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RHETORIC

AiVa!

SENIOR THESIS
STUDENT WORKBOOK



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE
TO MASTERING THE SENIOR THESIS
ALYSSAN BARNES, PHD

Dedication:
To David K. Naugle



Rhetoric Alive! Senior Thesis

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PREFACE

What some high school seniors are doing today may surprise you. After spending a semester researching an issue and then meeting with an expert in that particular field, many seniors prepare a fifteen- to twenty-minute address that is delivered before the entire school community. After they give their presentations, they are questioned by a panel of adults who have some expertise in the area, and then by members of the audience.

If you think that sounds like a daunting and harrowing experience, you're right. But the shocking thing is that virtually every senior I've spoken to has said the same thing: It's their favorite moment in school.

You see, the senior thesis changes the senior. Seniors take their thesis issue selection very seriously, and they grow up intellectually as their understanding of their issues evolves and takes shape over the course of the research and writing. The thesis gives each student a moment to step out from the crowd, to say something important. The shy senior gets just as much time and attention as the extrovert. And it is very often the student who has previously seemed "checked out" academically who will surprise the entire class by rising to the occasion and wowing his or her peers with a thoughtful and impassioned argument.

Why? Because the projects are 100 percent their own. When a student must stand before peers and take ownership for what is being argued, all bets are off. There is no safety net, and the thesis will stand or fall based on the speaker's own preparation. It's a ton of responsibility. And they love it.

But the thesis does more than just affect the senior; each thesis presentation leaves a mark on the school itself. The issues and their arguments become part of the school identity. Younger students will for years reference a conclusion or recall a point made by a thesis presenter: "Family mealtime is important. Remember Sam's thesis?" or "You know that philanthropy and charity aren't the same, right? That's what Ashtyn taught us." And in terms of modeling, it's great, too. Younger students witness an older student offering an impassioned, well-reasoned argument about their world, and they can see that it matters.

In a sense, then, the senior thesis is about growing up. It's about moving from foolishness to wisdom, and from being influenced to influencing others. The good news is that we don't have to leave those things entirely to chance. Training students to examine the evidence, to consider carefully the ethical implications of their arguments, and to defend a position winsomely in a setting that extends beyond the classroom—those are the goals of a rhetoric program.



They are the goals of this thesis workbook, too. The idea is to give students a step-by-step guide to writing a senior thesis, one that they can follow in order to begin generating ideas, organizing them, and getting them down on paper. Of course, there will be plenty of human help needed along the way—parents to encourage them, teachers to coach them, experts to mentor them. But this workbook is intended to provide a scaffold for the process, beginning with step one: finding a topic.

Students are bound to surprise both themselves and the audience as they develop and grow intellectually through their thesis work. In fact, some of us teachers will feel more than a little envious of our soon-to-be-graduates, wishing we'd had a similar rite of passage in high school. After all, such a hallmark signals that the baton of leadership is being passed on, and shows students that they are ready to move from the chair in the back of the room to the lectern up front. Which is what rhetoric—the art of a good person speaking well—is all about.¹

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook can be used in different ways.² In the traditional classroom, the workbook serves as a single place to keep all of a student's notes, ideas, and drafts. Teachers will find it to be a helpful road map in walking students through the circuitous journey of a major writing project. But the workbook can also be used by a student working on his or her own, perhaps in a homeschool setting or as a supplement to a writing course with no formal guide. In such a case, the workbook can substitute for an official teacher and can guide the student step by step through the writing process.

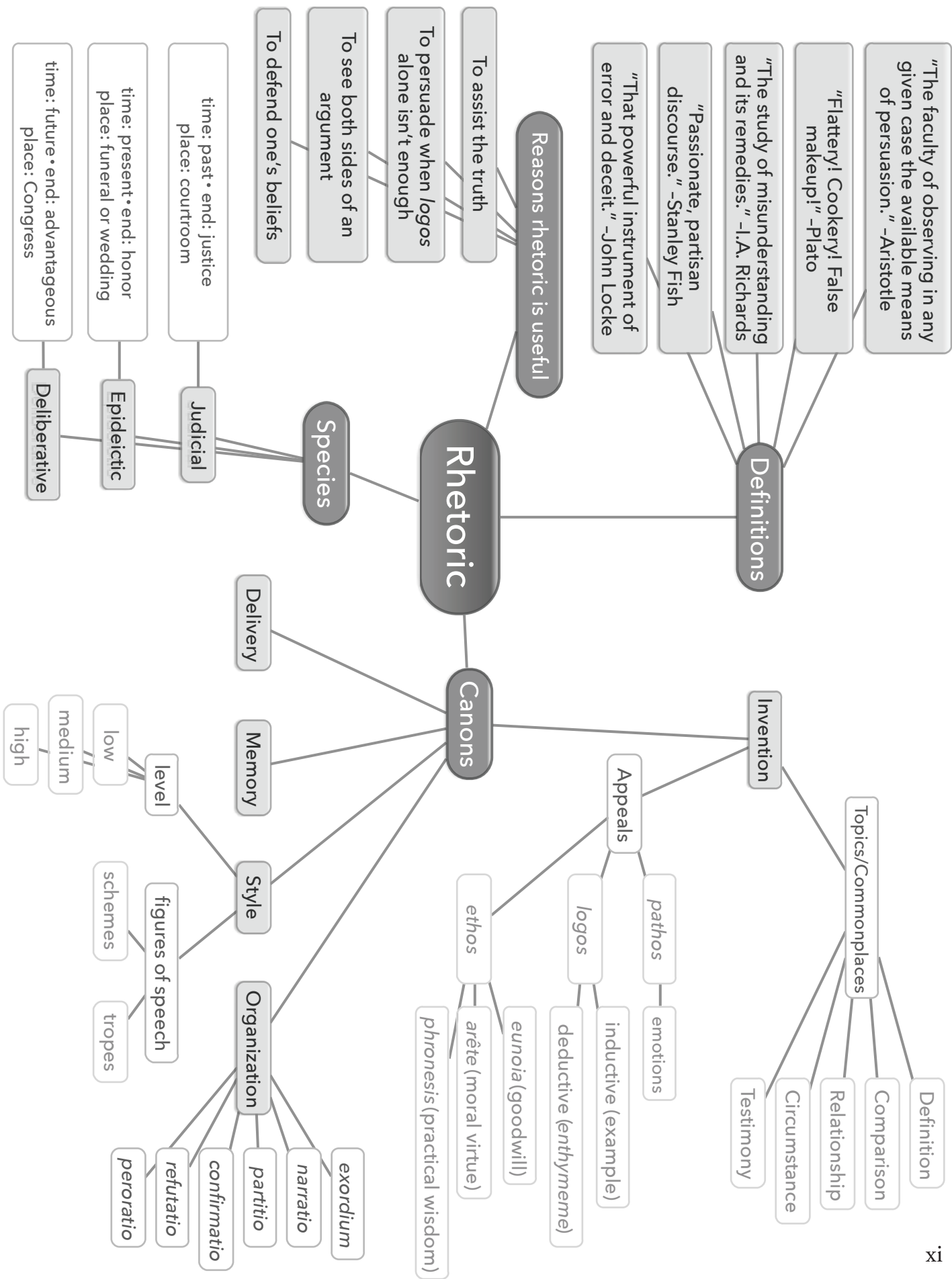


Students preparing both an academic paper and a separate speech should work through the entire text from start to finish. Students preparing only a speech should begin by reading the “Levels of Style” section of chapter 16 and then work through all of the chapters in order, beginning with chapter 1. Students writing only an academic paper should complete chapters 1–15. (See the introduction for more details.)

1. This note is based on my article “Teaching Rhetoric in the Classical Classroom,” *ICLE Beyond the Test: Rhetoric*, no. 23 (May 2017). Used with permission.

2. *Rhetoric Alive! Book 1: Principles of Persuasion* introduces and explores the five canons of rhetoric (invention, organization, style, memory, and delivery), the three appeals (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*), and the three species of rhetoric (deliberative, epideictic, and judicial). It provides helpful training in rhetoric and builds an excellent foundation for the senior thesis, but it is not a prerequisite to this text.

Figure 1. Rhetoric map.



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My greatest debt is to Carolyn Still, whose focused, intentional leadership of the thesis program at Live Oak Classical School in Waco, Texas, has served as a model for the program I offer here.

I am deeply grateful for my students. They have patiently and even joyfully endured a classroom that was part laboratory, part practicum; their honesty and candor have helped shape this text into a much better version than it would otherwise be.

Finally, the book is dedicated to my own teacher, David K. Naugle. His teaching career is an example of how one person's thesis can transform an audience.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE SENIOR THESIS, AND WHY SHOULD I UNDERTAKE IT?

The idea of writing a thesis may be new to you, but it's actually a very old practice. A **thesis** is an argument, and in this case, it is an argument that is researched, written, and defended. Students in graduate school typically write a thesis, hence the term “master’s thesis”; for PhD students, the extra-long research project is specifically called a “dissertation.” These graduate students compose and then publicly defend their theses before experts. And this process—research, write, and defend—has been revived as something of a rite of passage for seniors at a growing number of high schools today.

For high school seniors who complete the thesis, it functions as a capstone project, meaning that it is a crowning achievement in their academic journey, and specifically in their study of rhetoric. In it, they bring all that they’ve learned—reading, writing, arguing—to bear on one issue, an issue about which they care deeply. They learn the background of the topic, they analyze other people’s arguments, and they synthesize their findings and discoveries, putting it all together to form a true, good, and beautiful whole.

Think of the senior thesis as a kind of artist’s masterpiece; historically, a “masterpiece” was that first original creation that marked an artist’s move from “student” to “master,” qualifying him for membership in a professional guild. Just so, the senior thesis is an academic “masterpiece,” a sign that the student has earned the right to move from the desk at the back of the room to the speaker’s stand at the front.¹

This workbook will take you through the process of writing—and then delivering—a thesis yourself. Use it as an all-in-one resource: journal / scratch pad / research notebook / rough-draft-to-final-copy writing guide. Yes, you could write a thesis without this workbook, but using it as a catch-all organizer and handy guide is like having a good map on a wilderness adventure in Yosemite National Park: You may escape alive without it, but the fact that it’s in your pocket will make the journey much easier.

1. *Nota Bene* (Note Well): The senior thesis is akin, in many respects, to the undergraduate or master’s thesis, or even to the doctoral dissertation. A helpful difference between theses and dissertations that high school students will want to keep in mind is the following: Whereas the thesis calls its writer to synthesize a body of knowledge and defend a claim about a given subject, the dissertation requires that its writer make an original contribution to that body of knowledge. Senior theses, therefore, should strive more for synthesis than originality.



PAPER, PRESENTATION, OR BOTH?

If you are only delivering a speech, then this book is for you. You will work through the text from start to finish, all the while composing in the less formal tone of a spoken address. (Remember to start by reading the “Levels of Style” section in chapter 16, which discusses the more conversational tone of a speech.)

If you are only writing a thesis paper, then this book is also for you. Continue along, chapter by chapter, though you will be able to skip the final chapters—chapters 16–21—which concern memorizing and delivering the speech.

If you are both writing a paper and delivering a speech, this book is for you, too. You have a double duty; after all, delivering the speech is not a matter of merely standing up and reading the formal paper. Instead, you should end up with two very different versions of the same material: a formal written version and an informal spoken one.

There are several ways of going about the double duty of writing a paper and delivering a speech—for example, the speech first and then the paper, or both simultaneously—but the recommended way is this: Write the academic paper first, and then spend a couple of weeks recasting it as a verbal address. (This recasting is taught in chapter 16, “Turn It into a Speech,” just before chapters on memory and delivery.) This workbook will walk you through the process, step by step.

Let us begin, then, where one always ought to begin: with a good idea.



INVENTION

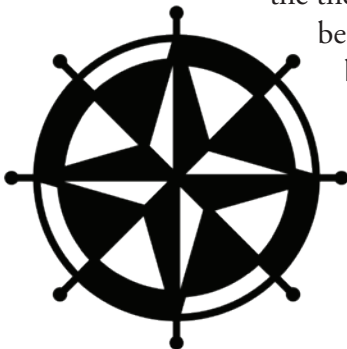
DISCOVERING GOOD IDEAS

Writing a thesis—even writing a solid paragraph—can be a daunting task. Where does one begin? How does that blank sheet of paper turn into a piece of well-written, well-researched prose, which then moves the hearts of an audience? The ancients had an answer for how to tackle the enterprise: step by step. These steps of the writing process are called the **five canons** of rhetoric—invention, organization, style, memory, and delivery.

First is **invention**, the discovery of arguments. The invention stage is the most important of the five canons because it concerns the content, which is the heart of the message. **Organization** follows; arranging the content to its most powerful effect takes care, even wisdom. Then is attention to **style**, or expression. After all, how the thought is conveyed in words can enhance or detract from the message. **Memory** is next; one commits to mind the arguments and their order. The final step is **delivery**, the presentation of the message (complete with gestures and facial expressions) and all that factors into presenting it well.

Of course, these canons are not always neat and tidy steps. In actuality, a rhetor (one who practices rhetoric, either in speech or in writing) shuffles among them, tweaking style, discovering new arguments, and rearranging old arguments along the way. Nevertheless, thinking of the writing process in this order helps us to approach with a little less trepidation the seemingly mysterious process of going from a blank sheet of paper to a polished presentation.

The process starts with ideas. Good ideas aren't a dime a dozen, and they don't grow on trees. Good ideas must be discovered. Classical rhetors called this process of discovery "invention," from the Latin *invenire*, meaning "to find, discover, or devise." Once you happen upon a good idea, however, your work still isn't finished; the good idea must be formed and developed into something more. It needs to be teased out and connected to other ideas, eventually becoming a solid argument. Hence, the student who is "inventing" is striving to determine *what*: "What will be included in the thesis? What is my basic claim? What evidence supports it? What must be said? What ought to be left out? What counterarguments need to be addressed?" The answers to these *what* questions will make up the thesis's content.



Invention is thus the first and most important of the five canons of rhetoric. These first few chapters lead you through the process of discovering and developing the content of your thesis.

CHAPTER 1

FIND YOUR TOPIC

Because writing a senior thesis is a long process, choosing a topic shouldn't be a hasty affair. You might think that choosing an "easy" topic that would be simple to write about is the smarter choice, but "easy" doesn't always turn out to be so easy. Easy can get boring—boring for both readers and writers. And boring theses end up falling flat. So you'll want to find a topic you care about, one that you're passionate about, one that's thorny, deserving of your time and attention. Many students have remarked that the thing that pushed them through writer's block in the end was the personal passion that they had for their topic. During this process, it is you who are going to learn more than anyone else—more than your thesis director and more than every member of your audience. So the question is, what do you want to learn about? What do you want to spend the next few months exploring in depth?

Think of it this way: If you had to go on an eight-week trip with another person, would you choose someone who never makes waves but whom you don't particularly care for, or would you choose someone you love hanging out with, even if you end up squabbling some of the time? While the former may initially seem like the safe choice, the latter will likely ensure that the trip is a memorable one you enjoy. The same can be said of your thesis: Go for interesting, thought-provoking, even puzzling. Such a topic can withstand your questions and surprise you with its revelations.

The first step is narrowing in on a topic. A **topic** is simply a general area of interest; a topic is a subject or theme, like "family mealtime" or "suffering." A topic is not yet an **issue**. Issues are discovered when you happen upon a point of controversy over which reasonable people can take opposite sides, such as "whether family mealtime is important" or "whether suffering is meaningless." Hold off on the issue, and start by identifying a broad topic of interest. In fact, you can begin by getting to know yourself better. What makes you tick? Consider the following questions.



QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION



1. What do you think about or do when you have free time?

2. What do you *love*? List ten things.

3. When you walk into a bookstore, which section do you go to?

4. What is your favorite type of movie/book? (*Science fiction, drama, romance, thriller, offbeat comedy, history, biography, documentary, etc.*)

5. If you asked your parents what your strengths are, what would they say?

6. Weaknesses?

7. If you asked your closest friends what your strengths are, what would they say?

8. Weaknesses?

9. What has been your favorite subject of study in school? Why?

10. What do you worry about?

11. What are your hobbies?

12. What do you *wish* your hobbies were?

13. What book have you read recently that you'd like to know more about?

14. You are different from everyone else, even your closest friends. In what one way would you say you stand out?

15. What do you think are the vital elements of *eudaimonia*, the good life?

16. What are you fascinated by?

17. What “drives” you?

18. What social problem in the world troubles you most?

19. What are you incredibly good at? What are your gifts?

20. When was the last time you went above and beyond what was required? What did you do, and why did you work so hard?

21. When was the last time you were in a state of “flow” or “in the zone” and totally lost track of time? What were you doing? (Do not include texting, watching TV, etc.)

22. Think back to the last time you engaged in a topic of conversation with others for more than an hour. What were you talking about?

23. What is something about your childhood that has shaped who you are today?

24. What is something without which you wouldn't be *you*?

25. What do you do to unwind? (Again, television and social media don't count.)

26. How do you help others?

27. What is something you dislike about your community?

28. How would you change the world?

29. Whom do you admire the most? Why?

30. When you watched the news last, what upset you the most?

31. What views do you have that almost no one in your class (or family) shares?

Reflect on your answers, and jot in the margins any topic ideas that come to mind. Spend some time considering just what makes you *you*.



Now keep in mind those personal reflections as you look at a list of topics. Perhaps some of these topics might strike you as interesting options, or they may help you come up with something related that's not on the list.

SAMPLE TOPIC LIST

Aesthetics of architecture
Animal entrapment
Animal and human interaction
Animal testing
Arranged marriages
Automation
Banning smoking
Beauty among the transcendentalists
Big data
Certainty and the leap of faith
Charity vs. philanthropy
Cheap renewable energy
Chivalry
Classical education
Clean water
Coed friendships
Community in a technological age
Conscription ("the draft")
Corporal punishment
Cottage industries
Dance
Depression
Dignity of work
Domestic (or international) adoption
Electoral College
EQ versus IQ
E-readers versus traditional books
Eugenics
Euthanasia
Family hobbies

Family mealtime
Fathers
Female role models
Feminism
Film
Food deserts
Foreign policy
Free-market economics
Friendships of mutual accountability
Funding NASA
Gene editing
Generational differences (Boomers, Millennials, etc.)
Genetically modified foods
Gentrification
Grief
Growing your own food
Health care
Homelessness
Human gene editing
Human trafficking
Immigration and hospitality
Interrogation techniques
Just war theory
Labor unions
Large vs. small families
Liberal arts vs. STEM
Liturgy
Mandatory military service
Manners

Mathematics as a liberal art
 Meaning of manhood/womanhood
 Medieval vs. contemporary music
 Mental disorders
 Modesty
 Morality
 Music and *eudaimonia*
 Music and *gymnasia* in education
 Nature studies
 New Urbanism
 Nuclear energy
 Online education
Ordo amoris (the order of loves)
 Origins of morality
 Panhandling
 Peer pressure
 Philosophy and neuroscience
 Plastic surgery
 Play-based learning
 Political correctness
 Polyphony
 Private education
 Private prisons
 Reading old books vs. new books
 Recycling
 Refugees
 Robots
 School architecture
 Screen time
 Sibling relationships
 Single-gender education (e.g.: an all-boys school)
 Single parenting
 Social immobility

Social media and true friendship¹
 The soul and the body
 The soul and neuroscience
 Space exploration
 Standards-based grading
 Study of history
 Suffering
 Teaching method of *imitatio*
 Teens and technology
 Terrorism
 Theology and science
 Title IX
 Travel vs. tourism
 Two-party political system
 Vaccinations
 Video games
 Virtual reality
 Virtue
 War statues
 Working with one's hands in a digital age

List other topics that come to mind:

1. See Aristotle's three types of friendship (friendships of pleasure, utility, and the good) as discussed in *Nicomachean Ethics*.



WORKSHOP:
Friends Know You Best

NAME: _____

As a final activity, let’s see if your friends can help you brainstorm. Share this book with your friends, family, teacher, or mentor, asking them to jot down topics that seem especially well suited to you. If you’re in a classroom, you should keep your book open to this page and set it on your desk. Circulate around the room, jotting down ideas that seem especially well suited to each person. What comes to mind when you think of John? That he has four brothers? Perhaps you’ll write on his sheet “the brother bond.” Or how about Sarah, who has a heart for the urban poor? Maybe you could suggest “inner-city initiatives.”

_____	_____
_____	_____
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ASSIGNMENT:

Choose Your Topic

Now it's time to choose a topic. Don't worry—there's plenty of time to change your topic as you approach the actual writing of the thesis, but for now you should narrow in on one area of interest that you think you'd like to pursue. If you're stuck between two choices, ask yourself which you'd be proudest to have chosen when you look back on high school twenty years from now. Which one is of more cultural importance; which topic will make the greatest impact on those who hear it? Which topic is more timeless—that is, it isn't just a flash in the pan in terms of relevance? The goal is to choose a topic that will be meaningful to you in the long run, a topic that will help you to define *eudaimonia*, or “human flourishing.”

Write your topic here:





PRESENTATION PRACTICE:

Partner Introduction

Each chapter will give you a chance to get up in front of others and speak; these presentations will serve as mini practice sessions to prepare for Thesis Day.

For this first practice presentation, get together in pairs and share the topic you have chosen. Explain to your partner why this topic interests you. Did you have a childhood experience that sparked this interest? Have you been personally affected by this issue? Why do you think it is so important?

Partners will then introduce each other to the rest of the class. Your task is to give a one- or two-minute presentation announcing your partner's topic selection. Be sure to explain why the topic interests him or her, and, if you can, suggest why you think this topic is a good personal fit.



CHAPTER 2

EXPLORE YOUR TOPIC

So you've decided (for now, at least) on your thesis topic—that is, the general issue you're interested in. You don't yet need to know exactly what you're going to argue about the issue or which side you'll take; that isn't necessary until later.

THREE TYPES OF RHETORIC

There are three types of rhetoric: **judicial**, **epideictic**, and **deliberative**.¹ The following chart summarizes their differences.

Table 1. The three species of rhetoric.²

	Other Names	Time	Action	According to What End	Transcendental Counterpart
judicial	forensic	past	accuse/defend	justice	the True
epideictic	ceremonial, demonstrative	present	praise/censure	honor	the Beautiful
deliberative	legislative, political	future	urge to do / urge not to do	advantage	the Good

Judicial rhetoric is speech about the past, and it accuses and defends according to justice. Epideictic rhetoric concerns honor; it is the speech of praise or censure. Deliberative rhetoric is geared toward future action; it considers what is advantageous and thus urges the audience to do or not do something. Your thesis will include elements of all three, but the goal is to end on a deliberative note; you will conclude by urging your audience to action in some way. But for now, we ought to explore your area of interest using the “goods”³ that define the horizons of it—that is, through epideictic rhetoric.

1. The three types of rhetoric—judicial, epideictic, and deliberative—correspond, more or less, with the different kinds of arguments that students are commonly asked to make in composition classes. Respectively, those are arguments of fact, value, and policy.

2. This table is taken from *Rhetoric Alive! Book 1*, p. 240.

3. A “good” is something that is important or valuable. Some goods are relative—their goodness depends upon the circumstance. For example, speed is good if you are running a race, but it is not good if you're taking a romantic walk around a lake. Other goods are absolute or universal; these may include health, beauty, friendship, wisdom, and happiness. For this chapter, your job is to identify what things are most valued regarding your issue.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAISE

The reason that praise and blame must be considered first is because of their great power. It is true that a court case—an example of judicial rhetoric—can make a great difference in the lives of the accuser and defendant, often even reverberating effects into the community at large. It is also true that the decisions that shape the future, which is the concern of deliberative rhetoric, affect where a person or a people end up. But there is a sense in which the simple act of praise and censure eclipses them all.⁴ That is, epideictic rhetoric is speech that sets the boundaries of the entire conversation: What are the goods at stake, and why should we care?

Let's take an example. Suppose your topic of interest is *automation*. (This is a sample topic we will return to throughout the text in order to illustrate the different activities you will be doing with your own thesis topic.) You are interested in the rapid changes in technology and how those changes might affect the job you will one day have—perhaps even whether you will have a job at all. Judicial rhetoric would be an investigation into the past, the changes that have happened since, say, the Industrial Revolution and whether the work practices at the time were humane and just. Certainly, this consideration of the past and of justice is an important part of understanding your thesis topic. A deliberative thesis, aimed at persuading toward future action, could encourage private companies to regulate their technological progress or individuals to accept some types of technologies but eschew others. This type of thesis—deliberative—is your ultimate goal for this thesis project.

But even before answering these questions concerning justice or policy, we must first ask, “What are the underlying goods and benefits assumed within this conversation in the first place?” *The goodness of work, the value of mental and physical challenges, the virtues learned through trial and error, and the evils of sloth*—these are the underlying concepts that are being honored or dishonored. They sit in the background of the entire conversation regarding automation; rather than ignore them, we must pause and bring the background to the foreground, at least for a moment. We need to be clear about which foundational goods frame an issue so that we can know just what is at stake. Epideictic rhetoric lays that foundation. Deliberative rhetoric is where you will eventually end up, but epideictic rhetoric is where you will want to start.

In this chapter, you will write three pieces of epideictic rhetoric—a toast, a speech, and a letter. Use these assignments to help you think through your topic and what it is that interests you about it. Epideictic rhetoric concerns honor; what can we praise or censure regarding the topic or person at hand?



4. As fellow teacher Joshua Butcher notes, “Most of the well-remembered and beloved speeches of the past have been encomiums [speeches of enthusiastic praise] or encomium-like rather than judicial or deliberative. Pericles’s Funeral Oration, [Patrick] Henry’s Liberty or Death, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, MLK’s ‘I Have a Dream’—even the deliberative elements of these speeches are eclipsed by the encomiastic style.”



WORKSHOP:

A Toast, Salute, or Tribute

1

To consider your topic from the perspective of epideictic rhetoric—speech of praise or censure—you should choose a particular figure (person, animal, or thing) that epitomizes your topic. You will then offer a toast to that particular figure. Your toast should include a short narrative. People love listening to stories, and telling a story is a common part of the toast genre.

For example, suppose you are interested in sibling relationships. You could toast your sister, telling a story of a particular time when you two, as young children, were fighting over the last blueberry muffin and how it fell on the floor in your scuffle. You might conclude by recounting what you learned from her and how you’ve both grown; now she is your best friend.

Or perhaps you’d like to think through the value of nature studies. You might choose to offer a tribute to a giant hundred-year-old oak tree that stands outside your bedroom window. You could tell of the shade it has provided for countless picnics and lawn gymnastics; the one time in particular that stands out is when you fell out of the tree and broke your arm. The tree has recently been diagnosed with oak wilt, and it may not survive.

Are you interested in hunting? You might pay tribute to the first deer you shot, telling the story of first seeing it and what you learned from the experience.

Whatever topic you have chosen, your toast should be written with honor in mind. What is honorable (or dishonorable) about your chosen topic? For example, the answers for the scenarios above would be something like this: the value of family bonds, the majesty of the natural world, and the dignity of creatures.

Sample topic: automation

Chosen figure: the bicycle

Sample tribute:

I'd like to say a few words about the form of transportation I love most: the bicycle. I remember my very first bike, and when I first saw it. There it was, beside the Christmas tree on Christmas morning. I must have been five years old, and it seemed as if I'd been asking for a bike forever. My older brother had one, and he would do the most impressive things: ride with no hands, do wheelies, jump boxes in the backyard. I was crazy enough to think that I could do all those things, too. So the first time I climbed aboard, I pedaled straight toward Dad's lumber pile, sure I would magically sail above it all. Instead, one of my training wheels caught on a board, and over the handlebars I flew. My lip was bloodied, but it didn't stop me; in fact, I think it made me tougher.

It wouldn't be the last time a bike caused me pain. I outgrew that first bike, and I was more than a little sad when I had to say good-bye to it. But I was growing up, and I needed a bigger bike. That bike also gave me a number of skinned knees and even a line of stitches on my chin—but the fun I had riding more than made up for it.

Wherever I wanted to go during those years, that bike took me; it was faster to ride than to walk. Truth be told, even when I didn't have to ride that bike, I preferred it over every other means of transportation—over skates, skateboard, scooter, and motorcycle. There was just something about its versatility—the way it took me off the beaten path. And its silence—I could ride around for no reason at all, and the quiet always seemed to clear my mind.

I haven't ridden that bike in a couple of years now—turning sixteen meant a short-lived obsession with my car—but that's all going to change in the fall. You see, next year I'm going off to college, and the large campus is going to mean that the bike will become a part of my daily life again.

A toast, then, to my bike: a newfound, long-lost friend!

Thoughts on how this tribute reveals a virtue or good:

This tribute made me realize that I appreciate certain technologies. The bicycle is an example of a technology that reduces but does not entirely eliminate human labor. It enables the rider to do something faster and easier than he or she can without it, but it doesn't replace the human; in fact, it leads to greater enjoyment for the person using this technology.



Now you try it! (Suggested length: approximately 250 words)

Your topic: _____

Chosen figure: _____

Tribute: _____

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Thoughts on how this tribute reveals a virtue or good:



WORKSHOP:

Valedictorian's Speech

2

For this assignment, you will choose three goods that frame your topic. Write a valedictory speech that praises these three virtues. Extolling three virtues will help you define the horizons of your issue.

For example, in exploring sibling relationships, you might extol three things that sisters and brothers learn from each other: how to forgive, how to share, and how to stand up for one another.

Before we can value nature studies, we must recognize the importance of three other things: limits, stewardship, and beauty.

If you wish, you can choose the opposite tack: Censure three vices. For example, if you were considering the importance of providing water to third-world countries, you could speak against three things that you think are keeping first-world countries back: greed, selfishness, and laziness.

Sample topic: automation

Three virtues (or vices) relevant to this topic: hard work, patience, and joy

Sample valedictory address:

Good afternoon, graduating seniors!

In just a few moments, you will be walking across this stage to shake the headmaster's hand. Before you do that, I want to remind you how you got this far—not everyone does, you know. In fact, the drop-out rate is about 6 percent—that's over a million students a year. Some of you have grandparents or even parents who didn't get this far.

And it hasn't been easy, has it? Passing Mrs. Pitts's chemistry class was no small feat. Making it through Mr. Hoff's history course felt a little like a miracle. No, you have gotten here because of three things: hard work, patience, and joy.

Our hard work over the past four years left us exhausted sometimes, yes, but it also left us feeling the satisfaction of a job well done. It molded in us—we hope, at least—the virtue of industriousness. We know that the world won't be handed to us on a silver platter. We'll have to work for it.

Another thing we have developed here is patience. Hard work doesn't ensure success; there is a kind of patient waiting that comes with true learning. We can work to understand, but at some point we must pause; we must wait patiently for understanding to dawn on us.

Finally, joy. There is real joy when, in working hard and patiently waiting, we come to understand; that is, we learn. And what is more, we learn together. This journey of hard work, patience, and joy has strengthened our friendships.

In a few moments, you will receive a diploma—a single sheet of paper that will be your entrance ticket to the world outside the walls of Viking Hills Academy. Maybe you will use it to enter the university world, in which case you'll need heavy doses of hard work, patience, and joy to complete the next four or more years of academic work. If you use your entrance ticket to go into the workforce, no doubt hard work, patience, and joy will

come into play just as much. If your entrance ticket takes you into starting a new family, well, won't you be in need of these three things on a daily basis? You'll have the hard work of communicating with your spouse, the patience of watching your children grow, and the joy of seeing the fruits of those labors.

Wherever your entrance ticket takes you, fellow graduating seniors, I hope you won't forget what you've paid for it. Developing, slowly but surely, into a hardworking, patient, and joyful person is truly priceless.

And now I challenge you: fellow seniors, don't lose that ticket.

Thoughts on how this address reveals virtues relevant to the thesis topic:

I chose these three virtues because they are borne out of activities that require human effort. These three virtues may be threatened by automation that replaces human effort.



Now you try it! (Suggested length: approximately 250 words)

Your topic: _____

Three virtues (or vices) relevant to this topic: _____

Valedictory address:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Thoughts on how this address reveals virtues (or vices) relevant to the thesis topic:



WORKSHOP:

Open Letter

3

You've now considered your topic from two perspectives: praise (or censure) of a person or thing who epitomizes the issue, and praise (or censure) of three virtues/vices that circumscribe the issue. Now you will engage in epideictic rhetoric in the form of an open letter—a letter intended for publication—to an institution or organization that either supports or inhibits the cause at hand.

For example, if your topic is sibling relationships, you might write to Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, championing its cause of providing sibling-like, one-to-one mentorship for struggling kids. You might praise the associated statistics: Kids involved with the program are 46 percent less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27 percent less likely to begin using alcohol, and 52 percent less likely to skip school.⁵

On the topic of nature studies, an open letter could be to the one-million-member organization called The Nature Conservancy, which seeks to protect “the land and water on which all life depends.”

You may need to do a little research online to find an organization that suits this assignment. Don't stop with the first one you come across; go ahead and come up with at least three organizations, and one of those three should be working *against* your cause. (An example of an open letter of criticism to forces working against a cause is Martin Luther King Jr.'s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”⁶ King faults fellow clergymen for their lack of support.) Of what organization would your cause be critical? And how can you communicate disapproval without alienating the reader?⁷

Remember, a letter is a personal form of communication; the letter may be to an impersonal institution, but it is written by you, a *person*, so your personal perspective needs to be highlighted. Do so by including a short anecdote, a story of how this issue affects or has affected you as an individual.



5. <http://www.bbbs.org/research/>.

6. See chapter 6 in *Rhetoric Alive! Book 1: Principles of Persuasion* for the full text of “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” It can also be found at https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

7. Be especially careful when writing letters that oppose vice or criticize wrongdoers. These are difficult rhetorical undertakings, for they can, if not done well, cast a shadow over the rhetor. King, as one of America's greatest rhetors, was able to critique his readers strongly while never representing himself negatively. Take pains to make sure that your letter of censure or blame does not cause you to be seen as a complainer.

Write the three organizations you're considering here:

Which would make for the most interesting subject of praise or censure? Write an open letter to the one you've chosen. (Suggested length: approximately 250 words)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Thoughts on how this letter reveals virtues (or vices) relevant to the thesis topic:



TIPS TO STUDENTS FROM STUDENTS

Do more *deep* reading. —Amanda

Try to get at least two mentors, and meet with them early. Meeting with my mentor was the single most important thing in the whole process. —Amber

Don't memorize your speech, but also don't read it word for word! Be conversational. Work on it until you are comfortable speaking from an outline. —Charlie

Your senior thesis is your chance to make a difference in your world. It will leave its mark on you, but through it you will also leave your mark on the school. —Will

Before you meet with your mentors, write a clear statement of your argument and beliefs about it. That way you can distinguish their thoughts from your own, even if you do end up being deeply influenced by them. —Gracie

I started writing the *refutatio* first; it helped me figure out the main arguments I needed to make. —Jessica

After you're done with the *confirmatio* and *refutatio*, go back and write a brand-new *narratio*. You'll know what background you need to give in order to enter the argument. Then you can combine your old *narratio* and new *narratio*, or just choose the better of the two. —Grace

You must be passionate about your topic; it makes the entire process easier and much more satisfying. —Emma

Start reading in the summer when you have time, and put sticky notes on paragraphs you really like. Meet with as many people as you can. Take notes. If you want a specific writing tutor, ask early on so that you have a better chance of getting him or her! —Grace

It's not too unbearably hard. You can handle it. You can make it *mean* something, and it's something that's entirely yours, so own it. Do good, impress yourself, challenge yourself, change perspectives. —Will

Outline early, but stay flexible. Your outline will probably change as you learn more about your issue. —Callie

Practice in front of other people. —Mitchell

Work on your thesis for long, deep periods of time rather than in lots of small snatches. It helps when you can sink into the work for an extended stretch. —Andrew

Sit down one evening and concentrate on your draft as hard as you can for several hours. —Jerome

Rewrite the entire draft for the spoken version. —Garand

Practice the delivery with gestures. Hand movements help you remember what you're going to say. —Rachel

Talk about your thesis with anyone who will listen. —Jonah



PRESENTATION PRACTICE:

Toast, Address, or Open Letter

Choose one or two of the three assignments (toast, valedictory address, and letter) to deliver in front of the class. Pay attention to how vocal delivery affects the message. For this assignment, focus on volume and clarity. Speak loudly, and speak clearly.



CHAPTER 3

FIND YOUR ISSUE

Now that you have decided on your topic, it is time to brainstorm issues. Again, a topic is a general category of interest, and the issue introduces the rub: What is an important and specific controversy regarding the general topic? For example, *adoption* is a topic; *whether people should consider domestic adoption before international adoption* is an issue. *Nuclear energy* is a topic; *whether nuclear energy should replace fossil fuels* is an issue. Before you definitively decide upon your issue, it is important to identify what kinds of issues you are considering.

FACT, OPINION, AND WISDOM

There are statements of fact, and these statements are true or false. Likewise, facts either exist or they do not. Any “issue” concerning a fact is really a matter of the most basic form of understanding. For example, it is a fact that two plus two makes four. You either understand it or you don’t; understanding that fact may be a result of someone explaining it well, but it is not a result of persuasive argumentation. Moreover, facts are generally settled affairs, meaning they can be passed down from generation to generation, and their truth can be verified again and again. We don’t usually argue about facts.¹ Instead, we consult experts, or those who know.

There are also opinions. Yes, there are better and worse opinions, but most people think of opinions as self-reports, or statements of subjective belief. And many would argue that all people have a “right” to their opinion. “Who’s to say?” is often what is meant when people speak of personal opinion. (Think of one’s preference in foods: “I love Indian food!” “What? I can’t stand that spicy stuff.”) Thus, attempts at persuasion concerning opinions—opinions that have been formed by a unique blend of cultural and personal factors—can often feel out of place.



1. Be careful here! Not all “facts” are actual facts. Often, debaters will invoke a “fact” that has not yet been established; that is, its existence is still contested and in doubt. Additionally, whenever people say, “It’s a fact!” in an attempt to shut down their opponents, be leery of this trump card. While there may be an established fact in such cases, the implications of that particular fact are often not self-evident or immediately known.

Let's list some questions of fact:

- *Are brain injuries increasing among NFL players?*
- *Do students who study Latin get higher scores on the verbal section of the SAT than those who don't?*
- *What is the percentage of successful technology leaders who studied the liberal arts in college?*
- *Does video game violence contribute to aggressive behavior problems?*
- *Who was Cicero?*
- *Is the temperature of the planet rising?*

Now for some questions of opinion:

- *What is the best team sport?*
- *Who is the most important American author?*
- *Is midnight blue more beautiful than pale yellow?*
- *Is Mrs. Smith friendly?*
- *Is keeping a journal the best way to understand yourself?*
- *Who is the most talented American singer in history?*

Generally speaking, facts need only to be established as existent; they are backed by evidence. Another way of saying this is that facts are objective; they exist or do not exist independent of one's beliefs about them. Opinions, on the other hand, are expressions of beliefs. They are not objective but rather *subjective*, dependent upon the person expressing the statement. They may be judgments *about* facts, but those judgments themselves have no bearing on the facts; moreover, those judgments can change over time.

But then there are the “wisdom questions.” In a sense, the wisdom questions seem to have a foot in both camps. Or perhaps it's more accurate to think of these questions as unwilling to have a foot in either camp, for their answers are found neither in the all-or-nothing, objective realm of facts, nor in the arbitrary, willy-nilly realm of opinion. In other words, whereas a question of fact can often be answered with a *yes* or *no*, the answers to wisdom questions aren't black and white. Instead, they usually are *better* or *worse*, *wiser* or *more foolish*. Strange as it is to say, these questions are about the most important things to us as human beings, and yet we rarely have settled agreement on them.

Take a look at the following wisdom questions:

- *What makes us human?*
- *What is our purpose?*
- *What is the meaning of life?*
- *Is it ethical to clone humans?*
- *Do aesthetics matter in a place of worship?*
- *Should sports be a central part of education?*
- *Should the U.S. change its immigration policy?*



- *Should families limit their size, or are large families a good thing?*
- *What role should the government take in mediating marriages?*
- *Should euthanasia be legal?*
- *Is family mealtime a necessary component within the life of a healthy family?*
- *What responsibility do humans have as stewards of the environment?*
- *Should humans embrace the limitations and responsibilities of hard work, or should technology be used to automate all jobs?*

Notice again how questions of wisdom are different. In some ways, they do seem to be like questions of fact because they are trying to move toward a claim about the world, a claim that we can deem to be truthful and that we can find evidence for. But they also seem to be like opinion questions in that there are a variety of positions people can take regarding them, and they are more difficult to “prove” than statements of fact; the evidence that leads to an answer is of a different kind. These debates remain unsettled, with intelligent people falling on both sides of the issue. And they require sensitive deliberation as we weigh and consider the potential answers.

These, the wisdom questions, are the ones you should be considering for your thesis—they concern the application of sound judgment in our everyday lives.

WHAT A SENIOR THESIS IS NOT

1. A book report
2. A summary of other people’s arguments
3. A one-sided polemic
4. A list of facts
5. A personal reflection

WHAT A SENIOR THESIS SHOULD BE

An *argument* that is . . .

- . . . interesting, even controversial.
- . . . fair-minded to both sides.
- . . . clear and organized.
- . . . based on evidence, not mere opinion.
- . . . compelling, calling the audience to action.



WORKSHOP:

From Topic to Issue

1

For any given topic, you should be able to create multiple issues. Here are some examples:

Topic: Small businesses

Issue: Whether opening small businesses should be incentivized by the government

Issue: Whether our town should ban chain businesses within the downtown center

Topic: Suffering

Issue: Whether suffering is a reason people should be allowed to end their lives

Issue: Whether suffering can have meaning

Topic: Animal testing

Issue: Whether animal testing should be illegal

Issue: Whether animal testing should be done on only rodents and lower forms of life

For illustration purposes, the topic of *automation* will serve as an example throughout this workbook. Automation is a kind of technology that doesn't just enhance human activity but completely replaces it. Or, to restate the distinction between automation and other forms of technology, we might view technology as any advance that makes human labor easier or more efficient; automation, however, improves ease and efficiency by doing away with human action entirely.

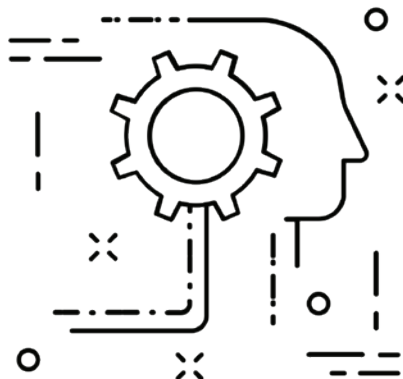
Sample topic: Automation

Issue: Whether automation advances or inhibits human flourishing

Issue: Whether automation bolsters or hinders the economy

Issue: Whether automation should be regulated by the government

Issue: Whether automation helpfully frees humans for leisure activities



Now try it with your topic. Think of a few different issues you could explore for your major category of interest.

Topic: _____

Issue: _____

Issue: _____

Issue: _____

Issue: _____

Look at your potential issues, and highlight the ones that most concern wisdom. Put a star beside your most promising specific issue.

Of course, there may be issues you haven't thought of. Who are some thoughtful people in your life? List them here:

Discuss your topic with three people you respect, and see if they have any new ideas or perspectives on your topic. What surprising issues arise within those discussions? The following questions might be helpful in getting the conversations started:

- *Do you have strong opinions concerning these issues I've shared with you?*
- *Which seems most important?*
- *What are potentially negative consequences if the issue is not resolved well?*
- *What are the positive outcomes that might result if the issue is resolved well?*
- *What are the best and worst possible outcomes?*
- *Which aspects of the issues we've discussed concern you more than others? Why?*
- *What do you think are some of the strongest points that I have raised?*
- *Which points seem the weakest?*

Take notes from those discussions, and write down any new ideas for issues here:

TWO SIDES TO AN ARGUMENT

Again, questions of wisdom are debatable; smart people disagree on their answers. This disagreement, however, is no excuse to abandon the questions. On the contrary, these questions must not be abandoned! After all, the way we answer them will affect the way we live our lives. That is, these are questions of *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing.

It is now time to look at both sides of your issue. In the space below, list possible arguments *for* your issue on the left and arguments *against* your issue on the right. Remember, rhetoric helps the speaker discover means of persuasion for both sides of an issue so that the speaker can more clearly see the truth—*not* so that the speaker can equivocate and argue whichever side is simply more advantageous.² Be open to seeing the strong and the weak points on both sides of the issue. If you find that you do not have much to write on one side of the case, then you may need to tweak your issue.

2. Students involved in debate or mock trial know the importance of understanding both sides of an argument; they must be ready to argue either the defense or the prosecution at mock trial tournaments.



ASSIGNMENT:

Write and Revise Your Thesis Statement

You narrowed your interests to a topic, a general area of interest. Write that topic here:

Then you narrowed your topic to an issue, a controversy within that general topic. Write that issue here:

Now that you have begun considering both sides of the argument, it is time to attempt a thesis statement. A **thesis statement** is a single declarative statement about which reasonable people disagree.³ In other words, a thesis statement takes a side on the controversial issue. Draft a rough thesis statement for your project. Remember to write it as a single statement, not a question.

Look carefully at your thesis statement. Is it a clear statement with which reasonable people might disagree? For example, “Teenagers should limit their consumption of junk food” is a reasonable statement, and it is written in one sentence, but it is not contentious. (After all, whether young or old, who should *not* limit their consumption of junk food?) “Junk food should not be sold to young people,” however, would raise some eyebrows. Is your thesis arguable? Do intelligent people have different opinions on the subject?

There is an exception to be made. Occasionally you may want to choose a thesis that is not controversial. Sometimes a thesis can be something that is obvious and people agree with—families should sit down to a daily meal together, for example—but that many people just do not follow through on. In this case, your goal could be to motivate them to action on something they already know is right.

*A thesis statement
takes a side on a
controversial issue.*

3. In chapter 9, we will turn your thesis statement into a *partitio*, a fuller version that will include the major lines of argumentation and their order.

THESIS STATEMENT TIPS

Tip #1: Try to include the word “should.” That word, “should,” is a kind of signpost, telling us that we are in the realm of deliberative rhetoric, the kind of rhetoric that tells what ought to be done going forward in the future. Your particular thesis may be a search for information on a topic; for example, you wish to research the beginnings of polyphonic music in the Middle Ages. A large portion of the thesis may need to explain that history. But you should not end there. Rather, consider how you can call your audience to action based on that information. What, for example, does the history of polyphonic music teach us about the kind of music we should be listening to in our homes, singing in our churches, or producing in our studios? Therein lies the controversy. Without this further step, the thesis is merely informative; it stops short of persuasion.

Tip #2: Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Your thesis will be somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen pages long, and the question you ask should be able to be answered in that space. You should think of your thesis in terms of burden of proof: The more narrowly you can limit your thesis, the better able you will be to offer a compelling answer. It is not feasible to solve the crisis in the Middle East in a dozen pages. You could, however, argue that the U.S. should adopt a specific policy regarding refugees from Syria, a concrete measure that could be a small step toward peace in the Middle East. And don’t worry that it will seem too narrow; your conclusion will give you a place to extend your claim.

Tip #3: Make it matter. Think in terms of what is important to the living persons who will be listening to your thesis. There’s nothing wrong with limiting the scope of your thesis to your hometown or even to your school. In fact, the more immediately and locally relevant you can make your thesis, the more likely it will be to make a real difference in someone’s life. Arguing for the global support of small business is grand, and to be frank, beyond the scope of what you can reasonably accomplish. But passing an ordinance that outlaws chain restaurants in the downtown square is an initiative that could actually happen.

The following are weak thesis statements. Take a look and see how you might improve them. (Don’t look at the suggested changes until you have tried your hand at revising the statement yourself.)

Examples:

Art psychotherapy has proven effective in treating mental illness.

Notice that this really is an answer to a question of fact. It could be changed to answer a wisdom question as follows: “*Art psychotherapy should be a first step in treating mental illness.*”

State laws penalize small businesses, though small businesses are the “engine” of the U.S. economy.

Again, this doesn’t quite answer a wisdom question. Instead, this is a statement of fact followed by an opinion regarding how small businesses should be imagined. Change to: “*State laws should be changed to incentivize new small businesses.*”

Art education is valuable and worthwhile for school-age students.

This statement could be more locally relevant and also include a persuasive element by being changed to this: *“Our school district should not cut funding for art education.”*

Private prisons are inhumane and expensive.

This statement depends upon one’s definitions of “inhumane” and “expensive” and does not bear on the future. Change to: *“Private prisons should be fundamentally reformed or shut down altogether.”*

America’s education system focuses too much on grades and standardized tests.

This statement comes closer to answering a “wisdom question” by being changed to: *“American schools should focus more on the cognitive development of students.”*

Automation hinders the economy.

This statement of fact can be improved by modifying it so that it calls for a change: *“Americans should be selective in the automated technologies they choose to use.”*

Write your original thesis statement (from page 29) here:

Write your revised thesis statement here:





WORKSHOP:

Promising Sources

2

The people in your life have the advantage of knowing you and your particular interests. But another way to drum up ideas is checking with experts—authors, public intellectuals, activists, etc. You can discover some of these thinkers by looking online.⁴ As you come across issues that you had not previously considered, list them below. Save the URL or website title for each promising source that sheds light on your possible issue so that you can return to it later for research purposes.

For example, suppose you're interested in reform of the U.S. prison system. You could enter “prison reform U.S.” into the search bar and check your findings. Or perhaps you are interested in how movies affect young people; if so, you could start by searching “film influence on youth.”

Sample issue: *Whether Americans should be selective in the automation technologies they use*

Promising site (title or URL): *“Our Automated Future: How long will it be before you lose your job to a robot?” <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/19/our-automated-future>*

Notes: *almost half of U.S. jobs are “potentially automatable”; computer Watson finally beat Jeopardy champion; Elizabeth I refused to grant a license for a knitting machine out of concern it would put hand-knitters out of work; image of a matrix that charts manual/cognitive and routine/non-routine; the highest- and lowest-paid (manual non-routine and cognitive non-routine) jobs are least likely to be automated, meaning that the middle class will suffer the most*

Issue: _____

Promising site (title or URL): _____

Notes: _____

Promising site (title or URL): _____

Notes: _____

4. This step is for inquiry and brainstorming purposes, not necessarily for deep, quality research. In other words, the internet might be a good place to start your research; it is not always the best place to end it. The later chapter on research will discuss how to find and evaluate reputable and credible sources.

Promising site (title or URL): _____

Notes:

Promising site (title or URL): _____

Notes:

Promising site (title or URL): _____

Notes:

Promising site (title or URL): _____

Notes:





PRESENTATION PRACTICE:

Essay Excerpt

For this chapter, you will get more comfortable in front of an audience by presenting someone else's words. You will practice the art of delivery using one of the sources you found.

Choose one section (about 250 words) from one of those sources; you will present that section in front of the class. You'll need to be sure to choose an interesting part, perhaps a section that has been written in a more conversational tone. Vocal delivery should again be the focus; this time, vary your rhythm by speeding up and slowing down to sound improvisational, not rehearsed.

Here are some examples:

Topic: Technology

Issue: Whether government support for science and technology should be increased

Thesis statement: Government support for science and technology should be increased.

Selection: "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort" by John F. Kennedy

Topic: Peer pressure

Issue: Whether peer pressure should be utilized for the good in the classroom

Thesis statement: Peer pressure should be utilized for the good in the classroom.

Selection: "Peer Pressure Has a Positive Side" essay in *Scientific American*

Topic: Women in STEM

Issue: Whether STEM fields should incentivize female participation

Thesis statement: STEM fields should incentivize female participation.

Selection: "Women in Science in the Pursuit of Excellence" speech by UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet

Topic: Creative writing

Issue: Whether creative writing should be taught in our school

Thesis statement: Creative writing should be taught in our school.

Selection: "Why I Write" by George Orwell

Topic: Farming

Issue: Whether people in the city should grow their own food

Thesis statement: People in the city should grow their own food.

Selection: "So God Made a Farmer" speech by Paul Harvey

Topic: Sportsmanship

Issue: Whether camaraderie should be a main factor in choosing a sport

Thesis statement: Camaraderie should be a main factor in choosing a sport.

Selection: "Being Perfect" speech in movie Friday Night Lights or "Gettysburg" speech in movie Remember the Titans

Topic: Title IX

Issue: Whether Title IX should be abandoned

Thesis statement: Title IX should be abandoned.

Selection: "Title IX: 37 Words that Changed Everything" by Steve Wulf

Topic: Automation

Issue: Whether Americans should be selective in the automated technologies they use

Thesis statement: Americans should be selective in the automated technologies they use.

Selection: Mark Zuckerberg's commencement address at Harvard, May 25, 2017.

Passage beginning: "But today, technology and automation are eliminating many jobs. . . . I've met factory workers who know their old jobs aren't coming back and are trying to find their place."

Your topic: _____

Issue: _____

Thesis statement: _____

Selection: _____