff**

Sarah Kliff has worked as a reporter and writer for *Newsweek* since 2007, soon after she graduated from Washington University in St. Louis. Her byline frequently appears on national political stories and on health-related Web exclusive features such as this one.

Pining for the perfect siesta? A sleep doc tells us what you need to do for the best midday snooze.

*By Sarah Kliff | Newsweek Web Exclusive*  
*Oct 22, 2007 | Updated: 7:35 P.M. ET Oct 22, 2007*

Naptime is not just for kindergarteners. A whole body of research shows that a midday snooze can increase *productivity and alertness in the workplace*. Naps can often be the perfect weapons to combat midafternoon sluggishness, which tends to hit between 2 and 5 P.M. *NEWSWEEK* spoke to Helene Emsellem, author of “Snooze . . . or Lose! Ten ‘No War’ Ways to Improve Your Teen’s Sleep Habits” about how, when and where to do the best napping:

1. **The Odd Couple: Coffee and a Nap.** Turns out that a cup of joe won’t ruin your nap, it will enhance it. A 2003 Japanese study found that you can alleviate sleepiness by combining a short snooze with coffee. Sound counterintuitive? Here’s how it works: caffeine takes about 20 minutes to a half-hour to kick in, just enough time for you to nap. That way, if you’ve had a coffee-primed nap, the benefits are twofold: you’ve rested and you’re ready to go when you wake. The British Transportation Department even provides drivers with the following recommendation to combat driver fatigue: “Stop, drink two cups of coffee or a highly caffeinated drink, then take a short nap.” Think of a nap as a free extra shot in your latte.

2. **The Nicest Nap Hour:** Emsellem says that 2 or 3 P.M. is the ideal nap hour—late enough to fit into your natural siesta zone but early enough that it will not interfere with your night sleep. Also take your afternoon schedule into consideration when making nap plans. If you can,
Emsellem recommends taking your midafternoon snooze just prior to a big meeting. Dozing right before the meeting will make sure you’re not drifting off during the meeting.

3. **Length Does Matter**: A good nap length is somewhere between 20 and 30 minutes. This will give you the restorative benefits of sleep without the lethargy or grogginess—what Emsellem calls “sleep drunkenness.”

4. **Making the Bed**: Location may be the toughest nap quandary. If your company has a health or nurse’s room, that could make a good place for snoozing. If that’s not an option, you may have to turn your cubicle into a makeshift nap room—but that means you’ll probably have to be all right with curling up under your desk. Heading to your parked car is another option—but of course you should make sure a window is open and the engine is not running.

5. **Set an Alarm**: Chances are, if you’re tired enough to take a nap, you will not magically wake up on your own accord. So set an alarm, both to avoid the grogginess of a long nap and to make sure you don’t sleep through anything important.

6. **Keep It Consistent**: Emsellem suggests working that 20-minute nap into a particular sleep routine to make it part of your body’s expected circadian rhythm. The easiest way to do that is by using a sleep log to record your snoozing habits.

7. **Be an Alert Napper**: If you always feel the need for a nap, think about your nightly sleep schedule. Are you down to only five or six hours? While a 20-minute nap is a good refresher, it will not make up for hours lost at night. Conversely, if you’re getting eight hours of sleep each night yet still feel the need to nap, that might be the sign of a sleep disorder, or another health problem, so check with your physician or check out the [National Sleep Foundation](http://www.sleepfoundation.org) or the [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](http://www.aasmnet.org) for more sleep resources.

The hyperlinks in the original online article, underlined in our version, led to the following Web sites:

- “productivity and alertness in the workplace”: the scholarly article from *Nature Neuroscience* shown in Figure 2.2: <http://www.snl.salk.edu/~smednick/Mednick-NN02.pdf>
- “National Sleep Foundation”: <http://www.sleepfoundation.org>
- “American Academy of Sleep Medicine”: <http://www.aasmnet.org/>