

TIPS ON QUALITY WRITING

GETTING STARTED:

- To write well and originally about any subject, you must allow yourself enough time to engage the subject matter. Ask questions frequently and challenge the material that you are studying.
- It is helpful to write down the major points that you intend to make and the major supporting evidence for each point. Outline your paper so that you are clear about what you intend to do.

PAPER STRUCTURE:

- The first paragraph of your paper is your introductory thesis and should describe briefly and explicitly what you intend to discuss in the rest of the paper (e.g., “In this paper I will...”). If it helps, number the arguments that you intend to make in the body of the paper.
- Remember that a paragraph must be at least three sentences, the first of which introduces the main point of the paragraph. Sentences within paragraphs must be logically coherent. Paragraphs should flow logically, one to the next.
- In your concluding paragraph, restate your objectives, how you achieved them, and why your arguments are compelling ones.
- You always need to include a “References” section with any paper that contains citations. Do not include references that are consulted but not specifically cited in the paper.

ELEMENTS OF QUALITY WRITING:

- Textbooks, encyclopedias, and other basic reference books should NEVER be used in scholarly writing at the college level.
- Do not rely too heavily on citations – have measured confidence in your capacity for *original* thought. Make claims or arguments in your own words, and then support those claims/arguments *selectively* with evidence from your sources.
- Do not just *describe* facts in your papers, *explain why* things are the way they are. Be critical in your assessment – thoroughly describe and analyze the issues in order to show the relationships between them.
- Use specific examples to illustrate your main points. Your claims are more significant and convincing when they are substantiated with specific examples.
- Adhere to an economy of language: keep your writing simple and clear. Say exactly what you have to say as simply, directly, and forcefully as you can. **Do not clutter your paper with personal opinions or extraneous statements that have no relation to the matter at hand.**
- Have a good dictionary and thesaurus on hand while writing your paper. Proper spelling and effective use of vocabulary are the best ways to make a compelling impression with your writing.
- Be wary of passive sentence structure, poor grammar, and meaningless sentences. Keep in mind the rules of agreement: singular nouns are accompanied by singular verbs, plural nouns by plural verbs. Be sure to write in complete sentences and avoid run-ons.

PRODUCING A FINISHED PRODUCT:

- Proofreading is essential to a well-written paper. Proofread your paper more than once. Give yourself ample time to read drafts over for errors and inconsistencies. You might also want to ask someone else to read over the paper - oftentimes a pair of fresh eyes will catch mistakes overlooked by the author.
- Use the spell-check function on your computer; but keep in mind that spell-check functions do not have a way of differentiating homonyms, so make sure that you are using the correct “there” or “their,” “too” or “two,” etc.
- Never trust the grammar-check function in any word processing software. More often than not, the suggested corrections are bad ones.