of the words on the page. But imagine how the meaning of these words would change if they were printed in **bold** or if they used a curly, informal font.

Visual texts often invert this relationship, bringing the visual elements into the foreground and letting words sit in the background or letting them work with or against the meaning suggested by the visual elements. The words and the images together make meaning and, like in all the texts you will read, this meaning is open to interpretation and analysis. In this sense, reading a visual text isn't all that different from reading any other kind of text, and you will want to use many of the same skills with critical reading that you would use with other selections in this book:

- **Identify the elements.** To begin reading a visual text, make note of each of its elements—not only any words it might contain but also each visual item included in the overall image. Think of each element as a sentence. Together, these elements express meaning just as the sentences of a paragraph do. When you identify each element, you are using your skills with annotation.
- **Identify the connections.** Once you've located the elements, think about the relationships between them. Do the visual and textual elements reinforce each other or do they work against each other? What meaning is the author trying to convey in each case?
- **Analyze and interpret the whole.** Just as you would with other readings in the book, you will want to analyze and interpret the visual image as a whole. This again involves critical thinking because you will need to think about not only the *explicit meanings*—what the image as a whole says—but also the *implicit meanings*—what the image as a whole implies.

Reading Arguments

Finding an author's argument, as we've already noted, is a basic goal as you approach each reading. But *reading* an author's argument involves a broader set of skills. Identifying the argument—locating and summarizing it—is the first step of that process. After that, there are a number of questions you can ask yourself in order to understand not only the argument but also its context and the ways in which the author has chosen to pursue that argument. Working through these questions will help you understand the essay more fully; it will also make you more aware of these issues in your own writing.

After reading the essay, ask yourself:

- **What is the larger conversation?** Each of the essays you read here is part of a larger discussion about an issue: ethics, race, digital life. Where do you see the author acknowledging, including, and joining that conversation? How do you imagine you will join it as well?
- **What other voices are in this conversation?** Where does the author bring in other voices? How does the author use quotation? How might you use quotations from this author as you write about the essay?
- **What counts as evidence for the author?** Each discipline has a different standard for evidence, and the standards for evidence in academic and public writing differ

Essays as Raw Material

as well. Does the author rely on anecdotes or statistics? Does the author use other credible sources? What sources should you use in your own writing?

- **How does the author acknowledge counterarguments?** Why might an author make or avoid this move? When should you acknowledge opposing positions?
- **How does the author acknowledge audience?** What sort of contextual information does the author provide? How does the style of writing reflect the needs of a particular audience?

Thinking Critically

Once you've completed a critical reading, you're ready to do some thinking. Imagine the essay is raw material. Critical thinking is the process of *doing something* with this raw material, making something out of it in order to join the conversation of the text. There are a number of methods you can use to help with your critical thinking. Responding to the essay is a good start because it allows you to record your thoughts and reactions. You can follow that by figuring out how the essay connects to other essays you've read or to your own ideas. Seeing connections is a way to begin to identify the relationships between ideas. Synthesizing these ideas then offers you a means to add to the conversation.

Responding

You can start the process of critical thinking by taking some time to respond to the reading and connecting what you read to your own life, to what you know and think and how you feel. Your instructor might ask you to keep a reading journal or a blog where you can record these initial connections.

For example, here's a short response assignment Risa Shiman, one of the instructors in the writing program in which I teach, recently gave students in one of her classes before they started discussing Peter Singer's "Visible Man: Ethics in a World without Secrets" (p. 425):

> Do the benefits of increased access to information provided by technology outweigh the costs? Why or why not?

Notice that the question isn't long or complicated. The goal is just to get you writing in response to the issues raised by the essay. Here's how one student responded:

> I believe that the benefits of increased access to information provided by technology outweigh the costs. The world as a whole is becoming a more dangerous and unstable place, and any efforts our country can make to protect us should be taken. Threats to the United States are becoming more frequent, and with terrorists successfully executing their 9/11 attacks, I believe we need to do whatever we can to prevent future occurrences from happening. Social media has definitely made it easier to monitor the world's

> views, thoughts, and opinions, and I wish that information were only used to monitor potential threats. But as Singer points out, corporations use what we put out into the world through social media so they can target their ads according to our consumer habits. But if getting Target coupons in the mail for Pampers diapers and Gerber baby food after you announce your pregnancy on Facebook is one of the things we have to deal with to make our country safer, then that is a small thing I am willing to give up. I also think that having organizations such as WikiLeaks provide a sort of checks and balances on our government is a good thing. Clearly Hillary Clinton was so upset over WikiLeaks' airing the government's dirty laundry because the government got caught, and it's embarrassing. I do understand that leaking some government documents can have a negative effect on our country. But it has been known that there are many corrupt dealings happening on Capitol Hill, and if that sort of threat makes politicians and government officials think twice before making a potential shady deal, then it's about time.

This student starts by articulating his or her beliefs about the issues, relating those opinions to Singer's discussion. These opinions can then become the basis for an argument as they are refined into a definite position and then put more closely into relation with Singer's text.

Connecting as Critical Thinking

Once you've considered your own responses, then it's a good idea to look for connections. Each of the essays you will read here is already connected to the conversation taking place around that author's particular topic. When you read, you might be able to guess some of these connections, but as you think critically about these readings, you will make new connections of your own, which is essential to critical thinking.

The strongest way to evaluate the information in an essay is to test it against other information, such as the ideas expressed in another essay. Connecting the readings might mean using a concept from one piece, such as Francis Fukuyama's idea of "Factor X," to explain another essay, such as the Dalai Lama's "Ethics and the New Genetics." But it might also mean using the ideas from one essay to modify the ideas in another: elaborating Michael Pollan's idea of the "holon" through Daniel Gilbert's concept of "super-replicators," for example. (See Figure 1.)

Connecting is a kind of critical thinking used by the authors of the essays in this book, too. In "AIDS, Inc.," Helen Epstein uses this move in discussing HIV prevention programs in Africa:

> Ugandans are more likely to know their neighbors and to live near members of their extended families. This in turn may have contributed to what sociologists call "social cohesion"—the tendency of people to talk openly with one another and form trusted relationships. Perhaps this may have facilitated

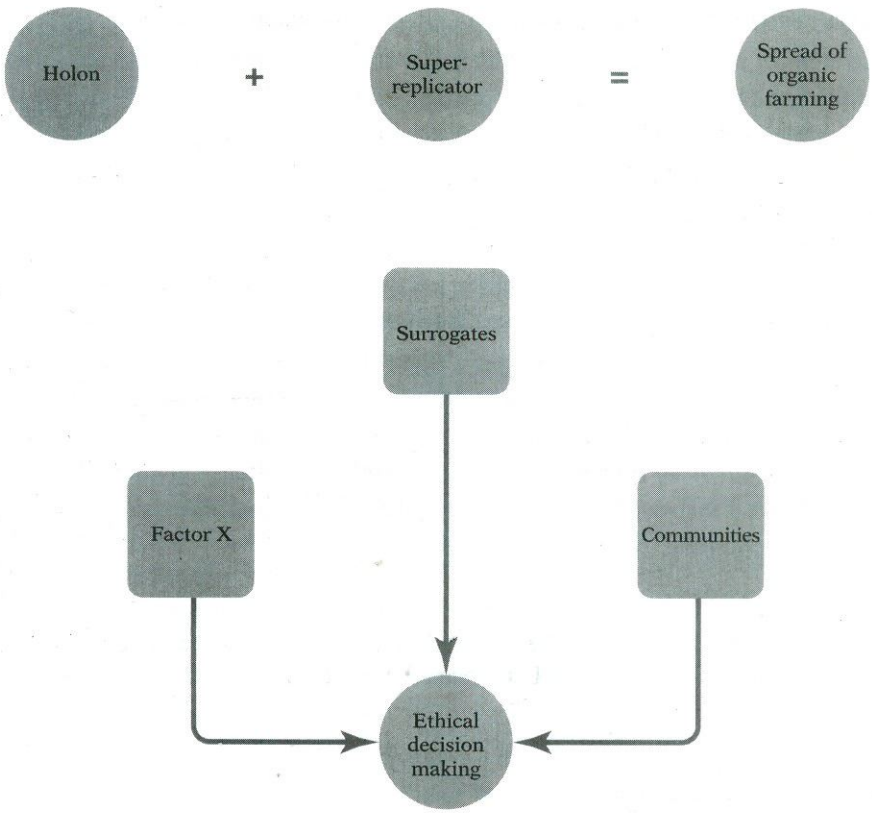

Figure 1 Clustering
Connecting and synthesizing are crucial ways of thinking critically about what you read.

> more realistic and open discussion of AIDS, more compassionate attitudes toward infected people, and pragmatic behavior change. (p. 116)

Epstein, a molecular biologist and specialist in public health, connects a concept from sociology, "social cohesion," with HIV prevention in Uganda. In making that connection, she uses the idea to support her argument and to create a new idea about what an effective prevention program should look like. It's the connections between ideas that allow authors like Epstein—and *you*—to make an argument.

In working with these readings, you might feel like there simply are no connections between them, that the topic of each essay is unique. But keep in mind that a connection is not something you find; it's something you *make*. If the connections were already sitting there in the essays, then there wouldn't be much critical thinking involved, because there wouldn't be much thinking involved at all. The process of making connections between disparate ideas is part of critical thinking. Sociology and public

health might not seem to have much in common, but when we make connections between them, we generate a new understanding of how to slow the spread of HIV.

Strategies for Making Connections

When making connections between the readings for this class, you might want to try a few different strategies:

- **Draw the connections.** Start by listing the important terms, concepts, and ideas from each essay on a sheet of paper. Once you've done that, you can literally draw lines between ideas that have some relation.
- **Use clustering.** You might also try a technique called clustering. Put the main concept of each essay in a circle on a sheet of paper. Draw other circles containing related or subsidiary ideas and connect them with lines to the circles containing the main ideas of the readings. When you find ways to connect the branches of these separate groups, you're locating relationships between the essays that you might want to pursue. Through figuring out exactly what these relationships are, you not only utilize critical thinking but also start the process of forming your own ideas, which you will express in your writing for this class.
- **Use the questions with the readings.** The Questions for Connecting at the end of each reading will also help in this process by asking you to think specifically about one essay in terms of another. These questions will direct you to think about both essays, giving you an opportunity to use each reading to test the concepts and ideas of the other.
- **Compare the tags.** The "tags" for each essay show key concepts, some of which overlap with the tags for other selections. Use the lists of the essays' tags in the table of contents to help you see some of the connections between the readings.

Synthesizing

Connecting defines relationships. Synthesizing goes one step further by combining different sources of information to generate something new. Synthesis happens a lot in the real world. For example, a doctor might combine test results, a patient's medical history, and his or her own knowledge to reach a diagnosis; and a businessperson might use a marketing report, recent sales figures, a demographic study, and data on the current economic outlook to craft a business strategy. Whenever you combine multiple sources of information to create new information or ideas, you're *synthesizing*. Synthesis always creates something new; because you'll be using it in this class to create new ideas and thus new knowledge, you'll use it to demonstrate your critical thinking.

All of the authors in this text use synthesis, because all of them are working from what's already been said and written about a subject to say and write something new. You'll do the same. After you've read a piece and connected its ideas to other contexts, you will synthesize the ideas into a new idea, your own idea. That idea will form the center of the writing you do in this class.

Strategies for Synthesizing

There are several techniques you can use to synthesize the ideas of these readings:

- **Combine ideas.** You might, for example, use ideas from two authors and combine them into a new concept that you use in your paper.
- **Apply ideas.** You might instead use a concept from one essay to show the limitations of another author's argument. In this case you would apply the first idea to the second, and in doing so, you'd produce something new, which would be the synthesis you create between the two.
- **Invent your own term.** You might even invent a term all your own, defining and deploying it through your analyses of the readings in the papers you will write. You can define the term using ideas that you pull from multiple readings, connecting and synthesizing them into a new understanding represented by your term.
- **Pay attention to similarities *and* differences.** When synthesizing, you want to ask yourself not simply how the two elements you're working with are alike but also how they're different. Paying attention to both similarities and differences allows you to discover how different ideas fit together in different ways.

Making an Argument

Introduction to Argument

All the processes we've discussed so far take place before you actually start formally writing in response to an assignment. You need to read (and reread), respond, connect, and synthesize in order to begin the process of critical thinking that forms the core of academic writing. Once you've done all that, it's time to form an argument. In academic terms, *argument* involves joining a conversation, taking a stand, or making a point. When you write in this class, you'll be doing all of these things.

You may already be familiar with this academic sense of *argument*, though you may have been introduced to it in different terms. In the grading criteria we use at my school, we make the meaning clear:

> When we use the term "argument" . . . we mean the central, problem-solving idea that drives the paper, a concept that many of us learned to think of as a "thesis." We might also think of this as a "position" or as a "project," all of which suggest that there is a central point the student is trying to make in the paper. The argument will usually show up in a thesis statement on the first page of the paper, but this is not the sole defining characteristic of an argument.
>
> The student should have a goal in a paper, something he or she is trying to accomplish, often defined by a specific, argumentative statement. But even when this statement is absent, the goal is often still apparent, whether as a summation in the conclusion or an underlying/recurring theme of the paper.
>
> An ideal argument will be spelled out in a clear thesis statement and will provide both a direction for the paper and a motivation for that direction

(a problem to solve, a goal to accomplish, a position to defend, a project to complete, etc.).

Forming an argument can be really challenging, in part because the word itself can mean so many things—an argument between lovers is quite different from an argument in a courtroom, which is also different from a scientific argument. Rather than thinking of your argument as the position you defend, like an army protecting its territory, try thinking of it as the words you send out into the world, like a participant joining a conversation.

Some Models for Argument

It might be useful to consider some models for argument to give you some sense of how you might think about your own argument. Many of these sound very similar, and that's because they are. Approaching argument from slightly different angles might be all it takes for you to get the hang of it:

- **Conversation.** We've already considered argument as a kind of conversation. With this model, you use the ideas and terms and concepts from one essay to discuss or evaluate the ideas from the other. That is, you put the authors in conversation.
- **Framing.** Think about your argument as using the ideas from one essay to "frame" the ideas from the other. That is, you examine the second essay using terms and concepts from the first, as though examining the second essay through a frame or lens provided by the first. Your goal would be to change how your readers understand the second essay by helping them view it through the frame provided by the first.
- **Theory and case.** Your argument might use a theory about something from one essay and test it using another essay as a particular case. That is, you evaluate how effective the first author's ideas are when applied to a second text. This is similar to framing, but whereas with framing you are teaching your readers something new about the second essay and its ideas, with this model you are teaching them something new about the first essay and its theories.
- **Application.** An argument might also apply the ideas of one essay to the ideas of the other. That is, you take a term or concept and apply it to the new essay, learning something new either about the term or about the new essay. Consider this a middle ground to the two models discussed above, one where your application of ideas could change the way your readers think about either essay.

Strategies for Forming an Argument

As you begin to work out what you want to argue, there are a number of matters to consider that can help you articulate your argument:

- **Think about the larger conversation.** The connections you find between essays are not just specific terms or ideas or concepts or quotations. There's also a connection in terms of the larger issues. Start by identifying the larger issue shared between

the essays, and then think about how each of these essays addresses this issue. For example, if the issue is civil rights, then what does each author say about civil rights, in a larger sense? How does what each says about the topic relate to larger public debates? How might you join in?

- **Think about what you're trying to prove.** Locating the points of connection between essays does show critical thinking. But it's not enough just to prove a connection between two authors. Yes, that takes some thinking, but you also want to think about what the connections *mean*.
- **Think about what we're learning from your paper.** What have you discovered by bringing these essays together? Do the ideas of one author extend the ideas of the other author into a whole new area? Are the ideas of one author limited because of what the other author shows? Can you raise new questions based on ideas from both authors? Adding your voice to the conversation means that you are saying something new about these issues and these essays. Think about what that is.

Points to Consider

When discussing argument in the classes I teach, I share with students the kinds of questions I ask about argument when reading students' papers:

- **And so?** An argument has to have a point. It has to first assert a connection between the two essays but then also answer the question "and so?" *Essay A is like (or unlike) Essay B and so . . .*
- **What are you trying to achieve?** I often use the term *project* in class instead of *argument*. When you write, you should have a project, something you want to achieve. Other instructors might use terms like *controlling purpose* or *motive*. Regardless, anyone who reads your argument should have a good sense of what you want to achieve in the paper.
- **What knowledge are you making?** An argument is a way of making new knowledge. How do you learn something new? You think about what you know, and then you come to a conclusion. That conclusion is a new piece of knowledge that you can express. Your argument might be: If we just read Essay A we learn X, but after reading Essay B we now learn Y about Essay A. Your argument tells your readers something new, something they haven't thought about before.

Practical Help

Finding your argument is not as hard as it sounds, because you've already done a lot of the work necessary by the time you get to thinking about your argument. In forming an argument, you will probably want to draw from:

- **The assignment or prompt.** We'll talk more about these later in this section and offer some tips on how to decode the focus of an assignment, but for now, consider the assignment a foundation on which you can build your argument. It offers a central focus that you can use to organize your critical thinking and join the conversation.

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- **Your annotations.** You will want to go back to your annotations of any selections connected to the assignment. Since you noted the important ideas and concepts in each essay and, most crucially, your own questions or concerns, these annotations will give you a preliminary sense of how you want to respond to each text.
- **Your connections and synthesis.** Many times strong arguments are built out of the connections you make between the texts. You may, for example, build an argument around the application of an idea from one essay to an example from another. In the process, you will offer a new insight into the essays, which represents your synthesis and your addition to the larger conversation of the texts.

Writing an Argument

All of these tips are meant to help you conceive of your argument. As you start the process of drafting it in writing, keep these points in mind:

- **Don't hide it.** Unlike some other forms of writing that build up to a central point, academic writing places the argument right at the beginning, usually in the introduction, so that the reader can follow the pursuit of that argument and the process of your thinking through the paper. Someone reading your paper should be able to point to a sentence and identify it as your argument. You may have learned to call this type of sentence a *thesis statement* for your paper.
- **Be specific.** Avoid broad statements. Instead, make your argument as specific as possible.
- **Use the essays.** One way to make sure you stay specific is to incorporate the terms from the essays in your statement of argument.
- **Make a map.** A really strong, clear argument serves as a map for the entire paper. Your reader should be able to predict the organization of the paper from reading your argument. Your argument should tell you exactly what you need to do in the paper and then should also tell your reader exactly how you will proceed in the paper.

From Argument to Draft

Once you have a good sense of your argument, you're in a good position to start drafting your paper. Let's look at a student's argument from a class I taught recently:

> A new civil rights can be achieved by replacing idle conversations with meaningful discussions that aid the presence of our true selves through Web sites that offer a safe place for human interaction.

Given this argument, it's clear the first thing the author will need to discuss is the idea of a "new civil rights," a concept from Kenji Yoshino's essay (p. 541). In the next body paragraph, the author will need to discuss how "idle conversations" prevent these new civil rights and then how "meaningful discussions" can help create them. Then the