Classification involves a three-step process:

1. Separate things into their elements, using the method of division or **analysis** (previous chapter).
2. Isolate the similarities among the elements.
3. Group or classify the things based on those similarities, matching like with like.

The following diagram illustrates a classification essay that appears later in this chapter, "The People Next Door" by Jonathan R. Gould, Jr. (p. 191). Gould's subject is neighbors, and he sees four distinct kinds:

```
                              Neighbors

Those who are      Those who are      Those who are      Those who are
too friendly       unsociable         irritable          just right
```

All the members of Gould's overall group share at least one characteristic: they have been Gould's neighbors. The members of each subgroup also share at least one characteristic: they are too friendly, for instance, or unsociable. The people in each subgroup are independent of one another, and none of them is essential to the existence of the subgroup: the kind of neighbor would continue to exist even if, at the moment, Gould didn't live next door to such a person.

The number of groups in a classification scheme depends entirely on the basis for establishing the classes in the first place. There are two systems:

- In a *complex classification* like that used for neighbors, each individual fits firmly into one class because of at least one distinguishing feature shared with all members of that class but not with any members of any other classes. All the too-friendly neighbors are overly friendly, but none of the unsociable, irritable, or just-right neighbors shares this characteristic.

- In a *binary or two-part classification*, two classes are in opposition to each other, such as constructive and destructive neighbors. Often, one group has a certain characteristic that the other group lacks. For instance, neighbors could be classified into those who respect your privacy and those who don't. A binary scheme is useful to emphasize the possession of a particular characteristic, but it is limited if it specifies nothing about the members of the "other" class except that they lack the trait. (An old joke claims that there are two kinds of people in the world—those who classify and all others.)

CLASSIFICATION

SORTING FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

We classify when we sort things into groups: kinds of cars, styles of writing, types of customers. Because it creates order, classification helps us make sense of our experiences and our surroundings. With it, we see the correspondences among like things and distinguish them from unlike things, similarities and distinctions that can be especially helpful when making a decision or encouraging others to see things from a new perspective. You use classification when you prioritize your bills, sort your laundry, or organize your music collection; you might also draw on the method to choose among types of data plans, to propose new pay scales at your workplace, or to argue at a town meeting that some types of community projects are more valuable than others. Because classification helps us name things, remember them, and discuss them with others, it is also a useful method for developing and sharing ideas in writing.
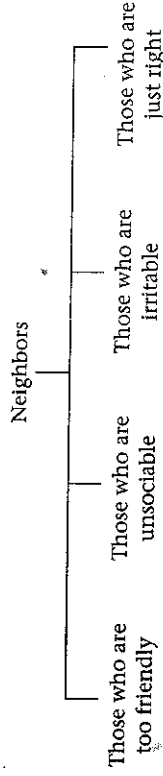
Reading Classification

Writers classify primarily to explain a pattern in a subject that might not have been noticed before: a sportswriter, for instance, might observe that great basketball defenders tend to fall into one of three groups based on their style of play: the shot blockers, the stealers, and the brawlers. Sometimes, writers also classify to persuade readers that one group is superior: the same sportswriter might argue that shot blockers are the most effective defenders because they not only create turnovers like the stealers do, but they also intimidate the opponent like the brawlers do.

Sorting items demands a **principle of classification** that determines the groups by distinguishing them. For instance, Gould's principle in identifying four groups of neighbors is their behavior toward him and his family. Principles for sorting a year's movies might be genre (action-adventure, comedy, drama), place of origin (domestic, foreign), or cost of production (low-budget, medium-budget, high-budget). The choice of a principle depends on the writer's main interest in the subject.

Although a writer may emphasize one class over the others, the classification itself must be complete and consistent. A classification of movies by genre would be incomplete if it omitted comedies. It would be inconsistent if it included action-adventures, comedies, dramas, low-budget films, and foreign films: such a system mixes *three* principles (genre, cost, origin); it omits whole classes (what about high-budget domestic dramas?); and it overlaps other classes (a low-budget foreign action-adventure would fit in three different groups).

Analyzing Classification in Paragraphs

Dahlia Lithwick (born 1968) is a legal correspondent and a senior editor at *Slate*. This paragraph is adapted from "A Unified Theory of Muppet Types," a tongue-in-cheek article she wrote for that magazine in 2012. (Of the human examples she offers for each class, Zelda Fitzgerald was the free-spirited wife of *Great Gatsby* author F. Scott Fitzgerald; Stephen Breyer and John Roberts are Supreme Court justices.)

Every one of us is either a Chaos Muppet or an Order Muppet. Chaos Muppets are out-of-control, emotional, volatile. They tend toward the blue and fuzzy. They make their way through life in a swirling maelstrom of food crumbs, small flaming objects, and the letter C. Cookie Monster, Ernie, Grover, Gonzo, Dr. Bunsen Honeydew and—paradigmatically—Animal, are all Chaos Muppets. Zelda Fitzgerald was a Chaos Muppet. So, I must tell you, is Justice Stephen Breyer. Order Muppets—and I'm thinking about Bert, Scooter, Sam the Eagle, Kermit the Frog, and the blue guy who is perennially harassed by Grover at restaurants (the Order Muppet Everyman)—tend to be neurotic, highly regimented, averse to surprises and

Margin notes: Principle of classification (topic sentence underlined): Muppet types — 1. Chaos Muppets — Characteristics of type — Muppet examples — Human examples — 2. Order Muppets — Muppet examples — Characteristics of type

may sport monstrously large eyebrows. They sometimes resent the responsibility of the world weighing on their felt shoulders, but they secretly revel in the knowledge that they keep the show running. Your first-grade teacher was probably an Order Muppet. So is Chief Justice John Roberts. It's not that any one type of Muppet is inherently better than the other. It's simply the case that the key to a happy marriage, a well-functioning family, and a productive place of work lies in carefully calibrating the ratio of Chaos Muppets to Order Muppets within any closed system. That, and always letting the Chaos Muppets do the driving.

Margin notes: Human examples — Implications of classification

Luis Alberto Urrea (born 1955) is an award-winning poet, fiction writer, and journalist whose work often focuses on the lives of impoverished Mexicans. In the following passage from "Night Shift," a 2012 essay about his former job as a campground janitor, Urrea classifies temporary neighbors in a California RV park.

The better sections of the campground were reserved for the RVs and fifth wheels. They had nice fat pullouts with room for an extra car or pickup, a little grass so they could unfurl their awnings and set up their lawn chairs. Electric and sewer hookups. It was deluxe, as far as blacktop roughing it went. The smaller RVs, Class 1 and shorter, got tawdrier, smaller parking slots. Yellower grass in narrower strips. Fewer oleanders. Farther from the golf course. And the suckers who came with tents—who should have had the smarts to head up to the Cuyamaca Mountains and at least hear a blue jay—why, they were crammed over on the far side, near the beach, but also near the adjacent trailer park with its... nocturnal Bachman Turner Overdrive recitals. Stray cats from the trailer park cruised our property, but there wasn't any policy about them. They kept rodents under control and might have even dissuaded the skunks, which really enjoyed the French fries and Sno Balls scattered around the trailers.

Margin notes: Principle of classification: equipment ownership — 1. Large RVs: given "deluxe" accommodations — 2. Small RVs: provided with "tawdrier" spaces — 3. Tents: pushed aside to an undesirable area

Developing an Essay by Classification

▶ Getting Started

Classification essays are often assigned in college: you might be asked to identify the major branches of government for a political science class, for instance, or to categorize difficult personality types for a business communication course. When you need to develop your own subject for a classification essay, think of one large class of things whose members you've noticed fall into subclasses, such as study habits, midnight shoppers, or charity fund-raising appeals. Be sure that your general subject forms a class in its own right—that all its members share at least one important quality. Then look for your principle of classification, the quality or qualities that distinguish some members from others, providing poles for the members to group themselves around. One such principle for charity fund-raising appeals might be the different methods of delivery, such as telephone calls, public gatherings, advertisements, and social media campaigns.

While generating ideas for your classification, keep track of them in a list, diagram, or outline to ensure that your principle is applied thoroughly (to all classes) and consistently (each class relating to the principle). Fill in the list, diagram, or outline with the distinguishing features of each class and with examples that will clarify your scheme.

▶ Forming a Thesis

You will want to state your principle of classification in a thesis sentence so that you know where you're going and your readers know where you're taking them. Be sure the sentence also conveys a *reason* for the classification so that the essay does not become a dull list of categories. The following tentative thesis sentence is mechanical; the revision below it is more interesting.

TENTATIVE THESIS SENTENCE   Charity fundraising requests are delivered in many ways.

REVISED THESIS SENTENCE   Of the many ways to deliver charity fund-raising requests, the three that rely on personal contact are generally the most effective.

(Note that the revised thesis sentence implies a further classification based on whether the requests involve personal contact or not.)

▶ Organizing

The **introduction** to a classification essay should make clear why the classification is worthwhile: What situation prompted the essay? What do readers already know about the subject? What use might they make of the information you will provide? Unless your principle of classification is self-evident, you may want to explain it briefly—but save extensive explanation for the body of the essay.

In the body of the essay, the classes may be arranged in order of decreasing familiarity or increasing importance or size—whatever pattern provides the emphasis you want and clarifies your scheme for readers. You should at least mention each class, but some classes may demand considerable space and detail.

A classification essay often ends with a **conclusion** that restores the wholeness of the subject. Among other uses, the conclusion might summarize the classes, comment on the significance of one particular class in relation to the whole, or point out a new understanding of the whole subject gained from the classification.

▶ Drafting

For the first draft of your classification, your main goal will be to establish your scheme: spelling out the purpose and principle of classification and defining the groups so that they are complete and consistent, covering the subject without mixing principles or overlapping. The more you've been able to plan your scheme, the less difficult the draft will be. If you can also fill in the examples and other details needed to develop the groups, do so.

Be sure to consider your readers' needs as you draft. For a subject familiar to readers, such as study habits, you probably wouldn't need to justify your principle of classification, but you would need to enliven the classes themselves with vivid details. For an unfamiliar subject, in contrast, you might need to take considerable care in explaining the principle of classification as well as in detailing the classes.

▶ Revising and Editing

The following questions and the information in the Focus box on the next page can help you revise and edit your classification.

- *Will readers see the purpose of your classification?* Let readers know early on why you are troubling to classify your subject, and keep this purpose evident throughout the essay.

FOCUS ON PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

A crucial aim of revising a classification is to make sure each group is clear: what's counted in, what's counted out, and why. It's not unusual to get so focused on identifying and sorting categories during the draft stage that you neglect the details. In that case, you'll need to go back and provide examples, comparisons, and other particulars to make the groups clear as you develop the paragraph(s) devoted to each group.

The following undeveloped paragraph gives just the outline of one group in a four-part classification of ex-smokers into zealots, evangelists, the elect, and the serene:

The second group, evangelists, does not condemn smokers but encourages them to quit. Evangelists think quitting is easy, and they preach this message, often earning the resentment of potential converts.

Contrast this bare-bones adaptation with the actual paragraphs written by Franklin E. Zimring in his essay "Confessions of a Former Smoker":

By contrast, the antismoking evangelist does not condemn smokers. Unlike the zealot, he regards smoking as an easily curable condition, as a social disease, and not a sin. The evangelist spends an enormous amount of time seeking and preaching to the unconverted. He argues that kicking the habit is not *that* difficult. After all, *he did it*; moreover, as he describes it, the benefits of quitting are beyond measure and the disadvantages are nil.

The hallmark of the evangelist is his insistence that he never misses tobacco. Though he is less hostile to smokers than the zealot, he is resented more. Friends and loved ones who have been the targets of his preachments frequently greet the resumption of smoking by the evangelist as an occasion for unmitigated glee.

In the second sentence of both paragraphs, Zimring explicitly contrasts evangelists with zealots, the group he previously discussed. And he does more, as well: he provides specific examples of the evangelist's message (first paragraph) and of others' reactions to him (second paragraph). These details pin down the group, making it distinct from other groups and clear in itself.

For more advice on developing paragraphs through specifics, see pages 33–34.

- *Is your classification complete?* Your principle of classification should create categories that encompass every representative of the general subject. If some representatives will not fit the scheme, you may have to create a new category or revise the existing categories to include them.

- *Is your classification consistent?* Consistency is essential to save readers from confusion or irritation. Make sure all the classes reflect the same principle and do not overlap. Remedy flaws by adjusting the classes or creating new ones.

A Note on Thematic Connections

Writers classify people more than any other subject, perhaps because the method gives order and even humor to our relationships. The authors in this chapter explore the connections that give people a sense of where they fit in with friends and neighbors. In a paragraph, Dahlia Lithwick asserts that everyone we know can be classified as one of two distinct types of Muppet characters (p. 180). Also in a paragraph, Luis Alberto Urrea sorts campers at an RV park by their assigned parking spaces (p. 181). Then, in essays, Brandon Griggs identifies a dozen irritating behaviors among *Face-book* friends (next page), Jonathan R. Gould finds four kinds of next-door neighbors (p. 191), and David Brooks examines several characteristics of neighborhoods to argue that American society isn't as diverse as we like to think (p. 195).

Now the cliques are moving online.

Rather than bringing me closer to others, the time that I spend online isolates me from the most important people in my life: my family, my friends, my neighborhood, my community.

—Kim Komando

There are three kinds of death in this world. There's heart death, there's brain death, and there's being off the network.

—Clifford Stoll

—Guy Alnes

JOURNAL RESPONSE Do you have a *Facebook* page? a *Twitter* following? a *Tumblr* account? Write a short journal entry about how you connect with your friends online. How would your relationships suffer, or improve, if you didn't have access to a social-networking tool?

Brandon Griggs

Brandon Griggs (born 1960) is a journalist who writes about culture and technology. He went to high school in Washington, DC, graduated from Tufts University in 1982, and studied at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism under a fellowship with the National Arts Journalism Program. Griggs held a staff writing position as the "Culture Vulture" for the *Salt Lake Tribune* for fifteen years before taking his current position as a technology-section producer for CNN.com. He is the author of *Utah Curiosities: Quirky Characters, Roadside Oddities and Other Offbeat Stuff* (2008), a guide to the state's peculiar legends and unconventional tourist attractions.

The Most Annoying Facebookers

In this 2009 article for *CNN.com*, Griggs draws on his personal experience and his sense of humor to call attention to behaviors that are almost guaranteed to alienate anyone's network of friends.

Facebook, for better or worse, is like being at a big party with all your friends, family, acquaintances, and coworkers. There are lots of fun, interesting people you're happy to talk to when they stroll up. Then there are the other people, the ones who make you cringe when you see them coming. This article is about those people. [1]

Sure, *Facebook* can be a great tool for keeping up with folks who are [2] important to you. Take the status update, the 160-character message that users post in response to the question, "What's on your mind?" An artful, witty, or newsy status update is a pleasure—a real-time, tiny window into a friend's life.

But far more posts read like navel-gazing diary entries, or worse, spam. [3] A recent study categorized 40% of *Twitter* tweets as "pointless babble," and it wouldn't be surprising if updates on *Facebook*, still a fast-growing social network, break down in a similar way.

Combine dull status updates with shameless self-promoters, "friend- [4] padders," and that friend of a friend who sends you quizzes every day, and *Facebook* becomes a daily reminder of why some people can get on your nerves.

Here are twelve of the most annoying types of *Facebook* users: [5]

The Let-Me-Tell-You-Every-Detail-of-My-Day Bore. "I'm waking up." [6] "I had Wheaties for breakfast." "I'm bored at work." "I'm stuck in traffic." You're kidding! How fascinating! No moment is too mundane for some people to broadcast unsolicited to the world. Just because you have 432 *Facebook* friends doesn't mean we all want to know when you're waiting for the bus.

The Self-Promoter. OK, so we've probably all posted at least once [7] about some achievement. And sure, maybe your friends really do want to read the fascinating article you wrote about beet farming. But when almost EVERY update is a link to your blog, your poetry reading, your 10k results, or your art show, you sound like a bragger or a self-centered careerist.

The Friend-Padder. The average *Facebook* user has 120 friends on the [8] site. Schmoozers and social butterflies—you know, the ones who make lifelong pals on the subway—might reasonably have 300 or 400. But 1,000 "friends"? Unless you're George Clooney or just won the lottery, no one has that many. That's just showing off.

The Town Crier. "Michael Jackson is dead!!!" You heard it from me [9] first! Me, and the 213,000 other people who all saw it on TMZ. These Matt Drudge[1] wannabes are the reason many of us learn of breaking news not from TV or news sites but from online social networks. In their rush to trumpet the news, these people also spread rumors, half-truths, and innuendo. No, Jeff Goldblum did not plunge to his death from a New Zealand cliff.

[1] Creator and editor of the *Drudge Report*, an online news and gossip site. [Editors' note.]

The TMIer. "Brad is heading to Walgreens to buy something for these pesky hemorrhoids." "Boundaries of privacy and decorum don't seem to exist for these too-much-information updaters, who unabashedly offer up details about their sex lives, marital troubles, and bodily functions. Thanks for sharing.   10

The Bad Grammarian. "So sad about Fara Fauset but Im so gladd its friday. yippe." Yes, I know the punctuation rules are different in the digital world. And, no, no one likes a spelling-Nazi schoolmarm. But you sound like a moron.   11

The Sympathy-Baiter. "Barbara is feeling sad today." "Man, am I glad that's over." "Jim could really use some good news about now." Like anglers hunting for fish, these sad sacks cast out their hooks—baited with vague tales of woe—in the hopes of landing concerned responses. Genuine bad news is one thing, but these manipulative posts are just pleas for attention.   12

The Lurker. The Peeping Toms of *Facebook*, these voyeurs are too cautious, or maybe too lazy, to update their status or write on your wall. But once in a while, you'll be talking to them and they'll mention something you posted, so you know they're on your page, hiding in the shadows. It's just a little creepy.   13

The Crank. These curmudgeons, like the trolls who spew hate in blog comments, never met something they couldn't complain about. "Carl isn't really that impressed with idiots who don't realize how idiotic they are." (Actual status update.) Keep spreading the love.   14

The Paparazzo. Ever visit your *Facebook* page and discover that someone's posted a photo of you from last weekend's party—a photo you didn't authorize and haven't even seen? You'd really rather not have to explain to your mom why you were leering like a drunken hyena and French-kissing a bottle of Jägermeister.   15

The Obscurist. "If not now then when?" "You'll see . . ." "Grist for the mill." "John is, small world." "Dave thought he was immune, but no. No, he is not." (Actual status updates, all.) Sorry, but you're not being mysterious—just nonsensical.   16

The Chronic Inviter. "Support my cause." "Sign my petition." "Play Mafia Wars with me." "Which 'Star Trek' character are you?" "Here are the 'Top 5 cars I have personally owned.'" "Here are '25 Things about Me.'" "Here's a drink." "What drink are you?" "We're related!" "I took the 'What President Are You?' quiz and found out I'm Millard Fillmore! What president are you?"   17

You probably mean well, but stop. Just stop. I don't care what president I am—can't we simply be friends? Now excuse me while I go post the link to this story on my *Facebook* page.   18

Meaning

1. Does Griggs have a thesis? Where in the essay does he make his point clear?

2. In which category or categories, if any, does Griggs place himself? How can you tell?

3. In paragraph 6, Griggs remarks of "every-detail-of-my-day" posts, "You're kidding! How fascinating!" Does he really mean to say that such information interests him? (Hint: look up *irony* in the Glossary.)

4. Try to guess the meanings of any of the following words that are unfamiliar to you. Test your guesses in a dictionary, and then come up with a sentence or two using each new word.

mundane (6)	unabashedly (10)	curmudgeons (14)
innuendo (9)	anglers (12)	paparazzo (15)
decorum (10)	voyeurs (13)	chronic (17)

Purpose and Audience

1. How can we tell that Griggs intends to entertain us with his essay? Do you detect any other purpose?

2. What assumptions does Griggs make about the readers of his essay? Are the assumptions correct in your case?

Method and Structure

1. How does Griggs use the method of classification for comic effect? In what ways does classification lend itself particularly well to a humorous subject such as this one?

2. What is the one quality that all members of Griggs's subject share, and what principle of classification does he use to sort them?

3. If Griggs's subject is *Facebook*, why does he mention a study of *Twitter* in his introduction (paragraph 3)? What do that study's findings have to do with his thesis?

4. OTHER METHODS In addition to classification, Griggs relies heavily on example (Chapter 7) to make his point. Why do you think he uses so many direct quotations from *Facebook* status updates? What would the essay lose if Griggs didn't provide these examples?

Language

1. Examine Griggs's tone. How would you characterize his attitude toward his subject? Is he angry, resigned, hopeful, something else? Does his overall tone strengthen his essay or weaken it? Why?

2. Find three places where Griggs uses **hyperbole**. What effect does this figure of speech have in this essay?

3. Consider the labels Griggs devises for each category. What **connotations** do these words and phrases have? How do they contribute to his overall point?

4. Notice that Griggs addresses his readers directly, as *you*. What is the effect of this choice? How does it contribute to his purpose?

Writing Topics

1. **JOURNAL TO ESSAY** Building on your journal entry about your use of social-networking sites (p. 186), write a response to Griggs's essay. Does it amuse you? anger you? embarrass you? make you feel something else? Does it make you want to change your habits when writing status updates? Do you find Griggs's categories, examples, and conclusions fair? Why, or why not? Support your response with details from Griggs's essay and examples from your own experience.

2. Defend one of the groups of *Facebook* users that Griggs finds annoying. Write an essay explaining why someone might engage in a particular posting behavior, such as sharing minor moments or seeking sympathy, and consider what good might come of it, both for the poster and for his or her network of friends.

3. Using Griggs's essay as a model, write an essay that classifies a group of people (teachers, bosses, or salesclerks, for example) for the purpose of getting readers to examine their own behaviors. Sort your subject into classes according to a consistent principle, and provide plenty of details to clarify the classes you decide on. In your essay, be sure to explain to your readers why the classification should persuade them to change their ways.

4. **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** In questioning how anyone could have a thousand friends, Griggs reveals an assumption that online friendship is nothing more than a digital extension of real-world friendship. Do you agree, or is the definition of *friend* unique to each context? How do online communities function differently than face-to-face communities, and what distinct purposes are served by each? Write an essay answering these questions. As evidence for your response, you may want to discuss how, if at all, your own real-world and online friendships correlate with each other.

5. **CONNECTIONS** Griggs and Jonathan R. Gould, Jr., in "The People Next Door" (next page), use similar means to achieve humorous effects. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the tone, style, and use of language in each essay. How does each writer make his readers laugh? Is one more successful than the other, and why?

ON NEIGHBORS

We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next-door neighbor.

—G. K. Chesterton

Good fences make good neighbors.

—Proverb

For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn?

—Jane Austen

JOURNAL RESPONSE Jot down a list of neighbors you have now and have had in the past. Then write a short journal entry about the different kinds of neighbors you have encountered.

Jonathan R. Gould, Jr.

Jonathan R. Gould, Jr., was born in 1968 in Little Falls, New York, and grew up on a dairy farm in nearby Fort Plain. After graduating from Little Falls Baptist Academy as valedictorian of his class, he served three years in the US Army, specializing in administration and computer programming. At the State University of New York (SUNY) at Oneonta, Gould was an honors student, received the Provost Award for academic distinction, and obtained a BS in mathematics education.

The People Next Door
(Student Essay)

From his experiences in many different settings, Gould identifies four types of neighbors, only one of which could be considered truly neighborly. Gould wrote this essay in 1994 for a writing course at SUNY.

I have moved more often than I care to remember. However, one thing always stays the same no matter where I have been. There is always a house next door, and that house contains neighbors. Over time, I have begun putting my neighbors into one of four categories: too friendly, unsociable, irritable, and just right.

Neighbors who are too friendly can be seen just about anywhere. I mean that both ways. They exist in every neighborhood I have ever lived in and seem to appear everywhere I go. For some strange reason these people become extremely attached to my family and stop in as many as eight to ten times a day. No matter how tired I appear to be, nothing short of opening the door and suggesting they leave will make them go home

at night. (I once told an unusually friendly neighbor that his house was on fire, in an attempt to make him leave, and he still took ten minutes to say goodbye.) What is truly interesting about these people is their strong desire to cook for us even though they have developed no culinary skill whatsoever. (This has always proved particularly disconcerting since they stay to watch us eat every bite as they continually ask if the food "tastes good.")

3 The unsociable neighbor is a different story altogether. For reasons of his own, he has decided to pretend that we do not exist. I have always found that one or two neighbors of this type are in my neighborhood. It is not easy to identify these people, because they seldom leave the shelter of their own house. To be honest, the only way I know that someone lives in their building is the presence of a name on the mailbox and the lights shining through the windows at night. My wife often tries to befriend these unique people, and I have to admire her courage. However, even her serenity is shaken when she offers our neighbors a fresh-baked apple pie only to have them look at her as if she intended to poison them.

4 Probably the most difficult neighbor to deal with is the irritable neighbor. This individual probably has several problems, but he has reduced all those problems down to one cause—the proximity of my family to his residence. Fortunately, I have only encountered this type of neighbor in a handful of settings. (He is usually too busy with one group of "troublemakers" to pick up a new set.) The times that I have encountered this rascal, however, have proved more than enough for my tastes. He is more than willing to talk to me. Unfortunately, all he wants to tell me is how miserable my family is making him. Ignoring this individual has not worked for me yet. (He just adds my "snobbishness" to his list of faults that my family displays.) Interestingly, this fellow will eat anything my wife (bless her soul) might make in an attempt to be sociable. Even though he never has anything good to say about the food, not a crumb will be left on the plate when he is finished (which leads me to wonder just how starved and impoverished he must be).

5 At the risk of sounding like Goldilocks, there is also a neighbor who is "just right." One of the most wonderful things about this neighbor is that there has always been at least one everywhere I have gone. We meet often (though not too often), and our greetings are always sincere. Occasionally, our families will go out to eat or to shop, or just sit and talk. We tend to spend as much time at their house as they do at ours (two to three times a month), and everyone knows just when it is time to say goodnight. For some reason, this neighbor knows how to cook, and we frequently exchange baked goods as well as pleasantries. For obvious reasons, this type of neighbor is my favorite.

6 As I mentioned before, each type of neighbor I have encountered is a common sight in any neighborhood. I have always felt it was important to identify the type of neighbors that were around me. Then I am better able to maintain a clear perspective on our relationship and understand their needs. After all, people do not really change; we just learn how to live with both the good and the bad aspects of their behavior.

Meaning

1. Where does Gould state his thesis?
2. What is the difference between unsociable and irritable neighbors in Gould's classification?
3. From their context in Gould's essay, try to guess the meanings of any of the following words that are unfamiliar to you. Check your definitions against a dictionary's, and then write a sentence or two using each new word.

culinary (2)   proximity (4)   pleasantries (5)
disconcerting (2)   impoverished (4)

Purpose and Audience

1. Why do you suppose Gould wrote this essay? Where does he give the clearest indication?
2. Does Gould make any assumptions about his audience? Does he seem to be writing for a certain type of reader?

Method and Structure

1. Why do you think Gould chose the method of classification to write about the subject of neighbors? How does the method help him achieve his purpose?
2. What is Gould's principle of classification? Do you think his classification is complete and consistent? How else might he have sorted neighbors?
3. Why do you think Gould stresses the fact that he has encountered most of these types of neighbors everywhere he has lived?
4. What does Gould accomplish in his conclusion?
5. OTHER METHODS Gould's categories lend themselves to comparison and contrast (Chapter 11). Based on his descriptions, what are the differences between the too-friendly neighbor and the just-right neighbor?

Language

1. What is Gould's tone? How seriously does he take the problem of difficult neighbors?

2. Point out several instances of **hyperbole** or overstatement in the essay. What effect do these have?

Writing Topics

1. **JOURNAL TO ESSAY** In your journal entry (p. 191) you began a process of classification by focusing on neighbors you have had. Now think of a group to which you belong—a religious organization, your family, a club or committee, even a writing class. Write a classification essay in which you sort the group's members into categories according to a clear principle of classification. Be sure to label and define each type for your readers, to provide examples, and to position yourself in one of the categories. What does your classification reveal about the group as a whole?

2. Most of us have had at least one colorful or bothersome neighbor at some time or another—a busybody, a recluse, a borrower. Write a descriptive essay (with some narration) about an interesting neighbor you have known or a narrative essay (with some description) about a memorable run-in with a neighbor.

3. **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** "Good fences make good neighbors," says a character in Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," and many people in our live-and-let-live society would seem to agree. Is the best neighbor an invisible one? Or do we lose something when we ignore those who are literally closest to us? Write an essay giving a definition of what it means to be a good neighbor. Or, if you prefer, write an essay in which you compare and contrast neighboring habits in different types of communities you have lived in or know of.

4. **CONNECTIONS** Both Gould and David Brooks, in "People Like Us" (next page), classify communities: Gould distinguishes four categories of neighbors, while Brooks focuses on the kinds of neighborhoods people share. Write an essay in which you compare the two essays. How persuasive do you find each writer's groups? Which comes closest to your own experiences with neighborhoods? Why?

No two people are alike and both of them are glad of it.
—*Farmers' Almanac*

Growing up, I came up with this name: I'm a Cablinasian [Caucasian, black, Indian, and Asian].
—*Tiger Woods*

I think the expression "It's a small world" is really a euphemism for "I keep running into people I can't stand."
—*Brock Cohen*

JOURNAL RESPONSE How does your religious, ethnic, or racial background influence your everyday life? Write a short journal entry to explore the answer to this question.

David Brooks

A distinguished journalist, political analyst, and moderate conservative, David Brooks has engaged readers across the political spectrum for three decades. He was born in 1961 in Toronto, Ontario, grew up in New York City and a Philadelphia suburb, and graduated from the University of Chicago in 1983. He began his journalism career as a police reporter for the Chicago City News Bureau, and in 1984 he moved to the *Washington Times*, writing editorials and movie reviews. Brooks has since worked as an international reporter and contributing editor for the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Newsweek*, and the *Atlantic*. In 2003 he launched a regular column for the *New York Times*, now appearing twice weekly on the op-ed page. He is the editor of the anthology *Backward and Upward: The New Conservative Writing* (1996) and the author of three books of what he calls "comic sociology": *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (2000), *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (and Always Have) in the Future Tense* (2004), and *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (2011). Brooks is a media personality as well, regularly appearing as a commentator on the NPR program *All Things Considered* and the PBS show *NewsHour*.

People Like Us

The United States is often described as a multicultural "melting pot," in which people with diverse backgrounds come together and form a shared American identity. Taking a close look at the populations of several US cities, towns, and universities, Brooks disputes this notion. "People Like Us" first appeared in the *Atlantic*.

Maybe it's time to admit the obvious. We don't really care about diversity all that much in America, even though we talk about it a great deal. Maybe somewhere in this country there is a truly diverse neighborhood in which a black Pentecostal minister lives next to a white anti-globalization activist, who lives next to an Asian short-order cook, who lives next to a professional golfer, who lives next to a postmodern-literature professor and a cardiovascular surgeon. But I have never been to or heard of that neighborhood. Instead, what I have seen all around the country is people making strenuous efforts to group themselves with people who are basically like themselves.   1

Human beings are capable of drawing amazingly subtle social distinctions and then shaping their lives around them. In the Washington, DC, area Democratic lawyers tend to live in suburban Maryland, and Republican lawyers tend to live in suburban Virginia. If you asked a Democratic lawyer to move from her $750,000 house in Great Falls, Virginia, she'd look at you as if you had just asked her to buy a pickup truck with a gun rack and to shove chewing tobacco in her kid's mouth. In Manhattan the owner of a $3 million SoHo loft would feel out of place moving into a $3 million Fifth Avenue apartment. A West Hollywood interior decorator would feel dislocated if you asked him to move to Orange County. In Georgia a barista from Athens would probably not fit in serving coffee in Americus.   2

It is a common complaint that every place is starting to look the same. But in the information age, the late writer James Chapin[1] once told me, every place becomes more like itself. People are less often tied down to factories and mills, and they can search for places to live on the basis of cultural affinity. Once they find a town in which people share their values, they flock there, and reinforce whatever was distinctive about the town in the first place. Once Boulder, Colorado, became known as congenial to politically progressive mountain bikers, half the politically progressive mountain bikers in the country (it seems) moved there; they made the place so culturally pure that it has become practically a parody of itself.   3

But people love it. Make no mistake—we are increasing our happiness by segmenting off so rigorously. We are finding places where we are comfortable and where we feel we can flourish. But the choices we make toward that end lead to the very opposite of diversity. The United States   4

[1] A progressive Democrat, Professor Chapin (1942–2002) was a political analyst, a writer for United Press International, and an author of history textbooks. [Editors' note.]

might be a diverse nation when considered as a whole, but block by block and institution by institution it is a relatively homogeneous nation.

When we use the word "diversity" today we usually mean racial integration. But even here our good intentions seem to have run into the brick wall of human nature. Over the past generation reformers have tried heroically, and in many cases successfully, to end housing discrimination. But recent patterns aren't encouraging: according to an analysis of the 2000 census data, the 1990s saw only a slight increase in the racial integration of neighborhoods in the United States. The number of middle-class and upper-middle-class African American families is rising, but for whatever reasons—racism, psychological comfort—these families tend to congregate in predominantly black neighborhoods.   5

In fact, evidence suggests that some neighborhoods become more segregated over time. New suburbs in Arizona and Nevada, for example, start out reasonably well integrated. These neighborhoods don't yet have reputations, so people choose their houses for other, mostly economic reasons. But as neighborhoods age, they develop personalities (that's where the Asians live, and that's where the Hispanics live), and segmentation occurs. It could be that in a few years the new suburbs in the Southwest will be nearly as segregated as the established ones in the Northeast and the Midwest.   6

Even though race and ethnicity run deep in American society, we should in theory be able to find areas that are at least culturally diverse. But here, too, people show few signs of being truly interested in building diverse communities. If you run a retail company and you're thinking of opening new stores, you can choose among dozens of consulting firms that are quite effective at locating your potential customers. They can do this because people with similar tastes and preferences tend to congregate by ZIP code.   7

The most famous of these precision marketing firms is Claritas, which breaks down the US population into sixty-two psycho-demographic clusters, based on such factors as how much money people make, what they like to read and watch, and what products they have bought in the past. For example, the "suburban sprawl" cluster is composed of young families making about $41,000 a year and living in fast-growing places such as Burnsville, Minnesota, and Bensalem, Pennsylvania. These people are almost twice as likely as other Americans to have three-way calling. They are two and a half times as likely to buy Light n' Lively Kid Yogurt. Members of the "towns & gowns" cluster are recent college graduates in places such as Berkeley, California, and Gainesville, Florida. They are big consumers of DoveBars and Saturday Night Live. They tend to drive small foreign cars and to read Rolling Stone and Scientific American.   8

9   Looking through the market research, one can sometimes be amazed by how efficiently people cluster—and by how predictable we all are. If you wanted to sell imported wine, obviously you would have to find places where rich people live. But did you know that the sixteen counties with the greatest proportion of imported-wine drinkers are all in the same three metropolitan areas (New York, San Francisco, and Washington, DC)? If you tried to open a motor-home dealership in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, you'd probably go broke, because people in this ring of the Philadelphia suburbs think RVs are kind of uncool. But if you traveled just a short way north, to Monroe County, Pennsylvania, you would find yourself in the fifth motor-home-friendliest county in America.

10   Geography is not the only way we find ourselves divided from people unlike us. Some of us watch Fox News, while others listen to NPR. Some like David Letterman, and others—typically in less urban neighborhoods—like Jay Leno. Some go to charismatic churches; some go to mainstream churches. Americans tend more and more often to marry people with education levels similar to their own, and to befriend people with backgrounds similar to their own.

11   My favorite illustration of this latter pattern comes from the first, noncontroversial chapter of *The Bell Curve*.[2] Think of your twelve closest friends, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray write. If you had chosen them randomly from the American population, the odds that half of your twelve closest friends would be college graduates would be six in a thousand. The odds that half of the twelve would have advanced degrees would be less than one in a million. Have any of your twelve closest friends graduated from Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Caltech, MIT, Duke, Dartmouth, Cornell, Columbia, Chicago, or Brown? If you chose your friends randomly from the American population, the odds against your having four or more friends from those schools would be more than a billion to one.

12   Many of us live in absurdly unlikely groupings, because we have organized our lives that way.

13   It's striking that the institutions that talk the most about diversity often practice it the least. For example, no group of people sings the diversity anthem more frequently and fervently than administrators at just

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[2] Published in 1994, the book uses statistical analysis to argue that IQ is inherited and to warn that the American population will become less intelligent (and less affluent) if college graduates continue having fewer children than less educated people do—both controversial claims that upset many readers. [Editors' note]

such elite universities. But elite universities are amazingly undiverse in their values, politics, and mores. Professors in particular are drawn from a rather narrow segment of the population. If faculties reflected the general population, 32% of professors would be registered Democrats and 31% would be registered Republicans. Forty percent would be evangelical Christians. But a recent study of several universities by the conservative Center for the Study of Popular Culture and the American Enterprise Institute found that roughly 90% of those professors in the arts and sciences who had registered with a political party had registered Democratic. Fifty-seven professors at Brown were found on the voter-registration rolls. Of those, fifty-four were Democrats. Of the forty-two professors in the English, history, sociology, and political-science departments, all were Democrats. The results at Harvard, Penn State, Maryland, and the University of California at Santa Barbara were similar to the results at Brown.

14   What we are looking at here is human nature. People want to be around others who are roughly like themselves. That's called community. It probably would be psychologically difficult for most Brown professors to share an office with someone who was pro-life, a member of the National Rifle Association, or an evangelical Christian. It's likely that hiring committees would subtly—even unconsciously—screen out any such people they encountered. Republicans and evangelical Christians have sensed that they are not welcome at places like Brown, so they don't

Cartoon by Steve Brodner, 2003

even consider working there. In fact, any registered Republican who contemplates a career in academia these days is both a hero and a fool. So, in a semi-self-selective pattern, brainy people with generally liberal social mores flow to academia, and brainy people with generally conservative mores flow elsewhere.

15   The dream of diversity is like the dream of equality. Both are based on ideals we celebrate even as we undermine them daily. (How many times have you seen someone renounce a high-paying job or pull his child from an elite college on the grounds that these things are bad for equality?) On the one hand, the situation is appalling. It is appalling that Americans know so little about one another. It is appalling that many of us are so narrow-minded that we can't tolerate a few people with ideas significantly different from our own. It's appalling that evangelical Christians are practically absent from entire professions, such as academia, the media, and filmmaking. It's appalling that people should be content to cut themselves off from everyone unlike themselves.

16   The segmentation of society means that often we don't even have arguments across the political divide. Within their little validating communities, liberals and conservatives circulate half-truths about the supposed awfulness of the other side. These distortions are believed because it feels good to believe them.

17   On the other hand, there are limits to how diverse any community can or should be. I've come to think that it is not useful to try to hammer diversity into every neighborhood and institution in the United States. Sure, Augusta National[3] should probably admit women, and university sociology departments should probably hire a conservative or two. It would be nice if all neighborhoods had a good mixture of ethnicities. But human nature being what it is, most places and institutions are going to remain culturally homogeneous.

18   It's probably better to think about diverse lives, not diverse institutions. Human beings, if they are to live well, will have to move through a series of institutions and environments, which may be individually homogeneous but, taken together, will offer diverse experiences. It might also be a good idea to make national service a rite of passage for young people in this country: it would take them out of their narrow neighborhood segment and thrust them in with people unlike themselves. Finally,

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[3]Located in Georgia, the private Augusta National Golf Club hosts the prestigious annual Masters tournament; until August 2012, it excluded women from membership. [Editors' note.]

it's probably important for adults to get out of their own familiar circles. If you live in a coastal, socially liberal neighborhood, maybe you should take out a subscription to *The Door*, the evangelical humor magazine; or maybe you should visit Branson, Missouri.[4] Maybe you should stop in at a megachurch. Sure, it would be superficial familiarity, but it beats the iron curtains that now separate the nation's various cultural zones.

19   Look around at your daily life. Are you really in touch with the broad diversity of American life? Do you care?

Meaning

1. Can you find a statement of Brooks's thesis anywhere in his essay? Try to express the author's main idea in your own words.

2. What are "psycho-demographic clusters" (paragraph 8)? What do they have to do with Brooks's thesis?

3. What useful purposes are served by segregation, according to Brooks? What are the negative consequences of people choosing to live in areas where the neighbors are similar?

4. If you do not know the meanings of the following words, try to guess them from the context of Brooks's essay. Test your guesses in a dictionary, and then use each word in a sentence of your own.

globalization (1)	congenial (3)	charismatic (10)
postmodern (1)	segmenting (4)	mores (13)
strenuous (1)	homogeneous (4, 17, 18)	evangelical (13, 18)
dislocated (2)	demographic (8)	renounce (15)

Purpose and Audience

1. Does Brooks make any assumptions about his audience? Where does he give the clearest indication of the type of person he imagines reading his essay?

2. What seems to be Brooks's purpose for writing "People Like Us"? Does he want to inform, persuade, or entertain his readers? How can you tell?

3. How does the cartoon by Steve Brodner (p. 199) relate to Brooks's essay? Why do you suppose the *Atlantic* included it with the article?

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[4]A tourist destination that features amusement parks, wax museums and similar attractions, and more than fifty theaters and music venues showcasing country-and-western acts and pop stars from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. [Editors' note.]

Method and Structure

1. What principle of classification does Brooks use to examine American society?

2. What kinds of diversity does Brooks consider in his classification? Diagram or outline his categories. Do any of them overlap?

3. Examine the examples and details Brooks uses to develop his classification. Where did this information come from? What sources does Brooks cite, and what evidence does he draw from them? How does he use the evidence he cites?

4. **OTHER METHODS**   At several points in his essay, Brooks uses **comparison and contrast** (Chapter 11) to shape his ideas. Locate two or three uses of this method, and explain what they contribute to the author's point.

Language

1. How would you characterize Brooks's tone? Why is the tone crucial in helping him achieve his purpose for writing?

2. Point out several **metaphors** in the essay. What effect do they have?

Writing Topics

1. **JOURNAL TO ESSAY**   In your journal entry (p. 195), you considered the effect of your cultural heritage on your everyday experiences. Now develop your ideas into an essay in which you evaluate the importance you assign to any outward symbols of your inheritance: food, music, holidays, customs, religious services, clothing, and the like. For example, do such signs serve to strengthen your cultural identity? If you don't have such signs, how important is their absence?

2. How accurately do Brooks's classifications represent your experience? Are all the people in your neighborhood alike—economically, racially, academically, and so forth? Write an essay that responds to Brooks, answering the two questions he poses in his final paragraph: "Are you really in touch with the broad diversity of American life? Do you care?"

3. Brooks encourages readers to seek out diversity in their experiences by interacting with people who are not like them—to find a way to connect with strangers. What, in your view, is the appropriate way to interact (or not interact) with a stranger? In answering, ignore situations that might be risky, such as deserted nighttime streets or strangers who appear clearly threatening. Think instead of a safe situation, such as a long line at the grocery store or coffee shop or the waiting room of a doctor's office.

What are your "rules" for initiating conversation and for responding to a stranger's overtures? What informs your rules: experience? personality? upbringing? How can readers apply your rules to make diverse acquaintances in their own lives?

4. **RESEARCH**   Brooks notes in paragraph 5 that "according to an analysis of the 2000 census data, the 1990s saw only a slight increase in the racial integration of neighborhoods in the United States." Visit the Web site of the US Census Bureau (*census.gov*), and find more recent information on racial integration in your local area. How has the shape of your community changed? Is it more diverse, or less, than it was a decade ago—or a generation ago? Write an essay analyzing the state of diversity in your community, considering how recent changes have affected the ways people relate to one another.

5. **CONNECTIONS**   Like "People Like Us," "Funny Business" by Scott Adams (p. 156) uses a cartoon to help illustrate the author's point. Both cartoons might be considered offensive to some readers. Why include them, then? Examine the visual elements of these two essays, and, in an essay of your own, assess the risks and rewards of using cartoons as evidence. Consider each author's purpose for writing and the overall tone of his essay, as well as the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the visual presented. Do both writers mean to amuse, for instance, or do the cartoons serve other purposes?

CLASSIFICATION

Select one of the following topics, or any other topic they suggest, for an essay developed by classification. Be sure to choose a topic you care about so that classification is a means of communicating an idea, not an end in itself.

People
1. Boring people
2. Laundromat users
3. Politicians
4. Passengers on public transportation

Psychology and Behavior
5. Punishments
6. Obsessions
7. Medical patients
8. Dreams

Things
9. Buildings on campus
10. Junk foods
11. Games
12. Mobile devices

Sports and Leisure
13. Gym members
14. Campers
15. Styles of baseball pitching, tennis serving, or another sports skill
16. Styles of dance, guitar playing, acting, or another performance art

Communications Media
17. Talk-show hosts
18. Blogs
19. Sports announcers
20. Advertisements

SORTING FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

1. Write a brief essay in which you classify students at your college or university or at a competing school. You may devise your own classification system, if you wish, or you might try adapting the categories of one of the other writers in this chapter to this subject. Are some students "Chaos Muppets" and some "Order Muppets," of the sort described by Dahlia Lithwick (p. 180)? Do they exhibit, in person, any of the characteristics that Brandon Griggs complains about in "The Most Annoying Facebookers" (p. 186)? Are they, like Jonathan Gould's neighbors, "too friendly, unsociable, irritable, and just right" (p. 191)? Do they, like the subjects of David Brooks's "People Like Us" (p. 195), fit into a particular "psycho-demographic cluster"?

2. Dahlia Lithwick, Brandon Griggs, and Jonathan Gould all classify and label people with some intention to amuse readers. However, as David Brooks suggests, not all labels used to classify people are harmless. Consider, for example, labels based on gender or race or sexual orientation. Write an essay in which you discuss both the benefits and the costs of assigning labels to people — for those using the labels, for those being labeled, and for society as a whole. Give plenty of specific examples.

3. Groups of friends and neighbors often form distinct communities, such as the neighborhoods David Brooks examines, Brandon Griggs's Facebook friends, Jonathan Gould's mutually supportive neighbors, or the campers at Luis Alberto Urrea's RV park (p. 181). Write an essay in which you offer your definition of community. Consider not only what constitutes a group identity but also why people might seek (or reject) a connection with others. What do communities offer their members, and what do they demand of individuals in return?