CHAPTER 3

Constructing the Paper: Planning, Researching, Writing

The GPS on the right locates where you are in the process. In the first stages, you started off with a topic (perhaps one that was general and unfocused); then you analyzed it around the circle. This chapter centers on two more stages of the GPS: *planning* out the paper, and then *writing* it. The lower box on the right again lists aspects of critical writing that run through everything. Among those aspects, the focus of this chapter is on *research*.

GPS
- topic
- analysis →
- **plan: thesis, structure, outline →**
- **writing →**
- "the other side" →
- improvement →
- flow

Constructing the Paper Out of the Analysis: Thesis, Main Points, Structure, Outline

By analyzing around the circle, your knowledge and understanding of the topic has both focused and deepened. The next stage is to come up with a logical plan—the thesis statement and main points that together constitute the outline of the paper as a whole.

The question now is: How do you come up with a thesis statement? And how do you then come up with the main points (and any further supporting points) to back it up? And how do you then assemble those parts into a coherent whole, one that maps out the structure of your whole paper and guides you, step by step, through writing it?

And the answer to those questions is that, to a large degree, *you have already done it*.

Pervasive aspects
- **research**
- critical thinking standards
- revision
- fundamental & powerful concepts
- giving credit

Or at least you probably have. If you have analyzed your topic using your best thinking and research, your thesis and main points (and even additional supporting points) are almost certainly there in the responses you have given, waiting to be extracted.

You may already see the way that will work. One of the main things the analysis around the circle gives you is a stronger, deeper ownership of your topic. As you look at your analysis, your responses will show aspects of the topic that you see as important, that fit together, and that are, in your judgment, insightful.

So, from your analysis, how do you construct your paper? Your analysis straightforwardly lets you discover or construct your thesis statement—the idea your entire paper is built around. In much the same way, it lets you see the main points of your paper—and thus an outline of the whole thing.

There are two paths you can take to find the plan of your paper.

Path #1. Letting it emerge. This path begins by realizing that there is a good chance your thesis statement is already stated in your analysis, right there in front of you. What you have to do is *see* it there. If you look, your thesis statement may jump out at you from your analysis. It may be in your response to *any* of the elements. Look for it: it is the most central and significant statement in your analysis. It may be something you wrote down as an implication or a conclusion. It may be one of the assumptions you found or a concept you explicated. Or it may be a combination of more than one of the elements. Wherever it appears in your analysis, the thesis statement is the one that stands out for you. It is the one that, in your best judgment, contains the most central thing you want to say about your topic.

In addition, and almost as valuable, your analysis very likely also contains the main ideas you will use to back up or explain the thesis statement. You may have to state them more clearly and fit them together in a more coherent way, and you may decide to add to them, but most of the full logical plan of your paper is probably already there in your responses to the elements. The essence of "letting it emerge" is *seeing* the plan of your paper in your analysis.

Path #2. Constructing it. This second path is the one you follow when the plan of your paper does not emerge for you, when there is no response that stands out as *the* central thing you are saying in the paper. This path is your Plan B. In this second path, you *construct* your plan out of the responses you gave as you analyzed the topic around the circle. You do it in a straightforward way.

Here's how. You read your responses carefully. As you do this, you pick out the most important points you raise in your analysis. These are the responses that, in your best judgment, carry the most weight and insight. You construct the plan of your paper straightforwardly by joining them together.

You will still have to do the work of making them fit together to form a coherent whole. You may also have to re-state some of these points in different words, and, down the road, there may be other points you choose to add, or points you decide to subtract, or other adjustments you may make. But this is the foundation.

Suppose you read your analysis around the circle, and you pick out four of your responses. Call them A, B, C and D. These are the points that, in your best judgment, are most important, the ones that carry the most weight for the topic you are writing about. Those four statements, then, constitute the plan of your paper:

A
B
C
D

The reason this process works so straightforwardly is that you have already put in a good deal of reasoning (including knowledge you may have acquired through research) into the analysis around the circle. The elements of reasoning then work by sorting out your understanding of the topic into separate statements in the responses you've written down. That is what lets the logic of the topic emerge so you can *see* it there. From those responses you can then select the ones that are most important. Seeing them as a whole in front of you (and perhaps adjusting them so they fit together better), you will be expressing the main points of your paper, the main things you want to say about the topic. When you think of the process this way, it seems only natural that a critical thinking analysis would reveal the plan of your paper.

It is important to notice what has just happened. The one path is "letting it emerge." The other path is "constructing it." Either way, what you have at this point, very near the beginning, is a well-defined, specific overall outline of your paper—or at the very least a major portion of it. Moreover, your plan for the paper has been vastly improved by applying critical thinking concepts.

In addition, some of the responses you include in your paper may be based on research you have already done. For others, you can mark an **R** next to any of them you still need to research. What this means is that your research will not be haphazard. Instead, you'll be guided in it by the well-organized plan you have built.

A frequently recommended way to write a paper is to read or view something, then summarize it, and finally identify your response to it. (Sometimes your response will be how you disagree, or see the issue from a different angle, or apply what is said in an important, different way.) This is often an excellent way to generate a thesis statement.

But analysis "around the circle" gives you more choices. In your analysis around the circle, your response will usually show up as a *conclusion* you draw about the article, or your way of *interpreting* it differently, or as an *assumption* you make about it.

In some approaches to argumentative writing, your response to an article is assumed to be the thesis of your paper. But notice that it doesn't have to be. Giving the analysis "around the circle" will often put your reaction to it in a different light, and you may end up choosing your thesis statement from among your other responses. Using the circle of elements makes you less limited.

Additional benefits of the analysis. The central benefit, then, of a critical thinking analysis is that it gives you a logical organization for your paper. Moreover, when you are actually writing the paper, you may find that you need additional supporting points to amplify or back up the thesis and main points: these too are likely to be in the responses you have already given in your analysis. But there are unlooked-for benefits as well, and some of them are substantial. A major one that will be explored more deeply in a few pages is that the analysis also gives you a guide for your research. In addition, though, with a well-thought-out analysis and plan in front of you, you should in fact have a substantial portion of the paper pre-written.

Introductory section and concluding section. The goal of an *introductory section* is to tell the reader the thesis of your paper and the main points you will be making—this is precisely what your plan spells out. You may have to re-phrase some of them, but they are essentially there in front of you. Something similar applies to the *concluding section*. There, the goal is to summarize what you've been saying in the paper—in essence, these are again the thesis and other main points—plus any insights you gained during the writing.

Giving credit. An essential part of writing a paper is giving credit. This usually involves giving citations in your text to sources you have used and giving full reference information for these sources on a page at the end titled "Works Cited," "References," or

"Bibliography" (see p. 198–199). Many times, writers will hold these off to the end, even though this is the most burdensome approach. Alternatively, if you cut-and-paste reference information about sources as soon as you come across them (and maybe bookmark them as well), giving credit will be much easier. You can then simply ignore sources you ended up not using.

Taking notes. As you analyze around the circle and then build your plan, you will be mentally processing your responses and the points you are choosing from those responses. You'll be thinking about what you mean by a given main point or why it's important. Examples may come into mind, or you may find yourself wondering if this or that is the best way to say it. Usually, that kind of processing is something that people are only slightly aware of, and it's something they often do only in their heads. But you can do at least some of that processing at the keyboard as well. In a way, it's just taking notes on what is going on in your mind.

This is a place where SEE-I can be particularly helpful. If you take written notes as part of the planning process, you can use SEE-I as a way of making the notes more productive. As you process, you try to *state* what you are saying more clearly, you *elaborate* on what you mean by this or that. You can prompt yourself to write down *examples* or find good *illustrations*.

You probably won't do it for all your points, but any written notes you take—even if they are only partial SEE-I's—will be there on your computer for you to incorporate into the paper when you are writing out the actual sentences and paragraphs. Often, people can't get themselves to take notes as they write, but if you can, it will make it substantially easier to write the body of the paper (see "Writing Before You Write," p. 100–102).

Going through the Process, Step-by-Step: An Example, with Commentary

Michelle is writing a paper for a class. The instructor suggests some possible topics but also lets students choose their own. Michelle has had some rough experiences where she has been the victim of stereotyping, and she decides to choose that as her topic. In addition, she decides she is already familiar enough with stereotyping to write the paper based in part on her own knowledge and experience. But, even though her instructor has not called this a "research paper," she knows her paper will be a lot more reliable if she researches some of the main points she will be making.

She also knows that as it stands "stereotyping" is far too general to yield a focused paper by itself. It is certainly not a "thesis statement": it's not even a statement, just a single word. (At this point, recognize how easy it is to find yourself in Michelle's position. You have a topic you're interested in, and you want to write about it, but it's far too general and too open-ended even to begin.)

Michelle begins by giving a critical thinking analysis "around the circle." Her analysis is a brief one, but her responses are the result of some intense thinking. There is a lot more thinking going on than appears in her written words. With each element, she doesn't just apply it mechanically. She consciously calls on her best judgment as she applies it to stereotyping. She recognizes that her answers may not be perfect and they may change later, but they are the genuine products of her thinking, at this moment in time. (She places an **R** next to responses where research is needed or would be helpful.)

Michelle's Analysis

Topic for paper: ***Stereotyping*****.**

question at issue**:**
- *What is stereotyping and what harm does it do?*

information**:**
- *Stereotypes of groups are often inaccurate.*
- *People who are being stereotyped are not all the same.*

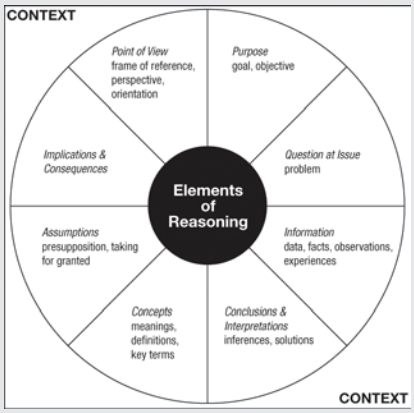
assumptions**:**
- *It is unfair to treat people as if they are all the same.*
- *The amount of stereotyping is increasing in our society.*

points of view**:**
- *the point of view of the people who are using stereotypes: People just use stereotypes without even thinking about how they affect other people.*
- *the point of view of the person being stereotyped: It's negative. That person feels unfairly treated and not given a chance to show what he or she can do.*

implications and consequences *(of stereotyping):*
- *Individuals are classified and judged not by who they are or what they do, but by their race or gender or some other classification.*
- *Sometimes people are denied jobs or housing or other opportunities because they have been stereotyped.* **R** [She thinks research will probably give her some actual data about this point.]

***purpose*:**

- *to judge individuals on the basis of what they themselves do, not on the basis of assumptions society has about the groups they belong to.*



***conclusion, interpretation*:**

- *Stereotyping is unfair.*
- *It does harm to people.*
- *Stereotyping makes us interpret people's behavior by using unfounded cultural generalizations. (***R***: Find some actual examples of people being judged by a stereotype.)*

***concept, key terms*:**

- *An important concept is* stereotyping *itself. A stereotype is an oversimplified idea or image people use to classify members of a group. (***R***: Get a more exact definition.)*
- *Another key term in my analysis is* harm*: The harm caused by stereotyping can be*
  - *emotional (for example, the feeling of being unfairly treated),*
  - *economic (for example, being denied a job or a promotion),*
  - *even physical (for example, people have actually been beaten and killed for being gay).*

context: *Stereotyping is a major issue in America today, and maybe in other countries too. You find it everywhere—in news stories, in things people say to you, on social media.*

Below, Michelle is using the response in her analysis to come up with a strong thesis and main points. To get a feel for how this might work in your own case, it will help if you immerse yourself in her thought process.

The path of "letting it emerge."

Michelle is strongly opposed to stereotyping people, and she thinks that many of her responses are important. If she had to choose only one as her thesis statement, it would be one of her responses under point of view:

- *The person who is stereotyped feels put in a box and not given a chance to show what he or she can do.*

She could simply take this as her thesis statement and then search through her responses for her other main points. But she thinks that several of the responses she gave are equally important. Because of that, she decides to use path #2—"constructing it"—to find the main points she will build her paper around. These will constitute her logical plan for the paper.

The path of "constructing it."

She re-reads her analysis several times and sees any number of possibilities. Out of those, she chooses five as the most important things she wants to say in her paper. Two of them are conclusions she wrote down, one is a consequence she thought was extremely important, and two of them are from point of view:

Outline

1. *Stereotyping is unfair.*
2. *It does harm to people.*
3. *A consequence of stereotyping is that sometimes people are denied jobs or housing or other opportunities because they have been stereotyped.*
4. *People just use stereotypes without even thinking about how they affect other people.*
5. *The person who is stereotyped feels unfairly treated and not given a chance to show what he or she can do.*

Take a moment to reflect on Michelle's process so far. At the beginning, she has a choice about whether to use Path #1 or Path #2. She can choose one of her responses as her thesis statement. She would then take other responses as the main points of her paper. She will choose to have a single thesis statement if she thinks it is the best way to look at the issue. In this instance, she doesn't do that. Instead, she sees her paper as centering on all five of the points in her outline, giving her a well-defined plan for writing her paper.

It is important to pause here to appreciate how this process applies to your own writing. Coming up with a specific, articulated plan is a major achievement in itself. Moreover, it is an achievement that many people find extremely difficult, and it's one that many people never master. With it you have a logical plan for writing virtually your whole paper.

Moving into the Writing: SEE-I

Michelle will write her paper using SEE-I all the way through. One at a time, she will take each of her main points and *state* it (maybe re-phrasing it to be clearer and more precise); then she will *elaborate* on it, explaining it in detail, in a paragraph or more; she'll give some well-chosen *examples*;

and, wherever it is helpful, she'll come up with a powerful *illustration*—a comparison, analogy, simile or metaphor—to bring it home to the reader.

She will also *staircase* her SEE-I's (p. 25–26). That is, she'll look closely at each of the main points in her paper. She won't just read them—she'll look *closely* at them and search for ideas, words, or phrases within them that could be clarified further. By drawing a circle around them, and then giving an SEE-I for them, she will generate fresh new ways of developing her paper.

Introductory section. There is a sense in which Michelle already "has" the introductory section of her paper, or at least the essence of it. It consists of the five main points of her paper, the outline of it, this time written out in a cogent paragraph. It's a chance for her to say these points clearly and with enough detail for the reader to understand the main emphasis of her paper and why it is worth reading.

The body of the paper. Michelle will write—or "develop"—the body of her paper all the way through using SEE-I. She'll begin by stating her first main point:

Stereotyping is unfair.

It may seem that this simple statement is perfectly clear all by itself, but that impression is deceptive. There is a good deal about the statement that needs to be explained more fully. How might Michelle elaborate?

She can start by explaining just *how* stereotyping is unfair. What exactly about stereotyping makes it unfair?

She might explain some differences between fair and unfair treatments, and maybe also explain exactly what she means by "fairness." She might explore the difference between just *feeling* you were treated unfairly and actually *being* treated unfairly. It will take several paragraphs to spell out fully what is involved in the unfairness of stereotyping.

> This stage, the bulk of the actual writing, is usually called "development." This is a good word for the process you go through as you write a paper because you are *developing* the main points in your outline. That is, you are explaining those points, expanding on them, giving examples and illustrations, showing the reader what is involved in those points.

Next she'll move on to *examples*. Here she'll try to give examples of different kinds so she can show the wide range of stereotypes that people use. For instance, she might give one example having to do with race and another having to do with gender. To broaden the point beyond race and gender, she might give examples of other kinds of stereotypes, maybe about age groups (perhaps including a personal example of a stereotype often applied

to her own age group) or about people in different professions (students, politicians, rock stars…).

She will then work to come up with an *illustration*: an analogy or a metaphor, something she can compare with stereotyping. Here she's looking for situations other than stereotyping where people are treated unfairly because of inaccurate assumptions made about them, maybe an innocent person being convicted of a crime, or even having people repeatedly calling you by a nickname you hate. In any case, this is an opportunity for her to be creative and clear at the same time.

Then she will move on to give an SEE-I for her next main point:

Stereotyping does harm to people.

Again, it might seem as if this point is clear enough all by itself, but there is a good deal Michelle can develop about it. She might describe the frustration, sometimes even the rage, that comes from being stereotyped. She might describe how when someone treats you badly, you might never even know if it was because they were stereotyping you, but you'll suspect it just the same. So when you're a victim of stereotyping, the harm continues into the future. She might bring in emotional, economic, and even physical harm. (She thought of these in her analysis around the circle under *concepts*.) These different kinds of harm will give her a range of *examples* as well. Her illustration would focus on things that can harm you in a way analogous to the way stereotypes harm you. (She says it is like *getting a virus on your computer*.)

There is a good deal of creativity in her paper already, and it comes out further in what she decides to "staircase." For instance, her third main point is:

> *A consequence of stereotyping is that sometimes people are denied jobs or housing or other opportunities because they have been stereotyped.*

In her SEE-I she describes how people are often rejected for jobs and how they are denied access to housing. She researches (**R**) this point as well, finding actual information about the effect of discrimination on jobs and housing.

She could now move on to her next main point, but instead she considers the idea of *staircasing*. Inside the main point she's just written about, she focuses on one part of it:

> A consequence of stereotyping is that sometimes people are denied jobs or housing or other opportunities because they have been stereotyped.

The circle tells her that she can use an SEE-I to explore the "other opportunities" people miss out on by being stereotyped. These would include opportunities that people never even know about. Michelle writes, "You could be held back in elementary school because you were stereotyped, and as a result you might later miss out on a college education or a career—and you would never even know it." She wonders about opportunities she herself has missed out on without even realizing it.

Exploring these "other opportunities" opens up a rich additional area Michelle can write about. But it's a *choice*. She isn't *obligated* to SEE-I the "other opportunities." She can decide about that now or later, based on whether she wants to use it to expand or deepen her paper.

You may have noticed that a major part of the way staircasing works is through *focus*. It draws your attention to aspects of a statement or paragraph you ordinarily would just glide over, without giving them a second thought. This focus is a good deal of what makes staircasing such a powerful tool. In Michelle's case, you should recognize how easy it would have been for her *not* to have noticed the phrase "other opportunities" at all. Staircasing draws her attention to it.

As she continues writing her paper, she develops each of her main points, and also thinks about her topic as a whole. As she does, her creativity continues to play an important role. It comes out in the way she elaborates, in the wording she uses, in her choice of evocative examples that hit home with the reader, in rich illustrations that help the reader feel the seriousness of being stereotyped.

She works to try and come up with a really good illustration for what it is like to be stereotyped. She wants people who haven't thought about it much to envision what it's like. She has already compared it to a computer virus, but she is dissatisfied with that illustration. For her, that comparison doesn't capture the feeling of it at all.

It takes her some time, but she finally comes up with an illustration that she thinks conveys it better:

> Being stereotyped is like carrying a load of bricks on your back. It weighs you down. Things around you look fair—equal opportunity for jobs, education, housing—but you are carrying a weight that other people aren't.

One of the reasons this illustration works well for her is that it is *structural*: it helps structure her thinking about other aspects of stereotyping in a more unified way. It generates a whole range of further ideas about stereotyping. For instance, she considers the idea that each of the bricks you carry is a time when you have been stereotyped and have missed out on something because of it. You fall further and further behind. You may not even notice the weight increasing—you may think it's your own fault that you're further

behind. Or you may think, "It's just one little brick. Why am I making such a big deal about it?"

The ideas based on that illustration develop further. She thinks that when people look at you, they may not see *you* at all. They may just see the bricks that you are carrying. People may do that without even meaning to—in a way it seems almost automatic: "When a person is carrying a load of bricks, what you notice is not the *person*, but the bricks on the person's back!" But no matter how automatic that reaction is, she thinks, they are still adding more bricks to the ones you are already carrying.

Her illustration is powerful enough for her to consider making it part of the title of her paper: "Carrying the Weight of Stereotyping."

Concluding section. In her concluding section, she may choose to re-state her main points. She can do so in different words this time, partly to avoid uninteresting repetition, but also because her thoughts about stereotyping will have evolved over the course of writing the paper. (She may also use the changes that have emerged in her thinking to revise the introductory section.)

Making your points more unified. You may have noticed how well Michelle's points flow together. They all interconnect, and as a result she has no trouble writing them out in a way that seems unified and natural. That may not always be true for you. In the purest case, the main points you select will fit together smoothly, and the reader's attention will follow along just as smoothly. But sometimes, when you assemble the main points together, they may seem choppy or disjointed. They may not fit together so naturally.

When that happens you may have to do some work to make them more unified. Sometimes you may end up dropping a point you've chosen or adding another one. More usually, you may have to work to re-phrase them, combining them so that they form an organic whole. The goal is to convey their underlying coherence. You want the reader to feel the smooth logical flow.

Enhanced SEE-I: Developing Your Paper

There are many ways to develop your paper. So far, the suggested ways have been based on SEE-I. But SEE-I is more flexible than may at first appear, and it can be expanded and refined to give you more choices about how to write the content of your paper.

Elaboration. A great variety of further ways to elaborate and explain a point will be spelled out with Socratic questioning in Chapter 5 (see p. 164–166). Socratic questioning in fact gives you virtually unlimited means for developing your paper.

Notice that the description of SEE-I is somewhat different from the one in Chapter 1. The differences should remind you that "clarifying with SEE-I" is not a cut-and-dried procedure. The same holds for the other processes of critical writing: There is more than one reasonable way to go about doing them.

Examples and contrasting examples. It has already been mentioned that you can give several examples, not just one, so that you can depict different aspects of the point you are making. Doing so will give your paper significantly greater breadth.

But, in addition to giving examples, you can also give *contrasting examples* to make your point not just clearer but also more precise. While an *example* shows what is *included* in a concept, a *contrasting example* shows what is *excluded*. In Michelle's case, as we have seen, her examples of stereotyping include illegitimately denying someone a job because of the person's race or gender. For a contrasting example, she would describe something that is *not* stereotyping, some reasons why, in her view, a person might legitimately be denied a job. Here is what she comes up with:

> *Suppose a job requires you to be able to speak to clients in Spanish. In that case it makes sense for applicants to be denied that job if they can't speak Spanish. An inability to speak Spanish is not a stereotype. Why? Because it's directly related to the job requirement. However, denying applicants a job because of their race or gender* ***is*** *stereotyping them.*

Notice how giving a contrasting example not only helps you understand what she means by stereotyping but also pinpoints it. That's greater precision.*

Illustrations. Finding a good illustration can dramatically increase the clarity of the ideas you are trying to communicate. But they can also easily be over-used. That is particularly true when the illustration is hackneyed or a cliché. When someone writes something trite such

*A few more contrasting examples in this book: on p. 22, the elaboration-part of the SEE-I for criticality gives four examples of what criticality is *not*; there are several contrasting examples in the section "So What Is Critical Thinking?" (p. 61–62).

as "It was like pulling teeth" or "It was like watching paint dry," it's hardly an illustration at all. It merely *says* that the thing was very difficult or very boring—but you don't actually get an image of someone pulling teeth or of laboriously sitting for hours watching paint dry. As a writer, the goal is to come up with an illustration that strongly *conveys* your point to the reader. Though illustrations in general are very helpful, if you can't come up with a good one, it may sometimes be better just to stick with examples. (Again, it is "SEE and sometimes I.")

Illustrations can be:
- quiet
- vivid
- overdone
- forced
- too flowery
- hackneyed
- cliché
- structural

Sometimes illustrations can be quiet or understated and still play an important role in clarifying. Michelle might begin a paragraph in her paper by saying:

> Stereotyping, like other forms of discriminatory behavior, …

It is an illustration, but a quiet one. It is a comparison of stereotyping to other similar kinds of behavior. Though it is understated, it nevertheless helps to clarify the writer's approach to stereotyping.

The most powerful illustrations are **structural**, such as Michelle's comparison between being stereotyped and carrying a load of bricks on your back. A structural illustration communicates your ideas clearly to the reader. But, almost as important, it also tends to unify your paper overall, and it clarifies and develops ideas in your own mind, generating aspects of the topic that you haven't thought of. Notice how Michelle's analogy illustrates so many of her points about stereotyping: its unfairness, the harm it does, and the practical consequences it has. It even gives readers a way to picture how people can use stereotypes "automatically," without even thinking about it. As Michelle says:

> *When a person is carrying a load of bricks, what you notice is not the person, but the bricks on the person's back!*

Her illustration also brings her some new thoughts about

Choices. An important aim of this book is to show the wealth of choices critical thinking opens up for you as you write a paper. You have *options* everywhere: about how to focus your topic, generate ideas, find main points you want to emphasize, organize your paper, develop it, staircase it, and expand it (maybe to meet length requirements). Later, the book will introduce you to other choices critical thinking offers you as well.

stereotyping: how the harm can build up over time, and how people might think they are falling behind through their own fault, without realizing it might be because they are carrying a heavier weight. Again, you don't have to agree with the points Michelle is making to see how powerful her structural illustration is.

Staircasing. Staircasing too applies more widely than might at first appear, and it gives you far-ranging opportunities to expand and strengthen your paper. Staircasing isn't confined only to the main points of your analysis "around the circle." You can also decide to staircase concepts and ideas that come up in your elaboration (or sometimes even in examples and illustrations you give). Thus, in one of her elaborations, Michelle says, "You could be held back in elementary school because you were stereotyped, and because of that you might later miss out on a college education or a career—and you would never even know it." She could circle the phrase "never even know it" and give an SEE-I for it, elaborating on how that might happen in a person's life, giving examples of it, or stories about it, and maybe an illustration as well.

The key is that staircasing allows you to focus on concepts and ideas that are important for your paper, and then to develop them, regardless of where those concepts and ideas occur.

Rhetoric. Rhetoric has to do with *how* you say (or present) something. An essential part of effective rhetorical writing is keeping in mind your intended audience as well as the circumstances in which you are writing. Enhanced SEE-I, though it's not the whole story, straightforwardly helps with this. Other aspects of rhetoric will come up in Chapter 6, on paying attention to how your paper flows.

Researching the Paper

Doing a critical thinking analysis focuses you. The circle of elements gives you the tools that let you concentrate on what is most relevant and important about a topic. That is what makes it so useful for planning out your paper, for coming up with both a significant thesis statement and a structure of well-thought-out points to back it up.

But analyzing around the circle also helps dramatically with *research*. It focuses you there too. It guides you in seeing what you have to research to make your paper substantive and compelling. It also, more optionally, suggests other specific aspects of the topic you can research to make your paper fuller and more authoritative.

Conversely, doing research in an ill-defined, un-thought-out way can be one of the most frustrating aspects of writing a paper. Many times, when students are assigned a research paper on a particular topic, they go about the research haphazardly, in a way that seems to rely on hoping they will just stumble across what they need by sheer luck. They start looking for sources on a topic guided simply by a search engine that highlights key terms. Typically, thousands of possible sources come up: some are reliable, some are not; some are relevant, some are not, and some you can't tell about; some are available online, some are not; and many of them plunge you into the most intricate, specialized, and advanced aspects of the topic, aspects that are extremely unlikely to be usable in your paper. This way of doing things can sentence you to a huge amount of fruitless and discouraging work. By relying on the elements of reasoning as your guide, your research will be focused and lead you to a substantive approach to your topic.

Two Roles of Research in Planning and Writing a Paper

What is the goal of research? And what roles does it play in writing a paper? The goal of a paper is not just to report what people say in their publications, and the goal certainly is not to cut-and-paste what various sources say. (What would be the point of that?) Moreover, it's not as if "doing research" solves your problems in writing—not even if what you're writing is a "research paper." When you are engaged in critical writing, research will play two strikingly different roles for you. Before you begin, you use it to become familiar enough with the topic to write about it with understanding. Then, when you analyze the topic around the circle, you target research in a more focused way. One of the most helpful consequences of using the circle of elements is that your analysis often displays for you what specifically you need to research.

"Research" is another word for "finding out," but the goal of research itself is not just to amass facts about a topic. It's not a passive activity. The goal is to learn about a topic and *understand* it. Researching is a critical thinking activity. Similarly, the main goal of a critical writing paper is for you to learn about and think your way through a topic, using reliable research to make your thinking more accurate, clear, relevant, and more attuned to what is important, and then to communicate your well-informed thinking to an audience.

Writing a substantive paper requires knowledge of the topic. You can't write effectively about a topic unless you know and understand enough about it. You can't engage in critical writing (or critical

thinking of any sort) just off the top of your head. Occasionally (as with topics about your personal life, for example), this knowledge can come directly from you: You may already know the topic in enough depth to analyze it around the circle and then write the paper out of your own understanding and background knowledge. More usually, though, writing a paper requires active research. Even when knowledge comes directly from your own experience, it usually enriches the paper if you corroborate your experience with research into the experiences of others. (Research is also a key part of most of the writing you will have to do when you are out of school.)

In a larger sense, though, your research is a reflection of who you are and of what you stand for. You will be saying many things in your paper. Some of what you say may come from your personal experience, some from your own thinking about the topic, and some from the sources you consult. But no matter where they come from, by writing them in your paper, you are vouching for them. In effect, you are giving your word that people can rely on what you say. You obviously can't *guarantee* that what you are saying is absolutely true, but you *can* guarantee that you've made a good-faith effort to find out what's true, that you've exercised your best judgment, and that you have used sources that you have every reason to believe are reliable. Again, doing good research is part of being a trustworthy person.

Though research plays many roles in writing a paper, two of them can be highlighted. Part of the difficulty with doing research comes from mixing up these two kinds of research and what can be accomplished by each.

Background research. Often, you may write a paper about a topic that initially you know very little about. For example, an instructor may assign you a paper on "democracy in Singapore" or "college life at Oxford." Or you may choose a topic yourself: maybe you have just read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and you'd like to write a paper on Jane Austen as a writer. Unless you already know a great deal about democracy in Singapore or Oxford or Jane Austen, you will have to do research even to *begin* giving a logical analysis of it. (The same thing comes up when you are out of school: employers often require people to write reports on new projects they initially know very little about.) One of the traits of a critical thinker is intellectual humility: even when you already know about a topic, you may have to realize that there is a lot of background knowledge you lack about it. Besides, it hardly seems reasonable to assume that all your background knowledge is automatically accurate. Background research will help in those cases too.

Focused research. Focused research has a different goal. This is the kind of research you do when you have fairly specific questions about a topic you are exploring or a point you are making. What focuses the research is *the circle of elements*. Using them to analyze a topic displays for you, and calls your attention to, those points that you need to do research on.

For example, if a main point in a paper you're writing is about whether capital punishment is a deterrent, you almost certainly have to research that claim. You can't support a claim like this simply by having an impression that it's true. Seeing the point singled out in your analysis helps you see that you need research that focuses on that specific question.

Doing Background Research

Background research is what gives you the knowledge about your topic, the familiarity with it, to let you begin. It is a starting point, not an end point. It lays a foundation, but it may still be necessary to do further (more focused) research to adequately support individual points in your paper. The goal in doing background research is to gain the insight and understanding you need so that you can analyze the topic around the circle—and then write the paper—in an informed way.

For some topics, you may be able to analyze them with a fair degree of confidence without doing a good deal of background research. If you're an American, depending on the specific issue you are focused on, "democracy in the U.S." may be an example of that for you. So may be "college life at your school." (As an aside: Note that it would make sense not to be over-confident of your background knowledge of either of these areas.) Contrast those topics with "democracy in Singapore" or "college life at Oxford." With topics like these last two, you may lack the background understandings to do an analysis of them around the circle. You probably don't have any idea of the main *points of view* about democracy

> The problem is not just that topics such as "democracy in Singapore" or "college life at Oxford" are too general to serve as a topic. They *are* very general. But you can go around the circle even with respect to general topics, provided you have enough knowledge for the analysis. Excessive generality is a problem, but using the circle of elements often allows you to take even a general topic and extract from it a thesis statement and the main points.

in Singapore, or what *assumptions* Singaporeans make about their democracy, or what are main *questions at issue* facing students at Oxford. Without such background familiarity, you can't even begin to do an analysis around the circle. The point of background research, then, is to give you enough *familiarity* with a topic to engage productively in an analysis. You have to use your own best critical judgment to decide at what point your "familiarity" with a topic is "enough."

What kinds of sources can you use for background research? There are many. You may get a good deal of background knowledge from a class you are taking, if the topic has been covered in some depth, or by reading books or the introductions to scholarly books where the topic has been covered as a whole. Many people use Wikipedia for a first stab at background research, both for a brief overview and for a list of further sources that can be consulted. Your instructor may require you to turn in a preliminary list of references you will use to get general background knowledge of a topic.

Wikipedia. Many instructors have reservations about Wikipedia and caution students to exercise considerable critical judgment when using it. It is difficult to tell, for example, about the reliability of a particular entry (those who run Wikipedia try to address this problem). You generally can't use Wikipedia itself as a reference, but you can often use it to direct you to sources that are reputable.

Go back for a moment to when Michelle was just thinking about writing a paper on stereotyping, before she began even planning it. Notice that she *decided* that she could write the paper based on her own familiarity with it. She recognized, right from the beginning, that she would have to do some *focused* research, but she decided she did not need to do *background* research. Contrast that with Lucia, who analyzed "false memory" in Chapter 2. Lucia already had *some* familiarity with her topic. It came from her course and from seeing a TED talk on it. But though she had some background knowledge, she soon decided that she didn't have enough. So she consulted some general books by reputable authorities to give her a fuller understanding. Notice that she knew she still had focused research to do: Background research is almost never enough by itself.

In both cases, though, it was a *decision*. That's important. Neither writer just drifted into writing the paper. They both made explicit, conscious, critical thinking decisions.

The critical thinking approach to background research requires self-awareness. *You decide* whether to engage in background research, and how much of it you need to do given the time available. The decisions you make may still be misguided, and you may have to live with the consequences of that, but at least it was your choice.

Doing Focused Research

The goal of focused research, by contrast, is fundamentally different from that of background research. It is not aimed at giving you an overall background familiarity. If anything, it relies on the idea that you already have enough familiarity with the topic to analyze it around the circle, and to do that pretty well. By contrast, then, it is the kind of research you do when there are unknowns you need to have answered so that you can write a paper that people can trust, or if there are parts you need to check on or confirm with more reputable information. It's the kind of research that is focused on the individual important points you singled out in your critical thinking analysis.

You do focused research when you need more information, or more exact or more reliable information about points you will make in your paper. For example, look back at Michelle's analysis of stereotyping. She marked three specific areas with an **R**, places where research would enhance her paper. One of her points was a *consequence* she recognized: that sometimes people are denied jobs or housing or other opportunities because they have been stereotyped. She marked this with an **R** because she realized that having reputable quantitative data on job discrimination and housing discrimination would make her paper far more substantive and powerful. Without reputable data her point might simply be an empty assertion. After thinking about it for a moment or two, she sees no reason why anyone would rely on an uncorroborated opinion, just because she happens to believe it strongly. In addition, she marked an **R** next to the *concept* of stereotyping, recognizing that it might be helpful to have a more exact definition, and also next to one of her *conclusions*, to focus her on finding some actual examples of people being judged on the basis of stereotypes.

You also engage in focused research when you check to see whether a point you are making is indeed accurate. Could it just be hearsay, or something you acquired from unreliable sources? Could your belief about X be biased? Focused research helps you check. For example, in her analysis of stereotyping Michelle identifies the assumption that the amount of stereotyping is increasing in our society. If she decided to make this one of the main points in her paper,

she would *need* to check by researching it: it could well be that the amount of stereotyping in our society is staying the same over time, or even decreasing. It may just be that we are now more aware of stereotyping than before. Her original point may be just an impression she has, rather than something that has been confirmed with objective data. Again, she knows people need to be able to trust what she says in the paper, and she wonders, "Why would anyone trust my point here, if even I don't really know it's true?" Only research using reputable authorities will give you answers you can count on, and even then reputable authorities do not always agree.

The main way to engage in focused research for a paper is by using reliable sources, such as scholarly books and articles and reliable websites. Peer-reviewed, scholarly articles are often a necessary part of writing a paper that is based on research. A standard way to do focused research on a topic is to use a library's scholarly search engine. And there are many search engines that are reliable guides to research in specific disciplines or groups of disciplines. Many other sources, though, are not reputable enough to rely on them: random websites or blogs, magazine articles, programs on TV, editorials in newspapers, and many others. You can use them sometimes as examples, or as a topic to analyze, or as representatives of a point of view, but you can't simply trust that the information they give is accurate, relevant, precise, or clear enough to be relied on.

A key difference between background research and focused research. There is a serious pitfall involved in mixing up the roles played by the two different kinds of research, and it is easy to fall into. The pitfall is that the sources you use for background research will seldom give you the focused information you need, and the sources you use for focused research will seldom give you the overall familiarity you need for background knowledge.

You can think of the role of research this way:

- ▶ **background research → analysis around the circle**
- ▶ **analysis around the circle → focused research**

- Background research is necessary for acquiring the knowledge and understanding to analyze the topic in the first place.
- Focused research is then needed both to substantiate and to fill in the points you have chosen from your analysis around the circle.

Thus, if you are focused on understanding the democratic process in Singapore, the introductions or opening chapters to scholarly books and scholarly history-based encyclopedias on the recent history of Singapore may be good sources for acquiring the background

knowledge and the "familiarity" you need to start analyzing the topic. But they wouldn't give you the more precise information you need to back up or authenticate specific points you make in your paper.

Similarly, peer-reviewed, focused, scholarly articles will not usually give you background knowledge of a topic you are unfamiliar with. They are usually not best used as an initial foundation from which to start your paper. You can easily sidetrack your whole topic by engaging in focused research at too early a stage. Scholarly articles are usually too restricted in scope to give you the overview you need. This is not a defect in the articles themselves. Rather, part of the point in writing peer-reviewed articles is to do original investigation on a focused, specific topic. Research using peer-reviewed, scholarly articles works best by giving you specific information in response to your analysis around the circle and focused on the specific points you have chosen. As an example, look at the following text box.

An example: I did a Google search on "democracy in Singapore." The first two sites were Wikipedia articles, but right after these two sites, both of the next two were political pieces criticizing this or that aspect of Singaporean democracy (one of them was written by a politician running for office). Neither of these articles would help someone get an overall understanding of the background of democracy in Singapore. They might even be seriously misleading.

Searching a more scholarly database may also bring too much focus too quickly. I did a search of "Scholarly & Peer-Reviewed" articles at a university library on "Jane Austen as a writer." The first was somebody's review of an obscure book that mentioned Jane Austen; the second was on Austen's view of animals, and the third was on her relationship with literary tourism. No help. In fact, the same was true when I looked at the entire first page of 70 scholarly articles: not one of them would give me the helpful background knowledge I needed to write about Jane Austen as a writer. Moreover, I got roughly the same results when I used library databases more specifically attuned to literature (such as the *Literature Resource Center* or *JSTOR Arts & Sciences*). Again, these peer-reviewed and scholarly articles were far too specialized to give an overview of Jane Austen as a writer.

The point, then, has two parts. The first part is that using peer-reviewed and scholarly articles is *essential* for doing reputable research for a paper. They are the most reputable source for the focused research you need to do. But the second part is that they are not meant to supply you with background knowledge or an overview.

Research and Critical Thinking

As you engage in research, whether it is focused or background research, remember that you can't leave your critical thinking behind. Thinking is important all the way through. You need to use your best critical thinking as you approach content from reputable sources. Getting accurate facts and data doesn't end the thinking process. Rather, facts and data furnish information that you have to think *about*.

Notice how analyzing around the circle and research combine two different dimensions. On the one hand, there is the dimension of what reputable sources say, the content of what you have found through your research. On the other hand, there is the dimension of your own best critical judgment. It is the combination of these two dimensions—the knowledge you have gained from reputable sources plus your own best judgment—that makes the resulting paper both informed and critical. If you leave out either of those dimensions, there will be serious flaws in the paper.

Here's an example. Tasha is a student in a business course. As part of the course, she is required to write a research-based paper. She is reading an article on a website called businessinsider.com and comes across an article about Amtrak, the national passenger rail system in the U.S. The title of the article is "Why the Heck Is Amtrak Still in Business after Losing Money 43 Years Straight?" In it, the author says, "For 43 years, Amtrak has operated at a loss. It stays in business thanks to a healthy annual government subsidy of around $1b a year." Tasha knows she can't simply rely on the information the author gives, but if it's true, it's an impressive fact. So she checks it out on Amtrak's official website. She knows that that is a reliable source.

Amtrak reports that in the previous year it earned a little more than $3 billion in revenue but had over $4 billion in expenses, thus corroborating the claim in the article. She looks through other years and sees that they check out as well. (You can see the way she gives credit to her sources in the endnote.[1]) As part of her research, she checks out some other reputable sources, and they all confirm what she read at businessinsider.com. With these facts in hand, she concludes that we should stop subsidizing Amtrak and let it go out of business.

Before reading on, check out your own response to Tasha's reasoning. You should feel the solidity of it. It is based on facts given by a reliable source. That's a good place to begin.

But Tasha still has the job of thinking through the issue. Using the circle of elements, she asks, "What are the *consequences* of terminating Amtrak?" She realizes this is a serious question, one that isn't answered simply by the result that it loses money. It's a question she sees she has to investigate. Her research into consequences isn't over: What are the consequences if there is *no* national passenger rail service in the U.S.?

This reasoning leads her to a broader *question at issue*: What is the role of a passenger rail service in the larger picture of America? Again, she doesn't know the answer, but it leads her to think that maybe there is more at stake than just whether Amtrak makes money.

She asks about *purpose*: Is the purpose of a national rail service to make money? Or are there other important goals as well? Then she asks about other services that are paid for out of taxes. Do they make money? Do interstate highways make more money than they cost? That seems extremely doubtful to her. How about police forces or the military? They certainly don't "make money"! For that matter, doesn't Congress "operate at a loss"? Doesn't Congress receive "a healthy annual government subsidy"? She is hit by this thought and says, "If we let them all 'go out of business,' there wouldn't be any country left." As she thinks about it still more, she realizes that she can't think of even a single thing the government pays for that "makes money"! She concludes that that isn't the purpose of government: it doesn't pay for services in order to "make money from them"!

Thus the result that Amtrak operates at a loss doesn't settle the issue. It is one relevant fact, but there are many other aspects of the issue that need to be addressed. Tasha still has to think about how that one fact fits into an overall analysis of Amtrak's role.

The same is true when *you* do research. Information from reliable sources has to be integrated into an overall analysis with a focus that *you* give it, and the information you have researched is only one part of the analysis.

Links between research and creating a plan for your paper. An interlinking quality exists between research and planning out your paper. Each influences the other, not just at the beginning, but all the way through. You can't just come up with a worthwhile outline in a vacuum, but you also can't expect that your research will somehow just "give you" a thesis statement and main points.

There is a distinction you always have to keep in mind, and it's one that people often mix up. It's the distinction between the order in which you proceed in your thinking and the order in which you present your thinking to the audience. Research brings out the distinction strongly. Your goal in doing research is often *to find* a solution to a problem, or

to figure out a strategy or *come to* a well-reasoned conclusion about an issue. In these cases, the solution, strategy, or conclusion typically comes at or near the end of your thinking process. But when you write a paper on it, there is a very different logic at work. Your goal when you write the paper, by contrast, is *to convey* your thinking to your audience, and the paper you build could easily *begin* with the solution, strategy, or conclusion that was at the end of your thinking process. It could easily be your thesis statement.

Thus, in many papers, you come up with a well-reasoned thesis statement only *after* doing a fair amount of research. It makes sense. It is part of being open-minded. Sometimes you have to immerse yourself fully in a topic or area without the preconceptions that an already-formulated thesis statement might bring. It helps you avoid the "confirmation bias" that unconsciously leads people to corroborate the views they already hold (see p. 114).

Notice that no matter what, the research doesn't "give you" the plan or the thesis of your paper. Both your plan for the paper and the paper itself result from your best research *plus* your own best thinking.

Using reliable sources. In researching and writing a paper, it's essential to use only sources that are *reliable*. That's true not just in a paper but also in writing you do later as part of your job or profession. It comes in whenever you are writing something that someone will rely on.

In a way, using reliable sources can be more difficult than it sounds. The difficult part is not just *finding* sources that are reliable. You can readily find a wealth of available peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books and reputable websites. What is often more difficult is learning to use *only* reliable sources. One of the reasons it's difficult is that when we read something or watch something, we often just take it in. Unless we already happen to have some strong reasons to disagree, what we read or hear just registers with us as if it is true.

> Instructors are often distressed that students are so willing to use unreliable sources in their papers, often without even wondering about it. It's not just instructors: employers and professionals in any career area are seriously distressed at the bizarre beliefs people acquire from unreliable sources. (Imagine your dentist or lawyer learning their professions by looking casually at some random website.)

But this sort of passive acceptance can be disastrous in writing a paper. Your audience expects you to take responsibility for what you write, to stand behind it, and when you use unreliable sources you pass along unreliable information to your reader.

Sources are, of course, not labeled as "unreliable." It is important to realize that writers often just write, and, discouragingly, under many ordinary circumstances they can say almost anything. They can pick data out of context; they can report only a single unrepresentative sentence from a scientific report; they can treat rumor or hearsay as if it were fact; they can distort in order to push a political or personal agenda on you. Think of it: Any doctor can write a book advocating any diet! And unless the diet makes people seriously ill, they can't even be sued for it! For that matter, any non-doctor can do the same thing.

"**Fact vs. fiction**." People sometimes have the impression that just because a written piece is "non-fiction," it must have some link to the truth. (They sometimes have a similar impression about "documentaries" or podcasts.)

But this reasoning is completely off-track. What makes something fiction is that it contains *fictionalized characters* (as in novels, stories and plays) or intentionally *fictionalized situations*. A book, article, or video in which an author tells outright lies is as much a work of "non-fiction" as a completely factual report.

Instructors recommend scholarly books and articles that have been *peer-reviewed*. That means those publications have gone through a screening process by professionals in the discipline. It means that the authors have credentials in the field they are writing in, and that their writing has been screened by others who also have credentials. (Very few of the diet books written by actual MDs are peer-reviewed or endorsed by the American Medical Association.) Being peer-reviewed, of course, doesn't mean that such articles are always "right," but it does mean that the sources have weight and authority. (An illustration: It's like the difference between being taught basketball by someone who has coached professionally *versus* being coached by the guy on the corner who just has some strong views about playing.)

Writing and Pre-writing

Students are often concerned about time and effort. If you're writing a paper for a course (or, for that matter, writing something as part of your professional work after you graduate), you typically have only a limited time to complete it. Not only that, but you also have a lot of other things in your life that take up your time and attention: other courses, personal life, employment, family, friends, a need for recreation and fun, and a hundred others. Crises and emergencies come up. You may habitually procrastinate, and that's a problem in itself.

You may not always prioritize accurately. Maybe not all of this is legitimate as a drain on your time and effort, but much of it is.

The concepts and skills of critical writing help with this. If you work on them, they can help almost immediately, and the amount of help they give increases as you work at it. They make your paper better. And when you become skilled in them, they can also make writing a good paper substantially less time-consuming.

Writing Better *and* Saving Time

The way people often write their papers is almost a sure-fire way not to do well on them: either they just cut-and-paste or they just start writing. They begin at some starting point and then keep on going to the end. They read an article, feel a strong response to it, and then simply defend the response they have. They often arrange their paper around points that come into their mind as they write or that they happen to find in a source. Usually there is no explicit focus on choosing points precisely *because* they are the important ones. If the paper involves research, it is the research the writer just happens to come across, or that some random search engine presents to them. Often the sources used are unreliable ones. Usually, there is no explicit focus on being either clear or well organized.

Writing a paper in haphazard ways like these not only makes for a weak paper but also uses up a lot of valuable time. It is time spent going in unproductive directions, in frustration, in being at a loss about what to do at almost every point in the writing, in worry about how to fill the pages, and in the hollow feeling that, after all the time and effort you've put into it, you may still not get a good grade on the paper. In the end, the way people often write is not only full of discouragement, it also squanders their time.

A main outcome of the critical writing process is that—in addition to making your paper better—it results in saving time. How does it do that?

- The relatively short time it takes to analyze a topic and construct a logical plan means that you have an outline to guide you step-by-step in writing the paragraphs of the paper.
- SEE-I gives you a smooth and efficient process for creating those paragraphs.
- Staircasing helps you focus on additional important aspects you can choose to develop.

Thus, the main outcome of the critical writing process is that it makes your papers significantly better: clearer, more planned out, more logically organized, full of your best thinking, trustworthy. But a

secondary outcome is that the process can end up actually taking less time. It does this in a way that may seem paradoxical but really isn't. It asks you to make an initial investment of your time—that's the time you spend on planning things out with critical thinking—and after that, the remaining parts of writing the paper flow more smoothly and efficiently. The focus in the remainder of this chapter is on how the process of critical writing saves you time.

Planning, and then writing. The initial-investment part is the time you spend on analyzing and understanding your topic. It is true that using the circle of elements takes time, but not nearly as much as you might think. Once you get more familiar with the elements themselves, the time it takes to apply them to your topic gets much shorter.

But then, out of this, you extract a thesis statement and a definite set of main points that constitutes the organized plan for your paper. Having that clear plan in front of you vastly reduces the amount of time and frustration you experience in writing the paper. Instead of worrying about what to do or how to go about it, you now just proceed.

Similarly, having SEE-I as a tool also allows you to reduce the time you spend. With SEE-I you now have a process for writing paragraph after paragraph, creating the paper as you move through it. You state, elaborate, exemplify, and often illustrate, again and again. It still takes work to write the paragraphs, but now you know exactly how to proceed through that work.

Moreover, with process of "staircasing" SEE-I's (and the refinements on p. 84–87), you now have possibilities—definite, focused possibilities—for expanding your paper almost at will. (Another such tool is Socratic questioning in Chapter 5.) So if you are stuck and need to have "more pages," you have a straightforward way to accomplish that. And it's not just *a* way; it's a way that is clear, relevant, and logical. The techniques of critical writing put abundant resources at your fingertips.

"Writing before you write." There is a further dimension of critical writing that also makes writing your paper more time-efficient. It too involves an initial investment on your part, and it too results in making your work easier later on. You can think of it as "writing before you write."

The suggestion is one that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. It's that the best way to "get ready" to write the paper is to write out your analysis—your thesis and main points—as well as SEE-I's for as many of them as you can manage. The suggestion is that you don't just do these "in your head," or put it off until later when you are in the middle of the paper. Instead, you write these out *ahead* of time, before you start writing the actual paper. Here's how it works.

With the thesis and other main points of your paper, the suggestion is that you write them out as clearly and as carefully as you can, making any changes or corrections as early as possible. These main points will then largely be ready to go directly into your paper. (They will be the statement part of the SEE-I.) You won't have to start from scratch all over again when you get to the writing.

The further suggestion is that you move into the rest of the SEE-I as soon as possible. You do this maybe only as notes, as soon as the ideas come up for you, while they are still fresh in your mind—but in writing.

Many people have a hard time accepting that "writing before you write" will actually save them time. And even if it does work for them, people sometimes just can't get themselves to do it. It's like taking the time to stretch before you play tennis. It's a tough psychological sticking point. If you feel that kind of resistance, you're not alone.

Still, the suggestion is that you write several things that seem to be only *preliminary* to writing the paper itself, and that you do it as part of the *planning* process. That might seem too laborious to you. And in a way it could be too laborious if all you were doing was planning the paper, and you still had to do all the work of actually writing it. But "writing before you write" is designed so that by the time you have completed the plan for your paper, a great deal of the paper will in fact already be written.

What follows from this is a kind of ideal process of critical writing:

1. As part of your planning, you write out your analysis, going around the circle of elements, and incorporating your research into it. From this analysis, you write out the thesis statement and the main points that explain or back up your thesis. Those points, again, constitute the overall plan for your paper.*

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*People sometimes recommend *brainstorming* (or similar associational techniques) as a way to come up with a thesis statement (and maybe main points as well). How well does that work?

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with brainstorming. There is a sense in which both James's and Sheila's outlines in Chapter 1 were the product of something like brainstorming.

The problem is that brainstorming does not give you an actual usable way to find a thesis statement and main points. It relies on the points of your paper just "coming to you."

By contrast, analysis "around the circle" gives you a definite procedure to find or construct a thesis statement and main points. It's not infallible, and it relies on your thought processes and creativity, but it gives you a concrete way to proceed.

Moreover, in a broader context, critical writing (in contrast to brainstorming) provides the concepts that you can use to tell whether the ideas you come up with are "good" or "bad." More precisely, the standards of critical thinking (a main topic of Chapter 5) give you guidance in deciding whether your ideas are accurate, relevant, fair, precise, important enough to emphasize, precise, and deep and broad enough to build a paper on. A distinct danger in brainstorming is that the ideas that just come to you are merely interesting, or catchy, or just *seem* to capture something. While all of those are important, they are not the same as being clear, accurate, relevant, and so forth.

2. As part of your planning, as you sit at your keyboard, you take written notes in the form of SEE-I's: statements, elaborations, examples, and illustrations of the thesis and main points you have chosen (and maybe doing some staircasing as well). You do this also for articles you have found in your research.

At this point you have completed your planning, and it seems as if you're finally ready to begin the actual writing. But in fact, again, the paper is, to a large degree, virtually written.

All along, you seem to be just planning: just taking notes, just carrying out your analysis around the circle, just writing down SEE-I's. By the time you are finished planning, though, a good deal of the paper is there in front of you. Except for taking account of "Other Minds, Other Views" (next chapter), the main work now will mostly be assembling the parts you have already written, polishing the sentences, maybe adding some additional aspects of SEE-I here and there. You may decide to enrich or expand your paper using Socratic questioning (Chapter 5), but that's your choice.

Where Are You in the Process?

The GPS that begins this chapter lays out the process of critical writing up to this point: analysis "around the circle," planning the paper out by choosing a thesis statement and main points, researching it, and then writing it using SEE-I. But this specialized terminology can sometimes distract you from what you are really doing. The terminology is intended to make the parts of writing more exact, but it can also make you miss how down-to-earth the whole process is.

So here is a more down-to-earth way of describing the process of writing a paper. You start with something that matters to you and that you believe will matter to your audience as well. *[That's your "topic."]* What do you have to do then?

- Find out about it. *[That's "research."]*
- Think it through, understand it. *[That's "analysis around the circle."]*
- Decide what you're going to say about it. *[This is the "thesis and main points."]*
- Then say it *[using "SEE-I"]*.

This is the fundamental process for writing a paper, not just a relatively short one but a paper of any length. (At the end of Chapter 5 there is a section on "Writing Longer Papers.") But beyond papers, the process is something you can use throughout your life in many contexts. You find out about something you're interested in, you

think it through, you decide on what position you will take, and then you carry that position through in actions. You may not do all these parts explicitly or consciously, but you can use this process when you think about jobs, classes, decisions, sports, shows you watch, or relationships you are in.

One of the main things the tools of critical thinking bring to the process is that they lay out *what* exactly you need to find out, *how* you can think things through more accurately and deeply, *how* to make better decisions about what to accept, and *how* to carry it through into action.

Chapter 3: Practice and Assessment Exercises

*1. The process of critical writing is partially highlighted in the GPS that begins this chapter. So far, the process runs this way:

GPS

- topic →
- analysis →
- plan (thesis, structure, outline) →
- writing

The process also highlights *research* as a "pervasive aspect."

Re-state the critical writing process concisely in your own words.

2. What does it mean to call *research* a "pervasive aspect" of writing a paper? Explain how it is "pervasive."

*3. **Think about writing**. What are the main outcomes for this chapter?

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

a.
b.
c.
…

*4. Here is a critical thinking question about your understanding of some of the main concepts and processes in this chapter, such as "thesis statement," "letting it emerge," "constructing it," and "writing before you write":

How can you tell how firm your understanding is of these?

It's a reflective question that people almost never ask themselves. That is, how can people tell when they understand something

pretty well versus when they merely have the impression that they understand it?

Constructing the plan of the paper: Thesis statement, main points, structure, outline.

*5. Look back at Charles's analysis of dieting in Chapter 2. As much as you can, immerse yourself in his thinking: *Be* Charles.

Letting it emerge. Which of the responses in his analysis do you think is the best choice for a thesis statement?

Constructing it. Now switch: Act as if no single thesis statement emerged for you. Instead, construct one: Choose the most important responses and blend them together into a unified thesis statement.

*6. As in the previous question, immerse yourself this time in Lucia's research paper on false memory.

Again, try, first, to see a thesis statement as it *emerges* in the responses she gives in her analysis.

Then, second, construct a thesis statement out of the most important responses in her analysis.

Finally, also select the main points for the paper, the ones you would choose if you were Lucia.

7. Carefully read Kara's analysis of Juliet and follow the way her thinking evolves. Make a full plan for her paper. That is, from her analysis, pick out a reasonable *thesis statement* (by using either path: letting it emerge or constructing it) and a set of *main points*.

*8. Kevin is considering going to law school after he graduates, and he considers writing a paper on some aspect of the way the law works. He tries various topics, but when he gets to *implications and consequences* he gets an insight that he hadn't really considered before. The insight began with a piece of *information*:

> When you bring a lawsuit against a large corporation, a very common thing that happens is that the corporation will have a team of very expensive and extremely competent attorneys on their side, while the only attorney you can afford may be far less competent and overloaded with cases.

An *implication or consequence* of that, he thinks, is:

> The person suing the corporation has very little chance of getting a fair trial!

As much as you can, *be* Kevin: Think of yourself as getting ready to write a paper, and that insight is your starting point. How would you go about making a plan for the paper?

*9. **Making a thesis statement more unified.** In question 7 you analyzed Kara's topic of Juliet. But independently of what you did, suppose that when Kara reads her analysis, no thesis statement emerges for her. She doesn't clearly see one already there. So she *constructs* one by putting together the responses she sees as most important. Here is the thesis she constructs:

> There were so many things that could go wrong with such a risky decision (like: the messenger might not reach Romeo in time; the sleeping potion might not work; it might not work for exactly the "two and forty hours" she plans for; it might kill her; her family could stay too long at the tomb or prevent Romeo from coming back). Romeo and Juliet were not star-crossed lovers. Instead, they were victims of unrealistic wishful thinking.

Re-state Kara's thesis statement in a more polished, unified way.

Writing. Questions 10–12 all relate to Michelle's analysis of stereotyping (p. 77–84).

*10. The chapter gave only a partial description of an SEE-I Michelle might have given for her main point 3:

> A consequence of stereotyping is that sometimes people are denied jobs or housing or other opportunities because they have been stereotyped.

Carry out more of the SEE-I by giving some examples and an illustration she might have given for it.

*11. Here are Michelle's last two main points:

4. *People use stereotypes usually without examining the way they affect people.*
5. *The person who is being stereotyped feels unfairly treated and not given a chance to show what he or she can do.*

Put aside whether you agree or disagree with Michelle. Write out a full SEE-I for each of her main points.

12. Look back over Michelle's main points (the full plan is on p. 80). This time, search through her responses for important words, phrases or ideas that she could staircase.

Critical reading and critical writing.

13. Question 10 in the exercises to Chapter 2 asked you to read something critically, carefully. As part of that, it asked you to (a) summarize what the author is saying, (b) give an SEE-I for it, and/or (c) analyze the reading around the circle of elements. (See the box on p. 60.)

With that done, now select a topic to write a paper on. Analyze your topic around the circle of elements, and from that create a plan for your paper as a whole.

14. Question 2 in the exercises to Chapter 2 contained part of a speech by Martin Luther King. You were asked there to analyze it around the circle. (It was a starred exercise, so there is a possible analysis of the excerpt in the Starred Responses section at the end of the book.)

    Suppose you were going to write about what Martin Luther King said. Do you see something there that you could take as the topic of your paper? Some possibilities:

    - Do you see any of the issues he is dealing with from a different point of view?
    - Do you want to investigate how successful or unsuccessful non-violent resistance was in those circumstances?
    - Do you disagree with an important part of what he said?
    - Do you want to write about how you think non-violent resistance would work with a present-day issue?

Expanded SEE-I.

*15. **Structural illustration.** In Chapter 1, Sheila was constructing a paper arguing that American universities should be as inexpensive as European universities are. (That was her thesis statement.) One of her main points was that when people receive a university education, it benefits the society as a whole, so society should pay for at least a large part of it. She didn't give a structural illustration, but she could have. What could she have given as a structural illustration?

*16. Give both an example and a contrasting example for Sheila's thesis statement in the previous question.

17. Illustrations are powerful, and that means they can sometimes overwhelm the content of the point you are making. Sometimes they are vivid. Here is one from a book on the Sahara:[2]

    > The western Desert … is one of the driest parts of the Sahara, though even here, in ancient days, there was apparently some water, for satellite photos show a skein of erosional channels, as faint and elusive as Martian canals.

    Is it too flamboyant for your taste? Does the comparison to Martian canals help you become clearer?

*18. In Chapter 2, Charles was writing a paper on dieting and came to the conclusion that just "dieting to lose weight" will not work,

that if you want to look good, you have to continue dieting on into the future. Write out and explain an illustration for Charles's conclusion.

Research.

*19. Without looking back at the chapter, explain the difference between background and focused research, including where one is needed and where the other is needed.

Background versus focused research.

20. For the possible topics listed below, how much background research would you need to do in order to analyze your topic effectively? Rank them on a scale of 1–5, where 1 means "I have enough background knowledge already" and 5 means "I don't know enough about the topic to write out an effective analysis. I'll have to start out with a good deal of background research."

- dealing with depression
- body image
- the civil rights movement in the United States
- tipping in restaurants and coffee shops
- the importance of grades
- planning a paper
- a relationship you have with someone
- the way you get along with your friends
- a value that's important in your life (such as responsibility, freedom, being respected…)
- aspects of you (such as your gender, ethnicity, upbringing, personality…)

*21. In the example on p. 95–96, Tasha found information (from an article on a business website and from Amtrak.com) that Amtrak has lost money for the last 43 years straight! Based on that information, she concluded that Congress should stop subsidizing Amtrak.

When she thought about it, though, she questioned the reasoning that brought her to that conclusion: she realized many government services (such as the police, the military, and Congress itself) do not "make money." For her, that considerably weakened the force of the facts about Amtrak.

Suppose that Tasha raised a different objection: Suppose she said that the information about Amtrak losing money may not be true, that it may not be a "fact" at all!

Is this a good critical thinking response?

*22. On page 93 in the section on doing research, the text says that you should use only reliable sources, but "even then reputable authorities do not always agree."

What should you do if you find reputable sources on an important point in your paper, but the sources do not agree?

Writing before you write.

23. A suggestion in this chapter is that instead of just writing, you take notes as you do the planning, so that you can then incorporate those notes into your paper—especially if you take notes using SEE-I.

Why do you think that's difficult for many people? Would it be difficult for you to get yourself to do it? Would there be advantages for you if you were able to do it?

24. **Write about your own experience.** In the view of the author of this book, *revising* a paper is very important. (*Revising* will come up strongly in Chapter 5, but for now take some time to reflect on it.) Temporarily, put yourself in the point of view of the author: Why does he think it's so important.

Now how about you? What in your view are the benefits of revising your paper? What are the costs or negative consequences of doing so?

25. **Putting it together in practice.** In the last question in the Exercises to Chapter 2, you were asked to choose at least three topics that you already know about and that you could write about in an informed, interesting way for, say, five pages. You were asked to analyze each of them by going around the circle.

At this point, build on what you did there:

For each one, plan out a paper by choosing a thesis statement and the other main points that will constitute the structure and the outline for it.

For each, write an introductory section to a paper you would write. In that section, your goal is to convey your thesis and main points to the reader in a clear, well-written, coherent paragraph or two.

26. Of those topics you worked on in the previous question, choose one of them to work on further. Based on the responses you gave there, write the bulk of the paper:

Write out an enhanced SEE-I for the thesis and each of the main points in your plan. Take your time about doing this. You are *developing* your paper. Try to make the paragraphs you write interesting by explaining well, giving good examples, perhaps a

striking analogy, and so forth. Try to come up with a structural illustration (p. 83) for the thesis of your paper. (Remember that when you write out one of your main points and take the trouble to say it really well, it will often seem as if there is no need to say any more about it. But it's almost never true. There are many aspects that can be developed, and without that development, the point will not really be clear to the reader.)

As you write out SEE-I's, search for focal points you can staircase. Incorporate them into the paper as you proceed.

Mark an **R** next to any important parts of the paper that would benefit from research.

As well as you can—given that you haven't actually done the research—write a concluding section.

When you've done that for that one topic, realize that—except for actually doing the research and incorporating what you've found there—you have the bulk of your paper written.

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Self-Assessment: Test It Out #2

How Can You Tell How Well You Did?

Test It Out #2: Organizing the main points in the paper. This test may also be hard to evaluate on your own, but here are some critical thinking standards that the main points need to meet:

- each of them should be clear and accurate,
- each of them should be directly relevant to the thesis statement you chose,
- each of them needs to be specific and focused,
- each of them should be important enough to write about,
- each of them needs to be something you could write about for at least several paragraphs (certainly not just a sentence or two), and
- ideally, all of them together should form a coherent whole.

Taking it a little further, you can look at the main points you've written and ask:

- Are they just scattered and unrelated to one another?
- If you've written more than one, do they really just say the same thing, but in different words?
- Do they convey to the reader the fullness of what you are trying to say about the topic?

Shifting to the process. In addition to assessing the main points you came up with, you can ask yourself some questions about *the process* you just went through to come up with them:

- Did the main points for your paper come readily to your mind?
- Did you draw a blank?
- Did only one come to mind?

- When you came up with your main points, did you consider—*consciously* consider—whether they were clear, accurate, relevant, specific, and important (the critical thinking standards just mentioned)?
- Did you invest all your hope in finding your main points later, maybe in research you might do?

If the main points did not come to mind, it's an indication that you're not ready to write the paper, but it's not automatically negative. After all, you may need more time to think about it. In addition, you may well need to do some research on the topic. But here, as with the first self-test, is the crucial ongoing critical thinking question:

> *How* will you come up with your main points? What is your *plan* or *strategy* for coming up with a rich, substantive set of main points?

Main points and research. For many topics you obviously have to do research to come up with main points for your paper. If that's true for the topics you chose, the suggestion here is to try it again, but this time with a few topics where you don't need research (for example, a personal issue). The point of self-test #2 is to test your skill at coming up with main points that meet the critical thinking criteria listed.

Having a strategy for coming up with main points is actually more important than the main points themselves. The main points are indeed important for this individual paper, but an effective process—having a strategy in mind—will help you come up with strong main points again and again, in everything you write.

Having a *strategy*—for coming up with either a thesis statement or the main points of a paper, or anything else—goes to the heart of critical thinking. It is a major part of what this book is designed to provide. It lays out actual strategies you can use. Those strategies will also open for you, in a way nothing else can, the whole endeavor of writing. And, since it's based in critical thinking, it can also open up better ways of thinking about other aspects of your life.

At this point, go back to "To the Student: Test It Out #3" (p. xxxii–xxxiii).