

# Introduction: On Academic Writing and Chapter 1: The Interrelated Skills of Thinking, Reading, and Writing

## Chapter Overview

The book’s Introduction explains that writing is an act which is performed across all academic disciplines in order to improve our thinking, to communicate, and to persuade. Writing well takes work, and all writers can become better through practice, self-analysis, and assistance. The book is organized according to the three “acts” of academic writing: summary (identifying key information), analysis (examining how a text works), and synthesis (creating independent scholarship).

Chapter 1 emphasizes the connection between thinking, reading, and writing. Engaging with a text in a post-secondary context requires the application of critical thinking skills. Being able to read critically depends upon accurately identifying a text’s key content and understanding how it achieves its purpose. These are necessary steps to creating one’s own scholarship through writing.

## Key Concepts

subject	In education, an area of knowledge studied in school or post-secondary education. In grammar, who or what is doing the action in a sentence or clause.
disciplines	Academic fields of knowledge that group together similar subjects with shared methodologies, conventions, and approaches to knowledge; may also refer to the specific fields of knowledge.
audience	The readership the author envisioned while writing (the intended audience), though texts can have readers beyond those the writer had in mind.
informal writing	Writing used for casual or personal purposes, including pre-writing techniques like brainstorming, not subject to the same standards of language and convention as formal writing.
formal writing	Writing used for academic, legal, and professional purposes, using language and conventions appropriate to the situation. In post-secondary education, formal writing includes assignments and, usually,

	communications between students, instructors, and administrators.
jargon	The discipline-specific short-hand terms for common concepts in a subject.
conventions	The patterns, structures, and practices that people use to communicate effectively with one another. Conventions embody the expectations the writer and reader have about a text.
purpose	What the writer intends to achieve through their writing and the rhetorical effect they want to have upon their intended audience.

## Discussion Topics

1. Think of different types of text you have come across in the last day or so: advertisements, posts on social media, emails, journalism, novels, textbooks, and so on. Do you read these materials differently depending on their form and the context in which you encounter them? Do you dedicate the same kind of attention to each one?
2. Do you enjoy reading for pleasure? If so, do you prefer fiction or non-fiction? What makes some instances of reading enjoyable and others challenging? What do you think your experience of reading at college or university will be like?

## Assignments or Activities

1. In groups of three, read the introductory paragraph of “The Social Price of Constant Connectivity: Smartphones Impose Subtle Costs on Well-Being,” by Kushlev et al., in the Readings section at the end of the book. What is the main subject of the article? Will the authors explore the drawbacks as well as the benefits of this subject? What is *your* view of this subject?
2. Keep a reading journal between now and our next class. Simply note down the title or a brief description of anything you have spent at least five minutes on reading. Can you distinguish between informal and formal writing? Are there any instances when you have been reading critically? Have you encountered any jargon or unfamiliar conventions?

## Further Resources

Alexis, André. “The Long Decline.” [The Walrus](#), 12 July 2010.

Alexis discusses the cultural importance of good critical reading and argues that Canada should have its own tradition of informed, intelligent criticism.

Gillis, Steven. “The Art of Writing Is in the Rewriting.” [Writer’s Digest](#), 14 Oct. 2015.

Although his focus is on writers of fiction, Gillis provides advice that is relevant to all writers in pointing out the crucial importance of rewriting and revising to producing good work.

Moran, Joe. “Why You Should Read This Article Slowly.” [The Guardian](#), 14 Sept. 2018.

Moran makes a pitch for the cognitive and social benefits of deep reading amid the many distractions of the digital age.

“Sadie Jones: “The Only Kind of Writing is Rewriting.” [YouTube, uploaded by Bodleian Libraries](#), 14 June 2021.

In this lecture, author Sadie Jones looks at the edited manuscripts of Ernest Hemingway, Mary Shelley, Toni Morrison, Charles Dickens, and others to explain how she and these writers remade their works through rewriting.