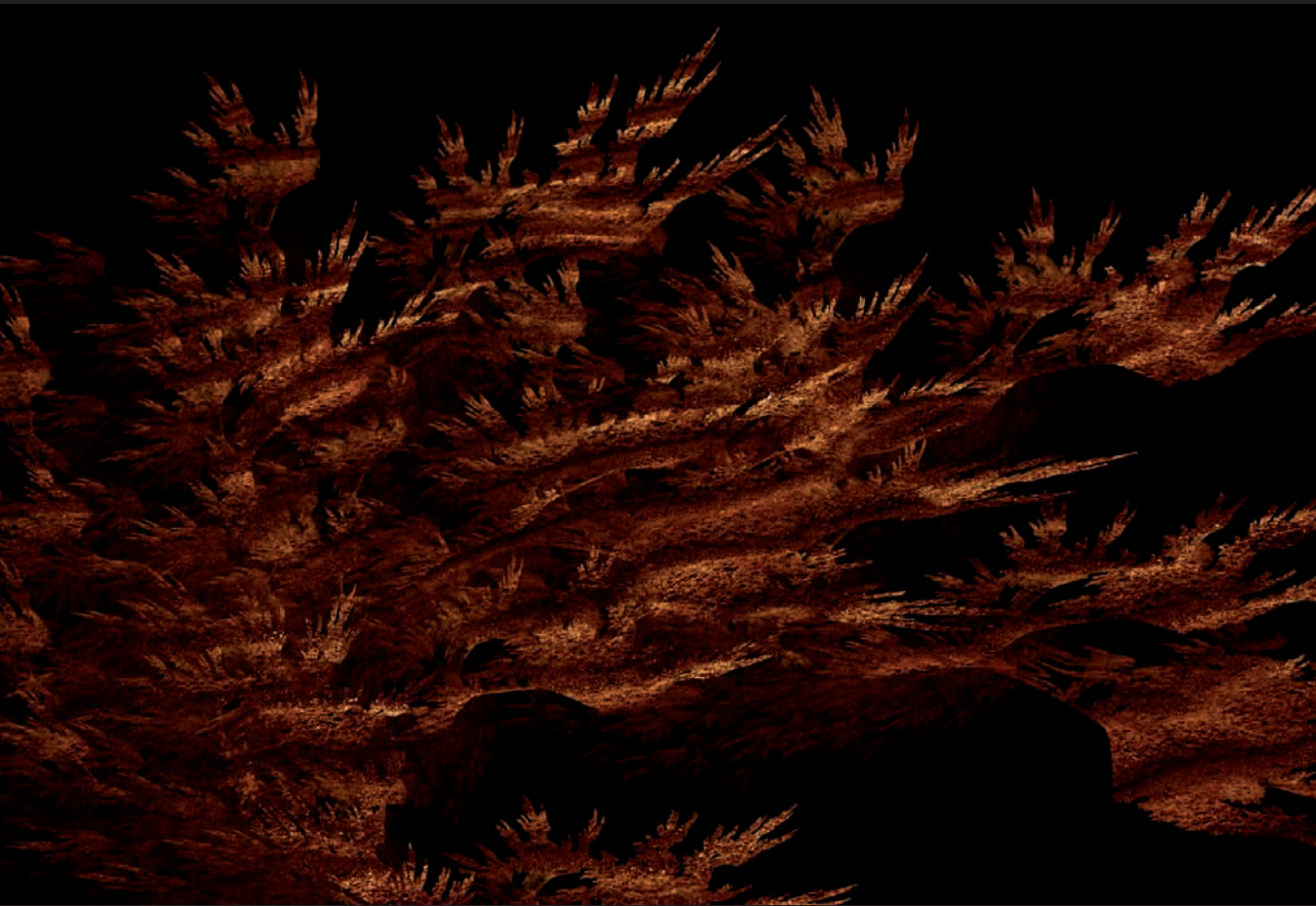


REASON TO WRITE



GINA L. VALLIS

STEP 7: SELF-DIAGNOSTIC GUIDE

# Issue	Very Good	Need to Improve	Issue for Revision
Critical Question			
Based on a Critical Question	_____	_____	_____
Contextualization			
Finds General/Specifics of question	_____	_____	_____
Definition			
Defines terms	_____	_____	_____
Analysis			
Gathers details	_____	_____	_____
Finds patterns	_____	_____	_____
Draws conclusions	_____	_____	_____
Organization			
Strong organizational principle	_____	_____	_____
Sources			
Emphasis on primary sources	_____	_____	_____
Secondary sources when needed	_____	_____	_____
Tone			
Tone works for publication	_____	_____	_____
Objective/Reasonable/Fair	_____	_____	_____
No emotional language	_____	_____	_____
No value judgments	_____	_____	_____
Complicates any binaries	_____	_____	_____
Is not opinion-based	_____	_____	_____
Deals with counterpoints	_____	_____	_____
Language Usage			
No "Wine-Bottle" Language	_____	_____	_____
No Adjectives	_____	_____	_____
No Generalizations	_____	_____	_____
Structure			
Title	_____	_____	_____
Paragraphs	_____	_____	_____
Mechanics			
1. Formatting	_____	_____	_____
Editing			
1. Editing (General)	_____	_____	_____
2. Specific Issue/s	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____



CHAPTER 10

JOINING THE CONVERSATION

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1 KINDS OF WRITING

“Writing is not a profession, occupation, or job; it is not a way of life.
It is a comprehensive response to life.”

—Gregory McDonald

People write in all sorts of different ways, for all sorts of different purposes. For example, personal writing is quite simply writing that one does without the intention of sharing it in a professional or academic or career-related context, because that is not its purpose. Writing that would fall under this might include a personal journal, a shopping list, a letter to a friend, etc. You get it.

Academic writing is merely one kind of writing. One of the things that distinguishes academic writing is that it uses a style that tends to offer a question, and then to move step by step, to a conclusion, through careful analysis and objective reasoning, in the process leading the reader through that thought process in an organized manner.

As a specific kind of writing, the academic essay is not an editorial, a review, or an autobiography. It is not a business proposal or a cover letter.

In contrast, non-academic writing serves a variety of purposes, in the world, but can also be broken down into types and sub-types. A part of learning about academic writing is the recognition of its unique quality, and it can help if one is able to differentiate it from other kinds of writing that function in the world .

Professional Writing

Professional writing is writing performed by a person who will receive payment specifically for the writing product that he or she produces. For example, editing is a type of professional writing. Professional writing can also include, among others:

technical writing: Writing that serves the function of breaking down a process, for a reader, for the practical purpose of having the reader perform that same process. This is done with the understanding that the result would, ideally, result in a duplication of that initial process. Technical writing is published, for example, in manuals. Its purpose is primarily to educate.

journalism: In the form of, for example, reporting, journalism is composed of writing that organizes, and synthesizes, for the reader, in a coherent and objective manner, the results of skilled research. This research often includes both primary sources, which can include current events, historical research, as well as investigation into secondary sources. Ideally, such writing is free of interpretation on the part of the writer, and concentrates only upon the reliable transmission of accurate data concerning those events or issues.

Journalism has many subgenres that would challenge this definition: it can also include opinion-based writing, in the form of the editorial. It can include reviews, or interviews, or satire. Journalism is published in magazines, newspapers, and non-academic journals. Its purpose is primarily to educate or to entertain.

creative writing: The writing of fiction or creative non-fiction for the purpose of publication in a variety of forms: magazines, anthologies, books, etc. Its purpose is more than just to entertain, but is a part of the verbal arts, which function outside of the range of utility.

2 WRITING IN PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

Of course, while professional writers are paid specifically for their writing, there are many professional contexts in which people engage in very specific kinds of writing tasks. Writing in professional contexts is often specific to certain career categories, whether in the public or private sector. There are many professions that require a person to write. An entrepreneur may write a business plan; a consultant may write a proposal; a teacher may write a lesson plan.

These context-specific kinds of writing can be important for people to master within a given professional field. Such writing is done under rules that often involve a complex understanding of heavily coded conventions that have built up over time. For example, we expect that a business letter will have a closing line (“Sincerely”; “Regards,” etc.). We expect that a lawyer will state his or her case, in a written brief, in language that follows a predictable formula, and that might be difficult to understand unless one has been to law school.

3 CONFERENCE PRESENTATION/PUBLICATION FOR UNDERGRADUATES

Sometimes students who enter into university have the idea that writing will not be required within their given field. This is not the case. There is no discipline in which writing does not occur, and copiously, within academics. There are publications in every field. Students also often see the “academic essay” as a school-based writing assignment, written to take entrance exams and to pass classes. Again, that is not, actually, its purpose.

The “academic essay” is, in fact, writing in any of the disciplines—Biology, History, Sociology, Anthropology, English, Chemistry, etc.—that is written in order to be presented to a review board for two potential purposes: for consideration for presentation at a conference, or for the purpose of consideration for publication in an academic journal.

The university is really a self-renewing writing situation. People in universities teach, do experiments, speak, and publish academic writing. Because undergraduates often see their role within the academy as a classroom-learner, few take advantage of the opportunities provided by participation in undergraduate conference presentation, undergraduate research assistantship, and undergraduate publication. Beyond the satisfaction that one can gain from such activities, they speak in a powerful way to potential committees or interviewers if one wishes to continue on to graduate school, or to put together a strong professional package for job application.

Academic Conferences for Undergraduates

Conferences are gatherings that are hosted by academic associations. They occur at universities, at hotels, and at conference centers, all over the world. Scholars attend these symposiums, or conferences, in order to learn what others present, and to get the opportunity to present what they have learned. There are conferences that are specifically aimed at undergraduates, and there are conferences at which persons at any level of scholarship can participate.

Usually, one must be a member of an association to attend, which usually involves either simply officially indicating willingness to join, as well as a desire to attend a given conference, and sometimes involves a fee for both membership and registration to a conference. Some associations are linked to academic journals, and some put out newsletters that keep their members up-to-date on various goings-on pertaining to the association.

These associations range widely: some are discipline-specific (e.g.: *The Association of Academic Psychiatrists*), some are theme-specific (e.g.: *The Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking*), and some are area-specific (e.g.: *The Mid-Western College Art Association*). Some are small. Some are very big. The Modern Language Association (which is the association that puts out the MLA guidelines for formatting) hosts a conference, each year, attended by thousands of participants.

When a given association is planning to host a conference, it notifies its members, and it also sends out a general notification called a CFP: a Call For Papers. The call goes out to anyone who would like to present, who fulfills the qualifications. Response to this call may require an abstract, or a paper, depending on the specifics of the call. A review board then evaluates this material, and presenters are chosen based upon that review.

Some associations will only accept submissions from specific presenters, but many will consider a strong abstract from anyone currently engaged in academic inquiry, and even those who are not. It is much easier to get accepted to an academic conference than to be accepted for academic publication. Presenting at a conference, or even attending one, gives students exposure to a given field, provides a chance to make contacts, and is a significant part of professional development reflected on a C.V. or résumé.

The Academic Journal

An “academic journal” is not a magazine. A legitimate academic journal publishes articles that are:

- Scholarly: The purpose of the articles contained within the journal is to distribute knowledge, not to make money.
- Peer-reviewed: Articles are reviewed and selected by experts within a field, depending on the nature of the journal
- Specialized: Articles are usually written by people within a given field, for an audience of readers within that same field.

When a journal is created, the editorial board gets together and makes a series of decisions. They will decide whether the journal will be disciplinary or interdisciplinary, on what the journal is going to concentrate, and what its general philosophy will be. Editorial boards get to decide which essays they publish, the journal’s intended audience, the look of the journal, and how it is distributed. Once a journal

is established, the editorial board will also put out a CFP. This invites those within academics to submit abstracts, or essays, for consideration for publication in the journal.

Some journals will publish essays from any source, as long as the essay meets their standards. Others are very specific about whom they will publish. Some will only publish articles or essays from established experts in a field. Others specify works from a specific university.

Here is an example of the description of an interdisciplinary journal from the editorial board for “NeoAmericanist.” This journal routinely publishes work from professors, graduate students, and undergraduates:

NeoAmericanist is an inter-disciplinary online journal for the study of America. We are focused on reaching out to universities and the general public to create an e-journal that pushes the boundaries of scholarship and theory, and blurs the lines between academic disciplines and popular culture. *NeoAmericanist* is a journal available for anyone who aspires to participate in the study of the United States of America.

Like most academic journals, this journal indicates the forum for the journal, its focus, its intended readership, and the people from whom it will accept submissions for potential publication.

There are literally hundreds of journals that publish work by undergraduates. There are interdisciplinary undergraduate academic journals, and journals that specialize in publishing undergraduate research. There are also many journals that are discipline-specific, including but not limited to:

Art	Creative Writing	Business
Communication	Economics	English
Cognitive Science	Rhetoric	History
Law	Computer Science	Psychology
International Affairs	Medicine	Political Science
Mathematics	Physics	Philosophy
Biology	Engineering	Anthropology
Neuroscience	Chemistry	Public Writing
Film Studies	Linguistics	Sociology

4 JOINING THE CONVERSATION

It is an excellent exercise to at least find a conference or journal to which one could contribute. Academic submission is always free. All one has to do is follow the guidelines. At the worst, one could get rejected—but the benefits, should one get accepted, far outweigh a bit of ego-deflation, should one not be accepted.

Knowing how to respond to a CFP does not mean that one has to actually submit the essay—but one should know how to go about doing so.

STEP 8: CONFERENCE/JOURNAL PUBLICATION GUIDE

STEP 1

Open your web browser and type in “undergraduate journal.” Other key words could include “undergraduate conference” or “CFP undergraduates.”

You will find multiple websites, often themselves lists to other resource links.

Find a Conference or Journal to which you could legitimately submit your essay for potential consideration.

Go to that website.

STEP 2

On that webpage, if you look around, there will be a link that says something to the effect of “Submission guidelines,” or “For Contributors.”

Click on the link.

STEP 3

This link will take you to a set of guidelines for how to prepare your essay for consideration for a conference presentation or journal publication.

Print out the “submissions guidelines” page

You don't *have* to submit your essay—but, at this point, you could.

SAMPLE UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE CFP

Conference for Undergraduate Research in Communication

Call for papers

We invite theoretical, critical and/or empirical papers on a broad range of communication topics for presentation in traditional panel format.

Undergraduate research projects suitable for poster session presentation in an interesting, engaging visual format are also encouraged.

Papers must be authored by one or more undergraduate students attending one of the participating institutions. Maximum length is 15 pages (not including references and appendixes). Please submit your paper, using the citation method of the American Psychological Association and following the directions laid out in the Paper Format Guide, with 100-word abstract, electronically to rrpgsl@rit.edu for review.

Poster session presentations should represent research projects and results in an interesting visual form. At least one author of the project must be present at the poster session to discuss the poster with attendees. Please submit your proposal, of no more than 500 words, electronically to pmsgsl@rit.edu.

Deadline for all submissions Monday, February 15. Acceptance is by e-mail.

SAMPLE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL CFP

HISTORY MATTERS

AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Submissions Info

HISTORY MATTERS welcomes submissions from all undergraduates. Please follow these guidelines when submitting papers:

- The deadline for submissions is the last Friday of January.
- Authors may submit papers via e-mail attachment, in Microsoft Word formats, to histmatt@appstate.edu.
- Please put your name, university, e-mail address, current mailing address, and phone number on a cover page.
- We are especially seeking papers that utilize primary sources.
- We strongly prefer papers between 10 and 20 pages in length.
- Please do not include your name in the header or footer.
- Please use 1" margins.
- The body text of all papers should be double-spaced, but footnotes should be single-spaced.
- All papers must include a bibliography of sources used.
- We ask that you use footnotes and conform manuscripts to the Chicago Manual of Style (latest edition), especially for footnote form.
- Only one submission per student will be reviewed.
- We do not accept papers already published or previously submitted to this journal or other academic journals.

Revisions and additional research may be requested after editorial review, but a request for revision does not guarantee publication.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Mythologies. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1972. Print.
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CHAPTER 10

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This handbook is a practical guide designed to offer students the means to apply critical thinking to academic writing.

Critical thinking is a challenging term. Sometimes it is presented in relationship to formal logic, which is too rigid to use as a strategy for writing instruction. Sometimes critical thinking is made synonymous with analysis, although they can be clearly differentiated as separate cognitive activities. Sometimes critical thinking is reduced to writing prompts on selected readings, or exemplar asides.

Reason to Write introduces the critical question, a pre-writing strategy that both stipulates a working definition for critical thinking, and, in doing so, reorients the approach to academic writing as fundamentally inquiry-based.

Critical thinking provides specific strategies designed to help student writers to work through the relationship between thinking and writing. When given the opportunity to develop a line of inquiry based upon a question, students acquire not only critical thinking skills, but also the means to be self-corrective in their writing, and to transfer those skills into new contexts.

In three major sections, students are guided through steps that build upon foundational critical thinking skills, and that reinforce academic writing as a practice designed to answer a question, solve a problem, or resolve an issue.

Gina L. Vallis received her Ph.D. in Literature with an emphasis in critical theory, and teaches Writing at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She writes and presents on topics concerning rhetoric, communication, critical and literary theory, and film and visual studies. She is certified in graphic design, has published poetry, and vendors an intervention program for children with ASD, in relationship to which she contributed a chapter for a book on autism intervention. She is currently completing a pending publication of a collaborative web-text for the praxis category of *Kairos*, as well as preparing a manuscript concerning writing about film, titled *Screening Arguments*.



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