Introduction
You are reading the very first edition of the Gordon State’s in-house writing guide. Members of the Gordon faculty have collaborated on the authorship of this guide, and it is targeted directly at Gordon students to help them with their writing across the GSC curriculum. This guide provides at least three distinct advantages over other guides: it is specifically targeted to Gordon State students, it covers writing across the whole curriculum, not just English; and it is free.

Many approaches to crafting this guide were entertained, but the authors decided that what students really want from a composition guide are practical examples of writing that they might actually encounter in their classroom experiences at Gordon. Many guides try to do this, but this guide uses real Gordon professors and real Gordon class assignments as a starting point. This results in what we feel is a substantial improvement over other available writing guides.

This guide was created as a product of the Gordon State College Composition Consortium, which is a group of faculty members from several disciplines. English faculty were well-represented, but faculty members from other disciplines have been given a balanced voice in the process, advising the English faculty on what features of writing in their disciplines are most important to them. These other faculty members sometimes also wrote full sections.

There are many benefits in using this guide beyond the rules of punctuation and grammar. More than anything, it will provide you with the tools you need to succeed in your college writing career in all disciplines, from your first semester to your last. Perhaps most importantly to the student with limited financial resources, this guide’s cost represents a substantial savings from the $90.00 composition guide that it replaces. (You’re welcome.)

This guide is organized according to the Areas of your Core Curriculum. The Core divides the subjects you study by Areas, and since writing is a factor in all subjects of study, and since the purposes and features of your writing will differ from one Area to the next, organizing this guide by Area seems to make the most sense and to be the most convenient. You will also be able to navigate through this guide with a good understanding of the Core curriculum.

The authors of this guide have taken the idea of Core curriculum and have applied it to writing throughout the Gordon State College experience. Many students will first be introduced to this guide when taking those all-important two English classes—English 1101 and English 1102. But the guide can be used to assist with writing tasks in all sorts of classes—from Health Science to Mathematics, and from Sociology to Theatre Arts. Wherever there is writing at GSC (and it is just about everywhere), this guide is there to help.

-Dr. Wesley Venus
-Dr. Mark King
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0. Why Write?

0.1 Writing everywhere
We sit in a coffee shop, hunched over our laptops, writing. As we walk across campus, we write using our thumbs and a smartphone keyboard. We arrive at our classroom, take out a notebook and write notes as the professor lectures. When he’s not looking, we take out another small piece of paper and jot down a list of “things to do” for that evening. After class, an attractive classmate gives us his or her number and we “write” it in our phone’s list of contacts. Pleased to have received such a valuable artifact, we write about our good fortune on social media. Writing, writing, writing. Writing is so common in our society that at first the question, “why write?” might seem pointless and take readers aback—“why write?” How could we not write? Haven’t human beings always written? After all, isn’t writing “natural”?

0.2 No writing?
It is not difficult to imagine a world without writing. In fact, for much of humanity’s two-hundred thousand years on the planet, people did not write (Zolfaharifard); writing only developed around 3,000 BC in the part of the world now known as Iraq (“Why Do We?”). So that means that for more than three quarters of humanity’s time on this planet, we didn’t write at all. What’s more, even after 3,000 BC, most of humankind were still non-writers: widespread literacy didn’t happen in the West until the nineteenth century or so (Mitch). Many believe that The Odyssey, arguably one of the greatest achievements in the Western literary tradition, was composed by a poet who could not write (Burgess 88). Maybe humankind won’t always write; maybe we’re one of the last generations to do so.

We don’t have to write; even today, it is possible to imagine a world with no writing. At some institutions, college examinations are still given orally: that is, a team of professors ask the student questions and the student replies on the spot—no pen or pencil required. Today, some of us prefer to leave voice mail messages rather than to send texts. Others discard the printed “How To” directions with a new gadget to search for a YouTube video explaining the same thing.

0.3 Natural?
Moreover, writing is not natural. Arguably, writing is decidedly unnatural: writing takes the jumble of our distinctively non-linear thoughts and forces those non-linear thoughts into tight linear rows of clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. There is even something mystical or dangerous about the act of writing: classical poets call upon the ancient Greek muses and ask for their blessings before venturing into the tricky world of epic poetry. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates never did get over his suspicion of writing. Socrates felt that if students could simply access knowledge that had been written, they might mistake having access to data for actual wisdom (“Why Do We?”). One can only wonder what Socrates would made of Google.
0.4. Six reasons to write

Although writing may not be natural, it sure is common. As mentioned earlier, it seems as if almost everyone is writing almost all the time—text messages, social media updates, essays, Yelp restaurant reviews. Certainly more people in history are writing now than ever before and they’re writing more text than ever before. The question remains: why? There is not just one answer to that question as we write for a number of reasons. We write for fun, for money, to share, to think, to remember, and to show what we think.

0.4.1 Write for fun

For some, even for those who write a lot, writing is a chore. Even some professional writers claim to dislike writing. A quotation often attributed to Dorothy Parker sums it up this way: “I don’t like writing. I like having written.” For others, the writing experience is even worse than a chore; they might call it sheer torture. But for some lucky folks, writing is a pleasurable activity. They delight in nothing more than being able to pen a long letter to a friend in a distant city or fire off a sharply worded two-thousand word letter to the editor of their local paper. For these people, writing is a source of fun. Lucky ducks.

0.4.2 Write for money

Though the number of those who make their livings via writing novels or poems is relatively small, when we expand the list of professional writers to include advertising copywriters, journalists, bloggers, and those in corporate communications, writing forms a fairly sizable part of the modern economy. When all of those in writing-related fields are added (the copy-editors, proofreaders, teachers, editors, and publishers) writing is more than “fairly sizable;} it is significant. In fact, at least one person thought that this was the only reason to write. Samuel Johnson once said, “No man but a blockhead ever wrote but for money” (qtd. in Boswell).

0.4.3. Write to share

Diarists, mooney-eyed lovers, religious leaders, facebook posters, poets from Shakespeare all the way to 2Pac Shakur, and even those self-appointed “experts” who post in the “comments” sections of on-line articles have felt an irresistible compulsion to let others know exactly what is in their hearts. For these sharers writing is an attempt to connect with their fellow human beings.

0.4.4 Write to remember

The student jotting down a homework assignment in a day planner, the owner of a new computer writing down a password on a Post-it note, the parent painstakingly making a grocery list before heading to the store, and the aged statesman sitting down to write his memoirs are all writing to remember. Even in our increasingly digitalized age, writing is still usually the best way to remember something. Indeed, many have learned to regret saying, “I don’t need to write it
down; I can remember it." Our memories are faulty and writing preserves our thoughts.

0.4.5 Write to clarify thinking
Sometimes, people don’t know exactly what they feel about an issue until they take the time to write about it. It is difficult to describe, but it seems as though there is something about the way writing forces us to organize our thoughts into sentences and paragraphs helps clean up muddy thinking. Thus, writing can be said to have a didactic quality to it—it aids in critical thinking.

0.4.6 Write to demonstrate thinking
One of the things that writing can do is serve as a veritable “snapshot” of a person’s mind. It is a unique activity that allows others to see exactly how a person thought about something. This aspect of writing is especially useful in college. If instructors had unlimited time (and classes contained very few students) they could give oral examinations. But instead, the modern college campus allows the student to explain to the professor how much (or how little) the student understands about the concept at hand. The writing may be just a phrase on an examination, or it might be a ten-page paper, but either way, the student demonstrates mastery of the subject through writing. By the way, the student who claims, “I understand the concept perfectly, I just have trouble putting it into words,” usually doesn’t understand it all that perfectly. At any rate, it is this last reason to write—to offer a “snapshot” of our thinking that will motivate much of the writing that students will do in college and be the focus for much of this book.

0.5 Three key elements in writing
Any piece of writing will have a number of elements in it, but arguably the three most important elements in any piece of writing are the writer, the audience, and the text or the subject. Writing has be about something (the subject). Someone has to do the writing (the writer). And, finally, the writing has to be aimed at someone (the audience). Take away any one of those elements and the writing would cease to exist. In fact, these three elements can be arranged in a triangle.

0.5.1 What is on top?
Even though every piece of writing has all three elements at work in it, the balance of attention given to each one of those elements is not always equal. It is a triangle, after all, and triangles have tops. Some forms of writing privilege the writer, some the text, and some the audience.
0.5.2. Writer on top
Some types of writing tend to privilege the role of the writer. That is to say, that type of writing is mostly about the person doing the writing. Some examples of this type of writing might include an autobiography, certain types of poetry—especially romantic poetry, or a diary or journal entry. More recent types of writing that privilege the role of the writer include such disparate types of writing as a love song, “Yesterday, all my troubles were so far away…” (Beatles). A facebook post, for example, is often ALL about the writer—to the detriment of everything else. Certainly it is no secret that a hefty percentage of rap music is about the writer as is the case in 2Pac’s “Me Against the World;” the “me” of the title is not some abstract, made-up character. That “me” in “Me Against the World” is 2Pac, the artist himself.

0.5.3. Subject (or text) on top
But that, “it’s all about me” approach is not the only way to write. A text is not always about the person speaking; sometimes it is about the subject at hand. For example, think about a textbook. The writers of a college chemistry textbook do not waste time and paper space discussing their feelings about magnesium with their readers; to do so would be silly. Their work is not personal, it is *expository*; the book will uncover (or “expose”) the secrets of chemistry to the uninitiated. Other examples of this sort of writing include encyclopedia articles, unbiased newspaper accounts, technical manuals, and cookbooks. Much, but by no means all, of the writing that students do in college will privilege the subject.

0.5.4 Audience (or reader) on top
There are also instances of writing that are focused on neither the writer nor the subject, but on the audience or reader. For example, if an inconsiderate boyfriend had to write a letter explaining his bad behavior to his girlfriend he might write something like, “There’s nothing as important as you are; even though I don’t always show it, you are the most important thing in my life.” Think about how advertisements work: what makes a good advertisement? On the simplest level, a good advertisement is simply one that successfully encourages the audience to purchase the intended product. Political communication works the same way: a Republican party television commercial is successful only to the extent that it motivates its viewership to vote for Republican candidates. In much college writing the audience is always going to be composed or partially composed of the professor. It is important to remember that when making choices as to appropriate voice and diction.

With three different ways to privilege a text (writer, subject, or audience), the student might ask, “which one is the right way?” The answer to that is whatever one is appropriate to the situation at hand.

It is not hard to imagine what happens when this work is done in an inappropriate manner. If you have ever read a facebook post and then thought, “Ick: too much information; who cares?” then you know what it is like to read work that is inappropriately personal. But that is not the only way to misjudge appropriateness in writing. A love note that only coldly discusses the physiological reactions associated with love, or one that outlines the history of the love poem from Petrarch to Walt Whitman would not be very effective. It is simply not appropriate in that situation to not talk about one’s self.

Similarly, if given the college English class assignment to trace the history of the love poem from Petrarch to Walt Whitman, it would not be appropriate for a student writer to talk about the funny feeling he gets in his chest and the way he always feels flush when a particularly attractive female classmate walks by.

0.6 Summary
Writing, although not natural, is hard to get away from; it is almost everywhere in our culture. People write for a number of reasons—to share, to remember, to make money, to have fun, and to show what is on their mind. Every piece of writing has three key elements—its writer, its subject and its intended audience. Writers should consider appropriateness when embarking on a writing project.
0.7 Works Cited