

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY

College & University Essay Writing

Complete chapters, worked models, and companion guidance

1st Edition

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HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY

A College and University Guide to Academic Argument, Research, and Revision

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APPLICABLE REQUIREMENTS

The applicable assignment sheet, instructor rubric, course or program requirements, institutional policies, and admissions requirements take priority over this guide.

Contents and Starting Routes

Use the PDF bookmarks to move between chapters. Begin with chapter 1, or use the workbook to plan, record sources, and revise an existing draft.

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Why We Write Essays

Essay writing is a method of inquiry. It helps a writer test an idea against evidence, make the reasoning visible, and contribute responsibly to an academic conversation.

Developing an answer, not displaying information

A strong academic essay moves beyond collecting facts. It frames a focused question, selects evidence that bears on that question, and explains how the evidence supports, complicates, or limits the answer.

Making gaps and assumptions visible

Writing exposes where a thesis is too broad, a source has been overextended, a counterargument has been ignored, or a key term remains undefined. Revision is therefore part of thinking, not merely correction after thinking is complete.

Joining a scholarly conversation

College and university writing asks you to represent sources accurately while making your own analytical contribution. Your voice appears in the choices you make, the relationships you explain, and the qualified conclusion you defend.

The process

Interpret the assignment. Develop a researchable question. Find and evaluate evidence. Build a provisional thesis. Draft the reasoning. Test it against alternatives. Revise for accuracy, significance, and clarity.

This guide supports that process while leaving the governing authority with your instructor, assignment, rubric, discipline, and institution.

How to Use This Guide

This guide teaches transferable principles, not one universal format. Your instructor's assignment, rubric, course guidelines, department rules, and institution's academic-integrity policy take priority.

Follow the governing instructions first. MLA, APA, Chicago, and other systems have different rules. Use the system required for the assignment and consult the official guide when exact formatting matters. Use spelling, grammar, punctuation, terminology, and academic conventions appropriate to your country and, where relevant, your state, province, school system, or institution. The precedence is: assignment instructions, then teacher or institutional requirements, then regional academic convention, then this guide's default. When no jurisdiction-specific or assignment-specific convention is given, the default is Canadian English (en-CA).

Learning Outcomes

- Interpret prompts, rubrics, and disciplinary expectations.
- Develop a focused research question and arguable thesis.

- Evaluate sources and build a defensible evidence base.
- Distinguish quotation, paraphrase, summary, synthesis, and analysis.
- Plan and draft a coherent academic argument.
- Revise for reasoning, structure, evidence, style, and disciplinary clarity.
- Use sources, citations, collaboration, and AI assistance responsibly.
- Submit a polished, accessible essay that follows the governing requirements.

Chapter 1: The Academic Essay and Its Purposes

What You Will Make

Write a brief identifying the question, intended reader, and type of reasoning your essay requires. A course essay can interpret a text, compare explanations, evaluate a policy, or synthesise research. Follow the assignment and disciplinary expectations rather than assuming every essay follows one format.

Identify Your Contribution

Your contribution is the relationship or interpretation you establish through evidence. Reporting that two sources disagree begins the work; explaining what their different methods allow each to show advances it. An instructor needs to see how you reached your answer, not only which answer you chose.

The Teaching Dossier

The university chapters use these **invented campus-transit records**. They describe no real institution, study, or population. Do not cite them as research in an assignment.

- **Record A, count table:** Total weekday boardings were 1,000 before and 1,200 after a service change, in two comparable four-week teaching periods. Boardings count trips, not unique people. No comparison route is provided.
- **Record B, timetable row:** The last weekday campus departure remained 20:10 in both periods. The records do not establish how reliably the service ran.
- **Record C, method and item 3:** Twenty students volunteered for an open survey after the change. Eight reported that their 20:30 class finished after the last bus. The survey is not a random sample; it supplies no before-period responses.

Descriptive statement: “Boardings rose from 1,000 to 1,200.”

Analytical direction: “The records suggest higher use without resolving the timetable problem for the surveyed late-class students.” The second statement connects different kinds of evidence while limiting its reach. Neither version proves that the service change caused the increase or improved access for every student.

Try It Yourself

Using the dossier, distinguish a question about usage from a question about access. For your real assignment, identify the equivalent distinction that matters in your field: interpretation versus summary, association versus cause, or comparison versus evaluation.

Possible result: “I will evaluate what these records can establish about evening access, rather than treat higher boardings as proof that every need was met.”

Check Your Work

- Does the brief name an arguable question and an appropriate evidence base?
- Have you identified what your reader needs explained?
- Are the limits part of the answer rather than hidden in a final disclaimer?

The following chapters develop this case into a research question, argument, and revision process.

Put This Chapter to Work

Write the question your essay answers, the evidence it needs, and the limits of the answer you can defend.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 2: Reading the Assignment and Course Guidelines

What You Will Make

Create a requirements list with a planned action beside each item. Keep the prompt and rubric as the governing documents; your checklist is a working interpretation of them.

Read for Intellectual and Practical Requirements

Separate the work of thinking from the conditions of submission. “Evaluate” needs criteria for judgement. A specified dataset limits the evidence you may use. A word limit affects how much analysis is feasible. Source counts, citation systems, collaboration rules, and file formats belong in the list without becoming substitutes for a clear argument.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Parse a Practice Assignment

Invented prompt: “In 1,500 words, evaluate whether the transit change improved evening access using Records A-C. Discuss the limits of the evidence. Use only this dossier.”

Translate “evaluate” into an action: define evening access and test the records against it. Translate “limits” into checking boardings versus people, timetable versus reliability, and volunteers versus a representative sample. “Use only this dossier” means finding outside evidence would not answer the specified task.

If your draft only calculates the boarding increase, it addresses one indicator but leaves the main access question unanswered. If you survey classmates instead, you have changed the evidence base without authorization. Those are planning errors that formatting cannot repair.

Try It Yourself

Write each requirement on a separate line, followed by where you will satisfy it. Example: “Evidence limits > discuss Record C’s voluntary recruitment beside its result.” Mark unspecified issues, such as whether the word count includes references, for clarification.

Use the same process with your course prompt. Ask a precise question when instructions conflict: identify the two requirements and explain the decision you need to make. Keep the clarification with your planning notes.

Check Your Work

- Can every requirement be traced to the prompt, rubric, or instructor?
- Does each intellectual requirement have space in the planned argument?
- Have you avoided silently turning assumptions into rules?
- Are you using the permitted sources and methods?

Revise the plan if it cannot satisfy the requirements within the available time and length.

Source Guidance

Action verbs, scope, and audience help identify what an assignment asks. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Create a requirement-to-action list, including evidence, scope, format, and unresolved questions for your instructor.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. “Tips for Reading an Assignment Prompt.” *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 3: Developing a Research Question

What You Will Make

Produce a research question with a scope note: case, period, evidence, and what the essay will not establish. A narrower question is useful only if answering it still requires thought.

Find a Difficulty in the Material

Begin with a tension, an unresolved explanation, or a mismatch between a claim and its support. Avoid questions that merely request a list of facts. Also avoid asking the evidence to reveal motives, causes, or populations it does not contain.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Narrow the Question

Too broad: “Does public transport improve education?” The dossier does not measure education and cannot answer a general causal question.

Too descriptive: “How many boardings were recorded?” Record A answers it directly; there is little argument to develop.

Workable: “What do the boarding, timetable, and survey records establish about evening access after this service change?” This invites comparison between usage and the ability to travel after class. It also requires explaining why the measures cannot be substituted for one another.

The word “establish” matters. You are evaluating the evidence’s reach, not promising to resolve every transport need on campus. A real research project would need real sources suited to the defined question.

Try It Yourself

Write two questions for your assigned material. Beside each, list the evidence that could answer it and one important fact you cannot currently determine. Reject a question that depends entirely on unavailable evidence, or adjust its scope with your instructor where appropriate.

Example adjustment: Replace “Did the new route cause better access?” with a question about what the available before/after records indicate. Record the missing comparison evidence as a limitation rather than pretending it is unnecessary.

Check Your Work

- Is there a real problem to examine, rather than a fact to retrieve?
- Does the question identify the relevant case and evidence?

- Could a reasonable alternative answer change how you read the sources?
- Can you answer it within the assignment's length and methods?

Keep the question provisional while researching, and record why any major change was needed.

Source Guidance

A useful analytical question identifies a difficulty that available evidence can help investigate. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Draft two possible questions, test both against the available sources, and choose the one you can investigate meaningfully.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. "Asking Analytical Questions." *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 4: Building an Arguable Thesis

What You Will Make

Write a working thesis and an evidence note explaining why it is defensible. A thesis should help you decide what belongs in the essay. It may change when you examine a serious objection.

State the Answer at the Right Scale

Distinguish a result from its interpretation. A number can be accurately copied yet used to support the wrong conclusion. Qualify the part that is uncertain rather than making every sentence vague.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in **Chapter 1**. Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Revise an Overclaim

First version: "The service change improved access for all students because ridership rose." This moves from trips to people, from a before/after difference to a causal explanation, and from a count to universal access.

Working thesis: "The dossier records greater weekday use after the change, but the unchanged last departure leaves the reported late-class timetable gap unresolved; it does not establish improved access for all students."

Record A supports increased boardings. Records B and C support the timetable problem described by those respondents. None of the records identifies every student's experience. The qualification makes the conclusion more accurate while preserving a clear judgement.

The thesis is not merely "more research is needed." It already explains what the current evidence supports and why one attractive conclusion goes too far.

Try It Yourself

Underline the central claim in your draft. Circle words such as "all," "proves," "causes," and "always," then ask what evidence each would require. Keep strong wording when justified; replace it when the support is narrower.

Write a plausible objection. For the dossier, a reader may argue that greater use is still a benefit. Concede that point while explaining why it does not resolve the particular evening-access question.

Check Your Work

- Does the thesis answer your research question?
- Can you identify support for each important clause?
- Does it distinguish observation, explanation, and evaluation?
- Does the qualification improve precision rather than hide the answer?

Use the revised thesis to select and order the essay's main points.

Source Guidance

A thesis needs a scope and interpretation that the evidence can support. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Write a thesis, identify its strongest supporting record, and revise one phrase that overstates what the evidence can establish.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. "Thesis." *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 5: Finding and Evaluating Sources

What You Will Make

Build an evidence matrix containing each source's bibliographic details, relevant claim, locator, method, limitation, and intended use. Follow course rules about acceptable sources and research methods.

Search with a Question in Mind

Turn the question into two or three concepts and list alternative terms. Use your library's catalogue and relevant databases, examine abstracts for fit, and follow references from useful work. Search results help locate sources; they do not verify the underlying claims.

Read the material you will cite. Check the author, publication, version, date, method, and the passage supporting your intended sentence. If you know a source only through another writer, do not describe it as directly inspected.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Compare Fit Rather Than Prestige

Record A can support a boarding count. Record B can support a scheduled departure time. Record C can describe what twenty volunteers reported. The timetable may be more useful than the survey for identifying the published departure, while the survey reveals a reported difficulty that the timetable alone does not describe.

These records do not necessarily contradict one another: more trips can occur while some late classes remain poorly served. Choosing only the source with the most favourable result would distort the question.

Try It Yourself

For two real sources, record the exact question each addresses. Compare the period, population, definitions, and method before deciding whether they disagree. Add a column labelled **what this cannot establish**.

Practice entry: "Record C, method and item 3 > use for a reported late-class problem among volunteers; do not use to estimate the percentage of all students affected." A real entry needs the real source's title, author, locator, and access details.

Check Your Work

- Did you inspect the source rather than rely on a generated or search summary?
- Does its method bear on the claim you intend to make?
- Have you retained relevant inconvenient evidence?

- Can you explain apparent disagreements without flattening their differences?

If a central source cannot be verified, find another evidentiary route or narrow the claim.

Put This Chapter to Work

Build a small source matrix showing each source's intended use, exact locator, limitation, and next verification action.

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Chapter 6: Reading Critically and Taking Notes

What You Will Make

Create notes you can safely use after the source is no longer open. Each note needs an identity, locator, content label, and a statement of relevance. Keep exact copied wording visibly marked from the start.

Read for a Claim and Its Support

Identify the source's question, answer, method, and limits. Then select the passage that matters to your essay. Copying pages of text without explaining their relevance can leave you with material but no usable argument.

Use **QUOTE** for exact words, **PARAPHRASE** for a restated idea, **SUMMARY** for a broader condensation, and **MY ANALYSIS** for your inference. A label does not replace citation, but it helps preserve the distinction while drafting.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in **Chapter 1**. Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Construct a Note

Source: Record C, method and item 3. **Summary:** Twenty students volunteered; eight reported a class ending after the last bus. **Limitation:** No random sample and no before-period responses. **My analysis:** The report identifies a possible timetable mismatch but cannot show how common it is across campus.

Notice what the note does not say: it does not call the survey representative or claim access got worse. Neither follows from these records. If your summary added either statement, compare it with the source and remove the unsupported inference.

Try It Yourself

Read a short section of a real source. Close it, explain the idea in your own words, and then reopen it to check accuracy and wording. Add the exact locator and a separate analytical response. If distinctive language must remain, quote and cite it according to the required style.

Write one question for further reading. For example: “Does another source measure the experience of students who did not volunteer?” That is a research task, not a missing fact to invent.

Check Your Work

- Can you recover the precise source version and passage?
- Are borrowed wording and your own inference distinguishable?
- Have you preserved the source’s limits and level of certainty?
- Does the note explain why you might use it?

Review notes before copying them into the draft, especially after changing your thesis.

Source Guidance

Paraphrased ideas still require attribution; exact borrowed wording needs quotation treatment. (**University of Toronto**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Make a source note with a verified locator, a paraphrase, an analysis, and one question the source leaves open.

Sources

University of Toronto. “Citations, Quoting and Paraphrasing.” *Academic Integrity*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

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Chapter 7: Building an Argument from Evidence

What You Will Make

Build an argument chain: claim, evidence, reasoning, alternative, and response. The chain should show how the evidence bears on the question rather than simply demonstrate that you have collected sources.

Make the Connection Explicit

After each source detail, explain what it establishes and how it changes your answer. When using several sources, organise them around a relationship: agreement, difference, qualification, or a gap. A sequence of unrelated source summaries is not yet synthesis.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in **Chapter 1**. Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Develop a Qualified Argument

Claim: Increased boardings do not settle whether the evening timetable meets late-class needs.

Evidence: Record A shows higher use, while Record B leaves the last departure at 20:10 and Record C reports some classes ending at 20:30.

Reasoning: The count measures trips across weekdays; the other records identify a time-specific barrier. A higher total can coexist with that barrier.

Objection: Greater use still suggests that the change served some demand.

Response: Accept that usage is relevant, then distinguish it from the narrower access question. Do not answer by pretending the increase is meaningless. The dossier also cannot show which people made the additional trips or why.

This response changes an absolute criticism into a more precise evaluation. You can recognise a benefit while showing that the evidence does not establish a different claim.

Try It Yourself

Choose one contested point in your essay. Write the strongest reasonable alternative as someone who holds it would recognise it. Identify its evidence and answer it directly. If it reveals a flaw you cannot resolve, revise your thesis or qualify the affected point.

Revision test: Replace “the change failed” with an answer identifying the criterion that remains unmet or unproven. Explain why that criterion matters to the assignment.

Check Your Work

- Does the evidence support the claim actually written?
- Is your reasoning visible between source and conclusion?
- Have you represented the objection fairly?
- Does your response engage its strongest point?

Place the objection where it helps the reader assess the relevant claim, not as an isolated requirement at the end.

Source Guidance

A serious alternative may require revising a claim rather than simply rejecting the objection. **(Harvard College Writing Center)**

Put This Chapter to Work

Write one claim-evidence-reasoning chain and a fair objection, then revise the claim if the objection reveals a real limit.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. "Counterargument." *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 8: Planning the Essay

What You Will Make

Create a section plan showing each part's job, evidence, and approximate share of the word count. This is a provisional allocation, not a universal formula.

Choose an Order for the Question

A chronological structure follows development over time; a comparison can organise around shared criteria; a claim-based structure follows the reasons needed for the thesis. Choose the structure that lets the reader evaluate your answer without reconstructing the connections alone.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Plan the Transit Evaluation

For the **invented 1,500-word assignment**, try: 150 words introducing the question; 200 defining evening access and the evidence; 350 examining usage; 400 examining the timetable and survey; 250 addressing the alternative reading and limits; 150 drawing the evaluation together. These allocations total 1,500 and can change during drafting.

The largest portion examines the time-specific question. A 700-word history of campus transport would crowd out that analysis. Conversely, removing all context would leave the reader unable to understand what the records measure.

Do not make "Record A," "Record B," and "Record C" your only section logic. The records belong where they support the reader's questions. One source may matter in more than one part, provided you avoid repeating the same explanation.

Try It Yourself

Write a question above each planned section: "What changed?", "For whom?", "What does the evidence leave uncertain?" Add the necessary source and a sentence of anticipated reasoning. If a section has only a topic label, specify its role in the argument.

Read the headings in order. Where the movement is unclear, write a connecting sentence before deciding whether to move or combine sections. Keep a note of evidence still needed.

Check Your Work

- Does every section help establish or qualify the thesis?
- Is there enough space for analysis after source description?
- Are necessary definitions supplied before they are used?
- Can the plan fit the assignment without hiding limitations?

After drafting, compare the actual paragraph sequence with this plan and revise either one when the reasoning improves.

Source Guidance

A reverse outline lists existing paragraph points so their order and gaps can be examined. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Make a section plan with a question, evidence, and approximate word budget for each part; remove a section that does not serve the thesis.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. "Tips for Organizing Your Essay." *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 9: Writing Analytical Paragraphs

What You Will Make

Write a body paragraph that develops one step of your argument. Keep the relevant sources open and record citations as you draft. Your discipline may expect a particular pattern; use the example as a reasoning demonstration rather than a sentence template.

Give Evidence an Analytical Role

Select the detail that matters to the paragraph's claim, explain its scope, and state why it bears on the question. Several accurate citations cannot compensate for an inference that those sources do not support.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in **Chapter 1**. Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Examine a Model Paragraph

Higher weekday boardings do not establish that the timetable served late classes. Record A's count table rises from 1,000 to 1,200 trips, but Record B's timetable keeps the last departure at 20:10. Record C's item 3 reports eight volunteers with classes ending at 20:30. These records measure different things: overall use and a reported time-specific obstacle. Their combination supports a qualified judgement that increased use coexists with an unresolved late-class gap, without showing how many students campus-wide were affected.

The first sentence states the point. The next two supply located evidence. The last two distinguish the measures and draw a limited inference. Record labels are practice locators; use full, verified citations for real sources.

An unsuccessful version might end “This proves the policy failed.” That introduces a wider verdict without explaining a criterion of failure or the evidence needed to establish it.

Try It Yourself

Take one paragraph from your draft. Underline its claim and mark its source details. Then identify the sentences explaining why the evidence supports the claim. If there are none, write that reasoning in ordinary language before polishing it.

Check the transition into the next paragraph. “However” needs an actual contrast; repeating a keyword can help continuity, but it cannot create a logical relationship that is missing.

Check Your Work

- Does the paragraph have a clear, limited job?
- Are sources introduced accurately and locators usable?
- Does the interpretation match the measures and population?
- Does the ending develop understanding rather than announce an unsupported verdict?

Revise the claim if the source cannot do the work your topic sentence promises.

Source Guidance

A paragraph can connect its main point, evidence, and analysis without following a fixed formula. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Draft one analytical paragraph, label its claim, evidence, and reasoning, and repair any unsupported move between them.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. “Anatomy of a Body Paragraph.” *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Chapter 10: Writing Introductions and Conclusions

What You Will Make

Draft an opening, a conclusion, and a provisional title. Add an abstract only if the assignment requires one. A short course essay does not automatically need every component of a journal article.

Set Up the Actual Question

Orient the reader to the case and the difficulty your argument addresses. State the approach and answer at a level the body can deliver. Avoid background that delays the question without helping the reader understand it.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Match the Beginning and Ending

Opening model: “A boarding increase is not the same measure as access after a late class. This essay compares the count, timetable, and voluntary survey in the fictional dossier to evaluate what the service change establishes about evening access. The records indicate greater use while leaving a reported timetable gap unresolved.”

Conclusion model: “Read together, the records support a narrower result than universal improvement. More weekday trips were counted, but the last departure still precedes the late classes reported by eight volunteers. The evidence therefore identifies an access question that the boarding total cannot answer, while leaving the campus-wide scale and cause uncertain.”

The conclusion assumes the body has analysed those records and limitations. It does not introduce a new survey, claim causation, or announce that further research makes the existing findings worthless.

Try It Yourself

Read only your introduction and conclusion. List the questions promised in the first and the answers delivered in the second. Then locate their support in the body. A missing match tells you where to revise.

Try a title that identifies the specific relationship, such as “**Counting Trips, Assessing Access: A Campus-Transit Evaluation.**” For a required abstract, summarise the question, approach, result, and central limit according to the course’s length and format instructions.

Check Your Work

- Can a reader identify the case, question, and argument early?
- Does the ending follow analysis already developed?
- Is the significance specific rather than a universal claim?
- Does the title or abstract accurately represent the final essay?

Return to these parts after substantive revision, when you know what the essay actually establishes.

Source Guidance

A conclusion can explain the significance of the argument without restating every step. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Draft an introduction and conclusion together, then check every promise and finding against the body of your essay.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. "Conclusions." *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 11: Drafting a Complete Academic Essay

What You Will Make

Produce a complete working draft and a prioritized revision list. Plan backward from the deadline to reserve time for reading, drafting, argument revision, and final verification. The length of each stage depends on the project.

Separate Drafting Problems

An unclear sentence, an unsupported claim, and a missing section require different work. Mark the type of problem so you do not spend a writing session smoothing language when the real task is finding evidence or changing the argument.

Keep citations attached to source-dependent sentences as you draft. A placeholder can identify an unresolved task, but it must never become a fabricated reference or remain in the submitted essay.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in **Chapter 1**. Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Manage a Drafting Session

Suppose the transit draft contains three polished pages about the boarding increase and no analysis of the timetable. The next action is not “proofread.” It is “draft the evening-access section using Records B and C, then reconsider the emphasis.”

A useful working note says **verify whether Record C permits a before/after claim**. The answer is no: the dossier provides no before-period survey. Revise the claim rather than filling the gap with an imagined earlier result.

Save a dated version before a major change. A short note such as “reframed from general success to evidence of evening access” explains why the argument evolved without preserving a transcript of every edit.

Try It Yourself

Choose a section with clear evidence and draft its reasoning. Then draft the remaining sections in the order that helps you make progress. Return to the opening and conclusion once the body exists.

At the end, divide unresolved tasks into **argument**, **evidence**, and **presentation**. Select the most consequential task from the first two categories before spending time on the third.

Check Your Work

- Does the whole question have a provisional answer, not only the easiest part?
- Are source gaps specific and visible?
- Have you preserved the source trail and an earlier version?
- Is revision time still available before submission?

A draft with honest, actionable gaps is useful working material. A submitted essay needs those gaps resolved or its claims narrowed.

Put This Chapter to Work

Draft the whole argument, preserve a dated version, and separate evidence gaps from sentence-level edits in your next-actions list.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 12: Academic Integrity and Responsible Source Use

What You Will Make

Create an integrity note identifying source use, collaboration, reused material, and assistance relevant to your assignment. Check the course and institution's current rules before relying on a practice. Disclosure cannot authorize a prohibited method.

Check Meaning as Well as Credit

Keep exact words visibly quoted and attributed. A paraphrase uses your own structure while preserving the source's meaning and credit. Changing several words or adding a reference does not repair a distorted statement.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Repair a Misleading Source Sentence

Draft: "Forty per cent of students cannot get home after class (Record C)." The calculation eight divided by twenty is correct, but "students" silently expands a voluntary sample into a population, and "cannot get home" expands missing a bus into having no way home.

Repair: "Eight of the twenty volunteers reported a class ending after the last bus (Record C, method and item 3)." Follow with your analysis of what this does and does not establish. The improvement concerns meaning and scope, not only citation format.

For a real source, record the actual bibliographic details and required locator. Do not copy a plausible reference from a tool without locating the source and checking the attached claim.

Try It Yourself

Compare one paragraph with every source it uses. Mark copied wording, paraphrased ideas, your analysis, and unsupported additions. Correct both attribution and meaning.

Separately record what another person or tool contributed. If permitted AI assistance suggested search terms, say that; if it drafted or translated text, do not call it merely proofreading. Use the required disclosure format and seek clarification about uncertain permissions. Check before reusing earlier coursework, even when you wrote it.

Check Your Work

- Can each source-dependent statement be traced and verified?

- Are paraphrases accurate and distinct from near-copying?
- Do assistance and reuse records describe the actual work?
- Are you following the governing policy rather than assuming disclosure is enough?

Keep notes and important draft versions so you can explain your process honestly if asked.

Source Guidance

Paraphrased ideas still require attribution; exact borrowed wording needs quotation treatment. **(University of Toronto)**

Put This Chapter to Work

Audit one paragraph against its sources and record the actual scope of collaboration, reused work, and any permitted AI assistance.

Sources

University of Toronto. "Citations, Quoting and Paraphrasing." *Academic Integrity*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 13: Revising Argument, Structure, and Analysis

What You Will Make

Produce a revision memo and a revised argument. Start with the question and thesis, then inspect paragraph order, evidence, and analysis. Sentence polish cannot compensate for a conclusion the evidence does not establish.

Diagnose Before Rewriting

Describe each paragraph's actual point in a short margin note. Compare the sequence with the thesis. Mark gaps, repetitions, and paragraphs whose topic is relevant but whose function in the argument is unclear.

Treat feedback as a report of a reader's difficulty. Separate that concern from the reader's suggested solution. You may address the difficulty in another way, provided the revised reasoning genuinely resolves it.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in **Chapter 1**. Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Make a Consequential Revision

A draft argues that the service change improved access for everyone. Its first four paragraphs discuss increased boardings; the timetable problem appears only in a final caveat.

The important change is to bring the access criterion forward and revise the thesis. Give Records B and C their own analysis, explain the survey's selection limit beside its finding, and acknowledge that greater usage remains relevant. Cutting a few sentences from the opening would not resolve the mismatch.

Revision memo: "The original conclusion confused trips with universal access. I reorganised around the measures and narrowed the claim. The timetable gap is now part of the answer rather than an afterthought." This explains the decision in terms a reviewer can check.

Try It Yourself

Choose the most serious reader concern or evidentiary gap. State it in one sentence, identify the affected sections, and make a targeted revision. Then read those sections together to see whether the repair creates a new inconsistency elsewhere.

If a counterexample undermines your central answer, return to the thesis instead of defending it through increasingly vague language.

Check Your Work

- Does the revised structure follow the logic of the question?
- Are inconvenient findings represented proportionately?
- Can the reader follow the inference from source to answer?
- Have the title, introduction, and conclusion caught up with the revision?

Save the earlier version and the memo before beginning the style pass.

Source Guidance

A reverse outline lists existing paragraph points so their order and gaps can be examined. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Put This Chapter to Work

Identify the largest mismatch between your question, evidence, and conclusion, then revise that mismatch before line-editing.

Sources

Harvard College Writing Center. "Tips for Organizing Your Essay." *Harvard University*. Accessed 6 Sept. 2026.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 14: Revising Style and Disciplinary Clarity

What You Will Make

Create a revised paragraph and a short style sheet. The style sheet can record spelling variety, key terms, abbreviations, citation system, and any course-specific conventions. Consistency supports clarity, but it should not conceal an important distinction.

Prefer Precision to Inflated Language

Identify who does what and what a measurement means. Define specialised terms when the reader needs them, and retain useful technical distinctions. Shortening a sentence is not an improvement if it removes a necessary limit or changes the claim.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Revise a Dense Statement

Before: “The implementation of mobility optimisation facilitated a demonstrable enhancement of inclusive educational accessibility.” This hides the measure and makes a broad evaluation without support.

After: “Weekday boardings increased after the change, but the timetable still ended before the late classes reported by eight survey volunteers.” The revision names the observed result and the unresolved issue. It does not assert that the change caused the increase.

In this essay, define **access** narrowly as whether the scheduled bus can serve the specified class ending time. Note that affordability, reliability, disability access, and other dimensions are not measured by the dossier. The definition limits the inquiry; it does not declare those other dimensions unimportant.

Try It Yourself

Circle abstract nouns and passive constructions in one paragraph. Ask whether naming the actor or measure would help. Keep a passive sentence when the actor is unknown or genuinely irrelevant; the aim is accurate emphasis, not a mechanical ban.

Read the revision beside the original. Check that population, time period, and uncertainty remain intact. Add descriptive headings where appropriate and use built-in heading styles in the working document so structure is more than visual decoration.

Check Your Work

- Can your intended reader understand the essential terms?

- Do subjects and verbs make the reasoning easier to follow?
- Are important qualifications still present?
- Does the style sheet agree with the course’s conventions?

Ask a reader to paraphrase your main point. A mismatch can reveal a wording problem that proofreading alone would miss.

Put This Chapter to Work

Revise one dense paragraph for clear actors and precise measures, then check that the revision preserves its qualification and meaning.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 15: Editing, Formatting, and Final Verification

What You Will Make

Prepare a verified submission file and a completed checklist. Use the assignment’s required format and citation system. General setup guidance is available in [Word and Google Docs Setup](#), but it does not override the course instructions.

Check Three Layers

First inspect the language: sentence boundaries, missing words, spelling, terminology, and headings. Next compare claims and quotations with the original sources and reconcile citation entries. Finally inspect the actual file, including page numbering, tables, comments, tracked changes, and any required disclosure.

For a Works Cited or References list, check correspondence with in-text use. If the assignment instead requires a broader bibliography, follow that distinction rather than removing legitimately consulted works mechanically.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Catch a Last-Pass Error

The draft correctly says eight of twenty volunteers reported a late-class gap, but a later sentence says “40 per cent of campus.” Verify both passages against Record C. The percentage calculation does not justify changing the population. Repair the later sentence and search the document for other versions of the same overclaim.

Then check the table or prose carrying the time comparison: 20:10 departure and 20:30 class end. Reversed labels would change the meaning even if the numbers themselves were copied accurately.

Try It Yourself

Select one quotation, one paraphrase, and one numerical or interpretive claim. Trace each to its source and locator. Then expand the check to every consequential claim. Record unresolved items explicitly instead of marking the whole document verified after a sample.

Export the required file, reopen it, and inspect every page. Check that references, headings, and any tables remain readable and that the intended version is easy to identify.

Check Your Work

- Do citations identify the correct sources and versions?
- Do locators support the attached claims in context?
- Are comments, revisions, and disclosures handled as required?
- Does the final file open and retain readable structure?

Keep the editable original and evidence records with the final submission copy.

Put This Chapter to Work

Audit citations against the sources, inspect the exported document, and verify the exact file and version you intend to submit.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Chapter 16: Completing and Reflecting on the Essay

What You Will Make

Complete one essay and preserve a concise project record. Keep the prompt, question, evidence matrix, important draft versions, final file, and any submission receipt together. This record supports explanation and later improvement; it does not certify a grade or eliminate every possible error.

Close the Loop with the Assignment

Compare the final answer with the original task and any instructor clarification. Confirm that revisions have not moved the essay outside its scope. Complete the source and file checks before submitting through the required channel.

If a material evidence gap remains, resolve it or narrow the answer. A final statement that you are responsible for the essay cannot substitute for doing the verification.

Fictional teaching case: This lesson uses the invented campus-transit records in [Chapter 1](#). Record labels and numbers are practice material, not real research to cite or submit.

Reflect on an Actual Decision

Unhelpful reflection: “I learned a lot and should manage time better.” It names no evidence or action.

Specific reflection: “I first treated increased boardings as proof of improved access. Comparing the unchanged timetable with the volunteer reports changed the question and thesis. On the next project, I will define the outcome before choosing the main indicator.”

The second reflection links a source comparison to an intellectual change and a future practice. It does not need to pretend the project followed a perfectly linear process.

Try It Yourself

After checking the uploaded version and any confirmation, write three short notes: one interpretation that changed, one source-use decision that mattered, and one practical adjustment for the next assignment. Use a before/after sentence from your own drafts where helpful.

When feedback arrives, identify whether it concerns the argument, evidence, clarity, or compliance. Compare it with your reflection and choose one change you can actually implement next time. If feedback is unclear, ask a question tied to a specific passage.

Check Your Work

- Did the intended final version reach the submission system?
- Can you trace the important claims and explain the major revisions?
- Does your reflection identify an evidence-based decision?
- Is the next action specific enough to use on another project?

Keep the record in a form you can retrieve, and follow any institutional requirements for storing or disposing of research material.

Put This Chapter to Work

Confirm the final submission, archive the relevant records, and write a reflection identifying which evidence changed your argument.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with developing this lesson, its fictional teaching examples, exercises, and review checks. Human editors remain responsible for source verification, educational suitability, and publication approval.

Models, Workflows, and Troubleshooting

Use the Shared Teaching Dossier

These models use the **fictional records** in **Chapter 1**. Record A counts 1,000 weekday boardings before and 1,200 after a service change. Record B leaves the last departure at 20:10. Record C is an open survey of twenty volunteers after the change; eight report a 20:30 class ending. These are invented practice records, not real research. There is no comparison route, before survey, random sample, or reliability measure.

Academic Paragraph Model

Increased boardings do not establish that late-class scheduling needs were met. Record A shows greater use, but it counts trips rather than unique riders. Record B's 20:10 last departure precedes the 20:30 class ending reported by eight volunteers in Record C. Those measures can coexist: more trips may be taken while a timing mismatch remains. The survey identifies an issue for these respondents; it cannot establish the campus-wide scale of that issue.

The paragraph moves from a claim through a comparison to a qualified inference. Its record labels are practice locators, not a substitute for citations to real sources in coursework.

Completed Evidence-Record Example

- **Question:** What do the records establish about evening access?
- **Claim:** The final departure precedes the late class ending reported by eight volunteers.
- **Sources and locators:** fictional Record B, timetable row; Record C, method and item 3.
- **Support:** 20:10 departure compared with 20:30 class ending.
- **Limit:** A voluntary sample does not represent all students; no earlier survey establishes a change in their experience.
- **My analysis:** Usage and schedule compatibility answer different questions. Retain both in the evaluation.
- **Decision:** Use for the limited comparison; do not claim universal failure or causal success.

The blank research matrix and its continuation page use the same fields. Add full bibliographic details and the version consulted for actual sources. Never replace a missing source with “verified study, p. 42.”

Argument Map

1. Define evening access for this question as a scheduled departure after the specified class ending.
2. Present the boarding increase accurately as trips.
3. Compare the timetable with the late-class reports.
4. Explain why greater usage can coexist with a scheduling mismatch.

5. Acknowledge that greater use is relevant evidence of demand.
6. Limit conclusions about population, causation, reliability, and other dimensions not measured here.

Weak-to-Strong Revision

Before: “Forty per cent of students cannot get home.”

After: “Eight of twenty survey volunteers reported a class ending after the last bus.”

The correction changes both the population and the outcome. Missing the scheduled bus is not evidence of having no possible way home. The arithmetic alone could not make the original claim sound.

Research and Citation Workflow

Translate the question into search concepts. Read the relevant source, inspect its method and scope, and record its creator, title, date or version, locator, and access information. Separate exact quotation, paraphrase, and your analysis. Compare disagreeing sources before deciding what their evidence permits. Use the assignment’s required citation system and official guidance for the relevant source type.

Revision and Integrity Audit

- Does the thesis answer the prompt within the allowed scope?
- Does each source support its attached claim in context?
- Are borrowed words and ideas attributed, with accurate locators?
- Have contrary evidence and limitations influenced the argument?
- Do disclosures accurately describe permitted assistance, collaboration, and reuse?
- Do the final manuscript and its reference list agree?
- Does the exported file preserve readable structure and the intended version?

Troubleshooting

When the draft becomes a list of sources, group them around a claim or disagreement. When a source is unavailable, record what you actually consulted. When a claim outruns the evidence, narrow the answer or obtain suitable evidence. When feedback conflicts, identify the underlying reader concern and the governing assignment requirement before deciding what to change.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with drafting and reconciling the teaching models, exercises, and companion guidance. AuthZ retains editorial responsibility.

Downloads and Worksheets

Start Where You Are

If you are beginning a project, read [Chapter 1](#) and complete the workbook's planning pages. If your draft already exists, begin with the revision and final-check pages. If you need help with sources, use the completed teaching example, then write in a blank source record.

Choose the Format You Need

The complete guide PDF contains the revised chapters, reference models, and document-setup notes. The printable workbook uses white pages and outlined writing areas. The fillable workbook has the same prompts with interactive fields.

Save, Type, and Check

Download a blank copy and save a project-specific filename before typing. Use a PDF reader that supports form fields. Save, close, and reopen your copy to confirm that entries persist. Response areas have deliberate character limits so printed entries remain visible; continue on a labelled page when necessary. The blank downloadable master contains no personal entries and no reset script.

Read Source Examples Correctly

Only the completed example is labelled fictional teaching material. Blank records and continuation pages are yours to complete. Record the actual source, precise locator, exact wording or paraphrase, your analysis, and the limits of the evidence. Never use an invented source from an exercise as real research.

Edition and Requirements

1st Edition

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The guide, workbooks, and trackers contain matching material. The institution's or venue's requirements remain authoritative for your own work.

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with revising the workbook instructions and checking consistency across formats.

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Preparing a Word or Google Docs Working File

Before writing

Set the document language and dictionary to the required variety of English. Confirm the assignment or venue's spelling, citation, heading, and file-format requirements.

While drafting

Use built-in spell check and grammar check as review aids, not as final authorities. Check names, quotations, citations, terminology, and regional spellings yourself.

Page setup

Set margins, page size, font, line spacing, paragraph spacing, headings, and page breaks to the governing instructions. Add a footer and page numbers when required; keep them clear of the text and worksheet writing areas.

Review and export

Accept or reject tracked changes, resolve comments, check accessibility and reading order, and confirm links and tables. Then export to PDF and inspect the PDF itself. Keep versioned source files and use a clear name such as AUTHOR_Title_Submission_v01.docx.

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This note is practical guidance, not a replacement for a style guide, accessibility standard, institutional policy, or publication's current instructions.