

# Holding Your Reader

# 7

◉ *If there is any way for your readers to get lost, they will.*

Readers can be a fickle lot, hard to please and easy to lose. And once lost, they're hard to recapture. Thus the first rule for holding your readers is to capture their interest. You can usually do that by teaching them something, since most readers want to stay with a writer as long as they are learning. So it's important, as you work, to ask yourself, "Am I telling my readers what they want and need to know?"

But when you're drafting and revising, it's also helpful to keep in mind some specific strategies for holding your readers. We suggest nine such strategies:

- ◉ Choose a good title.
- ◉ Write a strong lead.
- ◉ Keep your writing tight and unified.
- ◉ Keep sentences and paragraphs to a reasonable length.
- ◉ Chunk your writing into manageable units.
- ◉ Avoid antagonizing your readers.
- ◉ Make your writing look good.
- ◉ Use figurative and connotative language sparingly.
- ◉ Avoid stereotypes and offensive labeling.

## ● CHOOSE A GOOD TITLE

Because readers often decide whether they want to read something solely on the basis of its title, try to draft a title that is clear, accurate, and interesting. A good title does several things:

First, it predicts content.

Second, it catches the reader's interest.

Third, it reflects the tone or slant of the piece of writing.

Fourth, it contains keywords that will make it easy to access by a computer search.

Notice how the title "Artemisia Gentileschi: Artist against the Grain" meets the criteria for a good title. It tells you the piece is about the artist Artemisia Gentileschi; it piques your interest to learn why she was considered against the grain; it reflects a positive tone to the piece; it contains keywords that would allow a reader to find it quickly in an online search. Do resist giving your projects cute or facetious titles. They may fall flat with your readers, and they can mislead someone who's trying to classify or find your work.

## ● WRITE STRONG LEADS

Notice the importance William Zinsser attaches to opening sentences:

The most important sentence in any article is the first one. If it doesn't induce the reader to proceed to the second sentence, your article is dead. And if the second sentence doesn't induce him to continue to the third sentence, it's equally dead. Of such a progression of sentences, each tugging the reader forward until he is safely hooked, a writer constructs that fateful unit the "lead."

WILLIAM ZINSSER, *ON WRITING WELL*

Leads can make or break you with your readers. Editors, executives, admissions directors, and many other readers are busy and often impatient people. **If your opening doesn't engage their interest in two or three minutes, they'll move on.** "But," you may say, "that's not true, professors. They *have* to read what I write." Well, yes, that's what they're paid to do. But if your first paragraph rambles, you're off to a bad start. And if readers can't grasp your main idea by the middle of the second page,

they may lose interest in what you're saying. A good lead does these things:

- ☉ It engages the reader's attention.
- ☉ It makes a promise about what's to come.
- ☉ It sets the tone for the piece.
- ☉ It gives readers a reason to continue reading.

You can accomplish these goals in various ways. Here are two reliable strategies: (1) catch your reader's interest with a provocative statement or question, and (2) make your reader anticipate what is to come.

The writer who seeks to engage the reader may do so with an anecdote, an analogy, reinterpretation of a maxim or cliché, intriguing facts, or a series of informative questions. Here's an example of a lead that wryly interprets a maxim:

Ever since the first Florentine loaned his first ducat to his first Medici, it has been one of the most shopworn clichés of the financial industry that the best way to rob a bank is to own one. This maxim, like all maxims, is rooted in a basic truth about human nature: to wit, if criminals are given easy access to large sums of money, they will steal, and under such tempting circumstances, even honest men may be corrupted. To forget this is to invite madness and ruin.

L. J. DAVIS, "CHRONICLE OF A DEBACLE FORETOLD"

To trigger the reader's interest in her subject, the science writer Natalie Angier opens an article about scorpions with a series of intriguing facts about four ancient civilizations:

To the ancient Chinese, snakes embodied both good and evil, but scorpions symbolized pure wickedness. To the Persians, scorpions were the devil's minions, sent to destroy all life by attacking the testicles of the sacred bull whose blood should have fertilized the universe. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew King Rehoboam threatened to chastise his people, not with ordinary whips, but with scorpions—dread scourges that sting like a scorpion's tail. The Greeks blamed a scorpion for killing Orion, a lusty giant and celebrated hunter.

NATALIE ANGIER, "ADMIRERS OF THE SCORPION"

The following opening paragraph illustrates the strong informative lead:

Any woman who has devoted herself to raising children has experienced the hollow praise that only thinly conceals smug dismissal. In a culture that measures worth and achievement almost solely in terms of money, the intensive work of raising responsible adults counts for little. One of the most intriguing questions in economic history is how this came to be; how mothers came to be excluded from the ranks of productive citizens. How did the demanding job of rearing a modern child come to be trivialized? When did caring for children become a "labor of love" smothered under a blanket of sentimentality that hides its economic importance?

ANN CRITTENDEN, "HOW MOTHERS' WORK WAS 'DISAPPEARED' "

The paragraph introduces a chapter that traces how attitudes have changed in the past century about the work women do as mothers and housewives. This kind of informative lead works particularly well for serious pieces and class projects because it gives readers an immediate signal about what they're going to learn.

You'll find more suggestions about opening paragraphs in Chapter 8, on crafting paragraphs.

#### ● KEEP YOUR WRITING TIGHT AND UNIFIED

Whatever you're writing, you want your readers to be able to move through it smoothly without getting lost or having to backtrack and reread. You can achieve that necessary unity by following one of the organizational patterns discussed in Chapter 5, on drafting, and by using strong transitions throughout. Here are some key transitional devices:

- ☉ Directional terms—links and nudges
- ☉ Repeated words
- ☉ Conjunctions at the beginnings of sentences

#### ● LINKS AND NUDGES

*Links* are words and phrases that hold writing together by signaling connections. *Nudges* are terms that give readers a little push from one point to the next and keep them moving in the right direction. All writers need

to have a stock of such terms at their fingertips and to develop a sense of when and where these terms are needed. Here are some of the most common:

#### LINKS

also  
although  
moreover  
for example  
in addition  
however  
in spite of  
nevertheless  
and  
similarly  
not only  
because

#### NUDGES

this, that, these, those  
then  
first  
consequently  
therefore  
next  
thus  
hence  
since  
as a result  
for instance

Here's a paragraph from our model paper on Artemisia Gentileschi with both linking and nudging terms italicized:

The talented Gentileschi [. . .] was fortunate in being born into a painter's *family* in Rome in 1593. *Her father*, Orazio, was a friend of the painter Caravaggio and well established in the artistic community of Rome; the *family* lived in the artists' quarter of the city surrounded by other painters. *Thus from childhood* Artemisia breathed the ambience of the artist's workshop and absorbed the traditions of the heroic school of painting of the day that emphasized myth and legends from the Bible and the classical era. *From her early teens* she worked in her *father's* studio, which would have been considered the *family business*, developing her expertise in mixing paints and preparing canvases, and benefiting from the opportunity to draw from models that was essential for any serious painter of the day *but* almost impossible for women artists to attain unless they came from a *painter's family*.

The links come from the repeated mention of *family*, *father*, and Artemisia's age (childhood, teens); the nudging terms are *thus* and *but*.

#### ● REPEATED WORDS

Although you will often want to edit out repetitious language as you revise, occasionally you may choose to unify your writing by **deliberately repeating a key word or phrase**. Here's an example in which repetition works well:

For tens of thousands of years on the plains of North America, many forces of nature worked to sustain the grasslands. Of those forces, **fire** was perhaps the most important in the health of the prairie. Before the West was settled, grass **fires** were a natural part of the prairie ecosystem. [. . .] **Fire** helped burn back old-growth plants. On the plains, **fire** helped remove the dead grasses and allowed new plants to emerge from the charred soil. Often, if an area goes for an extended time without the benefit of **fire** or some other disturbance, it becomes a monoculture, in which only one type of plant grows.

RUSSELL GRAVES, *THE PRAIRIE DOG*

Here's another, from the African American poet Nikki Giovanni:

The *fact of slavery* is no more our fault than the *fact of rape*. People are raped. It is not their choice. *How the victim becomes responsible* for the behavior of the victimized is beyond my understanding. *How the poor are responsible* for their condition is equally baffling. **No one chooses** to live in the streets; **no one chooses** to go to sleep at night hungry; **no one chooses** to be cold, to watch their children have unmet needs. **No one chooses** misery, and our efforts to make this a choice will be the damnation of our souls. Yet such thinking is one of the several troubling legacies we have inherited from [W. E. B.] Du Bois.

NIKKI GIOVANNI, "CAMPUS RACISM 101"

#### ● USING CONJUNCTIONS TO CONNECT SENTENCES OR PARAGRAPHS

You may remember some authority telling you that you shouldn't start a sentence with *and* or *but* because they're conjunctions whose purpose is to join parts of sentences. Well, they are conjunctions, and they do join things, so you wouldn't want to use either one as the very first word of a piece of writing. But they are also strong signal words that can work well for beginning a sentence or a new paragraph when you want to emphasize a connection or show a contrast. They also help hold the parts of your writing together. The next examples, taken from essays reprinted in the

Best American Essays series, show that you can begin sentences or paragraphs with *and* or *but* (we've italicized the conjunctions) without making a grammatical blunder; both words can serve as important hooks to unify your writing:

[. . .] If we are using our land wrong, then something is wrong with our economy. This is difficult. It becomes more difficult when we recognize that in modern times, every one of us is a member of the economy of everybody else.

But if we are concerned about land abuse, we have begun a profound work of economic criticism. Study of the history of land use [. . .] informs us that we have had for a long time an economy that thrives by undermining its own foundations.

WENDELL BERRY, "IN DISTRUST OF MOVEMENTS"

[. . .] Corey knows how to work a crowd, sometimes too well. Last year in one of the season's crucial games, Corey was all alone under the basket, tried a fancy lay-up and blew it. The coaches rose to their feet, howling in rage. Corey jogged downcourt shrugging, palms turned toward the ceiling. "Relax, guys," he said, nonchalance itself. "It's just basketball."

And then there is Stephon. He is making his debut as a high-school player today, but he takes the court as he always does—ever confident, leaning forward onto the balls of his feet in happy anticipation, arms jangling at his sides. "Mission day," he announces with a clap. "Time to get busy." Within moments he is making quick work of his competition, stunning the crowded, noisy gym into reverential silence.

DARCY FREY, "THE LAST SHOT"

#### KEEP PARAGRAPHS AND SENTENCES TO A REASONABLE LENGTH

It may be that television and the Internet have made all of us less patient readers than we should be. Whatever the reason, it's a fact that many of us quickly become impatient with lengthy sentences or paragraphs, especially when we're reading online and have to scroll the text up a few lines at a time. That's when we may stop reading, so it's definitely in a writer's best interest to try to keep sentences and paragraphs reasonably short. (See Chapter 8 for more discussion of paragraphing.)

#### PARAGRAPHS

You can check on paragraph length in different ways, but the simplest is just to look at what you've written. Does a single paragraph take up almost a whole screen or whole page? If so, it's probably too long, and you need to find places to break it. (See pages 94–96 in Chapter 8 for specific suggestions.) Ask yourself if you are trying to cover too much in one stretch and would do better to focus on one small point at a time. Readers can process only a limited amount of information at a time, and if you crowd too much data into a few paragraphs, they'll lose interest. For example, this paragraph is overstuffed:

It takes a bold paleface to attempt a comprehensive history of Native American life nowadays—after being forced to swallow five hundred years of insulting and mainly inaccurate Anglo-European generalizations about their character and behavior, the Native Americans are justifiably tetchy. Get it wrong and Russell Means, the activist-turned-actor who has managed to play both the last of the Mohicans (Chingachgook, in Michael Mann's adaptation of James Fenimore Cooper's novel) and the fiercest of the Sioux (Sitting Bull, in my own *Buffalo Girls*) might show up on your doorstep, wearing his big hat; or Vine Deloria, Jr., the unmellowed Sioux polemicist, might launch a lightning bolt or two, possibly from that bastion of nativism, the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times*; or the young rumbler from the Northwest, Sherman Alexie, recently anointed by *Granta* as one of the twenty best young American writers, might pop onto one of the paleface talk shows and complain.

LARRY McMURTRY, "CHOPPING DOWN THE SACRED TREE"

(More about this caution in Chapter 8, on paragraphing, and in the next section, on chunking your writing.)

#### SENTENCES

Your sense of your audience should help you decide how long to make your sentences. If you're writing an opinion column for a newsletter or an editorial for the college paper, you can assume that your readers are probably reading hurriedly and won't take time to process long complex or rambling sentences. You also would intuitively write relatively short sentences if you were creating a Web page for a club you belong to or writing a presentation you will be giving orally.

More experienced readers, such as your instructors or people who read a great deal in their profession, can, of course, handle relatively long sentences without any problem. Larry McMurtry, for example, originally published the essay quoted above in the *New York Review of Books*, which appeals to highly educated, expert readers. Even so, we think McMurtry's sentences are too long and complicated. Why tax readers' patience? **Whoever your audience is, it's a good rule of thumb to check your sentences for length as you revise and edit.** When you see a sentence is running to more than six or seven lines on the page or screen, look to see if you can break it up. Usually you can, and you will probably improve it in the process.


And it is possible to make long sentences readable. **Use people or specific nouns as your sentence subjects; focus on showing someone doing something; use active verbs; avoid strung-out noun or verb phrases.** You can also make a long sentence readable by writing a sequence of parallel clauses, particularly when each clause is colorful and interesting in itself. For instance:

Long-distance buses have become the habitat of busted souls who've lost their cars to the finance company or lost their licenses because of driving drunk; of childless, indigent old people; or frightened new immigrants from Laos, Nigeria, or Guatemala, who have too many kids to manage; of people who have just been released from an institution; of legally blind people like me.

EDWARD HOAGLAND, "I CAN SEE"

Of course, writers who create sentences like this expend time and effort to get such striking results. It's not easy, but an elegant sentence can be worth the investment.

### CHUNK YOUR WRITING INTO MANAGEABLE UNITS

You can also make your writing easier to read by *chunking* it: that is, by **breaking up long stretches of writing into separate units** so they're easier to process. Chunking is the principle behind group  digits in telephone, Social Security, and credit card numbers—would you ever remember your sister's phone number if it were written 2140117760? But if you break it into smaller units—214-011-7760—it's easier to read and remember.

You're chunking your writing when you break up long sentences into shorter ones and divide long paragraphs into shorter paragraphs, as we discussed in the previous section. You can also break paragraphs into manageable chunks by **inserting numbers that mark off units**. Here's an example:

For several reasons, you can't count on scores from standardized tests to predict a student's college performance accurately. (1) Tests don't measure perseverance, a crucial quality for success in college. (2) They don't test a person's study habits or ability to set priorities. (3) Tests don't reflect the value a student's family places on grades and intellectual achievement. (4) Tests don't measure a student's confidence and maturity.

Notice how the numbers break the paragraph into chunks but also retain its unity. They also act as nudges that move the reader along in the right direction.

Another good way to break up a long sentence or paragraph is to **display the contents in a list**. For example, you would probably lose your readers' attention halfway through this sentence:

Successful bosses know that factors that make for job satisfaction are complex and include challenge, recognition, autonomy, status in the group, harmony on the job, variety of tasks, intellectual stimulation, and significant work as well as money.

There's just too much information jammed together. But if you break the same information out into a list, readers can absorb it.

Successful bosses know that employees get job satisfaction from many factors, not just money. They include:

challenge	harmony on the job
recognition	variety of tasks
autonomy	intellectual satisfaction
status in the group	significant work

You can also break your writing into chunks by **setting off material in boxes, pasting in graphics or pictures to break up long passages of text, creating charts, or dividing your writing into columns** if you're creating a brochure or a newsletter. You'll find more tips about breaking up your

writing and displaying information effectively in Chapter 11, on document design.

### ● AVOID ANTAGONIZING YOUR READERS

An important reminder about holding your readers comes from basic psychology: Don't make them angry. You'll surely lose them if you do. Few of us are open-minded enough to read through a piece of writing that attacks our beliefs or makes fun of people or institutions we cherish. But you can often get people to consider your point of view if you use moderate language and keep certain principles in mind:

- ☛ **Show respect for your audience.** Assume your readers are intelligent, thoughtful people of goodwill who will respond to a reasoned argument. Emphasize values and goals you may have in common and work from there.
- ☛ **Use moderate language.** Avoid extreme adjectives such as *vicious*, *immoral*, and *intolerable* when you're constructing an argument. Readers who don't already agree with you will get defensive and quit reading; those who do agree may be offended by your diatribes.
- ☛ **Write provisionally, not dogmatically.** State your points in tentative and conditional terms that get your ideas across but don't sound aggressive. Try expressing your ideas with phrases like *it's possible that . . .*, *we might consider . . .*, *perhaps we should think about . . .*, or *can I suggest. . .* Sentences like *Let's see if we can agree* and *I hope you'll take our suggestion into consideration* create an atmosphere of cooperation and courtesy in which your readers can pay attention to your proposals because they're not forced to defend their positions.

Unfortunately, because the hosts of TV and radio talk shows seem to believe that controversy attracts more viewers than a courteous exchange of opinions would, we have few public models of people engaging in dialogue to reach agreement. The reality is, however, that in democracies you get things done through **compromise and negotiation**. Those are good skills to work on in your writing.

### ● MAKE YOUR WRITING LOOK GOOD

When impatient readers—and there are lots of them—look at a long page of unbroken print, they're apt to think, "I'm not sure I want to read that." You can try to avoid that reaction in several ways. Here are some of the things you can do to make your writing look better in print or online.

- ☛ Put your title and any headings in a bold, easy-to-read type font. (See Chapter 11, on document design, to learn more about using headings and different type fonts.)
- ☛ Leave plenty of white space around titles, illustrations, and blocks of print. Be sure your writing doesn't look crowded and dark.
- ☛ Add graphs and charts to reinforce and dramatize statistics or chunks of data.
- ☛ Use illustrations and graphics when appropriate.
- ☛ Keep paragraphs short, especially if your writing is going to appear in columns or online.
- ☛ Look for ways to break your writing into units; use lists, boxes, headings, and captions as appropriate.

We'll add here that you may want to postpone working on the "body language" of your project until you get to either the small-scale revising or editing stage. Too much early concern about appearance could distract you in the drafting stage.

### ● USE FIGURATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE LANGUAGE SPARINGLY

Except for those who write scientific and technical articles, few writers would claim that they always use neutral language that has no emotional content. Nor would they want to. Anyone who wants to write colorful and engaging prose that involves people will use vigorous language at times and will want to use **images and metaphors**. Images and metaphors are seldom neutral. Notice their effect in this paragraph by William Zinsser:

I was the smallest of boys, late to grow, living in a society of girls who **shot up like mutants and were five-foot-nine by the age of twelve**. Nowhere was the disparity sharper than at the dances I was made to attend throughout my youth. The tribal rules required every boy to bring a gardenia to the girl who invited him, which he would pin to the bosom of her

gown. Too young to appreciate the bosom, I was just tall enough for my nose to be pressed into the gardenia I had brought to adorn it. The sickly smell of that flower was like **chloroform** as I lurched round and round the dance floor. Talk was almost out of the question; my lofty partner was just as isolated and resentful.

WILLIAM ZINSSER, *INVENTING THE TRUTH*

And the author of a report about corruption in college sports issued by the Knight Commission in June 2001 uses **passionate language** to convince readers that colleges and universities are damaging their institutions through commercialization. Here is an excerpt from the report:

Major college sports do far more damage to the university, to its students and faculty, its leadership, its reputation and credibility than most realize—or at least are willing to admit. The **ugly** disciplinary incidents, **outrageous** academic fraud, **dismal** graduation rates, and **uncontrolled** expenditures surrounding college sports reflect what Duderstadt and others have rightly characterized as an entertainment industry that is not only the **antithesis** of academic values but is **corrosive** and **corruptive** to the academic enterprise.

KNIGHT REPORT, "A CALL TO ACTION"

In these paragraphs, the authors use vivid language to engage their readers' emotions—Zinsser to evoke a nostalgic image from his childhood ("shot up like mutants," "tribal rules," "sickly smell," "lurched round and round"), the Knight Report to stir outrage about the way money has corrupted college sports ("ugly," "outrageous," "dismal," and so on). Both are using connotation—the **power of words to suggest much more than their bare-bones dictionary definitions include**—but they're doing so responsibly and openly. That's the key: responsibility. You can use emotional language for effect, but don't conceal your position and your purpose from your readers.

#### ● AVOID STEREOTYPES AND OFFENSIVE LABELING

When you're writing college papers, business documents, articles for newspapers or newsletters, or communications that will go online, pay special attention to **avoiding offensive language**. Avoid gender or racial

and ethnic stereotyping, and don't express contempt for people who are different from you or disagree with you.

#### ● SEXIST LANGUAGE

To avoid sexist language, keep some guidelines in mind.

Instead of using the male pronouns *he* and *him* in general statements, write *he or she* and *him or her*. Often you can avoid the problem by using plural nouns, or you may switch back and forth between *she* and *he* when you're generalizing.

##### WHY WRITE . . .

The astute leader always listens to his men.

Men show their true nature in times of crisis.

Policemen, mailmen, chairman, or businessmen . . .

##### WHEN YOU COULD WRITE . . .

Astute leaders always listen to their followers.

People show their true nature in times of crisis.

Police officers, mail carriers, chairperson, or business executives . . .

Edit out language that stereotypes certain professions as male or female. Don't suggest that nurses, librarians, or secretaries are usually women, or that engineers, physicians, and military officers are usually men.

Avoid implying that men and women behave in stereotyped ways. Don't suggest that most women love to shop, that most men are sloppy, or that only men like to hunt and fish.

#### ● USING RACIAL AND ETHNIC TERMS CAREFULLY

Mention race only if you make an important point by doing so. Then keep these guidelines in mind:

Use specific and accurate terminology. For Americans whose forebears come from another country, **combine descriptive terms with American**: *Japanese American*, *Cuban American*, and so on, without hyphens. The term *Asian* is so broad that it's almost useless; use *Chinese*, *Japanese*, *Indonesian*, *Filipino*, and so on. The term *Oriental* is no longer used to

describe specific races. The term *Hispanic* is also very broad and means something different from *Latino*. When you can, choose a more specific term: *Mexican*, *Peruvian*, *Colombian*, *Spanish*, and so on.

The terms *Native American* and *American Indian* are both acceptable for indigenous Americans; for natives of the Arctic regions, more specific ethnic names such as *Inuit* or *Aleut* are preferred over *Eskimo*.

As far as you can, use terminology preferred by the people you're writing about. At this time, the term favored by many whose ancestors came from Africa seems to be *African American*, but *black* is still widely used. If you're in doubt, ask a friend from that group or consult a respected newspaper such as the *New York Times* or the *Christian Science Monitor*. *People of color* is the choice of some writers.

Be careful not to slip into subtle ethnic or racial stereotypes. Might someone construe something you've written to mean that Irish are hot-tempered or Italians are connected with crime or Scots are stingy? If so, consider revising to avoid unintended bias. Sometimes it helps to get someone else to read your work to look for such slips.

Avoid unnecessary references to age, physical condition, or sexual orientation. **Be careful not to demean people for characteristics over which they have no control.**

Use respectful terms for people who are sixty-five or older, and recognize that individuals in that category vary as much as those in any other group. Many such individuals do not want to be called *elderly* or *old* or even *senior citizens*. Your best bet here is to be specific; write "late sixties" or "early seventies." Mention someone's age only if it's relevant, and avoid patronizing comments like "For a seventy-five-year-old, he's remarkably alert." Of course, that doesn't mean that you can't recognize truly unusual accomplishments, as a *New York Times* article did in reporting on a performance the Russian ballerina Maya Plisetskaya gave on her seventieth birthday.

Use *boys*, *girls*, and *kids* only for people under eighteen. College students and young working adults deserve to be called men and women. The term *college kids* is both patronizing and highly inaccurate.

When it's relevant to mention a person's disability or illness, use specific language and avoid words like *crippled* or *victim*. Terms like *blind*, *visually impaired* or *paraplegic* are simply descriptive and are acceptable. A useful formula is to mention the person first and his or her

disability second: "my friend Joe, who is diabetic" or "Anne's father, who has multiple sclerosis."

Mention a person's sexual orientation only when it is pertinent to the topic you're discussing, and use specific, nonjudgmental language when you do. *Gay* and *lesbian* now seem to be the terms preferred by those whose sexual orientation is toward their own sex.

Edit out language that suggests negative stereotypes such as *red-neck*, *wetback*, *welfare mother*, *fraternity boy*, *country club set*, or *Junior Leaguer*. Be careful, too, with terms that have become code words suggesting racial or social stereotypes; two such terms are *underclass* and *cultural elite*.

#### ● MAINTAINING A CIVIL TONE

Finally, **remember that the language you use reflects who you are.** So even when you're using strong language for strong purposes, keep it civil. People who call those who disagree with them names like *wacko* or *fascist* or *pinko* reveal themselves as extremists who have little interest in honest argument or productive discussion. Their language works only with those who already agree with them. They're contemptuous of anyone else. So **if you want to be taken seriously, show respect for your readers even when you disagree with them.** That's the only way you'll get them to consider your point of view.

.....

**Q** When can I use contractions such as *they're* and *wouldn't* in college writing?

**A** As with most questions about writing style, the answer to this question depends on your writing situation. You need to analyze each situation in order to decide what your audience expects of you and what you want to accomplish with what you are writing. It would also be useful to think about how the writing situation *feels* to you. **If it is relaxed and friendly, contractions may be appropriate. But if you feel your instructor keeps a certain distance from students, you may decide that he or she would rather you didn't use contractions.**





I knew I'd arrived at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge when I pulled up to the visitor center and spotted two white-tailed deer grazing in a clearing. They soon were joined by two more deer, which watched nonchalantly as I got out of my car and headed inside. They seemed to know that they're safe on this 115,000-acre refuge, created in 1937 to protect the endangered whooping cranes.

SCOTT WILLIAMS, "ARANSAS OFFERS REFUGE FROM CITY LIFE"

4 Here are two long though fairly readable sentences by professional authors. How would you break them up to make them more readable without destroying their unity?

When Ben Jonson was a small boy, his tutor, William Camden, persuaded him of the virtue of keeping a commonplace book: pages where an ardent reader might copy down passages that especially pleased him, preserving sentences that seemed particularly apt or wise or rightly formed and that would, because they were written afresh in a new place, and in a context of favor, be better remembered, as if they were being set down at the same time in the memory of the mind.

WILLIAM H. GASS, "IN DEFENSE OF THE BOOK"

Blue and white canopied water taxis glide through the harbor, allowing passengers to embark and alight at the attractions that dot the waterfront: not only the glass-enclosed shopping pavilions and the Aquarium, but the kid-friendly Maryland Science Center (Imax theatre and hands-on displays galore) and the oddly provocative American Visionary Art Museum (where the displays of multimedia constructions by self-taught artists range from the striking to the bizarre) as well.

DIANE COLE, "HOW DOWDY OLD BALTIMORE TURNED FASHIONABLE"

5 Working with two or three other students in a group, discuss how you might revise the following passages to get rid of biased language:

The artist must follow his own intuition if he is to do lasting work, whether he is a painter or a sculptor. The man who tries to imitate what is currently chic will not make his mark on the culture.

The nurse who wants to work with the day-to-day patients in a hospital will often find that she has been replaced by nurses' aides because the hospital administrator has been forced to cut his expenses.

Policemen, teachers, and mailmen are often well paid in large cities that have strong public employee unions.

One can depend on good restaurants in Cincinnati because many Italians and Germans settled there.

As a 6-foot 8-inch African American, Jarvis will probably be going to college on a basketball scholarship.

The editor of an online magazine to be launched next year is a gay man with wide experience in magazine publishing and television talk shows.

Those girls have been playing bridge together once a week for at least twenty-five years.

Although the photographer has passed her seventy-fifth birthday, she still travels and does outstanding work.

• **FOR WRITING** • • • • •

Choose one of the writing assignments in this section and, before writing, complete an analysis of your readers. Include the analysis when you submit the assignment. Your analysis should answer the following:

Who are your readers?

What questions do they want answered?

What is your persona in this piece of writing?

What is your goal in writing?

What characteristics of the audience do you need to keep in mind in order to hold their attention?

1 You have a part-time job as restaurant critic for your local newspaper, and you specialize in reviews of restaurants that attract both students and faculty from your institution. Write a review of no more than 500 words (two double-spaced pages) in which you focus on food quality, atmosphere, and the service you received. Keep a moderate tone and an informal style. Be sure to mention price ranges and specialties.

2 The board of trustees is holding a hearing to help decide whether to tear down and replace low-rent student housing that was fashioned thirty years ago out of buildings at a local Air Force base that was closed down. The housing is unsightly and needs repairs; some trustees believe it may be unsafe. If it is torn down, however, there will be no low-cost student housing available close to campus for at least two years, and the housing that would replace it would rent for at least 50 percent more.

As spokesperson for the married students who are now living in the housing, prepare a ten-minute talk (no more than 750 words) against tearing down the housing. Be sure to propose some alternative solution. In the proposal suggest

what measures the college might take to improve the current buildings or where substitute housing might be located and how it could be financed.

③ A charitable organization in your city called The New Career Closet seeks donations of women's clothes appropriate for first-time women job seekers who have finished a city-sponsored business training program and will be going out on job interviews. You have offered to create a Web site for the organization to help it publicize its service to both potential donors and possible recipients of such clothing. Remember, you have two audiences here: women who can donate such garments, and women who seek a reliable source for tasteful business apparel. Write copy of no more than 350 words for the Web site.

# Crafting Paragraphs 8

▷ Create paragraphs that will make life easier for your readers.

**M**ost of us seem to think naturally in sentences. We don't, however, think in paragraphs. They are artificial divisions created by writers—or sometimes editors—because readers need them. They break writing into chunks so that readers can process and absorb what they're reading without bogging down and having to reread. And since most of us don't have editors to help us, we have to learn paragraphing on our own. How does one do that? Partly through practice and partly through developing a keen sense of audience. The more conscious you are of your audience, the better you will become at crafting paragraphs.

You can look at paragraphing from two points of view: *external* and *internal*. When you create paragraphs from an external point of view, you're paragraphing for appearance. When you create paragraphs from an internal point of view, you're paragraphing for unity and coherence. Let's consider the external view first.

## ● THE EXTERNAL VIEW OF PARAGRAPHING

A printed page or computer screen has its own "body language" that sends signals to readers before they ever read a word, and paragraph length strongly affects the impression readers get. Think about your response when you face a page of solid, unbroken print, whether in a book,