

THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO WRITING CHIDUSHEI TORAH

HA'AROS, PILPULIM, AND
GUIDELINES FOR TORAH WRITING



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PART TWO

Beginner Track

For Bochorim who are new to writing Inyonim in Torah

QUESTION · ANSWER · PROOF · CONCLUSION

סיכום · ראיה · תשובה · שאלה

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At a Glance: What You Will Do

The beginner track teaches you to write a clear, focused Torah insight in 500 to 750 words. Every piece follows the same four steps:

- **Ask a Question (שאלה)** — Find a specific contradiction or difficulty in the sources. Cite exact locations.
- **Propose an Answer (תשובה)** — State your chidush clearly and show how it solves the problem.
- **Prove It (ראיה)** — Bring evidence: from a text, from logic, from comparison, or from a mefaresh.
- **Conclude (סיכום)** — Restate briefly and show why it matters: a broader principle, a practical application, or a deeper insight.

Think of this as training yourself to notice questions, work through them step by step, and explain your thinking to others. The template is rigid on purpose. Once the structure becomes second nature, you can adapt it.

Chapter 3

The Four Steps

Question, Answer, Proof, Conclusion

Every beginner piece follows four steps in order. Below, each step is explained with an example built in. For complete worked-out examples, see Appendix A.

Step 1: The Question (שאלה)

This is what you are trying to figure out.

For beginners, the best questions fall into two main types: (1) a contradiction between two sources, and (2) a difficulty — something that does not make sense or seems unnecessary in a text. (There are other types too, which we cover in Part Six when we discuss writing on different subjects.) Pick one specific question and write one paragraph (four to six sentences) that introduces the topic, gives Source A with its exact location, gives Source B or the difficulty, and explains the problem.

A note before the examples: The topic we are about to use — Birkas HaTorah and oiver l'asiyasan — is a well-known discussion in the poskim. We are not presenting it as an original chidush. We are using it because it is a sugya you can look up and check yourself, and because it is an excellent example to show you how the four-step structure works. Think of this like watching a slow-motion replay of a play in a game — the point is to see the mechanics clearly.

We are also going to show you something important: the same topic can be approached with two different types of questions, and the type of question you ask changes the whole direction of the piece. Watch how this works.

Method 1: The Contradiction Question (קשיא)

A contradiction question points to two sources that do not fit together and asks: how do we resolve this?

Inline example:

“The Gemara in Brachos (11b) says that a person must say Birkas HaTorah before learning Torah each day. Rashi explains this is a ‘birkas ha’mitzvah’ — a bracha said before doing a mitzvah, just like the bracha before matzah or lulav. There is a well-known rule that birkas ha’mitzvos must be said ‘over l’asiyasan’ — right before the act, with no break. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 47:9) rules that we say pesukim and mishnayos right after Birkas HaTorah — showing that over l’asiyasan does apply.

Yet the Shulchan Aruch (47:10) also rules that if someone sleeps during the day, he does NOT need a new Birkas HaTorah — the Mishnah Berurah explains that ‘ha’chiyuv tamid alav,’ the obligation is constant. This seems like a contradiction: if Birkas HaTorah follows over l’asiyasan (as 47:9 shows), it should behave like a regular birkas ha’mitzvah. But if it is really a ‘constant obligation’ (as 47:10 says), why do we need to say pesukim right after the bracha at all?”

Notice what this does: it finds a real contradiction — between two rulings of the same Shulchan Aruch (47:9 and 47:10). One implies Birkas HaTorah is a regular birkas ha’mitzvah with over l’asiyasan. The other implies the obligation is constant and never expires. These two ideas pull in different directions, and that tension is the question.

Method 2: The Difficulty Question (קושיא on a single source)

A difficulty question does not need two contradicting sources. It points to something in the text that seems strange, unnecessary, or hard to understand, and asks: why?

Inline example:

“The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 47:9) rules that after saying Birkas HaTorah, a person should immediately learn something — and we therefore say the pesukim of Birkas Kohanim, the Mishnah of Eilu Devarim, and the Braisa of Eilu Devarim. This is to fulfill the requirement of ‘over l’asiyasan’ — saying the bracha right before the act.

But this seems difficult: the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, as the Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:8) writes, is ‘by day and by night’ — a constant, ongoing obligation. If the mitzvah is truly constant, and the bracha covers the whole day (as the Mishnah Berurah on 47:10 explains), why is there any need for over l’asiyasan at all? Why do we need to learn something right away?”

CHAPTER 3: THE FOUR STEPS

Notice the difference: this question is not a contradiction between two sources. It is a difficulty within the logic of a single halacha. If the obligation is constant, over l'asiyasen should be automatic — yet the Shulchan Aruch still requires you to learn something immediately. That “why?” is the question.

Both methods are valid. They lead to different analyses and different answers. The contradiction method pushes you to find a distinction or a deeper principle that resolves the tension. The difficulty method pushes you to understand the reasoning behind what the source is doing. As you develop as a writer, you will naturally start to see which method fits the sugya you are working with.

(Note: For writing on Halacha, Chumash, Chassidus, and other subjects, the types of questions are different. See Part Six for subject-specific guidance.)

Step 2: Your Answer (תשובה)

Using the Contradiction Method

This is your chidush — your insight that resolves the difficulty.

Your answer should explain how the difficulty is resolved. Common types of answers include: a distinction (chiluk) between cases, a reinterpretation of one of the sources, or a hidden principle that explains both. Write one to two paragraphs (five to eight sentences) that state your answer clearly, explain how it works step by step, and show how it solves the original question.

Inline example (answering the contradiction question above):

“The answer is that Birkas HaTorah has a dual nature. On one hand, it is a birkas ha’mitzvah — and like all birkas ha’mitzvos, it requires over l’asiyan. That is why the Shulchan Aruch (47:9) requires learning immediately after the bracha. On the other hand, the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is unique: the obligation is constant (‘by day and by night’). Because of this, once the bracha is said with proper over l’asiyan (by learning the pesukim and mishnayos), it does not expire for the rest of the day — even if you stop learning for hours.

The bracha ‘attaches’ through over l’asiyan and then ‘extends’ because of the continuous obligation. This resolves the contradiction: 47:9 tells us how the bracha is established (through over l’asiyan). 47:10 tells us why it does not need to be repeated (because the obligation is constant).”

✓ *Tip: Start with a clear statement (“The answer is that...”). Do not be too wishy-washy (“I think maybe possibly...”).*

Step 3: Proof (ראיה)

Why should someone believe you?

Your proof shows that your answer is based on sources or logic, not just guessing. Use at least one type of proof (two is better): textual proof (specific words in the sources), logical proof (why your answer makes sense), comparative proof (the same idea appears elsewhere), or authority proof (a mefaresh says the same thing).

Inline example:

“Tosafos (Brachos 11b, d”h ‘shekvar’) cites Rabbeinu Tam who explains that ‘divrei Torah ein tzrichin chizuk’ — Torah words do not need ‘strengthening’ or renewal. The obligation carries forward on its own. This fits our explanation: once established through over l’asiyasan, the bracha extends because the mitzvah never ends.

Separately, the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 47:11) cites the Agur (Siman 1) who adds another angle: a person is never truly disconnected from Torah, because even everyday activities involve following halacha. Together, these two sources confirm that the bracha does not expire during the day — both because the obligation is inherently continuous (Rabbeinu Tam) and because a person is always connected to Torah in practice (the Agur).

Further support: the Shulchan Aruch treats sleep during the day differently from hefsek in other brachos. For most birkas ha’mitzvos, a long break would require a new bracha. But for Birkas HaTorah, even daytime sleep does not — because the chiyuv remains in force.”

✓ *Tip: Always cite specifically and connect your evidence clearly to your answer: “This shows that...”*

Citing Multiple Sources That Support the Same Point

Notice something in the proof above. We brought two sources — Tosafos/Rabbeinu Tam and the Agur — that both support our answer. But they make different arguments. Rabbeinu Tam says the obligation of Torah is inherently continuous and does not need renewal. The Agur says a person is never disconnected from Torah because even everyday life involves following halacha. Same conclusion, different reasoning.

When this happens, do not lump them together as if they are saying the same thing. Cite each one separately, with its own location, and explain what each one adds. This does two things for your piece:

- First, it makes your proof stronger — two independent arguments are more convincing than one.
- Second, it shows the reader (and your reviewer) that you actually looked up the sources and understand the difference between them.

A common mistake is to remember an idea, remember roughly where you saw it, and attribute the wrong words to the wrong source. The fix is simple: before you submit, open the sefer and check that it says what you think it says, in the place you think it is. This takes a few extra minutes. It is worth it.

Step 4: Conclusion (סיכום)

Wrap it up and leave a clear impression.

Your conclusion should be short but strong. Briefly restate your question (one sentence). Remind the reader of your answer (one sentence). End with impact — show the broader principle, a practical application, a deeper insight, or what this leads to next.

Inline example:

“We asked how Birkas HaTorah can follow the rules of over l’asiyasan (requiring immediate learning after the bracha) while also being described as a bracha over a ‘constant obligation’ that never expires. We answered that it has two elements: it is established through over l’asiyasan, but it extends through the entire day because of the unique, ongoing nature of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah. This teaches us something about the nature of Torah learning itself: it is both something we do at specific moments and something we are at all times.”

Writing Template

Use this structure for your first attempts

[YOUR TITLE: Topic or Question You Are Addressing]

By: [Your Name] | Yeshiva: [Name] | Date: [Date] |
Masechta/Topic: [What you were learning]

INTRODUCTION (2–3 SENTENCES)

When learning [topic], an interesting question comes up.
[One sentence setting the stage.]

THE QUESTION (4–6 SENTENCES)

The Gemara says [Source A with exact location]. However,
[Source B with exact location] seems to say [something
different]. The question is: [state your question in one
sentence].

MY ANSWER (5–8 SENTENCES)

The answer is [your chidush]. According to this, [apply to
Source A]. [Apply to Source B]. This solves our question
because [connect back].

PROOF (4–5 SENTENCES)

We can see support from [specific evidence]. Notice that
[specific details]. This shows that [connect to your answer].

CONCLUSION (2–3 SENTENCES)

We asked [brief restatement]. We answered [brief
restatement]. [End strong: broader principle, application,
or insight.]

Word count: 500 to 750 words.

TRANSITIONING TO THE ADVANCED TRACK

The Advanced Track is not just harder questions. It requires a different kind of thinking.

You Are Ready When

- You have written at least three or four beginner pieces with feedback. Your questions come naturally from learning.
- You can defend your chidush when someone pushes back.
- You are starting to notice patterns across sugyos.
- You have started learning at least one major Acharon inside — not just seeing them quoted in a shiur or a sefer, but working through their reasoning on your own, following how they read the Gemara and why they say what they say.
- You find yourself asking not just “what does the Gemara say?” but “why does it have to work that way? Could it work differently? What is the difference between this case and that one?” — questions about the logic underneath the text, not just the text itself.

You Are Not Ready Yet If

- Your beginner pieces still struggle to clearly state the question.
- You have not built the habit of writing regularly.
- You are mostly working with Gemara, Rashi, and Tosafos without looking at Acharonim.
- You are drawn to the Advanced Track because it sounds impressive, not because you have outgrown the Beginner framework.

If the Beginner Track is still where your writing is growing, stay with it. The four-step structure still sits underneath advanced writing too — each step just becomes more developed. The skeleton is the same; the flesh is richer.

PART THREE

Advanced Track

*For experienced learners ready to make an original contribution to
Torah scholarship.*

At a Glance: What You Will Do

Advanced writing builds on the beginner's four steps but asks more of you at every stage. Your piece (1,000 to 2,000 words) will show four things:

1. **Sophisticated Textual Analysis** — Work with a range of primary sources — enough to show real depth and find patterns across Rishonim. Study specific language choices. Notice subtle differences.
2. **Novel Conceptual Framework** — Propose an original yesod, chiluk, or chakira that grows out of the sources — not one you force on them from the outside.
3. **Rigorous Logical Development** — Support every claim. Anticipate objections. Consider alternatives. Use more than one type of evidence.
4. **Broad Applications** — Show your insight applies to two or three other specific cases. Find nafka minos. Acknowledge limitations.

Before going into these criteria, it helps to understand the different analytical methods you can use. At the advanced level, the method you pick shapes the kind of chidush you produce.

How This Connects to the Four Steps

You already know the beginner's four steps: Question, Answer, Proof, Conclusion. The advanced track does not replace them. It expands each one:

- **Step 1 — The Question** becomes more developed. In the Beginner Track, you find a question and work with it — a contradiction, a difficulty, something that does not make sense. At the advanced level, you learn to identify what kind of question you are dealing with, and that shapes the kind of answer you give and the kind of proof you need. You now have six types of questions to choose from, and knowing which one fits your sugya is itself an important skill.
- **Step 2 — Your Answer** becomes more deliberately conceptual. In the beginner track, your answer is usually a distinction that resolves the problem — and that already involves real thinking. At the advanced level, you are consciously choosing what kind of answer to give: are you clarifying the pshat, building a yesod, or running a chakira? The type of question you asked guides that choice.

ADVANCED TRACK

- **Step 3 — Proof** becomes more rigorous. You now use multiple analytical tools — textual analysis, logical analysis, comparative analysis — and you need to anticipate objections, not just bring one supporting source.
- **Step 4 — Conclusion** becomes broader. Instead of just restating your answer, you show that your insight applies to other cases and produces real *nafka minos*.

Think of it this way: the four steps are still the frame of the building. What changes is how much detail goes into each floor.

Chapter 5

Advanced Goals and Analytical Methods

In the beginner track, every piece follows the same basic pattern: question, distinction, proof. Advanced Torah writing uses a range of analytical methods. Knowing which method fits your question is itself an important skill.

Six Types of Questions

Every chidush starts with a question. But questions come in very different types. Knowing which type you are dealing with tells you which analytical approach to use and what kind of proof you need.

1. Kushya / Stira (קושיא / סתירה) — Contradiction

Two sources directly conflict. Both cannot be true as simply understood. You need a chiluk, a limiting interpretation, or a textual reinterpretation. Stira refers to the conflict itself — the fact that the sources say opposite things. Kushya is the problem the conflict creates — the challenge you need to solve. In practice, both terms are used for this type of question. This is a question type you already know from the beginner track, but at the advanced level the contradictions are subtler and the answers more conceptual.

Example:

Here is a contradiction you already know how to resolve — but before you knew the answer, this is what it looked like as a question. The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 2:3) rules that pikuach nefesh overrides Shabbos. The same Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:1) rules that a person must give up his life rather than violate three specific aveiros. If saving life overrides Torah law, why should it not override these three as well?

You already know the answer — the three cardinal sins are different in kind, and the Gemara spells out this distinction. But that is exactly the point. Before you learned the sugya, these two rulings looked like a direct conflict. That feeling — “these two sources cannot both be right” — is what a kushya feels like when you encounter it for the first time.

Your job as a writer is to find contradictions like this in areas where the resolution is not already well known.

2. Teima (תימה) — Difficulty

Something seems strange, unnecessary, or unexpected in the text, even without a direct contradiction. Why this language? Why this order? Why this detail? You need to uncover hidden logic or purpose.

Example:

The Gemara (Kiddushin 29a) lists the obligations a father has toward his son: circumcision, redemption, teaching Torah, teaching a trade, and teaching to swim. Why does the Gemara include swimming? Teaching Torah and a trade make sense as life skills. But swimming seems out of place. What is it doing in this list?

3. Hechrach (הכרח) — Logical Necessity

Why must something be true? What forces this conclusion? You need to show the cause-and-effect chain and rule out alternatives.

Example:

The Gemara (Brachos 21a) establishes that Birkas HaMazon is a Torah obligation. But why must it be d'oraisa? Could the obligation not work just as well as a rabbinic enactment? You need to show what would go wrong if it were only d'rabanan — what halachic consequence forces us to say it must be from the Torah.

4. Plugta (פלוגתא) — Dispute Analysis

What is the real root of a machlokes? Not just what they argue about, but why — the yesod ha'machlokes. You need comparative analysis across multiple cases to find the pattern.

Example:

Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel disagree about the order of brachos on motzaei Shabbos (Brachos 52a). They also disagree about the order of brachos at Kiddush (Brachos 51b). And they disagree about lighting Chanukah candles (Shabbos 21b). Is there a single yesod — a root principle — that explains all three disagreements?

5. Diyuk (דייוק) — Inference

What can we learn from specific language, structure, or details? Close reading that pulls out what is implied, not just what is said. You need to compare how the same source says things elsewhere.

Example:

Rashi on Shabbos 73a describes the melacha of zoreia (planting) as “putting a seed in the ground.” But on Moed Katan 2b, Rashi describes watering as “helping growth.” If both are about making things grow, why the different language? The word choice suggests Rashi sees two different categories of agricultural melacha.

6. Yishuv (יישוב) — Harmonization

How do we understand a difficult text in light of other texts or rules? This is not a full contradiction — the sources do not directly say opposite things — but something does not sit easily and needs to be worked out.

A yishuv question sits in the space between a full kushya and a simple difficulty. In a kushya, you can point to two sources and say “Source A says X, and Source B says not- X.” In a yishuv, the situation is more like “Source A says X, and Source B says Y, and it is hard to see how both can be true at the same time.” The conflict is real, but indirect. The sources create a tension rather than a head-on collision.

This matters because the type of answer a yishuv needs is different from a kushya. A kushya usually demands a sharp chiluk — a clear distinction that resolves the direct conflict. A yishuv often requires a broader framework that shows how two ideas that seem to pull apart actually belong together. The skill of a yishuv is not splitting things apart but finding the deeper coherence.

Example:

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4) says that someone who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead has no share in the World to Come. But the Rambam himself (Hilchos Teshuvah 8:2) describes the World to Come as purely spiritual, with no bodies at all. These two statements are not directly contradicting each other — the first is about who gets in, the second is about what it is like there.

But they create a tension: if the World to Come has no bodies, why is belief in bodily resurrection the entry requirement? You cannot resolve this with a simple chiluk. You need a framework that explains the relationship between the belief and the reality it points to.

Four Analytical Goals

When you sit down to write, you are not just asking a question — you are trying to accomplish something specific. Your goal determines the kind of answer you give and the kind of proof you need.

1. Pshat (פשט)

Contextual Meaning. Understanding what the text means in its straightforward sense. Tools: close reading, language analysis, context, standard commentaries. This is the foundation everything else builds on.

2. Sevara (סברא)

Logical Reasoning. Understanding the logic or reason behind a halacha or statement. Not just “what” but “why.” Tools: logical analysis, identifying the purpose, tracing consequences, testing consistency.

3. Yesod / Shita (שיטה / יסוד)

Foundational Principle. Finding or creating a fundamental principle that explains multiple halachos. You start from many individual cases and work inward to find the common thread. Tools: pattern recognition, abstraction, categorization, testing against all relevant sources. The direction here is from many cases to one principle.

4. Chakira (חקירה)

Analytical Inquiry. Investigating the precise nature of a single din, usually as a binary question (“Is it A or B?”) with nafka minos that let you test against sources. You start from one concept and split it into two possible understandings. The direction here is from one concept to a precise definition of what it is. This is the hallmark of the Brisker derech and much of advanced yeshiva analysis.

How are Yesod and Chakira different?

They often work together, but the core difference is direction. A yesod says: “I looked at five halachos and here is the one principle that ties them all together.” A chakira says: “I took one halacha and here is the question about what it really is.” A yesod moves from many cases to one idea. A chakira moves from one idea to a precise definition. In practice, you might discover a

yesod through a chakira, or a chakira might emerge from noticing a pattern. But as goals, they are doing different things.

A note on the tools listed above: Each goal lists its main analytical tools briefly. These tools — close reading, language analysis, logical analysis, pattern recognition, and the rest — are explained and demonstrated in full in Chapter [X]. Here we are just showing you what each goal is aiming for and which tools it draws on. When you are ready to apply them, the later chapter walks you through each one with examples.

Matching Question to Method

A common advanced-level mistake is using the wrong tool for the question. A few key rules:

- A simple kushya usually needs a chiluk or pshat clarification — not a full chakira.
- A plugta analysis needs comparative work across multiple cases to find the pattern, not just restating what each side says.
- A hechrach question needs to show logical necessity — not just that your answer makes sense, but that it has to be so.
- A diyuk needs to show the textual detail is deliberate — by comparing how the same source phrases things elsewhere.
- A chakira must produce testable nafka minos — if your two options make no practical difference, the question is not yet sharp enough.

The Chakira in Practice

Because the chakira is the most common tool for advanced chidushei Torah, here is how it works step by step:

1. **Put the question in binary terms.** Make sure the two options are mutually exclusive. For example:
 - “Is the obligation on the person (chiyuv gavra) or on the act (din in the cheftza)?”
 - “Is this halacha a cause that produces the result (sibah) or an indicator that the result already exists (siman)?”
 - “Is this requirement a condition that must be met for the mitzvah to be valid (tnai) or part of the essential act of the mitzvah itself (ma’aseh hamitzvah)?”

The framing matters — if your two options are not genuinely exclusive, the chakira will not produce clear results.

2. **Find nafka minos.** What would be different under each option? The more nafka minos, the more powerful the chakira.
3. **Test against sources.** Which sources support option A? Which support B? Is there a decisive source?
4. **Resolve or acknowledge.** Can you prove one over the other? Or does it depend on a machlokes Rishonim? Either is fine.
5. **Apply to new cases.** Use your conclusion to predict what the halacha should be in cases that have not been studied yet.

CHAPTER 5: ADVANCED GOALS AND METHODS

Critical: A chakira is not something you force onto a sugya from the outside. It grows from careful study of the sources. If you decide in advance “I want to apply cheftza/gavra to shlichus” and then go looking for sources to fit, you will produce a forced analysis. Start with the sources. Let the conceptual question come out of the patterns you see.

A Chakira Walked Through: Birkas HaTorah

To make this concrete, let's walk through a chakira using the Birkas HaTorah sugya from Part Two. You already know the basic question: Birkas HaTorah seems to follow the rules of over l'asiyasan (like a regular birkas ha'mitzvah), but also seems to be a "constant obligation" that never expires. Now, let's run a chakira on it.

Step 1 — Binary question: Is the duration of Birkas HaTorah determined by the act of learning (so the bracha lasts as long as you are actively engaged in learning, and a significant break should require a new bracha) or by the obligation of learning (so the bracha lasts as long as the chiyuv of Talmud Torah is in effect, regardless of what you are doing at any given moment)? These two options are mutually exclusive: either the bracha tracks the activity or it tracks the obligation.

Step 2 — Nafka minos: (a) If the bracha tracks the act, then a long break during the day — going to work, taking a nap, running errands — should require a new bracha when you return to learning, because the act was interrupted. If the bracha tracks the obligation, no break matters, because the chiyuv of Talmud Torah is always in effect. (b) If the bracha tracks the act, someone who plans not to learn afterward should not say the bracha. If it tracks the obligation, the bracha is said regardless, because the obligation exists whether you plan to learn right now or not.

Step 3 — Test against sources: The Shulchan Aruch (47:9) requires learning right after the bracha — this fits the "act" side, because over l'asiyasan applies to brachos tied to specific acts. But the Shulchan Aruch (47:10) rules that daytime sleep does not require a new bracha — this fits the "obligation" side, because the chiyuv persists through the interruption. Rabbeinu Tam (Brachos 11b) says Torah "does not need renewal" — which supports the obligation side.

Step 4 — Resolve: The sources suggest a dual nature. At the moment it is said, it behaves like a bracha on an act (requiring over l'asiyasan — you must learn right after saying it). After that, it behaves like a bracha on the obligation (lasting all day without renewal). This is not a compromise — it is a precise answer: the bracha is established through the act but extends through the obligation.

Step 5 — Apply: This dual-nature framework predicts that any bracha on a continuous mitzvah should work the same way. For example, Birkas HaMazon (which covers the ongoing satisfaction from eating) might follow a similar pattern — established by an act (eating), but covering an extended period. You would test this against sources on Birkas HaMazon to see if the pattern holds.

CHAPTER 5: ADVANCED GOALS AND METHODS

Notice what happened: we did not decide in advance to apply a chakira. We started with the same question from Part Two, noticed the tension between the sources, and formulated the binary question out of what the sources were telling us.

Six Analytical Tools

No matter which question type or goal you are working with, these are the tools you have:

1. Textual Analysis — Word-by-word reading, phrase structure, comparing language across parallel texts.
2. Logical Analysis — If-then reasoning, cause-and-effect, kal v'chomer, ruling out alternatives.
3. Structural Analysis — Mapping the architecture of a sugya, finding patterns in organization, noticing when something deviates from the standard form.
4. Conceptual Analysis (Brisker Derech) — The classic distinctions: cheftza/gavra, kum aseh/lo sa'aseh, din/status, giluy milsa/chiddush. Formulating binary questions and testing through nafka minos.
5. Comparative Analysis — Side-by-side comparison, extracting patterns, isolating differences.
6. Source-Tracing Analysis — Following how a concept develops from Gemara through Rishonim to Shulchan Aruch to Acharonim, noting where understanding shifts and why.

An advanced chidush will usually use two or three of these tools together. For example, you might use textual analysis to find a difficulty, conceptual analysis to formulate your framework, and comparative analysis to prove it works broadly.

There are also foundational assumptions and methods — such as the expectation that a given author is internally consistent across all his writings, and the broader assumption that Torah forms one

unified system — that run behind many of these tools. These are treated in full in Chapter [X].

A Note on Different Subjects

Everything in this chapter — the question types, analytical goals, and tools — applies mainly to Gemara-based writing, which is the core of advanced yeshiva analysis. But if you are writing on Halacha, Chumash, Chassidus, Nach, Applied Halacha, or Mishnah, the methods change. Different subjects have different kinds of questions, different standards of proof, and different ways of organizing a piece.

Part Six of this program gives you a complete chapter for each subject, with its own question types, methods, templates, and examples. When you are ready to write on a specific subject, go to the relevant chapter in Part Six and use it as your guide. The tools and thinking skills you learn here carry over — but the way you apply them will be different.

PART SIX

Writing Across Torah Subjects

Chidushei Torah Writing Program

Introduction: Why Different Subjects Need Different Approaches

Everything you have learned so far — how to ask a question, propose an answer, prove it, and present it clearly — applies to every kind of Torah writing. Those are universal skills.

But here is something important: the way you write a chidush in Gemara is not the same as how you write one in Halacha. Writing on Chumash is different from writing on Chassidus. Each subject has its own kind of questions, its own methods for investigating, its own standards for proof, and its own way of organizing a piece.

Think of it like this. A doctor and a mechanic both solve problems. They both gather information, figure out what is wrong, and propose a solution. But the way a doctor examines a patient is completely different from how a mechanic checks an engine. They use different tools, look for different signs, and present their findings differently. The same is true in Torah learning. The thinking skills are the same, but the methods change depending on the subject.

The following chapters give you a complete guide for each major Torah subject. Each chapter covers what kind of questions come up, how to research, what counts as proof, how to structure your piece, a template, and an example. Go to the chapter that matches what you are writing about and use it as your guide.

Chapter 12

Writing on Gemara (Lomdus)

What Makes Gemara Writing Different

Writing on Gemara is what most people think of when they hear “chidushei Torah.” This is the classic yeshiva approach: you are learning a sugya, something does not fit, and you work out an answer. The earlier parts of this program already teach the basic version. This chapter goes deeper into the specific methods that apply to Gemara writing.

In Gemara, your starting point can come from many directions. Sometimes it is a contradiction between sources — Rashi says one thing and Tosafos says another, or a Rambam does not fit with a Gemara. Sometimes it is a diyuk: an unusual word, an extra phrase, a formulation that could have been simpler. Sometimes it is a logical question: why must the halacha be this way? What forces this conclusion? And sometimes it is a conceptual investigation: what is the underlying yesod of a machlokes, or what principle connects two seemingly unrelated sugyos? All of these are your raw materials.

Types of Questions in Gemara

- **Contradiction between two sources (Kushya).** Source A says X. Source B says Y. Both cannot be true as stated. You need a distinction, a reinterpretation, or a deeper principle that explains both.
- **Something that seems strange or unnecessary (Teima).** The Gemara uses an unusual word. A step in the argument seems extra. A case is discussed that seems obvious. Ask: why?
- **Understanding the basis of a machlokes (Plugta).** Two Tana'im or Amora'im argue. You want to understand not just

what they argue about, but why. What is the root of their disagreement?

- **Precise inference from language (Diyuk).** A Rishon uses a specific word. Elsewhere the same Rishon uses a different word for what seems like the same idea. That difference must mean something.
- **Logical necessity (Hecherach).** Why must the halacha be this way? What forces this conclusion? This is not just asking what the din is, but proving why it has to be that way.

Methods and Tools

- **Textual analysis:** Read carefully word by word. Compare how Rashi phrases something versus how the Rambam phrases it. Look at which words the Gemara uses and what they imply.
- **Conceptual analysis:** Ask: is this a *din* in the *cheftza* (object) or the *gavra* (person)? Is this a new law or a revelation of an existing one? These binary questions — *chakiros* — help you get to the root of what is going on.
- **Comparative analysis:** Put two or three sources side by side. What do they agree on? Where do they differ? What pattern comes out of the differences?
- **Source tracing:** Follow a concept from the Gemara through the *Rishonim* to the *Shulchan Aruch* to the *Acharonim*. Notice where understanding shifts and ask why.

What Counts as Proof

1. A source that directly supports your reading.
2. A logical argument showing your answer is necessary — if we do not explain it this way, another Gemara cannot be understood.
3. A *nafka mina* that your explanation produces, confirmed by a source.
4. Showing your explanation resolves an additional difficulty you did not originally set out to answer.

Weak proof: “It makes sense,” “it is obvious,” or “my maggid shiur said so.” You need to show, not just tell.

Structure

- **INTRODUCTION (1–2 paragraphs)** — Introduce the *sugya*. Give enough background. State the *masechta* and *daf*.
- **THE QUESTION (1–2 paragraphs)** — Present your difficulty. Cite Source A and Source B with exact locations. State the question in one sentence.
- **YOUR ANSWER (2–3 paragraphs)** — State your *chidush*. Explain step by step how it resolves the difficulty.
- **PROOF (2–4 paragraphs)** — At least one strong proof from a source. Explain exactly how it supports your answer.
- **APPLICATIONS (1–2 paragraphs, advanced)** — Show implications beyond the original case.
- **CONCLUSION (1 paragraph)** — Restate question and answer. End with the broader principle.

Chapter 13

Writing on Halacha

What Makes Halacha Writing Different

Writing on Halacha is different from Gemara in a basic way. In Gemara, your main goal is understanding: what does this machlokes really mean? In Halacha, your main goal is clarification: what is the actual ruling? How do we pasken? What happens when the sources do not give a clear answer?

A Gemara piece might end with “therefore, the machlokes between Rashi and Tosafos is based on the following yesod.” A Halacha piece ends with “therefore, the halacha in this case should be X, for the following reasons.”

This does not mean Halacha writing is less analytical. It is just analytical in a different direction. Instead of building a conceptual framework, you are tracing a chain of psak: from the Gemara to the Rishonim to the Shulchan Aruch to the Acharonim, following how the halacha was understood and applied, and figuring out what the correct ruling is.

Types of Questions

What is the halacha when poskim disagree? The Mechaber says one thing. The Rama says another. The Poskim are split. How do we pasken?

What is the halacha in a case not directly discussed? The Shulchan Aruch discusses case A. You have case B, which is similar but not identical. Does the same ruling apply?

Why does the halacha work this way? The ruling is clear, but the reason is not. Understanding the reason matters because it determines how far the halacha extends.

Contradictions between rulings. The Shulchan Aruch seems to rule one way in one siman and differently in another. Is there a distinction between the cases?

Tracing how a halacha developed. The Gemara says one thing. The Rambam understands it differently. The Shulchan Aruch follows the Rambam. The Acharonim raise difficulties. You trace what happened at each stage.

Methods and Tools

Chain-of-psak analysis: Start with the Gemara source. See how the Rif, Rambam, and Rosh understand it. Check the Tur. See how the Shulchan Aruch rules, and what the Rama, Taz, Magen Avraham, and the Alter Rebbe say.

Reason-based analysis: Find the ta’am (reason) behind the halacha. Different reasons lead to different results in borderline cases.

Comparison of parallel halachos: Compare how the same principle is applied in different areas. If the rule works one way in hilchos Shabbos and differently in hilchos brachos, ask why.

Rule-of-psak analysis: When poskim disagree, apply the standard rules. Do we follow the Mechaber or Rama? Majority of poskim or strongest reasoning? Is there a difference between d'oraisa and d'rabanan?

What Counts as Proof

1. A later posek who explicitly rules the way you are arguing.
2. Showing that the reasoning of the halacha demands your conclusion.
3. Showing that the alternative leads to a contradiction with another established halacha.
4. Minhag — established practice. In halacha, accepted minhag is real evidence.

Important: in Halacha writing, you are not just doing an intellectual exercise. You are arguing for a practical ruling. If you are not sure, say so. If the matter needs a posek, say that too.

Structure

- **INTRODUCTION (1–2 paragraphs)** — Introduce the halachic topic and the specific question.
- **THE QUESTION (1–2 paragraphs)** — State the specific halachic question.
- **TRACING THE SOURCES (2–4 paragraphs)** — Walk through the chain of psak step by step. This is the core of a Halacha piece.
- **YOUR ANALYSIS (2–3 paragraphs)** — Present your conclusion and explain why.
- **PROOF AND SUPPORT (1–2 paragraphs)** — Bring evidence from a later posek, logic, or a parallel case.
- **PRACTICAL APPLICATION (1 paragraph)** — What does this mean l'maaseh? In Halacha, this is not optional.
- **CONCLUSION (1 paragraph)** — Summarize.

Chapter 14

Writing on Applied Halacha (Halacha L'Maaseh)

What Makes Applied Halacha Writing Different

Applied Halacha is about taking classical halachic principles and applying them to real-life situations that the Shulchan Aruch never directly addressed. This includes questions about technology, modern medicine, business ethics, and other areas where classic sources need to be applied to new realities.

This is different from regular Halacha writing (Chapter 13). In regular Halacha, you analyze an existing disagreement or trace how a known halacha developed. In Applied Halacha, you are often the first one applying a principle to a specific case. You are doing what a posek does.

This requires extra responsibility. You are not just analyzing — you are proposing a ruling. Even as a student exercise, you must be careful, honest about uncertainty, and respectful of the complexity involved.

Types of Questions

New technology. Can you use a timer for lights on Shabbos? Does a digital signature count for a halachic document?

Modern social situations. What are the halachos of lashon hara on social media? Can bikur cholim be done through a video call?

Medical questions. Can a patient take medication on Shabbos that is not immediately life-saving? How does pikuach nefesh apply to mental health?

Business and financial questions. How do the laws of ribis apply to modern financial tools? What does geneivas da'as mean in advertising?

Methods and Tools

Category identification: The most important skill. Figure out which classical halachic category applies to the modern case.

Analogy and precedent: Find the closest case the poskim discussed. Argue by analogy, but be honest about the differences.

Multiple-factor analysis: Real she'eilos often involve several halachic considerations at once. Identify all relevant factors and weigh them.

Surveying contemporary poskim: Check Igros Moshe, Minchas Shlomo, Shemiras Shabbos K'Hilchasa, Piskei Teshuvos.

What Counts as Proof

1. A contemporary posek who addresses a similar case and reaches the same conclusion.
2. A clear analogy to a classical case, with an explanation of why it holds.
3. A logical argument based on the reason behind the halacha.
4. Showing that ruling otherwise leads to an absurd or contradictory result.

Always note that practical halachic questions require consultation with a competent rav. Your piece is an analysis, not a binding ruling.

Structure

- **INTRODUCTION** — Describe the real-life situation concretely.
- **THE QUESTION** — State the specific halachic question.
- **IDENTIFYING RELEVANT CATEGORIES** — Which halachic principles apply? This is the core of the piece.
- **ANALYZING THE SOURCES** — Trace through Gemara, Rishonim, Shulchan Aruch, Acharonim, contemporary poskim.
- **YOUR CONCLUSION** — What you believe the halacha should be and why.
- **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES** — Summarize the takeaway. Note that a rav should be consulted.
- **CONCLUSION** — Summarize case, analysis, and result.

Chapter 15

Writing on Chassidus and Machshava

What Makes Chassidus Writing Different

Writing on Chassidus is fundamentally different from Gemara, Halacha, or Chumash. In those subjects, you work with legal reasoning, textual analysis, and practical rulings. In Chassidus, you work with concepts — deep ideas about Hashem, levels of Elokus, revelation vs tzimtzum, the neshamah, avodas Hashem, the nature of creation, and the purpose of a Yid in this world.

This does not mean Chassidus writing is less rigorous. It means the rigor is conceptual instead of legal. You still need to be precise, prove your points, and ground everything in sources. But the sources are ma'amarim and sichos, and the analysis is about understanding ideas deeply rather than resolving legal contradictions.

Types of Questions

A difficulty in a ma'amar or sicha. The Alter Rebbe says something in Tanya that seems to contradict what he says elsewhere. Or a ma'amar uses a mashal that does not seem to fit.

A contradiction between two Chassidus concepts. In one place, the Alter Rebbe explains that teshuvah comes from a higher level than tzaddikim can reach, because it draws from the Essence (Etzem) that transcends all giluyim. But elsewhere, Chassidus explains that a baal teshuvah's previous aveiros are actually transformed into zechuyos — meaning the sin itself becomes a positive force. These seem to pull in different directions: is teshuvah about transcending the sin entirely, or about transforming it? Working out how both are true — and at what stage of teshuvah each applies — is a real chidush.

Connecting Chassidus to nigleh. A halacha seems purely technical. But Chassidus reveals a deeper reason behind it. You show that the Chassidus explanation illuminates why the halacha works the way it does.

Explaining why the Rebbe explains something a certain way. In Likkutei Sichos, the Rebbe gives a Chassidus-based explanation for a Rashi or Rambam. You investigate why this approach and what it reveals.

Understanding a mashal deeply. Chassidus uses many mashalim. Sometimes every detail of the mashal corresponds to something in the nimshal. Working out the full correspondence can be a chidush.

Tracing a concept across Rebbeim. The Alter Rebbe introduces an idea. The Mittler Rebbe develops it. The Tzemach Tzedek applies it differently. Following this development reveals the full depth.

Methods and Tools

Conceptual analysis: Define terms precisely. Words like “ohr,” “keli,” “etzem,” “giluy” have very specific meanings in Chassidus. Often the definition may be slightly different depending on the context of the ma’amar.

Cross-referencing ma’amarim: Compare how different Rebbeim discuss the same idea. Look for what each one adds.

Nigleh-Chassidus integration: Study both the nigleh source and the Chassidus source independently. Then see what the combination reveals.

Mashal-nimshal analysis: Map every detail of the mashal to its corresponding part in the nimshal. Sometimes a detail in the mashal reveals something new.

Structural analysis of a ma’amar: Ma’amarim have a very precise structure. Nothing is extra. If a section seems unnecessary, ask what it adds.

What Counts as Proof

1. A source in another ma’amar or sicha that directly supports your reading.
2. Your explanation resolves a known difficulty in the text.
3. Your Chassidus explanation also perfectly explains a related point in nigleh.
4. Every detail of a mashal fits your explanation with nothing left over.

Weak proof: vague connections (“this reminds me of...”), unsupported claims about what “Chassidus means,” or presenting your own feelings as Torah sources.

Structure

- **INTRODUCTION** — Introduce the ma’amar, sicha, or concept. Give context.
- **THE QUESTION OR DIFFICULTY** — What needs explanation?
- **BACKGROUND CONCEPTS** — Define key terms. Explain the framework. This section does not exist in Gemara or Halacha writing, but it is essential here.
- **YOUR EXPLANATION** — Your chidush. Be precise with language.
- **PROOF AND SUPPORT** — Evidence from other Chassidus sources or nigleh.
- **CONNECTION TO AVODAH** — What does this teach about serving Hashem? In Chassidus, understanding without application is incomplete.
- **CONCLUSION** — Summarize and end with the deeper message.

Chapter 16

Writing on Chumash

What Makes Chumash Writing Different

In Gemara, you work with legal arguments and logical structures. In Halacha, you trace rulings. In Chumash, you work with the text of the Torah itself — its words, its structure, its narrative, and what the meforshim say about it.

The questions in Chumash are usually textual: Why this word instead of that word? Why is this story here and not there? Why does the Torah repeat something? Why does it leave something out? The answers come from careful reading, comparing meforshim, and uncovering the deeper meaning.

An important difference: in Gemara, you usually work with a machlokes or difficulty between legal sources. In Chumash, your question often comes from the text itself — something that strikes you as unusual, extra, or out of place.

Types of Questions

A word or phrase that seems unusual or extra. The Torah uses a word it does not usually use, or adds a detail that seems unnecessary. What is it teaching?

A contradiction or inconsistency in the text. One pasuk says X, another says Y. How do we explain the difference?

The order or placement of a section. Why is this parsha next to that one? Rashi often asks: “Why is this written here?”

A disagreement between meforshim. Rashi, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra each explain a pasuk differently. What is the root of their disagreement?

A difficulty that Rashi addresses. Rashi raises a question and gives an answer. But is his answer satisfying? Other meforshim sometimes are not satisfied. You can investigate why.

Connecting peshat to a deeper message. The straightforward meaning is clear, but you notice it connects to a broader theme in hashkafa or Chassidus.

Methods and Tools

Close reading (diyuk): Read word by word. Compare parallel passages. If the Torah describes a similar event elsewhere, what is different and why?

Comparing meforshim: Read Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, Or HaChaim, and Kli Yakar on the same pasuk. What question is each answering? Where do they actually disagree?

Structural analysis: Look at the parsha's structure. Are there parallel sections? Repeated patterns? The Torah is very precise in its organization.

Cross-referencing with Tanach: A word in Chumash may appear in Navi or Kesuvim. Comparing contexts can shed light on the original.

Connecting to Chazal: The Midrash often notices the same textual difficulties you notice. Seeing how Chazal respond deepens your analysis.

What Counts as Proof

1. Internal textual evidence — the Torah uses the same word elsewhere in a way that confirms your reading.
2. A mefaresh who supports your reading.
3. Your explanation resolves multiple difficulties, not just one.
4. The alternatives do not work as well as your explanation.

Structure

- **INTRODUCTION** — Introduce the parsha or section. Quote the key pesukim.
- **THE TEXTUAL QUESTION** — What did you notice? Quote exact words. Explain the difficulty.
- **WHAT THE MEFORSHIM SAY** — Present relevant meforshim. Where are they satisfying? Where do they leave room for more?
- **YOUR EXPLANATION** — Your chidush. Show how it grows from the text.
- **TEXTUAL SUPPORT** — Prove it from the text, other pesukim, or meforshim.
- **BROADER SIGNIFICANCE** — What larger lesson does your explanation reveal?
- **CONCLUSION** — Restate and end with the message.

Chapter 17

Writing on Nach (Navi and Kesuvim)

What Makes Nach Writing Different

Nach includes everything from Yehoshua and Shoftim to Tehillim and Koheles, from the stories of the Melachim to the prophecies of Yeshayahu. Writing on Nach combines elements of Chumash writing (textual analysis, careful reading) with its own unique features.

The biggest difference from Chumash is that Nach includes many different literary forms: historical narrative, prophecy, poetry (Tehillim), wisdom literature (Mishlei, Koheles), and megillas (Esther, Rus). Each form has its own kind of questions.

Another difference: while Chumash has a massive body of meforshim that everyone studies, Nach has fewer widely-studied commentaries on many sections. This means there is more room for original observation — but you also need to be more careful.

Types of Questions

Textual and literary questions. Why does Tehillim use this metaphor? Why does the navi repeat himself? Why is this prophecy structured this way?

Historical questions. Why did a king act this way? What does the sequence of events teach? The navi records every detail for a reason.

Comparing parallel accounts. Melachim and Divrei HaYamim sometimes tell the same story differently. Comparing them reveals what each emphasizes.

Connecting Nach to Halacha. Many halachos are derived from or illustrated by Nach passages.

Understanding a prophecy's message. Prophecies use symbolic language. What is the navi actually saying? What is the eternal relevance?

Methods, Proof, and Structure

The methods are similar to Chumash: close reading, comparing meforshim (Rashi, Radak, Metzudos), cross-referencing within Tanach, and using Chazal as guides. The structure follows the same template as Chumash: Introduction, Textual Question, Meforshim, Your Explanation, Textual Support, The Message, Conclusion.

The main practical difference is that Nach gives you more room for literary analysis and more opportunity to connect to broader themes in Jewish thought.

Chapter 18

Writing on Mishnah

What Makes Mishnah Writing Different

Writing on Mishnah is a great starting point for bochurim who want to practice their skills on a concise, focused text. The Mishnah is short, precise, and packed with meaning. Every word matters.

The main difference from Gemara writing is that you are working with the text before the Gemara's discussion. Your job is often to understand what the Mishnah is really saying, what question the Gemara will ask, or what difficulty lies beneath what seems like a simple statement.

Another difference: the Mishnah often states halachos without giving reasons. Your chidush might be to uncover the reason, explain why the Mishnah chose this specific language, or show how two mishnayos that seem unrelated are actually connected.

Types of Questions

Why this specific language? The Mishnah could have said the same thing more simply. Why these words?

What is the underlying reason? The Mishnah states a rule without explanation. What is the reason? Does it suggest limitations or extensions?

Why are these cases grouped together? Is there a common principle? What does the grouping teach?

A contradiction between two mishnayos. One seems to say X, another Y. You propose a resolution.

The order of the mishnayos. Why does this one come before that one? The order is deliberate.

Methods, Proof, and Structure

The methods are similar to Gemara writing, with special emphasis on close reading of the Mishnah's language. A useful technique: compare the Mishnah's language to the Rambam's restatement of the same halacha. The Rambam often reformulates the Mishnah in a way that reveals how he understood it. Differences in wording are excellent starting points.

The structure follows the same template as a Gemara piece: Introduction, Question, Answer, Proof, Conclusion. Your primary text is the Mishnah itself rather than the Gemara's discussion.

