is method even in such seemingly intuitive leaps. And when the sudden flashes of inspiration don't come, method is even more essential.

One trick to becoming a better observer and thus a better thinker is to *slow down,* to stop trying to draw conclusions before you've spent time openly attending to the data, letting yourself notice more. Better ideas grow out of a richer acquaintance with whatever it is you are looking at. Observation and interpretation go hand in hand, but it helps greatly to allow yourself a distinct observation stage and to prolong this beyond what most people find comfortable. All of the activities in the Toolkit seek to create such a stage. The Toolkit will also help you to stave off anxiety about assimilating difficult material by giving you something concrete to do with it, rather than expecting yourself to leap instantly to understanding.

The activities in the Toolkit can be conducted either orally or in writing and should be practiced again and again, until they become habitual. The activities themselves do not produce ready-made papers, and may in fact produce an abundance of writing that never makes it through to the final draft. But the thinking these activities inspire ultimately produces much better final results.

There are, of course, more observational and idea-generating methods than we have offered here. In classical rhetoric, for example, the topics of invention include such things as the traditional rhetorical modes (comparison and contrast, classification, definition, etc.) and ways of inventorying an audience to discover things that need to be said. Our purpose in this chapter is narrower. We are concentrating on ways of looking at data—whether in print, visual, or the world—that will allow you to become more fully aware of the features that define your subject, that make it what it is. (Later chapters offer tools for other, mostly later-stage tasks such as making interpretive leaps, conversing with sources, and finding and evolving a thesis.)

PARAPHRASE × 3

The activity we call Paraphrase × 3 offers the quickest means of seeing how a little writing about something you're reading can lead to having ideas about it. Paraphrasing moves toward interpretation because it tends to uncover areas of uncertainty and find questions. It instantly defamiliarizes. It also keeps your focus small so that you can practice thinking in depth rather than going for an overly broad "big picture."

Paraphrasing is commonly misunderstood as summary (a way of shrinking material you've read) or perhaps as simply a way to avoid plagiarism by putting it in your own words. Too often when people wish to understand or retain information, they summarize—that is, they produce a general overview of what the words say. Paraphrasing stays much closer to the actual words than summarizing. The word *paraphrase* means to put one phrase next to *(para)* another phrase. When you paraphrase a passage, you cast and recast its key terms into near synonyms, translating it into a parallel statement. The goal of paraphrasing is to open up the possible meanings of the words; it's a mode of inquiry.

Why is paraphrasing useful? The answer has to do with words—what they are and what we do with them. When we read, it is easy to skip quickly over the words, assuming we know what they mean. Yet when people start talking about what they mean by

particular words—the difference, for example, between *assertive* and *aggressive* or the meaning of ordinary words such as *polite, realistic,* or *gentlemanly*—they usually find less agreement than they expected. Most words mean more than one thing, and mean different things to different people.

What you say is inescapably a product of how you say it. Language doesn't merely reflect reality; what we see as reality is shaped by the words we use. This idea is known as the constitutive theory of language. It is opposed to the so-called "transparent" theory of language, wherein it is implied that we can see through words to some meaning that exists beyond and is independent of them. When you paraphrase language, whether your own or language you encounter in your reading, you are not just defining terms but opening out the wide range of implications those words inevitably possess.

We call this activity Paraphrase × 3 because usually one paraphrase is not enough. Take a sentence you want to understand better and recast it into other language three times. This will banish the problematic notion that the meaning of words is self-evident, and it will stimulate your thinking.

If you paraphrase a key passage from a reading several times, you will discover that it gets you working with the language. But you need to paraphrase *slavishly*. You can't let yourself just go for the gist; replace all of the key words. The new words you are forced to come up with represent first stabs at interpretation, at having (small) ideas about what you are reading by unearthing a range of possible meanings embedded in the passage.

In practice, Paraphrase × 3 has three steps:

1. Select a single sentence or phrase from whatever it is you are studying that you think is interesting, perhaps puzzling, and especially useful for understanding the material.
2. Do Paraphrase × 3. Find synonyms for all of the key terms—and do this three times.
3. Reflect. What have you come to recognize about the original passage on the basis of repeated restatement?

Try this 3.1: *Experimenting with Paraphrase × 3*

Recast the substantive language of the following statements using Paraphrase × 3:

- *I am entitled to my opinion.*
- *We hold these truths to be self-evident.*
- *That's just common sense.*

What do you come to understand about these remarks as a result of paraphrasing? Which words, for example, are most slippery (that is, difficult to define)?

It is interesting to note, by the way, that Thomas Jefferson originally wrote the words "sacred and undeniable" in his draft of the Declaration of Independence, instead of "self-evident." So what?

Try this 3.2: *Doing Paraphrase × 3 with a Reading*

Recast the substantive language of a key sentence or short passage in something you are reading—say, a passage you find central or difficult in any of your assigned reading, the kind of passage most likely to attract yellow highlighter. Try not to make the language of your paraphrase more general than the original. This method is an excellent way to prepare for class discussion or to generate thinking about the reading that you might use in a paper. It is also, as we discuss in Unit III, a key method of analyzing the secondary sources that you draw on in your papers.

NOTICE AND FOCUS (RANKING)

The activity called Notice and Focus guides you to dwell longer with the data before feeling compelled to decide what the data mean. Repeatedly returning to the question, "What do you notice?" is one of the best ways to counteract the tendency to generalize too rapidly. "What do you notice?" redirects attention to the subject matter itself and delays the pressure to come up with answers.

So the first step is to repeatedly answer the question, "What do you notice?" being sure to cite actual details of the thing being observed rather than moving to more general observations about it. This phase of the exercise should produce an extended and unordered list of details—features of the thing being observed—that call attention to themselves for one reason or another.

The second step is the focusing part in which you *rank* (create an order of importance for) the various features of the subject that you have noticed. Answer the question "Which three details (specific features of the subject matter) are most interesting (or significant or revealing or strange)?" The purpose of relying on "interesting" or one of the other suggested words is that these will help to deactivate the like/dislike switch, which is so much a reflex in all of us, and replace it with a more analytical perspective.

The third step in this process is to say why the three things you selected struck you as the most interesting. Your attempts to answer this "why" question will trigger leaps from observation to interpretive conclusions.

Doing Notice and Focus is more difficult than it sounds. Remember to allow yourself to notice as much as you can about what you are looking at before you try to explain it. Dwell with the data (in that attitude of uncertainty we've recommended in Chapter 2). Record what you see. Resist moving to generalization or, worse, to judgment. The longer you allow yourself to dwell on the data, the more you will notice, and the richer your interpretation of the evidence will ultimately be.

Prompts: Interesting and Strange

What does it mean to find something "interesting"? Often we are interested by things that have captured our attention without our clearly knowing why. Interest and curiosity are near cousins.

The word *strange* is a useful prompt because it gives us permission to notice oddities. *Strange* invites us to defamiliarize things within our range of notice. *Strange,*

in this context, is not a judgmental term but one denoting features of a subject or situation that aren't readily explainable. Where you locate something strange, you have something to interpret—to figure out what makes it strange and why.

Along similar lines, the words *revealing* and *significant* work by requiring you to make choices that can lead to interpretive leaps. If something strikes you as revealing or significant, even if you're not yet sure why, you will eventually have to produce some explanation.

Try this 3.3: *Doing Notice and Focus with a Room*

Practice this activity with the room you're in. List a number of details about it, then rank the three most important ones. Use as a focusing question any of the four words suggested above—interesting, significant, revealing or strange. Or come up with your own focus for the ranking, such as the three aspects of the room that seem most to affect the way you feel and behave in the space.

Try this 3.4: *Notice and Focus Fieldwork*

Try this exercise with a range of subjects: a photograph, a cartoon, an editorial, conversations overheard around campus, looking at people's shoes, political speeches, and so forth. Remember to include all three steps: notice, rank and say why.

10 ON 1

The exercise we call 10 on 1 is a cousin of Notice and Focus—it too depends on extended observation but with more focus and usually occurring at a later stage of analysis. Notice and Focus is useful because it frees you to look at the object with no constraints or prejudgments. Notice and Focus treats your subject matter as a broad canvas to move around in. 10 on 1 promotes a more intensive and elaborate exploration of a single representative piece of evidence. 10 on 1 is built on the idea that one sure way to notice more is to narrow your scope.

The term *10* on *1* is shorthand for the principle that it is better to make ten observations or points about a single representative issue or example (10 on 1) than to make the same basic point about ten related issues or examples (1 on 10). A paper that has evolved from detailed analysis of what the writer takes to be his or her single most telling example is far more likely to arrive at a good idea than a paper that settles prematurely for one idea and applies it mechanically to each piece of evidence it encounters (i.e., the same general idea attached to 10 similar examples).

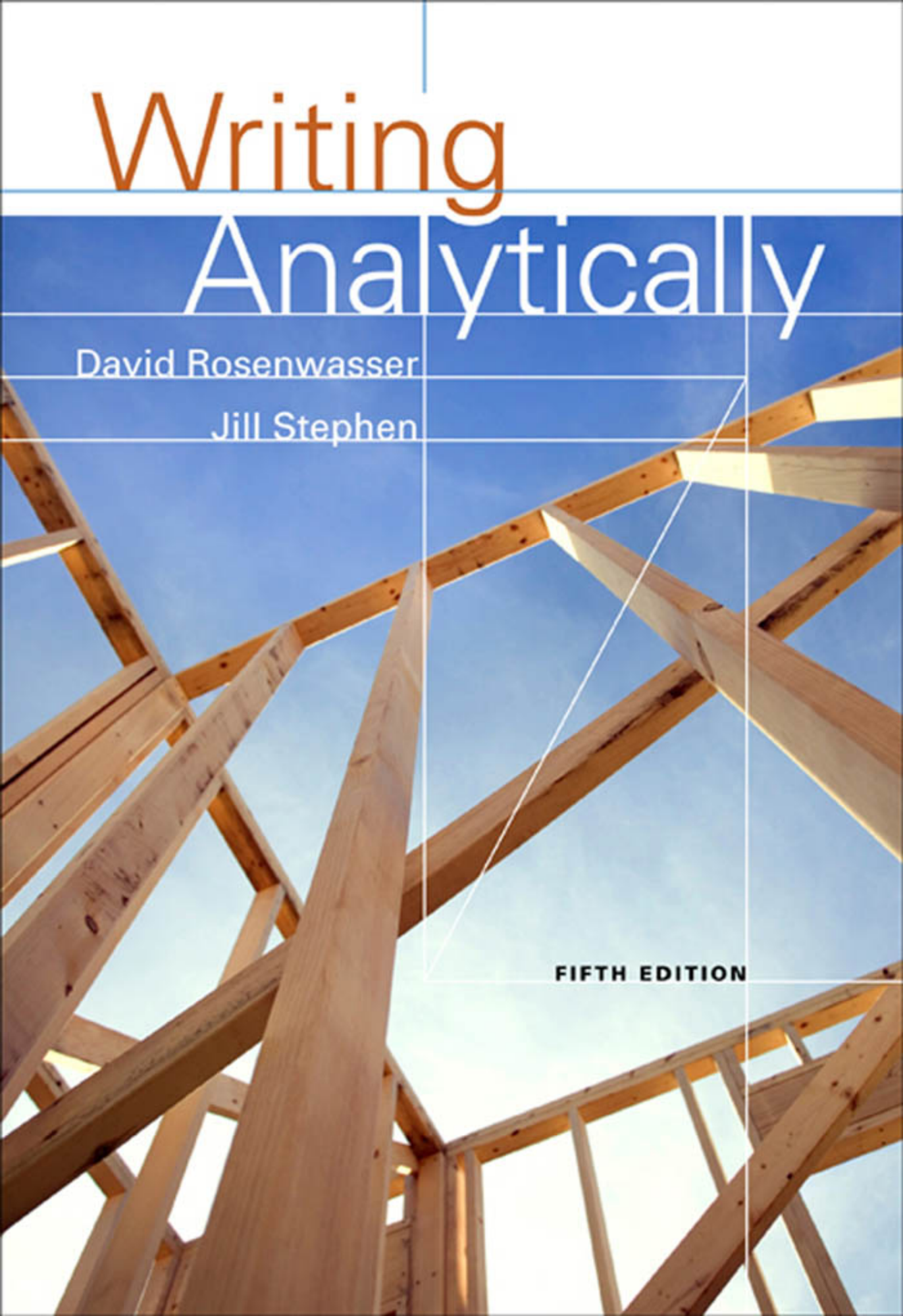
The shift from making one observation about ten examples to making ten possible observations about your single best example is the aim of the exercise. Ten, in this case, is an arbitrary number. The ten are the observations you make about your representative example along with any ideas these observations start to give you. If you can keep the number 10 in mind, it will prod you to keep asking yourself questions rather than stopping the observation process too soon. What do I notice? What else do I notice? What might this imply? What else might it imply?

For extended discussion of doing 10 on 1 as an organizational principle for papers, see Chapter 8 (Using Evidence to Build a Paper) in Unit II, Writing the Analytical

Writing Analytically

David Rosenwasser

Jill Stephen



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David Rosenwasser
Jill Stephen

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