

CHAPTER 2

Writing from Reading

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you have read this chapter and completed its exercises and assignments, you should be able to

- read a piece of writing and identify its thesis and main ideas
- make notes of the main ideas in a piece of writing
- write a summary and a paraphrase of a piece of writing
- avoid plagiarizing a piece of writing
- respond to a piece of writing
- write an essay test effectively and efficiently

“Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words or he will certainly misunderstand them.”

~ JOHN RUSKIN

▼
JOHN RUSKIN, BORN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, WAS KNOWN FOR HIS ART AND SOCIAL CRITICISM.

Reflecting

What do you think John Ruskin meant by this? Do you agree or disagree?

Want to learn more about Ruskin? Go to www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/index.html to find out about his life and works.

WHAT IS WRITING FROM READING?

One way to find topics for writing is to draw from your ideas, memories, and observations. Another way is to write from reading you’ve done. You can *react* to it; you can *agree* or *disagree* with something you’ve read. In fact, many college assignments ask you to write about an assigned reading: an essay, a chapter in a textbook, an article in a journal. This kind of writing requires an active, involved attitude toward your reading. Such reading is done in steps:

1. preread
2. read
3. reread with a pen or pencil

After you’ve completed these three steps, you can write from your reading. You can write about what you’ve read or you can react to what you’ve read.

AN APPROACH TO WRITING FROM READING

Attitude

Before you begin the first step of this reading process, you have to have a certain **attitude**. That attitude involves thinking of what you read as half of a conversation. The writer has opinions and ideas; he or she makes points just as you do when you write or speak. The writer supports his or her points with specific details. If the writer were speaking to you in a conversation, you would respond to his or her opinions or ideas. You would agree, disagree, or question. You would jump into the conversation, linking or contrasting your ideas with those of the other speaker.

The right attitude toward reading demands that you read the same way you converse: you *become involved*. In doing this, you “talk back” as you read, and later you react in your own writing. Reacting as you read will keep you focused on what you’re reading. If you’re focused, you’ll remember more of what you read. With an active, involved attitude, you can begin the step of prereading.

Prereading

Before you actually read an assigned essay, a chapter in a textbook, or an article in a journal, magazine, or newspaper, take a few minutes to **preread** it: look it over, and be ready to answer the questions in the prereading checklist below.



CHECKLIST FOR PREREADING

- ✓ How long is this reading?
- ✓ Will I be able to read it in one sitting, or will I have to schedule several time periods to finish it?
- ✓ Are there any subheadings in the reading? Do they give any hints about the reading?
- ✓ Are there any charts? Graphs? Boxes of information?
- ✓ Are there any photographs or illustrations with captions? Do the photos or captions give me any hints about the reading?
- ✓ Is there any introductory material about the reading or its author? Does the introductory material give me any hints about the reading?
- ✓ What is the title of the reading? Does the title hint at the point of the reading?
- ✓ Are any parts of the reading underlined, italicized, or emphasized in some other way? Do the emphasized parts hint at the point of the reading?

Why Preread?

Prereading takes very little time, but it will help you immensely. Some students believe that it’s a waste of time to scan an assignment; they think they should jump right in and get the reading over with. However, spending just a few minutes on preliminaries can save hours later. And, most important, prereading helps you become a *focused reader*.

If you scan the length of an assignment, you can pace yourself. And if you know how long a reading is, you can alert yourself to its plan. A short reading,

for example, has to come to its point fairly early. A longer essay may take more time to develop its point and may use more details and examples.

Subheadings, charts, graphs, illustrations, and boxed or other highlighted materials are important enough that the author wants to emphasize them. Looking over that material *before* you read will give you an overview of the important points the reading contains.

Introductory material or questions will also help you know what to look for as you read. Some background on the author or on the subject may hint at ideas that will come up in the reading. Sometimes, even the title of the reading will give you the main idea.

You should pre-read so that you can start reading the entire assignment with as much *knowledge* about the writer and the subject as you can get. Then, when you read the entire assignment, you'll be reading *actively*, for more knowledge.

Forming Questions Before You Read

If you want to read with a focus, it helps to ask questions before you read. Form questions by using the information you gain from pre-reading.

Start by noting the title and turning it into a question. If the title of your assigned reading is “Reasons for the War Measures Act,” you can ask the question, “What were the reasons for the War Measures Act?”

You can turn subheadings into questions. If you are reading an article on beach erosion, and one subheading is “Artificial Reefs,” you can ask, “How are artificial reefs connected to beach erosion?”

You can also form questions from graphs and illustrations. If a chapter in your history book includes a photograph of a Gothic cathedral, you could ask, “How are Gothic cathedrals connected to this period in history?” or “Why are Gothic cathedrals important?” or “What is Gothic architecture?”

You can write down these questions, but it's not necessary. Just forming questions and keeping them in the back of your mind helps you read actively and stay focused.

An Example of the Pre-reading Step

Take a look at the article that follows. Don't read it; *pre-read* it.

Free for All

Jesse Brown

Jesse Brown, a contributor to Toronto Life, examines the impact of mobile computing and social media. Here, he describes his experience with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

I'm studying sociology at Princeton in my spare time. I'm also taking game theory at Stanford, computer programming at the University of Toronto and **equine** nutrition at the University of Edinburgh. I attend class in my underwear, watch cartoons during lectures and cheat on tests with help from some of my hundreds of thousands of classmates. The classes I'm enrolled in are called MOOCs—Massive Open Online Courses, available for free to knowledge-hungry students of life like myself through the educational website Coursera.

MOOCs are a global phenomenon with Canadian roots. The term was coined in 2008 by Dave Cormier, a web communications manager at the University of P.E.I., to

equine: regarding horses

describe an Internet-based course designed by professor George Siemens of Athabasca University in Alberta and Stephen Downes of the National Research Council. Twenty-five University of Manitoba students signed up for a course on connectivist theory and were joined by 2,300 virtual students from the general public, who participated free of charge via the web.

The MOOC concept stalled until 2011, when Stanford offered three open online courses and received a staggering 350,000 registrants from 190 countries. A couple of the Stanford profs involved with the experiment were encouraged enough to drop everything and launch Coursera, a self-described “social entrepreneurship company.” And there have been other launches, notably Udacity and EdX, a joint venture of MIT and Harvard. In a matter of months, MOOCs attracted millions of students from around the world and millions of dollars in venture capital. Coursera alone has enrolled 2.6 million students and secured \$16 million in investment. But according to **evangelists**, MOOCs are not about money—they’re about revolutionizing post-secondary education.

evangelists: people who believe very strongly in the subject at hand

Last July, U of T signed up as a Coursera partner. Students can’t earn course credits for taking the classes, nor do they pay any fees. And no money changes hands between Coursera and U of T—at least not yet. If profits emerge in the future—through nominal tuition fees or by selling their database—Coursera says the money will be shared with partner universities.

My computer programming class, one of seven MOOCs offered by U of T, attracted more than 100,000 registrants. Yes, I’m participating for the purpose of writing this article, but I’m also hoping to learn something about programming. Without reading the honour code—which I assume says something about promising not to cheat—I click a button swearing to uphold it, and class begins.

I half expect a bunch of videotaped lectures. I’m half right. While the course is taught via a series of short videos starring my teachers—senior computer science lecturers Jennifer Campbell and Paul Gries—the videos weren’t created by pointing a Handycam at a lectern. They were designed specifically for the web, and the **production values** are pretty good. When the teachers code, I watch them code. Difficult concepts are rendered simple through live-drawn illustrations. When the class gets ahead of me, I pause the video, or play it again from the start. When I grasp the point of the lesson, I hit 1.5X to speed things up. I rarely grasp it.

production values: quality of a media production; can include aspects of lighting, pacing, video quality, and the like.

My homework consists of multiple-choice and short-answer exercises, coding assignments and a three-hour final exam. All work is auto-graded, but other MOOCs also use peer assessment to evaluate assignments. I visit the course’s discussion forums to hang out with my fellow students.

So how did I do? Not great. I dropped out. Programming fundamentals started off fun, kind of like a **TED talk**, but then it turned into actual work, so I gave up. I also dropped out of sociology, game theory and equine nutrition. I’m not alone.

TED talk: TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) is a conference where speakers give lectures on current and innovative ideas

Of all those students who enrolled in the coding class, only 9,000 completed it to earn a “statement of accomplishment.” I learn this upon visiting Jennifer Campbell in her office at U of T’s Bahen Centre for Information Technology on St. George. I’m a

little star-struck by the nice-looking teacher I've been spending so much time with at home, and I resist the urge to blurt out, "Hey, I know you from the Internet!"

Campbell is disheartened by her MOOCs completion rate. When she taught the same course in a real classroom last fall, 85 percent of students saw it through. Of course, those students needed to pass. I didn't, though I still got something out of it.

I ask Campbell what the experience was like for her. "Fun," she says. "But I missed the face time with students." Participating in online discussions with thousands is no replacement for the one-on-one chats she has with students during her office hours.

And yet the advantages of MOOCs are undeniable. They drive the cost of a world-class education down to nothing. They make knowledge accessible to all. They let you pace your learning—and emerging companies are developing technology that will enable MOOCs to learn how you learn in order to adapt to different styles. Open captioning allows anyone to translate a MOOC, so you can take courses taught in different languages. All of this explains why they're popular, but there is a legitimacy problem. To become a viable alternative, MOOCs will have to grant course credits, which would improve the dismal completion rates and allow committed students to distinguish themselves from dabblers.

The obstacles to this are many. MOOCs need a reliable identity verification system to prevent cheating. They need richer assessment of oral and written work that goes beyond machine-graded multiple choice and peer assessment. Most of all, they need to offer meaningful interaction and discussion with scholars.

A couple of daring schools (Georgia State and San Jose State) are planning to provide these services in the months ahead, charging and sharing tuition fees with MOOC sites and providing bona fide, transferable credits to students.

It's a horrifying idea to education traditionalists, the reduction of our institutions of higher learning to mere support systems for "classroom in a box" websites. But perhaps it's time to shed romantic notions of **ivory tower symposiums**. Toronto's undergrad students are crammed into vast auditoriums by the hundreds—Psych 101 at U of T maxes out at 1,500 students per lecture. The days when U of T luminaries like Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan taught intimate classes of 19-year-olds are well behind us.

It won't be long before our universities shift their big introductory courses online. Tuition needn't change, and few students will complain—most will prefer it. But that's just the opinion of one equine nutrition dropout.

ivory tower: sheltered academic isolation, often providing abstract, impractical advice

symposium: meeting or conference

The Results of Prereading

By *prereading* the article, you might notice the following:

The title is "Free for All."

The author is a columnist for *Toronto Life*.

There are some vocabulary words you may need to know.

The introductory material says that the essay is about online courses.

You might begin reading the article with these questions in mind:

What could the title, “Free for All,” mean?

How big is a “Massive Open Online Course”?

Reading

The first time you read, try to get a sense of the whole piece you’re reading. Reading with questions in mind can help you do this. If you find that you’re confused by a certain part of the reading selection, go back and reread that part. If you don’t know the meaning of a word, look in the margin to see if the word is defined for you. If it’s not defined for you, try to figure out the meaning from the way the word is used in the sentence.

If you find that you have to read more slowly than you usually do, don’t worry. People vary their reading speed according to what they read and why they’re reading it. If you’re reading for entertainment, for example, you can read quickly; if you’re reading a chapter in a textbook, you must read more slowly. The more complicated the reading selection, the more slowly you’ll read it.

An Example of the Reading Step

Now *read* “Free for All.” When you’ve completed your first reading, your answers to the prereading questions you formed will probably be like these:

Answers to Prereading Questions

“Free for All” could mean that the courses are free, or could refer to the expression “free for all,” meaning that the courses have so many students that there is little organization.

A “Massive Open Online Course” could include hundreds of thousands of students.

Rereading with Pen or Pencil

The second reading is the crucial one. At this point, you begin to *think on paper* as you read. In this step, you make notes or write about what you read. Some students are reluctant to do this, for they’re not sure *what* to note or write. Think of making these notes as a way of learning, thinking, reviewing, and reacting. Reading with a pen or pencil in your hand keeps you alert. With that pen or pencil, you can do the following:

Mark the main point of the reading.

Mark other points.

Circle words you don’t know and define them in the margin.

Question parts of the reading you’re not sure of.

Evaluate the writer’s ideas.

React to the writer’s opinions or examples.

Add ideas, opinions, or examples of your own.

It’s easiest to do this right on the page, although if you’re reading a library book or a book that doesn’t belong to you, you can use sticky notes or make notes on a separate sheet. There is no single system for marking or writing as you read. Some readers like to underline the main idea with two lines and to underline

other important ideas with one line. Some students like to put an asterisk (a star) next to important ideas, while others like to circle key words.

Some people use the margins to write comments like “I agree!” or “Not true!” or “That’s happened to me.” Sometimes, readers put questions in the margin; sometimes, they summarize a point in the margin, next to its location in the essay. Some people make notes in the white space above the reading and list important points, while others use the space at the end of the reading. Every reader who writes as he or she reads has a personal system; what these systems share is an attitude. If you *write as you read*, you concentrate on the reading selection, get to know the writer’s ideas, and develop ideas of your own.

As you reread and write notes, don’t worry too much about noticing the “right” ideas. Think of rereading as the time to jump into a conversation with the writer.

An Example of Rereading with Pen or Pencil

For “Free for All,” your marked article might look like the following:

Free for All

by Jesse Brown

American
university located
in New Jersey

I’m studying sociology at (Princeton) in my spare time. I’m also taking game theory at Stanford, computer programming at the University of Toronto and equine nutrition at the University of Edinburgh. I attend class in my underwear, watch cartoons during lectures and cheat on tests with help from some of my hundreds of thousands of classmates. The classes I’m enrolled in are called MOOCs—Massive Open Online Courses, available for free to knowledge-hungry students of life like myself through the educational website Coursera.

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University of
Toronto

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I ask Campbell what the experience was like for her. "Fun," she says. "But I missed the face time with students." Participating in online discussions with thousands is no replacement for the one-on-one chats she has with students during her office hours.

And yet the advantages of MOOCs are undeniable. They drive the cost of a world-class education down to nothing. They make knowledge accessible to all. They

let you pace your learning—and emerging companies are developing technology that will enable MOOCs to learn how you learn in order to adapt to different styles. Open captioning allows anyone to translate a MOOC, so you can take courses taught in different languages. All of this explains why they're popular, but there is a legitimacy problem. To become a viable alternative, MOOCs will have to grant course credits, which would improve the dismal completion rates and allow committed students to distinguish themselves from dabblers.

The ^{obstacles}obstacles to this are many. MOOCs need a reliable identity verification system to prevent cheating. They need richer assessment of oral and written work that goes beyond machine-graded multiple choice and peer assessment. Most of all, they need to offer meaningful interaction and discussion with scholars.

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It won't be long before our universities shift their big introductory courses online. Tuition needn't change, and few students will complain—most will prefer it. But that's just the opinion of one equine nutrition dropout.

What the Notes Mean

In the sample above, the underlining indicates sentences or phrases that seem important. The words written between the lines or in the margin are often summaries of what is underlined. The phrases and words *only 9%*, *drastic difference in completion rates*, and *obstacles*, for instance, are like subtitles or labels added by the reader.

Some words in the margin are reactions. When Brown describes how he took multiple courses in his underwear or watched cartoons during lectures, the reader notes, "Cool!" Several words in the margin are definitions. For example, the term "U of T" in the selection is defined as *University of Toronto* in the margin.

The marked-up article is a flexible tool. You can go back and mark it further. You may change your mind about your notes and comments and find better or more important points in the article.

You write as you read to involve yourself in the reading process. Marking what you read can help you in other ways, too. If you're to be tested on the reading selection or asked to discuss it, you can scan your markings and notations at a later time for a quick review.

EXERCISE

1

READING AND MAKING NOTES

Below is a paragraph from “Free for All.” First, read it. Then reread it and make notes on the following:

1. Underline the advantages of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
2. Circle a word you don’t know and define it in the margin.
3. In the margin, add another possible advantage of a MOOC.
4. At the end of the paragraph, summarize the point of the paragraph.

Paragraph from “Free for All”

And yet the advantages of MOOCs are undeniable. They drive the cost of a world-class education down to nothing. They make knowledge accessible to all. They let you pace your learning—and emerging companies are developing technology that will enable MOOCs to learn how you learn in order to adapt to different styles. Open captioning allows anyone to translate a MOOC, so you can take courses taught in different languages. All of this explains why they’re popular, but there is a legitimacy problem. To become a viable alternative, MOOCs will have to grant course credits, which would improve the dismal completion rates and allow committed students to distinguish themselves from dabblers.

Main point of the paragraph: _____

WRITING A SUMMARY OF A READING

There are a number of ways you can write about what you’ve read. You may be asked for a summary or paraphrase of an article or chapter, or for a reaction to it, or to write about it on an essay test. For each of these, this chapter will give you guidelines so that you can follow the stages of the writing process.

A **summary** of a reading tells the important ideas in brief form in your own words. It includes (1) the writer’s main idea, (2) the ideas used to explain the main idea, and (3) some examples used to support the ideas.

When you preread, read, and make notes on the reading selection, you have already begun the prewriting stage for a summary. You can think further, on paper, by *listing the points* (words, phrases, sentences) you’ve already marked on the reading selection.

PREWRITING

GATHERING IDEAS: SUMMARY**Marking a List of Ideas**

To find the main idea for your summary and the ideas and examples connected to the main idea, you can mark related items on your list. For example, the expanded list below was made from “Free for All.” Five symbols are used:

- h **history** of MOOCs
- e the author's **experience** of taking a MOOC
- the **drawbacks** of MOOCs
- + the **benefits** of MOOCs
- s what it will take for MOOCs to be **successful**

A List of Ideas for a Summary of “Free for All”

- | | |
|--|---|
| e attend class in underwear | – instructor missed face-to-face interaction with students |
| e watch cartoons during lectures | |
| h MOOCs are free through Coursera | + MOOCs make education more affordable |
| h MOOCs available around the world but began in Canada | + MOOCs make courses more accessible |
| h interest in MOOCs took off in 2011, when hundreds of thousands registered for three courses and Coursera was developed | + students can learn at their own pace |
| h millions of dollars invested | + MOOCs can be designed to adapt to different learning styles |
| MOOCs expected to change post-secondary education | + technology can translate courses from different languages |
| e students cannot earn credits, but do not pay tuition for courses | s MOOCs will have currency only when credits are granted |
| e students must adhere to an honour code | s MOOCs require systems to prevent cheating |
| e course delivered through short videos of good quality; videos can be replayed | s MOOCs will require grading schemes that are more thorough |
| e assignments and exercises automatically graded, though some courses assign grades through peer evaluation | s students will need more interaction with their instructors and each other |
| – very small percentage of students complete MOOCs compared with traditional courses | – courses may reduce post-secondary schools to supports for online courses, but some first-year university courses are already very large |

The marked list could be reorganized, like this:

history of MOOCs

MOOCs are free through Coursera

MOOCs are available around the world but began in Canada

interest in MOOCs took off in 2011, when hundreds of thousands registered for three courses and Coursera was developed

millions of dollars invested

the author's experience of taking a MOOC

students cannot earn credits, but do not pay tuition for courses

students must adhere to an honour code

course delivered through short videos of good quality; videos can be replayed

assignments and exercises automatically graded, though some courses assign

grades through peer evaluation

drawbacks of MOOCs

very small percentage of students complete MOOCs compared with traditional courses

instructor missed face-to-face interaction with students

courses may reduce post-secondary schools to supports for online courses, but

some first-year university courses are already very large

benefits of MOOCs

MOOCs make education more affordable

MOOCs make courses more accessible

students can learn at their own pace

MOOCs can be designed to adapt to different learning styles

technology can translate courses from different languages

what it will take for MOOCs to be successful

MOOCs will have currency only when credits are granted

MOOCs require systems to prevent cheating

MOOCs will require grading schemes that are more thorough

students will need more interaction with their instructors and each other

Selecting a Main Idea

The next step in the process is to select the idea you think is the writer's main point. If you look again at the list of ideas, you'll note that one idea is unmarked:

MOOCs expected to change post-secondary education

You might guess that it's unmarked because it's more general than the other ideas. This may allow you to conclude that this is the *main idea* of the reading selection:

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are expected to change post-secondary education.

Once you have a main idea, check to see if it fits with the other ideas in your organized list. Do the ideas in the list connect to the main idea? Yes. The author examines how very different *his MOOC experience* is from a traditional course, and then describes both the *drawbacks* and *benefits* of MOOCs. Finally, he concludes that there are several elements required for MOOCs to be *successful*, and that ultimately, MOOCs will change the face of post-secondary education.

Once you have a main point that fits an organized list, you can move to the *planning stage* of a summary.

EXERCISE

2

MARKING A LIST OF IDEAS AND FINDING THE MAIN IDEA FOR A SUMMARY

Below is a list of ideas from an article called “How to Ride Ups, Downs of Learning New Skills.” Read the list, and then mark it with one of these symbols:

X = examples of different learning styles

S = steps in learning

A = advice from successful people

After you’ve marked all the ideas, survey them, and think of one main idea. Try to focus on an idea that connects to the title, “How to Ride Ups, Downs of Learning New Skills.”

List of Ideas

- _____ Kids tend to learn by trial and error and are ready to learn from their mistakes.
- _____ Excitement and confidence replace fear and confusion, since the learner can say, “I know this.”
- _____ If you want to increase your success rate, double your failure rate.
- _____ Confidence and comfort levels are highest when the course begins.
- _____ Another student prefers to study alone to avoid distractions.
- _____ Focus all your energy on improving, learning, and achieving your goals.
- _____ Utter confusion, frustration, and discomfort make the learner feel lost.
- _____ Some adults view change with suspicion and uncertainty and are uncomfortable moving into new situations.
- _____ One student enjoys studying with a group to exchange ideas and bolster her confidence.

Main idea: _____

PLANNING

DEVisING A PLAN: SUMMARY

Below is a sample of the kind of outline you could do for a summary of “Free for All.” As you read it, you’ll notice that the main idea of the prewriting stage has become the topic sentence of the outline, and that the other ideas have become the details.



Outline for a Summary of “Free for All”

topic sentence: Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are expected to change post-secondary education.

details:

history of MOOCs

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are free through the website Coursera. Millions of dollars have been invested.

author’s experience of taking a MOOC

Although students cannot earn credits, they do not pay tuition for courses. Students must adhere to an honour code, which includes no cheating. Courses are delivered through short videos of good quality; videos can be replayed for review. Assignments and exercises are automatically graded, although other courses assign grades through peer evaluation and feedback.

drawbacks of MOOCs

A very small percentage of students complete MOOCs compared with traditional courses. Instructors can miss face-to-face interaction with students. Courses may reduce post-secondary schools to supports for online courses, but some first-year university courses are already very large

benefits of MOOCs

MOOCs make education more affordable. MOOCs make courses more accessible; anyone with internet access can take them. Students can learn at their own pace. MOOCs can be designed to adapt to different learning styles. Technology can translate courses from different languages.

what it will take for MOOCs to be successful

MOOCs will have currency only when credits are granted. MOOCs require the implementation of systems to prevent cheating. MOOCs will require grading schemes that are more thorough. Students will need more interaction with their instructors and each other.

In the preceding outline, some ideas from the original list have been omitted (they were too detailed for a summary), and the order of some points has been rearranged. That kind of selecting and rearranging is what you do in the planning stage of writing a summary.

DRAFTING AND REVISING

DRAFTING AND REVISING: SUMMARY

Attributing Ideas in a Summary

The first draft of your summary paragraph is the place where you combine all the material into one paragraph. This draft is much like the draft of any other paragraph, with one exception: When you summarize another person’s ideas, be sure

to say whose ideas you are expressing. That is, *attribute* the ideas to the writer. Let the reader of your paragraph know

1. the author of the selection you are summarizing, and
2. the title of the selection you are summarizing.

You may wish to do this by giving your summary paragraph a *title*, such as

A Summary of “Free for All” by Jesse Brown

(Note that you put the title of Brown’s essay in quotation marks.)

Or you may want to put the title and author into the paragraph itself. Below is a draft summary of “Free for All” with the title and author incorporated into the paragraph.

> A Draft for a Summary of “Free for All”

“Free for All” by Jesse Brown claims that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will change the face of post-secondary education. MOOCs became popular in 2011, when hundreds of thousands of students registered for three courses and the website Coursera was developed in response. Millions of dollars have been invested in the site, and students can now take courses for free. Brown himself enrolled in several MOOCs: sociology at Princeton and game theory at Stanford. He also took computer programming at the University of Toronto and equine nutrition at the University of Edinburgh. He describes his own experience taking the computer programming course. While students cannot earn credits toward a degree, they do not have to pay tuition, either. Students are expected to adhere to an honour code, which Brown assumed includes a stipulation of no cheating. Brown found that the course was delivered through a number of short videos of good quality. He found it helpful that he could replay these videos to review concepts. Assignments and exercises were automatically graded through multiple-choice questions, though other courses assign grades through peer evaluation. Brown, through discussions with his instructor, discovered some drawbacks to MOOCs: a very small percentage of students complete MOOCs compared with traditional courses. Brown dropped out of his programming, sociology, game theory, and equine nutrition courses. His instructor missed the face-to-face interaction with students. MOOCs’ detractors are often concerned that such courses may reduce post-secondary schools to supports for online courses, but Brown argues that some first-year university courses are already very large. He continues to describe the benefits of MOOCs: they make education more affordable. MOOCs also make courses more accessible, so more people can take them. Students can learn at their own pace, and they can review whenever they need to. Technology is being developed so that MOOCs can be adapted to different learning styles, and technology can already translate courses from different languages. Brown suggests that there are several elements required for MOOCs to be successful. To encourage students to complete a MOOC, credits must be granted. Such courses will require a more robust grading system, more than mere multiple-choice tests or peer

review. Systems must be implemented to prevent cheating. Above all, students will need more interaction with their instructors and each other. Given the significant advantages MOOCs offer, it may not be long before many students are able to take their introductory courses through MOOCs.

When you look this draft over and read it aloud, you may notice a few problems:

1. It's wordy, and repetitive in places.
2. Some of the sentences are choppy.

Revising the draft would mean rewriting to eliminate some of the wordiness, to combine sentences or smooth out ideas. Also, when you state that Brown interviewed his instructor and drew conclusions, you are clearly giving the author credit for his ideas. Giving credit is a way of attributing ideas to the author.

Note: When you refer to an author in something that you write, use the author's first and last name the first time you make a reference. For example, you would write "Jesse Brown" the first time you refer to this author. Later in the paragraph, if you want to refer to the same author, use only his or her last name. Thus, a second reference would be to "Brown."

PROOFREADING**PROOFREADING AND POLISHING: SUMMARY**

Look carefully at the final version of the summary. Notice how the sentences have been changed, and words added or taken out. "Brown" is used to show that the details and conclusions given came from the essay.

**A Final Version of a Summary of "Free for All"**

"Free for All" by Jesse Brown claims that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will change the face of post-secondary education. MOOCs became popular in 2011, when hundreds of thousands of students registered for three courses and the website Coursera was developed in response. Millions of dollars have been invested in the site, and students can now take courses for free. Brown enrolled in several MOOCs offered in different countries but describes his experience taking a computer programming course. Currently, MOOCs do not count as credit toward a degree. Students are expected to adhere to an honour code, which Brown assumed includes a stipulation of no cheating. Brown found that the course was delivered through a number of short videos of good quality, and found it helpful that he could replay these videos to review concepts. Assignments and exercises were automatically graded through multiple-choice questions, though other courses assign grades through peer evaluation. Brown, through discussions with his instructor, discovered two drawbacks to MOOCs: a very small percentage of students complete MOOCs compared with traditional courses, and his instructor missed the face-to-face interaction with students. MOOCs' detractors are often concerned that such courses may reduce post-secondary schools to supports for online

courses, but Brown argues that some first-year university courses are already very large. He continues to describe the benefits of MOOCs: they make education more affordable and courses more accessible; students can learn at their own pace; technologies are being developed so that MOOCs can address different learning styles; and MOOCs can already be delivered in different languages. Brown suggests that several elements are required for MOOCs to be successful. To encourage students to complete a MOOC, credits must be granted. Such courses will require more robust grading systems, more than mere multiple-choice tests or peer review. Systems must be implemented to prevent cheating. Above all, students will need more interaction with their instructors and each other. Given the significant advantages MOOCs offer, it may not be long before students around the world are able to take their introductory courses through MOOCs.

Writing summaries is good writing practice, and it also helps you to develop your reading skills. Even if your instructor does not require you to turn in a polished summary of an assigned reading, you may find it helpful to summarize what you have read. In many classes, mid-terms or other exams cover many assigned readings. If you make short summaries of each reading as it is assigned, you will have a helpful collection of focused, organized material to review.

WRITING A PARAPHRASE OF A READING

A **paraphrase** is like a summary: you use your own words to express the ideas found in a reading in the same order. However, a paraphrase is usually as long or longer than the original because its purpose is to restate the entire content in different words rather than stating the main ideas, as in a summary. Because of its potential length, you generally won't be asked to write a paraphrase of anything longer than a paragraph or so.

Let's see how it works. Ever heard "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"? or "The early bird catches the worm"? These statements are *proverbs*, frequently used sayings that express common truths. However, proverbs can be difficult to understand if you haven't heard them all your life. How would you explain "The early bird catches the worm" to a recent newcomer to Canada?

You might say, "Well, 'The early bird catches the worm' means that people who wake up early benefit more than people who don't." You have just *paraphrased* the proverb.

EXERCISE

3

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrase the following proverbs, working individually or in a group.

1. You are what you eat.
2. When the cat's away, the mice will play.
3. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
4. Too many cooks spoil the broth.
5. Once bitten, twice shy.
6. A penny saved is a penny earned.

7. Many hands make light work.
8. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.
9. A friend in need is a friend indeed.
10. Least said, soonest mended.

Paraphrasing a Paragraph

Paraphrasing is very similar to summarizing, only you don't have to distill as much information; remember that a paraphrase is usually as long or even longer than the original. So, in keeping with the summary-writing steps, follow these paraphrasing steps:

- Step 1:** Read the passage three times. The first time, read to understand the passage; the second, read to define any terms you don't understand. Lastly, read the passage looking at paragraph structure and the order in which the ideas are presented.
- Step 2:** Start to translate the ideas into your own words, maintaining the same order in which they were presented in the original passage. When reading the paraphrase, the reader should hear *your* voice, not the original author's.
- Step 3:** Revise your paraphrase for unity and coherence. Does it contain all the important ideas? Do the sentences flow together?
- Step 4:** Edit your paraphrase for spelling and grammar.

communication at work

Employers demand good communication skills, both spoken and written. Read the following paragraph, taken from an article entitled, "Employers Complain about Communication Skills" by Jim McKay (2005), and consider its paraphrases:

Communication skills often top the list of qualities employers seek not just for entry-level jobs but for executive and blue-collar positions as well. But the qualities persistently are at the bottom of what potential recruits bring to an interview. When the National Association of Colleges and Employers recently asked employers what skill was most lacking in college job candidates, good communication skills was first.

An unacceptable paraphrase:

Communication skills are the most important qualities employers look for, not only for entry-level jobs but other positions as well. However, recruits don't often bring these qualities to interviews. The National Association of Colleges and Employers said good communication skills were most lacking in college job candidates.

This paraphrase is unacceptable because much of it has been copied from the original (see *italics*); changing a few words here and there and changing the sentence structure (see underlining) don't mean you have paraphrased. You must also indicate *where* you found the information.

An acceptable paraphrase:

Employers often say that communication skills are the most important qualities they look for, for virtually any position. However, they also say that these qualities are among those they see the least in job interviews. Employers told the National Association of Colleges and Employers that they found communication skills were the most deficient quality in recent college graduates (McKay, 2005).

EXERCISE

4

PARAPHRASING A PARAGRAPH

The following passage is from a *Toronto Star* article entitled, “Mass Collaboration: Harnessing the Power of Global Ideas” by Sharda Prashad (2007). Write a paraphrase of the passage.

Mass collaboration, a large number of people and companies coming together on the Web to innovate and create value, is evidenced in the operating system Linux, the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, and the virtual communities of YouTube and MySpace. While owners of traditional bricks-and-mortar businesses might be quick to dismiss mass collaboration as a new-fangled notion that won't reap profit, in *Wikinomics* the authors emphasize that profits and mass collaboration go hand-in-hand.

A Note on Plagiarism

“Borrowed thoughts, like borrowed money, only show the poverty of the borrower.”

~ LADY MARGUERITE BLESSINGTON, COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON

Plagiarism is the act of copying someone else's words or ideas and passing them off as your own, even if done inadvertently. It is a serious academic offence, one that usually incurs some sort of academic penalty; check the academic policy of your college or university to find out what its stand is on plagiarism, and consult with your instructor if you have any questions or concerns about your own work.

Keep in mind that you do *not*, necessarily, have to copy from the original word for word for your summary to be considered plagiarized. Similar sentence structure and phrasing are also signs of plagiarism, and these may be the most difficult for students to identify. This section of *Along These Lines* will deal specifically with plagiarism issues common to summary writing. Additional plagiarism issues specific to researching and documenting outside sources such as books, newspapers, magazines, and electronic sources are addressed in Chapter 12, “The Research Process.”

The following excerpt is from an article by Maura Welch (2006), originally published in *The Boston Globe*, and ironically about online plagiarism:

Beth gets more than 500 hits per day at her blog, Cursed to First, which serves as a very personal homage to the Red Sox and the Patriots, so she

knew that spicy entries like “Chicks dig the long ball” were being read. She didn’t realize until recently that they were also being ripped off.

Last month, an alert reader informed Beth that her blog was being plagiarized. Dozens of Beth’s blog entries had been stolen, word-for-word, over six months. Names of people in her life were changed to the names of people whom the plagiarist apparently knew, creating the impression that she had lived Beth’s experiences and had thought her thoughts.

On the same day that this was published, the following was published on an ebusiness website:

Beth’s blog got more than 500 hits per day, mostly from Red Sox and New England Patriots fans, not an unusual occurrence since she lives in Boston.

But one of Beth’s regular readers told her that her blog was being plagiarized on a regular basis, word-for-word over the past six months. The thief simply changed the names of Beth’s friends in her post to those in the thief’s post (which was, of course, actually Beth’s).

This was considered plagiarism, and the article on the ebusiness website was removed.

INFOBOX**PLAGIARISM IN A PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT**

Plagiarism also occurs in more traditional professional contexts; one notable example is that of Jayson Blair, a former staff writer with *The New York Times*. In 2003, Blair confessed to lying and/or plagiarizing in multiple articles he wrote for the newspaper. Blair resigned and went on to write a book about his journalistic experiences, but *The New York Times*’s reputation was tarnished. See an interview with Jayson Blair at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4457860.

EXERCISE**5****IDENTIFYING PLAGIARISM**

1. With a partner or in a small group, discuss the excerpt from *The Boston Globe* (above) and the excerpt from the ebusiness website. Why is the second considered plagiarism?

2. W. R. Inge once said, “Originality is undetected plagiarism.” Writers throughout the ages have argued that one writer builds on another’s thoughts and that the results ought not to be considered plagiarism.

What do you think? Is there a difference between expanding an idea and plagiarism? What should the consequences be for professional instances of plagiarism? What do you think of the Jayson Blair incident? Be prepared to discuss your views in class.

EXERCISE

6

IDENTIFYING PLAGIARISM IN A PARAPHRASE

In the following, read the original passages and their paraphrases. Identify whether each paraphrase is acceptable or unacceptable, and rewrite those that are unacceptable.

1. *original*: MOOCs are a global phenomenon with Canadian roots. The term was coined in 2008 by Dave Cormier, a web communications manager at the University of P.E.I., to describe an Internet-based course designed by Professor George Siemens of Athabasca University in Alberta and Stephen Downes of the National Research Council.

paraphrase: Belying their global reach, MOOCs found their start in Canada at the University of P.E.I., where an internet-based course had been developed.

rewrite:

2. *original*: They were designed specifically for the web, and the production values are pretty good.

paraphrase: These videos were designed specifically for web viewing, and their production values were good.

rewrite:

3. *original*: Campbell is disheartened by her MOOC's completion rate. When she taught the same course in a real classroom last fall, 85 percent of students saw it through.

paraphrase: Campbell is disappointed by the completion rate in her MOOC. Eighty-five percent of her students passed the same course in a real classroom last fall.

rewrite:

For more information on plagiarism and strategies to avoid it, visit the “Avoiding Plagiarism” section in Pearson’s MyWritingLab.

WRITING A REACTION TO A READING

A summary or a paraphrase is one kind of writing you can do after reading, but there are other kinds. You can write a **reaction** to a reading by writing on a topic related to the reading or by agreeing or disagreeing with some idea within the reading.

Writing on a Related Idea

Your instructor might ask you to react by writing about some idea you got from your reading. If you read “Free for All,” for example, your instructor might have asked you to react to it by writing about some other trend in post-secondary education. You can begin to gather ideas by freewriting.

PREWRITING

GATHERING IDEAS: REACTION

Freewriting

You can freewrite in a reading journal, if you wish. To freewrite, you can

- write key points made by the author
- write about whatever you remember from the reading selection
- write down any of the author’s ideas that you think you might want to write about someday
- list questions raised by what you’ve read
- connect the reading selection to other things you’ve read, heard, or experienced
- write any of the author’s exact words that you might like to remember, putting them in quotation marks

A freewriting that reacts to “Free for All” might look like this:



Freewriting for a Reaction to a Reading

“Free for All”—Jesse Brown

Brown says that MOOCs will change post-secondary education, and that many introductory courses at university are really large anyway, so what’s the difference? Being able to replay a lecture would be really helpful. Online completion rates are really low. Do students need more face-to-face interaction? It seems that instructors miss that interaction, too.

Freewriting helps you review what you've read, and it can give you topics for a paragraph that is different from a summary.

Brainstorming

After you freewrite, you can brainstorm. You can ask yourself questions to lead you toward a topic for your own paragraph. For instance, brainstorming on the idea of student–instructor interaction could look like this:



Brainstorming after Freewriting

Brown's programming instructor said that she was disappointed in how few of her online students completed the course. Completion rates for online courses are dismal compared with completion rates for similar traditional courses. **Why is this the case? Is it merely because MOOCs don't yet give credits?**

In part, yes. Many students can't stay motivated.

Could there be other reasons?

Perhaps multiple-choice tests don't give enough feedback for students to understand how they can improve. Students may not feel enough engagement with other students or the instructor.

Do instructors also feel a lack of engagement?

Brown's instructor did say that she missed the "one-on-one" chats she had with students during office hours.

Could you write a paragraph on the importance of student and instructor engagement in MOOCs? If so, your brainstorming, based on your reading, might lead you to a topic.

Developing Points of Agreement or Disagreement

Another way to use a reading selection to lead you to a topic is to review the selection and jot down any statements that provoke a strong reaction in you. You are looking for sentences with which you can agree or disagree. If you already marked "Free for All" as you read, you might list these statements as points of agreement or disagreement:

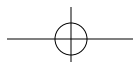


Points of Agreement or Disagreement from a Reading

"Most of all, [MOOCs] need to offer meaningful interaction and discussion with scholars."—agree

"It won't be long before our universities shift their big introductory courses online . . . few students will complain—most will prefer it."—disagree

Then you might pick one of the statements and agree or disagree with it, in writing. If you agreed with the first statement that "MOOCs need to offer meaningful interaction and discussion with scholars," you might develop the



prewriting part of writing by listing your own ideas. You might focus on how such interaction helps your own learning process. With a focus and a list of reasons, you could move to the outline part of writing from reading.

PLANNING**DEVISING A PLAN: AGREE OR DISAGREE**

An outline might look like the one below. As you read it, notice that the topic sentence and ideas are your opinions, not the ideas of the author of “Free for All.” You used his ideas to come up with your own thoughts.

An Outline for an Agree or a Disagree Paragraph

topic sentence:	Face-to-face interaction is important for students to be successful.
details:	
with other students	{ It's much easier to make friends and maintain relationships when you meet on a regular basis. Students will be able to develop a supportive network to help each other with assignments and study for tests and exams. These relationships can extend to other courses.
with the instructor	{ When students feel that their instructor knows them and cares about their learning, they're more likely to be invested in the course. They may feel more comfortable asking for help. In a traditional classroom setting, the instructor can be more responsive, answering students' questions as they arise.

DRAFTING AND REVISING**DRAFTING AND REVISING: AGREE OR DISAGREE**

If your outline gives you enough good points to develop, you are on your way to a paragraph. If you began with the ideas above, for example, you could develop them into a paragraph like this:

**A Draft for an Agree or a Disagree Paragraph**

Face-to-face interaction is important for students to be successful. It's much easier to make friends and maintain relationships when you meet on a regular basis. Students will be able to develop a supportive network to help each other with assignments and study for tests and exams. These relationships can extend to other courses. When students feel that their instructor knows them and cares about their learning, they're more likely to be invested in the course. They may feel more comfortable asking for help. In a traditional classroom setting, the instructor can be more responsive, answering students' questions as they arise.

PROOFREADING**POLISHING AND PROOFREADING: AGREE OR DISAGREE**

When you read the previous paragraph, you probably noticed some places where it could be revised:

- It could use more specific details.

- It should attribute the original idea about the importance of student interaction to Jesse Brown, probably in the beginning.
- It requires a conclusion.

Below is the final version of the same paragraph. As you read it, notice how a new beginning, added details, and a conclusion make it a smoother, clearer, and more developed paragraph.



Final Version for an Agree or a Disagree Paragraph

In “Free for All,” Jesse Brown indicates that for MOOCs to change post-secondary education, they must provide “meaningful interaction and discussion with scholars.” It’s true: face-to-face interaction is important for students to be successful. It’s much easier to make friends and maintain relationships when you meet on a regular basis; lifelong friendships have begun when two nervous strangers sit next to each other on the first day of class. Students will be able to develop a supportive network to help each other with assignments and study for tests and exams. They may share notes or form a study group. These relationships can extend to other courses. When students feel that their instructor knows them and cares about their learning, they’re more likely to be invested in the course. They may feel more comfortable asking for help. In a traditional classroom setting, the instructor can be more responsive, answering students’ questions as they arise. An instructor who can read and respond to the dynamic in her class will add to her students’ investment in the course. Students need such face-to-face interaction to be successful, true; however, this interaction will also benefit their instructor, and the institution itself, in the form of a more engaged student body.

Reading can give you many ideas for your own writing. Developing those ideas into a polished paragraph requires the same writing process as any good writing, a process that takes you through the steps of thinking, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading.

WRITING FOR AN ESSAY TEST

Most essay questions require a form of writing from reading. That is, your instructor asks you to write about an assigned reading. Usually, an **essay test** requires you to write from memory, not from an open book or notes. Such writing can be stressful, but breaking the task into steps can eliminate much of that stress.

Before the Test: The Steps of Reading

If you work through the steps of reading several days before the test, you’ll be half-way to your goal. Prereading helps keep you focused, and your first reading will give you a sense of the whole selection. The third step, rereading with a pen or pencil, can be particularly helpful when you’re preparing for a test. Most essay questions will ask you to summarize a reading selection or to react to it. In either case, you must be familiar with the reading’s main idea, supporting ideas, examples, and

details. If you note these by marking the selection, you'll be teaching yourself about the main point, supporting ideas, and structure of the reading selection.

Shortly before the test, review the marked reading assignment. Your notes will help you focus on the main point and the supporting ideas.

During the Test: The Stages of Writing

Answering an essay question for a test may seem very different from writing at home. After all, on a test, you must rely on your memory and write within a time limit, and these restrictions can make you feel anxious. However, by following the stages of the writing process, you can meet that challenge calmly and confidently.

- **Prewriting:** Before you begin to write, think about the question: Is the instructor asking for a summary of a reading selection? Or is he or she asking you to react to a specific idea in the reading by describing or developing the idea with examples or by agreeing or disagreeing? For example, in an essay question about “Free for All,” you might be asked (1) to explain what Jesse Brown thinks are the advantages of Massive Open Online Courses (a summary); (2) to explain what he means when he says that MOOCs are “about revolutionizing post-secondary education” (a reaction, where you develop and explain one part of the reading); or (3) to agree or disagree that “most students will prefer” MOOCs for introductory courses (a reaction, so you have to be aware of what Brown said on this point).

Once you've thought about the question, list or freewrite your first ideas about the question. At this time, don't worry about how “right” or “wrong” your writing is; just write your first thoughts.

- **Planning:** Your writing will be clear if you follow a plan. Remember that your audience for this writing is your instructor and that he or she will be evaluating how well you stick to the subject, make a point, and support it. Your plan for making a point about the subject and supporting that point can be written in a brief outline.

First, reread the question. Next, survey your list of freewriting. Does it contain a main point that answers the question? Does it contain supporting ideas and details?

Next, write a main point and then list supporting ideas and details under the main point. Your main point will be the topic sentence of your answer. If you need more support, try brainstorming.

- **Drafting and revising:** Write your point and supporting ideas in paragraph form. Remember to use effective transitions and to combine short sentences.
- **Proofreading:** You probably won't have time to copy your answer, but you can review it, proofread it, and correct any errors in spelling, punctuation, and word choice. This final check can produce a more polished answer.

Organize Your Time

Some students skip steps; they immediately begin writing their answer to an essay question without thinking or planning. Sometimes, they find themselves stuck in the middle of a paragraph, panicked because they have no more ideas. At other times, they find themselves writing in a circle, repeating the same point over and over. Occasionally, they even forget to include a main idea.

You can avoid these hazards by spending time on each of the stages. Planning is as important as writing. For example, if you have half an hour to write an essay, you can divide your time like this:

- 5 minutes: thinking, freewriting, listing
- 10 minutes: planning, outlining
- 10 minutes: drafting
- 5 minutes: reviewing and proofreading

Focusing on one stage at a time can make you more confident and your task more manageable.

Lines of Detail: A Walk-Through Assignment

Here are two ideas from “Free for All”:

1. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will “revolutionize post-secondary education.”
2. For introductory courses, most students will prefer a MOOC to a traditional course.

Pick one of these ideas, with which you agree or disagree. Write a paragraph explaining why you agree or disagree. To write your paragraph, follow these steps:

- Step 1:** Begin by listing at least two reasons why you agree or disagree. Use your own experience with post-secondary courses to come up with your reasons. For example, for statement 1, you could ask yourself these questions: Does this mean all post-secondary education? University only? College? For statement 2, you might ask questions like these: Will students prefer MOOCs for introductory courses only? Do MOOCs lend themselves to other courses? Answering such questions can help you come up with your reasons for agreement or disagreement.
- Step 2:** Read your list to a partner or to a group. With the help of your listener(s), you can add reasons or details to explain the reasons.
- Step 3:** Once you have enough ideas, transform the statement you agreed or disagreed with into a topic sentence.
- Step 4:** Write an outline by listing your reasons and details below the topic sentence. Check that your list is in a clear and logical order.
- Step 5:** Write a draft of your paragraph. Check that you have attributed Jesse Brown’s statement, that you have enough details, and that you have combined any choppy sentences. Revise your draft until the paragraph is smooth and clear.
- Step 6:** Before you prepare the final copy, check your last draft for errors in spelling, punctuation, and word choice.

Writing Your Own Paragraph on “Free for All”

When you write on one of these topics, be sure to work through the stages of the writing process in preparing your paragraph.

1. Jesse Brown writes about the impact MOOCs may have on post-secondary education. MOOCs, like many other educational advancements, rely

heavily on technology. Think of the impact technology has had on education. How does technology affect your learning process? Does it help or hinder? Write a paragraph describing the impact technology has had on education, good or bad.

2. Brown notes that his online programming course had an “honour code,” and that successful MOOCs would have to ensure that students not cheat. Why do you think students cheat on assignments and tests? Do students not have enough time to prepare? Are they afraid to ask for help if they don’t understand the material? Are they lazy? Write a paragraph in which you describe why you think students cheat.

Writing from Reading: The Writing Process

To practise the skills you’ve learned in this chapter, follow the steps of prereading, reading, and rereading with a pen or pencil as you read the following selection.

Cursive Is Dying, Kids Can’t Sign Their Own Names—And That’s a Huge Problem

Amber Daugherty

Amber Daugherty studied journalism at Humber College in Toronto. She has worked as a reporter for The Globe and Mail and as a producer for Bell Media.

Before you read this selection, consider these questions:

Did you learn cursive writing in school?

Is cursive writing an art?

With today’s technology, is cursive writing still a necessary skill?

Can you envision situations where cursive writing would be necessary?

We live in a digital era. It can be argued everything is the exact same as it was 10, 15 years ago, that we’ve just added more screen time to our daily lives. But there are some important—and subtle—changes that aren’t all positive.

There’s now less of a focus on teaching children how to **cursive write** in schools, and while you might think, “So what? I learned how to cursive write and I don’t do it on a regular basis,” there are some stunning drawbacks to this.

First and foremost: signatures.

Signatures are our identifier. They are the passwords that unlock our banks, that sign our bills, that prove that we are who we say we are. And they require a basic, working knowledge of cursive writing. Those **intricate** loops and delicate swirls are pieces of a key we all need to open vaults we have chosen to store important things in.

An article in the *Toronto Star* highlights this growing issue: Children who aren’t learning how to cursive write are unable to form their personal signature.

“I do a lot of stuff on the computer,” Lukas, 14, told the *Star*. “But I guess it’s weird [not to learn any cursive], because it turns out I have to sign my name on some things.”

Lukas couldn’t sign his name when applying for a passport, something his father was shocked about.

cursive writing:
handwriting in script

intricate: complex,
involving many parts

Ontario curriculum no longer lists cursive writing as mandatory, but as an option for students to communicate, thrown into a list alongside printing and PowerPoint presentations.

Brought up in a world pushing hard for digital-first, all the time, students don't understand the importance of creating something that is uniquely theirs that doesn't come in the form of code. They aren't being taught to value that. It's surprising, particularly because there is such an emphasis in the world placed on brand creation. "Everyone is their own brand," we hear.

So we all create our own websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, LinkedIn profiles, and some of those vaults our valuables are stored in can be accessed digitally, too—banks, for example. But we may be setting ourselves up for digital despair: Accounts are hacked into every day, because, as much as we'd like to believe it, the Internet isn't as secure as we'd like to think.

As recently as mid-2013, four computer hackers in Britain were handed lengthy jail sentences after organizing cyberattacks on the CIA, Sony Pictures, British National Health Services and others. They posted the personal information, including credit-card details, of millions of people, online. And there's a raging debate still happening in the United States over why exactly the **National Security Agency** has been collecting records of phone calls and e-mails of U.S. citizens.

A signature is something that is uniquely ours. It is something we have created, that no one else can replicate (**nefarious** motives aside) in true likeness. An Internet password is none of those things. By neglecting to teach our children the value of cursive writing, with which they can create their own physical mark, are we setting them up to have their digital identities stolen, with no real, hard-copy ones to back them up?

We risk moving into an age where we all take on online **personae**—anonymous, floating heads, entrusting password-remembering sites to hold the keys to the things we value most, as we try different combinations of capitals letters, numbers and exclamation points to keep the hackers at bay. Let's not lose that piece of ourselves that once was our permission, our safety, our original brand.

National Security Agency: federal government agency responsible for the national security of the United States

nefarious: wicked

personae: plural form of *persona*, meaning a person or character

UNDERSTANDING "CURSIVE IS DYING, KIDS CAN'T SIGN THEIR OWN NAMES—AND THAT'S A HUGE PROBLEM"

1. According to the article, what is the most serious drawback of not learning cursive writing? Why?

2. According to the article, what might be the rationale behind eliminating the teaching of cursive writing?

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3. According to the author, what are we at risk of losing in the digital era?
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WRITING FROM READING “CURSIVE IS DYING, KIDS CAN’T SIGN THEIR OWN NAMES—AND THAT’S A HUGE PROBLEM”

When you write on any of the following topics, make sure to work through the stages of the writing process in preparing your paragraph.

1. Using the ideas and examples you gathered in the previous exercise, write a summary paragraph of Daugherty’s article.
2. “Creativity is more, not less, necessary in the technological age.” Write a paragraph in which you agree or disagree with this statement.
3. What other subjects are no longer taught in school but that you feel are necessary? Why?
4. Are there some professions that still require legible handwriting? Write a paragraph in which you make a case for cursive writing by giving examples of these professions.

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