Chapter 15 is designed to offer concentrated reading and practice in analyzing texts in order to unpack the ways that individual authors achieve their purpose. The chapter presents seven strategies, each discussed and illustrated by one student essay and one professional essay. Questions about strategy following each professional essay focus discussion on how the writer achieved a particular effect. In assigning the professional essays, you might want to advise students to read the three questions before beginning to read the essay. This can help focus their reading and prepare them for class discussion. The questions could be assigned for student journals. The point of the questions is not to pinpoint specific, correct answers but to encourage students to read closely and be able to cite evidence for their answers.

The seven strategies have been introduced in Chapters 5 and 6 as ways to develop writing, but this chapter provides more sustained attention to reading and writing strategies. The seven strategies are (1) narration and description, (2) process analysis, (3) comparison and contrast, (4) division and classification, (5) definition, (6) causal analysis, and (7) argument. In addition to the two essays that illustrate each strategy, the text provides “A Sampler of Other Essays,” all included in Writing with a Purpose. Instructors may want to direct students with strong interests in particular strategies toward these additional essays.

Each strategic discussion guides students through the processes of “Selecting Your Subject,” “Analyzing Your Audience,” “Determining Your Purpose,” and “Using the Strategy.” The repetition of these four practices emphasizes for students the importance of maintaining awareness of their goals and taking control of their writing. Emphasis on close readings of the texts invites students into the world of writers whose essays have reached a high level of artistry. Self-consciously chosen strategies for particular purposes is the key to the success of the sample writings. Particularly useful for students is the attention to “Using the Strategy.”
The student essays included illustrate the strategies used, offering running marginal commentary. The steps for each strategy are broken down and analyzed so students can apply to their own essays what they have learned.

**STRATEGY ONE: NARRATION AND DESCRIPTION**

*Questions About Strategy (p. 424)*

1. The opening and closing scenes are detailed, personal accounts of the author’s actions. The conflict is established in the first sentence, with the news of death. The narrator muses that “at just about the hour when my father died . . . I banged my thumb with a hammer.” The author concludes the narrative by recounting his “journey” to the basement and to his father’s tools. Memories of his father come up out of the drawer of chisels and knives. The hammer at the beginning hits the narrator with great force, providing an objective correlative to the news of his father’s death. The chisels and knives at the end are tools that whittle away and pierce, again mirroring the type of pain one feels when experiencing grief. The author self-consciously chooses tools that provide figurative images and suggest, metaphorically, the emotions of loss. By focusing on his father’s tools and the memories surrounding them, Sanders restricts his subject to manageable size; the story within the story is the inheritance of not just tools but of the memories embedded in them.

2. Sanders chooses details that are related to acts of building. On the one hand, he recounts the use of the hammer in building his grandparents’ house. On the other, he intertwines the building of relationships among family members as the tools are handed down from generation to generation. Providing technical detail as needed (such as how to hit the nail and not your thumb, and the importance of using the level), Sanders does not attempt to provide painstaking detail about great numbers of tools. Instead, he confines his discussion only to particular hand tools (hammer, saw, level, squares) that have been most meaningful to him. Each of the tools described carries with it a separate story about his father or grandfather, all of which contribute to the larger story of Sanders’s inheritance.

3. Each of the details Sanders chooses entails relationships between different generations and the things they learn from one another: between Sanders and his father (and *his* father), and between Sanders and his daughter. The smashed thumb frames the narrative with a story of pain, which then transcends the physical and reaches to emotional pain as the narrator shifts from the moment of contact to memories of things his father had said. Each of the details provides another link to the theme of “inheritance.” Sanders’s
Teaching with a Purpose

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STRATEGY TWO: PROCESS ANALYSIS

Questions About Strategy (p. 433)

1. In his overview, Evans roughs out a typical dancer routine following the opening of a show (paragraph 2); introduces a particular example of the “swing dancer” (paragraph 3); and provides information about auditions (paragraphs 4 and 5). Paragraphs 6 and 7 provide “special terms” by categorizing the dancers with whom the swing dancer will be working according to behavioral patterns (those who “nest” in the theatre and those who don’t). This provides a context for understanding the different personalities the swing dancer must adjust to.

2. Evans writes to an audience, addressing his readers directly with the use of the casual second-person pronoun “you.” His purpose is to provide information rather than give directions; he makes only the assumption that his readers have an interest in what happens before the curtains rise, not that they have been on stage themselves. In illustrating the sequence of steps required of the swing dancer in preparation for performance, Evans avoids the use of specialized dance jargon. Instead, he uses a chronological pattern to organize the steps (“your first evening,” “the next night,” etc.) and explains what the swing dancer does in relation to the other dancers. The steps are told with a fair grain of narrative humor, which prevents the essay from becoming too immersed in linear, factual steps.

3. Evans does not provide details of the performance, saying only that “it happens just the way everyone expected, only worse.” The details he gives of both practice and performance appear to be taken from Evans’s own experience, although he presents the details in a general way rather than from the perspective of an autobiographical “I.” Although practice sessions allow the swing dancer to pause and take notes, the notes usually end up being next to useless. The performance itself leaves the swing dancer (and some of the other dancers as well) with a sense of confusion about who is doing what, and
how. Somehow, the performance concludes, but the swing dancer is left with little self-esteem and no sense of pride in the accomplishment of having done the show. Success in performance is defined as simply getting through it. What Evans’s essay shows, albeit humorously, is the enormous amount of stress experienced by swing dancers, who nonetheless will continue to show up for future auditions.

STRATEGY THREE: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Questions About Strategy (p. 444)

1. Nye’s many stories about her house and its familiar objects reinforce her thesis that old houses have deep roots, like the trees that surround them, but “the roots of new houses go out into the atmosphere.” Her stories about her mother’s red Magic Chef stove and turquoise refrigerator are counterbalanced by the absence of stories about her brother’s house.

2. The differences between Nye and her brother may result from the variety of homes they shared during their upbringing. But while Nye likes to tell the story of her visit to their first family house, her brother has never been back. He is less sentimental than she and likes to know that everything around him is new and perfect.

3. College students often discuss the timeless controversy of nature versus nurture. Nature means that human beings, in this case Nye and her brother, are the way they are because of their innate nature, or genetic structure. Nurture means that human beings, again Nye and her brother, are the way they are because of the way they have interacted with or been shaped by their environment. Nye has no conclusions about how either of these concepts accounts for her differences with her brother.

STRATEGY FOUR: DIVISION AND CLASSIFICATION

Questions About Strategy (p. 452)

1. Viorst divides the subject of lying into three main categories, as suggested in the discussion of “Using the Strategy.” Viorst’s categories are “Social
Lies,” “Protective Lies,” and “Trust-Keeping Lies.” Since all classification systems are arbitrary, students can see that Viorst selected these categories for her specific purposes. The overarching reasoning behind her classification system has to do with maintaining social relations, not intentional criminal activity. The categories she creates pose a more subtle moral dilemma than criminal lying, since most will agree that criminal activity is not to be tolerated.

2. Inconsistencies include evasion rather than outright lies (saying “You really cooked up a storm” instead of praising the soup); lying to “protect” others when you wouldn’t like it if someone did this to you; lying for others but not for one’s self. Viorst makes a distinction in degree when she states that “once we’ve promised to keep a trust, we must tell lies to keep it,” while at the same time “we can’t tell Watergate lies.” She acknowledges the contradiction in these two statements. Her ending supports her opening, which actually lacks a thesis because she isn’t sure what stand to take on all this. She instead presents what she calls “a series of moral puzzles,” which is also how she categorizes the entire subject of lying.

3. The question “What about you?” appears as a refrain throughout the essay and creates cohesion between sections of the essay in addition to drawing her reader into the debate. Her examples come from everyday interactions common to most people. Viorst also asks more specific questions (“Will you praise hideous presents and homely kids?”) in each section. In concluding her essay with “What about you?” Viorst projects moral decision making about lying onto her readers, creating them as responders.

STRATEGY FIVE: DEFINITION

Questions About Strategy (p. 459)

1. Gleick explains that the word multitasking, like many of the words in our contemporary vocabulary, comes from the world of computers. In the 1960s, scientists “arranged to let a single computer serve multiple users on a network.” By extension, when multitasking is applied to human beings, it explains how individuals try to work at many different tasks at the same time.

2. In these three examples, as well as in the others in this essay, Gleick provides illustrations that may seem logical and efficient to the user but slightly bizarre to the reader. Does David Feldman really need to floss and browse at the same time? Does Mark Maxham really need to convert life into the shorthand of computer code and then compile it into some kind of
program? Does Michael Hartl have to start his morning by pushing so many
tasks into so little time? That’s multitasking.

3. McLuhan saw media as a “black and white, unitary stream”—that is,
information was broadcast to a passive viewer. He did not anticipate that the
viewer would surf with the remote control or constantly interact with the many
domains of the Web.

STRATEGY SIX: CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Questions About Strategy (pp. 467–468)

1. The theory suggests that if, by getting a divorce, the parents are happier, then
that happiness will trickle down to the children. But Wallerstein and Blakeslee
say that the circumstances that enrich an adult’s life are not available to
children and the love that prompts a second marriage is not shared by the
children.

2. “Divorce is a different experience for children.” Because they don’t expect it,
children often view divorce as the destruction of a family structure. For that
reason, they are afraid and feel rejected, angry, alone, guilty, and grief
stricken. The authors illustrate these effects by quoting children who
experienced them.

3. Wallerstein and Blakeslee argue that the real effects of divorce are felt not in
the immediate crisis but years later: “One cannot predict long-term effects of
divorce on children from how they react at the outset.” The tapestry metaphor
suggests that the many threads (causes/effects) woven into the postdivorce
period make the pattern difficult to read.

STRATEGY SEVEN: ARGUMENT

Questions About Strategy (p. 482)

1. Ethical appeals establish the trustworthiness of the writer. McKibben
establishes himself as a naturalist through the use of personal narrative before
introducing outside authorities. The personal experience ends with his
description of the sounds of a chainsaw in the woods. This provides the
transition into the larger context of nature and how human activity has
changed it. McKibben relates the effects of a changed nature to the cause of
human-made noise in the woods.

2. McKibben makes the point that we are now in a “postnatural” world where the
view of nature as enduring blinds us to its fragility. He twice states that
we have changed the atmosphere and weather, thereby changing everything. Humans’ view of nature has shifted from nature as a force to be reckoned with to nature as hobby. We have only a surface relationship with the natural world, which is being fundamentally changed by human engineering. We continue to cling to the idea of nature as hardy, despite the realities of endangered ecosystems.

3. McKibben does not argue for solutions but presents the ideas of several scientists, such as the suggestion of a natural method for extracting carbon dioxide from the air; using a laser to scrub chlorofluorocarbons from the earth’s atmosphere, and using dozens of airplanes to carry ozone into the stratosphere. McKibben remains skeptical of any solutions. He says they only “might” effect normalcy. Even if the various solutions work, he feels the planet will never be the same. As a result of having produced carbon dioxide, we are “ending nature.” He argues there is a difference between the end of natural processes (which has not occurred) and the end of the separation of nature from human society, which he sees as the end of nature as we have known it. Nature has become merely another hobby. Our conscious need for nature, he says, has become superficial. We may recognize what we have lost only when it is irrevocably gone.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Narrate: Particularly important in this assignment is the emphasis on finding the “lesson” of the object and not simply telling a story—“finding the story within the story.” Students all have personal stories to tell, and they enjoy writing personal narratives more than any other assignment. In order to push them beyond a mere accounting of events (“and then . . .”), stress the importance of finding the reason why the story must be told: Why should an audience care about someone else’s family photograph or old tool? This demands that students carefully consider audience purpose for their writing. The sample of other essays can provide students with more models as they ponder their own stories.

2. Observe: This assignment can benefit students in several ways. They can research a job in their major that interests them, or they can learn about a completely new field of study. Conducting an interview and perhaps visiting the person on the job can provide direct experience of the job environment, particularly valuable for students with no job experience. Seeing a real person in a real job can demystify professions unknown to individual students and
help them avoid romanticizing certain jobs. Finally, the task of analyzing a process and presenting it to a reader demands that they consider how to shape the data they have gathered. This kind of “field research” exposes students to the processes of case study research and shows them that “knowledge” takes many forms.

3. Investigate: In order to complete this assignment, students must first define the concept of “joke” and then find out how each “community” they observe defines “joke.” What is considered to be “humor” may also differ from group to group. To what degree do shared experiences provide the basis of humor for each group? Do there appear to be race-specific or gender-specific jokes? Strategies of definition and classification, as well as comparison and contrast, will be useful as students work on their assignment. Students might introduce their findings by narrating their interviewing methods, engaging in a kind of “meta-narrative” about their research.

4. Collaborate: The real focus of this assignment is on how students perceive the learning process and what they have learned about what they need as writers. It is also an opportunity for them to express what irritates them about their writing teachers and what kinds of things they have found most helpful. The categories students outline and the selection principles they use could be instructive for teachers in terms of explaining what students value in the writing classroom. This assignment could produce highly entertaining essays, as long as students maintain a sense of humor about themselves and their teachers (and as long as their teachers maintain a sense of humor about themselves). Emphasis on personality traits should be discouraged; stress should be placed on classroom management and teaching styles. As a group or classroom activity, the assignment could be fun while offering students practice in learning how to define by category.

5. Read: Students may want to research the language of computers, to see how words have taken on additional meanings as the electronic superhighway has expanded (they might even begin with the terms highway and superhighway and compare nonelectronic meanings with electronic meanings). They might make lists of other terms and try to identify when these words began to take on “other” meanings. “Yahoo,” for example, has evolved into an entirely different unit of meaning since becoming a search engine.
6. Respond: If possible, mail the responses to the author. You might be able to set this up ahead of time by writing to the author yourself and asking if he or she would be willing to respond to your class in a general way. The assignment replicates the kind of work students do in groups for their own writing, concentrating on first articulating what features most attract them to the essay. Specifying a portion of the essay that they find less easy to understand requires not only that students be able to analyze what it is, but also why that portion of the essay doesn’t work for them. In addition, the “you attitude” is important, since students must carefully phrase what they don’t like in positive yet clear ways that do not alienate or offend the writer whose work they are reading.

7. Analyze: Students might want to discuss the importance of establishing social policy in a general sense before focusing on a single policy. Some students might be interested in exploring policies relating to Internet access and the social implications of imposing restrictions, especially for children. Part of their process in analyzing what prompts the creation of any policy will be to outline criteria guiding the policy. For a potential mini–research project, students might begin with a particular question about the policy which they want to answer for themselves. For example, why was the “Joe Camel” character dropped from the R. J. Reynolds tobacco advertising: What prompted this decision?

8. Evaluate: Asking students to read widely and consider a range of essays when examining a particular strategy can sharpen their awareness of how various writers have used the strategy. The emphasis is on reading closely and providing evidence from the text to support their argument. This assignment could make an excellent group activity. Assign a particular strategy to each group, ask each member to read each of the essays for the strategy, and then ask the group to rank the essays according to how well they exemplify the strategy. This process will require considerable discussion among group members. Ask the groups to write up a response and present it to the class.

9. Argue: In addition to Gialanella and Luedtke’s article, students might search other sources on the topic of air pollution and waste management using the World Wide Web. They might link the information they find to McKibben’s essay as a means of helping promote McKibben’s ideas or to resist those ideas. This could be a collaborative assignment in which students are asked to take
sides, or to accommodate all the arguments in an attempt to locate a third point of view.

10. Argue: Students might challenge other statements by McKibben as well. Ask them to choose a statement or passage to explore with “chat groups” on the Web. Ask them to analyze how the use of new forms of technology can reverse damage to nature. What is the relationship between the various forms of technology and nature? How can technology now be used “to avoid the most gruesome . . . consequences” of the various processes that McKibben says lead to the end of nature?

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

For a discussion of how meaning is made during the act of reading, see Doug Brent, *Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992).

David B. Downing has edited a collection of essays that offer concrete suggestions for reshaping the classroom into a social and political transaction: *Changing Classroom Practices: Resources for Literary and Cultural Studies* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994).
