

Into the Wild

Reading selection for this module:

Krakauer, Jon, *Into the Wild*. Doubleday: New York, 1996.

Reading Rhetorically

Prereading

Activity 1

Getting Ready to Read

Into the Wild is a nonfiction, full-length text by Jon Krakauer. Published in 1996, it is based on an article Krakauer wrote in *Outside Magazine* about Christopher McCandless, a young college graduate who went off to Alaska and died in the woods. Because Krakauer's article drew a huge amount of mail to the magazine, he decided to write a book about this interesting character. He's a young, idealistic guy who forms a life philosophy based on his experience and his reading in college. His idealism, ironically, leads to his death by starvation. He makes choices that seem foolish as we look at them now. But McCandless genuinely loved the outdoors and wanted to live in the world without all the trappings of money and his middle-class upbringing. *Into the Wild* is, in a way, a mystery story. We're unsure as to why he rejects his family, why he's so angry with them, and why he chooses to head for Alaska.

Quickwrite:

- Think about your experience hiking, backpacking, and/or existing in the wild. What are the benefits of any one of these activities?
or
- Think about some alternative plans you might have to beginning college immediately after high school. What might you do? Why would you do it, and for how long could you see yourself doing that activity?
or
- Think about an experience you have had when you were alone and made some misjudgments that could have led to disaster but didn't (it doesn't have to be in the outdoors). What miscalculations did you make and how did you avert disaster?

Activity 2

Introducing Key Concepts

We know about characters from their actions, their thoughts, what they say, their appearance, and what others say about them. This book explores a character, Chris McCandless, and the actions he takes. Before reading about him, complete this prereading activity. Read the scenarios below and use specific words to describe the character in the scenario. In groups, you will compare your lists, then turn in your finalized list of descriptive words to your teacher.

Mary was from the Valley. She used the word “like” in front of most of her adjectives when she spoke and talked quite a bit. On her 16th birthday she expected to get a car. It was a given. Her friends thought she would get a pink Maserati, but she was sure her parents would buy her the candy-apple red Alfa Romeo. The day of her birthday came, and as she peered out her bedroom window, she noticed a new car in the driveway, but it was yellow—surely not hers. She thought it may have been the new cleaning woman’s. She did not see any other car in the long driveway. She ran down to get a closer look. It was a new canary-colored convertible Volkswagen bug. On the front driver’s-side seat was a birthday note to her. She burst into tears and ran into the house.

Words to describe **Mary**: _____

Vandana had a comfortable life. Not unlike her friends, Vandana had gone to school and done well and soon was to attend the university. She had received several scholarships and her parents had planned to pay the rest for her education. Vandana hoped to help people in her future career, but hadn’t quite decided in which field she wanted to do this. She decided to take a year off before attending college. Her parents refused her this. She worked hard the summer before she was to go to college, and made enough money for a one way ticket to India. She had been interested in the life of Buddha and wanted to learn more about him. Leaving a note for her parents, she headed off to India, in hopes of discovering a spiritual and centered path for herself.

Words to describe **Vandana**: _____

Emory was very popular and made friends easily. People were drawn to his honest nature and his free spirit. It was odd when two of his classmates saw drawings he had made to build bombs in his math notebook. It was even odder when he took off one day without a word to his teachers or friends. His parents notified the police. When they did a search of his room, they found two small guns and threatening notes he had written to a former girlfriend a year earlier.

Words to describe **Emory**: _____

Activity 3

Surveying the Text

- Count the number of chapters in the text.
- Read a few chapter titles.
- Read a few of the short epigraphs that come before a chapter begins. (An epigraph is a relevant quotation at the beginning of a book, a chapter, etc.)
- Look at the length of the book.
- Look at any maps or photographs.
- Identify the author and publication date.
- What other works has Krakauer written? Do you know of them? Have you read them?

Author's Note:

Many readers skip the author's note that begins a book, but this note by Krakauer is particularly interesting and will guide your reading of his book. Read the three-page author's note before you begin to read the work. Then form groups of three or four and discuss the following questions:

- What might have McCandless's motives have been for his behavior (paragraph 3)?
- How difficult would it be to invent a new life?
- In paragraph 4, Krakauer introduces some themes of the book. Discuss these.
- In paragraph 5, Krakauer warns us that he will not be an impartial biographer. What does this mean? Are all biographers impartial? What might we expect from Krakauer?
- In the last paragraph, Krakauer introduces the complexity of Chris McCandless. Keep in mind the following four questions as you read the text:
 1. Should we admire McCandless for his courage and noble ideas?
 2. Was he a reckless idiot?
 3. Was he crazy?
 4. Was he an arrogant and stupid narcissist?

Activity 4

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

Find an issue of *Outside Magazine* and write a one-page report describing the magazine, its audience, the kinds of articles it publishes, and so forth. Then ask yourself these questions:

- Why do you think Krakauer wrote this particular book?
- Who do you think is the intended audience for this book?

Note that the book's roots can be found in a long article about McCandless in *Outside Magazine*.

Activity 5

Introducing Key Vocabulary

You will keep a concept dictionary as you read *Into the Wild*. Each page in the dictionary you will maintain will focus on one concept. You will gather words from the reading that seem to fit under the concept. For example, you will have one page for raw weather conditions. Words that would appear on that page would be *harsh, raw, grim, austere, stringent, severe*. You will also want to include antonyms, such as *sonorous*.

A page in the dictionary might contain the following items under the key concept heading:

- synonyms (page numbers cited)
- antonyms (page numbers cited)
- meanings of the words (in your own words)
- drawings of the word written
- plus or minus marks (denoting positive or negative), depending on the word's connotation
- other words sharing the same root or derivation if the meaning is related

The vocabulary words below are contained in the author's note. Where would they go in your concept dictionary?

- Emory University (Where is it? What kind of a university is it?)
- transcendent
- Alaska taiga
- peregrinations
- impartial biographer
- dispassionate
- authorial presence
- oblique light
- emulating
- moral rigor
- shards
- fulminated
- narcissist

Reading

Activity 6

First Reading

Because you will be given directed tasks as you read *Into the Wild*, you will need to flip back and forth in this guide. For example, you might read chapters 1 and 2, practice a reading strategy, skip to the section on vocabulary for those chapters, skip on to the section that gives you strategies for rereading, and so forth.

Reading Chapters 1 and 2: The Beginning and the End

Note the epigraphs that begin each of these chapters. One is by a friend of Chris McCandless and the other is by McCandless, followed by a

Activity 6 (Continued)

quotation from *White Fang*, by Jack London. In a notebook, keep track of the literary quotations that Krakauer uses in his epigraphs.

Make note of all the maps that begin the text.

What is your assessment of Chris McCandless so far? Keep notes as you read, ask questions of the text, and write down your reactions.

Reading Chapter 3: Home

Jot down your thoughts on the following questions:

- What was Westerberg like? What kind of character did he have?
- What was McCandless like? What kind of character did he have? Would you have liked to know him?

Reading Chapters 4–7: The Journey

Study the map that begins Chapter 4 and refer to it as you follow McCandless's journey.

Jot down answers to the following as you read these chapters:

- In your notebook, list the people McCandless met along the way.
- What was it about McCandless's personality that made an impression on people?
- Note Alex's journal. Why do you think he avoided using the first person when he talked about himself? (He did not use "I.")
- What is the purpose of Chapter 4?
- Characterize Ronald Franz. What kind of a human being was he? Did he have your sympathy? Why or why not?
- What more did you learn about Alex's relationship with his father? Do you think his anger is justified? Why or why not?

Reading Chapters 8–10: The Outcasts

- What is the function of these chapters? What is their relationship to the rest of the text?
- Why did Krakauer interrupt the McCandless story with Chapters 8 and 9?
- Were you surprised that McCandless left trails so that the authorities could find out who he was?
- What's in a name? Does it matter that we have the name we were given by our parents? How do names matter? Does your name fit you? If not, what name would you choose? Why?

Reading Chapters 11–13: Family History

These three key chapters give background information that will help you piece together the mystery of McCandless. Chapter 11 fills in his personal past; Chapter 12 fills in his family past; and Chapter 13 chronicles McCandless's family's grief.

Jot down the surprises (if any) that you encountered as you read.

- What was McCandless like as a child and as a teen? What was he like as an adult? Were there indications throughout his life as to the kind of person he would become?

Activity 6 (Continued)

- Do you think you are essentially the same person you were as a child? How have you changed?

Reading Chapters 14 and 15: Krakauer Interjects

- Why does Krakauer talk about himself in these two chapters?
- Do you like his interjections?
- What is your reaction to his description of his own climbing experience?
- How is Krakauer's life related to McCandless's?
- John Menlove Edwards said that climbing is a "psycho-neurotic tendency." Do you think that is so? Always?
- Do you think that Edwards defines McCandless? How is he psycho-neurotic?

Reading Chapters 16–18: Into the Alaskan Wild

Go back to the author's notes and jot down your thoughts on the questions Krakauer asks at that point:

- Was McCandless crazy?
- Was he just ignorant?
- Did he have a death wish?
- Investigate further the wild sweet peas and wild potatoes McCandless ate. Were they toxic?

Reading the Epilogue: Grief

- What was your initial sense of McCandless's mental condition compared to what you think now? Have you changed your mind?
- What was your reaction to his parents as they visited the bus?

Activity 7

Looking Closely at Language

Because this reading is a full-length book, there are many new words to learn. You learn most of the words you know from hearing them or reading them. Here are some clues to help you learn new words as you are reading.

1. Notice what comes before and after the word for clues as well as the parts of the word itself you may already know.
2. Link your prior knowledge with what you are reading—make connections to the word or subject.
3. Make predictions about the word's meaning.
4. Use references to find more about the word.
5. Make connections to a key concept and, if relevant, place the new word and its meaning in your concept dictionary.

Activity 8

Rereading the Text

Our first reading of a book gives us the story line, the major conflicts, and a sense of what the author intends. The second (or third) reading provides richer analyses and a deeper understanding of the text. In the author's notes, Krakauer provides a guide to our reading—especially to our subsequent reading of *Into the Wild*.

As you look at the text again, go back to the four questions he asks in his “notes.”

- Was McCandless admirable for his courage and noble ideas?
- Was he a reckless idiot?
- Was he crazy?
- Was he a narcissist who perished out of arrogance and stupidity—and was he undeserving of the considerable media attention he received?

Make marginal notes as you reread the text. When you respond to the chapter questions, cite the text, if necessary, where you find evidence for your judgments.

Chapters 1 and 2

Each chapter begins with a short epigraph (a quotation that is relevant to that chapter). Now that you have a better sense of Chris McCandless's story, why do you think these epigraphs are relevant to these chapters?

Chapter 3

- How would you characterize McCandless's relationships with other people: his parents, his sister, Westerberg?
- What did his friends make of his secretive life?

Chapters 4–7

As you read, see if you can find evidence of Alex's preparation for Alaska:

Read Thoreau's “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” and consider how Alex might have incorporated Thoreau's advice into his life philosophy.

Read some of Jack London's work that we know influenced Alex: *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, “To Build a Fire,” “An Odyssey of the North,” “The Wit of Porportuk.”

- Why did these works appeal to Alex?

Reread the notes Alex sent to his friends at the end of Chapter 7.

- What is his tone?
- What is his attitude?

Chapter 8–10

Reread Chapter 8 and consider the charges by others against Krakauer.

- Should they be taken seriously? Why or why not?

Activity 8 (Continued)

Study the map that begins Chapter 9 and follow Ruess's journey.

- Consider how the story of the papar (Irish monks) relates to the story of the “outcasts” that Krakauer discusses (Chapter 9).

Chapters 11–13

Consider McCandless's family history.

- Does that change your view of him?
- Characterize each of McCandless's family members. What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- Was McCandless reasonable in his reaction to his parents' past? Should he have forgiven them?
- How do you think the information about his parents affected McCandless?
- Does his anger at them explain something about McCandless's choices in life?
- Chapter 12 ends with McCandless's mother talking about a dream (nightmare?) that she had. Have you ever had such a thing happen to you? Should we take dreams such as these seriously? Why or why not?

Chapters 14 and 15

- Think about and then jot down comparisons you see between McCandless's relationship with his father and Krakauer's relationship with his.
- Do you think Krakauer understands McCandless? Why or why not?
- Do you think Krakauer reads too much into McCandless's life because he feels some sort of affinity to him?
- Respond to the following quotation at the end of Chapter 15: “It is easy, when you are young, to believe that what you desire is no less than what you deserve, to assume that if you want something badly enough, it is your God-given right to have it.”

Chapters 16–18

- List the various miscalculations and mistakes McCandless made.
- Toward the end of Chapter 16, Krakauer tells us that McCandless read *Walden*. Take a look at Thoreau's text and figure out what Chris found most interesting in Thoreau's discussion of food.
- If you have worked through the module called “Politics of Food,” compare Thoreau with Wendell Berry.
- Have you ever fasted? Do you know anyone who has? Do some research on fasting and report to the class what you find or write a short report.

Epilogue

The traditional definition of an epilogue is that it is a concluding part of a literary work.

- Is *Into the Wild* a “literary work”? Why or why not?
- Is the last paragraph of the book an effective ending to the book? Why or why not?

Analyzing Stylistic Choices

Precise writers make linguistic choices to create certain effects. They want to have their readers react in a certain way. Go back through the text and analyze Krakauer’s use of words, sentences, and paragraphs and take note as to how effective a writer he is.

Chapters 1 and 2

Words

As you revisit these chapters, pay attention to the denotative and connotative meanings of key words. Think about the effect certain words have on you.

Krakauer describes McCandless’s body in a very clinical way. Reread that description:

“Virtually no subcutaneous fat remained on the body, and the muscles had withered significantly in the days or weeks prior to death. At the time of the autopsy, McCandless’s remains weighed sixty-seven pounds. Starvation was posited as the most probable cause of death.”

- How are you affected by this description?
- Look again at the words in the vocabulary list that relate to the harshness of Alaska. Are you interested in traveling there sometime?
- Why does understanding the new words matter?

Sentences

Consider the sentence structure Krakauer uses.

- How varied are his sentences?
- What effects do choice of sentence structure and length have on the reader?

Chapter 3

Denotation/Connotation

Consider the connotations of some of the word choices Krakauer makes. For example, he describes Westerberg as “drawn into a scheme to build and sell ‘black boxes,’ which illegally unscramble satellite-television transmissions, allowing people to watch encrypted cable programming without paying for it.”

- Is Krakauer sympathetic to Westerberg? How do you know?
- Compare the language and tone of the two letters that McCandless writes, one to his sister and one to his parents. What did McCandless mean when he said, “. . . they will think they have bought my respect”?

Chapters 4–7

Paragraphs

A few pages from the end of Chapter 7, Krakauer gives us an analysis of Alex’s relationship with his father and mother (it begins, “Westerberg’s latter conjecture . . .”).

Activity 9 (Continued)

- What is the tone of this paragraph?
- Does Krakauer cite any evidence that suggests he “knows” that his analysis is accurate?
- Does it matter?

Chapters 8–10

Paragraphs

In the first part of Chapter 8, Krakauer quotes Alaskans who had opinions about McCandless and his death.

- Why does Krakauer cite these letters? How does doing so add to the text or subtract from it?
- Choose one of these letters and respond to it, explaining the degree to which you agree or disagree.

Tone

Krakauer inserts himself into the story in Chapter 8.

- Does this give him more credibility?
- Do you find this annoying? Why or why not?

Chapters 11–13

Words

A few pages into Chapter 13, Krakauer describes McCandless’s sister’s behavior when she was told about her brother’s death.

- Why does he use the word “keening” instead of crying?
- What are the denotations and connotations of this word? What is its history?

Sentences

Reread aloud the next-to-last paragraph in Chapter 13, where Krakauer powerfully describes Billie’s grief.

- Rephrase the paragraph and simplify it in your own words.
- What makes Krakauer’s description powerful?

Chapters 14 and 15

Words

The technical vocabulary in these two chapters is important. Investigate the meaning of the vocabulary and provide information for the class, using slides or drawings.

Chapters 16–18

Tone

Read aloud the last paragraph in Chapter 18.

- How does Krakauer know that McCandless “was at peace, serene as a monk gone to God”? Explain.
- Does Krakauer have the right to infer from the photograph that McCandless had the serenity of a monk?
- What is an alternative interpretation of the photograph?

Activity 9
(Continued)

Epilogue

Read aloud the last paragraph of the book.

- Is the language literary? Why or why not?
- What is its effect on you?

Activity 10

Considering the Structure of the Text

Mapping out the organizational structure of the text helps us to understand the content itself.

Chapters 1 and 2

Mapping the Organizational Structure

- Contrast the two chapters. What is the purpose of each?
- How effective is the organization?
- Draw a line where you think the introduction ends in each chapter.
- Consider the last paragraph of each chapter. What is the function of each? How does each paragraph work?

Chapter 3

- What is the point of focusing on Carthage, South Dakota, and on Westerberg in this chapter?
- How does this chapter function in terms of the organization of the whole?

Chapters 4–7

Descriptive Outlining

Write brief statements describing the function of each of these chapters. What is Krakauer trying to accomplish?

- Chapter 4:
- Chapter 5:
- Chapter 6:
- Chapter 7:
- How do these chapters work as a whole?

Chapters 8–10

Briefly outline each of these chapters and explain the function of each.

- Chapter 8:
- Chapter 9:
- Chapter 10:
- How important is it for us to compare McCandless with Rosellini, Ruess, and Waterman?
- Why did Krakauer give us these details?

Chapters 11–13

These chapters give us important background knowledge.

- Would the book have been more effective if Krakauer had used a different organizing strategy?

Activity 10 (Continued)

- What if the book had ended with McCandless’s death (i.e., moved chronologically)? Argue for an organizing strategy (either Krakauer’s strategy or another one).

Chapters 14 and 15

In these two chapters, we learn about Krakauer.

- Are these chapters important to the story of McCandless?
- What do they add?
- Is there an argument for dumping them?
- In the first few pages of Chapter 14, Krakauer gives his thesis for the whole book. Can you find it?
- Do you agree with Krakauer’s thesis? Why or why not?

Chapters 16–18

In Chapter 16, Krakauer gives a summary of the last few months of McCandless’s life.

- Do you think Krakauer admires McCandless? Cite your evidence.
- In Chapter 17, Krakauer does not arrive at the bus until after about four pages. In those first pages, he gives us the details of the equipment he carries, the river flow, and the others with him. Is this necessary? What does it add? What does it detract?
- Krakauer says that McCandless had a kind of “idiosyncratic logic.” Explain what Krakauer meant and the extent to which you agree or disagree with him.

Epilogue

This part of the book is very short.

- What is the effect of having an epilogue that focuses entirely on the parents’ return to the bus?

Postreading

Activity 11

Summarizing and Responding

Summarizing is a very important skill used to extract the main ideas from a text and explain what the author says about them. You have re-read the text and have looked at the way in which each chapter fits into a whole. In a way, you have “mapped” the text. Now you can generate a summary from that mapping.

- Try to write a one-sentence summary of Krakauer’s book (plot only).
- Try to write a five-sentence paragraph of Krakauer’s book, including a bit of the plot, and offer what the book might provide to a reader in addition to a good story.
- Try to write a five-sentence summary of your favorite chapter.

Thinking Critically

Rhetorical appeals are the accepted ways in which we persuade or argue a case. The following questions will move you through more traditional rhetorical appeals. By focusing on logic, emotion, and the appeal of the writer, you will find yourself understanding further how Krakauer persuaded us and how you can use these techniques to persuade others when you write or speak.

Questions about Logic (Logos)

- Locate two major claims and assertions Krakauer makes in this book (e.g., I do [do not] agree with Krakauer that McCandless planned his death because . . .).
- Look at Krakauer’s support for his major claims and ask yourself if there is any claim that appears to be weak and unsupported. Which one(s) and why? Respond to the claims in the quotation below:

In Chapter 16, Krakauer says that McCandless “seemed to have moved beyond his need to assert so adamantly his autonomy, his need to separate himself from his parents. Maybe he was prepared to forgive their imperfections; maybe he was even prepared to forgive some of his own. McCandless seemed ready, perhaps, to go home.”

- Look at McCandless’s response to several passages in Tolstoy’s “Family Happiness” toward the end of Chapter 16:

“He was right in saying that the only certain happiness in life is to live for others. . . . I have lived through much, and now I think I have found what is needed for happiness. A quiet secluded life in the country, with the possibility of being useful to people to whom it is easy to do good, and who are not accustomed to have it done to them; then work which one hopes may be of some use; then rest, nature, books, music, love for one’s neighbor—such is my idea of happiness. And then, on top of all that, you for a mate, and children, perhaps—what more can the heart of a man desire.”
- Does this indicate a change in McCandless?
- Was he ready to “go home”?
- Do you think McCandless would fit into modern life—a job, a home, a mate, children? Why or why not?
- Can you think of counterarguments the author does not deal with?
- Do you think the author has left something out on purpose? Why?

Questions about the Writer (Ethos)

- Does this author have an acceptable background to speak with authority on this subject?
- Is this author knowledgeable? Smart? Successful?
- What does the author’s style and language tell you about him?
- Do you trust this author? Why or why not?

Activity 12 (Continued)

- Do you think this author is deceptive? Why or why not?
- Do you think this author is serious?

Questions about Emotions (Pathos)

- Does this book affect you emotionally? Which parts?
- Do you think the author is trying to manipulate your emotions? How?
- Do your emotions conflict with your logical interpretation of the arguments?
- Does the author use humor? How does that affect your acceptance of his ideas?

Quickwrites (5 minutes)

After you finish a chapter, jot down what you think the chapter's main focus is and what the author is trying to accomplish in that chapter. Here are some other questions to ask yourself:

- What are the issues the author is discussing?
- What does the author want us to believe?

Connecting Reading to Writing

Activity 13

Using the Words of Others

One of the most important features of academic writing is the use of the words and ideas from written sources to support the writer's own points. There are essentially three ways to incorporate words and ideas from sources:

- **Direct quotation.** Jon Krakauer says, "I had been granted unusual freedom and responsibility at an early age, for which I should have been grateful in the extreme, but I wasn't" (148).
- **Paraphrase.** In Chapter 11 of *Into the Wild*, Walt, McCandless's father, remembers an early hike with twelve-year-old Chris. They made it to 13,000 feet before turning back from the 14,256-foot summit in Colorado. Chris did not want to quit, and complained all the way down (109).
- **Summary.** In *Into the Wild*, Krakauer seems to be working out his own past and his relationship with his father as well as telling the sad story of Chris McCandless. Because Krakauer, too, is a man of the outdoors, he understands something about the call of the wild.

Documentation. You will also need to learn to take notes with full citation information. For print material, you will need to record, at a minimum, the author, title, city of publication, publisher, date of publication, and page number. The two most common documentation formats used are the Modern Language Association (MLA) format, which is used mainly by English Departments, and the American Psychological Association format (APA).

Activity 13
(Continued)

MLA Format

Books. Here is the Works Cited format for a typical book in the MLA style:

Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977.

Here is the bibliographic information, in the MLA format, for the text by Krakauer:

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

Web Sites. You might also want to incorporate material from Web sites. To document a Web site, you will need to give the name of the author (if known), the title of the site (or a description, such as “Homepage,” if no title is available), the date of publication or update (if known), the name of the organization that sponsors the site, the date of access, and the Web address (URL) in angle brackets. Here is an example:

University Writing Center. 26 June 2003. University Writing Center, California Polytechnic University, Pomona. 26 May 2004 <<http://www.csupomona.edu/uwc>>.

The author for the above site is unknown, so no author name is given. This entry would appear in the Works Cited section, alphabetized by “University.”

In-Text Documentation. The MLA style also requires in-text documentation for every direct quotation, indirect quotation, paraphrase, or summary. If the author is given in the text, the page number should be given in parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the material.

Practice with Sources. Choose three passages from the text that relate to a particular theme in the book. Write each passage down as a correctly punctuated direct quotation. Then paraphrase the material in your own words. Finally, respond to the idea expressed in the passage by agreeing or disagreeing with it and explaining why. Later, you can use this material in an essay.

- Direct quotation:
- Paraphrase:
- Respond to the idea expressed in a passage by agreeing or disagreeing with it and explaining why:

Writing Rhetorically

Prewriting

Activity 14

Reading the Assignment

Select a prompt from the four assignment options given below. Use your concept dictionaries to brainstorm the prompt you have chosen.

Writing Assignment

1. Investigate how someone might go about smoking game (i.e., McCandless's moose) when out in the wild. Analyze where McCandless might have gone wrong.
2. Compare and contrast your initial judgment of McCandless's parents with your judgment at the end of the epilogue.
3. Consider three people who befriended McCandless: Jan Burre, Ronald Franz, and Westerberg. Explain why McCandless left such a strong impression on each of them.
4. McCandless had certain literary heroes: Henry David Thoreau, Jack London, Leo Tolstoy, and so forth. Choose three of McCandless's literary heroes and analyze what he appreciated about their work as well as what he incorporated into his own philosophy of life.

Now you need to study the topic you chose.

Here are some strategies that will help you read assignments carefully. These strategies will help you avoid answering the wrong questions or misunderstanding the prompt:

- Read the assignment carefully.
- Decide which issue you will discuss (if it is not specified in the question itself).
- What is the purpose of the assignment? Are you informing your audience or are you reporting something? Are you going to persuade your readers to a position you hold? What will you try to accomplish in your essay?

Activity 15

Writing under Pressure

In some cases, you might be asked to write a draft of an essay in a time-pressure situation. At this point, we are using a timed writing assignment as a prewriting exercise to help you discover what you think on a related topic. Following are the writing assignment and some guidelines for approaching the timed task.

Activity 15 (Continued)

On-Demand Writing Assignment

You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an essay on the topic assigned below. Before you begin writing, read the passage carefully and plan what you will say. Your essay should be as well-organized and carefully written as you can make it.

I think that Chris McCandless was bright and ignorant at the same time. He had no common sense, and he had no business going into Alaska with his Romantic silliness. He made a lot of mistakes based on arrogance. I don't admire him at all for his courage nor his noble ideas. Really, I think he was just plain crazy.

Shaun Callarman

Explain Callarman's argument and discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with his analysis. Support your position, providing reasons and examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Strategies for Writing under Pressure

1. Read and then reread the prompt. Underline the important verbs that tell you what action to perform. For example, the verbs, "explain," "discuss," and "support" are in the above prompt.
2. Find the argument in the passage.
3. Quickly jot down some ideas that come to mind. Do you agree or disagree with the author's basic position? Do you think defining terms might allow you to cushion your position?
4. Figure out the topics of your body paragraphs and what the topic sentences might be.
5. Don't worry about a smooth introduction if nothing comes to mind; begin with your point, your thesis.
6. What is the evidence that you will use to prove your position? Jot down the evidence that comes to mind in bullet form or in a few words. Fit them into your paragraph outline, after your topic sentences. Having this brief outline will remind you of what you want to say, but it won't mean that you can't change your mind.

Activity 16

Getting Ready to Write

Review the essay topic you selected in Activity 14, and use one or more of the prewriting techniques you have learned to generate ideas on the issue. (See Prewriting Strategies on page 70.)

Activity 17

Formulating a Working Thesis

Record your responses to the questions below in preparation for writing your tentative thesis statement.

If you are going to respond to the question that asks about your initial judgment of McCandless's parents versus your judgment after you finished the book, you might first list your initial impressions when you began the book in one column and then list your final impressions in another. Then compare the two and figure out a general statement that you can begin to outline. Your tentative thesis might then be that McCandless's parents were terrible human beings and you didn't change your mind after you read the book. Remember, if you say this, you must then go to the text to prove it.

- What specific question will your essay answer? What is your response to this question? (This is your tentative thesis.)
- What support have you found for your thesis?
- What evidence have you found for this support? For example, facts, statistics, authorities, personal experience, anecdotes, stories, scenarios, and examples.
- How much background information do your readers need to understand your topic and thesis?
- If readers were to disagree with your thesis or the validity of your support, what would they say? How would you address their concerns? (What would you say to them?)

Now, once again, draft a possible thesis for your essay.

Writing

Activity 18

Composing a Draft

Now write a draft of your essay. This draft is usually “writer-based,” the goal of which is simply to get your ideas down on paper. You should start with your brainstorming notes, informal outlines, freewriting, or whatever other materials you have and write a rough draft of your essay.

Activity 19

Organizing the Essay

The following items are traditional parts of any essay.

Introduction (usually one or two paragraphs)

You might want to think about the following items as you compose your introductory paragraph(s).

- Use a “hook” to get the reader's attention.
- Avoid truisms—obvious statements that everyone knows: “One should always be prepared to go into the wild.” Why would anyone argue with that?

Activity 19 (Continued)

- Provide background information that the audience may need to begin reading your argument.
- Write a thesis statement and give some indication of how the essay will be developed. You might sharpen or narrow your thesis at this point.
- Write a conclusion (usually only one paragraph) that summarizes the main points and explains the significance of the argument.

Body

The number of paragraphs in an essay depends on the nature and complexity of your argument.

- Your paragraphs should relate back to your thesis and support it.
- Your paragraphs should begin with topic sentences.
- Your paragraphs should include different points of view, and you should directly address them (e.g., refute them, show them to be irrelevant, dazzle the audience with the strength of your own argument, etc.).
- Make it clear that you have considered the values, beliefs, and assumptions of your audience as well as your own and that you have perhaps found some common ground.
- Develop the content of your argument by giving evidence in the form of examples, illustrations, statistics, and so forth.
- In addition to giving evidence, you must analyze what the evidence means to your argument and how it connects to your argument.

Conclusion

The final paragraph or paragraphs demonstrates that you have made a solid argument to support your thesis, shows the significance of your argument, and answers the question, “So what?” Your ending should be honest and elegant. It might point to a solution or tie up the ends. A good conclusion does not just stop, it ends. A mere summary of all you have said in a short essay is rather insulting to the reader.

Activity 20

Developing the Content

Understanding the following characteristics of most essays is very helpful. Read and discuss these with your classmates.

- Most body paragraphs consist of a topic sentence (or an implied topic sentence) and concrete details to support that topic sentence.
- A topic sentence is usually related directly to the thesis statement.
- No set number of paragraphs make up an essay.
- The thesis is like a contract; it dictates the content of an essay.

Revising and Editing

Activity 21

Revising the Draft

You will now need to work with the organization and development of your draft to make sure your essay is as effective as possible.

Peer Group Work

Back into groups of three or four. Each student will read his or her essay aloud to the other members of the group. Then complete Part I: Revising Checklist of the Evaluation Form for each group member's essay.

Paired Work

Work in pairs to decide how you want to revise the problems group members have identified.

Individual Work

Revise the draft on the basis of the feedback you have received and the decisions you have made with your partners. Consider these additional questions below for your individual work:

- Have I responded to the assignment?
- What is my purpose for this essay?
- What should I keep? What is most effective?
- What should I add? Where do I need more details, examples, and other evidence to support my point?
- What could I omit? Did I use irrelevant details? Was I repetitive?
- What should I change? Are parts of my essay confusing or contradictory? Do I need to explain my ideas more fully?
- What should I rethink? Is my position clear? Did I provide enough analysis to convince my readers?
- How is my tone? Am I too overbearing, too firm? Do I need qualifiers?
- Have I addressed differing points of view?
- Does my conclusion show the significance of my essay?

Activity 22

Editing the Draft

You will now need to work with the grammar, punctuation, and mechanics of your draft to make sure your essay conforms to the guidelines of standard written English.

Individual Work

Edit your draft based on the information you have received from your teacher or a tutor. See Part II: Editing Checklist of the Evaluation Form for guidelines. The suggestions below will also help you edit your own work.

Editing Guidelines for Individual Work

- If possible, set your essay aside for 24 hours before rereading it to find errors.

Activity 22 (Continued)

- If possible, read your essay aloud so you can hear your errors. Focus on individual words and sentences rather than on overall meaning. Take a sheet of paper and cover everything except the line you are reading. Then touch your pencil to each word as you read.
- With the help of your teacher, figure out your own pattern of errors—the most serious and frequent errors you make.
- Look for only one type of error at a time. Then go back and look for a second type and, if necessary, a third.
- Use the dictionary to check spelling and confirm that you have chosen the right word for the context.

Activity 23

Reflecting on the Writing

When you have completed your essay, answer these six questions in writing:

1. What was most difficult about this assignment?
2. What was easiest?
3. What did you learn about arguing by completing this assignment?
4. What do you think are the strengths of your argument? Place a wavy line by the parts of your essay you feel are very good.
5. What are the weaknesses, if any, of your paper? Place an X by the parts of your essay you would like help with. Write any questions you have in the margin.
6. What did you learn from this assignment about your own writing process—about preparing to write, about writing the first draft, about revising, and about editing?

Prewriting Strategies

Brainstorming: Based on free association, this is the act of making a list of related words and phrases.

Clustering/webbing: This is the process of “mapping” any ideas that come to mind on a specific topic. This strategy involves writing a key word or phrase in the center of the page, drawing a circle around it, then writing down and circling any related ideas that come to mind and drawing lines to the words that prompted the new words.

Discussing: This is the act of talking with another person about your subject matter and grappling aggressively with your ideas in the process.

Freewriting: Based on free association, this is the strategy of writing for a brief period of time about anything that comes to your mind.

Outlining: This is the listing of the main ideas and details related to your subject in the order in which you will probably address them.

Questioning: This is the process of asking questions that will generate new ideas and topics. This process is often based on the five Ws and one H: Who? What? Why? Where? When? and How?

Scanning: This is the process of scanning and spot reading to generate specific ideas and form opinions.

Evaluation Form

Based on the CSU English Placement Test (EPT)

Part I: Revising Checklist—Mark the appropriate categories.

	Superior	Strong	Adequate	Marginal	Weak	Very Weak	Comments
Response to the topic	Addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the task.	Addresses the topic clearly but may respond to some aspects of the task more effectively than others.	Addresses the topic but may slight some aspects of the task.	Distorts or neglects aspects of the task.	Indicates confusion about the topic or neglects important aspects of the task.	Suggests an inability to comprehend the question or to respond meaningfully to the topic.	
Understanding and use of the assigned reading	Demonstrates a thorough critical understanding of the assigned reading in developing an insightful response.	Demonstrates a sound critical understanding of the assigned reading in developing a well-reasoned response.	Demonstrates a generally accurate understanding of the assigned reading in developing a sensible response.	Demonstrates some understanding of the assigned reading but may misconstrue parts of it or make limited use of it in developing a weak response.	Demonstrates very poor understanding of the main points of the assigned reading. Does not use the reading appropriately in developing a response or may not use the reading at all.	Demonstrates little or no ability to understand the assigned reading or to use it in developing a response.	
Quality and clarity of thought	Explores the issues thoughtfully and in depth.	Shows some depth and complexity of thought.	May treat the topic simplistically or repetitively.	Lacks focus or demonstrates confused or simplistic thinking.	Lacks focus and coherence and often fails to communicate ideas.	Is unfocused, illogical, or incoherent.	
Organization, development, and support	Is coherently organized and developed, with ideas supported by apt reasons and well-chosen examples.	Is well-organized and developed, with ideas supported by appropriate reasons and examples.	Is adequately organized and developed, generally supporting ideas with reasons and examples.	Is poorly organized and developed, presenting generalizations without adequate support or details without generalizations.	Has very weak organization and development, providing simplistic generalizations without support.	Is disorganized and undeveloped, providing little or no relevant support.	
Syntax and command of language	Has an effective, fluent style marked by syntactic variety and a clear command of language.	Displays some syntactic variety and facility in the use of language.	Demonstrates adequate use of syntax and language.	Has limited control of syntax and vocabulary.	Has inadequate control of syntax and vocabulary.	Lacks basic control of syntax and vocabulary.	
Grammar, usage, and mechanics (See list on next page for details)	Is generally free from errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.	May have a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.	May have some errors but generally demonstrates control of grammar, usage, and mechanics.	Has an accumulation of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that sometimes interfere with meaning.	Is marred by numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that frequently interfere with meaning.	Has serious and persistent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that severely interfere with meaning.	

Part II: Editing Checklist

Problem	Questions	Comments
Sentence boundaries	Are there fragments, comma splices, or fused sentences?	
Word choice	Are word choices appropriate in meaning, connotation, and tone?	
Subject-verb agreement	Do main verbs agree with the subject in person and number?	
Verb tense	Is the tense appropriate to the topic and style? Does the writing shift back and forth from present to past inappropriately?	
Word forms	Are any parts of verb phrases missing or incorrect? Are verb endings correct? Do other words have correct endings and forms?	
Noun plurals	Do regular plurals end in "s"? Are irregular plurals correct? Are there problems with count and non-count nouns?	
Articles	Are articles (<i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , and <i>the</i>) used correctly? (<i>Note</i> : Proper nouns generally don't have an article, with exceptions like "the United States" and "the Soviet Union," which are more like descriptions than names.)	
Spelling	Are words spelled correctly?	
Punctuation	Are periods, commas, and question marks used correctly? Are quotations punctuated correctly? Are capital letters used appropriately?	
Pronoun reference	Does every pronoun have a clear referent? (<i>Note</i> : Pronouns without referents or with multiple possible referents create a vague, confusing style.)	
Other problems	Are there other important problems?	