



What You Do is What You are

Nickie McWhirter

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

- choose words and phrases for effect.
- apply skimming and scanning strategies for relevant information and main points in texts to identify the writer's purpose and intended audience, infer the theme/main idea of the text, distinguishing between fact and opinion where necessary.
- give an informed personal and analytical response to a text and provide some supporting textual references.
- practice precis writing skills.
- use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- use gerunds, infinitives, and participles.
- apply the techniques of writing the first draft with sufficient details, proofreading and editing to suit the purpose and audience.
- write and critique (self/peer checking) the final draft after editing and proofreading. ensure that the topic sentence of each paragraph contains the main idea of the essay/piece of writing and also that each paragraph develops the idea of its topic sentence. use the technique of hook, and lead-in sentences to develop the flow of thought.
- gather relevant information from multiple authentic resources available following research ethics to write and present their assignment.

Pre-reading:

- **Skim** the text "*What You Do Is What You Are*" to get a sense of its structure and main points. Look at the title, introduction, and conclusion, as well as the first and last sentences of paragraphs.
- **Scan** the text for specific information that might help answer the following questions:
 - What is the writer's main argument?
 - What evidence or examples does the writer provide to support this argument?
 - How does the writer feel about the way society judges people based on their jobs?
 - Who do you think is the intended audience for this text?
- Now that you have a general understanding of the text, think about the central message or theme.
 - What is the main theme of the text? Can you identify the main idea of the text in one sentence?

1. We, unlike people almost everywhere else in the world, tend to define and judge everybody in term of the work they do, especially work performed for pay. Charlie is a doctor; Sam is a carpenter; Mary Ellen is a copywriter at a small ad agency. It is as if by defining how a person earns his or her rent money, we validate or reject that person's existence. Through the work and job title, we evaluate the worth of the life attached. Larry is a laid-off auto worker; Tony is a retired teacher; Sally is a former showgirl and blackjack dealer from Vegas. It is as if by learning that a person currently earns no money at job --- and maybe hasn't earned any money at a job for years--- we assign that person to **limbo**, at least for the present. We define such non-employed persons in term of their past job history.

2. This seems **peculiar** to me. People aren't **cast in bronze** because of the jobs they hold or once held. A retired teacher, for example, may spend a lot of volunteer time working with handicapped children or raising money for the Loyal Order of Hibernating Hibiscus. That apparently doesn't count. Who's Tony? A retired teacher. A laid-off auto worker may pump gas at his cousin's gas station or sell encyclopaedia on weekends. But who's Larry?

While-reading

Why do you think the author finds this way of labelling people "peculiar"?

Until and unless he begins to work steadily again, he is laid-off auto worker. This is the same as saying he is nothing now, but he used to be something: an auto worker.

3. There is a whole category of other people who are "just" something. To be "just" anything is the worst. It is not to be recognized by society as having much value at all, not now and probably not in the past either. To be "just" anything is to be totally discounted, at least for the present. There are lots of people who are "just" something. "Just" a housewife immediately and painfully comes to mind. We still hear it all the time. Sometimes women who have kept a house and reared six children refer to themselves as "just" a housewife.

While-reading

What does the writer suggest about the use of the word "just" before job titles or roles?

"Just" a **bum**, "just" a kid, "just" a drunk, bag lady, old man, student, punk are some others. You can probably add to the list. The "just" category contains present **non-earners**, people who have no past job history highly valued by society and people whose present jobs are on the low-end of pay and prestige scales. A person can be "just" a cab driver, for example, or "just" a janitor. No one is ever "just" a vice-president, however.

4. We're supposed to be a **classless** society, but we are not. We don't recognize a titled nobility. We refuse to acknowledge **dynastic** privilege. But we certainly separate the valued from the valueless, and it has a lot to do with jobs and the importance or **prestige** we attach to them.

5. It is no use arguing whether any of this is correct or proper. Rationally it is silly. That's our system, however, and we should not only keep it in mind we should teach our children how it works. It is perfectly swell to want to grow up to be a cowboy or a nurse. Kids should know, however, that quite apart from earnings potential, the cattle breeder is much more respected than the hired hand. The doctor gets a lot more respect and **privilege** than the nurse.

While-reading

What contrast is made between the roles of cowboy and cattle breeder, or nurse and doctor? What point is the author trying to make?

6. I think some **anthropologist** ought to study our uncatalogued system of awarding respect and **deference** to each other based on jobs we hold. Where does a vice-president-- product planning fit in? Is that better than vice-president--sales in the public consciousness, or unconsciousness? Writers earn **diddly** dot, but I suspect they are held in higher esteem than wealthy rock musicians...that is, if everybody older than 40 gets to vote.

7. How do we decide which jobs have great value and, therefore, the jobholders are wonderful people? Why is someone who builds shopping centres called an **entrepreneur** while someone who builds freeways is called a contractor? I have no answers to any of this, but we might think about the phenomenon the next time we are tempted to **fawn** over some stranger because we find out he happens to be a judge, or the next time we catch ourselves discounting the personal worth of the garbage collector.

Theme

The theme of "*What You Do Is What You Are*" by Nickie McWhirter centres on how society unfairly judges individuals based on their occupation or employment status. The author highlights that people are often valued not for who they are, but for what they do—especially when that work is paid and carries social prestige. Those without formal jobs or in low-paying roles are frequently dismissed or described as "just" something, such as "just a housewife" or "just a janitor", which undermines their worth and contributions. McWhirter critiques this shallow value system, pointing out how irrational it is to equate a person's identity with their job title. Through reflective and sometimes ironic commentary, the text exposes the flaws in a society that claims to be classless but still ranks people according to their work.

Glossary:

Words	Meanings
anthropologist	a person who studies the human race, especially its origins, development, customs and beliefs
bum	a person who has no home or job and who asks other people for money or food
cast in bronze	to be permanently celebrated, honoured, or remembered for something, especially for a particular role, achievement, or status
classless	not clearly belonging to a particular social class
deference	behaviour that shows that you respect somebody/something
diddly	not anything; nothing
dynastic	connected with a series of leaders of a country who all belong to the same family
entrepreneur	a person who makes money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks
fawn	to try to please somebody by praising them or paying them too much attention
limbo	a situation in which you are not certain what to do next, cannot take action, etc., especially because you are waiting for somebody else to make a decision
non-earners	people who do not currently earn money through a job or paid employment
peculiar	strange or unusual, especially in a way that is unpleasant or makes you worried
prestige	the respect and value that somebody/something has because of their social position, or what they have done
privilege	a special right or advantage that a particular person or group of people has
uncatalogued	not formally recorded or arranged in any recognised order or system

Reading and Critical Thinking

A. Answer the following questions:

1. Why does the author describe the way society defines people by their jobs as

peculiar?

2. Provide two examples the author uses to show how individuals are judged based on their employment status or past jobs.
3. What does the phrase “*cast in bronze*” symbolise in the context of the text?
4. The author mentions certain professions like “*just a housewife*” or “*just a janitor*.” What is the critique behind these labels, and what point is the author trying to make?
5. In what way does the author suggest that children should be taught to understand respect and job roles in society?
6. What is McWhiter's tone? Illustrate it with few words and phrases that establish the tone.
7. Why does the author state that no one is ever described as “*just*” a vice-president? What does this reveal about how society values certain jobs?
8. Do you agree with the writer's view that society unfairly defines people by their jobs or employment status? Why or why not?

B. Read the excerpt from the text carefully. Identify words or phrases that the author uses to create strong emotional or persuasive effects. Then, answer the questions that follow.

Excerpt:

It is as if by learning that a person currently earns no money at a job — and maybe hasn't earned any money at a job for years — we assign that person to limbo, at least for the present.

- What is the effect of the phrase “*assign that person to limbo*”?
- How does it reflect society's attitude towards the unemployed?

C. Read the following statements from the text and identify whether they are facts or opinions. Also, explain why you classified each statement as a fact or an opinion.

- i. *People aren't cast in bronze because of the jobs they hold or once held.*
- ii. *A retired teacher, for example, may spend a lot of volunteer time working with handicapped children or raising money for the Loyal Order of Hibernating Hibiscus.*
- iii. *To be 'just' anything is the worst.*
- iv. *We still hear it all the time. Sometimes women who have kept a house and reared six children refer to themselves as 'just' a housewife.*

D. Write a précis of “What You Do Is What You Are” in 80–100 words. Follow these guidelines:

1. *Begin with the main idea of the text.*
2. *Include key supporting arguments made by the author (e.g., society's judgment based on job titles, the undervaluing of unpaid work, the "just" label).*
3. *Use your own words (avoid copying entire sentences).*
4. *Keep your tone objective—do not add personal opinions.*
5. *Avoid examples or excessive detail; focus on the essence.*

Vocabulary and Grammar

A. Read the following sentences from the text. Use the context to guess the meaning of the bolded word or phrase. Then explain your reasoning.

1. "It is as if by defining how a person earns his or her rent money, we **validate** or reject that person's existence." **What does "validate" most likely mean here?**

- ☐ Confirm as worthy
- ☐ Punish
- ☐ Change
- ☐ Ignore

Explain why: _____

2. "People aren't cast in **bronze** because of the jobs they hold or once held." **What does "cast in bronze" mean in this context?**

- ☐ Turned into statues to be honoured forever
- ☐ Paid for their work
- ☐ Made into machines
- ☐ Made unemployed

Explain your reasoning: _____

3. "Some anthropologist ought to study our **uncatalogued system** of awarding respect and deference to each other based on jobs we hold." What does "uncatalogued system" imply?

- ☐ A well-known and organised set of rules
- ☐ A random or informal set of social rules
- ☐ A new government policy
- ☐ A published list of careers

Which words in the sentence helped you guess this?

Gerunds

A gerund is the -ing form of a verb that functions as a noun.

Uses of Gerunds

- **As the subject of a sentence**

Example: *Networking* is crucial for entrepreneurs.

As the object of a verb

Example: She enjoys *brainstorming* new business ideas.

After prepositions

Example: They discussed *launching* a startup.

After certain verbs

Example: He suggested *investing* in emerging markets.

Infinitives

An infinitive is the base form of a verb preceded by "to."

Uses of Infinitives

- **As the subject of a sentence**

Example: *To innovate* is essential for business success.

As the object of a verb

Example: She plans *to expand* her company next year.

After adjectives

Example: He is eager *to pitch* his idea to investors.

To express purpose

Example: They organized the event *to attract* potential clients.

Gerund vs. Infinitive

There are certain verbs in English that can be followed by either a gerund or an infinitive, but choosing one over the other can change the meaning of the sentence.

Here are some common examples and explanations:

1. Continue

- **Gerund (continue + -ing):** Refers to persisting with the same activity.
 - **Example:** *He continued working* on his startup despite the challenges. (He kept working on the startup.)
- **Infinitive (continue + to + verb):** Can also mean to persist, but sometimes emphasizes the decision to proceed.
 - **Example:** *She continued to work* on her startup even after facing setbacks. (She chose to keep working.)

2. Prefer

- **Gerund (prefer + -ing):** Refers to liking one activity more than another.
 - **Example:** *I prefer working* with small businesses. (You generally like working with small businesses.)
- **Infinitive (prefer + to + verb):** Refers to choosing or being inclined towards a specific action.
 - **Example:** *I prefer to work* with small businesses. (You choose to work with small businesses.)

3. Begin

- **Gerund (begin + -ing):** Refers to starting an action, with no significant change in meaning from the infinitive.

- **Example:** *He began studying* market trends to enhance his business. (He started the process of studying.)
- **Infinitive (begin + to + verb):** Similarly refers to starting an action.
 - **Example:** *He began to study* market trends to enhance his business. (He started the process of studying.)

4. Hate

- **Gerund (hate + -ing):** Refers to strongly disliking an activity in general.
 - **Example:** *I hate dealing* with unnecessary paperwork. (You dislike the activity of dealing with paperwork.)
- **Infinitive (hate + to + verb):** Often used to express a specific, immediate situation.
 - **Example:** *I hate to deal* with unnecessary paperwork when I'm busy. (You dislike having to do this specific action, especially now.)

5. Like

- **Gerund (like + -ing):** Refers to enjoying an activity in general.
 - **Example:** *She likes mentoring* young entrepreneurs. (She enjoys the ongoing activity of mentoring.)
- **Infinitive (like + to + verb):** Can be used interchangeably but sometimes emphasizes preference or habit.
 - **Example:** *She likes to mentor* young entrepreneurs every month. (She has a preference for mentoring, often as a habit.)

6. Advise

- **Gerund (advise + -ing):** Refers to recommending an activity in general.
 - **Example:** *The consultant advises taking* calculated risks. (The consultant generally recommends this action.)
- **Infinitive (advise + to + verb):** Typically used in passive form or with an object.
 - **Example:** *They were advised to take* calculated risks. (They received advice to perform this action.)

Participles

Participles are verb forms used as adjectives. There are present participles (ending in -ing) and past participles (usually ending in -ed or -en).

Uses of Present Participles

- 1. As an adjective:**
 - **Example:** *The growing startup* attracted investors. (Describes the startup.)
- 2. To form continuous (progressive) tenses:**
 - **Example:** *She is presenting* her business plan. (Present continuous tense.)
- 3. In participial phrases:**
 - **Example:** *Pitching to investors*, he felt confident about his idea.

(Describes the subject of the main clause.)

Example

- The expanding company is hiring more employees.
- They were discussing their marketing strategy.

Uses of Past Participles

1. As an adjective

- **Example:** *The launched product* was an instant success. (Describes the product.)

2. To form perfect tenses

- **Example:** *She has secured* funding for her startup. (Present perfect tense.)

3. To form the passive voice

- **Example:** *The contract was signed* by both parties. (Passive voice.)

4. In participial phrases

- **Example:** *Encouraged by the feedback*, they decided to proceed with the launch. (Describes the subject of the main clause.)

Example Sentences

- *The developed software* met all client requirements.
- *They had planned* the event well in advance.

1. Present Participle as an Adjective

Example: *The inspiring speech* motivated the team.
Here, "inspiring" describes the noun "speech."

2. Past Participle as an Adjective

Example: *The exhausted entrepreneur* finally took a break.
Here, "exhausted" describes the noun "entrepreneur."

3. Participles in Verb Tenses

- **Present Continuous:** *They are finalizing* the business deal.
- **Past Continuous:** *They were negotiating* with potential partners.
- **Present Perfect:** *They have launched* the new product line.
- **Past Perfect:** *They had completed* the market research before the meeting.

4. Participial Phrases

- **Present Participle Phrase**
- **Example:** *Seeing an opportunity*, she quickly pitched her idea.
"Seeing an opportunity" provides additional information about why "she quickly pitched her idea."
- **Past Participle Phrase**
- **Example:** *Motivated by their success*, they expanded their business.
"Motivated by their success" provides additional information about why "they expanded their business."

B. Read the following sentences. Underline the gerunds, infinitives, and

participles and label them accordingly.

1. Judging people by their jobs is common in our society. (Gerund)
2. Some individuals are reduced to being "just" something. (Gerund phrase)
3. To assign value based on job titles is deeply flawed. (Infinitive)
4. The author criticised the unthinking use of the word "just." (Present Participle)
5. To grow up wanting respect should not depend on one's profession. (Infinitive phrase)
6. Discounted by society, many people struggle with identity. (Past Participle)

C. Transform the following base verbs into gerunds, infinitives, and participles. Use each form in a sentence.

Base Verbs: judge, define, respect

D. Write a short paragraph focused on the theme of social identity and work. Use at least two gerunds, two infinitives, and two participles. Underline and label them clearly (G = Gerund, I = Infinitive, P = Participle).

E. Fill in the blanks with a suitable gerund, infinitive, or participle form of the verb in brackets.

1. Society often resists _____ new roles to undervalued workers. (*assign*)
2. The idea of _____ people as "less than" is deeply troubling. (*rank*)
3. The author urges readers _____ their own assumptions. (*question*)
4. _____ by job labels, many feel their full identity is lost. (*limit*)
5. She continued _____ her value beyond her employment history. (*assert*)

Oral Communication

A. Engage in Collaborative Group Discussions on Identity and Job Perception.

- i. Divide into small groups. Assign each group one of the following discussion prompts:
 - The social value attached to different kinds of work (e.g., doctor vs janitor)
 - The use of labels like "just" a housewife or "just" a student
 - How society treats unemployed or retired individuals
 - Whether society should continue to define people by their jobs
- ii. During group discussions:
 - Practise active listening by making eye contact, nodding, and paraphrasing your peers' points before adding your own.

- Be mindful of non-verbal cues (posture, facial expressions) to maintain a respectful and encouraging group environment.
- iii. Prepare and present a summary of your discussion to the class. Use clear pronunciation, natural intonation, and structured delivery.
- iv. Take part in a whole-class discussion comparing insights from different groups. Reflect on:
 - Whose work is typically valued in our society and why?
 - How these ideas impact our self-worth and how we treat others
- v. Cultural Sensitivity: Respect differing views, especially regarding how work and identity are perceived in various social, economic, and cultural settings.

B. Respond to the text by telling short stories and role play.

- i. Choose a person (real or fictional) whose work is often overlooked (e.g., janitor, stay-at-home parent, retired teacher). Research or imagine their daily life and contributions.
- ii. Tell a short story about this person, highlighting their role, challenges, and value to society. Practise active listening while your peers narrate, summarising key points and asking thoughtful questions.
- iii. Create and perform a role-play of a moment when this character challenges the stereotype attached to their job. Focus on:
 - Accurate expression of emotions
 - Listening and responding to cues
 - Standard pronunciation and appropriate vocal tone

C. Debate on Work and Worth

- i. Participate in a debate on 'Jobs determine a person's value in society'.
- ii. Present your arguments with confidence and clarity. Pay attention to intonation, emphasis, and respectful tone when responding.
- iii. After the debate, reflect as a class:
 - What did you learn about social attitudes toward work?
 - How did listening help you better understand different views?

Writing Skills

- A. Write an analytical essay exploring the idea that all professions, regardless of pay or status, deserve equal respect. Use examples from the text "*What You Do is What You are*" by Nickie McWhirter, personal experiences, and other sources to support your argument:**

1. Introduction:

- Introduce your topic with a strong hook to engage the reader.

- Provide context through lead-in sentences that guide the reader into your main idea.
- State your thesis clearly at the end of your introduction.

2. Body Paragraphs:

- Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that expresses the main idea of the paragraph.
- Support your points with examples from the text, real-life cases, or researched facts.
- Develop your point with explanations, comparisons, or reflections.
- Use at least two gerunds, two infinitives, and two participles throughout the essay.

3. Conclusion:

- **Summarize your main points** to reinforce your thesis.
- **Restate your thesis** in a new way to remind the reader of your key argument.
- **End with a closing thought** that provides insight or a call to action.

Revise and Improve Your Draft

Instructions: After writing your first draft, follow these steps:

1. Self-Check:

- Review your draft for clarity and coherence. Ensure that each paragraph is well-developed and supports your thesis.
- Check your introduction and conclusion to make sure they effectively frame your essay.

2. Peer Review:

- Exchange drafts with a peer and provide constructive feedback.
- Focus on the structure of the essay, the clarity of ideas, and the use of evidence.
- Receive feedback and consider how you can incorporate it into your revision.

3. Revise Your Essay:

- Make revisions based on the feedback you received. Improve the flow of your essay by refining transitions between paragraphs.
- Proofread your final draft to correct any grammatical errors and ensure the essay is polished and ready for submission.

Gather and Cite Resources

Instructions: As you write your essay, follow these steps to gather and cite information:

1. Research:

- Gather relevant information from at least three authentic sources, such

as academic journals, books, or reputable websites.

- Organize your notes to ensure you have supporting evidence for each point in your essay.

2. Citation:

- Cite your sources correctly in the body of your essay using the appropriate citation style (e.g., APA, MLA).
- Include a reference list or bibliography at the end of your essay, ensuring all sources are properly credited.

3. Presentation:

- Prepare to present your essay, either in written form or as an oral presentation. Be ready to explain your research process and how you used the information gathered.

B. Translate the following passage into Urdu:

There is a whole category of other people who are "just" something. To be "just" anything is the worst. It is not to be recognized by society as having much value at all, not now and probably not in the past either. To be "just" anything is to be totally discounted, at least for the present. There are lots of people who are "just" something. "Just" a housewife immediately and painfully comes to mind. We still hear it all the time. Sometimes women who have kept a house and reared six children refer to themselves as " 'just' a housewife." "Just" a bum, "just" a kid, "just" a drunk, bag lady, old man, student, punk are some others. You can probably add to the list. The "just" category contains present non-earners, people who have no past job history highly valued by society and people whose present jobs are on the low-end of pay and prestige scales. A person can be "just" a cab driver, for example, or "just" a janitor. No one is ever "just" a vice-president, however.