

new stage sooner, too. The point is to spend the middle three or four months of your thesis project doing directed research, organizing your notes, prewriting, and then drafting sections of the thesis.

If you and your adviser prefer to work from a more detailed outline, then do that (or, better yet, do that plus some prewriting). Just be sure to update your outline as you draft the thesis and discuss the updated version with your adviser. Give yourself every opportunity to learn and adapt as you research and write.

Whichever approach you take, don't worry about the introduction and conclusion at this stage. You will tackle them toward the end of the drafting process, but not until then. I'll discuss that in chapter 10.

**TIME SCHEDULE FOR MONTHS 3-5
(OR MONTHS 3-6, DEPENDING ON YOUR SCHOOL SCHEDULE):
RESEARCH AND WRITING**

Reading:	Focused research and planning
Writing:	Prewrite middle sections of thesis Write and revise middle sections Prewrite the introduction and conclusion

CHECKLIST: PLANNING AND PREWRITING

- Establish main categories for your paper (similar to Roman numerals in an outline).
- Line up categories in a logical order—the building blocks of your argument.
- Sort your research and notes into these categories.
- Amplify your work in each category by writing sentences and paragraphs (prewriting).
- Build on this prewriting and research to draft brief stand-alone papers for categories.
- Look for gaps in your research and begin filling them.

9 WRITING YOUR BEST

You are not only a researcher; you are a writer. The two tasks are intimately bound together. Good organization and crisp language are the high road to engaging your readers and persuading them.

Early in the paper, you should lay out your major argument—that is, your thesis statement. That's important for you *both as a writer and a researcher*. It will guide your readers through the entire paper and give them a clear sense of your main points. That's why it should be placed prominently in the introduction, where it can orient readers for the journey to come.¹

The thesis statement's importance does not mean it has to appear at the top of page 1. That's a very visible spot, and you might commandeer it for a compelling story or quote to engage readers. (For an example, see how I begin chapter 11.) Or you might prefer to give a general introduction to your topic, with a little caffeine kick. That's what I try to do in most chapters of this book, including this one. But whatever your opening is, use it effectively and then turn to the main questions you want to raise and the argument of your thesis. State them clearly, briefly, and early. Don't bury them. Don't try to be overly subtle and indirect in presenting them. State them directly.

Tip: Your argument and your main questions should appear early in the paper, stated as simply and clearly as possible.

This sets the stage for you to explain

- Why your topic is important—in practical terms, in theory, or in both
- What methods you will use to investigate it
- What texts or evidence you will rely on

¹ The importance of your thesis statement, or main argument, is discussed in chapter 7. In chapter 10, I will discuss how to place it prominently in your introduction.

If you are using some key terms (such as the term “argument” in the last few chapters), introduce them as they arise and define them in simple, precise language, perhaps reinforced by an example or two. Using these terms consistently will establish a *core vocabulary* for your project, one you share with your readers and then use repeatedly throughout your thesis.

Tip: Define key terms simply and precisely. Then use them consistently as a core vocabulary throughout your thesis.

Of course, you can't cover everything in the first few pages—certainly not in any detail—but you should at least pose your central questions and explain your argument. Beyond that, you should briefly introduce some other major elements of your thesis to prepare the reader for a full discussion later. You might mention what kinds of evidence you will use, for example, or which theories you will consider. There's no need to offer many details at this point, but flagging these topics will orient your readers. All this should unfold smoothly, giving your readers confidence that your analysis will proceed in a sensible, orderly way.

REMEMBERING YOUR AUDIENCE

Always remember you are writing for others, as well as yourself. You want readers to understand the topic and your ideas about it. You want to persuade them that your analysis offers useful insights into an important issue. It's helpful to assume they are open-minded and receptive but need a little convincing. Show them that your topic is well worth their time, your approach is fruitful, and your conclusions are logical and well-grounded.

Tip: Always remember you are writing for an audience. Think of them as intelligent peers you want to educate and persuade.

Thinking of your readers as peers encourages a more natural conversational tone. And it avoids a cardinal sin: talking down to your audience. Never, ever do it. You might tell a friend, for example, that you consider Einstein the most important scientist of the twentieth century or that he

revolutionized physics while still a young clerk in a Swiss patent office. But you would never say, “Einstein, the well-known scientist . . .” That's not just starchy language; it assumes you are talking to a moron. “Hold on, I thought you were talking about Einstein the bagel maker.”

A thesis that begins, “William Shakespeare, in his play *Hamlet*,” is in trouble before it reaches the first verb. We're just fortunate Shakespeare didn't have a middle name, or it would be included, too. Yes, we may need to be told that *The Cherry Orchard* is a play or *The Wasteland* is a poem, but *Hamlet* is the most famous play by the most gifted writer in the English language. It is part of our common cultural heritage. Better to say: “In *Hamlet*'s opening scene, Shakespeare writes . . .”

Assume your readers are intelligent and well educated; they're just not experts in your field. They want useful information, clear ideas, and compelling analysis. Give it to them in simple, lucid prose, without ever talking down to them.

Tip: Never talk down to your readers. Let me repeat that slowly . . .

To write like that, you need to keep your readers constantly in mind. Most of all, you need to show them genuine courtesy. Since we research and write alone, it is all too easy to ignore this world of readers, to think we are writing only for ourselves. We *should* write for ourselves, but not for ourselves alone. We should remember that we are also writing for others who want to understand the subject. Give them clear language and convincing arguments.

Tip: Good thesis writing is clear, convincing, and courteous to readers.

Presenting your draft work to advisers, tutors, and workshops is a continuous reminder that somewhere out there, lurking behind the computer screen, are actual readers. Thinking about them and their needs will improve your writing. The moral of this tale: Respect your audience. It worked for the very famous English playwright, the Bard of Avon, William R. Shakespeare. It will work for you, too.

TIGHT, CLEAR WRITING

Aim for taut presentation. Your writing and editing should eliminate fat wherever you find it, without severing muscle or bone. That means following the wise advice of Strunk and White: no extraneous words, sentences, paragraphs, or sections.² They weigh down your prose, distracting readers and obscuring your ideas.

Tip: Write as clearly as you can, with unaffected prose. Prune the excess words so your ideas can shine through.

Compliment your readers, says John Trimble, “by writing as if they preferred unaffected, unsolemn, conversational prose to the pretentious Formal variety.”³ Trimble is not just saying which words to use. He is saying how to treat your readers. Respect their intelligence and acknowledge their quest for understanding, their sense of humor, and their desire for graceful language with an occasional snap of surprise.

This combination of clarity, simplicity, and courtesy is the opposite of dumbing down or oversimplifying. It’s the enemy of jargon and pretentious blather. It’s the bodyguard of obscure ideas that are, at bottom, hiding from honest debate. This kind of bloated prose is all too common in academic journals, I’m afraid. It is not modeled on great science or humanistic scholarship. It is modeled on the Wizard of Oz, where heavy curtains and the Wizard’s booming voice conceal a tiny, fearful man and a fundamental fraud. That’s no model for you.

PRACTICAL ADVICE ABOUT WRITING YOUR BEST

This spare viewpoint on writing yields practical advice for your thesis. Let me hit the high points and add some explanations or illustrations where I think they might help:

2. Strunk and White is the bible of clear, concise writing. William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2000).
3. John R. Trimble, *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 87.

- *Write courageously.* Present your ideas as clearly as possible so others can understand and engage them.

When readers understand you, they may agree or disagree, but at least they know where you stand and why you hold the views you do. You have launched an honest discussion, and that is a contribution in its own right, even if others disagree. That is how knowledge advances.

- *Use plain, unadorned language.*
Don’t use long words when short ones will do. Don’t use Latinate words when Anglo-Saxon ones carry the same meaning. Avoid pretentiousness. “Short words are the best,” Churchill said, “and old words when short are best of all.”

On the other hand, never simplify to improve readability *when it would distort your meaning*. It’s fine to trot out elaborate words and complex sentences occasionally when you need them to convey your precise meaning. Just think hard before you do it.

T. S. Eliot pointed the way to combining plain language with (occasional) more elaborate forms:

The common word exact without vulgarity,

The formal word precise but not pedantic,

The complete consort dancing together⁴

- *Write in the active voice.*

The passive voice is not only weak and clumsy; it often conceals the main player—the one who is doing the acting. That’s why it is so beloved of politicians and public figures in deep trouble. Their mantra is “Mistakes were made.” That language intentionally obscures the crucial question: “Who made the mistakes?” They say, “Revenues should be enhanced,” not “I want to raise taxes.” George Orwell drives home this point in his classic essay “Politics and the English Language.”⁵ It is a rallying cry against the deadening language of bureaucratic control. Don’t fall into that trap yourself. Write in compact, transparent language. Tell your readers exactly who is doing what to whom and why. Write in the active voice.

4. T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* (London: Faber and Faber, [1942]).
5. George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1946).

Along the same lines, avoid weak verbs like “is,” “was,” and other forms of “to be.” We all have to use them sometimes, but don’t overdose.

Let strong verbs carry the heavy load, without flowery modifiers. This follows the advice of my friend, a chef, who told me how to read a menu: “You can’t eat adjectives.”

- *When editing, cut deeply and cut often to get rid of extra words and stray thoughts.*

It’s easy to fall in love with our own words. It’s partly self-love—the story of Narcissus enchanted by his own reflection—and partly the memory of how long it took to hammer out that particular sentence or paragraph. Remember, instead, your reader’s needs. They are paramount.

To make the cuts less painful, set up a “scrap file.” The file should be organized to reflect the different sections of your paper. When you delete a sentence or paragraph you might wish to reinstate, just put it in the appropriate section of the scrap file. That way, you can always put it back in.

Chances are you won’t reuse any of these sentences. That’s certainly been my experience. In fact, the main reason for this scrap file is psychological. It’s easier to remove a paragraph that took an hour to write if you know you are “just moving it to another file,” not murdering it with an ice pick. Occasionally, you’ll return to the scrap graveyard and revive a sentence you want to use. It’s amazing how rarely that happens. ~~That proves you were right—you really could cut it out.~~

- *When in doubt, break long sentences into shorter ones, as long as the result is not choppy.*

There is nothing inherently wrong with long sentences. At their best, they are graceful, rolling, and elegant. The Declaration of Independence, a masterpiece of persuasive writing, begins with one: “When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another . . .” That sentence runs for seventy-one words. The next one is even longer and equally famous.

So why do nearly all writing teachers say, “Avoid them”? Because most of us are not Thomas Jefferson. Long sentences, with their elegantly framed subordinate clauses, were integral features of good

writing in the eighteenth century. Jefferson, Edward Gibbon, and Samuel Johnson mastered them. But developing that mastery took years and always required a deft hand.

Long, complex sentences are more difficult to control and more likely to contain unneeded words. They can meander through vast, prickly fields of verbiage and tangential thoughts. Compact prose is more powerful, more likely to drive home your point.

Short sentences do pose some risks, though. They can be choppy, monotonous, and singsong: “See Spot run. Run, Spot, run.” Tedious. At their worst, they talk down to readers. To avoid these problems, simply vary the length and construction of your sentences. Change their rhythm from time to time. You can also try one more trick; occasionally join some short sentences with a semicolon.

- *Write brief, coherent paragraphs, each with a single topic sentence.*

Paragraphs, not sentences, are the building blocks of your prose. Well-constructed paragraphs develop your questions and answers in orderly ways. Building them is like any other craft. It is improved by attentive practice and mentoring, just like pottery or woodwork-ing, but with less heavy machinery.

Each paragraph should have a single idea, captured in a topic sentence. The topic sentence is usually the first or second in the paragraph, though that’s not a hard-and-fast rule.

Paragraphs should be relatively short and focused. If any run over five or six sentences, check to see if you are cramming too much into them. But don’t chop them in half just “because.” Divide a group of sentences when you realize it actually contains two paragraphs, with two topic sentences. That’s why you are checking.

Occasionally, you may want to write a one-sentence paragraph. That’s not illegal or fattening, as long as you don’t do it too often. Used carefully, they can change the pace of your writing, create surprise, and, most of all, highlight a point. That’s why they are valuable.

That’s also why they should be used sparingly.

- *Rewrite any sentences that string together prepositions.*

If you find three or four prepositions in a sentence, perform emergency surgery. Compare these examples, the first with several prepositions strung together, the second without them.

- (1) In defense of his theory of the beginning of World War II, Gerhard Weinberg states
- (2) Defending his theory of how World War II began, Gerhard Weinberg states

The revised version is easier to read, with no loss of meaning. That's exactly what you should aim for.

- *When you mention a person for the first time, use the full name, unless it is Aristotle, Shakespeare, or a rock diva. After that, use a shortened form, and be consistent.*
- "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* explores the deep, continuing wounds of slavery through a powerful narrative and complex characters. Morrison writes that"
- *Check to see if you are repeating yourself or using the same words too often.*

Check to see if you are repeating yourself or using the same words too often. Check to see

Let me take an example from this book. When I reread an early draft, I realized I had used the adjective "key" far too often. Everything seemed to be a "key idea" or "key point." The repetition was boring. So I lost the keys and replaced them with synonyms. Variety engages your readers.

There is one important exception, one area where you should avoid variety: core vocabulary terms. *Don't use synonyms for core terms* since they may confuse your readers. Analytic terms like "argument" should be defined early and used consistently so readers become familiar with them.

- *Use direct quotations sparingly and name the person being quoted.*
- I'll discuss quotations below and show how to use them effectively.
- *Review your opening and closing paragraphs, and edit them with special care.* They are the most important in the paper.
- The opening lines have the most difficult task in the entire thesis: they need to announce your subject while enticing the reader to continue.
- The closing paragraphs are almost as important since they offer your principal conclusions.
- I'll discuss both in the next chapter.
- *Know the rules of grammar, but don't be an ayatollah.* When the

rules produce stiff, awkward language, bend the rules not the reader.

Grammatical rules make communication easier and more reliable. That's why you should know them, and why you should use them correctly . . . most of the time. Bend the rules—knowledgeably, self-consciously—when they damage your conversational tone or interfere with sensible speech. Churchill clinched the point with ridicule, the sharpest of all rhetorical tools. The target was a proof-reader, who had primly corrected his manuscript, striking out a sentence that ended with a preposition. Churchill responded: "This is an impertinence up with which I will not put."

- *Use examples, stories, quotations, hypothetical cases, and anecdotes to enliven your abstract language and theoretical presentation.*

They vary the tone, quicken the pace, illustrate your points, and make your paper more accessible. They are not out of place in a thesis, as long as they actually make a point and you don't run them into the ground.

- *Read aloud as you edit, or read silently but hear the words.*

One of the best ways to improve your writing is to read it aloud to yourself. I know it seems silly, but it really works, and all good writers know it. If your sentences sound leaden when you read them aloud, then you've struck lead, not gold. As a practiced reader, you can hear when your own prose sounds wrong or even a little off. If your roommate complains, read silently but listen for the words. Or get a new roommate.

- *Edit, edit, and edit some more.*

I will discuss editing in the next two chapters, but it can't be postponed entirely. After all, editing begins the moment you choose one word instead of another. Mark Twain, who knew something about these matters, said, "Use the right word and not its second cousin."

It's impossible to write well without editing continuously. One or two editorial passes through the text is not enough. Your first draft and even your second may not produce the clear argument and graceful prose you want. Persist. Careful editing is *the* way to make your thesis sharper, deeper, and more readable. Keep going through your text, and keep editing each time you do. That's the surest way to produce your best work.

As you begin work each day, read what you wrote the day before. That's an excellent way to edit because you approach the cold text with a fresh attitude. Be sure to do it with a pen in hand so you can smooth out your sentences and shuffle paragraphs to the right spot.

None of this is rocket science. Mostly, it's a matter of caring about your prose and caring about your readers. That, plus some practice, will make you a more lucid writer and a more persuasive one.

You certainly get a lot of practice, whether you like it or not, as you write your thesis. You are constantly preparing notes, short papers, and draft sections, and receiving faculty comments on them. You can use this drafting and editing to grow as a writer *if you make it your goal*.

Contrary to the old adage, practice does not make perfect. Sometimes, it just perpetuates the same old problems. That's as true of writing as it is of other endeavors. To improve, you have to make improvement your goal, monitor your work, and, above all, edit your writing with a good ear as well as a sharp pen. If you do that, then practice *will* make perfect.

FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL LANGUAGE

As you've probably noticed, I use conversational language throughout this book. I don't hesitate to use contractions or begin sentences with personal references. That doesn't make the analysis any less thoughtful or rigorous, I hope, but it does change the tone.

You and your adviser may prefer a different tone. In fact, most theses use more formal language, as do most books and articles. They avoid contractions and rarely use personal references. The writing is more reserved and professional. That should *not* mean it is starched, dull, and dry.

The differences between formal and informal styles are easy to see by comparing sentences that say essentially the same thing:

Formal	Informal
That is a compelling argument.	I certainly agree with that argument.
Do not use contractions.	Don't use contractions.

So, which language should *you* use? That depends on several things: which feels most comfortable to you as a writer and a reader, which style

your adviser prefers or requires, and whether your field avoids informal language.

To make your choice, think about the articles that have impressed you, especially those you consider well written. Think, too, about how you prefer to write. Review your work to see which style you use and whether you do so consistently. Of course, your style can differ from assignment to assignment, but an individual paper shouldn't wobble back and forth.

After you've done this homework, ask your adviser's opinion about one of your early drafts. Is your style suitable and effective? Working from a writing sample like this, you can go beyond an abstract discussion about "how to write." You can talk concretely about how well you express your views, the tone you strike, and whether your adviser thinks it is appropriate for your thesis.

Whichever style you choose, you can write well that way. Formal sentences do not have to be stiff. Informal ones don't have to be sloppy. You can write powerfully and precisely using either style.

USING QUOTATIONS

Quotations are a great resource and an important element in thesis writing. But don't overuse them. Avoid them when you are simply presenting data or well-known opinions. It's better to rephrase those quotes in your own words and cite the sources in a note.

Don't use any quotes without explaining, in the text itself, who is talking. Sometimes quotes simply stagger in, out of nowhere. They arrive with no name tag and no introduction, and the reader stumbles over them. "That's absolutely true." Citations don't correct this particular problem. You need to introduce quotes first.

Tips on quotations:

- Use them judiciously.
- Name the speaker.
- Introduce long quotes so your text makes sense even if readers skip the quote.

Use the *exact* words whenever you quote. If you leave something out, add an ellipsis (which is simply three dots with spaces before and after each

one). If the omission comes in the middle of a sentence, then an ellipsis . . . is all you need. If the omission comes at the end, then you need a period and an ellipsis. . . . If you insert a word to make a sentence understandable, put it in [brackets].⁶ If the writer misspells or makes a grammatical error, reproduce it exactly and add the bracketed term [*sic*] where the mistake occurs, unless your addition would sound fussy. If you add *italics* for emphasis, the footnote or endnote should say “*italics* are my own.”

Rule: Use the exact words when you quote, along with quotation marks and proper citation. If you omit words, use ellipses . . . and use [brackets] if you add them.

TWO TIMES WHEN YOU SHOULD USE QUOTES

When are quotes most useful? In at least two instances. First, some quotations capture a speaker's striking, memorable language. For example:

In President John Kennedy's ambitious phrase, “We will pay any price, bear any burden.”⁷

“Politicians *are* interested in people,” P. J. O'Rourke observes. “Not that this is always a virtue. Fleas are interested in dogs.”⁸

As George Bernard Shaw put it, “Assassination is the extreme form of censorship.”⁹

What sensible person would want to paraphrase those words?

Second, well-chosen quotes can illustrate the viewpoint—and sometimes even the character—of a scholar, policy maker, or participant. The

6. These points are covered in more detail in chapter 3.

7. John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1961, in *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 1.

8. P. J. O'Rourke, *Parliament of Whores* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 58.

9. George Bernard Shaw, “The Rejected Statement,” in *The Doctor's Dilemma, Getting Married, and The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (London: Constable, 1911), at <http://www.gutenberg.net/dirs/texto4/shwbp10.txt> (accessed August 9, 2004).

words may not be memorable in their own right, but they reveal the speaker. For example:

Senator Joseph McCarthy did more than call his opponents misguided; he repeatedly damned them as “communists” or “fellow travelers.”

Lenin, who understood dictatorships since he ran a brutal one himself, called them “authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force.”¹⁰

Lenin's quote does not just tell us about dictatorships. It tells us about Lenin. The McCarthy quotes are examples of his demagoguery.

Tip: Use quotes to capture distinctive language or reveal the speaker's viewpoint. Avoid them for more pedestrian materials, which you should paraphrase.

USING LONG QUOTES

What about much longer quotes, running several sentences? Use them sparingly unless your project is mainly a textual analysis, such as the study of a novel. When you do use longer quotes, set them off from the text, indent them, and place citations in their usual spot, at the end of the quotation. When you use indents like this, you should omit the quotation marks. They are implied; your readers will understand this is quoted material.

Because long quotes interrupt the narrative flow, it is important to introduce them with one or two summary sentences. A fortunate by-product of this introduction is that your text will still make sense if readers skip over the quotes, which they sometimes do. Here, for example, is my introduction to a longer quote from Mahatma Gandhi:

In 1922 Mohandas Gandhi was convicted of sedition. His crime: writing magazine articles that opposed British rule in India. Before sentencing, Gandhi was allowed to address the court. It was a highly charged moment, and Gandhi made the most of it, defending his actions and explaining his strategy of nonviolent resistance:

10. Quoted in J. M. Roberts, *Twentieth Century: The History of the World, 1901 to 2000* (New York: Viking, 1999), 294.

Nonviolence is the first article of my faith. . . . But I had to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done an irreparable harm to my country, or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth, when they understood the truth from my lips. . . . I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.¹¹

This example shows how to handle a longer quotation. First, it is introduced with a sentence or two, followed by a colon before the quote itself. Because Gandhi's comments run several sentences, they are indented rather than included in a normal paragraph. The indentation signals a quote, so there is no need for quotation marks. Finally, the note reference appears at the end of the quoted material.

PUTTING QUOTATION MARKS AROUND "ORDINARY WORDS"

Sometimes, students use quotation marks around "ordinary words" in the middle of a sentence. Be careful. It's fine to say: He went downtown wearing "casual Friday" clothes. You are putting quotation marks around a characteristic term to call attention to it. Or you might say:

What the military often calls "collateral damage" is really killing and maiming innocent civilians, smothered in the numbing language of bureaucraticies.

The quotation marks around "collateral damage" are fine because they refer to specific words used by government officials.

What is irritating, however, is to see quotation marks used to make sly arguments, a passive-aggressive way of showing the writer is superior to the subject. Compare these two sentences:

- France is a civilized country.
- France is a "civilized" country.

11. "Gandhi Defends His Beliefs," in *Let Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*, ed. William Safire (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 323.

In the second one, the writer is striking a snide, ironic pose. Sarcasm like this rarely works, although you've certainly got a better shot if the target is France. It won't work at all unless you lay the proper groundwork or follow the quote immediately with supporting evidence. These, for example, meet the rules:

- France is said to be a "civilized" country, but it certainly treats its immigrants, religious minorities, and allies in uncivil ways.
- Many call France a "civilized" country, and after visiting the Louvre and lingering over a demitasse at a nearby café, who could deny it?

If you don't offer such explanations, then you are trying to sneak your viewpoint in the backdoor, hoping nobody's guarding it. Don't. Say what you mean and argue openly for your view. My advice is to use this kind of "in-line quote" only when you want to flag a word's use (or misuse) and have made your purpose clear.

Tip: Be careful using quotation marks around "ordinary words." They are fine to highlight a word or phrase people are saying. Don't use them as sarcastic put-downs.

HE SAID, SHE SAID

Finally, a few words about identifying the speaker in the text. "Most of the time, his name should go at the beginning or end," according to Dr. Lipson, "but it adds variety to put it in the middle occasionally."

Be consistent about using the present tense or past tense to identify when someone spoke or wrote. If you say, "Mark Twain writes frequently about small-town life," then don't lapse into "Henry James wrote about cities." This consistency is important not only for identifying quotations but for the rest of your text as well.

Tip: Don't wobble between present tense and past tense in your text or in introducing quotes.

Most quotes are best introduced with straightforward words like "said," "wrote," "noted," or "observed." Don't spend too much effort trying to add

variety here. Plain words are usually the best choice. Steer clear of frilly modifiers. "Go easy on the adverbs," he opined emphatically.

**TIME SCHEDULE FOR MONTHS 3-5
(OR MONTHS 3-6, DEPENDING ON YOUR SCHOOL SCHEDULE):
WRITING AND REVISING THE MIDDLE SECTIONS**

Reading:	Focused research and planning
Writing:	Prewrite middle sections of thesis Write and revise the middle sections Prewrite the introduction and conclusion

CHECKLIST: EFFECTIVE WRITING

- Write with plain, unaffected language.
- Use the active voice.
- Cut excess words.
- Write brief, coherent paragraphs, each based on a topic sentence.
- Use examples, stories, and quotes to enliven your text.
- Proofread each version of your text for spelling and grammar.
- Above all, make sure your ideas come through clearly.

Now that we've discussed writing in general, let's consider two areas where good writing is vital: the introduction and conclusion. They are the most important pages in your thesis, and they should be the best written. The opening section should entice readers and pose your main questions directly; the final section should state your answers firmly and clearly. The next chapter discusses how you can write strong introductions and conclusions—and drive home your major ideas.

10 EFFECTIVE OPENINGS, SMOOTH TRANSITIONS, AND STRONG CLOSINGS

Now that we have covered some general writing issues, let's turn to a couple of specific tasks: writing your paper's introduction and conclusion. (We dealt with the middle sections in chapter 8, on prewriting.) Your opening and closing sections will be read more carefully than any others, so it's crucial to make them your best. Begin by taking control of the subject matter. Raise the questions *you* want to raise, say why they are important, and state your argument. Then, after developing your argument and evidence in the middle sections, bring your paper to a strong conclusion by drawing together your answers, insights, and judgments.

GOALS OF YOUR INTRODUCTION

The introductory section of the paper should do three things:

- Entice the reader into the subject matter, beginning with a compelling anecdote, concrete example, real-life puzzle, or powerful overview, which should come in the first paragraph.
- Explain the topic you are studying, the material you will cover, and your argument about it; this overview of the project should come soon after the opening paragraphs.
- Orient your reader by giving a "road map" for the overall paper, explaining briefly the order of upcoming sections and what each will do; this should come at the end of the introductory section.

Let's see how these goals are accomplished. How can you do them well? How can you avoid the pitfalls?