



THE ASSIGNMENT:

WHY AM I WRITING THIS ESSAY?

Rebecca Goodman
Martin Nakell

FOUNTAINHEAD PRESS





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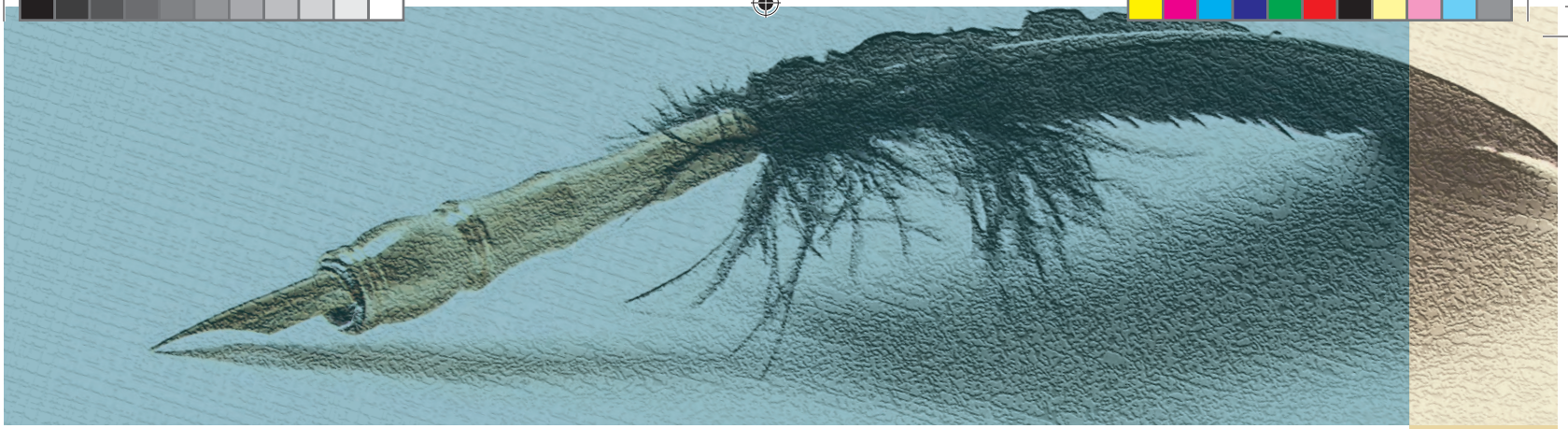
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INTRODUCTION

the assignment: introduction to the instructor

I. How It Came About

A writer draws on all of his or her faculties of intuition, inspiration, craft, thought, and spontaneity to express him or herself. Having observed our students in the classroom struggle to do the same, we have taken note of what stands in their way, and we have observed what serves them well. *The Assignment* teaches by following patterns of learning and the natural processes of imagination and integration.

Literacy is an active, living, ubiquitous part of our lives. Whether viewing a painting or watching a movie or listening to music or reading a book, we don't participate passively—we interact. We carry on a dialogue with the text. The painting, movie, music, or book speaks to us while we, in our own minds, speak with it. When we write, we carry on a dialogue with our reader. We see this, our book, *The Assignment*, as a dialogue with you, the instructor, and with our students.

We discuss this dialogic perspective within *The Assignment*. We provide examples of how this philosophy works in individual cases, and we give the students opportunities to practice this philosophy in their own writing. Just as the authors of paintings, movies, music, and books have something to say to us, our students have something to say to their readers about their thoughts, their experiences, their observations, and their imaginations.

To teach writing—which we prefer to call literacy—we have developed a holistic approach. The act of writing is only part of the game. Literacy is an activity that is a part of—not a study separate from—the world at large. Our students need to read well, to think critically, and we want them to come to a conscious appreciation of the significance of language in their lives.

We unify the text of *The Assignment* through the theme of silence and language. When the authors we study write, they break the silence of their lives to speak; when our students write, they break the silence of their own lives to speak. We teach our students to experience language.

We hope to inspire students with the idea that they write to express themselves. After every third Chapter in *The Assignment*, we add a short piece that we call “The Origins of Language.” We begin with a



primitive wall painting from the Cave at Lascaux in France. Those paintings represent a very early example of “writing,” i.e., they communicate in a visual language. We then present, throughout *The Assignment*, seven myths of the origins of language from cultures around the world. We complete this cycle with a scientific explanation for the origin of language. Every culture in the world has created a language that arises from the urge to communicate. Every culture has developed a language that brings them from silence to expression. The invention of language is so central to every culture, and, in a sense, so enveloped in mystery, that every culture has developed a myth to give substance to this creative invention. Likewise, every essay in our book partakes of this urge. Every essay students write expresses this urge.

II. Design and Tone

We designed *The Assignment* for students to experience the pleasure of learning itself. Because we know that pleasure in learning will enhance the rigor necessary to learn, we want the professors and their students to enjoy this book. Maintaining a sense of respect for our students, we’ve used humor, fresh readings to excite and challenge the students, and a personal tone where we address the student directly.

III. The Signature Question

We begin by asking the student to write a brief essay, so you will have some of their writing to evaluate as you begin the term. We also introduce the student in this section to the signature question of our text: **Why Am I Writing This Essay?** If the student asks him/herself that question, the answer will lead them to a thesis. Once they have a thesis, of course, they have the basis for a coherent essay. We stress this throughout the book.

IV. Visual Literacy

Visual literacy has always been with us. What are the Caves at Lascaux but a form of visual literacy? With the explosion of technology in our age, visual literacy has now come to equal, if not surpass, language literacy. To take advantage of this phenomenon, it has become common in composition courses to study the visual image in the context of visual literacy.

Each of the seven “Origins of Language” contains a visual image from the culture it discusses. We also use a Salvador Dalí painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, in the book. These images provide opportunities to explore and teach visual literacy. You can certainly apply our signature question “Why am I Writing This Essay?” to these visual images, and ask your students, “Why did the artist make this image?”

V. The Structure

The Assignment is made up of eighteen sections. Each section is made up of three Chapters in a recurring pattern.

- THE ART OF LANGUAGE
- THE ACT OF READING
- THE ACT OF WRITING

Thus, the first section of *The Assignment* looks like this:

PART01

the origins of language | the cave at lascaux

CHAPTER01

the art of language | language & identity | parts of speech

In the first Chapter of Part 1, we study the **Parts of Speech**, including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

CHAPTER02

the act of reading | noun:verb:image

In Chapter 2 of Part 1, we read an excerpt from *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, by N. Scott Momaday, focusing in particular on Momaday's use of the Parts of Speech we just studied. We expand this to explore how we use nouns to create images, and later on, how we use those images as concrete evidence in support of the thesis.

CHAPTER03

the act of writing | what's the point? | all about thesis

In Chapter 3 of Part 1, we discuss thesis. We look at what makes a good thesis, then we look at the N. Scott Momaday essay we have just read in Chapter 2 to discover Momaday's thesis. We then assign an essay for the students to write in which they pay particular attention to creating a good thesis and using the Parts of Speech we studied in Chapter 1 of this section.

Each of *The Assignment's* eighteen Chapters follows this same pattern.

VI. Using the Structure

In the students' interest and for practical purposes, we have made *The Assignment* shorter than other texts in the field. We want the students to find an approachable book when they go to the bookstore. Yet, *The Assignment* is a dense book, foregoing nothing a developmental or freshman composition student might need to learn.

You can use *The Assignment* straight through from beginning to end. But you might want to break down the structure of the book. Depending on the level of your students or other considerations, you can approach *The Assignment* as a modular text, rearranging it according to your own design.

For example:

- You could teach the grammar all together, going from one grammar/structure Chapter to the next. (Chapters 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16.)
- You could do all the “Act of Writing” Chapters in sequence (Chapters 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17.)
- You could teach all the Readings together. (Chapters 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18.)
- You could choose a particular grammar/structure to focus on, then pair that with a reading from any other Section.

The following chart may aid you by identifying all the **grammar** chapters, all the **reading** chapters, and all the **writing** chapters.

THE ART OF LANGUAGE:	Chapter 1: Parts of Speech	Chapter 4: Parts of Speech 2	Chapter 7: One Sentence: One Thought	Chapter 10: The Ever-Changing Verb	Chapter 13: Punctuation	Chapter 16: Making the Sentence Work Right
GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE STRUCTURE			Subject/Verb	Verb Conjugation		Independent Clauses Run-Ons Comma Splices
THE ACT OF READING:	Chapter 2: Noun, Verb, Image	Chapter 5: The Image Is Evidence	Chapter 8: A Community of Readers	Chapter 11: Dialogue with the Text	Chapter 14: Quote, Paraphrase, & Summary	Chapter 17: Essay As Argument
ESSAY & FICTION READINGS	N. Scott Momaday: “The Way to Rainy Mountain”	Jack London: “The Story of an Eyewitness: The San Francisco Earthquake”	Diane Ackerman: “Modern Love”	Lewis Carroll: “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”	John Seabrook: “Renaissance Pears”	William Manchester: “Okinawa: The Bloodiest Battle of All”

	Chapter 3:	Chapter 6:	Chapter 9:	Chapter 12:	Chapter 15:	Chapter 18:
THE ACT OF WRITING:	What's the Point: All About Thesis	Develop It!	Develop It:	From Dialogue to Analysis to Essay	Dialogue with the Reader	Dialogue of Text With Text(s): Language Expresses Identity
ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS		Parts of an Essay	Paragraph Unity	Freewriting; Dialogue with the Text		

VII. Silence and Speech : An Interwoven Theme

Within our theme of silence and speech, we have chosen essays that interlock and echo and respond to each other. You may want to group essay readings by those interrelated issues. For example, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, page 281, works well with the Ursula LeGuin essays in the back of the book ("World Making" and "Hunger," page 311). The Messerli essay, page 301, contrasts urban life beautifully with the rural life of Momaday, while both pieces raise issues of racial harmony/disharmony. The Jack London essay, "The Story of an Eyewitness: The San Francisco Earthquake," page 273, portrays the power that nature exerts over civilization, while "Our Vanishing Night," page 307, highlights how civilization has obscured nature to our detriment. Octavio Paz's "The Day of the Dead," page 327, discusses cultural rituals, while "Renaissance Pears," page 285, discusses culturally cohesive qualities of our natural environment.

VIII. Grammar

We can look at the acquisition of writing skills and literacy as the mastery of two equally important components: the micro and the macro. The micro focuses on the management of the sentence, while the macro focuses on the development of essay writing. In *The Assignment*, we concern ourselves with both of these essential studies.

Grammar is a logical system for organizing language. It performs an analysis of language and language structure. As students study grammar, they study analysis. They study critical thinking. And they come to learn, in our book, that grammar is a form of communication. To communicate their ideas and feelings, the students need grammar.

We begin the study of grammar in Chapter 1, the book's densest chapter. While there may be controversy in the field today about the efficacy of teaching grammar, we take from both sides of that argument. Students must know the components of language, sentences, and essays in order to analyze and discuss the readings we offer as well as their own and their colleagues' work, and to construct,

analyze, and discuss their own work. We prepare the student to go on to more complex studies of grammar and writing.

We begin with the Parts of Speech. In studying these basic building blocks of language, our students will see how we break language down to organize it into comprehensible systems they can master. While this may look like only rote learning, it introduces the student to the genius inherent in the intelligence of the human brain, which has invented language.

With the power of this knowledge, the student has the primary tools he or she needs to engage with you in a productive critique of their writing. He or she can also move on to the next level to discover how we use the Parts of Speech to construct the Parts of a Sentence.

IX. Reading

Among the skills of literacy, we count analysis, interpretation, and discussion. We have chosen each essay in *The Assignment* with the following criteria in mind: (a) it must be exciting; (b) it must be well written; (c) it must be well organized; (d) it must be on a topic which grabs the students' interest; (e) it must demonstrate the art of language in the preceding chapter; (f) it must leave room for analysis, interpretation, and argument, and (g) it must lead to a discussion which becomes productive in forming theses for the students' own essays.

In the back of the book, we include the whole of each essay we excerpt in the "Act of Reading" Chapters. The other essays that we've chosen to include in the back of the book complement and expand on the discussions and the readings within the book. Each of these additional essays also addresses the idea of language and silence, covering such various disciplines as science, film, sociology, etc. These essays can show students who will go on to study in these and other fields just how expressive and effective writing can be for them.

X. Writing

We've had students come up to us mid-semester or later to comment that they finally get the importance of thesis in their writing. They finally see the whole picture, and they finally understand how to write an essay. They have discovered that it's not all that hard once you have created your own guide: a good thesis.

While the writers may present their thesis late in the work, or not necessarily even overtly state their thesis, students benefit from stating their thesis early on, in the first paragraph. Then they know that everything they write from then on must relate to and prove that thesis.

We integrate all the rhetorical modes into each essay. Rather than basing an essay on a given rhetorical mode—description, argument, comparison/contrast, etc.—we base it on the development of a thesis. When you work from a thesis to develop an essay, you incorporate all the rhetorical modes of writing into the essay, using each one of them in an integrated way.

If an instructor wishes to highlight one or more of the rhetorical modes, he or she may easily do so using our essays. For example, in the Momaday essay, you could highlight the descriptive passages, you could point out the narrative passages, you could analyze the passages that use comparison/contrast, and so on. Following this holistic approach, the students can still clearly identify the rhetorical modes in the essays they read, while they can write thesis-driven essays in which they *use* the rhetorical modes to support their thesis development.

We work on thesis development using our signature question: **Why Am I Writing This Essay?** Applying that question to Chapter 3, we ask: “Why Did N. Scott Momaday Write This Essay?” The answer to that question leads us to Momaday’s thesis.

Our students, likewise, will pose this same question to themselves: **Why Am I Writing This Essay?** In answering it, they will discover their own motivations, their own passions. They will know why it is important for them to write that essay. They can then formulate a thesis to guide them. They will also know how the essay they write is important to them. They will write with more vigor, more passion, and more concentration. They have something to say. They can only say it in well-written language.

XI. Exercises

To help students absorb the skills of writing, we provide a number of exercises for them to practice the skills they have just studied. You, of course, can use all those exercises, or you can pick and choose among them. But we want the students to understand that they are not simply doing these exercises as a homework assignment to test what they know. In working through these exercises, they *develop* skills and they build habits they won’t forget. They train their eye and their ear and their brain to write correctly.

XII. Some Notes on the Readings

We have found it useful at times to draw thematic correspondences among two or more essays. Here we will offer a few suggestions of how these essays fit together, drawing on both the essays within the text and those at the back of the text.

All of the essays in *The Assignment* address the issue of language, culture, and identity. Beyond that, we can suggest a few more thematic possibilities:

A. Landscape, Nature, Environment, and the Relationship between Environment and Culture

1. N. Scott Momaday. “The Way to Rainy Mountain.”
2. John Seabrook. “Renaissance Pears.”
3. William Manchester. “Okinawa: The Bloodiest Battle.”
Manchester discusses the effects of war on the landscape.

4. Verlyn Klinkenborg. "Our Vanishing Night."
5. Jack London. "The Story of an Eyewitness: The San Francisco Earthquake."

B. Time and Change

1. Salvador Dalí. *The Persistence of Memory*.
2. Lewis Carroll. *Alice in Wonderland*.
3. Ursula LeGuin. "World-Making."
4. John Seabrook. "Renaissance Pears."

C. War and Reflection

1. William Manchester. "Okinawa: The Bloodiest Battle of All."
2. Steve Freidman. "A Moment of Silence."
3. N. Scott Momaday. "The Way to Rainy Mountain."

D. The Meetings of Cultures

1. N. Scott Momaday. "The Way to Rainy Mountain."
2. Douglas Messerli. "20 Days in the City of Angels."
3. Helen Barolini. "Buried Alive by Language."
4. James Baldwin. "What It Means to be an American."

E. Art

1. "Origins of Language I—VI" and the images that go with them.
2. Salvador Dalí. "The Persistence of Memory."
3. Pauline Kael. "Why are the Movies so Bad? or, The Numbers."
4. John Seabrook. "Renaissance Pears."



PROLOGUE

the first day: why am i writing this essay?

begin writing

You come into class. It's your first day. You sit in the back of the room. The Professor calls the roll, mispronouncing your last name. Do you correct it? For now, you let it go.

The Professor passes out a syllabus. It lists all the subjects you'll cover and all the things you'll read and all the assignments you'll complete during this class. You have a lot of work ahead of you. You're up to it. You came to college to work, didn't you? You're serious about this. You're excited about it. You'll do well. The Professor asks you to write a short essay to evaluate your writing skills.

Imagine that one of your good friends, or someone special to you in your family, thinks you should not go to college. Maybe they think you're wasting your time. Write a short essay explaining to that person why you've chosen to go to college.

You look around the room. Other students have begun to write. You better get to work, but you have nothing to say. What can you write about? Your hands get clammy. The girl in front of you turns around because you're tapping your foot on the back leg of her chair. "I'm sorry," you whisper. You stop the tapping. You don't know what you're doing. You get frustrated. You ask yourself, "Why am I writing this essay?"

You've asked exactly the right question! Ask yourself that question—"Why am I writing this essay?"—before every essay you write.

Maybe you think to yourself, "I'm writing this essay only to pass this class." Now, ask yourself, "Why do I want to pass this class?" Perhaps you answer yourself, "I want to pass this class because I'm

the first one in my family to go to college, and I want to succeed. I'm writing this essay to succeed in college.”

Gather your thoughts. Write the essay. Put all of your desire to succeed in college into this essay.

After a while, the Professor asks you to turn in your papers. You were still going strong. You were in the middle of great ideas. You were writing about how going to college will make your whole future better. You were writing about how you're going to learn so many things. You're going to be somebody. But the time's up. As the Professor comes down your row, you hand in your paper.

“Sorry I was tapping on your chair before,” you say to the girl in front of you as you both get up to leave.

“It's all right,” she says. “How did you do?”

“I don't know. OK, I guess. I hope. We'll see.”

“We'll see,” she says. You walk out of the classroom together, then part ways as you head off toward your Math class.

*what is language?
silence, language, and identity*

On your second day of class, the Professor calls the roll, and he mispronounces your name again, a different mispronunciation from his mispronunciation on the first day. Should you say something?

The Professor passes your papers back, going up and down the rows. The guy two rows away gets his paper. He sighs, then scowls. When you finally get your paper, it's filled with red ink. Corrections! Mistakes! What's this all about? You know how to write. What's all this red ink? You got good grades in high school English.

So what do all the red marks mean?

<i>VT</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>FS</i>
When I work in your auto repair shop you told me I was a good mechanic I shouldn't go		
<i>CS</i>	<i>FS</i>	<i>SP</i>
to college, I should stay and work with you I will own the auto repair shop one day and hav a lot		
	<i>frag</i>	<i>pr</i>
of money. When I tell you I will go to college look at all the Mercedes in the shop. They came to		

what is grammar?

What do you want to do with your language? What do you want to say? Do you want to tell your mother on the phone that your college Math class is difficult?

You can't say, "Difficult why so math me always for." Your mother might understand you. After all, she's your mother. But no one else would understand. **GRAMMAR** organizes our sentences. **LANGUAGE** is a miracle of human intelligence. **GRAMMAR** is the genius that makes language work for us.

GRAMMAR organizes the chaos of words, words, words into sentences. Then we can use those words for anything we want. Would you tell your boyfriend or girlfriend, "Love you I"? You need **LANGUAGE**, but you also need **GRAMMAR** to organize the words for you into the sentence, "I love you." Would you tell your friend, "Salt please the pass"? You need both **LANGUAGE** and **GRAMMAR** to say "Please pass the salt." It's not a mystery. You use **GRAMMAR** all day long every day.

To create **GRAMMAR**, we use several different systems.

The Professor erases the whiteboard:

what is language?

and writes instead:

parts of speech...



PART 01

the origins of language: the cave at lascaux



On September 12, 1940, four French teenagers—Marcel, Jacques, Georges, and Simon—along with Simon’s dog, Robot, hiked out into the woods. They climbed to the top of Lascaux Hill in Southwestern France, one of their favorite spots. Simon’s dog, Robot, fell into a hole. The four boys went home, returning the next day with a rope and a lantern to rescue Robot. Lowering themselves into the dark hole, the boys found that the hole led them into what we now call the Cave at Lascaux, a system of 110 different caves branching off the main entrance. Those caves, dating from 17,000–13,000 B.C.E., contain 2,188 prehistoric, pre-literate wall paintings of animals.

Why did those pre-historic, pre-literate people of Lascaux make those wall paintings? Those people, from about 17,000–13,000 B.C.E., depended entirely on hunting. If the hunt failed, the people starved. We believe they made those paintings of deer, bison, bulls, etc. in order to ensure a good hunt. You could call the paintings a kind of magic. The artists made the paintings as a way of “capturing” the animals. Or, you could simply say the artists painted a successful hunt, practicing the art of positive thinking. However you phrase it, these pre-literate people, unable to write, sought a language to express themselves and their world. They found that language in painting. Today, we still have painting to express ourselves, but we also have written language.

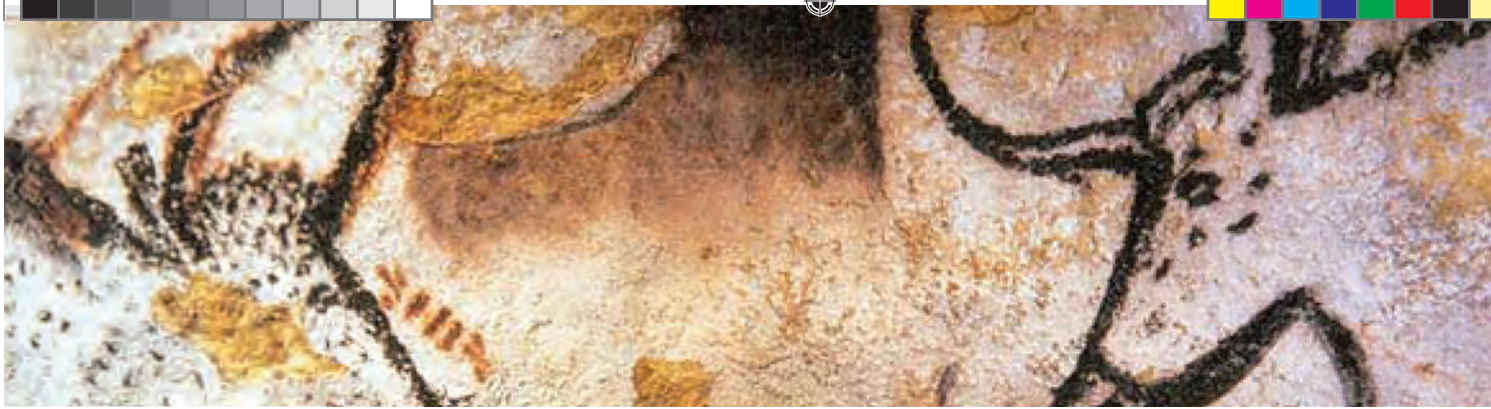
We have asked why the people of Lascaux made those wall paintings. Ask yourself that same question about whatever you write: **“Why am I writing this essay?”** When you can answer it, you will write better.





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CHAPTER 01

the art of language | language & identity | parts of speech

The grammar system that we call **PARTS OF SPEECH** organizes words for us into categories. We take words, just words, random words, and we organize them into systems we can use. The **PARTS OF SPEECH** make up the building blocks we use to understand language and to construct sentences.

Some linguists organize language into eight Parts of Speech, while other linguists organize language into nine Parts of Speech.

We will designate nine Parts of Speech. We believe that will make things more clear for you.

In this Chapter, we'll look at five **PARTS OF SPEECH**.

- Nouns
- Verbs
- Pronouns
- Adjectives
- Adverbs

It's all about **nouns** and **verbs**. All the other **PARTS OF SPEECH** relate somehow to **nouns** and **verbs**.

You may already know some of these **PARTS OF SPEECH** well, perhaps all of them. In that case, you'll have a good review.

After we explain each **PART OF SPEECH** with examples, we'll give you one exercise for that **PART OF SPEECH**, so you get a little practice with it, a chance to get it into your memory. Then we'll give you more exercises at the end of this chapter. We'll go over the **PARTS OF SPEECH** throughout the book. In a short time, you'll know them all. Let's begin.



Parts of Speech I: Nouns

What kind of words are **NOUNS**? What do **NOUNS** do?

A **NOUN** names:

- persons
- places
- things
- ideas

Before we had language, nothing had a name. Nothing. Look around the room. Without language, you couldn't name one thing that you see. Now, we do have language. We have **NOUNS**. We can name the things that we see.

A **NOUN** names:

a **PERSON**,

a **PLACE**,

a **THING**,

an **IDEA**

Joey lives in **Chicago** in an apartment **building**. He loves to maintain his good **health**. He loves to play basketball.

NOUNS:

A *PERSON* : **JOEY**

A *PLACE* : **CHICAGO**

A *THING* : **BUILDING**

AN *IDEA* : **HEALTH**

EXERCISES ON NOUNS

Fill in the missing **nouns**:

1. He rented an expensive _____ to drive up to San Francisco.
2. He played the _____ in the High School marching band.
3. The mother called her _____ in for dinner.
4. The _____ called the roll before beginning class.
5. Yesterday, we saw a great _____ at the zoo.

Parts of Speech II: Verbs

What kind of words are **VERBS**? What do **VERBS** do?

A **VERB** names an action, any action, every action, for example:

AN ACTION

↓
run

AN ACTION

↓
talk

AN ACTION

↓
sing

AN ACTION

↓
write

After Joey and his friends have **run** around the basketball court for an hour and have finished their game, they like to hang out together and **talk** for a while. Sometimes, they'll **sing** along with a song they play on an iPod. When Joey gets home, he **writes** down the names of everybody who played basketball that day and the final score of the game.

“Run,” “talk,” “sing,” and “writes” are all **VERBS**. They all **name** actions that somebody or some thing does.

EXERCISES ON VERBS

Fill in the missing **verb**:

1. After running a mile, I _____ a half-gallon of water. {what **action** do you name?}
2. With my new iPhone, I _____ my grandmother in Hawaii. {what **action** do you name?}
3. Tonight, I will have to _____ my first paper for college. {what **action** do you name?}
4. I love to _____ soccer. {what **action** do you name?}
5. I _____ my boyfriend/girlfriend. {what **action** do you name?}

Now we know two **PARTS OF SPEECH**:

- A **NOUN** **names** persons, places, things, or ideas.
- A **VERB** **names** an action.

Parts of Speech III: Pronouns

What is a **PRONOUN**? What can a **PRONOUN** do? When your writing becomes awkward because you have used the same **noun** over and over, you can use a **PRONOUN** to take the place of that noun. That will make your language sound better. Writing should read well. When you read your work out loud to a friend or to yourself, see if it sounds right. As for pronouns, take the following paragraph, for example:

Joanne studies marine biology. Joanne’s father wanted Joanne to become a lawyer, like Joanne’s father is, but Joanne always loved the sea. Now, Joanne studies the sea and all the plants and all the creatures in it, large and small, from whales to starfish. Yesterday, Joanne spent the whole day sitting in a tide pool at the beach watching little sea creatures move about—starfish and crabs and anemones and barnacles. Joanne took a lot of notes about those sea creatures,

including how they moved with the movement of the sea, how they ate, how they defended themselves against attack, and how they breathed. Tomorrow, Joanne will go out in a boat with her scuba gear so Joanne can dive into the sea to watch some larger fish. Joanne will take notes on those larger fish when she returns to her boat. In one more year, Joanne will graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology.

That’s an OK paragraph. It tells us about Joanne and her studies. But it gets a little boring because it always repeats Joanne’s name: “Joanne does this; Joanne does that.” We can use **PRONOUNS** to make it read better.

Joanne studies marine biology. Joanne’s father wanted **HER** to become a lawyer, like **HE** is, but Joanne always loved the sea. Now, Joanne studies the sea and all the plants and all the creatures in it, large and small, from whales to starfish. Yesterday, **SHE** spent the whole day sitting in a tide pool at the beach watching little sea creatures—starfish and crabs and anemones and barnacles—move about. **SHE** took a lot of notes about those sea creatures, including how they moved with the movement of the sea, how they ate, how they defended themselves against attack, and how they breathed. Tomorrow, **SHE** will go out in a boat with **HER** scuba gear so **SHE** can dive into the sea to watch some larger fish. **SHE** will take notes on those larger fish when she returns to her boat. In one more year, Joanne will graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology.

Some of the **PRONOUNS** in our English language are¹:

I	we	me	us	my	our	mine	ours
you	you	you	you	your	your	yours	yours
he/she/it	they	him/her/it	them	his/her/its	their	his/her/its	theirs

We use **PRONOUNS** to make our writing sound better and flow more smoothly. But, when we use **PRONOUNS**, we can also cause confusion. We have to make sure our reader knows *who* or *what* the **PRONOUN** refers to.

Pronoun Reference

Every **PRONOUN** refers to a **noun**. In the paragraph above, both of the **PRONOUNS** “**HER**” and “**SHE**” refer to the **noun** “Joanne.” The **PRONOUN** “**HE**” refers to the **noun** “father.”

¹See the **Index of Pronouns** at the back of the book for a list of the different types of **pronouns**.

You must be sure that your **pronoun reference** is clear; you must be sure that your reader knows to *which noun* your **pronoun** refers. In the following sentence, we don't know whether the **pronoun** "he" refers to Paul or to Sam.

Paul and Sam bought a computer together, agreeing that **he** would use it first.

While in the sentence below, the **pronoun reference** is clear:

When Paul and Sam bought a computer together, Sam said **HE** would use **IT** first.

EXERCISES ON PRONOUNS

Fill in the missing **PRONOUNS**:

1. _____ wash _____ car every Saturday afternoon.
2. After Ronnie washes _____ car, she waxes _____.
2. _____ walks _____ dog every afternoon.
3. When Latasha came home, _____ helped cook dinner.
4. Joe met _____ friend, Ronald, at the corner at 2:30.
5. Alice played _____ saxophone all night long.

Parts of Speech IV: Adjectives

What are **ADJECTIVES**? What can **ADJECTIVES** do?

ADJECTIVES describe → **NOUNS**

When you want to describe something—a **PERSON**, **PLACE**, **THING**, or **IDEA**—in more detail, adjectives do that for you. Let's say that, when you were young, your family moved from one state to another or from another country to the United States. You want to tell a friend about a tree that grew outside the house where you came from. Let's say you remember that tree from the summers, when green leaves filled its branches. Instead of just writing:

NOUN
↓
The tree grew outside my window,

you might add an adjective:

ADJECTIVE
NOUN
↓
↓
 The green tree grew outside my window.

When you complete the sentence, you have:

ADJECTIVE
NOUN
ADJECTIVE
NOUN
↓
↓
↓
↓
 The green tree grew outside my bedroom window.

The **ADJECTIVE** “green” describes the **NOUN** “tree.” The **ADJECTIVE** “bedroom” describes the **NOUN** “window.”

EXERCISES ON ADJECTIVES

Fill in the missing **adjectives**:

1. I just saw that _____ car run a red light.
2. Maureen wore a _____ dress that I loved.
3. He was a very _____ basketball player.
4. He wore one _____ earring in his right ear.
5. Her new _____ tennis shoes look great on her.

Parts of Speech V: Adverbs

What are **ADVERBS**? What can **ADVERBS** do?

ADVERBS describe → **VERBS**.

How can you *describe* a verb?

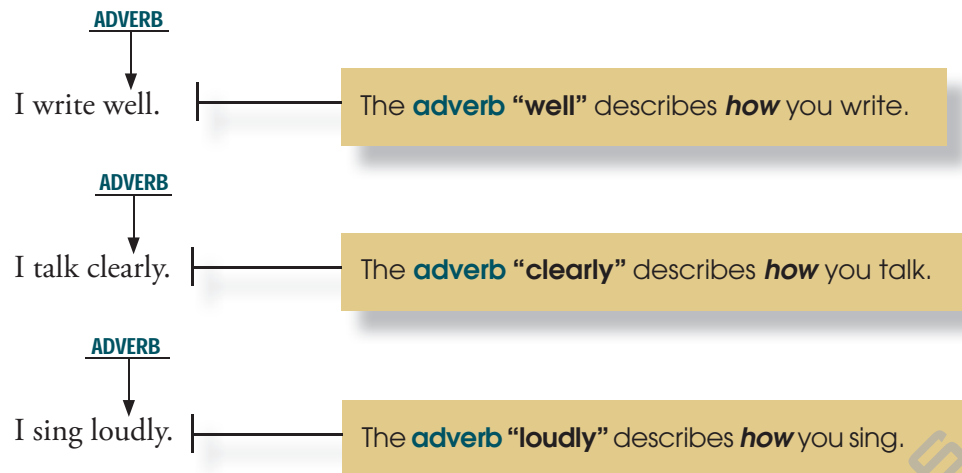
A **VERB** names an action: *run, write, talk, sing*.

An **ADVERB** describes that action. An **ADVERB** describes the **VERB**.

ADVERB

↓

I run fast. | The **adverb** “fast” describes *how* you run.



If we use the **VERB** “waved” we could use the **ADVERB** “gently” to describe *how* the leaves waved in the tree outside my bedroom window.

VERB ADVERB
↓ ↓
The green tree, whose leaves waved gently in the wind, grew outside my bedroom window.

The **ADVERB** “gently” describes the action of the **VERB** “waved.”

If we were to say the **VERB** “explained” and ask you to *describe* it further, you might use the **ADVERB** “clearly,” to describe the **VERB** “explained.”

VERB ADVERB
↓ ↓
He explained clearly how a jet engine works.

The **ADVERB** “clearly” describes the action of the **VERB** “explained.”

If we were to give you the **VERB** “text” and ask you to describe it further, you might give us this sentence:

ADVERB VERB
↓ ↓
She quickly texts her boyfriend.

The **ADVERB** “quickly” describes the **VERB** “texts.”

ADVERBS can change the meaning of a sentence.

VERB
ADVERB
 ↓ ↓
 He walked **quickly** to work.

VERB
ADVERB
 ↓ ↓
 He walked **slowly** to work.

When you *describe* the *action* (**walk**) with an **ADVERB** (**quickly** or **slowly**), you change the meaning of what you say, and you communicate more vividly. In the following example, notice how the **ADVERB** changes the meaning of the sentence.

ADVERB
VERB
 ↓ ↓
 I **passionately** asked my father to help me pay for college.

ADVERB
VERB
 ↓ ↓
 I **calmly** asked my father to help me pay for college.

Let's look at one more example. Let's try the **VERB** "dance."

VERB
ADVERB
 ↓ ↓
 He dances **wildly**.

As you can see, an **ADVERB** comes *either* before or after the **VERB**.

EXERCISES ON ADVERBS

Fill in the missing **adverb**:

1. I ran home _____.
2. Yesterday, he spoke _____ in favor of civil rights.
3. The sign was big, so he could read it _____.
4. I _____ ate my lunch.
5. The sea roared _____.



TRICKY:

“**Good**” is an **ADJECTIVE**; it describes **nouns**:

We won the game. It was a **good** day.

“**Well**” is an **ADVERB**; it describes a **verb**:

We won because we played **well**.

Chapter Review: Parts of Speech

NOUNS: Name a person, place, thing, or idea.

ADJECTIVES: Describe a person, place, thing or idea.

PRONOUNS: Take the place of (and refer to) nouns.

VERBS: Name actions, any action, every action.

ADVERBS: Describe verbs. They describe the action.



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Exercises for Chapter 01

I. NOUNS

a. Go for a walk. Take a notebook with you. Write down ten nouns that name things you see.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

b. In the following sentences, write **noun** above each **noun**.

Example:

noun *noun noun*

Johnny named his dog, Max.

1. Sally saw her Dad on the street.
2. The fire truck blared its sirens.
3. Roger asked Sally out to a movie.
4. The waitress brought us our tacos.
5. The big airplane landed noisily.
6. Rodrigo checked his iPhone for messages.
7. The balloons flew in the wind.
8. The band played all night long.
9. Judy made millions in the stock market.



10. The earthquake rattled everybody's nerves.

c. Fill in the missing noun in the following sentences:

1. Alicia served us _____

2. Jessica bought _____

3. Tyrone wanted _____

4. Mark cleaned _____

5. Miguel built _____

6. Susanna wrote _____

7. Francesco played _____

8. Marguerite wore _____

9. Kevin owned _____

10. Janet liked _____

II. VERBS

a. Watch a sports game. Write down ten **verbs** that name the actions in that game.

1. _____

6. _____

2. _____

7. _____

3. _____

8. _____

4. _____

9. _____

5. _____

10. _____

b. In the following sentences, write **verb** above each verb.

Example:

verb

Johnny named his dog Max.



14 PART 1 | ORIGINS OF LANGUAGE I: *The Cave at Lascaux*

1. Sally saw her Dad on the street.
2. The fire truck blared its sirens.
3. Roger asked Sally out to a movie.
4. The waitress brought us our tacos.
5. The big airplane landed noisily.
6. Rodrigo checked his Blackberry for messages.
7. The balloons flew in the wind.
8. The band played all night long.
9. Alice made millions in the stock market.
10. The earthquake rattled everybody's nerves.
11. The wind carried the umbrellas into the sky.

c. Fill in the missing **verb** in the following sentences:

1. Joanne _____ cookies.
2. Luis _____ a book.
3. I _____ dinner.
4. Charles _____ a motorcycle.
5. Rosa _____ the table.
6. Eric _____ his dog.
7. Sarah _____ the movie.



8. Justin _____ his name.
9. Tracy _____ New York.
10. Lucy _____ the guitar.

III. NOUNS & VERBS

In the following sentences, replace each missing NOUN with a *different* NOUN and each missing VERB with a *different* VERB. Your new sentences can make sense or not. They can be normal or silly. Feel free to be playful if you like.

Example:

Johnny named his dog Max.

Billy loved his elephant, George.

1. Sally saw her Dad on the street. _____ her _____ on the _____.
2. The ambulance blared its sirens. The _____ its _____.
3. Roger asked Sally out to a movie. _____ out to a _____.
4. The waitress brought us our tacos. The _____ us our _____.
5. The big airplane landed noisily. The big _____ noisily.
6. Rodrigo checked his iPhone for messages. _____ his _____ for _____.
7. The balloons flew in the wind. The _____ in the _____.



8. The band played all night long. The _____ all
_____ long.
9. Alicia made millions in the stock market. _____ in the
stock _____.
10. The earthquake rattled everybody's nerves. The _____
_____.

IV. PRONOUNS

Here's a paragraph with no **pronouns**. Where appropriate, cross out the **noun** and write the **pronoun** above it.

Roger and Roger's friend, Samantha, went to a concert last night. Roger bought the tickets for the concert last week when Roger heard about the concert on the radio. Samantha wanted to go because Samantha loved the group that was playing. Samantha listened to their music all the time. When Roger told Samantha about the concert, Samantha said immediately that Samantha wanted to go.

V. ADJECTIVES

- a. We'll pick a noun, any noun, then think of **adjectives** that might describe that noun.

Young woman

Old woman

Skinny woman

Funny woman



Pick a noun of your own, any noun. Think of ten **adjectives** that might describe that noun.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

b. Fill in the missing **adjective**:

1. I went to a _____ soccer game last night.
2. We had _____ seats.
3. My brother's new girlfriend is really _____.
4. My friend Juliet wore _____ jeans.
5. The goalies were both extremely _____.
6. One coach wore a _____ jacket; the other coach wore no jacket at all.
7. I had a _____ hot dog and a _____ soda.
8. Although it was a _____ night, the stadium lights showed everything well.
9. We were all _____ when we left.
10. In that _____ weather, we walked almost half a mile to our car.

c. Choose your favorite **adjective** for each sentence. It doesn't matter which one you choose, as either one may work well. Cross out the **adjective** you wouldn't use.

1. My new computer is extremely (fast, slow).



2. The (loud, harsh) sirens blared through the city.
3. My Professor is very (interesting, short).
4. The (beautiful, exciting) painting hangs in the entryway now.
5. All five (big, smart) guys came into the meeting at once.
6. Last October was the (hottest, coldest) October in 20 years.
7. The (blue, green) bird flew in through the window.
8. The city was (busy, quiet) today.
9. I bought the most (expensive, gorgeous) shirt this afternoon.
10. This summer, even the sea was (hot, wild).

VI. ADVERBS

- a. We'll pick a verb, any verb, then think of **adverbs** that might describe that verb.

He runs **fast**.

He runs **slowly**.

He runs **hard**.

He runs **awkwardly**.

He runs **beautifully**.

Pick a verb, any verb, then choose ten **adverbs** to describe that verb.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



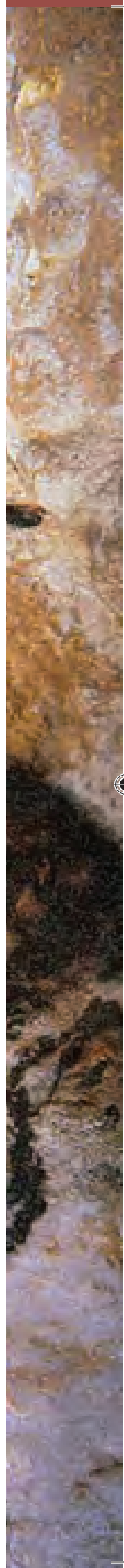
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

b. Fill in an **adverb** wherever we have left a space.

When I hired Johnny, I thought he worked _____. One morning, we went _____ to work together on that project I had on Delancy Street. All morning, Johnny worked _____. At lunchtime, I bought Johnny something down at the corner. He ate _____. He talked _____. When we got back to work, Johnny worked _____ all afternoon. Had I hired the right guy?

c. Think of ten **adverbs** that describe some *action* that you do regularly.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____





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6. _____

7. _____

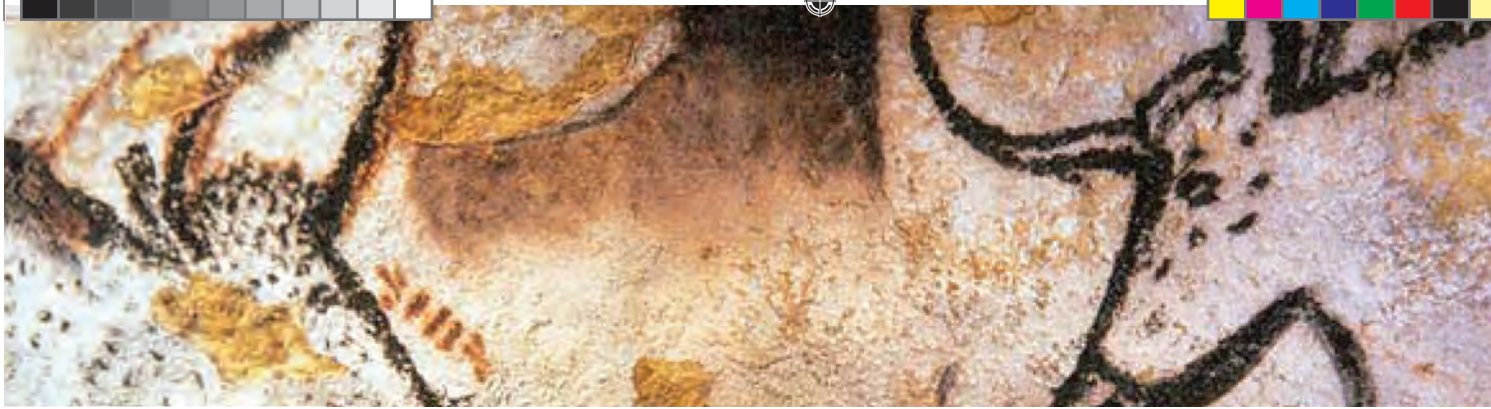
8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

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CHAPTER 02

the act of reading | noun:verb:image

Coming into the classroom, you take your usual seat. “Did you ever wonder,” the Professor asks the class, “why we all take the same seat every time we come into a classroom? Your seat becomes your place, your home, someplace you’re comfortable.”

In the following excerpt from the narrative essay¹, “The Way to Rainy Mountain,” the Native American writer N. Scott Momaday discusses a journey he takes to his native land in Southwestern Oklahoma. This becomes a journey of self-discovery for Momaday. He investigates his cultural roots to discover himself; he examines the “handprint” his people have left on the world, made up of their landscape, their religion, their history, and their myths.

Throughout this book, we give you different myths of the origins of language. Here, Momaday describes the Kiowas’ myth of the origins of their people. Myths play a vital role in every culture, giving us stories to explain our lives. Powerful tales, myths speak to every member of the culture. Momaday, for example, a modern man, may not exactly believe the myth that his people came into the world through a hollow log, but that myth offers him a vision that he cherishes as a poetic gift from the imagination of his people.

The Way to Rainy Mountain

A SINGLE KNOLL rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves

¹In a **narrative essay**, the author writes in a personal way, often telling a story. Here, Momaday includes other types of writing as well, including history, myth, etc. But the main form of this essay is **narrative**.



of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

I returned to Rainy Mountain in July. My grandmother had died in the spring, and I wanted to be at her grave. She had lived to be very old and at last infirm. Her only living daughter was with her when she died, and I was told that in death her face was that of a child.

I like to think of her as a child. When she was born, the Kiowas were living the last great moment of their history. For more than a hundred years they had controlled the open range from the Smoky Hill River to the Red, from the headwaters of the Canadian to the fork of the Arkansas and Cimarron. In alliance with the Comanches, they had ruled the whole of the southern Plains. War was their sacred business, and they were among the finest horsemen the world has ever known. But warfare for the Kiowas was preeminently a matter of disposition rather than of survival, and they never understood the grim, unrelenting advance of the U.S. Calvary. When at last, divided and ill-provisioned, they were driven onto the Staked Plains in the cold rains of autumn, they fell into panic. In Palo Duro Canyon they abandoned their crucial stores to pillage and had nothing then but their lives. In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum. My grandmother was spared the humiliation of those high gray walls by eight or ten years, but she must have known from birth the affliction of defeat, the dark brooding of old warriors.

Her name was Aho, and she belonged to the last culture to evolve in North America. Her forebears came down from the high country in western Montana nearly three centuries ago. They were a mountain people, a mysterious tribe of hunters whose language has never been positively classified in any major group. In the late seventeenth century they began a long migration to the south and east. It was a journey toward the dawn, and it led to a golden age. Along the way the Kiowas were befriended by the Crows, who gave them the culture and religion of the Plains. They acquired horses, and their ancient nomadic spirit was suddenly free of the ground. They acquired Tai-me, the sacred Sun Dance doll, from that moment the object and symbol of their worship, and so shared in the divinity of the sun. Not least, they acquired the sense of destiny, therefore courage and pride. When they entered upon the southern Plains they had been transformed. No longer were they slaves to the simple necessity of survival; they were a lordly and dangerous society of fighters and thieves, hunters and priests

of the sun. According to their origin myth, they entered the world through a hollow log. From one point of view, their migration was the fruit of an old prophecy, for indeed they emerged from a sunless world.

* * *

In the last class, you worked on **NOUNS** and **VERBS**.

Notice a few of the **NOUNS** Momaday uses to name persons, places, things, or ideas in this paragraph: “people,” “winds,” and “grasshoppers.”

Notice a few of the **VERBS** Momaday uses to name the actions in this paragraph: “rises,” “gave,” “turns.”

Let’s go just one more step today. Let’s ask ourselves, what is an **IMAGE**?

The word **IMAGE** is familiar, but you don’t really know what an **IMAGE** is.

what is an image?

An **IMAGE** is a picture of something. When you look at a painting, you are seeing an **IMAGE**. When you go to the movies, you see **IMAGES** on the screen. In language, **IMAGES** are those pictures you see in your mind when you read or hear certain words. If we say, “Your friend Billy went home,” you might see Billy’s house in your mind. If I say that your boyfriend or girlfriend called, you might see an image of your boyfriend or girlfriend in your mind. We use **IMAGES** in writing to describe the things we want our reader to see.

Describe =

From the Latin: *Describere*

De = the meaning is uncertain in this case

Scribe = [scribere] *to write*

IMAGES make your writing strong. They help the reader see what you want to say. How do we make **IMAGES** using language? Usually, we see that **NOUNS** make up the center of an **IMAGE**. However, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs can all play an important role in creating **IMAGES**.

Why do we want to think about **IMAGES**? An idea is abstract. An image is concrete. We can feel an **IMAGE**, we can see it, we can smell it, and we can hear it. If you say the word *love*, that’s an abstract idea. If you say that Sally and Joe walk down the street hand in hand, that’s a concrete image of love. You can’t see love, but you certainly can picture Sally and Joe and feel their love.

In “The Way to Rainy Mountain,” N. Scott Momaday uses the **NOUNS** *grasshopper* and *hill* to create **IMAGES**. If you close your eyes, and we say the noun “**grasshoppers**” you see grasshoppers.

That's an **IMAGE**. Nouns can make us see **IMAGES**. If you close your eyes, and we say the noun "**hill**" you see a hill. What you see in your mind is an **IMAGE** of a hill.

When you see the **IMAGE** of those grasshoppers, you imagine an open landscape where it is quiet enough to hear the grasshoppers chirp. When you see the **IMAGE** of this hill, together with hearing the sound of the grasshoppers, you get a picture of a natural environment which must have contributed to the Kiowas' culture by giving them a sense of quiet, peacefulness, openness, and a sense of gratitude and respect for the landscape they live in. As we can see, **IMAGES**, in a few words, can envelop us in a whole mood.

Now we understand how **NOUNS** work to make **IMAGES**.

For example, you might say:

This morning, I had breakfast.

You use the **NOUNS** *morning* and *breakfast* to give us an **IMAGE**. We can picture you in the *morning* eating *breakfast*. We know something of how your day began. (As you read this, you might be seeing an **IMAGE** in your mind of yourself eating breakfast this morning.)

If you use more specific nouns, you might say:

This morning, I had eggs, bacon, sausage, hash browns, fruit, cornbread, and coffee for breakfast.

You use the **NOUNS** *eggs*, *bacon*, *sausage*, *hash browns*, *fruit*, *cornbread*, and *coffee* to create a better **IMAGE**. We know you have a big appetite, and now we know a lot more about how your day began.

In another instance you might say:

I saw a good movie last night.

You use the **NOUNS**, *I*, *movie*, and *night* to create an **IMAGE**. I know something about what you did last night.

But, if you tell us:

Last night, downtown at the Rialto, my friend, Charlene, and I saw a good movie,

you have used the more specific **NOUNS** *night*, *downtown*, *Rialto*, *friend*, *Charlene*, and *movie* to give us a more specific **IMAGE** of your life.

You will use an abundance of **IMAGES** in all your essays. Looking back at N. Scott Momaday's essay, is it possible to say that his whole essay is images? Perhaps all essays are about creating **IMAGES**.



When you write, think in terms of **IMAGES**, think in terms of the images you use to describe what you write about.

How do you pull those **IMAGES** together into one cohesive, unified piece of work? You do that with your **THESIS**.

Chapter Review: Image

An **IMAGE** is a mental picture an author creates through the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These images make ideas concrete so the reader can grasp the ideas and most clearly understand the essay.



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Exercises for Chapter 2

I. YOUR THOUGHTS

- a. What do the **images** in Momaday's essay, "The Way to Rainy Mountain," make you think of or make you feel?
- b. What do the **images** in Momaday's essay tell you about Momaday himself? Why do you think Momaday chose these particular **images**?
- c. Why did N. Scott Momaday write this essay?
While there is no one right answer to this exercise, we've provided the entire essay at the back of the text to help you find your own answer to this question.

II. MOMADAY'S ART: PARTS OF SPEECH

- a. Go back over Momaday's essay. List ten nouns that Momaday uses.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

- b. List ten verbs Momaday uses.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |



c. Momaday uses only four pronouns. They are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

d. List ten adjectives that Momaday uses.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

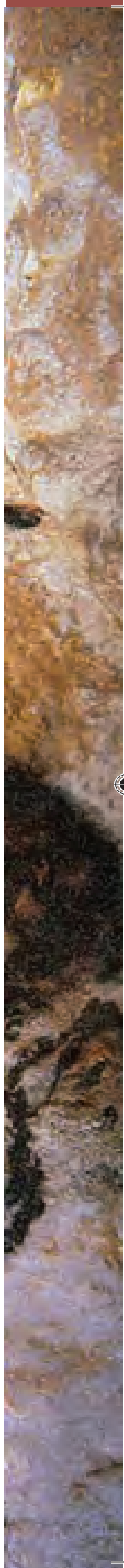
e. Momaday uses only three adverbs. They're a little tricky to spot, so if you get them, be proud of yourself.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

III. YOUR EXPERIENCE

a. Look around the classroom. List ten **nouns** that name things in the classroom.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |



b. Momaday uses **nouns** to make **images** that describe his life and the life of his tribe, the Kiowas. List ten nouns that describe your life in and around your house, apartment, or dorm. Notice how those **nouns** alone tend to create **images**.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

c. Pick one of the **nouns** you listed above. Write about that **noun**. Do you like the object it describes? Why? Do you not like it? Why? Does it have a special meaning in your life? Does that noun define you or your family in some way?

d. List a few of the verbs that name actions from your daily life (walk, talk, etc.).

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

e. List ten adjectives that describe some of your friends.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |



- f. List five **adverbs** that *describe* actions (**verbs**) you might see people in a movie do. (Include the verb.)

Example: drive **fast**

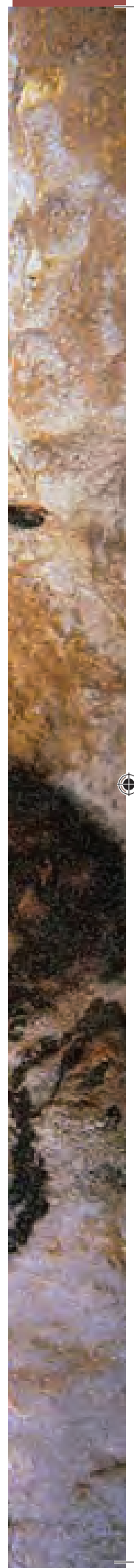
- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

IV. ACTIVE READING

Nouns name people, places, things, and ideas. N. Scott Momaday's people, the Kiowas, named their mountain "Rainy Mountain." We name things to make them part of our lives.

{Here is a real-life example.} When my father was a kid in the Bronx, New York, he used to tell his friends, "I'll meet you at *the stables*." There had once been a horse stables at that place, 133rd Street and the Grand Concourse, but not for a hundred years. For those kids, the name, *the stables*, was a secret code, a secret naming of a special place. Even though my father lives in California now, he can still imagine that, if he went back to *the stables* in the Bronx, all his childhood friends would be there.

- a. Write about a place that is important to you or an imaginary place that could be important to you. Notice the **nouns** you use to describe that place. Feel free to make up names, like "the stables."
- b. Momaday writes, "Loneliness is an aspect of the landscape."
1. Do certain words in Momaday's piece evoke loneliness?
 2. Do certain words in Momaday's essay evoke a feeling of home?



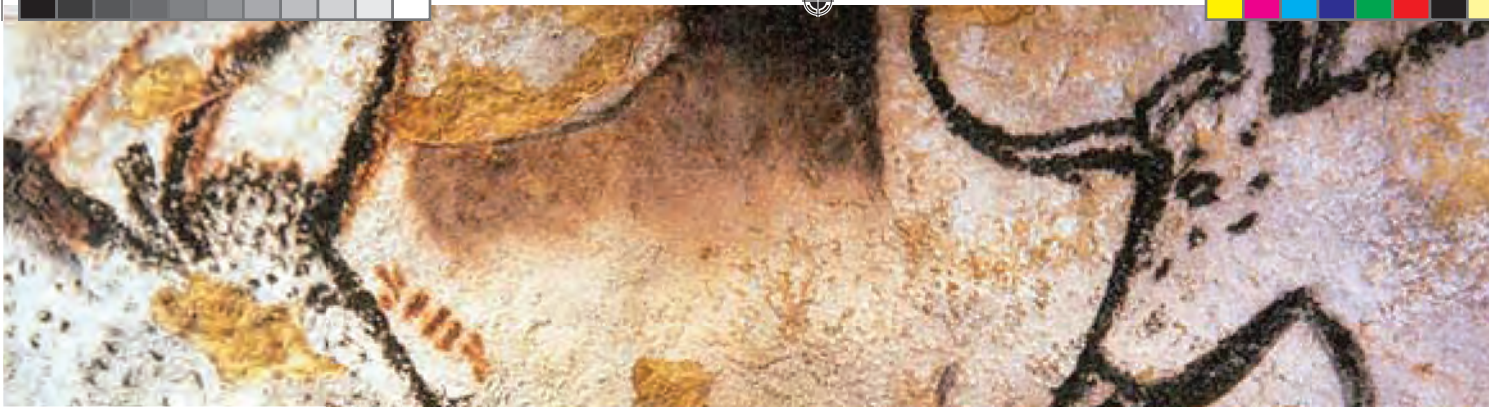


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3. Describe a place that feels lonely to you.
 4. Describe a place that feels comfortable to you.
- c. Momaday writes about the relationship between nature and people. Is there a strong relationship between nature and the people where you live? Write about that relationship. If there isn't, write about why the place where you live is important to the people who live there.

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CHAPTER 03

the act of writing | what's the point | all about thesis

Your **THESIS** is a gift you give to your essay. Better, even, your **THESIS** is a gift you give to your reader. To make an essay work beautifully, and to help the reader understand you, the **THESIS** clearly sets forth the direction the essay will take. The thesis organizes your ideas for you as you write your essay; it organizes the ideas of the essay as a reader reads it. Your **THESIS** is the heart of the communication that unites you with your essay and unites your essay with your reader.

what is a thesis?

What is a **THESIS**? What can a **THESIS** do for you?

- Your **THESIS** states the *main idea* of your essay.
- Your **THESIS** tells your reader *why* you are writing this essay.

To understand what a **THESIS** does, we can learn from the way that scientists use **THESIS**:

The Thesis in Science

In scientific research, scientific theory, and scientific knowledge, the scientist always has a **THESIS**, and s/he has to prove it or disprove it. Some great moments from the history of science:

- **THESIS:** The earth is flat. (Christopher Columbus took care of that one.)
- **THESIS:** The sun and the planets all revolve around the earth. (Copernicus **disproved** that **THESIS** in the 16th Century.)
- **THESIS:** Penicillin can cure many bacterial infections. (Alexander Fleming **proved** that **THESIS** in 1928, curing, among other serious diseases, staphylococcus infections, strep throat, etc.)
- **THESIS:** The moon is made of green cheese. (Astronauts Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin **disproved** that **THESIS** when they landed on the moon on July 21, 1969.)



What Makes a Good Thesis?

A good **THESIS**:

- States something that is not obvious and is not just a statement of facts;
- States an idea that requires discussion, evidence, and proof;
- Is narrowly focused;
- Makes an argument—an argument you *care* about. The more you care, the better you will write.

Not a good THESIS:

A good THESIS:

Today is Monday. (Obvious)	History supports the superstition that bad things happen on Mondays. (Not obvious; requires discussion, evidence, and proof.)
Abraham Lincoln was the 16th President of the United States. (Obvious)	We still rely, today, on the human values Abraham Lincoln defined for us when he delivered the Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863. (Not obvious; requires discussion, evidence, and proof.)
Rain is wet. (Obvious)	Acid rain is a major destructive ecological problem. (Not obvious; requires discussion, evidence, and proof.)
Bears live in the woods. (Obvious)	As humans take over more wild land for development, bears come into towns in search of food. When they do, we should kill them (or: we should not kill them). (Not obvious; requires discussion, evidence, and proof.)
Beethoven was an important composer. (Too broad, too general.)	Beethoven's late quartets broke the mold of musical composition to establish new forms that would last into the 21st Century. (Specific and focused.)
Weather is important. (Too broad, too general.)	As we face global warming, we should look to past major climate changes, such as the Irish Potato Famine, the Depression-era drought in the U.S., the Biblical famine in Egypt, etc. to guide us in planning for the challenges global warming presents to us. (An argument.)
Public schools generally serve bad food in their lunchrooms. (A statement, not an argument.)	Schools that serve bad food in their lunchrooms harm their students and should turn to fresh, unprocessed, whole foods for better health and eating patterns. (An argument.)
Beautiful architecture is nice. (A statement, not an argument.)	The historical architecture of Chicago makes it an important, vital city to visit. (An argument.)

Let's now review the first paragraph of N. Scott Momaday's essay "The Way to Rainy Mountain" to both refresh our memory and determine his **THESIS**. We'll repeat the first paragraph of "The Way to Rainy Mountain." Read it over to remind yourself of what Momaday writes. Then, we'll find Momaday's **THESIS**.

An author (including you) might put the **THESIS** at the beginning of an essay or put it in later, after he or she has developed the work. Or, as in the case of N. Scott Momaday's essay, the **THESIS** may be implied. The author may not state it directly, but we can discover the **THESIS** from reading the work. Momaday doesn't state his thesis, but we can figure it out pretty easily.

The Way to Rainy Mountain

A SINGLE KNOLL rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil's edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

* * *

When you write an essay, we have suggested that you ask yourself our signature question: **WHY AM I WRITING THIS ESSAY?** The answer to that question will lead you to your **THESIS**. When we ask this same question of Momaday—**why is N. Scott Momaday writing his essay?**—we will discover his **THESIS**. In the second line, Momaday writes about "my people." In the rest of this paragraph, he describes his people with an intensely detailed description of the landscape they inhabit. He concludes that the landscape is so unique and so beautiful that you may think this "is where creation was begun."

From all this, we might decide that Momaday, wanting to tell us about his heritage, has this **THESIS** in mind:

A severely beautiful and sacred-feeling landscape has shaped the life and culture of my people, the Kiowas.



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As you learn to write well, it would serve you better to state your **THESIS** early on in your essay. For example, Momaday might have begun his essay:

A severely beautiful and sacred-feeling landscape has shaped the life and culture of my people, the Kiowas.

Do you think Momaday continues, in his full essay, to develop this **THESIS**?

Looking back at the selection from Momaday in Chapter 2, page 21, if we were to write an essay *about* Momaday, would any of the following work well as our **THESIS**?

In “The Way to Rainy Mountain,” N. Scott Momaday demonstrates that the landscape shapes the culture of a people.

or

When N. Scott Momaday returns home to honor the death of his grandmother, he also revisits the culture of the golden age of the Kiowas.

or

In his journey home to honor the death of his grandmother, N. Scott Momaday preserves the dying culture of the Kiowas by writing about it.

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Chapter Review: Thesis

A Good Thesis:

- States the main idea of the essay.
- Tells the reader why you are writing this essay.
- States an idea that requires discussion, evidence, and proof.
- Is narrowly focused.
- Makes an argument—makes an argument you *care* about. The more you care, the better you will write.



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Exercises for Chapter 3:

A. THESIS

1. Which of the following seem to be a good **THESIS** or bad **THESIS**?"

Red is my favorite color. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

Tuition at public colleges should be free. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

I'm really hungry right now. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

We should (or should not) lower the drinking age to 18. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

We should (or should not) legalize marijuana. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

The United States of America is 234 years old. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

California is the most populous State of the United States. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

Any immigrant living, working, and paying taxes in the United States should (or should not) be allowed to become a citizen. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

Every young American should have to do two years of military service. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

My dog's name is Dog. Good Thesis ____ Bad Thesis ____

2. Read the following excerpts. What is the thesis of the each one? The author may or may not state it directly. Copy each author's **THESIS** in their own words, or write in your own words what you think the main idea—the **THESIS**—will be.

from AN ORGY OF POWER

I am reluctant to write about torture. It holds no special fascination for me—on the contrary, I find the subject repellent. But I did not choose the times I live in, nor do I choose what I am compelled to write. As a writer, I am committed to speaking from my own experience, which may seem to counsel silence. I have not been to Iraq, Afghanistan, or Guantánamo Bay. I am not a journalist or an authority on the history of torture. But the perimeters of experience do not end with what is immediate. In today's world, almost everything connects with everything else. The coffee that fuels my editing was raised in Kenya, my shirt was made in China. Reports arrive daily from around the world. The problem is sorting the relevant from the



irrelevant, the true from the false, and assigning each bit of information something like its proper weight. These things make learning gradual, writing slow, and these notes very late.

— GEORGE GESSERT

What is this author's **THESIS**?

BASEBALL FOR LIFE

Jarrold Petree has spent his whole life throwing. The first things he threw, according to his mother, were assorted toys and a fair amount of food from the highchair. Before long, he moved on to throwing balls. Some babies, of course, are throwers. But from the very start, Jarrod had an especially determined arm. At least this is the view taken by his father, Tim, who played Division II baseball at the Florida Institute of Technology in the late '80s, graduating only a few years before his son was born: the kid basically arrived on earth wanting to throw.

— SARA CORBETT

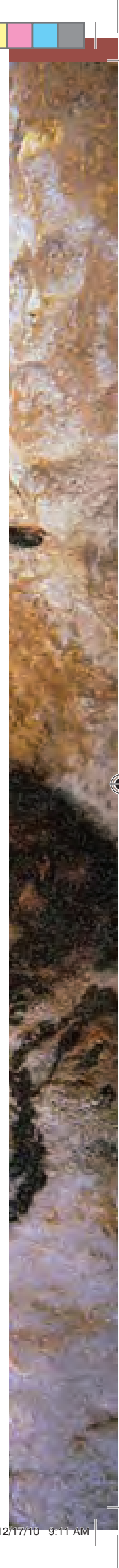
What is this author's **THESIS**?

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO DINNER

Sometimes in life, there is a thing you long for so deeply that you are willing to wait for years – almost lying in ambush! – until you can get it. Suppose there's a woman you've always desired, but her heart belongs to another. Or maybe there's a job you've always fancied, or a wristwatch, or a car. You wait for it. Or perhaps there's a sovereign nation that you and your family have always wanted to invade, but the moment never seemed right. What do you do? You *wait*.

— ELIZABETH GILBERT

What is this author's **THESIS**?



Assignment for Chapter 3:

Write an essay in which you either:

1. • Analyze the relationship of any group of people to the landscape they live in.

How do they relate to that landscape? How does the landscape shape them? You could write about the community that you come from, or you could write about any other group of people: farmers in Central California, fishermen in Texas, Parisians in Paris, any group that strikes your imagination.

or

- Analyze the relationship of a group of people to their language.

or

- Analyze the relationship of a group of people to their history.

or

- Analyze the relationship of a group of people to at least one of their myths.

2. Using N. Scott Momaday's essay as a model, write about your home and your culture. How might you write about your culture to keep your cultural history and your cultural identity alive?

Remember:

Whether you choose option #1 or option #2, formulate a clear, strong **THESIS** for your essay.