

Writing an Outline or Plan

*"When something can be read without effort, great effort has gone into its writing."
-- Enrique Jardiel Poncela*

WHY PLAN?

When you read a formal writing assignment for the first time, do you ask yourself: "Where do I start?" This is a common response.

The question that follows might be "What is the quickest way to complete this assignment?" The desire to rush through an assignment might lead you to believe that writing whatever first comes to mind is a good idea. At this juncture, the rational side of your brain should intervene and tell you, "It's not a good idea to take shortcuts because you'll have to do more work in the end anyway!"

The PREWRITING process is essential to help you formulate a main idea, and organize your supporting ideas so that your writing makes sense. If steps are missed, your writing *won't* make sense. Formulating a plan or outline will make expressing your ideas easier, and your audience will understand your ideas. So just do it! 😊

Imagine building a house without blueprints to ensure the house is structurally sound and includes all necessary rooms. The result would be disastrous! The same is true of effective writing. Without an outline, you could miss important elements, such as a clear argument, the equivalent of building's strong foundation, which would destine your writing for collapse.

PLANNING IN A NUTSHELL

No matter what assignment you're tackling, the easiest way to start is to analyze the question you're answering. **Key words** will help you understand that question.

Next, think about **how** to respond to that question. Your answer to the question is your **main idea or thesis**.

Once you've determined your viewpoint, plan the **supporting ideas** that will reinforce your main idea. Focus on why the topic you're discussing is significant. **If the assignment you're working on provides a planning template, USE IT.** ... and that's planning in a nutshell.

WHAT FORMAT IS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT?

The required writing form shapes your plan: content you plan for a creative or personal response is much different from that of a critical or a persuasive piece, for example.

Three types of writing are most important in this course:

1. **response to a visual**
2. **personal response to literature or literary exploration**
3. **persuasive writing**

In the response to a **visual**, you're to interpret an image and support that interpretation with details in the image. **Personal response to literature**, or literary exploration, is an essay style response in which you respond to a question using support from both **a text you studied in the course** and your **personal perspective**. **Persuasive writing** presents a well-supported opinion to **convince your audience to adapt your viewpoint**. This could be in the form of a speech, a letter, a rant, etc.

So, you need to consider the form of your written response, which determines your plan.

WHAT TYPE OF LEARNER ARE YOU?

Besides what you plan, **how you plan** is significant. What works for you is a reflection of the type of thinker you are. Do you remember completing a learner and personality profile in Workbook 1? Are you abstract? Random? Concrete? Sequential? A combination of these? Are you visual in your learning style? These factors might affect the way you choose to prepare an outline of your ideas.

If you're an abstract random learner, you might use mind maps to organize your ideas. If you're concrete sequential, a chart or point form outline might make most sense.

For information about making a mind map, go to this link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUKGk8MTqhY&feature=related>

... and, if there's a template and guiding questions provided to assist your planning, USE THEM.

What? So What? Now What?

No matter what planning style you prefer, or what type of assignment you're approaching, the "What? So What? Now What?" guide is a helpful resource. Questions can be applied to any type of literature.

"WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?" Guide to Understanding Theme and Purpose of Texts

What <ul style="list-style-type: none">• details• events• effects• ideas	<p>Consider the text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What details and ideas are significant in this text?• What ideas do you get from key elements of this text?• What effects specific to this text support ideas?• What is the text creator's message about humanity?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>You can apply this to a section or to the entire text.</i>
So What? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• personal connection• another perspective	<p>Explore relevance of the text to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you relate personally to ideas in this text, or how has this text affected you?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>What memories or experiences did this text prompt?</i>◦ <i>What connection did you make with experiences of people you know?</i>◦ <i>What connection did you make with other texts?</i>
Now What? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• societal connection• universal effect	<p>Explore relevance of the text to society or to the world:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are the author's ideas relevant in the world today?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>How are these ideas unfolding in the world around us?</i>◦ <i>Where are these ideas occurring? When? Why?</i>• Are the issues important to all people? (universal means to everyone)<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>If so, in what way are they important?</i>◦ <i>Who may be affected by these issues?</i>

Applying “WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?” to a VISUAL RESPONSE

For her **3.4 Visual Response Plan** in Workbook 3, Hailey applied “What? So What? Now What?” to “Exercise Your Options”, an advertisement on [page 174](#) in *Between the Lines 11*.

The assignment requires students to complete two tasks:

- analyze a visual, providing details that led them to a main idea
- plan an introduction, body, and conclusion to develop their discussion

Questions in the guide below have been adapted to address a **visual**.

What <ul style="list-style-type: none">• details• events• effects• ideas	<p>Consider the visual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What details and ideas are significant in this visual?• What ideas do you get from key elements of this visual?• What effects specific to this visual support ideas?• What is the visual creator’s message about humanity?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>You can apply this to a section or to the entire visual.</i>
So What? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• personal connection• another perspective	<p>Explore relevance of the visual to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you relate personally to ideas in this visual, or how has this text affected you?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>What memories or experiences did this visual trigger?</i>◦ <i>What connection did you make with experiences of people you know?</i>◦ <i>What connection did you make with other visuals?</i>
Now What? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• societal connection• universal effect	<p>Explore relevance of the visual to society or to the world:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are the author’s ideas relevant in the world today?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>How are these ideas unfolding in the world around us?</i>◦ <i>Where are these ideas occurring? When? Why?</i>• Are the issues important to all people? (universal means to everyone)<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>If so, in what way are they important?</i>◦ <i>Who may be affected by these issues?</i>

Hailey addressed some of the questions in her plan, which she chose to do in point form, linear fashion.

Hailey's 3.4 Visual Response Plan

Introduction

- a. *Hook — Describe Ad briefly (what it looks like, what the message is, and what's going on)*
 - "Exercise your options" is main text on a white banner
 - four squares of colour below (red, orange, yellow, blue)
 - Each square has a solid white figure or icon of a man and a piece of technology
 - Final message: "healthy mind lives in a healthy body"
- b. *Topic to discuss — Mental and physical exercise- how ideas and elements in the ad contribute to the overall theme of the ad*
- c. **Theme/Main idea** — Full potential of an individual is obtainable in finding a balance between physical and mental activity (one must be present with the other for balance).

This is Hailey's thesis.

Discussion

- a. **Idea 1 — Reaching our full potential**
 - Words in ad "your options" remind me of future planning or individual potential to be achieved, - Idea of keeping options open
 - Exercise of body and mind is a good way to reach our "potential" now and in the future
 - Lots of options available to an individual for life-long fitness

Hailey identifies the topic as well as the accompanying evidence for each paragraph.

Evidence and Explanation:

- "Icon" idea of the athlete figure—message applies to anyone or everyone male (like a "fill in the blank" for any male to insert themselves as an example.
- Negative aspect: the man's body type is not specifically applicable to most people. He has a muscular and athletic body, which is not the majority.
- His physical actions represent the physical side
- Computer, TV, laptop= represent the mental side (learning, mental stimulation)
- Different sports shown by white figure—discus, hurdles, gymnastics—all balance-based activities

b. **Idea 2- Balance is important**

- Avoid couch-potato behaviour
- Image of technology being used as a tool or prop for an activity or being treated as a hurdle for fitness (throwing it away, overcoming it, side-stepping it?)—pairing of physical and mental activity here—both equally important?

Evidence & Explanation:

- *"Healthy mind lives in a healthy body"*
- *Could be speaking out about rejection of too much screen-time in front of tv, computer, etc.*
- *Images of white figure, and the mood given by each image—dynamic warm colours*
- *Overall composition of ad is simple- solutions for balance are simple?*

Conclusion

Recap - Talked about people reaching full potential, balance in activities important

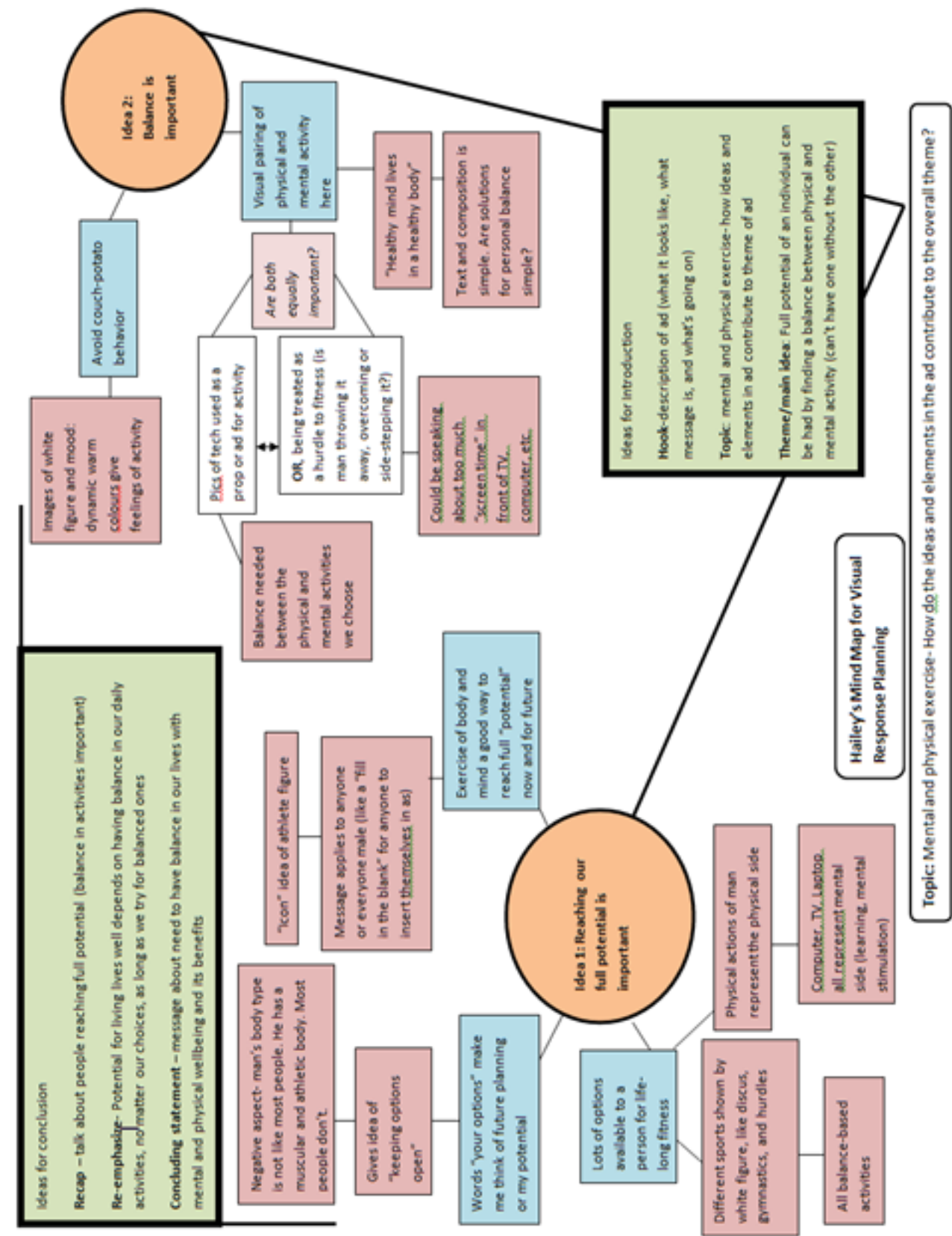
Re-Emphasis - Our potential for living our lives well, is to have balance present in our daily activities, no matter our choices (as long as we make conscious choices to pursue balance)

Concluding statement

- *A universal message about the need to have balance in our lives as far as physical and mental wellbeing.*
- *Idea of balance applies to more than just exercise (work, play, relationships, and more)*

This is what Hailey's plan might look like in a mind map. You can view Hailey's **4.5 Polished Visual Response** in the Appendix of Workbook 4.

Hailey's 3.4 Visual Response Plan (Mind Map)

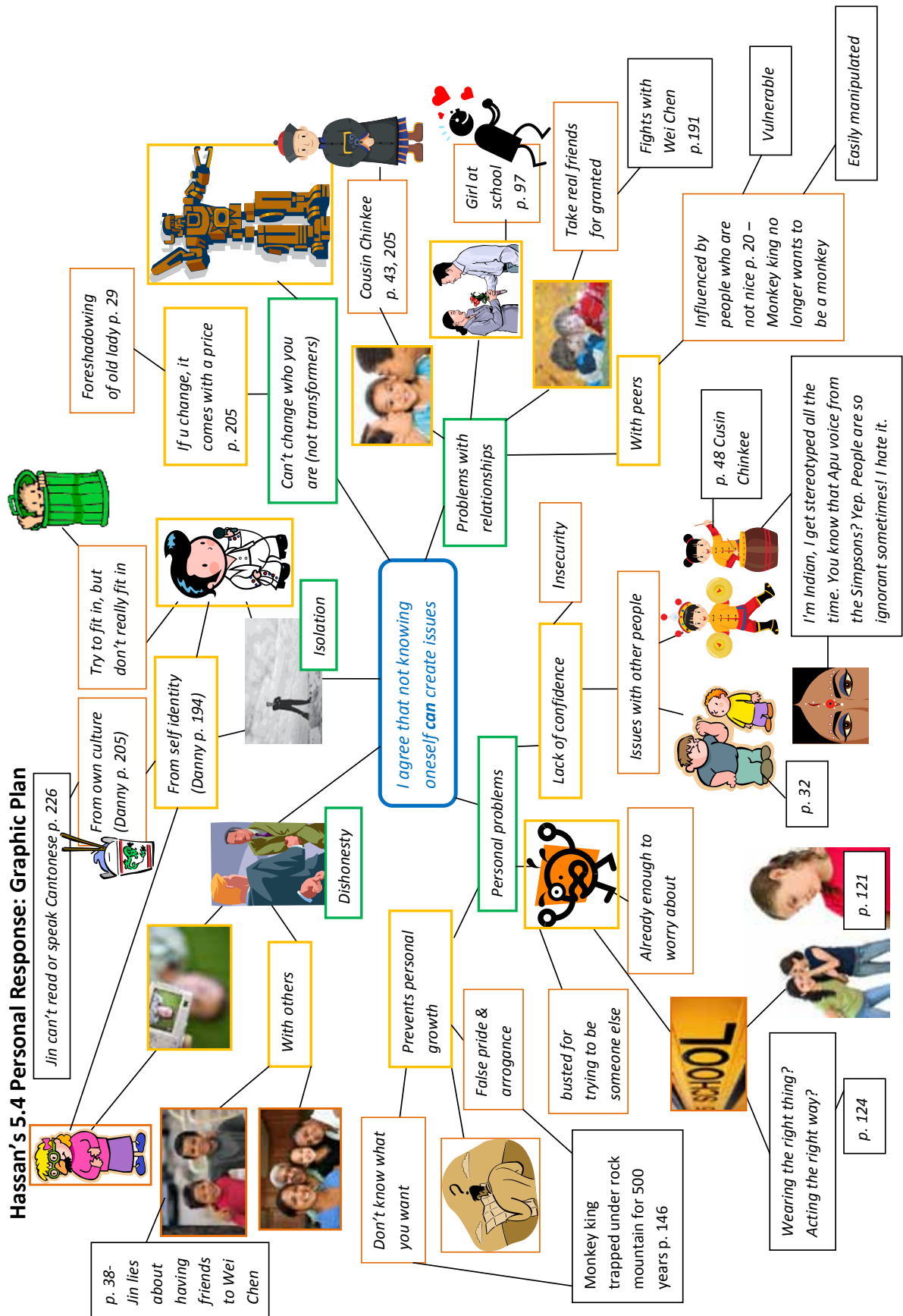


Applying “WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?” to a PERSONAL RESPONSE (Literary Exploration)

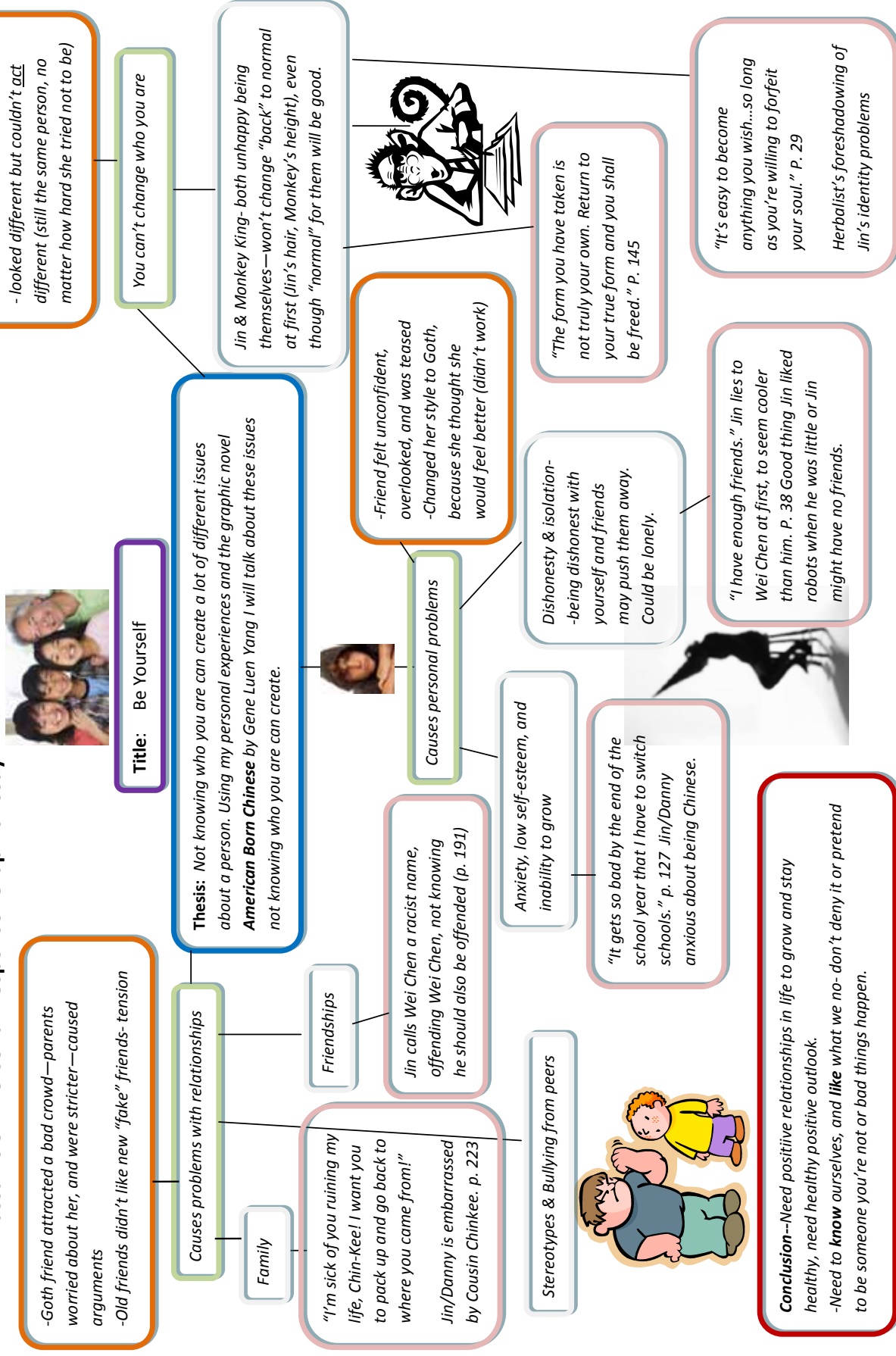
For his **5.4 Visual Response Plan** in Workbook 5, Hassan applied “What? So What? Now What?” to the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. Hassan responded to the question: “What is your opinion of the idea that not knowing oneself can create issues?” Questions in the guide below have been adapted to address a personal response (Literary Exploration).

<p>What</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • details • events • effects • ideas 	<p>Consider the personal response (Literary Exploration):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hassan’s topic of choice: What is Gene Luen Yang suggesting about how not knowing oneself can create issues? • What ideas do you get from key elements in <i>American Born Chinese</i>? • What effects specific to <i>American Born Chinese</i> support ideas • What is Gene Luen Yang’s message about not knowing oneself? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>You can apply this to a section or the entire graphic novel</i>
<p>So What?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal connection • another perspective 	<p>Explore relevance of <i>American Born Chinese</i> to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you relate personally to the idea that not knowing yourself can create issues? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>What memories or experiences did this graphic novel trigger?</i> ◦ <i>What connection did you make with experiences of people you know?</i> ◦ <i>What connection did you make with other texts?</i>
<p>Now What?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • societal connection • universal effect 	<p>Explore relevance of <i>American Born Chinese</i> to society or to the world:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Gene Luen Yang’s idea about not knowing oneself relevant in the world today? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>How are these ideas unfolding in the world around us?</i> ◦ <i>Where are these ideas occurring? When? Why?</i> • Are the issues important to all people? (universal means to everyone) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>If so, in what way are they important?</i> ◦ <i>Who may be affected by these issues?</i>

Hassan addressed the assignment question in a mind map in his planning process for his **5.4 Graphic Plan**.



Hassan's 5.4 Personal Response: Graphic Essay



Hassan's **5.4 Graphic Plan** was adapted to a **linear** format in the following outline. Hassan provides his thesis, information for three body paragraphs (complete with topics and evidence), and a brief recap for his conclusion.

Hassan's 5.4 Graphic Plan (Linear Outline)

Topic: "What is your opinion of the idea that not knowing oneself can create issues?"

Thesis: Not knowing who you are can create many problems or negative issues about a person. Using my personal experiences and the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang I will talk about these issues not knowing who you are can create.

Idea 1: Causes problems with relationships – Personal experience about my friend trying to be Goth

Goth friend attracted a bad crowd; parents worried about her and were stricter; caused arguments
Old friends didn't like new "fake" friends; tension

Example: *Family*

Evidence: *"I'm sick of you ruining my life, Chin-Kee! I want you to pack up and go back to where you came from!"*
Jin/Danny is embarrassed by Cousin Chinkee, p. 223.

Hassan should have written this information, and details for Idea 2, as a topic sentence, which introduces his first body paragraph.

Example: *Friendships*

Evidence: *Jin calls Wei Chen a racist name, offending Wei Chen, not knowing he should also be offended (p. 191)*

Example: *Stereotypes and Bullying from peers*

Idea 2: Causes personal problems- Graphic Novel (American Born Chinese)

Friend felt unconfident, overlooked, and was teased; Changed her style to Goth, because she thought she would feel better; didn't work

Example: *Anxiety, low self-esteem, and inability to grow*

Evidence: *"It gets so bad by the end of the school year that I have to switch schools." p. 127 Jin/Danny anxious about being Chinese*

Example: *Dishonesty & isolation; being dishonest with yourself and friends may push them away; Could be lonely*

Evidence: *"I have enough friends." Jin lies to Wei Chen at first, to seem cooler than him. p. 38 Good thing Jin liked robots when he was little or Jin might have no friends.*

Idea 3: Can't change who you are –Jin and my friend

Had a friend who dressed Goth; got a lot of negative reactions; looked different but couldn't act different (still the same person, no matter how hard she tried not to be)

Example: *Jin & Monkey King both unhappy being themselves; won't change "back" to normal at first (Jin's hair, Monkey's height), even though "normal" for them will be good*

Evidence: *"The form you have taken is not truly your own. Return to your true form and you shall be freed." p. 145*

Evidence: *"It's easy to become anything you wish...so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul." p. 29 Herbalist's foreshadowing of Jin's identity problems*

Conclusion: *Need positive relationships in life to grow and stay healthy; need healthy positive outlook
Need to **know** ourselves, and **like** what we no; don't deny it or pretend to be someone you're not or bad things happen*

Applying “WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?” to PERSUASIVE WRITING

Persuasive writing presents a well-supported opinion to **convince your audience to adapt your viewpoint**. This could be in the form of a speech, a letter, a rant, etc.

In this type of assignment, students are convincing when they explain the issue as they understand it, use specific support to convince the audience that the opinion is credible, and, if possible, suggest a solution to address the issue for a positive result.

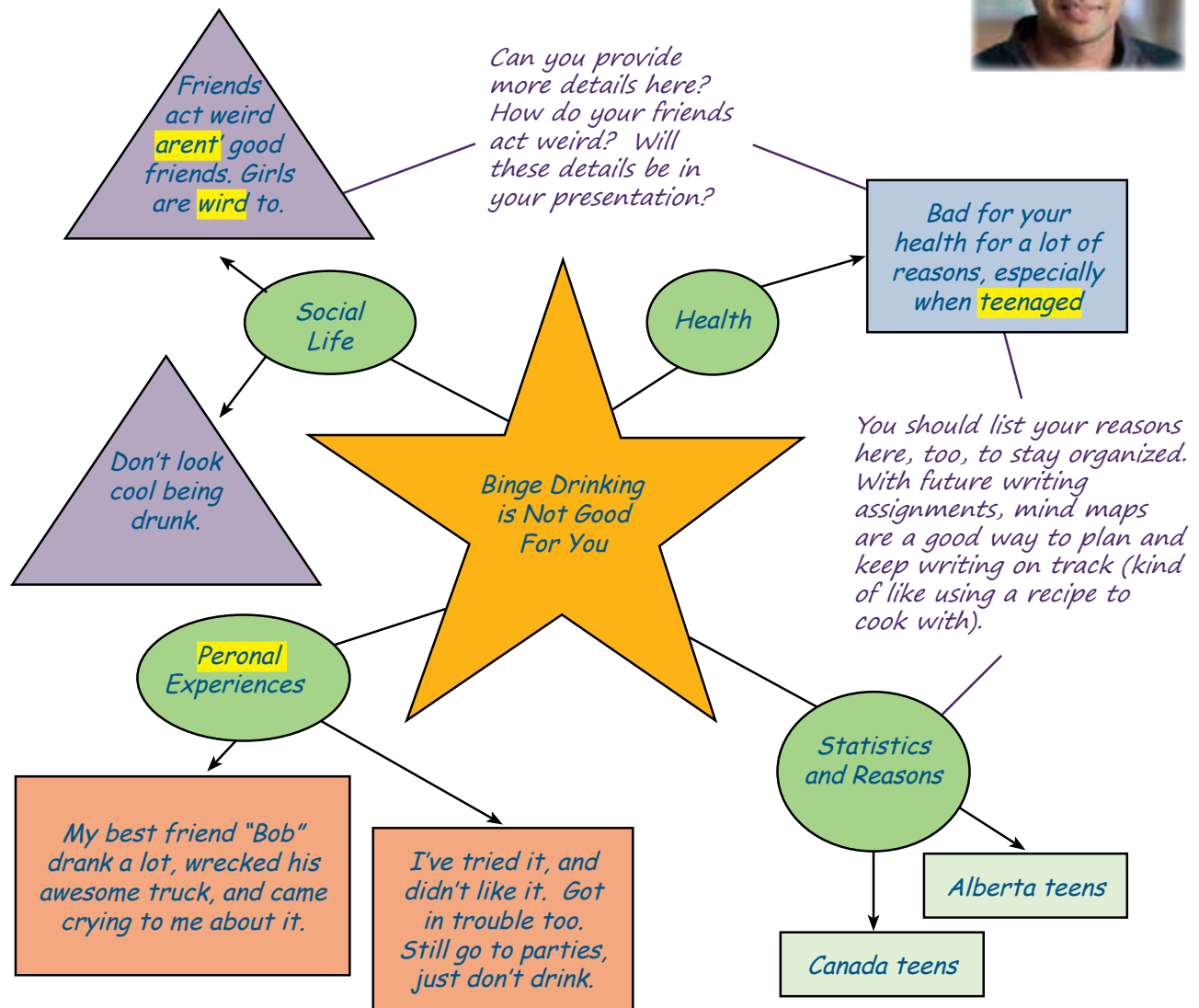
Sometimes, students become emotional because of their commitment to the issue. Remember that an audience will listen only if the presenter is knowledgeable and polite. No one takes a gruff, rowdy person seriously.

For his 1.3 Rant in Workbook 1, Toby applied “What? So What? Now What?” to the issue of **teenage binge drinking**. He provided only a mind map for his plan.

What <ul style="list-style-type: none">• details• events• effects• ideas	Consider the topic and information you researched : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What details and ideas are significant to the issue of teenage binge drinking?• What ideas do you get from researched information?• What specific details support your opinion?• What is your message about teenage binge drinking?
So What? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• personal connection• another perspective	Explore relevance of the issue to you : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your experience with teenage binge drinking?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>What is your experience with teenage binge drinking?</i>
Now What? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• societal connection• universal effect	Explore relevance of the issue to society or to the world : <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is the issue relevant in the world today?<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>How are these ideas unfolding in the world around us?</i>◦ <i>Where are these ideas occurring? When? Why?</i>• Are the issues important to all people? (universal means to everyone)<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>If so, in what way are they important?</i>◦ <i>Who may be affected by these issues?</i>

Toby's 1.3 Rant: Mind Map

Toby's 1.3 Rant: Mind Map – “Teenage Binge Drinking”



Sources:

1. <http://www.the-alcoholism-guide.org/binge-drinking-facts.html>
2. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/the-hot-button/canada-control-your-binge-drinking-medical-journal/article1873629/>
3. <http://www.afm.mb.ca/Learn%20More/BingeDrinking.pdf>
4. <http://www.madd.ca/english/research/stats.html>
5. <http://www.teenchallenge.ca/get-help/educational-resources/alcohol-abuse-facts>

Ensure you have all the correct information. The URL is a good start, but you should also have the author's name and the title of the source. You will learn a more formal way later in the course.

Toby's 1.3 Rant Reflection

"What did you learn about your issue of choice that you did not realize before? Does this issue have an established solution, or does it need a solution? Do you have any ideas about one?"

I knew it was ^{dangerous} **dangeros** from commercials and things I've ^{heard} **herd** on the radio before, about drunk driving, and then I knew how dumb **it** was from watching some of my friends when they drink. I didn't know all that scary stuff about how kids can die from it though. It made me feel like less of a loser about not drinking with my buddies, and more like I made a right decision. One thing that stuck out **to** was the actual drinking rate in Alberta. 79% of kids over 15 drink? They say this increases roughly about 10% ever three years. So, only 6 years to go until 99% of kids over 15 drink? It looks like a pretty big problem to me. **Ithink** from experience my friends only stop **drinkin** when something **scares the crap out of** **them**. It'd be nice to find a different way to get them to stop that didn't involve a **sccare**. I'm not sure what it is, but I'm definitely **gonna** think about it.

Can you clarify what "it" is? Do you mean drunk driving or binge drinking, or are there some words missing here?

"too" is the word you're looking for here, as a way of emphasizing a point.

Avoid slang in your writing.

Toby, I'm glad you found this presentation informative. It seems to have confirmed a very good decision you've made on a quite serious issue. As a teacher, I can say honestly that I was also boggled by that 79% statistic. When I was younger (oh, the nineties...), binge drinking was around, but no one even had a name for it, just "drinking too much." Back then, I don't think it was as common with a younger crowd as you are seeing with your friends now. Did you notice any differences between Canadian statistics and American statistics? I noticed that you stuck with the Canadian statistics, which is a good choice because you considered who you wanted your audience to be: Canadian teens.

Thank you for such a thoughtful presentation, Toby. We can hope for a solution, but awareness is always a great start!

So, if you take time to plan, writing your response will not take long and should have positive results!