

Writing the Investigative Essay or Feature article

Before writing

- Start the process by asking a question that you want to answer—a question that's not too broad and not too narrow
- Don't look only for sources to support what you already think (or think you know) about a topic—be open to learning, and to complicating your discussion.
- Take careful notes, including your own reactions, summaries, paraphrases, and questions about the articles and book chapters you read
- Consider your audience: who in particular would you like to read your article/essay?

Putting it together—you need:

- **Context**—i.e., how you will frame your discussion
- **Background:** lay out the groundwork necessary for readers to understand key concepts and issues, including defining terms as needed. Note: While you may provide some of it in a chunk (think of Marcia Angell's ¶ how the brain and neurotransmitters work) you will probably also need to introduce some of it as you go—large chunks of technical language and concepts are hard for readers to digest.
- **Content:** If you are struggling to know what to say, you probably haven't read enough. As Elise Hancock reminds us, we need to know more than we are going to write, to write something confident and worthwhile.
- Make **distinctions and comparisons** between or among issues, explanations, points of view—i.e., when we make distinctions explicit, we make it easier for readers to see what we are saying; we give our discussion a clear shape.
- Include a **variety of good evidence:**
 - Examples, including stories & scenes and studies
 - Facts & statistics,
 - Comments from writers and experts,
 - Your own observations and/or those of professors, classmates, friends, movies...
- Include **evidence on more than one side of a question;** anticipate readers' or experts' questions or criticisms. (We call this counterargument.)
- **Your own reasoning**—in the way you direct readers' attention, make comparisons, ask questions, provide emphasis, link ideas
- **Keep coming back to the question you are trying to answer** (and, if it's an essay, keep building toward your thesis—the answer to your question.)
- **Good writing!**—i.e., clear, vivid prose that uses images, metaphors and analogies, and other rhetorical devices to invite readers in, keep them interested, and make them happy to be reading and learning.

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