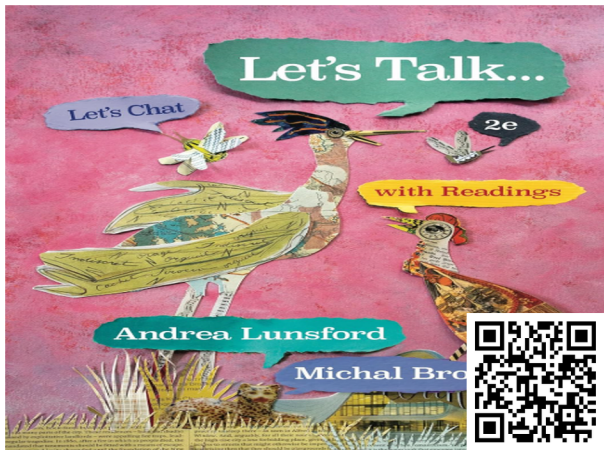


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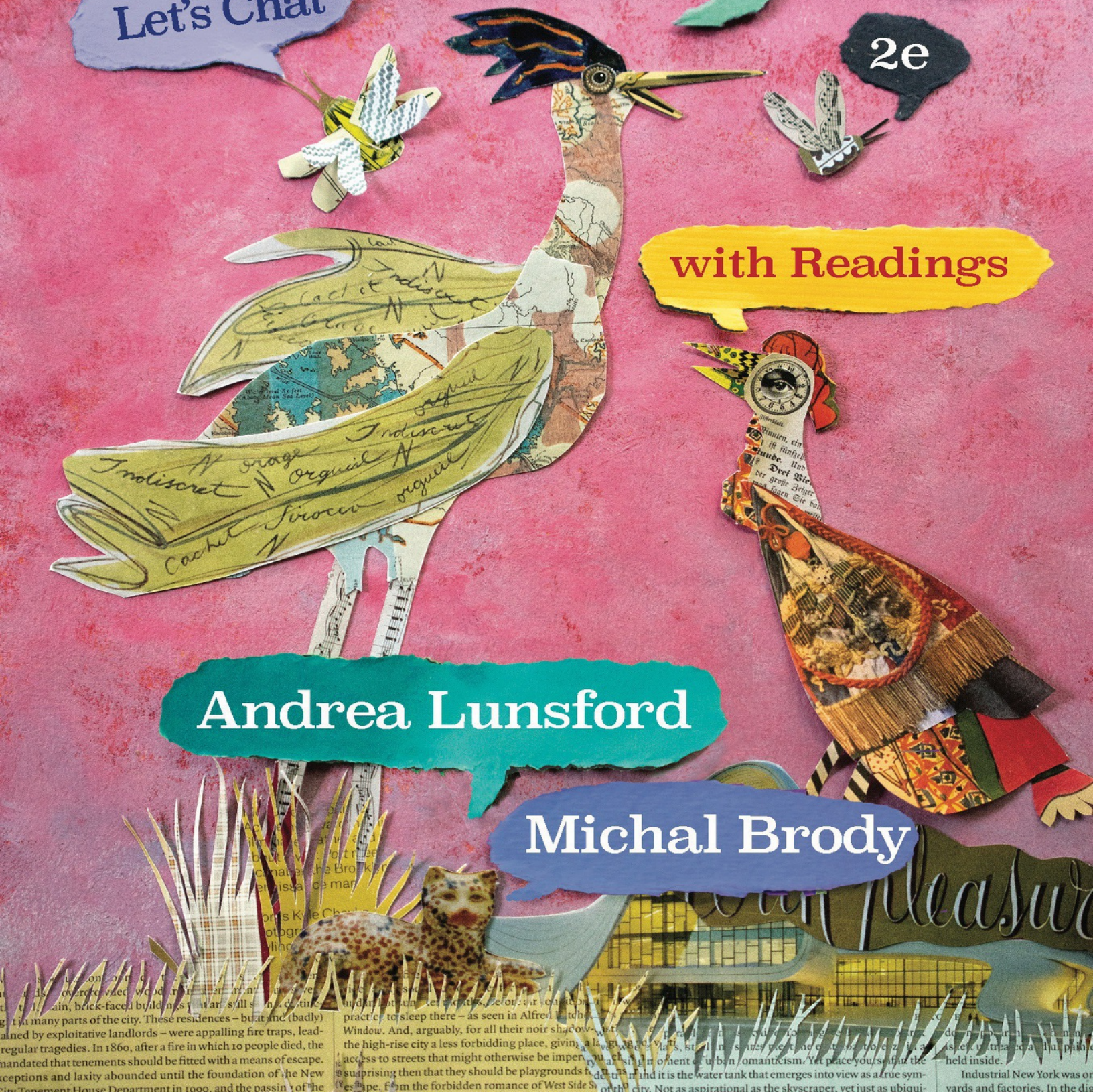
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with Readings

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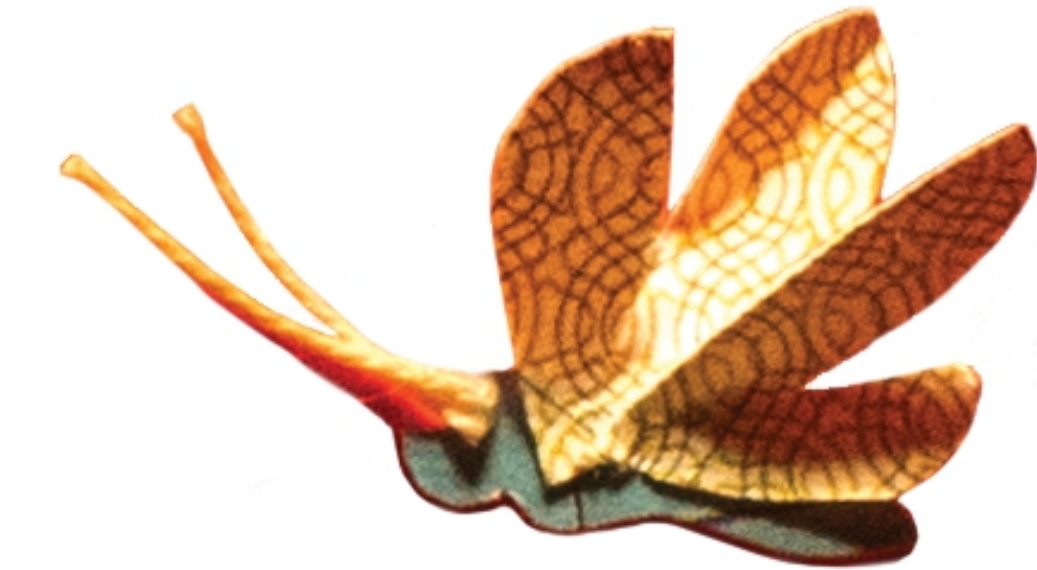
Michal Brody



Publisher's Notice

Please note that this version of the ebook does not include access to any media or print supplements that are sold packaged with the printed book.

About the Cover



Talk is at the very heart of any society, including that of our fine-feathered friends the birds, who talk, negotiate, and share information with each other across vast distances. The birds on this cover are certainly talking with one another—and *chatting!*—even though they’re very different kinds of birds. Even the little bugs and the ground the birds are standing on seem to be in on the conversation.

Now take a closer look: you’ll see that they are all made up of text—words, maps, music, bits of images, and in several languages (French! German! English!)—reflecting the ways that text helps shape who we are.

Think about the title. *Let’s Talk* is short for “let us talk”—and “us” means *all* of us, from all points of view and perspectives, from all walks of life, from all places. And the three dots bring to mind the blinking dots when someone is responding to a text. So “let’s talk” assumes at the very least a two-way conversation, and at its best a gathering of many voices.

So the cover of this book, entitled *Feathered friends 2* by award-winning graphic designer Stephen Doyle, sends an invitation we hope you will accept: Come on in! Join us! Let’s talk! Let’s chat! Let’s write!

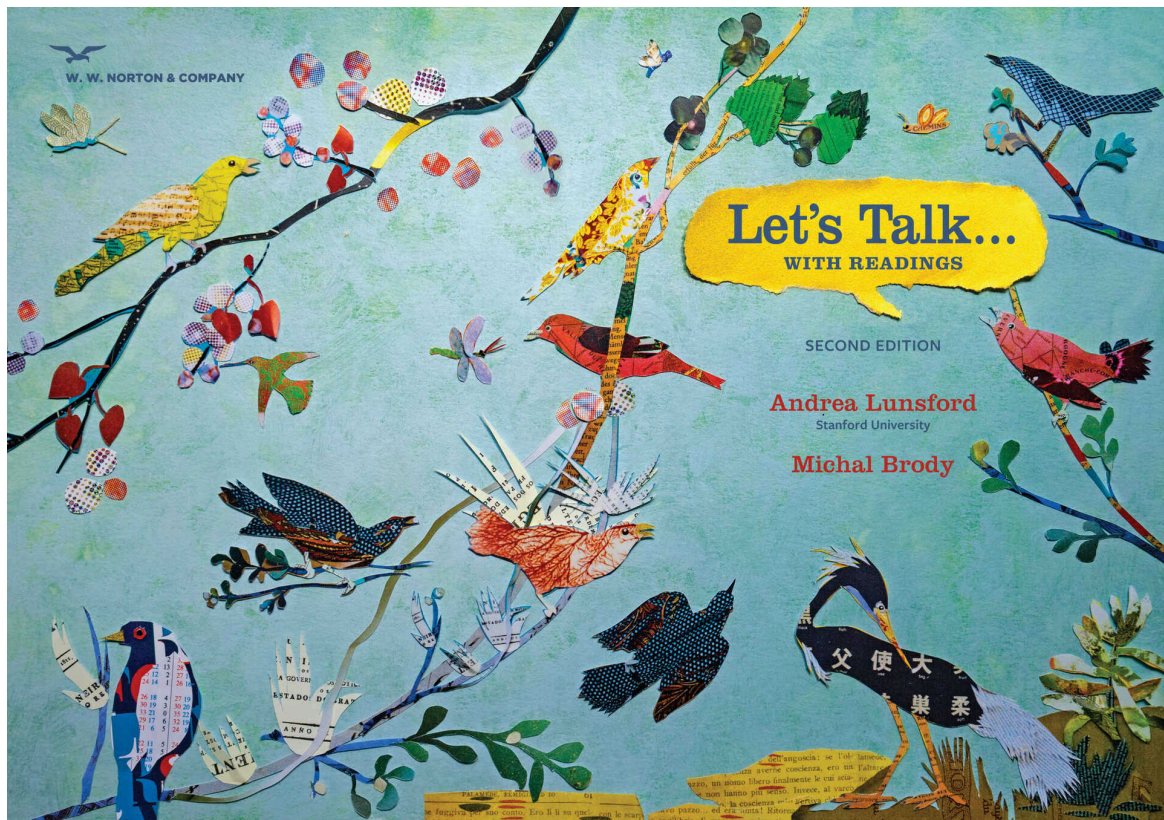


Let's Talk...

WITH READINGS

SECOND EDITION





Dedication

I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity.

MALCOLM X (1925–65)

Preface

As I write this preface, we are deep into September—my favorite time of year. Back to school time. Time to welcome new first-year students to our campuses, to our classrooms, and into our hearts. Time to listen to their hopes and dreams and aspirations.

And yet. Increasingly, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires threaten communities across the land. On some of our campuses, concerns about food insecurity and adequate housing loom large. And the deep divisions throughout our society continue to affect the way we regard and care for one another. So listening to our students also means engaging with their genuine fears and anxieties. As they gather to begin a new year, many of them are struggling—feeling fearful about the future, having trouble engaging with their classes or completing their assignments, “doing school” with much enthusiasm or hope.

And yet. It is still the beginning of a new school year. And we go on. As teachers everywhere, and especially teachers of writing, we go on as we always have—making connections with our students by listening, really listening.

Making and sustaining connections has been at the heart of my efforts over the years to meet all students where they are, to stretch out a hand, to listen and to learn, and to provide help where I can. And I’ve tried to do so not only with my own students, but in the work I do on textbooks—and now in this second edition of *Let’s Talk with Readings*.

When I first imagined this book, I aimed to provide a short, sweet, and inexpensive little rhetoric that would provide just the guidance today’s students need to succeed in writing. But as I dug in, I saw that students didn’t just need help with writing: they needed help with engaging in classroom discussions, with listening to and understanding people whose beliefs differed from theirs, with having their say without silencing others. Hence the title, *Let’s Talk*, with chapters on **Listening** and **Engaging Respectfully with Others**—and essays, examples, and epigraphs from over 200 people, making it a book of many diverse voices, some I agree with and some I definitely do not!

And yet. Times change, and the last few years have brought new challenges. Who could have anticipated the advent of generative AI, or the sheer intensity of campus protests that pit student against student? What in this environment could *Let’s Talk* do to help? For a start, might it help encourage students to stop shouting and start talking to one another, to get out of their polarized stances and into some real conversation?

That’s a goal that led to a new part, on **Speaking with Others**, which includes three new chapters. First comes a chapter on **The Need for Conversation**, which aims to help move students beyond the agonistic debate that’s so prevalent today and into open and productive conversation—talking *with* rather than *at* one another. This chapter provides guidelines for conversations across a range of situations, including those that are difficult and contentious, and for letting others speak rather than shouting down people whose ideas they dislike or even loathe.

Then comes another new chapter, **Let’s Chat: Using AI Carefully & Ethically**, which aims to guide students as they learn to negotiate the new AI terrain, using it as a tool that can *help* them write rather than as something that writes *for* them, and recognizing what it can and cannot do. Finally comes **Presentations & Podcasts**, which covers kinds of speaking that students are often assigned to do, and that they listen to and do themselves.

And that's not all. We've also added three other new chapters. **The Role of Argument in Our Lives** shows students that argument is central to almost all writing. So this is a go-to chapter that will support them in the many kinds of writing they do, from a personal narrative in sociology to an analysis in history or a lab report in engineering. And a new chapter on **Reviewing** covers a genre many instructors have asked for, and one that provides yet another opportunity for students to grapple with complex ideas and to consider many points of view, with examples from *Gilmore Girls* to *Killers of the Flower Moon* that we hope will resonate with our students. And a new chapter of readings focuses on the question **In What Ways Does Pop Culture Shape Who We Are?**, with selections that bring in a range of voices from an author in San Quentin on listening to Taylor Swift in prison to a Baptist minister and divinity school professor on Beyoncé as “something of a religious prophet” to a reporter for a business publication on the history of hip-hop.

And several chapters have been revised. The reporting chapter has been expanded to cover both **Synthesizing & Reporting**, making it one that could serve as a framework for developing a research project. And the chapter on mixing languages and dialects has been broadened to focus on **Using Languages & Dialects Rhetorically**, a chapter that will prompt students to think about their use of language in any (and every!) situation. The readings chapter on the inequities that divide us has been refocused to address **The Diversities That Unite Us**.

You'll also hear many new voices in this book, from Jay-Z to Ethan Mollick, Mary Oliver to Dawn Staley, Tommy Orange to Jimmy Santiago Baca—to name only a few. In short, I hope there'll be a lot for you and your students to talk *about* and to talk *with* in this new edition—to talk as a means of connecting and understanding, as a way of sharing, as conversations that will lead to and embody learning.

I'm excited about this book, and about the important new material we've added. And yet. I know that this book will come alive only in the hands of you and your students, and in conversations that will have at least a chance of changing them, and maybe the world they inhabit, for the better.

Acknowledgments

One set of voices echoing in the pages of this book is those of the many friends, colleagues, and reviewers who have prodded, questioned, sometimes heckled, and ultimately inspired me to think harder and more deeply, to identify weak spots (and to improve them), to meet students where they are and to recognize and honor the wisdom and strengths they bring with them into our classrooms. In fact, one hallmark of this book is its multivocality, its inclusion of and attention to a wide range of diverse and lively voices. Among these in *Let's Talk with Readings* is that of co-author Michal Brody, curator of the readings. As a sociolinguist, Michal has an eye for out-of-the-box stories—and a wit to match. Next is our editor, the inimitable Marilyn Moller; for almost forty years (and counting!), Marilyn's ingenuity, tough-mindedness, and sheer brilliance have challenged and inspired me to reach beyond my grasp, to try and try—and then try again. We often joke that we are “two women with one brain,” meaning that our partnership has enriched my thinking and my life, every day. One of Marilyn's many strokes of genius led us to the world-renowned graphic designer Stephen Doyle, whom she somehow convinced to design *Let's Talk*. His consummate artistry and razor-sharp wit are on display in the cover designs and throughout the book, and we are profoundly grateful for his contributions to this project.

We are also fortunate to have the support of a magnificent team at Norton, starting with Christine D'Antonio, who consistently goes above and beyond, and has skillfully guided this book from manuscript to final pages, improving it immensely along the way. Next comes Jane Searle, who has produced the book beautifully and, miraculously, on time—and contributed both her words and image to the book as well.

And very special thanks to Debra Morton Hoyt, Rubina Yeh, and Michael Wood for overseeing the entire design of this book, and to Tyson Cantrell for the whimsical interior design, one that has made this book easy to use.

Many others have given their time and talent to this project. Special thanks to Melinda Patelli and Josh Garvin for securing permission for the many images and texts. And we owe an especially big thank-you to Claire Wallace for her excellent work on *InQuizitive for Writers* and *Let's Teach*—and for truly heroic work on the MLA and APA chapters. Big thanks as well to Caroline Fairey Meese for her help finding (and editing) good examples and images, and to Anthony Cardellini, for assistance on so many things both large and small.

We're similarly grateful to Joy Cranshaw and Lindsey Heale for all they've done for media, to Sophia Purut and Jay Barrett for all they've done for the ebook, and especially to Kim Yi for making sure everything ran smoothly. Thanks also go to Jodi Beder for her very careful copyediting, Mary Kanable for proofreading, and Eric Chernov for his work updating the index.

Thanks as well to Michele Dobbins, Elizabeth Pieslor, Heidi Balas, Sarah Purnell, Ryan Schwab, and Emily Frankenberger for all they've done and will be doing to introduce *Let's Talk with Readings* to teachers across the country—and as always to Erik Fahlgren and the fabled Norton travelers: they rock!

As always we are grateful to Ann Shin, Mike Wright, and Julia Reidhead for their unwavering and enthusiastic support for this book.

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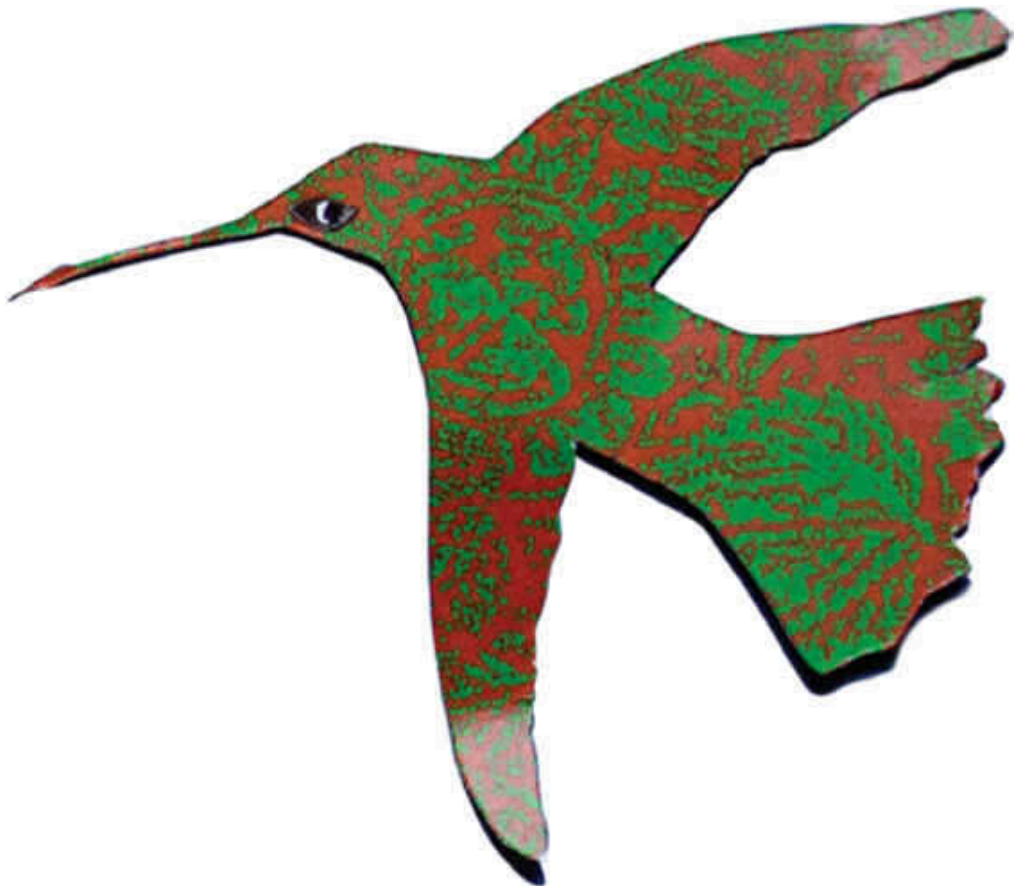
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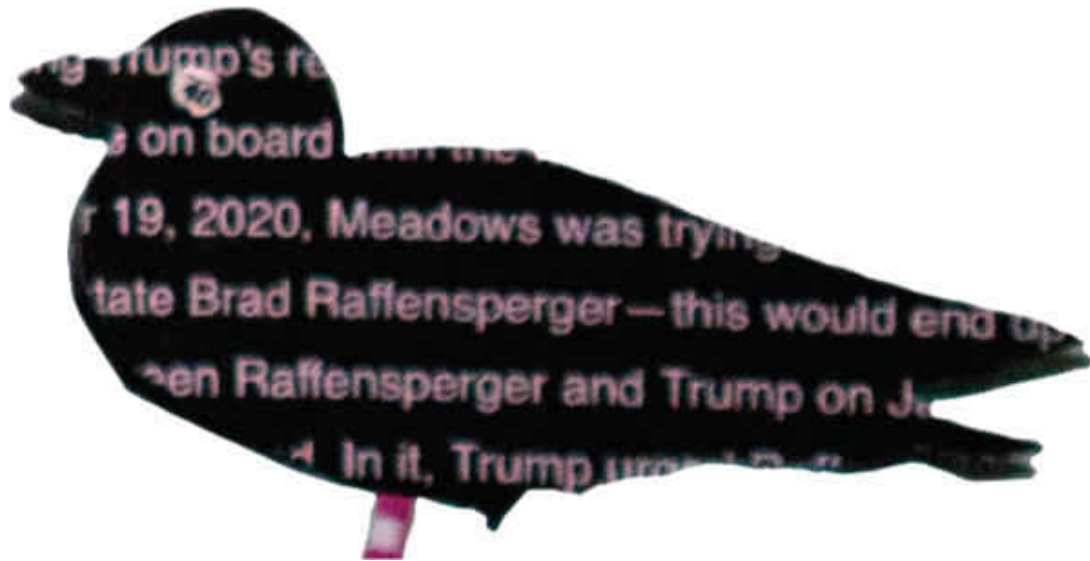
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How to Use This Book

You could look it up.

—JAMES THURBER

Many people attribute the above statement to Casey Stengel, the late great manager of the New York Yankees. But if in fact you do look it up, you'll find that it comes from the title of a short story written by James Thurber. Whoever said it first, it works for this book. Whether you're trying to figure out how to conclude an essay, fact-check an outlandish statement, or come up with a good title, *Let's Talk with Readings* is here to help. And whatever the advice or help you're looking for, here are various ways you can look it up.

Brief menu. If you're looking for a specific chapter, check [the Brief Menu](#) on the inside front cover. If you're looking for a specific section of a chapter, look in the Contents on [pages xvii–xxxi](#).

Directory of readings. You'll find a list of all the readings on the [inside back cover](#) of the book.

Glossary/index. The fastest way to find something in any book is with the index, and this book combines the glossary and the index where you'll find both the definitions of key terms and concepts and the pages where you'll find more detail. Words highlighted in **RED** are all defined there, and many of the definitions include enough detail that you'll find all you need there.

Color-coded organization. The various parts of this book are color-coded for easy reference: green for the **INTRODUCTION**, turquoise for the **RHETORIC** chapters, orange for the **WRITING** chapters, gold for the **READING** chapters, blue for the **RESEARCH** chapters, pink for **MLA**, light blue for **APA**, blue-green for **LANGUAGE & STYLE**, tan for **DESIGN**, purple for **MEDIA**, gray-green for the **READINGS**, and red for the **GLOSSARY/INDEX**.

Writing guides. [Chapters 9 to 15](#) cover eight kinds of writing that college students are often assigned to do, along with essays written by students demonstrating each kind of writing.

Index of common kinds of writing. Whatever kind of writing you are assigned or simply decide to do, you'll find guidance in this book. In this section, you'll see a list of commonly assigned kinds of writing and where you'll find help in this book.

A roadmap for doing research refers you to pages in the book you'll want to consult when doing research.

MLA and APA guidelines. If you need to document sources, turn to [Chapters 22](#) for MLA style and [23](#) for APA. Each chapter provides color-coded templates that show what information to include, along with documentation maps showing where to find that information. Directories in the back of the book will lead you to the specific examples you need. You'll also find a full MLA-style research essay on [page 420](#) and an APA-style essay on [page 462](#).

The LetsTalkLibrary. Here you'll find an online collection of essays, articles, op-eds, videos, speeches, and more—all searchable by theme, genre, and medium. Check it out at letstalklibrary.com.

Editing what you write. This book comes with digital access to both *The Little Seagull Handbook* and *InQuizitive for Writers*. You'll find help with sentence-level editing in the *Little Seagull* and game-like practice editing common errors and working with sources in *InQuizitive*. Access is free with all new print copies and can be activated on the registration card included in the book. You can also purchase access at digital.wwnorton.com/letstalkreadings2.

Introduction: Stop! Look! Listen! and Write!

Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese Deserve Better

—*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

Fans Booing McDonald's Halloween Boo Baskets

—*THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH*

Wildfires Raging in California and Colorado

—NPR

Headlines like these jostle with hundreds of others vying for our attention, all too often leaving us out of breath just trying to keep up with “breaking news.” And while these three headlines report actual, factual information, much of the “news” that reaches us is based on misinformation and oddball conspiracy theories that aim at nothing so much as creating divisiveness, stoking fears, and inciting distrust. It’s enough to make us want to throw up our hands and just tune out. But I say: resist that urge!

If we have ever needed to put our critical thinking caps on, to take a deep breath, to *stop, look, and listen*, this is it. For all the junk that clogs our news feeds and inboxes, there’s much of real importance to think about, to read about, to talk about—and yes, to write about. And that’s what this book will help you do. To talk about these and other important issues with others, including those whose views differ from yours—and to listen to what they say, respectfully and with an open mind. To research topics and issues you care about as a matter of inquiry, searching for multiple perspectives rather than just for data to support what you already believe. And of course to write—as a way to explore ideas, to respond to something you’ve read or heard, to report on a topic you’ve researched or argue a position you want others to think about. In fact, thinking and writing almost always go hand in hand: as one of my students put it, “I really can’t think without a pen in my hand—or a mouse.” This book is here to help you do all that.

Stop!

In the face of so many urgent issues, it seems especially important to hit the pause button long enough to look very closely at these issues in all their immediate complexity. In other words, to resist the urge to rush from one tweet to another, one headline to the next. Instead, we need to slow down to a crawl, and then to a halt: close observation and real understanding take time and patience—they can’t be done on the fly. So turn off your devices, put distractions aside, and practice being still and open to what is happening around you.

Look!

We all have ways of seeing the world, some of which are so deeply ingrained that we're not even aware of them. So it's especially important to understand them, to look at where they come from, and to ask if they really reflect values we want to embrace. *We need to look at ourselves* as clearly as possible—our age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation; where we live, where we work and play, where we go to school, what interests we pursue—and ask how these factors lead us to see and understand the world from a certain position, and how that position keeps us from seeing the world as others from different backgrounds see it. This kind of up close and personal looking at ourselves is not easy. But it is necessary if we are to recognize and understand—and acknowledge—the role we may be playing in going along with the status quo, and even in perpetuating unjust systems.



Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.

ALAN ALDA

Consider the coronavirus, for instance. How do we understand competing beliefs about protecting people's health and respecting the rights of those who want to make their own decisions about their health, about whether or not to vaccinate, about something as simple as whether or not to wear a mask? The covid pandemic may now seem to be in the distant past, but as new variants continue to emerge, what are our responsibilities—to ourselves, our families, and our fellow citizens? And what can we actually do, what actions can we take?

Such choices, though often unconscious, reveal what we pay attention to and how they affect and limit what we see—and also what we read. So as a reader, you first need to be aware of how your preferences and ways of seeing the world lead you to value (and trust) some things and not others, and to think critically about what that means for what you know—and what you don't know. Second, you need to learn to pay close attention to what you read, especially when the stakes are high. Most of all, you need to read with an open mind, saying “maybe” to ideas you're not sure about and attempting to understand them before saying “no” or rejecting them. It means looking closely at texts you might once have rejected, giving them a chance to make their points to you, and being open to the idea that they just might be right. When you read in this way, you are actively reading to understand, to learn, and to respond thoughtfully to what someone else thinks.

Listen!

Where do you get most of your news? *Facebook*? *TikTok*? Take some time to switch gears and listen for half an hour or so to a news source you don't normally pay attention to—or even resist listening to (MSNBC, say, or Fox News). *Pay attention to how you are listening*: With sources you like, do you accept what you hear without questioning or even thinking about what they say? And with sources you don't like, are you listening with a chip on your shoulder, looking for ways they're wrong? All of us have such patterns of listening, so it's important to get a sense of where your listening biases lie and to keep them from clouding your good judgment.

In addition, we all need to listen consciously and critically, doing the kind of listening that rhetoric professor Krista Ratcliffe calls “rhetorical listening.” This kind of listening means opening yourself up to the views of others, even those with whom you disagree, and really hearing what they have to say. It means taking their views seriously, listening to really understand what they're saying.



We have to listen to other people, so that *we* and *they* may lay *our* stories alongside one another's.

KRISTA RATCLIFFE

This is the kind of listening that one student did when he read a series of *Facebook* posts attacking a politician in his Navajo community who “proudly supports” Donald Trump. Rather than joining them and screaming out “hate speech,” he responded to those posts with a call for listening and understanding. As he listened more carefully to this politician, he said:

I began to understand more about why she supports what we don't like. In her positions, I have to applaud her for having a clear and civil stance. She doesn't come off to me as aggressive like the comments have labeled her. We need to remember that she is also a loving mother, aunt, and relative in the community. Creating memes to “Put her in her own casket” is taking it too far! You don't understand what this kind of a violent witch hunt can do to a person. I am certain she means good.

Furthermore, social media has its good and bad sides, and learning more about an issue before posting that next hate speech is the best method for starting a proper conversation. I know that discussing politics is not all rainbows and butterflies. I get it. She is controversial. But taking time to at least know where she's coming from may help you understand her politics (even if, like me, you disagree). After understanding her stance, you can proceed to make a critique that's not violent or threatening.

—KYLE WHITE

This post is a product of sound rhetorical listening, of listening as a way of coming to understand another person. So the next time you're talking with someone with whom you deeply disagree, take a tip from Kyle White: don't attack, don't insult, don't hate. It's always better to stop and listen.

Think!

The listening and reading this book advocates, and the writing that grows out of them, go hand in hand with *thinking*—not just skimming over words and passages, but putting your mind to it and asking questions at every turn. But what does that really mean? It means paying very close attention and then asking serious and often detailed questions about what you are hearing or reading. In other words, it means not just agreeing or going along with it, but challenging it to convince you.



I don't write to make readers think like me. I write to make them think.

ANNA QUINDLEN

One student who was taking a course examining cultural stereotypes started wondering where his own largely negative impressions of Iran as a country of religious zealots came from. Since he was reading Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* for another course, he decided to make some notes about how Satrapi represents Iran, her home country—and he quickly saw that her perceptions of Iran differed from those he held. This careful reading led him to dig further, looking back to the time of the 1979 Iranian revolution, which overthrew the US-backed regime of the shah. Carefully and methodically, he read coverage of Iran in national newspapers and found that

New York Times reporting from 1979 reveals a narrative emphasizing a solidly unified, radical religious movement that brought the Islamic Republic into reality. Such a narrative laid the foundation for characterizations of Iran by future leaders, whether by President Bush in his famous claim that Iran was part of an “axis of evil” or by Iranian Mahmoud Ahmadinejad when he spoke of Holocaust denial in the name of Iran.

—DREW AGUILAR

This analysis led to further reading on Iranian history and especially on the diversity within Iran, a diversity that contradicted the monolithic stereotype he saw reflected in the *Times* coverage. At the end of his investigation, this student had not only learned a great deal about Iran; he had also thought about how narratives about entire countries can build up in our minds almost without our even noticing—and he was able to bring this new understanding to his reading of Satrapi’s famous graphic novel as well. Best of all, he was well prepared to write essays in both of his classes that drew on the knowledge he had gained and on his growing understanding of how cultural stereotypes get established and reinforced.

Act!

Taking time to stop, look, listen, think, and write can bring us only so far. Sooner or later we need to roll up our sleeves and do something—to take some kind of action. When 17-year-old Trayvon Brown, who had organized a protest following the death of George Floyd, found a burning cross propped up on the lawn of his home in Monroe, Virginia, he was so shocked and taken aback that the event stopped him in his tracks. What deeply held beliefs could have propelled such a hateful and violent attack? As he looked at the situation in his community and listened to those on both sides of the debate surrounding police violence, Brown came to the conclusion that he had to do something—to lead a second protest. Here’s what he said to those who joined him as the protest began:

This is your chance, young people. Y’all complain about the laws? Go change those laws. You don’t have to destroy anything. You don’t have to tear down statues.

—TRAYVON BROWN

As news of that second protest march had spread, counterprotesters were there as well, some waving Confederate flags, some armed. Law enforcement officials gathered to try to keep the two sides apart, as those on both sides began shouting angrily at each other. With tensions at a boiling point, Brown took another action: he knelt, raised his arm, and began shouting “I love you” to those on the other side. He was soon joined by the rest of the protesters, who did the same—thus defusing the situation and leading to a peaceful conclusion to the march.



Stand up, speak up, and speak out!

JOHN LEWIS

Remember the Golden Rule

Trayvon Brown's actions call to mind the Golden Rule, of "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you." Showing respect and concern for others and for their views will encourage them to reciprocate, and in so doing will pave the way for establishing common ground that can move a conversation forward. And doing so is pretty simple, even if sometimes challenging: you demonstrate concern when you take other people's feelings and thoughts and needs seriously, and respect when you acknowledge them as equals in conversation, when you listen to what they say carefully and with an open mind, and when you are truthful.

Such concern is especially necessary now, as raging wildfires and hurricanes have destroyed thousands of homes and flattened or flooded whole towns, and as the effects of climate change are more visible and frightening than ever. Such times call for us to think beyond our individual selves, to recognize that we are all in this together, and to take action not just for ourselves but for the greater good of all. In short, we need to focus less on "I" and more on "we," knowing that in helping—and respecting—others we will in the long run be helping everyone.



When “I” is replaced with “we,” even illness becomes wellness.

MALCOLM X

This kind of thinking is the very opposite of the kind of trolling, cyberbullying, and harassment that often takes place online—actions that seek to disrupt, to attack, to sow discontent and distrust and even fear. This is not to say you cannot disagree with someone; just keep in mind that you can disagree without being disagreeable, much less frightening or disruptive.

We all need, then, to stop, look, and listen—to step back and think hard about how we communicate with others, about how respectfully we listen and how we show that we have their best interests at heart. But we can’t stop there. Eventually, we will need to engage with the issues most important to us and to other people, including those who do not share our views as well as those who do.

Write!

This kind of engagement will often involve writing. Taking notes and trying to capture in words what you’ve heard someone say, for example, is a very good way to help understand it better, and to remember it. And just think of the role that writing plays in the courses you’re taking, from preparing reports to analyzing issues, summarizing and synthesizing information drawn from many sources, developing a script to use in an important oral presentation, and reflecting on the ideas and perspectives of others—all writing. And don’t be surprised if you find that as you write, your thinking gets sharper, your ideas more focused, your message more clear: you are, in fact, writing yourself into the role of a college student. Then, as you move toward your major, absorbing its vocabulary and methods and style, you are writing yourself into that discipline, becoming a member of its intellectual community.



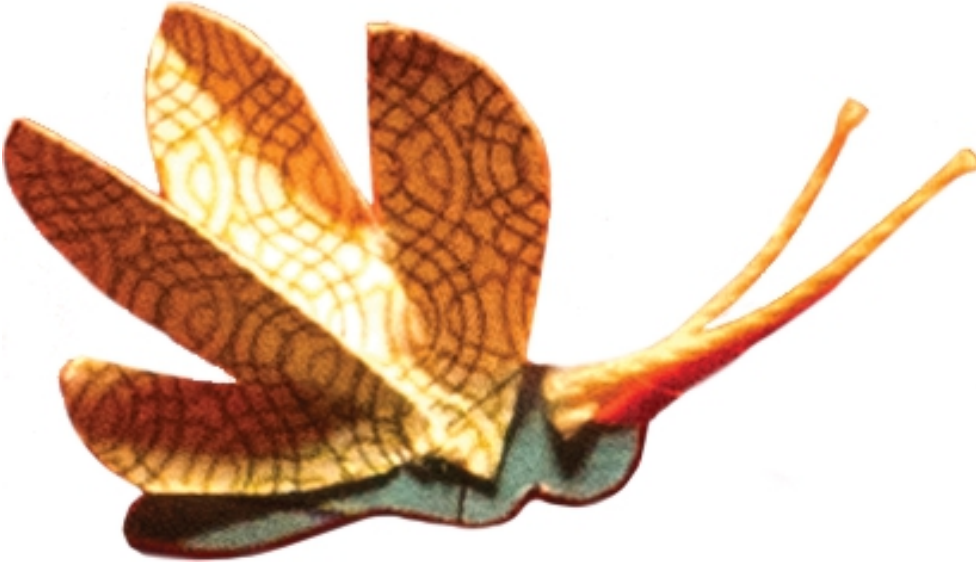
How can I know what I think till I see what I say?

E. M. FORSTER

And then there's the role that writing plays well beyond the classroom. Think about posters and signs proclaiming No Justice, No Peace! Make America Great Again! I Can't Breathe! Vote!—these are all words, yes, but they are actions as well. Think about the writing you do on social media—*Instagram*, *Facebook*, and *X* all connect you to friends and family as well as to people you might never otherwise know. Podcasts and *YouTube* videos—these allow you to put the power of your spoken voice and your personality to work in getting your messages across.

No matter what kinds of writing you do, you'll be aiming to reach particular audiences in particular contexts and for particular reasons. That means you'll be listening and thinking hard about what others say. Thus moving purposely from listening to thinking, and from thinking to writing, is a kind of dance that good communication calls for—and the more we practice that dance, the better we will get.

Stopping, looking, listening, thinking, taking action. None of the steps in this dance are easy or simple, especially in times as contentious as those we face today. But we need to try—and to recognize that our differences are some of our most valuable assets. We won't know about those differences, however, without being open to them, without opening ourselves to the thoughts and ideas and beliefs of others. This book is one attempt to begin and sustain such conversations. So—let's talk!



REFLECT! Fox News host **Laura Ingraham** once famously criticized **LeBron James** for commenting on political issues, saying that he should “shut up and dribble.” Her comment got instant blowback from many, including James and other athletes, who posted on social media with the hashtag #wewillnotshutupanddribble. Ingraham and James are coming from completely different places in terms of their personal beliefs and ideologies, but how might this exchange have gone differently had they at least attempted a face-to-face conversation—and first taken time to stop, look, listen, and think?

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PART ONE

RHETORIC: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

1. [Listening](#)
2. [Thinking Rhetorically](#)
3. [Engaging Respectfully with Others](#)
4. [The Role of Argument in Our Lives](#)
5. [Developing Academic Habits of Mind](#)



PART ONE RHETORIC / JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Chapter 1 Listening

Listening to others, especially those with whom we disagree, tests our own ideas and beliefs. It forces us to recognize, with humility, that we don't have a monopoly on the truth.

—JANET YELLEN

If you want to be listened to, you should put in time listening.

—MARGE PIERCY

Why would a book titled *Let's Talk* begin with a chapter on listening? That's a good question, and it has an important answer. Talking is (at least) a two-way street: when you talk, you're talking *to* someone, and you want that someone to listen, to hear what you're saying, whether you're calling a clinic to make a doctor's appointment or talking confidentially with your best friend about whether to break off a relationship. You want—and sometimes need—to be listened to. You can probably think of times when you've felt like you weren't being listened to, or when the person you were talking with was only halfway listening.

Elizabeth MacGregor certainly has such memories. As the first person in her family—and one of only two students in her high school graduating class—to go to college, she remembers feeling insecure when she first arrived at college. “Do I really belong here?” she wondered. Faced with some daunting assignments in the first weeks of fall term, she asked for advice from an older student in her dorm. That person was sympathetic, but he was checking email and was somewhat distracted, responding, “Don't worry; you'll be fine.” She also went to her history instructor's office hours, hoping to get some guidance for doing the first assignment. He merely encouraged her to “start on the assignment early” and wished her luck; he didn't seem to hear what she was really asking for, which was concrete advice on how to address the assignment. Reflecting on these experiences two years later, MacGregor said, “They were well meaning, but they just weren't listening to me.”

Or you may be part of a group that feels ignored or not listened to. That was certainly the case for more than two hundred women gymnasts who, for decades, had been reporting sexual abuse by Larry Nassar, doctor for the US gymnastics team. Their reports were ignored: very few people with the power to stop Nassar's abuse were willing to listen, much less to speak up on their behalf. But as the #MeToo movement gained momentum in 2016, hundreds of gymnasts, including gold medalist Simone Biles, raised their collective voices to speak out about his crimes. Coaches and USA Gymnastics officials began to listen, and Nassar was fired, charged, and convicted. This series of events led to a shift in the culture of gymnastics as coaches began to listen to their athletes. So in 2021, when Biles told her coach she could not continue in the Tokyo Olympics, the coach listened, and had Biles's back when many commentators and fans attacked her decision to withdraw as cowardly—and much worse. At this point, Biles needed to listen to her own inner voice and *not* to the yammering critics. In short, there are times to listen—and times not to.



Listening is the ultimate sign of respect. What you say when you listen says more than any words.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN

Many of us, however, need to listen more, not less. NBA star Draymond Green admits that he sure does. During the 2019 NBA finals, Green—known for his constant chatter on and off the court—decided he’d been doing too much talking and not enough listening. In particular, he decided to listen to his mother and his fiancée, both of whom told him he needed to learn some self-discipline and especially to stop screaming at the referees. As Green put it:

Sometimes I’m not mindful, and I’ll get a tech and that will just kill the energy of our team. I’ve really been focused and locked in on that, and I realized I got to a point where I was doing more crying than playing. I’m sure it was disgusting to watch, because I felt disgusting playing that way.

—DRAYMOND GREEN

Sometimes we all need to take a good look at our behavior to see if we are doing more talking than listening.



Draymond Green, frustrated by getting a tech for yelling.

Think of the times when you have most needed someone to listen—openly and carefully and intently—to something you needed to say: when you were talking through a serious conflict with a family member, for instance, or when you were trying to explain to a professor something you didn't understand about a complex topic. On occasions like these, you want the person you're addressing to really listen—to look up from what they're doing and pay attention to what you're saying. And in return, you'll want to reciprocate, listening—*really listening*—to what others are saying. At times you may be tempted to jump into a conversation—but think again: it's often much more effective to find out what others think before doing so.

Listening with an open mind

Careful listening has been in short supply in the last few years, as the divisions in our society have grown deeper and more entrenched and as many people have retreated into their own bubbles or echo chambers where they hear only those they already agree with—and have stopped listening to anyone else. Yet if we don't learn to listen openly and carefully to others, including those whose views differ from our own, we can't hope to gain understanding and insight into their motivations, hopes, and goals. So that's why this book opens with a chapter calling on you to start by listening and calling on all of us to pay attention to the words of others—and to be willing to hear what they say.



We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak.

EPICETUS

Whether you're writing an essay or participating in a face-to-face discussion, you'll need to engage with other people's views. In order to do so, you'll need to listen to what they say—and even to repeat back to them what they say as a way of making sure you've understood before responding with what *you* want to say. This kind of listening is what rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe dubs [RHETORICAL LISTENING](#)—opening yourself to the thoughts of others and making the effort not only to hear their words but to take those words in and fully understand them. It means paying attention to what others say as a way of establishing goodwill and acknowledging the importance of their views. And yes, it means taking seriously and engaging with views that differ, sometimes radically, from your own.

See [p. 31](#) for advice on getting to know people different from you.

Rhetorical listening is what middle school teacher Julia Blount asked for in a *Facebook* post following riots in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray, who suffered fatal spinal injuries while in police custody:

Every comment or post I have read today voicing some version of disdain for the people of Baltimore—"I can't understand" or "they're destroying their own community"—tells me that many of you are not listening. I am not asking you to condone or agree with violence. I just need you to listen....

—JULIA BLOUNT, "Dear White *Facebook* Friends: I Need You to Respect What Black America Is Feeling Right Now."

Blount went on to call for her friends to expose themselves to unfamiliar perspectives, and to engage in conversation—in other words, to listen rhetorically. Learning to listen this way takes time and attention and practice, but it is a skill you can develop and one that will pay off in better and more effective communication. There isn't any magic potion for becoming a good listener, but here are some tips that should put you on your way to achieving that goal.

Advice to listen and really hear what others are saying was much needed during the 2023 Israel-Hamas war. This issue led to intense, sometimes even violent, confrontations between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian supporters who were unwilling to listen to or talk with one another—and equally unwilling to think outside the narrow boundaries of their own beliefs, or to think about where those beliefs came from. This dispute erupted on many college campuses, where hate speech, both antisemitic and Islamophobic, left little or no room for listening. These incidents demonstrate how hard it can be in times of such intense disagreements to stop shouting, step back, and at least try to begin listening to what others are thinking and feeling.

Turn to [p. 614](#) to see how one writer’s thinking changed once he started paying attention—listening—to views different from his own.

But listen we must. Shouting and violence too often lead to more shouting and violence—and rarely if ever lead to resolution. So why not at least give listening a try?

Tips for listening respectfully and with an open mind

- ***Give the gift of your full attention***; it is a precious one that you hope will be reciprocated. Turn off your phone, and don’t allow yourself to be distracted by texts, emails, or social media.
- ***Listen with an open mind*** and without an agenda. Listen to learn, and with the goal of understanding.
- ***Let others speak*** before stating your own opinion or asking questions. Even if you disagree with what someone says, don’t shout them down; everyone deserves to be listened to.
- ***Listen with empathy*** to try to see things from the other person’s point of view. Make it a goal to understand their perspective, where they’re coming from. Be on the lookout for [COMMON GROUND](#), things you can agree on: “I can see where you’re coming from.”
- ***Summarize*** what the other person says to be sure you understand what they’re saying.
- ***Offer affirmation*** when you can: “Good point; I hadn’t thought of that.”
- ***Don’t interrupt***, and don’t be thinking about what you’re going to say in response.
- ***Be sure that any questions you ask are respectful***, not judgmental. Ask questions that are open-ended (“What do you think we should do?”) or that clarify, not challenge (“Are you saying —?” rather than “Don’t you think —?”).
- ***Pay attention to body language*** and [TONE](#) of voice, yours and theirs. These can give you insight into the message the other person is trying to send. And maintain a respectful tone and posture yourself: lean in, nod your head.

Listening to understand complex issues

There are likely to be opportunities at your school to learn about [PERSPECTIVES](#) that differ from your own: courses on topics you’ve never before studied, guest lectures on issues that are being debated, and more. When protests broke out about the Israel-Hamas war, for example, many colleges offered courses on the history of Israel and Palestine and forums designed to foster thoughtful discussion about the conflict. These are all opportunities to learn about and listen to multiple perspectives on complex issues.

Beyond campus, there are a number of organizations that provide guidance for listening with an open mind, along with opportunities to meet up with people who think differently than you do.



When you look at election results, the color red doesn't necessarily mean white power. It can also mean there are people who want the world to pay attention to them.

TREVOR NOAH

One such organization is the *Listen First Project*, founded by Pearce Godwin with the goal of “mend[ing] the frayed fabric of America by bridging divides one conversation at a time.” In 2019, *Listen First* launched the *National Conversation Project*, which helps people start new conversations, ones dedicated to moving “from *us vs. them* to *me and you*.” By 2023, over 500 schools, libraries, and other groups hosted *Listen First* conversations. Go to listenfirstproject.org or conversation.us if you're interested in joining or hosting such a conversation.



We hope you'll take the advice in this chapter to heart, seeking to understand those with whom you may disagree, and learning to become a better listener as you do.

What's listening got to do with writing?

Here's what: whatever you're writing, you need to start by doing your homework: reading up on your topic, doing research, maybe conducting some interviews. That means listening.



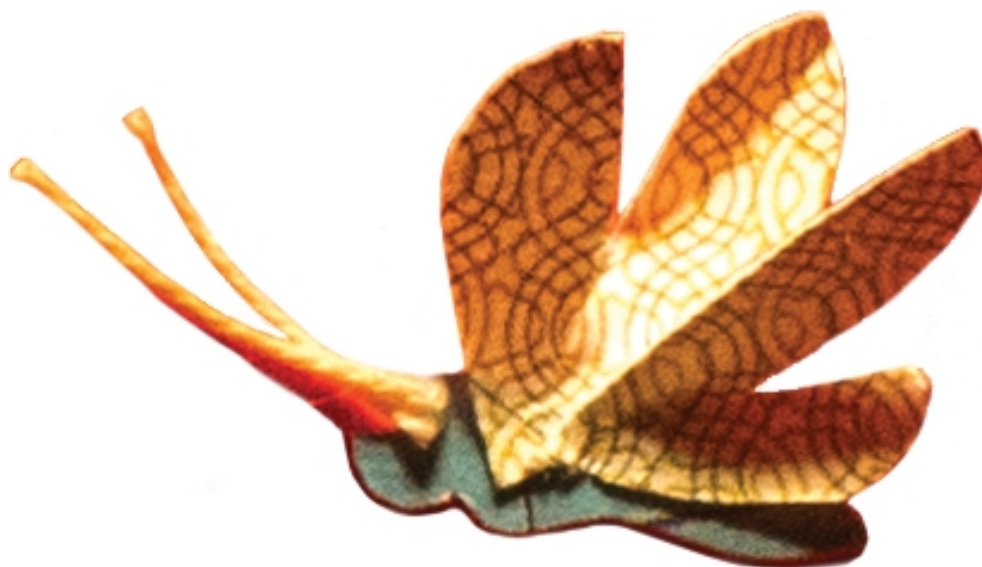
Writing doesn't begin when you sit down to write. It's a way of being in the world, and its essence is paying attention.

JULIA ALVAREZ

And whatever your topic, it's unlikely that you'll be the first to write about it. In fact, when it comes to academic writing, what you write will usually respond to something that others have already said about your topic: they say this, you think that. So after introducing your topic, one effective way to proceed is to [QUOTE](#), [PARAPHRASE](#), or [SUMMARIZE](#) what others have said about it and presenting your ideas as a response. And that means listening carefully to what's already been said, not just launching into what you have to say.

So writing is actually a way of participating in a larger conversation, of engaging with the ideas of others. When you quote, paraphrase, or summarize sources, you're weaving their words or ideas in with yours—and hopefully responding to them in some way. You can't do that unless you've listened closely to those words and ideas.

Like writing, reading demands listening, really hearing what an author has to say. And if you read rhetorically, not just to absorb information but also to question and respond to the text, you enter into a dialogue with the author. That too starts with listening.



REFLECT! Think of a time when you were in a conversation with someone whose views you strongly disagreed with. How did the topic on which you disagreed come up? How carefully were you listening to the other point of view—and how well were you being listened to? Write a paragraph describing the incident, and how you think you handled it. Was the disagreement resolved—and if so, how? What might you have done differently, and why? What lessons can you take from the experience about interacting with people you don't agree with?

Glossary

RHETORICAL LISTENING

A way of listening that is open-minded, accepting, and respectful—of listening to what others say as a way of understanding their **PERSPECTIVES** and demonstrating respect for their views.

COMMON GROUND

Shared values. Writers build common ground with **AUDIENCES** by acknowledging their **POINTS OF VIEW**, seeking areas of compromise, and using language that includes, rather than excludes, those they aim to reach.

TONE

The way a writer's or speaker's **STANCE** is reflected in the text.

PERSPECTIVES

Viewpoints, an important part of a writer's **STANCE**. As a writer and a researcher, you should always strive to seek, think about, and work to understand multiple perspectives.

QUOTE

To cite someone else's words exactly as they were said or written. Quotation is most effective when the wording is worth repeating or makes a point so well that no rewording will do it justice or when you want to cite someone's exact words. Quotations in academic writing need to be acknowledged with **DOCUMENTATION**.

PARAPHRASE

To reword a text in about the same number of words but without using the word order or sentence structure of the original. Paraphrasing is generally called for when you want to include

the details of a passage but do not need to **QUOTE** it word for word. Paraphrasing a source in academic writing requires **DOCUMENTATION**.

SUMMARIZE

To use your own words and sentence structure to condense someone else's text into a version that gives the main ideas of the original. In academic writing, summarizing requires **DOCUMENTATION**.

Author / Title Index

The title of this book, *Let's Talk with Readings*, assumes that communication is a two-way street: if someone is talking, somebody else is listening, and responding. It's an assumption that goes far beyond the title, however, and this is a book of many voices—and many, many perspectives. And that turns out to be a lot of folks, of widely varying backgrounds and convictions and from widely varying places around the country and beyond. In essays and epigraphs, examples and prompts for reflection, these voices provide information, inspiration, intriguing examples, and instructive viewpoints that enliven and enrich the book before you now. Here they are—collaborators and contributors all.

A

Abed, Sally, [38](#)

Abbott, Berenice, [537](#)

“Abraham Lincoln” (Du Bois), [49](#)

“Adam Sandler’s Everlasting Shtick” (Keiles), [68–69](#)

“Advantages and Disadvantages of Cryptocurrency” (Tambe & Jain), [68](#)

Agnes Scott College commencement address (Winfrey), [30](#)

Aguilar, Drew, [xxxviii–xxxix](#)

“Ain’t I a Woman?” (Truth), [188](#)

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“All Seven Deadly Sins Committed at Church Bake Sale” (*The Onion*), [483](#)

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“The Amazon That Customers Don’t See” (Kantor et al.), [52–53](#), [618–37](#)

“America Ruined My Name for Me” (Nguyen), [694–99](#)

Andersen, Hans Christian, “The Snow Queen,” [366](#)

Glossary/Index

This glossary/index defines key terms and concepts and directs you to pages in the book where you can find specific information on these and other topics. Please note the words set in **SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS** are themselves defined in the glossary/index.

A

ABSTRACT, [459](#) A **GENRE** of writing that summarizes a book, an article, or a paper, usually in 100–200 words. An *informative abstract* summarizes a complete report; a briefer *descriptive abstract* works more as a teaser; a stand-alone *proposal abstract* (also called a **PROJECT PROPOSAL**) requests permission to conduct research, write on a topic, or present a report at a scholarly conference. Key Features: a **SUMMARY** of basic information • an objective description • brevity

ACADEMIC HABITS OF MIND, [70–78](#) Practices that are essential for success in college: being curious, creative, flexible, persistent, and open to new ideas; collaborating; taking responsibility and engaging with your work; reflecting on what you’re learning; and not being afraid to fail.

Academic Search Complete, [325](#)

acknowledging multiple viewpoints, [20](#), [116–17](#)

in arguments, [141–43](#)

in reports, [209](#)

acknowledging sources, [20](#), [366–76](#)

ACTIVE VOICE When a **VERB** is in the active voice, the subject performs the action: *Gus tripped Bodie*. See also **PASSIVE VOICE**

AD HOMINEM ARGUMENT, [66](#) A logical **FALLACY** that attacks someone’s character rather than addresses the issues. (*Ad hominem* is Latin for “to the man.”)

AGRIS, [326](#)

AI. See **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**; **GENERATIVE AI**

AllSides.com, [34](#), [104](#)

ALLUSION, [482](#) An indirect reference to something. Telling a friend that they look like they’re carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders alludes to the Greek god Atlas, whom Zeus punished by making him support the heavens on his shoulders.

ALT TEXT, [544](#) A way of describing images in digital texts for readers who are visually impaired or whose computers do not display images.

ANALOGY, [486](#) A **STRATEGY** for **COMPARISON** by explaining something unfamiliar in terms of something that is more familiar. See also **FALSE ANALOGY**