

10 Steps to Successful Reading FOR Evidence and Writing WITH Evidence

These basic steps apply to any question (whether history or work or life) where you have to figure things out accurately and quickly—and be brief but absolutely as true as you can.

An Analogy to Help You Figure Out How Figuring Things Out Is Different from Collecting Facts for a Research Paper

The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* defines **figure out** as “discover” or “determine” or “solve.” I overheard a math prof explain figuring out in the briefest way. A student asked for help with a math problem and was trying to think it through in her head. The math prof stopped her, told her to get out paper and pencil, and said:

“This is too big to work in your head.”

If you are just collecting information for a general paper, you can probably work as you did as a kid and be OK. On the other hand, if you need to **figure** something out **accurately** and **quickly**, you need paper and pencil to work—to modify to understand more and **to reject** some things if necessary. Do not type until you figure it out. Typing before then is **not** a good idea because people tend:

- To hold tight to anything they typed as though it must be valuable (If it is **not** true, it is **not** valuable.)
- To believe what they type (As the Internet proves every day, typing does not make something true.)

The information below can help you—and I am glad to help **each** of you.

Background on Visuals for Figuring Things Out

The first visual you use to help your brain understand depends on the problem that you **think** you face. Sometimes you find that the information is more complex or complex in a different way than you thought. Common visuals for figuring things out:

What Are You Trying to Figure Out	Visual to Try with a Pencil and Notebook Paper
Who did what to whom and why and what changed	Sets of stick figures sketched in time order
Who did what to whom and there are many detailed actions occurring	Sets of stick figures sketched in time order but with numbers added to help you see multiple actions in time order
Who did what to whom and why and what changed and you need to compare what happened, especially if there are changes over time Tip: All of the writing topics in this class are about change over time.	5 Ws Chart (explained below) Tip: After years of work figuring things out, I learned that behind every clear 5 Ws Chart there were 2 (or more) charts that I rejected and then tried again. It takes re-thinking to figure something out.

Background on a 5 Ws Chart – The Easiest Way to See Interconnections in Complex Information

A 5Ws Chart forces you to look at **all** of the issues with many actions going on. Honorable reporters (and you) are expected to cover at least these things:

- Who?
- What?
- When? (for this class, not a specific date but a period of time or an order of events)
- Where?
- Why?
- and sometimes *How?*

Be sure you:

- Line things up in each of the time periods so you can see changes easily. When you are doing this for yourself, just write the 5 Ws Chart on a piece of notebook paper with lines, but this shows you how you might make chart for a question about how foreign policy (or **any** other issue) changed from one document to another. If you have 3

documents, you need 3 columns. Notice how the columns are in time order from earliest on the left to latest on the right.

5Ws	Foreign Policy in the Earliest Document	Foreign Policy in the Middle Document	Foreign Policy in the Latest Document
Who			
What			
When			
Where			
Why			
How			

- With the writing work in this course, do **not** go to any resources outside of the course, except the textbook.
- Limit yourself to a **word or two** for each thing. Refer to things in the book or primary; don't copy what is in the book, especially not a quotation.
- Always make sure you understand the question. For example, if you are answering a question is about a region, a type of worker, or any category, always check that you have the right one.
- Write down the specific page number where you can find a specific fact you place in the chart. (If facts in a section of the chart are from one page, you may place the page number after the last fact.)
- Do not write down quotations at this stage. Instead, if you think you might want to quote a phrase, write the word QUOTE? and the page number in the 5 Ws Chart as a reminder.

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1. Read with care and for accuracy and then log what you have read into a 5 Ws Chart. Be sure to record the page numbers as you read.

Tips:

- Do **not** take notes from your textbook or your primary source in a separate notebook. If you have this habit, click [here for why you want to replace this habit](#). (This link takes you to the bottom of this webpage.)
 - For writing assignments in this course, use my **exact** pages listed in the course.
 - For your future **outside** of this course, remember these additional tips:
Your best buddy on the job or in a class is the index to the document you are required to use. The index is at the back of the book. It is in alphabetical order and often has subcategories that help you. When you don't know what pages in the textbook might help you answer a question, do this:
 - a. Check to see the page number of the **last** page of the **last** chapter that your current work is covering.
 - b. Then go to the index at the back of the book.
 - c. Look up words in the index that are in the question and are also **before** the last page number that your current work is covering
 - d. Jot the page numbers down on a piece of paper and look them up and read them.
 - e. When the pages apply to the question, read carefully and record in the 5Ws chart using the method explained above.
2. **After** you have logged everything, tentatively identify about 3 or so things you plan to discuss in your answer and how you will try to teach it to another person. There are two common ways to explain or teach things:
 - **Summaries of issues**--and with some kinds of assignments that can be a safer approach
Example: You are covering 3 foreign policy documents in 3 different time periods so you plan to cover each time period in a separate paragraph (3 paragraphs total), with the earliest first, and you plan to cover in each paragraph these same big issues (and there are lots of possible issues) for each document:
 - what was going on when the person wrote the policy

- what the policy said should happen
 - one or two examples of how that policy worked out
- Examine specific issues in the documents **one by one**.
Example: You are covering the same 3 foreign policy documents and you know the same content but you want to reveal those 3 documents by focusing on 2 big issues. You would have a really short 1 paragraph introduction about these 2 big issues and then 1 paragraph on issue a) and 1 on issue b)::
 - a) Whether the person who wrote the policy needed to accomplish what was in the policy but also needed to accomplish some larger issue not in the policy
 - b) Whether the person who wrote the policy could carry it out without the help of other nations
3. **After** you decide on your issues and the best way to teach them, you can mark them on your 5Ws chart with a big checkmark (or an arrow or a number of the paragraph you plan or something that works for you). Keep working from the 5Ws chart. You can use the **same** 5Ws chart for steps 3 through 9.
 4. Using your 5 Ws chart, practice **aloud** as though you were teaching someone who is smart and wants to learn but knows nothing about this subject.
 5. When you cannot speak without stammering around, that means you do **not** understand. What do you do? Go read **that** section again—and you can find the page quickly because the page number is on the 5 Ws chart.
 6. Do this until it you can explain aloud in a common sense way—it often takes five practices. By using the 5Ws chart and practicing aloud, you will catch your own errors in understanding and notice when you need to add or remove a fact.
Caution: Do **not** write your paper yet. Students who write before they have practiced several times believe their own errors.
 7. Now, you say your summaries or your analysis aloud one last time, typing as you speak. (Think of it as dictating to yourself.)
 - If you want to quote a phrase that you identified, open the book and quote it exactly. To avoid errors in quoting, use [the brain trick in this link](#).
 - Keep your book closed as you write. If you must check on something, open it briefly but close it again **before** you write a word.

 Why? If you have your book open when you write **or** you took extensive notes (see the tip with step 1), in almost all cases you will make **both** these errors:
 - Plagiarize or do a “half-copy” version of plagiarism (to use the term in *The Bedford Handbook*)
 - Be factually inaccurate
 8. When you have finished typing your paper, upload your work to Turnitin in Blackboard so that it can check your paper for both language errors and possible plagiarism. Ask if you need help.
 9. Double check your work and carefully make any corrections:
 - Read your paper syllable by syllable—ideally in a funny accent that will force you to pay attention.
 - Check your paper against each of the instructions for the assignment. Did you do everything?
 - Run spellcheck and grammar check with your paper, but do not make corrections automatically.
 - Check your citations: some people benefit by using [this tactile method to make sure their citations are correct](#).

Here are additional tips on how to prevent different types of errors:

- [How to verify content before you write](#)
- [How to check evidence in your written work](#)

- [How to proof quotations](#) - Plus the [Basics about Quotations](#))
- [How to proofread for clarity](#)

10. If you can wait 24 hours, check your paper again.

Look at This Part ONLY If You Think You Ought to Take Notes in a Notebook When You Read

Taking notes in a separate notebook or on paper can be useful if you are collecting information that you do not have easy access to. The typical example of when it is OK to take notes is when you are collecting information for a term paper when you can't check out the source.

If you take notes in a notebook when you read a textbook or when you read anything you have to *do* something with, it is dangerous to your success. The simplest way to put it is:

- Taking notes is your first—and therefore your **worst**—understanding.
- Why would you keep studying your **worst** understanding?

IF you are absolutely sure that taking notes from your textbook is something you *ought* to do, then click [here for a PowerPoint video on the danger of taking notes separately from your source](#). (It is one I did years and years ago.)

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