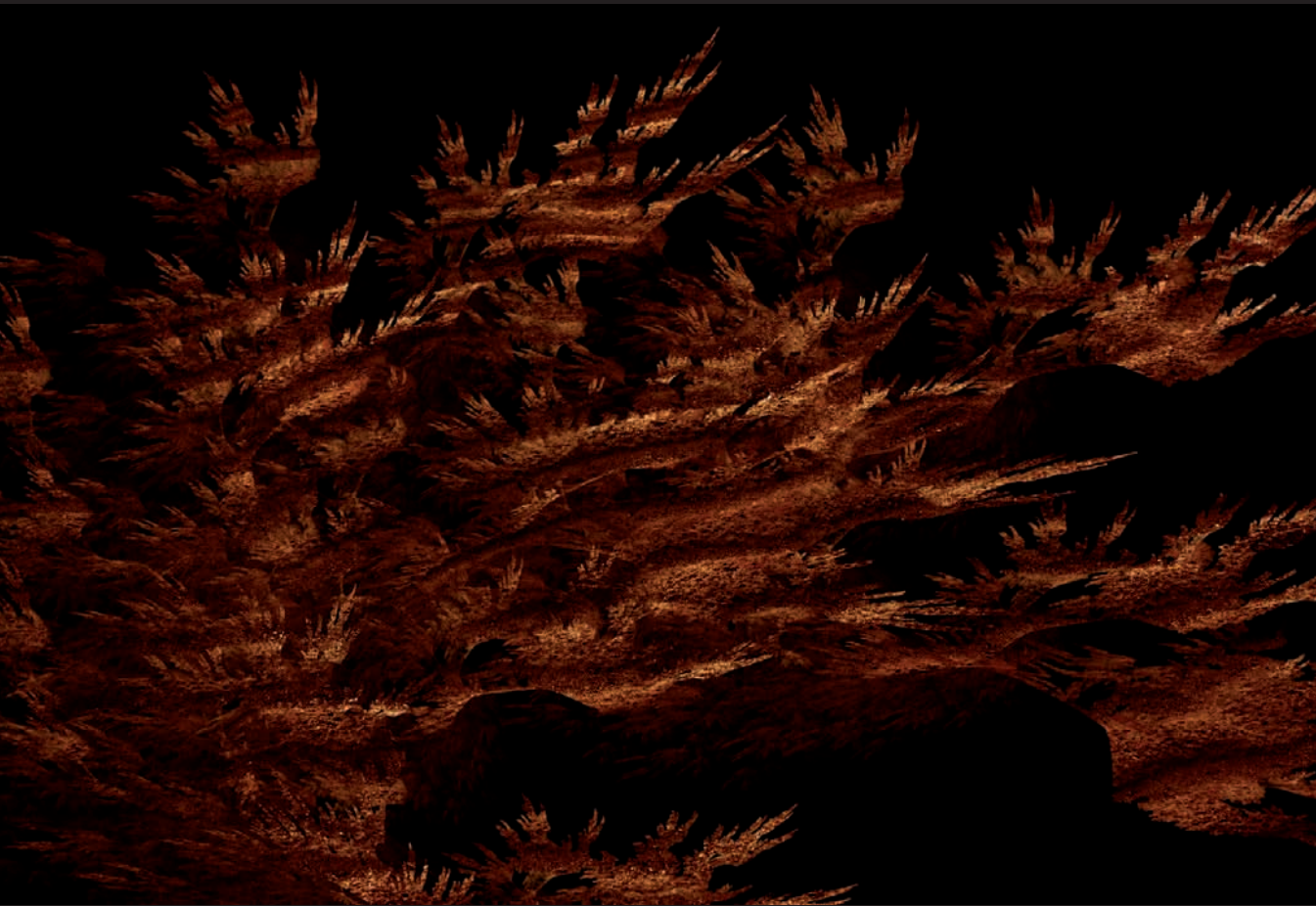


REASON TO WRITE



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that he or she is, in that moment, speaking for all persons, and make sure that the statement justifies that level of generality, as in:

“It’s true of all people. When we are embarrassed, we often blush.”

THREE COMMON ERRORS

1. Singular to Plural:

If what you are replacing is singular or plural, keep it singular or plural:

“When one goes to the store, one shops.”

NOT: “When one goes to the store, they shop.”

2. Pronoun Switching:

If you use a pronoun, keep using that same pronoun for what it replaces, as in:

“If one goes online, one can buy almost anything, especially if one has the money to do so in one’s bank account because one was born wealthy.

NOT: “If one goes online, he or she can buy almost anything.”

3. “He” for “every-single-person.”

“He” can never substitute, by itself, for “every-single-person.”

One can alternate between the genders as long as it is not confusing to the reader, as in:

“A student studies a great deal. He may stay up all night to read. She may get up early to write a paper.”

One can use the phrase “he or she” (or “she or he”), as in:

“A student studies a great deal. He or she may stay up all night and read. She or he may get up early to write a paper.

NOT: A student studies a great deal. He may stay up all night and read. He may get up early to write a paper.

If you are wondering why this last rule applies, ponder the following statement:

“A human is a mammal. *He* breastfeeds *his* young.”

3 THE QUESTION MAP

Once you have a critical question, the next step is to prepare for analysis. Analysis involves breaking the question down into manageable parts that will allow you to answer the original question, or simply allow you to refine your original question to one that is more specific.

One can refine a critical question by determining general and specific elements of that question, outlined in the Question Map Guide that follows. It should both clarify the complexity of your question, and also offer a specific context in which your question operates. Once you have a specific context, you will have the material you need in order to perform effective analysis.

The Question Map is broken into three steps.

1. Three Parts to the Question Map
2. Example Question Map
3. **Step 2: The Question Map Guide**

THREE PARTS TO THE QUESTION MAP

STEP 1

In Step 1, gather details by asking: Who? What? Where? How? When? Why? Each of these could be answered in either a *general* way, or a *specific* way. You will need to use your judgment in formulating them, in sentence form. Each will provide details that will be separated into *General* or *Specific* information.

General details should be given only when the list is too large to give you important patterns.

Example: “**What** needs air to breath?”

Obviously, it would be too much to try to offer a detailed list of living creatures that need air to breath (e.g.: monkeys, antelope, koala bears, dogs, eagles...). Therefore, your answer would be *general* in nature.

Answer: “***In general***, living creatures with respiratory systems need air to breath.”

Specific examples should be given whenever possible. Your list should be specific if there are a variety of possibilities, but it is reasonable to provide a list of them, even if that list is somewhat incomplete.

Example: “**What** kinds of transportation do people use?”

This would be a manageable list of details, and therefore your answer would be *specific* in nature. A response that says: “In general, people use vehicles for transportation” would not be useful.

Answer: ***Specifically***, people use trains, bicycles, airplanes or helicopters, walking, cars or trucks, rocket ships, boats, wheelchairs, sleds, horses, and buses, as transportation.

STEP 2

From all questions that you responded to with the words “In general...” construct a single sentence that describes what you know, in general, about your question.

STEP 3

From all questions that you responded to with the words “Specifically...” begin to combine those details into new patterns to refine your question.

EXAMPLE QUESTION MAP

Original Critical Question: “How has modern technology changed human interaction?”

STEP 1

Gather details in *whole sentences*. Establish whether they are *general* or *specific*

WHO...uses modern technology?

General

In general: humans in all social contexts, public and private. Corporations, institutions, public figures, and private citizens, use it, or are subject to having it used, upon them.

WHAT...technology is used?

Specific

Specifically: computers, cell phones, radar detectors, ATM machines, video games, televisions, weapons tech, medical tech., satellites, MP3 players, scanners, X-rays, voting machines, assembly lines, motion sensors, cameras, telescopes, filming equipment, vehicle technology such as GPS.

WHERE...is the technologically used?

General

In general: In all social contexts, including the home, workplace, places of business, schools, hospitals, prisons, places of transit.

HOW...is the technology used?

Specific

Specifically: databases (identification, taxation, immigration, voter registration, vehicle records, legal records, social security, crime records, medical records, census, school records, statistical data, market research, property records, credit records), timecards, scientific and humanities research, entertainment, production of goods, performance of services, forensic investigation, advertising, voting, testing, medical assessment and procedures, transportation, accounting, stock trade, news, art, navigation, polling.

WHEN...is the technology used?

General

In general, in all contexts, when affordable, except as legislation for reasons of: privacy or ethics.

WHY...is this technology used?

General

In general, to make efficient the management of systems handling the flow of people, time, labor, goods, services, information.

STEP 2

In Step 2, use *General* details to create a single sentence that establishes what you know, in general, about your question.

Example:

In general, technology: 1) is used by, or used upon, corporations, institutions, public figures, and private citizens, 2) in all social contexts, including the home, workplace, places of business, schools, hospitals, prisons, and places of transit; 3) when affordable, except as legislated for reason of privacy or ethics, 4) for the purpose of increasing the efficiency of the flow of people, time, labor, goods, services, and/or information.

STEP 3

In Step 3, use *Specific* details, matching different details into patterns in order to form new questions.

Examples:

In what ways have personal computers affected privacy in the United States?

What role does surveillance play in the life of the average United States citizen?

How does popular culture technology encourage the notion of the average United States citizen as celebrity, through things such as reality TV or YouTube?

How does the technology in institutions (schools, prisons, hospitals) aid the flow of people through systems, and what does it say about the individual?

In what ways does the instantaneous quality of communication (e.g.: texting) result in a shift in the way that time is treated in cultural discourse?

How has the Internet shifted language usage in regard to the perception of space?

If the acquisition of information is no longer a question of access, what other factors now affect its transmission?

How does access to technology affect social mobility?

How do “virtual selves” complicate the division between appearance and “personality”?

How does the means of communication affect the message that is conveyed?

How has the cellphone changed adolescent/parent relationships in the United States?

What significance does the “keyword” play in accessing information?

STEP 2: THE QUESTION MAP GUIDE

STEP 1

In relationship to your question, answer the following, in as much detail as possible. Indicate whether it is a *general* or a *specific* answer:

Who? _____

What? _____

Where? _____

How? _____

When? _____

Why? _____

STEP 2

From the list in Step 1, being as inclusive as possible, answer the question: “What can I say, IN GENERAL, about this question?” In general, _____

STEP 3

From the list in Step 1, being as inclusive as possible, match specific details to other specific details to create a new list of related questions:



CHAPTER 4

SAYING WHAT WE MEAN-MEANING WHAT WE SAY

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1 WRITING HAS WORDS IN IT

Does it trouble you that...

They call what doctors do “practice”?

People who invest your money are called “brokers”?

You board an airplane from something called a “terminal”?

The time when traffic is slowest is called “rush hour”?

To write well is not just about organizing ideas; writing is a product of the use of language. Exploring the nature of words—what they mean, how they mean, why they mean, and any difference between those elements and what we intend to say, when we use them—seems like important information to have, when writing.

The fact is, no matter how erudite, nobody knows all the words in a given language. Nor are all the words in a given language in the dictionary. Language is in use, all around us, every day. The whole of a language is actually held collectively by all persons who speak it.

We choose which words to speak or write at any given moment. However, our power over language is limited. Let’s say that I were suddenly to decide that I was tired of using the word “door” for describing that swinging thing that lets us in and out of buildings. Let’s say that I dislike the word “door,” and believe that the word “snart” would be entirely more pleasant. That does not mean that when I went to work in the morning, someone would say: “Here, let me get that snart for you.”

DEFINITION

vernacular: More than just “language,” this term indicates what is spoken in a given country or region, as it is used, whether “proper” or not. This is also different from **dialect**, which can indicate a variety of distinct forms of that language spoken within a given country or region.

Family members and friends, and even secret societies, may have private words they trade with one another, but it is rare for those words to travel into the general **vernacular**. When a word does become a part of general usage, its origin is often obscured. Who was the first person to use the word “cool” to mean “really good in a particularly new way”? It is almost impossible (unless one is a large corporation with a talented advertising team) to introduce a new word into general usage, on purpose.

This means three things. First, language is always changing, but it is also, at any given moment, complete. Second, people use the words that are available to them—if they want others to understand their meaning. Third, our choices—the particular words

we use when we speak or write—profoundly affect meaning in ways that have nothing to do with the dictionary definition of the words that we use.

2 LANGUAGE AND ASSOCIATES

Language is powerful. People are persuaded by language. Religious texts, political speeches, philosophical treatise, laws, contracts, and constitutions have compelled people to all sorts of actions and beliefs. Despite our protestations that only sticks and stones have the ability to do so, such things as profanity or racial slurs can offend or hurt people.

In turn, even how one uses language can reflect one's origin, one's class, and one's level of education. People judge others based upon the way that they speak. Even a person's name, which usually won't be found in a typical dictionary, can provide huge amounts of information to others about a person. Yet, as so many people have pointed out, these are *just words*.

One of the things that gets in the way of understanding why these are not “just” words is our reliance upon the dictionary to define what language is, for us. A dictionary gives people the impression that language is merely a bunch of unrelated words organized in an alphabetical list.

In our use of language, however, it is quite the opposite. All language is what could be described as *associational*: each word is linked to words to which it is alike, to words in which it is in opposition, and to words to which it is in some other kind of relationship. Those associations are often not so much logical as much as categorical, or even based simply on how the word sounds. Each word shares a variety of things in common with other words, and those relationships impact upon the way that we perceive the world, which is determined, to a large degree, by language.

This is why one could pick practically any word and begin to create an associational “web” of related words, even if the relationship has nothing to do with the definition of the words, themselves. Let's take a simple example: the word **boat**.

From a dictionary, “boat” would probably be listed following a word such as “boastful,” to which it has little relationship besides sharing the first few letters. The word **boat**, in general, would probably be defined as a noun and a verb. It would probably be described as a man-made means of transportation that travels on the water, that