a human face by quotations from a student who is taking longer to graduate than he expected.

**Key Features / Reports**

**A tightly focused topic.** The goal of this kind of writing is to inform readers about something without digressing—and without, in general, bringing in the writer's own opinions. All three examples focus on a particular topic—texting, throwing a baseball, and the cost of college—and present information about the topics evenhandedly.

**Accurate, well-researched information.** Reports usually require some research. The kind of research depends on the topic. Library research to locate scholarly sources may be necessary for some topics—Cullington, for example, uses various sources available through her library's database. Other topics may require field research—interviews, observations, and so on. Fallows interviewed two coaches in addition to reading several books on pitching baseballs.

**Synthesis of ideas.** Reports do more than present lists of unconnected facts; they **SYNTHESIZE IDEAS** by showing patterns in and relationships among the information presented. Marcus compares undergraduate students' expectations of finishing college in four years with statistics showing that more than half will take longer. Fallows combines observations of women pitching baseballs and serving tennis balls to refute claims that their arms are structured differently from men's.

**Various writing strategies.** Presenting information usually requires various organizing patterns—defining, comparing, classifying, explaining processes, analyzing causes and effects, and so on. Fallows explains the process governing throwing a baseball and classifies different ways of throwing. Marcus analyzes the financial effects of delaying graduation, and Cullington analyzes the effects (or lack of effects) of texting on students' writing ability.
Clear definitions. Reports need to provide clear definitions of any key terms that their audience may not know. Cullington defines both texting and textspeak. Fallows defines several pitching terms, such as inside your elbow.

Appropriate design. Reports often combine paragraphs with information presented in lists, tables, diagrams, and other illustrations. When you're presenting information, you need to think carefully about how to design it—numerical data, for instance, can be easier to understand and remember in a table than in a paragraph. Often a photograph can bring a subject to life, as do the photos on page 138, which accompany "Throwing Like a Girl." The caption provides important information that is explained more fully in the essay itself. Online reports offer the possibility of video and audio clips as well as links to source materials and more detailed information.

A GUIDE TO WRITING REPORTS

Choosing a Topic

Whether you get to choose your topic or are working with an assigned one, see if you can approach the topic from an angle that interests you.

If you get to choose. What interests you? What do you wish you knew more about? The possible topics for informational reports are limitless, but the topics that you’re most likely to write well on are those that engage you. They may be academic in nature or reflect your personal interests or both. If you’re not sure where to begin, here are some places to start:

- an intriguing technology: hybrid cars, touchscreens, tooth whiteners
- sports: soccer, snowboarding, ultimate Frisbee, basketball
- an important world event: the Arab Spring, the fall of Rome, the Black Death
[Reports on topics that are unfamiliar to readers]

Begin with an anecdote, quote, or other means of interesting readers.

Provide background, and state your thesis.

Describe your topic, defining any key terms.

Explain by comparing, classifying, analyzing causes or effects, explaining processes, and so on.

Conclude by restating your thesis or referring to your beginning.

[Reports on events]

Introduce the topic; provide any necessary background information; state your thesis.

Narrate the first event or procedure.

Narrate the second event or procedure.

Narrate the third event or procedure.

Repeat as necessary.

Conclude by telling what happened, stating the implications, or some other means.

[Reports that compare and contrast]

Introduce the topic; provide any necessary background information; state your thesis.

Describe one item.

Describe the other items, using the same structure used to describe the first.

Conclude by restating your thesis.
Could any of your information be summarized in a **TABLE** or **FIGURE**?

Do you have any data that readers would more easily understand in the form of a bar **GRAPH**, line graph, or pie chart?

Would **ILLUSTRATIONS** (diagrams, photos, drawings, and so on), video or audio clips, or links help you explain anything in your report?

**Getting Response and Revising**

The following questions can help you study your draft with a critical eye. **GETTING RESPONSE** from others is always good, and these questions can guide their reading, too. Make sure they know your purpose and audience.

- Do the title and opening sentences get readers’ interest? If not, how might they do so?
- What information does this text provide, and for what purpose?
- Does the introduction explain why this information is being presented? Does it place the topic in a larger context?
- Are all key terms defined that need to be?
- Do you have any questions? Where might more explanation or an example help you understand something better?
- Is any information presented visually, with a chart, graph, table, drawing, or photograph? If so, is it clear how the illustration relates to the written text? Is there any text that would be more easily understood if it were presented visually?
- Is any information presented through digital media, such as hyperlinks, video clips, or audio files? If so, is the relation of these elements to the written text made clear? Would any aspect of the report be clearer if presented using such elements?
- Does the organization help make sense of the information? Does the text include description, comparison, or any other writing strategies? Does the topic or rhetorical situation call for any particular strategies that should be added?
If the report cites any sources, are they quoted, paraphrased, or summarized effectively (and with appropriate documentation)? Is information from sources introduced with **SIGNAL PHRASES**?

Does the report end in a satisfying way? What are readers left thinking? These questions should identify aspects of your report you need to work on. When it’s time to **REVISE**, make sure your report appeals to your audience and achieves your purpose as successfully as possible.

**Editing and Proofreading**

Readers equate correctness with the writer’s competence. Once you’ve revised your draft, follow these guidelines for **EDITING** a report:

- Check your use of key terms. Repeating key words is acceptable in reports; using synonyms for unfamiliar words may confuse readers, while the repetition of key words or the use of clearly identified **PRONOUNS** for them can be genuinely helpful.
- Check to be sure you have **TRANSITIONS** where you need them.
- If you have included **HEADINGS**, make sure they’re parallel in structure and consistent in design.
- Make sure that any photos or other **ILLUSTRATIONS** have captions, that charts and graphs have headings—and that all are referred to in the main text. Use white space as necessary to separate sections of your report and to highlight graphic elements.
- Check any **DOCUMENTATION** to see that it follows the appropriate style without mistakes.
- **PROOFREAD** and spell-check your report carefully.

**Taking Stock of Your Work**

- How well did you convey the information? Is it complete enough for your audience’s needs?