

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY

High School Essay Writing

Complete chapters, worked models, and companion guidance

1st Edition

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HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY

A High School Student's Guide to Ideas, Evidence, and Clear Writing

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APPLICABLE REQUIREMENTS

The applicable assignment sheet, teacher or instructor rubric, course requirements, school 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.

Chapter 1: What an Essay Does

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Why We Write Essays

Essay writing begins a continuing journey: it builds critical thinking in high school, grows into deeper academic inquiry at college or university, and can eventually help professional readers develop their own ideas.

High school: building critical thinking

Essays help students think through a question rather than simply repeat information. They practise asking better questions, choosing useful evidence, explaining their reasoning, and considering other points of view.

College and university: improving understanding

Writing makes gaps visible. It can show where evidence is missing, a claim is too broad, an assumption needs examination, or more research is needed. Revision becomes part of developing a more accurate and defensible argument.

Professional practice: supporting the reader's thinking

A professional essay gives readers enough context, evidence, and reasoning to develop their own informed ideas. It can clarify complexity, challenge assumptions fairly, and contribute something useful to an ongoing conversation.

The process at every level

Ask a meaningful question. Explore evidence. Develop a focused claim. Organize and explain the reasoning. Revise when gaps or better ideas appear. As audiences and expectations grow, the process moves from building your own thinking to improving it and helping others think more deeply.

This guide begins with the first part of that journey. It helps you build clear, evidence-based thinking for future study, work, and participation in the world.

How to Use This Guide

Use the chapters in order when you are learning the process. When you are writing an assignment, return to the chapter that matches the stage you are in. The worksheets and checklists at the end are designed to be used with a real essay.

Follow your teacher's instructions first. Your teacher may require a particular structure, length, citation style, heading format, font, spacing, or submission method. This guide explains general essay-writing principles, but your assignment sheet and rubric take priority. 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. If anything is unclear, ask before submitting.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand an assignment and identify its requirements.
- Develop a focused topic, question, and thesis.
- Plan introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions.
- Use examples and sources honestly.
- Distinguish quotation, paraphrase, summary, and analysis.
- Draft, revise, edit, and proofread an essay.
- Keep a simple source trail and disclose AI assistance when required.
- Submit work that follows the teacher’s instructions.

Chapter 1: What an Essay Does

What You Will Make

Write a short statement of your essay’s purpose. It should name the subject and the work you will do with it: explain, interpret, compare, argue, or reflect. Your assignment determines the task; an essay does not always need to persuade someone to take an action.

Move Beyond Naming the Subject

An essay gives a reader a path through your thinking. An introduction establishes direction, body paragraphs develop it, and a conclusion considers the result. The number and arrangement of paragraphs depend on the task and material. Use your teacher’s required structure where one is given.

An analytical essay examines how details create meaning. An argumentative essay defends a position against reasonable alternatives. An expository essay explains a subject; a reflective essay examines experience in relation to learning. These purposes can overlap, so read the actual instructions before choosing a form.

Follow an Example

In the **fictional teaching passage** “*The Empty Chair*”, Mina initially blocks a chair with her backpack and later invites another student to sit beside her.

Retelling: “Mina puts a bag on a chair, watches a student with a chessboard, and later speaks to him.” This records events.

Analytical direction: “I will explain how Mina’s changing use of the chair suggests greater willingness to connect, while her final gesture leaves her feelings uncertain.” This gives the essay something to establish through details.

The second version is appropriate for an assignment asking how the chair shows change. It would not automatically answer a task asking you to compare two stories or describe your own experience. Good writing still needs to answer the right question.

Try It Yourself

Take your assignment and write “My subject is...” followed by “My job is to...”. Add one source detail you could examine. If you are using the fictional passage, decide whether the bag, the invitation, or the hand on the chair best supports your starting idea.

Possible result: “My subject is Mina’s behaviour. My job is to explain how the chair reveals a change, using the blocked seat and later invitation.” You now have a direction, even though the final interpretation remains open.

Check Your Work

- Does the purpose match the assignment’s task?
- Have you named a question or relationship to examine rather than only a topic?
- Can you identify material that could support or challenge your answer?

If the purpose could describe almost any essay, narrow it before making the plan.

Put This Chapter to Work

Write a two-sentence explanation of what your essay will help a reader understand, then point to one detail you will need to examine.

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: Understanding the Assignment and Choosing a Topic

What You Will Make

Create an assignment checklist and a focused question. Keep the original prompt beside the checklist so that your summary does not quietly change what the teacher asked.

Separate the Task from the Conditions

First identify what you must do with the material. “Compare” asks you to explain a relationship between things; “analyse” asks you to examine how details work. Then record the subject, allowed sources, length, format, deadline, and submission method. If a rubric specifies evidence or reasoning, give those requirements their own lines.

Do not guess whether outside research, group work, or AI assistance is permitted. Record the uncertainty and ask the teacher before relying on that approach.

Work Through a Prompt

Fictional practice assignment: “In 600-800 words, explain how the chair shows a change in Mina in ‘The Empty Chair.’ Use two or more details from the passage. Do not use outside research. Include a title and submit a PDF on Friday.” These conditions are invented for practice, not rules for your course.

A useful checklist reads: explain the chair’s role; use the assigned passage; analyse at least two details; stay within 600-800 words; add a title; inspect and submit the PDF by the stated deadline. The prompt does not specify an exact citation format or a time on Friday, so those are questions to clarify.

“Why is friendship important?” is too broad for this task. “How does the blocked seat become an invitation?” stays with the object and change the prompt identifies. **Chapter 3** develops that question into a provisional answer.

Try It Yourself

Annotate your real prompt with three labels: **task**, **conditions**, and **questions**. Choose a topic narrow enough that you can identify the relevant evidence now. If your topic is “technology,” narrow it to a specific tool, context, and question that the assignment permits.

Self-correction example: If your plan depends on interviewing classmates but the teacher permits only assigned readings, replace that research plan before drafting. A more interesting project is not necessarily the assigned project.

Check Your Work

- Can every checklist item be traced back to the prompt, rubric, or teacher’s clarification?
- Does the question fit the source limits and word count?
- Have you separated known requirements from assumptions?

Save the checklist with your draft and return to it before submission.

Source Guidance

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

Put This Chapter to Work

Make a requirements list from your assignment and write one focused question; mark anything that needs your teacher’s clarification.

Sources

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

Chapter 3: Finding a Main Idea and Making a Plan

What You Will Make

By the end of this lesson, you will have a focused question, a working thesis, and a short plan connecting your main points to evidence. Use paper or the **Essay planner: assignment and argument** page in the [printable worksheet packet](#) or [fillable worksheet packet](#).

The example below practises an analytical essay: it explains a meaning in a text. Your teacher may ask for a different kind of essay or a particular planning format. Follow that task first.

Begin with a Question You Can Investigate

A topic names a subject; a question gives you something to investigate. A working thesis is your provisional answer. For an analytical essay, it should offer an interpretation that you can support with evidence. The Harvard College Writing Center explains that a thesis develops through examining evidence and needs a scope the essay can support. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

Start by reading the assignment and your source. Notice a detail that puzzles you, a change, or a tension between what someone says and does. Ask a question about that detail. Avoid settling on a conclusion before you have examined what the source actually contains.

Follow a Worked Example

Fictional teaching passage: “The Empty Chair.” This passage was created for this lesson. It is not an extract from a published story or a report of real events. Paragraph numbers are provided for practice.

1. Every lunch hour, Mina put her backpack on the chair beside her. When a new student stopped at the table, she pointed towards the crowded benches by the window. After he left, she moved her bag to the floor. 2. On Friday, the new student arrived carrying a chessboard. Mina watched him unpack the pieces at another table. She opened her notebook, drew a small black square in the margin, and closed it again. 3. On Monday, Mina left the chair empty. When the student passed, she asked whether he needed a second player. She kept one hand on the chair until he sat down.

Practice assignment: Explain how the writer uses the chair to show a change in Mina. Support your reading with details from the passage.

Move from topic to question

“Friendship” is a topic, but it could lead to an essay about almost anything. “Why do people need friends?” moves beyond what this short passage can establish. A more focused question is: **How does Mina’s use of the chair reveal her changing willingness to connect with someone?** This question addresses the assignment and points you towards details you can examine.

Test a first answer

First attempt: “Mina changes during the story.”

This names a change without explaining it. A reader still needs to know what changes and how the chair helps show it.

Working thesis: “The chair changes from a barrier into an invitation, showing Mina becoming willing to connect even though she still seems hesitant.”

This answer gives the essay a direction. The backpack, the empty seat, and Mina’s hand on the chair become relevant evidence. “Seems hesitant” identifies an interpretation: the passage does not tell us exactly what she feels.

Check what might challenge your answer

Could Mina simply want to play chess? Yes. The chessboard appears before her invitation, so that possibility deserves attention. It does not erase the change in how she treats the student. It does mean that a claim such as “Mina has overcome all her fears” goes beyond the passage. Keep the thesis close to what you can explain.

Build a Plan That Shows Your Reasoning

For this short exercise, try two main points. Each needs an exact detail and an explanation of its relevance. A longer assignment may need more points; a fixed paragraph count is not the purpose of the plan.

Main point 1: Mina initially keeps the student at a distance

Evidence: In paragraph 1, she blocks the adjacent seat with her backpack and redirects the student. She removes the bag after he leaves.

Explanation: The timing suggests that the bag serves as a barrier to company. This detail supports a reading of deliberate distance, although it does not establish why she wants that distance.

Main point 2: Mina makes room for contact without becoming entirely at ease

Evidence: In paragraph 3, the chair is empty, she invites the student to play, and her hand remains on the chair until he sits down.

Explanation: Compare this available seat with the blocked seat in paragraph 1. Her invitation establishes a change in behaviour. The hand on the chair can suggest lingering hesitation; acknowledge that this gesture allows more than one reading.

The order lets a reader follow the change. When drafting the second point, consider the chessboard in paragraph 2 as a possible reason for the invitation. Your plan now contains a question to address, as well as

evidence supporting your answer.

Try It Yourself

Before using your own assignment, practise revising this claim: “**The story proves that Mina is now confident.**”

1. Find a detail that supports part of the claim.
2. Find a detail that makes “confident” uncertain.
3. Rewrite the claim so it explains both details.

One possible revision: “Mina becomes more willing to approach the student, but her hand on the chair suggests that the invitation still takes effort.” Her question supports willingness; the gesture supports a cautious interpretation of her feelings. A different answer can work if it explains the passage fairly.

Now use your assigned text or research material. Write your question, a provisional answer, and two main points in the planner. For each point, record a passage or other source detail, its location, and what you infer from it. Mark missing evidence as **evidence needed**. Return to the source or narrow the claim before treating that part of the plan as ready to draft.

Check Your Plan Before Drafting

- **Task:** Does my question address what the assignment asks? If it drifts, rewrite the question using the assigned task.
- **Answer:** Does my thesis answer that question with a specific idea? If it only names a topic, state what I want to explain about it.
- **Support:** Can I connect each main point to an exact source detail? If I cannot, find evidence or revise the point.
- **Reasoning:** Have I explained the connection in my own words? If I have only copied a passage, add what I think it shows and why.
- **Limits:** Have I considered a detail that complicates my answer? If it changes the meaning, qualify the thesis.

You are ready for the next drafting step when you can explain how your planned points support your answer. Keep the plan provisional: discovering a better interpretation is a reason to revise it.

Put This Chapter to Work

Complete the assignment-and-argument planner with your question, working thesis, and two main points. Beside each point, record an exact detail from your source and explain what it supports. Revise one part of the plan after using the self-check above.

Sources

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

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with researching the writing guidance, drafting this lesson and its fictional teaching passage, developing the exercises, and checking the rendered page. A human editor remains responsible for educational suitability and publication approval.

Chapter 4: Building Paragraphs

What You Will Make

You will draft and revise one body paragraph using a point from your essay plan. Have your source and its page or other locator beside you. Write in your working document or on paper; the planner holds your notes, while the paragraph develops their reasoning.

This lesson continues the analytical reading of “The Empty Chair” from **Chapter 3: Finding a Main Idea and Making a Plan**. The passage is fictional and was created for these lessons. Its paragraph numbers are practice locators, not page references to a published book. Follow your teacher’s required citation style when working with assigned sources.

Give the Paragraph One Main Job

A body paragraph develops a point that helps support the essay’s thesis. The Harvard College Writing Center identifies a topic sentence, evidence, and analysis as useful elements while noting that paragraphs can arrange them differently. **(Harvard College Writing Center)**

For this exercise, begin with your point, show the source detail, and explain the connection. Treat that sequence as a starting aid. You may need several pieces of evidence, explanation between them, or a different order to make your meaning clear. Follow any structure your teacher requires.

Our working thesis: “The chair changes from a barrier into an invitation, showing Mina becoming willing to connect even though she still seems hesitant.”

The first paragraph will explain the barrier. It does not need to explain the whole story or prove every part of the thesis at once.

Compare a Weak Paragraph with a Revision

Here is the relevant part of the **fictional teaching passage**, reproduced from Chapter 3:

Paragraph 1. *Every lunch hour, Mina put her backpack on the chair beside her. When a new student stopped at the table, she pointed towards the crowded benches by the window. After he left, she moved her bag to the floor.*

A paragraph that needs work

Mina is unfriendly. She puts her bag on a chair. Then she moves it. This proves that she does not like people. The chair is important in the story.

The paragraph notices the bag, but it leaves out when Mina moves it. It also jumps from one encounter to a claim about her attitude towards everyone. The final sentence announces importance without explaining it.

A more careful revision

At first, Mina uses the chair to keep the new student at a distance. In paragraph 1 of “The Empty Chair,” she directs him elsewhere while her backpack occupies the seat beside her. The next sentence begins “After he left” and describes her moving the bag to the floor. That timing suggests the seat could have been made available while he was there. The bag therefore appears to serve as a barrier to company, although the passage does not establish why Mina wants that distance.

The quotation preserves the exact words “After he left” from the passage. Naming the passage and paragraph makes the detail traceable within this exercise.

Notice what each part does

- **Claim:** The first sentence identifies a specific action and its possible meaning. It gives the paragraph a manageable job.
- **Evidence:** The next two sentences describe the encounter and quote the timing. They include enough context for someone to check the reading.
- **Explanation:** The fourth sentence shows why that timing matters: the seat becomes available after the student goes away.
- **Limit and connection:** The final sentence connects the evidence to the thesis’s idea of a barrier while leaving Mina’s motive uncertain.

The improvement comes from more precise reasoning. Adding extra sentences about friendship in general would not repair the original paragraph.

Explain the Detail You Selected

When you get stuck after a quotation, ask: **Why did I choose these words? What would change if the detail were different?**

If Mina had kept a heavy bag on the chair throughout lunch, the evidence for deliberately excluding the student would be weaker. Moving it after he leaves is what makes the timing worth examining. This comparison helps you explain the source; it does not add an event to the story.

Try the same move with your own evidence. Identify a word, action, contrast, or pattern that matters to your claim. Explain its significance, then check that the source actually supports your explanation. Avoid treating a guess about a character’s feelings as a stated fact.

Connect the Next Paragraph

Your second planned point concerns Mina’s invitation in paragraph 3. Its opening could establish the change directly:

By Monday, Mina makes the same chair available and invites the student to join her.

“The same chair” carries the object forward; “by Monday” locates the change in time. The next sentences need to examine the invitation and her hand on the chair. A word such as “furthermore” would not, by itself, explain this movement from exclusion to invitation.

In your own essay, decide what the next paragraph does: adds another reason, contrasts with the previous point, qualifies it, or follows an event in time. Write the relationship in ordinary words before choosing a transition. Use “therefore” only when you have explained why the conclusion follows.

Try It Yourself

Revise these two sentences using paragraph 3 of the fictional passage:

Mina keeps her hand on the chair. This means she is definitely afraid of rejection.

1. Read paragraph 3 in Chapter 3 and locate the exact detail.
2. Identify what the passage states and what the draft infers.
3. Add the invitation as context, then revise the explanation so it does not claim to know Mina’s exact fear.

One possible revision: “In paragraph 3, Mina invites the student to play but keeps one hand on the chair until he sits down. The gesture may suggest that she is still hesitant, even as she makes room for contact.” This answer connects the action to the working thesis without inventing a stated motive. Another reading can work if it explains the evidence fairly.

Now choose one main point from your own plan. Draft the paragraph, keeping source wording clearly marked and recording the required citation as you write. If evidence is missing, mark the gap and return to the source before calling the paragraph complete.

Check Before You Continue

- **Focus:** Can I name the paragraph’s main point? Move a competing point into the plan for another paragraph if it needs its own development.
- **Evidence:** Can a reader locate the detail I used? Restore missing context, quotation marks, or citation information.
- **Explanation:** Have I shown why the detail supports the point? Replace “this proves my point” with the actual reasoning.
- **Accuracy:** Does my wording distinguish an observation from an interpretation? Revise certainty that the source cannot support.
- **Connection:** Does this paragraph help establish the thesis, and does the next one have a clear job? Adjust the order or opening if the relationship is unclear.

Read your revision aloud if that helps you hear a gap. The paragraph is ready for the next drafting step when its claim, evidence, and explanation work together; there is no fixed sentence count for this exercise.

Put This Chapter to Work

Choose one main point from your essay plan and draft a paragraph in your working document. Underline the claim, mark the source evidence and its locator, and circle your explanation. Revise any sentence that repeats the evidence without explaining it.

Sources

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

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with researching the writing guidance, drafting the explanations and model paragraphs, developing the exercise, and checking the rendered page. The fictional passage used here was created with AI assistance for Chapter 3. A human editor remains responsible for educational suitability and publication approval.

Chapter 5: Writing the Beginning and Ending

What You Will Make

You will draft an introduction, a conclusion, and a working title for your essay. Use the **Introduction and conclusion planner** in the [printable worksheets](#) or [fillable worksheets](#), then write the paragraphs in your working document.

This lesson continues the analytical essay about “[The Empty Chair](#)” in [Chapter 3](#). The passage and the essay models are fictional teaching material created for these lessons. They are not examples to submit as your own work. Follow your teacher’s instructions about structure, length, and citation.

Give the Opening a Clear Destination

For this exercise, try an introduction that answers three reader questions: What are we examining? What is worth explaining about it? What answer will the essay develop?

You can write a provisional opening from your plan. Return to it after drafting the body: if your interpretation changes, the introduction needs to promise the argument you actually make.

An opening that stays too general

Friendship has been important throughout history. Everybody needs friends. This essay will discuss friendship and a chair.

These sentences do not identify a particular text or a question about it. The claims about history and everybody’s needs also reach beyond the evidence in our short passage.

An opening with a specific question

In the fictional passage “The Empty Chair,” Mina first blocks the seat beside her and later invites a new student to join her. Her changing use of the chair raises a question: does making room for someone mean that she is entirely at ease? The chair changes from a barrier into an invitation, showing Mina becoming willing to connect even though she still seems hesitant.

Notice the sequence: The first sentence names the passage and supplies the relevant situation. The second identifies a tension that gives the essay something to investigate. The third offers the working thesis developed in Chapter 3. The body must now explain both the invitation and the possible hesitation.

The question works here because it leads directly into the interpretation. You do not need a rhetorical question in every introduction. A precise statement of the problem can do the same job.

Choose Context That Your Reader Needs

For this short reading, the reader needs to know who Mina is in the passage and what changes about the chair. A history of chess or a general definition of friendship would delay the analysis without helping establish its point.

Apply this test to each background sentence in your draft: **What would the reader struggle to understand if I removed it?** Keep context that helps explain the subject, question, or stakes. Move detailed evidence into the body when it needs analysis there.

With an assigned literary work, identify its title and author accurately. With a research question, define essential terms and the case or situation under discussion. Record citations for borrowed background information as you write; an introduction still needs accurate attribution.

Let the Ending Develop the Result

The Harvard College Writing Center explains that a conclusion can return to the central idea, show its significance, and clarify what readers can now understand. It also cautions against simply repeating the whole paper or introducing a substantial counterargument too late to address it. (**Harvard College Writing Center**)

For our example, assume the body has examined the backpack as a barrier, the later invitation, and Mina's hand remaining on the chair. It has also considered that the chessboard may help explain her interest in the student. The conclusion should follow that analysis.

An ending that repeats the starting point

In conclusion, the chair is a barrier and then an invitation. Mina changes. This proves my thesis.

The ending names the result but does not explain what the comparison helps us understand. "This proves my thesis" asks the reader to accept a verdict in place of a final insight.

An ending that draws the ideas together

Mina's invitation changes the meaning of the chair without settling everything about her feelings. The seat once kept the student away; it now gives him a place beside her. Her remaining hand on the chair complicates an ending of effortless confidence. Read together, these details suggest that, for Mina, beginning a connection can involve acting while hesitation remains.

The final sentence offers an implication of this reading. It stays with Mina rather than claiming that the passage proves how everyone makes friends. The ending also avoids deciding exactly why she was hesitant, which the passage leaves open.

If your body has not yet examined the hand on the chair, develop that evidence there first. A conclusion cannot repair a missing part of the argument by announcing it for the first time.

Choose a Title That Fits the Essay

Try “**From Barrier to Invitation: The Chair in ‘The Empty Chair’.**” It names the focus and suggests the interpretation. Compare it with “My Essay,” which gives the reader no information, or “How Everyone Overcomes Fear,” which promises more than this analysis supports.

For your own draft, write one title naming the subject and another naming your interpretation. Combine them if the result is clear, or choose the more useful one. Check the final title after revising the essay, and follow any title format your teacher requires.

Try It Yourself

Revise this proposed final sentence:

Mina’s story proves that anyone can solve loneliness by joining a chess club.

1. Identify what the sentence claims that the passage never establishes.
2. Return to the invitation and the hand on the chair.
3. Write a final sentence about what those details suggest about Mina.

One possible answer: “Mina’s invitation suggests that her willingness to connect has changed, even though her feelings remain partly uncertain.” The revision removes an invented chess club, a universal claim, and a promised solution. Another interpretation can work if it stays answerable to the passage.

Now draft your own opening and ending. Read them together, then compare them with the body. If the conclusion gives a different answer from the introduction, decide whether your thinking has improved or your argument has drifted. Revise the appropriate part rather than forcing the ending to repeat an outdated thesis.

Check Before You Continue

- **Opening:** Have I identified the subject and given the reader a focused question or problem?
- **Promise:** Does the thesis match the argument developed in the body?
- **Context:** Does each background sentence help the reader understand that argument, with attribution where needed?
- **Ending:** Have I explained the result’s significance without claiming more than the evidence supports?
- **Title:** Does the title describe this particular essay and follow the assignment’s requirements?

Keep both paragraphs provisional until your revision of the whole essay is complete.

Put This Chapter to Work

Complete the introduction-and-conclusion planner, then draft both paragraphs in your working document. Mark the question and thesis in the opening. In the ending, underline what your evidence establishes and remove any claim your body paragraphs have not supported.

Sources

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

Editorial disclosure: AI assisted with researching the writing guidance, drafting the introduction and conclusion models, developing the exercise, and checking the rendered page. The fictional passage used here was created with AI assistance for Chapter 3. A human editor remains responsible for educational suitability and publication approval.

Chapter 6: Evaluating Sources

What You Will Make

Complete one source record with a use decision: **use for this claim**, **investigate further**, or **leave out**. The decision concerns a particular claim. A source can help answer one question and be unsuitable for another.

Examine the Evidence Behind the Claim

Record who created the source, its purpose, date, and where its evidence comes from. Look for the original passage, report, or data behind a summary. When checking an unfamiliar publisher, consult an independent account of it rather than relying entirely on its own description.

Ask what was actually observed and what the writer concludes. A polished layout, a confident title, or an impressive affiliation cannot fill a missing connection between those two things. Follow any source-type requirements in your assignment.

Compare Two Teaching Sources

Fictional practice materials: A garden supplier's advert says its kits make every student a better scientist. A classroom log records plant heights for one class over four weeks. Neither is a real source to cite in an assignment.

The advert offers a broad educational claim but supplies no assessment of learning in this example. The log could support a statement that this class recorded growth over time. It cannot, by itself, establish that the students learned more than another class or that a garden caused the improvement.

Careful decision: "Use the log to describe the activity. Do not use it to claim improved science achievement." To examine achievement, you would need evidence that actually measures learning and helps assess the explanation, within your assignment's scope.

Try It Yourself

Take a source you found and complete these sentences: “The source directly shows...”; “I want to claim...”; “The gap between those statements is...”. Record the exact passage or table, not only the homepage link.

If the gap is large, narrow your claim or seek better evidence. If the original evidence is unavailable, record that limitation instead of treating someone else’s summary as inspected data.

Check Your Work

- Have you identified the creator, date, purpose, and evidence?
- Can you locate the detail that supports your intended sentence?
- Does your conclusion stay within the source’s scope?
- Have you distinguished independent confirmation from several pages repeating the same claim?

An unanswered question is a reason to investigate, not a reason to invent missing support.

Put This Chapter to Work

Choose one source, record the claim it supports and its limits, then decide whether to use it, investigate further, or leave it out.

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 7: Using Sources Honestly

What You Will Make

Create a source note that keeps borrowed words separate from your explanation. Record the source’s author or organisation, title, edition or date where relevant, and a page, paragraph, timestamp, or other usable locator. Use your teacher’s required citation system in the essay.

Keep Three Kinds of Writing Distinct

Label exact copied words **QUOTE** immediately. Label a restatement **PARAPHRASE** and your inference **MY ANALYSIS**. A paraphrase needs your own structure as well as wording, and it still credits the source. A bibliography alone does not show which sentence uses someone else’s work.

One drafting method is to read the passage, look away, explain its meaning, and then compare your version with the original. Looking away is only a practical aid; the comparison is what catches distortion or wording that remains too close.

Examine a Note

The following uses the **fictional passage** “The Empty Chair”, paragraph 3.

QUOTE: “She kept one hand on the chair until he sat down.”

Too close to the wording: “She held one hand on the chair until he took a seat.” This mainly swaps words while retaining the source’s construction. A citation would not make it a strong paraphrase.

Flawed paraphrase: “Mina maintains contact with the seat throughout the student’s approach, letting the invitation unfold before she withdraws her hand.” Check this carefully: the passage does not say she withdraws her hand afterwards, so the final phrase adds an event. Remove it.

Corrected paraphrase: “Mina maintains contact with the seat while the student accepts her invitation and sits.” Cite paragraph 3 in this practice exercise.

MY ANALYSIS: “The gesture may suggest hesitation alongside her willingness to connect.” This is an interpretation, not a quotation or a stated fact about her feelings.

Try It Yourself

Make the three labelled notes from one of your assigned sources. Compare the paraphrase against the original for both wording and meaning. Circle any event, certainty, or cause your version adds. Remove it or identify it separately as your inference.

Check Your Work

- Are exact words marked and checked?
- Does the paraphrase preserve meaning without near-copying?
- Can you distinguish the source’s statement from your analysis?
- Is there enough source information to build the required citation?

Do this before copying notes into your draft; uncertainty is harder to untangle later.

Source Guidance

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

Put This Chapter to Work

Create three labelled notes from one passage: QUOTE, PARAPHRASE, and MY ANALYSIS. Verify the wording and locator before drafting.

Sources

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

Chapter 8: Writing the First Draft

What You Will Make

Produce a complete provisional draft and a short list of unresolved tasks. Complete means that the main parts have been attempted, not that every sentence is polished. You must resolve source gaps before submitting.

Draft One Reasoning Step at a Time

Choose the planned point for which you have the clearest evidence. State the point, introduce the relevant detail, and explain the connection. You can draft a body paragraph before finalising the introduction. Return to the opening once you know what the draft actually argues.

When you get stuck, leave a precise working note such as **check whether paragraph 3 supports hesitation**. Avoid vague notes like “add something here.” Never fill the gap with an invented quotation or citation.

Follow the Example Through a Draft

In the **fictional “Empty Chair” exercise** from **Chapters 3-5**, a workable sequence is: introduce the chair’s change; explain the blocked seat; examine the invitation and hand; draw together willingness and remaining uncertainty.

Suppose your first draft says “Mina becomes completely confident,” but the final gesture makes you uncertain. Record **revise thesis to distinguish action from feeling**. Change the thesis and conclusion after examining the detail, instead of deleting the difficult evidence to protect your first answer.

A first draft might also repeat the backpack detail in two paragraphs. Leave a note to give each paragraph a different job. You do not need to solve every sentence problem before seeing the whole structure.

Try It Yourself

Set a manageable writing session and choose its output: one body paragraph or a rough opening, for example. Draft that part, then write the next section’s job in a sentence before stopping. Repeat until the whole plan is represented.

At the end, list the three most important unresolved tasks in order. **Example:** verify the quotation; revise the thesis; remove duplicated background. Correcting a spelling error can wait until you know which sentences will remain.

Check Your Work

- Does every planned point have a draft section or a specific explanation of why it was changed?
- Are source uncertainties visible and actionable?
- Does the provisional conclusion follow the draft's evidence?
- Have you saved a dated copy and a next-actions list?

Keep the source notes with the draft. The next chapter turns this provisional work into deliberate revision.

Put This Chapter to Work

Draft every planned section, mark unresolved evidence precisely, and save a dated version with a short next-actions list.

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Chapter 9: Revising and Improving the Essay

What You Will Make

Create a reverse outline and a revised draft. A reverse outline describes what the paragraphs currently do, which may differ from what your original plan said they would do.

Read for the Argument First

Write the main point of each paragraph in the margin. Read those notes without the essay. Look for a missing step, repetition, or a conclusion that appears before its evidence. Decide whether the thesis itself needs to change before moving sentences around.

Ask a reader a focused question: “Where does my explanation stop making sense?” is more useful for this pass than “Is it good?” Compare the feedback with your purpose and assignment; you need not accept every proposed wording change.

Diagnose a Fictional Draft

An essay about “**The Empty Chair,**” the fictional passage in Chapter 3, has four body paragraphs: summary of Mina’s lunch; another summary of the backpack; an unexplained claim that she is confident; a history of chess.

The problem is not simply that the essay is long. Two paragraphs repeat events, the central interpretation lacks analysis, and the chess history does not establish the chair’s meaning.

Revision plan: combine the useful scene context; explain how removing the backpack after the student leaves supports a barrier reading; examine the invitation alongside the hand on the chair; remove the chess

history unless a relevant assignment requires it. Revise “confident” to reflect the uncertainty in the source.

This repair changes the argument’s support, not only its appearance. A shorter version that merely deletes random sentences could still leave the same reasoning gaps.

Try It Yourself

Write one sentence naming each paragraph’s job. Mark **keep**, **develop**, **move**, or **remove**, and explain the most consequential decision. Revise that part before editing individual words.

Possible feedback response: “The reader could not see why the bag mattered. I added the timing of its removal and explained the connection.” Record what changed so you can check whether the concern is actually resolved.

Check Your Work

- Can a reader follow the points in their revised order?
- Is important evidence explained rather than merely included?
- Have you treated a difficult detail fairly?
- Does the opening now promise the argument you actually make?

After the structure works, revise sentences and proofread. Save the earlier draft so the revision remains recoverable.

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

Write a one-line job for each paragraph, identify the largest gap or repetition, and make that structural revision first.

Sources

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

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Chapter 10: Editing, Formatting, and AI Disclosure

What You Will Make

Prepare a checked submission file and a record of any assistance that the assignment requires you to disclose. Editing comes after the major argument revisions, so you spend time polishing material you intend to keep.

Use Separate Final Passes

Read once for sentence boundaries, missing words, punctuation, and consistent spelling. Read again against the sources: confirm exact quotations, locators, and citation entries. Then compare the document with the required length, headings, spacing, file format, and filename.

Use the required citation style rather than combining conventions from different guides. The [document setup page](#) offers general checks, but your teacher's specifications govern. Reopen an exported PDF and inspect its pages; a correct-looking working document does not prove the export is correct.

Write an Accurate Assistance Note

Fictional example: A teacher permits AI-generated questions about a student's outline but prohibits generated essay wording. A student uses a tool to suggest three objections, investigates them, and writes the essay independently.

A possible disclosure, if it truthfully describes the work, is: "I used [tool and version] on [date] to suggest questions about my outline. I checked those questions against the assigned text and wrote the submitted essay myself." Replace the brackets with actual information and use the teacher's required location and format.

If the tool also rewrote sentences, that note would be incomplete. Record the actual use and resolve any conflict with the teacher's policy. Disclosure does not make prohibited assistance acceptable. If instructions are unclear, ask instead of inventing a universal placement rule.

Try It Yourself

Make three short checklists: **wording**, **sources**, and **submission file**. Review one paragraph against its source and open the final file from the folder you will submit from.

Repair example: The draft quotes "After he left" correctly, but the exported file drops quotation marks during an edit. Restore them, export again, and recheck that passage in the new file.

Check Your Work

- Does each quotation match the source and have the required citation?

- Have you resolved comments and tracked changes as required?
- Does any disclosure describe what actually happened?
- Can you open the correct version and read every page?

Keep the editable document as well as the submission copy so later corrections remain possible.

Put This Chapter to Work

Complete separate wording, source, and file checks; record any permitted assistance accurately and reopen the exact file 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 11: Completing a Full Essay

What You Will Make

Finish one real assignment and preserve a compact record: the prompt, source notes, plan, important drafts, final file, and submission confirmation. Use the collection with your teacher’s requirements; finishing these steps does not guarantee a particular grade.

Connect the Stages

Read the prompt again. Compare its task with your question and thesis. Check that each main point has relevant evidence and explanation, and that the conclusion follows those points. Then complete the editing and file checks from Chapter 10.

If a source remains unverified, resolve the problem or remove the unsupported material. A deadline is a reason to narrow an essay responsibly, not to pretend a gap has disappeared.

Review the Teaching Project

In the **fictional “Empty Chair” project**, the question concerns the chair’s changing role. The thesis distinguishes growing willingness from uncertain feelings. The first main point examines the backpack; the second examines the invitation and final gesture. The conclusion explains why an action can change without proving complete confidence.

This final check catches a mismatch if the title still reads “How Mina Overcomes Every Fear.” Change the title to fit the interpretation actually supported. It also catches an old conclusion left behind after the thesis was revised.

Try It Yourself

Use the **requirements and final checks** page in the **worksheet packet**. Check the exact file against the prompt, then submit by the required method. Where the system provides a receipt or uploaded preview, confirm that it shows the intended file and version. If submission fails, follow the teacher's instructions for reporting the problem.

Write a three-sentence reflection after submission: what changed in your thinking, which revision helped, and what you will do earlier next time.

Specific reflection: "I first equated Mina's invitation with confidence. Comparing the final gesture changed my thesis. Next time I will test my answer against an awkward detail before drafting the conclusion." This records a usable habit rather than only saying the essay was difficult.

Check Your Work

- Do the prompt, thesis, evidence, title, and conclusion agree?
- Are the sources and required disclosures complete?
- Did the intended version reach the submission system?
- Does your reflection name a concrete change you can repeat?

When feedback arrives, compare it with your reflection and carry one practical adjustment into the next assignment.

Put This Chapter to Work

Complete the final assignment check, verify the submitted version, and write one evidence-based reflection about a change in your writing process.

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Examples, Checklists, and Troubleshooting

Follow the Shared Example

The models below use the original **fictional passage** “The Empty Chair” in **Chapter 3**. They are teaching material, not a published story or a student submission. Paragraph numbers locate this practice passage; use the citation system required for your actual assignment.

Annotated Sample Essay

A seat becomes an invitation

Opening: An empty chair can welcome someone, but it can also be kept unavailable. In “The Empty Chair,” Mina first blocks the seat beside her and later offers it to a new student. The chair changes from a barrier into an invitation, showing Mina becoming willing to connect even though she still seems hesitant.

Annotation: The opening identifies the passage, the recurring detail, and an interpretation. It avoids claiming that Mina’s motive is known.

Body paragraph 1: At first, Mina controls access to the seat. She puts her backpack on it and sends the new student towards other benches. She moves the bag only after he leaves (paragraph 1). The timing makes the bag seem more than a temporary place to store something: it functions as an obstacle while the student is present. The passage does not explain why she keeps him away, so this reading concerns her actions rather than a definite claim about her feelings.

Annotation: Specific actions support the point. The interpretation follows the evidence and keeps its limitation visible.

Body paragraph 2: Mina’s later invitation changes the chair’s role without making the change entirely simple. After noticing the student’s chessboard, she leaves the chair empty on Monday and asks whether he needs a second player. Yet “She kept one hand on the chair until he sat down” (paragraph 3). The invitation supports a reading of increased willingness to connect; the continued contact with the chair may suggest hesitation. Interest in chess is another plausible part of the change, since the passage draws attention to the board in paragraph 2.

Annotation: The paragraph connects evidence from different moments, quotes accurately, and acknowledges a reasonable alternative.

Ending: The chair moves from something Mina guards to something she offers. That change makes connection visible through an ordinary action rather than an explanation of her thoughts. Her hand remains part of the final image, leaving room to read the invitation as a tentative beginning rather than a complete transformation.

Annotation: The ending develops the significance of the body’s analysis. It adds no invented chess club, friendship history, or universal lesson about loneliness.

Use the Source Record

- **Source:** AuthZ, “The Empty Chair,” fictional teaching passage in chapter 3.
- **Locator:** paragraph 3.
- **QUOTE:** “She kept one hand on the chair until he sat down.”
- **PARAPHRASE:** Mina maintains contact with the seat while the student accepts her invitation and sits.
- **MY ANALYSIS:** The gesture may suggest hesitation alongside willingness to connect.
- **Limit:** The passage does not state her feelings or say what she does with her hand afterwards.

Keep these categories separate in your workbook. Record the actual author, title, version, and locator for real sources. Exact wording needs quotation treatment; paraphrased ideas also need credit. Follow **Chapter 7** and your teacher’s citation requirements.

Revise a Weak Claim

Before: “Mina becomes completely confident and makes a lifelong friend.”

After: “Mina becomes willing to invite the student to sit with her, although her final gesture may suggest hesitation.”

The revision removes an invented future and qualifies an inference. Practise the same move on a sentence from your own draft: identify the evidence, remove additions, and distinguish observation from interpretation.

Use the Workbook in Order

Start with the assignment planner, then develop your main points. Use the opening-and-ending planner after the argument takes shape. Keep source records during reading, and complete the revision and submission checks last. Blank continuation pages are for your work; only the separately labelled teaching example is pre-completed.

Final Checklist

- I answer the assigned question and can state my main idea.
- Each paragraph has a purpose, evidence, and explanation.
- My quotations and paraphrases match their sources.
- I distinguish an interpretation from a stated fact.
- I follow the required citation, format, collaboration, and AI-use rules.
- I reopen the final file and verify what I actually submit.

Troubleshooting

If the essay retells the passage, explain what a detail contributes to your interpretation. If the thesis promises too much, narrow it to the evidence. If feedback is unclear, ask about a specific paragraph. If a source or tool supplied an idea, record that contribution accurately rather than treating disclosure as permission to use a prohibited method.

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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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.

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