Writing at Fontbonne

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About this Booklet

This booklet discusses many features of writing at the university level, and it contains material that will be useful to you throughout your undergraduate education. While this booklet focuses on the essay form, you should be aware that in different departments and at different levels you will be asked to write many other forms of assignments.

Please consider visiting the Kinkel Center (in Fontbonne's library) if you are having difficulty with any writing assignment. The writing specialists there have experience working with students, freshmen to seniors and from English to dietetics and business. The writing specialists are happy to help at any stage of the writing process; they encourage you to visit them early on so that they can provide you with the best help possible.

Because the material covered in this booklet is so essential to your success at Fontbonne University, **please keep it during your time as a student here** and refer to it as you encounter writing assignments in all your classes.

STANDARDS FOR WRITING AT FONTBONNE UNIVERSITY

THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF WRITTEN WORK AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Instructors evaluate five basic elements of writing. Though these elements are called by many different names, they can be summed up in the following list. It is important to note that some instructors, depending on the academic discipline or the specific course or assignment, may weigh some elements more heavily than others. The first three are considered major elements, and a writing assignment may be considered inadequate if one of these elements is missing or seriously flawed.

FOCUS — *the point of the paper*
thesis, argument, point of the paper or the assignment, purpose, significance, unity, originality, creativity, academic audience

DEVELOPMENT — *how the paper expands or develops the focus*
evidence, support, content, balance, facts, research, details, background and context, paragraph unity and development

ORGANIZATION — *how the paper organizes the developed focus*
arrangement, transitions, introductory paragraph or section, concluding paragraph or section, flow, pacing, direction

STYLE — *how the paper reads*
word choice, diction, tone, voice, sentence structure, title, academic audience

CONVENTIONS — *how the paper conforms to standards of academic writing*
grammar, spelling, formatting, integration and citation of sources

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HOW THE FIVE ELEMENTS OPERATE AT EACH GRADE

A Excellent; completely fulfills the expectations of the assignment; demonstrates understanding of the topic and the course and an ability to relate the topic and course materials to a broader context. The five elements (focus, development, organization, style, and conventions) all work together.

B Good. Demonstrates solid understanding of the topic but does not apply that knowledge as effectively as possible. One major element (focus, development, or organization) is flawed, or more than one major element is weak. Could be an A if the flawed element were corrected or the weak elements strengthened.

C Adequate. Fulfills the bare requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates superficial or otherwise incomplete understanding of the topic. More than one major element (focus, development, or organization) is flawed, and the others are weak.

D Poor. Does not fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment. Has some material relating to the question but does not demonstrate adequate understanding of the topic. One or more major elements (focus, development, organization) are missing, and the rest are flawed or weak.

F Failing. Fails to address the assignment or has no material relating to the question. Confusing and frustrating to read. May result from plagiarism or a lack of citation and reference information (please see statement on plagiarism).

an A paper

FOCUS

The thesis or argument is clear. The reader has no trouble determining the point of the paper. Everything relates to the thesis or argument, and the paper never wanders from its focus. Each paragraph develops only one point that clearly furthers the thesis or argument. The paper explains and explores concepts discussed in class and shows that the writer understands and can apply the course materials. The reader comes away from the paper with a better understanding of the topic or with some insight into it. The paper keeps the reader's attention and addresses an academic audience.

DEVELOPMENT

The evidence supports the focus. The essay goes into the appropriate level of detail—not so much that the paper gets bogged down in examples but not so little so that the points are under-developed. All points and claims are explained, and paragraphs are well developed and unified in topic and purpose. The points of the paper get equal emphasis (as appropriate) and equal support. When appropriate, the paper includes a variety of viewpoints—it presents arguments for and against the thesis but ultimately makes the thesis seem convincing. Reputable and appropriate sources are used, and quotations are introduced and explained. The paper falls into the required page range without padding.

ORGANIZATION

The organization of the paper, whether derived from the assignment or some other organizing principle, moves the focus forward in a logical way to a conclusion. The paper contains clear transitions between paragraphs, so that the paper moves from one subject to the next without losing the reader. The introductory paragraph or section sets up the paper (providing necessary background and context) and presents the argument or thesis (statement of focus). The concluding paragraph or section leads the reader out of the paper, without direct summary or repetition of the body, to a connection with the larger world and an understanding of why the topic and the argument about it matter. Each paragraph follows a structure appropriate to the point being developed so that the reader moves forward in understanding that point and also so that the reader sees the connection between that point and the argument or thesis.

STYLE

The paper reads like a college-level paper. The word choice is appropriate to the topic, and the paper is written at the required level of formality. The paper should be in standard written English and demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of style used in the discipline of the course (English, history, biology, psychology, mathematics, art, business, etc.). It should have a consistent tone and voice and read as if it were written by one person; if it is a group paper, there should be a uniform tone—it shouldn't sound like four papers mashed together. The title should convey the focus and be specific and unique to the paper (it shouldn't fit any other papers written for the same assignment, except in those disciplines that require purely descriptive titles).

CONVENTIONS

The work is properly formatted according to assignment in terms of font size, spacing, indentations, citation and reference format (usually MLA or APA), headings, title page or identifying information, etc. Quotes from sources are kept in context, and all quotations, paraphrases, conclusions, concepts, and statistics are properly cited and referenced.

a B paper

FOCUS

The thesis or argument is, generally speaking, clear. The paper does a good job of fulfilling the assignment, but doesn't reach beyond it—that is, the paper demonstrates that the writer understands the course materials but maybe has trouble applying them or making connections between the topic of the paper and the course concepts or materials. The reader comes away from the paper with a good understanding of the topic—but not much in the way of new insight into it.

DEVELOPMENT

The evidence supports the thesis but falls a little short of where it could be. Usually some aspect of the paper needs to be pushed further: some points are left without being fully discussed, conclusions aren't taken to their fullest extent, not enough examples or details are brought in; the paper is a bit unbalanced in some way. The sources used are fine, but they could be better or more fully used; or they are a bit limited in some way (too few sources are used or some sources are relied on too heavily). Quotes and other support may not be set up or discussed as fully as they could be, but they make sense. The paper might be a little too short with some obvious places that could be more fully developed, or it may be a bit too long because it tells the reader more than is necessary or contains too many examples.

ORGANIZATION

The organization of the paper moves the argument forward but seems a bit unbalanced. The paper might have a weak or standard introduction that doesn't completely set up the paper or present the thesis or argument. The conclusion might be weak or simply a summary of the paper that doesn't lead the reader to make a connection between the topic and the larger world. Some of the points could be rearranged for a more logical flow. The reader never gets lost, but the paper could do more to guide the reader, especially in terms of transitions from one paragraph to the next. The organization of the paragraphs might seem a bit formulaic, perhaps following a preset pattern that doesn't arise out of the topic.

STYLE

The paper mostly reads like a college-level paper but might not be at the right level of formality, or it could be a bit weak in using the conventions of the discipline of the course. There might be some repetition in word choice or lack of sophistication and variety in sentence structure. The title should convey the focus, but it might not be specific or unique to the paper.

CONVENTIONS

The paper contains some grammar or spelling errors but nothing distracting. The paper may have some problems in citation and reference format, though nothing that makes it difficult for the reader to track down the sources.

a C paper

FOCUS

The thesis is a little unclear or seems so obvious that there isn't much point to reading the paper; the reader may have difficulty determining the point of the paper. The paper has some difficulty sticking to the thesis or argument. The reader doesn't learn much from the paper, and it seems that the writer may not have learned much either. Some paragraphs may not have a point or may not relate to the thesis or argument. The paper shows that the writer is familiar with the concepts of the course but lacks deep understanding of them or the ability to apply them effectively. The paper may not effectively address an academic audience.

DEVELOPMENT

The evidence supports the thesis but not very well. The evidence is not very convincing, and the discussion of the points isn't very developed. Some paragraphs may make several points but only briefly and not completely (these paragraphs could perhaps be divided into several paragraphs so that each point could be fully developed). The paper is unbalanced—some points get ample discussion while others get very little, or the paper is one-sided. Some portion of the assignment is not covered or is only touched on and not dealt with in any depth. The sources are limited in number, kind, or quality (not enough sources are used, not enough kinds of sources are used, or the wrong kinds of sources are used). The paper may string together quotes without introducing or explaining them. The paper may be short and not fulfill the required page limit.

ORGANIZATION

The organization does not forward the argument or thesis. The paper has some direction, but it doesn't really go anywhere. The organization doesn't follow the assignment's suggested or required organization or doesn't follow the organization typical of the genre or inherent in the topic. The paragraphs could be reorganized without affecting what the paper says—in other words, the paragraphs don't seem to lead from one to the next but rather seem stuck together without a logical progression. The introduction doesn't set up the paper and may not contain the thesis; it just seems stuck on. The thesis or argument might be in the conclusion, in which case the writer should have taken the last paragraph and made it the first paragraph and rewritten the paper to fit the thesis or argument. The conclusion doesn't sum up the paper and seems tacked on.

STYLE

The paper doesn't read like a college paper. The writer misjudges the audience. The writer seems to choose words without understanding what they really mean. The paper deviates from "standard written English" through the use of slang, lazy language, informality, and repetition; it does not demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of style used in the discipline of the course. The paper may also suffer from overstatement. If a group paper, it reads like separate papers fused together. The paper may suffer from overuse or inappropriate use of first person ("I") or second person ("you"). The title doesn't reflect the paper, or the title is simply a statement of the topic. The paper seems to have been written in a rush with no time allowed for revision.

CONVENTIONS

The grammar and conventions errors are distracting. The citations and references deviate significantly from the style guide (MLA, APA, etc.) so that it's not clear what some of the sources are or how to track them down.

a D paper

FOCUS

There does not seem to be a thesis or an argument. The reader has to work quite a bit to figure out what the paper is about, or the reader has to make connections that are not in the paper to figure out what the writer probably intended to say. The author does not seem to understand the topic or seriously misunderstands it. The reader actively does not want to read the paper. The paper demonstrates that the author is unfamiliar with or misunderstands the concepts of the course and the nature and expectations of an academic audience.

DEVELOPMENT

The evidence does not support the thesis. Support for points is lacking, or the details are factually wrong. The paper demonstrates a lack of understanding of the purpose and use of sources. The paper may be significantly short of the required page limit.

ORGANIZATION

There is no apparent organizational pattern. Points are made in a seemingly random order or repeated in various places in the paper. The reader feels lost. The paper lacks an introduction and/or conclusion.

STYLE

The paper does not exhibit college-level writing. The voice or tone of the author is widely inconsistent or even missing. No real sense of author emerges from the paper.

CONVENTIONS

Conventions errors are very distracting. The paper is nearly unreadable due to spelling and grammar errors.

an F paper

FOCUS

The paper has no thesis or argument. It simply isn't a college paper—that is, it doesn't follow any of the conventions of academic discourse, the assumptions that guide the academic community in presenting arguments and knowledge. It may fit within a genre of writing, but it does not fit with the assigned genre (essay, report, analysis, review, etc.).

DEVELOPMENT, ORGANIZATION, STYLE

The development, organization, and style of an F paper are not relevant. A paper without a thesis or that falls outside the genre of a college paper cannot be evaluated according to development or organization. Style is irrelevant for similar reasons.

CONVENTIONS

Conventions errors make the paper unreadable. The F paper may be completely or partially plagiarized.

Academic Writing

Throughout (and beyond) your university education you will be asked to produce essays, outlines, reports, memos, reviews of research on a given topic, literary critical essays—in other words, many forms of academic writing. Writing courses at Fontbonne are designed to instruct you in the basic elements of the academic essay: establishing a focus, finding an effective sequence of evidence to develop that focus, developing unified paragraphs fully, writing clear and sophisticated sentences, and mastering the conventions of grammar and citation of sources. If you master these skills, you will be able to use them in any academic (and much non-academic) writing.

You will notice that different courses will ask you to produce different forms of writing. A university usually comprises several schools (for instance, a school of arts and sciences, a school of medicine, a school of business, a school of education, a school of business) that themselves contain several disciplines. So the school of arts and sciences may have departments of biology, chemistry, modern languages, history, philosophy, etc. Each discipline will have its own conventions and forms of academic writing which a student will have to master if that discipline is his or her major. Even when a given discipline is not a student's major, he or she should be familiar with the conventions of that discipline, especially if it is related to his or her own—for instance, a nursing major would do well to understand the guidelines for writing lab reports in biology. We cannot cover these disciplinary distinctions in this booklet; but we do want to emphasize that clarity in expression and structure is an important element in any academic writing.

Below is a statement from Harvard University's Writing Center on the academic essay. It applies just as well to us here at Fontbonne University, and you are urged to read it carefully.

OVERVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC ESSAY (FROM HARVARD)

A clear sense of argument is essential to all forms of academic writing, for writing is thought made visible. Insights and ideas that occur to us when we encounter the raw material of the world---natural phenomena like the behavior of genes, or cultural phenomena, like texts, photographs and artifacts—must be ordered in some way so others can receive them and respond in turn. This give and take is at the heart of the scholarly enterprise and makes possible that vast conversation known as civilization. Like all human ventures, the conventions of the academic essay are both logical and playful. They may vary in expression from discipline to discipline, but any good essay should show us a mind developing a thesis, supporting that thesis with evidence, deftly anticipating objections or counter-arguments, and maintaining the momentum of discovery.

Motive and Idea

An essay has to have a purpose or motive; the mere existence of an assignment or deadline is not sufficient. When you write an essay or research paper, you are never simply transferring information from one place to another, or showing that you have mastered a certain amount of material. That would be incredibly boring--and besides, it would be adding to the glut of pointless utterance. Instead, you should be trying to make the best possible case for an original idea you have arrived at after a period of research. Depending upon the field, your research may involve reading and rereading a text, performing an experiment, or carefully observing an object or behavior. By immersing yourself in the material, you begin to discover patterns and generate insights, guided by a series of unfolding questions. From a number of possibilities, one idea emerges as the most promising. You try to make sure it is original and of some importance; there is no point arguing for something already known, trivial, or widely accepted.

Thesis and Development

The essay's thesis is the main point you are trying to make, using the best evidence you can marshal. Your thesis will evolve during the course of writing drafts, but everything that happens in your essay is directed toward establishing its validity. A given assignment may not tell you that you need to come up with a thesis and defend it, but these are the unspoken requirements of any scholarly paper. Deciding upon a thesis can generate considerable anxiety. Students may think, "How can I have a new idea about a subject scholars have spent their whole lives exploring? I just read a few books in the last few days, and now I'm supposed to be an expert?" But you can be original on different scales. We can't possibly know everything that has been, or is being, thought or written by everyone in the world—even given the vastness and speed of the Internet. What is required is a rigorous, good faith effort to establish originality, given the demands of the assignment and the discipline. It is a good exercise throughout the writing process to stop periodically and reformulate your thesis as succinctly as possible so someone in another field could understand its meaning as well as its importance. A thesis can be relatively complex, but you should be able to distill its essence. This does not mean you have to give the game away right from the start. Guided by a clear understanding of the point you wish to argue, you can spark your reader's curiosity by first asking questions—the very questions that may have guided you in your research—and carefully building a case for the validity of your idea. Or you can start with a provocative observation, inviting your audience to follow your own path of discovery.

The Tension of Argument

Argument implies tension but not combative fireworks. This tension comes from the fundamental asymmetry between the one who wishes to persuade and those who must be persuaded. The common ground they share is reason. Your objective is to make a case so that any reasonable person would be convinced of the reasonableness of your thesis. The first task, even before you start to write, is gathering and ordering evidence, classifying it by kind and strength. You might decide to move from the smallest piece of evidence to the most impressive. Or you might start with the most convincing, then mention other supporting details afterward. You could hold back a surprising piece of evidence until the very end. In any case, it is important to review evidence that could be used against your idea and generate responses to anticipated objections. This is the crucial concept of counter-argument. If nothing can be said against an idea, it is probably obvious or vacuous. (And if too much can be said against it, it's time for another thesis.) By not indicating an awareness of possible objections, you might seem to be hiding something, and your argument will be weaker as a consequence. You should also become familiar with the various fallacies that can undermine an argument—the "straw man" fallacy, fallacies of causation and of analogy, etc.—and strive to avoid them.

The Structure of Argument

The heart of the academic essay is persuasion, and the structure of your argument plays a vital role in this. To persuade, you must set the stage, provide a context, and decide how to reveal your evidence. Of course, if you are addressing a community of specialists, some aspects of a shared context can be taken for granted. But clarity is always a virtue. The essay's objective should be described swiftly, by posing a question that will lead to your thesis, or making a thesis statement. There is considerable flexibility about when and where this happens, but within the first page or two, we should know where we are going, even if some welcome suspense is preserved. In the body of the paper, merely listing evidence without any discernible logic of presentation is a common mistake. What might suffice in conversation is too informal for an essay. If the point being made is lost in a welter of specifics, the argument falters. The most common argumentative structure in English prose is deductive: starting off with a generalization or assertion, and then providing support for it. This pattern can be used to order a paragraph as well as an entire essay. Another possible structure is inductive: facts, instances or observations can be reviewed, and the conclusion to be drawn from them follows. There is no blueprint for a successful essay; the best ones show us a focused mind making sense of some manageable aspect of the world, a mind where insightfulness, reason, and clarity are joined.

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Argument

How can I know what I think until I see what I've said?
E.M. Forster

WHAT IS ARGUMENT?

Almost all of the writing assignments in your university classes (and many other classes) will ask you to make an argument (also called a "thesis" or a "claim") or to develop a focused idea. The material in this section will emphasize argument (though not all academic writing will ask you to make an argument). An argument technically occupies the whole intellectual space of your essay—the claim(s), the reason(s), the assumptions underlying your claim(s), the evidence presented, the presentation of counter-arguments)—but we will focus here on the statement of argument. We encourage you to try to structure your arguments with both a claim and a reason.

Let's say we want to argue that grades should be abolished at the university level. We know what our claim is (grades should in fact be abolished), but our argument will be a lot stronger if we can attach a good reason.

claim: Universities should no longer use a system of letter or number grades.
reason: Grades are not an accurate measure of students' abilities and therefore unfairly penalize some students and erroneously reward others.

If we connect these in one sentence using the word "because" we have a strong argument.

You also need to think about the *assumptions* embedded in your arguments. In the above example, both the writer and the readers must take it for granted (we must *assume*) that measuring students' abilities accurately is not only a worthwhile goal but also one that is central to the purpose of the university. If we didn't think accurate measurements of ability were important, we wouldn't care enough to make (or read) this argument.

Here is another example in which a student moves from a topic to a general argument to a specific argument.

not an argument: The relationship between poverty and crime.
(**This is a topic**.)

half an argument: Poverty generates crime.
(**This has a claim but no reason**.)

full argument: <u>underline</u> = claim; *italics* = reason(s)
<u>Poverty generates crime</u> *because it degrades the human spirit, thereby creating pathological behavior*.
(**This argument has both a claim and a reason—though note that it is a very broad argument**.)

more specific <u>The conditions of schools in poor urban environments generate crime among youth</u> *because the school is a symbol of the larger society*—a society that does not seem to care about poor youth. *Young people are sensitive to this neglect*—a message that is all the more powerful when it is conveyed in an institution that is supposedly devoted to human development—*and respond to it by rebelling against the system that tells them they are unworthy of better treatment*.
(**This argument would be more appropriate for a long essay; the former argument would require a book to develop adequately**.)

Once you are comfortable with your argument, you can start outlining your essay. You need to plan what material you are going to include in your essay to support that argument. Remember that each paragraph should have a distinct sub-topic, which you should explore as fully as possible and which should clearly develop the argument (see the section on paragraph development). A strong statement of argument is only the beginning of a strong essay; you must develop it fully throughout the essay.

THREE MAJOR CLASSES OF ARGUMENT

These are not the only types of argument, but they are common types in academic writing. In some readings you may see varying combinations of these arguments, and you may also be asked to combine them, depending upon the assignment.

1) **arguments of analysis and interpretation** (*including arguments of definition*)
What is the nature or essence of something (an event, a work of art, a cultural practice, etc.)? What is its meaning? How did it come about? What effect does it have? What do we learn when we apply a given theory to a situation or artifact? (Many kinds of academic writing involve arguments of analysis and interpretation.)

2) **arguments recommending a course of action**
What should we do about something (a social problem, a complex issue, etc.)?

3) **arguments of evaluation**
How positive or negative, useful or not useful, artistic or not artistic, original or not original (etc.) is something (a work of art, a cultural practice, a social trend, a political stance, etc.)?

The Why Factor
All of these arguments have a "why factor"—why you are arguing what you are arguing. The "why factor" is what gets developed throughout the essay. It should be highlighted, as well, in the concluding section of your essay.

What follows is an excerpt from an explication of argument from the writing center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You should read it carefully. The material presented here is crucial not only for your success in writing classes but also for your success in your university education. Please ask questions about this material if something is unclear.

Arguments are everywhere

You may be surprised to hear that the word "argument" does not have to be written anywhere in your assignment for it to be an important part of your task. In fact, making an argument—expressing a point of view on a subject and supporting it with evidence—is often the aim of academic writing. Your instructors may assume that you know this fact, and therefore they may not explain its importance to you in class. Nevertheless, if your writing assignment asks you to respond to reading and discussion in class, your instructor likely expects you to produce an argument in your paper. Most material you learn in college is or has been debated by someone, somewhere, at some time. Even when the material you read or hear is presented as simple "information" or "fact," it may actually be one person's interpretation of a set of information or facts. In your writing, instructors may call on you to question that interpretation and either defend it, refute it, or offer some new view of your own. In writing assignments, you will almost always need to do more than just present information that you have gathered or regurgitate information that was discussed in class. You will need to select a point of view and provide evidence (in other words, use "argument") to shape the material and offer your interpretation of the material.

If you think that "fact," not argument, rules intelligent thinking, consider these examples. At one point, the "great minds" of Western Europe firmly believed the Earth was flat. They had discussions about how obviously true this "fact" was. You are able to disagree now because people who saw that argument as faulty set out to make a better argument and proved it. The more recent O.J. Simpson trial provides another

example. Both the prosecution and the defense used DNA testing but in totally different ways. The prosecution brought in DNA experts to prove that DNA testing was good evidence, while the defense called other experts to prove it was poor evidence. Differences of opinion are how human knowledge develops, and scholars like your instructors spend their lives engaged in debate over what may be counted as "true," "real," or "right" in their fields. In their courses, they want you to engage in similar kinds of critical thinking and debate in your writing. Argumentation is not just what your instructors do. We all use argumentation on a daily basis, and you probably already have some skill at crafting an argument. The more you improve your skills in this area, the better you will be at thinking critically, reasoning, making choices, and weighing evidence.

Making a Claim

What is an argument? In academic writing, an argument is usually a main idea, often called a "claim" or "thesis statement," backed up with evidence that supports the idea. Ninety-nine percent of the time you will need to make some sort of claim and use evidence to support it, and your ability to do this well will separate your papers from those of students who see assignments as mere accumulations of fact and detail. In other words, gone are the happy days of being given a "topic" about which you can write anything. It is time to stake out a position and prove why it is a good position for a thinking person to hold.

Claims can be as simple as "protons are positively charged and electrons are negatively charged," with evidence such as, "In this experiment, protons and electrons acted in such and such a way." Claims can also be as complex as "the end of the South African system of apartheid was inevitable," using reasoning and evidence such as, "Every successful revolution in the modern era has come about after the government in power has given and then removed small concessions to the uprising group." In either case, the rest of your paper will detail reasons and facts that have led you to believe that your position is best.

When beginning to write a paper, ask yourself, "What is my point"? For example, the point of this handout is to help you become a better writer, and we are arguing that an important step in the process of writing argumentation is understanding the concept of argumentation. If your papers do not have a main point, they cannot be arguing for anything. Asking yourself what your point is can help you avoid a mere "information dump." Consider this: Your instructors probably know a lot more than you do about your subject matter. Why, then, would you want to provide them with material they already know? Instructors are usually looking for two things:

- **Proof that you understand the material, AND**
- **A demonstration of your ability to use or apply the material beyond what you have read or heard.**

This second part can be done in many ways: You can critique the material, or apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. In order to achieve this second step, though, you must have a particular point to argue.

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Essay Structure (part 1)

This section covers the basic structure of short academic essays. **Longer essays will require a more complex structure than represented here**. You may need, for instance, a whole introductory section (rather than one paragraph) in which you provide essential background material or perhaps review the current research on the topic about which you are making an argument. But this basic structure will be present in most academic writing: (1) an introductory section (one to several paragraphs), in which the author makes a claim and provides context for the topic; (2) the body of the essay, in which the author presents evidence in logical order to develop or substantiate that claim (which may include presenting previous research on the topic); and (3) a concluding section, in which the author reminds readers why this topic and argument are important, what further questions or research might be done, and what are the larger implications of the material presented.

BASIC ESSAY STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

A well developed introductory paragraph has all or most of the features listed below.

- It gets the reader's interest right away with an engaging opening sentence.
- It establishes a context for the subject of essay, including commonly held views, stereotypes, or other attitudes against which you will be arguing.
- It establishes your argument.
- It defines terms or explains how you are using certain terms so that the reader can fully understand the scope of your argument.
- It gives an overview of how your argument will be developed, a sketch of what material the essay will include and why it will include this material.

BODY PARAGRAPHS

- Each body paragraph discusses ONE (and only one) sub-topic that you develop in support of your overall argument. If my argument is that grading should be abolished because grades are not an accurate measure of students' abilities, then perhaps I would devote one paragraph to grades in English classes. I would argue that some students could do very well on tests that include in-class essay-writing but that other students, who are perhaps excellent writers, would do poorly on such exams because of test anxiety and other factors. So I would be making a small sub-argument about grades in English courses to support my larger argument that grades should be abolished.
- Each body paragraph should have a topic sentence that makes clear the topic of the paragraph and how it helps support your main argument. An example of a topic sentence for the above example would be "Writing is one area in which students' abilities need to be assessed through a variety of methods; in courses that ask students to produce time writing, for examples, grades will not be an accurate measure of those students' writing skills." These topic sentences should also provide a bridge to the previous paragraph.
- In longer essays some body paragraphs may be devoted to somewhat different purposes, such as providing essential background, reviewing past and current research, and presenting counter-arguments.

CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

The concluding paragraph does more than restate your argument and recap the supporting evidence you have presented (though it should do that subtly and quickly). A well developed concluding paragraph has the following features.

- It summarizes how evidence paragraphs have supported argument.
- It discusses the implications of your argument (what policies might be changed, actions taken, etc.). What other issues might we think of differently as a result of having read your essay?
- It discusses possible further research or considerations.
- It indicates why it is important to think about the issues you raise.

Essay Structure (part 2)

This material below expands what you learned in "Essay Structure (Part 1)." The first item, an excellent explanation of the movements of an academic essay, is from the writing center at Harvard University.

ESSAY STRUCTURE

Writing an academic essay means fashioning a coherent set of ideas into an argument. Because essays are essentially linear—they offer one idea at a time—they must present their ideas in the order that makes most sense to a reader. Successfully structuring an essay means attending to a reader's logic. The focus of such an essay predicts its structure. It dictates the information readers need to know and the order in which they need to receive it. Thus your essay's structure is necessarily unique to the main claim you're making. Although there are guidelines for constructing certain classic essay types (e.g., comparative analysis), there are no set formulas.

Answering Questions: The Parts of an Essay

A typical essay contains many different kinds of information, often located in specialized parts or sections. Even short essays perform several different operations: introducing the argument, analyzing data, raising counter-arguments, concluding. Introductions and conclusions have fixed places, but other parts don't. Counter-argument, for example, may appear within a paragraph, as a free-standing section, as part of the beginning, or before the ending. Background material (historical context or biographical information, a summary of relevant theory or criticism, the definition of a key term) often appears at the beginning of the essay, between the introduction and the first analytical section, but might also appear near the beginning of the specific section to which it's relevant. It's helpful to think of the different essay sections as answering a series of questions your reader might ask when encountering your thesis. (Readers should have questions. If they don't, your thesis is most likely simply an observation of fact, not an arguable claim.)

"What?" The first question to anticipate from a reader is "what": What evidence shows that the phenomenon described by your thesis is true? To answer the question you must examine your evidence, thus demonstrating the truth of your claim. This "what" or "demonstration" section comes early in the essay, often directly after the introduction. Since you're essentially reporting what you've observed, this is the part you might have most to say about when you first start writing. But be forewarned: it shouldn't take up much more than a third (often much less) of your finished essay. If it does, the essay will lack balance and may read as mere summary or description.

"How?" A reader will also want to know whether the claims of the thesis are true in all cases. The corresponding question is "how": How does the thesis stand up to the challenge of a counter-argument? How does the introduction of new material—a new way of looking at the evidence, another set of sources—affect the claims you're making? Typically, an essay will include at least one "how" section. (Call it "complication" since you're responding to a reader's complicating questions.) This section usually comes after the "what," but keep in mind that an essay may complicate its argument several times depending on its length, and that counter-argument alone may appear just about anywhere in an essay.

"Why?" Your reader will also want to know what's at stake in your claim: Why does your interpretation of a phenomenon matter to anyone beside you? This question addresses the larger implications of your thesis. It allows your readers to understand your essay within a larger context. In answering "why", your essay explains its own significance. Although you might gesture at this question in your introduction, the fullest answer to it properly belongs at your essay's end. If you leave it out, your readers will experience your essay as unfinished—or, worse, as pointless or insular.

Mapping an Essay

Structuring your essay according to a reader's logic means examining your thesis and anticipating what a reader needs to know, and in what sequence, in order to grasp and be convinced by your argument as it unfolds. The easiest way to do this is to map the essay's ideas via a written narrative. Such an account will give you a preliminary record of your ideas, and will allow you to remind yourself at every turn of the reader's needs in understanding your idea.

Essay maps ask you to predict where your reader will expect background information, counter-argument, close analysis of a primary source, or a turn to secondary source material. Essay maps are not concerned with paragraphs so much as with sections of an essay. They anticipate the major argumentative moves you expect your essay to make. Try making your map like this:

- ❒ State your thesis in a sentence or two, then write another sentence saying why it's important to make that claim. Indicate, in other words, what a reader might learn by exploring the claim with you. Here you're anticipating your answer to the "why" question that you'll eventually flesh out in your conclusion.

- ❒ Begin your next sentence like this: "To be convinced by my claim, the first thing a reader needs to know is . . ." Then say why that's the first thing a reader needs to know, and name one or two items of evidence you think will make the case. This will start you off on answering the "what" question. (Alternately, you may find that the first thing your reader needs to know is some background information.)

- ❒ Begin each of the following sentences like this: "The next thing my reader needs to know is..." Once again, say why, and name some evidence. Continue until you've mapped out your essay.

Your map should naturally take you through some preliminary answers to the basic questions of what, how, and why. It is not a contract, though—the order in which the ideas appear is not a rigid one. Essay maps are flexible; they evolve with your ideas.

Signs of Trouble

A common structural flaw in college essays is the "walk-through" (also labeled "summary" or "description"). Walk-through essays follow the structure of their sources rather than establishing their own. Such essays generally have a descriptive thesis rather than an argumentative one. Be wary of paragraph openers that lead off with "time" words ("first," "next," "after," "then") or "listing" words ("also," "another," "in addition"). Although they don't always signal trouble, these paragraph openers often indicate that an essay's thesis and structure need work: they suggest that the essay simply reproduces the chronology of the source text (in the case of time words: first this happens, then that, and afterwards another thing . . .) or simply lists example after example ("In addition, the use of color indicates another way that the painting differentiates between good and evil").

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source: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Structure.html
downloaded: 26 August 2004

Paragraph Development

The material that follows on paragraph development is important and useful to you in all your academic writing. Frequently, beginning university students either don't develop paragraphs fully enough or fail to create unified paragraphs. Here are a few pointers.

- A well developed paragraph is usually at least half a double-spaced typed page in a standard 12-point font (and usually not longer than ¾ a double-spaced typed page). Of course there can be variation. But if you need a guideline, this is a good one.

- A well developed paragraph has unity of topic and purpose. It would not, for instance, in an essay arguing for the abolition of grades at the university level, try to review previous research about university grade-point averages and success in the working world and provide evidence about the psychological effects of low grades on students. Both points may well develop the overall argument, but each topic needs its own space.

- Make sure you can answer this question: What is the purpose of this paragraph with respect to the development of my argument?

- A reader can almost always see when an essay has no logical structure by looking at the layout of the paragraphs. Lots of two- and three-sentence paragraphs or a 5-page essay with only two paragraphs will alert the reader that the essay has a serious structural problem.

- Time spent making a detailed outline and revising the outline for logical coherence and progression is time very well spent.

For my imaginary essay— in which I argue that grades at the university level should be abolished because they do not accurately measure students' abilities—I will want to create an outline that allows me to present some crucial background information (which may well require several paragraphs), present evidence that helps develop my argument, and suggests the implications of my argument for policy or for further research. The hardest part to outline is the middle section, in which I will provide the substantiating evidence for my argument. I will have to find evidence that grades are inaccurate (perhaps in a few different disciplines), say why they are inaccurate, and move on to discuss the effects that grading has (because I have argued that some students are unfairly punished while others are unfairly rewarded). I can't rush through any of this—so we might be looking at between 10 and 20 paragraphs just for that middle section. No matter how much material I am covering, however, **I must make sure that each paragraph has a clear purpose** with respect to my argument (for example, "Paragraph 12 describes the range of reactions students have to low grades and explains why those reactions interfere with the learning process.").

from the writing center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

FIVE-STEPS OF PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

1. CONTROLLING IDEA- the expression of the main idea, topic, or focus of the paragraph in a sentence or a collection of sentences.

Paragraph development begins with the formulation of the controlling idea. This idea directs the paragraph's development. Often, the controlling idea of a paragraph will appear in the form of a topic sentence. A topic sentence announces and controls the content of a paragraph (Rosen and Behrens 122).

Here's how you might begin a paragraph on handing in homework:

IDEA - *Learning how to turn in homework assignments on time is one of the invaluable skills that college students can take with them into the working world.*

2. EXPLANATION OF CONTROLLING IDEA- Paragraph development continues with an expression of the rationale or the explanation that the writer gives for how the reader should interpret the information presented in the idea statement or topic sentence of the paragraph. Here's the sentence that would follow the controlling idea about homework deadlines:

EXPLANATION - *Though the work force may not assign homework to its workers in the traditional sense, many of the objectives and jobs that need to be completed require that employees work with deadlines. The deadlines that students encounter in the classroom may be different in content when compared to the deadlines of the work force, but the importance of meeting those deadlines is the same. In fact, failure to meet deadlines in both the classroom and the workforce can mean instant termination.*

3. EXAMPLE – (We show two here, but you can have more.)
Paragraph development progresses with the expression of some type of support or evidence for the idea and the explanation that came before it. Here are two examples that you might use to follow the homework deadline explanation:

EXAMPLE A--*For example, in the classroom, students form a contract with the teacher and the university when they enroll in a class. That contract requires that students complete the assignments and objectives set forth by the course's instructor in a specified time to receive a grade and credit for the course.*

EXAMPLE B--*Accordingly, just as a student risks termination in the classroom if he/she fails to meet the deadline for a homework assignment, so, too, does that student risk termination in the work force.*

4. EXPLANATION (of EXAMPLE) (We show two here, but you can have more.)
The next movement in paragraph development is an explanation of each example and its relevance to the topic sentence and rationale given at the beginning of the paragraph. This pattern continues until all points/examples that the reader deems necessary have been made and explained. NONE of your examples should be left unexplained; the relationship between the example and the idea should always be expressed. Look at these two explanations for examples in the homework deadline paragraph:

EXPLANATION FOR EXAMPLE A--*When a student fails to complete those assignments by the deadline, the student breaks her contract with the university and the teacher to complete the assignments and objectives of the course. This often leaves the teacher with no recourse than to fail the student and leaves the university with no other recourse than to terminate the student's credit for the course.*

EXPLANATION FOR EXAMPLE B--*A former student's contract with his/her employer functions in much the same way as the contract that student had with his/her instructor and with the university in a particular course.*

5. COMPLETION OF PARAGRAPH'S IDEA
The final movement in paragraph development involves tying up the loose ends of the paragraph--and reminding the reader of the relevance of the information in this paragraph to the main or controlling idea of the paper. You might feel more comfortable, however, simply transitioning your reader to the next development in the next paragraph. Here's an example of a sentence that completes the homework deadlines paragraph:
IDEA-*Developing good habits of turning in assignments in class now, as current students, will aid your performance and position as future participants in the working world.*

Beneath the Formula for Paragraph Development

Transitions

Transitions come in the form of single words, phrases, sentences, and even whole paragraphs. They help to establish relationships between ideas in a paragraph and to create a logical progression of those ideas in a paragraph. Without transitions, your paragraph will not be unified, coherent, or well developed. Look at the following paragraph and the transitions that it uses from idea to idea (in bold and underscored print):

> Juggling the demands of a job with the demands of being a full-time student makes good academic performance difficult. Many students are forced to choose between good work on the job and good work in the classroom. **Often**, good work in the classroom is compromised for good work on the job because the job pays the rent. **In addition**, those students who do manage to perform well in both areas usually do so at the expense of their health. **For example**, several students complain of the inability to handle the stress of both a job and school. **In fact**, the stress of both can often cause headaches, dizziness, fatigue, and other ailments which slow the body down and prevent adequate performance in either area. **To eliminate the threat of being in the middle between job and school**, students have to form a balance between the demands of work and the demands of the classroom. **Ultimately**, managing your time more effectively, working the same number of hours in smaller chunks, and planning ahead can all help in alleviating some of the stress to the body and to the mind.

In Review…

Paragraph development is more than just a few sentences that occupy the same space in a paper, it is an organic process that makes intricate links between various ideas. These links, ultimately, create one single idea that runs throughout the entire paper. There are many different components of the paragraph development model. All of your paragraphs should have one central idea, the idea should have a discussion of how it works, the explanation should be shown in an example, the example should be explained, and the final idea should be reiterated while preparing the reader for the development to come. Awareness and utilization of all of these components will help to make your paragraphs more unified, more coherent, and most importantly, better developed.

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SEE ADDENDUM ON NEXT PAGE

addendum to section on paragraph development

Below is what the finished paragraph would look like when a student hands it in (12-point font, double-spaced, first line indented). Of course, it would be just one paragraph in a longer essay on, for instance, the skills learned in college that apply well in the workforce. The **argument** for that essay (the point of which it is trying to convince its readers) could be that a college education is as useful for the non-academic skills it teaches students as for the academic content of its courses and programs. The importance of learning how to comply with deadlines would be one example used to develop that argument. Keep in mind, then, that the following paragraph could not be the **introductory** or **concluding** paragraph of the essay; it is one of the supporting **body paragraphs** of the essay. What other examples could be developed into other body paragraphs to help support the argument given above? What content might the introductory and concluding paragraphs include?

Learning how to turn in homework assignments on time is one of the invaluable skills that college students can take with them into the working world. Though the work force may not assign homework to its workers in the traditional sense, many of the objectives and jobs that need to be completed require that employees work with deadlines. The deadlines that students encounter in the classroom may be different in content when compared to the deadlines of the work force, but the importance of meeting those deadlines is the same. In fact, failure to meet deadlines in both the classroom and the work force can mean instant termination. For example, in the classroom, students form a contract with the teacher and the university when they enroll in a class. That contract requires that students complete the assignments and objectives set forth by the course's instructor in a specified time to receive a grade and credit for the course. Accordingly, just as a student risks termination in the classroom if he/she fails to meet the deadline for a homework assignment, so, too, does that student risk termination in the work force. When a student fails to complete those assignments by the deadline, the student breaks her contract with the university and the teacher to complete the assignments and objectives of the course. This often leaves the teacher with no other recourse than to fail the student and leaves the university with no other recourse than to terminate the student's credit for the course. Developing good habits of turning in assignments in class now, as current students, will aid your performance and position as future participants in the working world.

Topic Sentences

Topic sentences are usually the first sentence of a paragraph, though they do not have to be. We might also sometimes see the first few sentences collectively serving the purpose of a topic sentence. Topic sentences provide transition from the previous paragraph, announce the sub-topic of a paragraph, and make a mini-argument in support of the larger argument of the whole essay.

Let's use the example from the section on paragraph development. We imagined that the argument for the whole essay is that a college education is as useful for the non-academic skills it teaches students as for the academic content of its courses and programs. In that section we developed, step by step, a paragraph to help support that argument. I have underlined the topic sentence (and I've revised it slightly to add a little bit of TRANSITION, imagining that it is perhaps the second body paragraph). You'll see that the second sentence serves as an extension or explanation of the topic sentence.

Learning how to turn in homework assignments on time is ANOTHER invaluable skill that college students can take with them into the working world. Though the work force may not assign homework to its workers in the traditional sense, many of the objectives and jobs that need to be completed require that employees work with deadlines. The deadlines that students encounter in the classroom may be different in content when compared to the deadlines of the work force, but the importance of meeting those deadlines is the same. In fact, failure to meet deadlines in both the classroom and the work force can mean instant termination. For example, in the classroom, students form a contract with the teacher and the university when they enroll in a class. That contract requires that students complete the assignments and objectives set forth by the course's instructor in a specified time to receive a grade and credit for the course. Accordingly, just as a student risks termination in the classroom if he/she fails to meet the deadline for a homework assignment, so, too, does that student risk termination in the work force. When a student fails to complete those assignments by the deadline, the student breaks her contract with the university and the teacher to complete the assignments and objectives of the course. This often leaves the teacher with no other recourse than to fail the student and leaves the university with no other recourse than to terminate the student's credit for the course. Developing good habits of turning in assignments in class now, as current students, will aid your performance and position as future participants in the working world.

Titles

Titles serve two main purposes: (1) to make your reader want to read your essay and (2) to give your reader some hint of what to expect with respect to your topic and your argument.

If am writing an essay in which I am arguing that the Disney film *The Little Mermaid* vilifies female power, I want a title that indicates that interesting argument in some catchy way. (Note that this kind of argument is an *interpretive argument*.)

stinky titles

Disney's *The Little Mermaid*

Essay #3

Film Analysis

O.K. titles

Female Power in *The Little Mermaid*

Why the Mermaid is Little

Voice and Authority in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*

better titles

Why the Mermaid is Little: The Vilification of Female Power in Disney's *Little Mermaid*

Sea Witch Got Your Tongue?: The Ambivalent Representation of Female Voice and Authority in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*

All Legged Up and Nowhere to Go: The Fear of Female Power in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*

Punctuation

This section will focus on run-ons, the single I most common grammatical error in beginning college writing (though this section covers several other situations). You should refer to this as you revise your written work.

- The most important feature of a sentence with respect to its punctuation is the number of independent clauses it contains.

- An **independent clause** is one that can stand on its own as a complete sentence.

- There are two types of conjunctions that can connect independent clauses: **strong** (or coordinating) conjunctions and **weak** (or subordinating) conjunctions. The most common strong conjunctions are ***and***, ***but***, ***nor***, ***or***; common weak conjunctions (among *many* others) are ***however***, ***therefore***, ***moreover***, ***nevertheless***.

- If you have a sentence with two independent clauses connected by a strong conjunction, you need add only a comma. (Note that both parts of the sentence could stand alone as their own sentences.)
  Ex.: The house caught fire, and several men in tutus came tumbling out the door.

- If you have two independent clauses connected by a weak conjunction you must use a semi-colon.
  Ex.: I don't understand you; moreover, I don't want to understand you.

- Any sentence with more than two independent clauses is a run-on sentence if only commas are used to separate the clauses.
  Ex.: [this is a run-on!] Sally went to the store, and Jill went to the movies, but Brenda stayed home.

  A semi-colon must be used in the logical place, or a new sentence must be created.
  Ex.: She had never been to a circus , nor had she ever participated in a political rally ; but she was to discover the two experiences simultaneously.
  or She had never been to a circus , nor had she ever participated in a political rally. But she was about to discover the two experiences simultaneously.

- When the subject of the clauses does not change and is not repeated no comma is needed.
  Ex.: I have neither resisted temptation nor delivered anyone from evil.
  I went to dinner last night and then saw a movie.

- When "however" is used as an editorial aside it must be enclosed in commas.
  Ex.: It must be said, however, that I am a generous mistress and rarely stoop to beating my minions.

- Dashes should be used sparingly, but they can be very effective.
  Ex.: Although I searched for hours, I found nothing of use in the 500 reference works I consulted—nothing, that is, but the usual trappings of the feeble academic mind: cowardice, fragile logic, and pomposity.
  A comma could also be used in this case, but the dash is really more appropriate.

- Multiple adjectives must be separated by commas (see example below).

- Hyphens are used when two words that do not grammatically belong in sequence are used as single part of speech (see example below).

- Dependent clauses that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence must be set off by commas (see example below).

  Ex.: Electronic mail is a quick, cost-effective alternative to the postal service, whose administration is aghast at the popularity of the new technology.

Why We Use Sources

For the most part, the requirements of academic research and the essays you will be asked to write at the university go well beyond what you were asked to do in high school (which was often to assemble some information on a given topic). Here you will often be asked to develop a point of view (an argument) about a specific topic or issue and to support that point of view with researched evidence (as opposed to anecdotal evidence—though you can, in some circumstances, also use anecdotal evidence or even, as with the first essay for this class, your own experience to develop your argument).

The best way to demonstrate how you will be using academic research is to use an example. Let's say a student wants to argue that "social promotion" is a terrible mistake especially in primary education because students should master the basic skills taught at that level before moving on to secondary education (junior high and high school). (Probably the student will have to narrow the focus a bit more, but we won't worry about that now.) Following are some fictional examples of sources and how the writer might use them.

A) A writer sometimes uses sources to define important terms.
An scholar of educational law, Jorge Sabio, playing on the word "appropriate," defines "social promotion" as the "advancement of students to age-appropriate grade levels without appropriate consideration of their academic skill level" (38).

B) A writer sometimes uses sources to provide important background information about the topic he or she is researching.
As Salazar reports in her historical overview of twentieth-century public schooling in the U.S., "The phenomenon of social promotion in U.S. public schools is a relatively new one. As late as 1975 school regulations and some federal and state laws made it virtually impossible for a student with seriously substandard skills to pass to the next grade level. The unraveling of rigor over the last thirty years is the tragic story of public education in the U.S." (74).

C) A writer sometimes uses sources to provide arguments that help support his or her own argument. The arguments quoted may deal with a slightly different topic or approach.
Eleanor Glass, a sociologist of higher education, demonstrates, with painstaking precision and persuasive statistical evidence, that students entering universities today are far less prepared than they were twenty years ago. Towards the conclusion of her study, she attributes some of this problem to the phenomenon of social promotion: "Obviously, we need to look closely at what secondary, and perhaps even primary, schools are doing with students who are not mastering basic skills. If students are being passed along from grade to grade without having to show evidence that they can make use of the skills practiced in one context in a new and more sophisticated context, how can we expect them suddenly to be able to read and write at a college level?" (68).

D) A writer sometimes uses sources to provide a point of view very different from or even the opposite of his or her own in order to show that there are, in fact, two (or more) sides to the issue.
Georgette Bushwhacker, a social worker and scholar in the sociology of education, claims that "a consideration of the social damage created by keeping a child back when his or her classmates are advancing should clearly outweigh the academic disadvantages of social promotion as we make policies for public schooling in this country" (126). *In this case, the writer may wish to include more evidence to show that there is some pain caused by keeping a child back—of course, the writer would not want to make that evidence the focus of the essay.*

E) A writer sometimes uses sources to provide statistical information or other kinds of data that will help support his or her argument.

The 2003 edition of the *Almanac of Public Education in the United States* provides the following startling statistics: "In 2002, across all public elementary schools, 8.5% of students were required to repeat the grade they had just finished" (746), but "32% of all students entering the seventh grade showed substandard skill levels in reading, writing, and mathematics, according to a variety of standardized tests" (812).

A FEW GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING SOURCES

1) If you are unsure of how to summarize or paraphrase sources correctly, use only direct quotes, even for statistics.
2) Do not dump quotes in without introducing them with signal phrases (do not, therefore, put authors' names in parentheses following quotes).
3) Do not end a paragraph with a quote; you should always comment on it somehow or make clear its relevance.
4) Try to make sure quotes are grammatically embedded.
   incorrect: Mathers describes the schools as "they were falling down around the students' heads" (188).
   correct: Mathers describes the schools as "falling down around the students' heads" (188).

FOOTNOTE

Q. Why do we use bibliographic standards like the MLA or APA?

A. We use them so that our readers can easily find the sources to which we are referring; if that information were not given in a standardized format, we would all have great difficulty finding the sources our own.

Steps in the Research Essay

Once you have decided upon a topic and drafted a preliminary argument, try following the steps below to make the research essay project more manageable. Note that these steps may occur with a slightly different ordering.

1) **initial research**, including browsing the library's academic databases, especially EBSCO Host, JSTOR, and LEXIS NEXIS, and perhaps also trying a few general internet searches

2) **tightening (or revising) the argument** and drafting the introductory paragraph

3) **outlining**

4) **focused research**; annotated bibliography

5) **gathering other sources** (examples: interviews with teachers and students, the student's own experience if applicable, interviews with professionals in the field)

5) **revising the outline** to include sources

6) **extracting material**, direct quotes, statistics, etc., **from sources** and typing them up in a separate file, noting by each entry the source and page number from which it came as well as where and how it will be used (using the outline as a guide)

7) **drafting** the essay

8) **revising** the essay

9) **compiling** the page of references in a standard format (MLA, APA, etc.)

10) thorough **proofreading**, especially for correct in-text citation

Paraphrase, Summary, Quotation

You will include sources in a researched essay in a number of ways. This section reviews the techniques of paraphrases (same idea as the source in different words), summary (condensation of the material presented in the source in one's own words), and direct quotation (taking material verbatim from a source and enclosing that material in quotes. All three techniques require you to add a parenthetical reference at the end of sentence or phrase in question and to include that source in your list of references.

Guidelines for writing paraphrases:

1. Say what the source says, but no more.
2. Reproduce the source's order of ideas and emphases.
3. Use your own words, phrasing, and sentence structure to restate the material.
4. Read over your sentences to make sure that they do not distort the source's meaning.
5. Expect your material to be as long as, and possibly longer than, the original.
6. As you take notes, record all documentation facts about your source.
7. Provide correct parenthetical citation after paraphrased material.

Guidelines for writing summaries:

1. Identify the main points and condense them without losing the essence of the material.
2. Use your own words to condense the message.
3. Keep your summary short.
4. Avoid plagiarism.
5. As you take notes, record all documentation facts about your source so that you can prevent plagiarism.
6. Provide correct parenthetical citation after summarized material.

Guidelines for using quotations:

1. Use quotations from authorities in your subject to *support* what you say, not to present your thesis or main points.
2. Select quotations that fit your message.
3. Choose a quotation only if
   a. its language is particularly appropriate or distinctive
   b. its idea is particularly hard to paraphrase accurately
   c. the authority of the source is especially important to support your argument
4. Quote accurately.
5. Work quotations smoothly into your writing.
6. Document your source. Set off quotations with quotation marks.

Paraphrase exercise:

Original:

A good street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wish for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment, or help from the people around. This balance is largely made up of small, sensibly managed details, practiced and accepted so casually that they normally seem taken for granted.

Unacceptable paraphrase:

A good neighborhood maintains its impressive balance between the people being determined to have privacy and wishing for varying degrees of contact, pleasure, or assistance from others nearby. People managed this with small details that are normally taken for granted (Jacobs 141).

Acceptable paraphrase:

When people want to create a sense of neighborhood where they live, they need to balance their interest in privacy with their desire for knowing their neighbors. Practically without being conscious of it, people manage the details of their lives to achieve the balance they need (Jacobs 141).

Summary exercise:

Original:

The manner in which we respond to negative criticism is a clue to the level of our self-esteem, which in turn is a good index to the degree of our fear of success. If we harbor a feeling of inadequacy, as many of us do, about something, no matter how slight, negative criticism can wipe us out. Many of us carry too many internalized low-esteem messages from the past, negative things our parents or siblings or teachers or schoolday peers said to us.

Unacceptable summary:

Many people harbor feelings of low self-esteem as a result of internalized negative messages the past, and if people respond badly to negative criticism, no matter how slight, it indicates a low level of self-esteem, which is also an excellent index of their fear of success (Friedman 68).

Acceptable summary:

When people respond badly to negative criticism, they are revealing poor self-esteem that usually results from childhood experience and that indicates that they are afraid of success (Friedman 68).

[From the Lynn Troyka, *Simon and Schuster Concise Handbook*, revised printing, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992.]

Integrating Quotations

Use accurate, descriptive signal phrases to introduce quotes into your essay. We provide some examples below (the signal phrases are underlined). Note that a quotation can be included by setting it off from the structure of your own sentence (as in *c* and *d* below) or by including it as part of the grammatical structure of your own sentence (as in *a* and *b* below).

a) While the concept of free will seems an essential principle for the whole system of human morality, some philosophers have put into question that very principle. As Nietzsche argues, "The evil actions which now rouse our indignation are based upon the error that he who causes them has a free
will . . ." (303).

b) It is pointless to question motives, for, <u>as Bentham makes clear</u>, "A motive is substantially nothing more than pleasure or pain operating in a certain manner" (243). In investigating morality, we must analyze only the effects of our actions.

c) While <u>Kant argues that</u> a lie is "a wrong committed upon mankind in general" (252), we could with equal force propose that any small act of cruelty is harmful in general, no matter how inconsequential the act itself may appear to be. Therefore, a lie, when the "liar" seeks to avert committing a small act of cruelty, is beneficial "in general," in that its effect is to strengthen the force of kindness in all human relations. In romantic love, especially, lying is not only occasionally appropriate but also an act morally superior to truth-telling when the speaker's aim is to demonstrate kindness—and thus avoid cruelty—towards his or her beloved.

d) <u>Benedict concludes</u> from her study of a variety of cultures that "[t]he concept of the normal is . . . a variant of the concept of the good" (231) and that "normality . . . is culturally defined" (231); if we think of different kinds of friendship as different cultures, these linked propositions may help shape an analysis of the moral ground of friendship. Friendships among men may adhere to certain principles of what is "normal" and "good," while those among women may follow a substantially different set of such principles.

Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined in the Fontbonne Student Handbook as "using another writer's ideas or expressions without adequate acknowledgment." The handbook also states that "there is no more important value than academic honesty, which requires that words and ideas scholars present as their own are truly their own." In accordance with the policies of the Department of English and Communication, any plagiarized writing will fail. Some instructors may have stronger penalties, including failing the course.

Our hope is that no Fontbonne student would ever consider turning in a plagiarized essay. On the rare occasions when a student commits plagiarism, it strikes at the heart of the educational process. It interferes with the instructor's efforts, undermines the quality of the college environment, and places other students at a disadvantage. It violates the trust that unites the college community. Plagiarism is an offense that all of the faculty, staff, and students at Fontbonne should take very seriously.

In Fontbonne University courses, a student has committed plagiarism if any of the following conditions apply:

- all or any part of the work (including factual material, phrases, or sentences) was copied from another source without acknowledgement;
- all or any part of the work was written by someone else;
- the author has paraphrased material without acknowledgment;
- the author has had significant outside help with planning or editing the essay, to the point where it is of a different quality from the work that he or she would have accomplished without the help.

Other forms of cheating, such as turning in an essay written for another course without the instructor's consent, will also result in failure.

It's worth taking a minute to consider why we uphold a high standard for honesty in writing. After all, the public sphere of commerce and politics provides us with numerous examples of professional writing that would seem to fall short of our standards. The speeches given by presidents, senators, and representatives are almost always written by someone else. Advertisers typically employ a number of people when producing a single commercial or slogan. And every year, thousands of books and articles are "ghost written" or substantially edited by someone other than the purported author. By the time that many published works reach the bookstores or airwaves, they have often been authored and altered by a large and sometimes anonymous group of individuals, with profit typically being the primary motive. It may not matter who wrote the ad about the new washing machine; what matters is that the ad gets people to buy the washing machine. For better or for worse, many publishers and broadcasters in the so-called "real world" are concerned less with the issue of attribution than they are with producing a popular magazine or an effective commercial.

But the standard for academic honesty in the equally real world of the college community also has a very practical purpose, a purpose that is rooted in the reasons that we teach writing here at Fontbonne in the first place. At Fontbonne, our focus is on the education of the individual student, and all of our work is ultimately done for the benefit of the individual student. Students write papers in order to strengthen their thinking and their command of language, while instructors grade papers in order to assess and encourage a student's academic progress. In the college environment, it *does* matter who wrote a given piece. If we can't be sure that a work is written by a particular student, then we can't fairly evaluate the student's progress, nor can we help the student to learn more. It is because our work at Fontbonne College is directed at educating the individual student that we must maintain the very highest standard for academic honesty.

True, no writer works in a vacuum. On the contrary, writing is by definition a social activity, and it's often legitimate and even advisable to seek help during the writing process. We get ideas for our papers from what we have read, seen, or heard, and we often solicit the advice and feedback of others in order to make our writing better. This important social element of good writing is recognized and encouraged in many of the English courses at Fontbonne, with their workshops, peer editing, and conferences.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the appropriate and desirable help that a student receives in a Fontbonne course (or at the Kinkel Center) and the inappropriate help that a student may receive elsewhere. For example, when a Rhetoric student engages in the workshop process, the instructor is in the position to observe the kind of help that the student obtains and to see that the student's use of this help is part of an *honest individual effort*. All help given to the student is intended to put the student in the position of doing better work—*not* to do the work for the student. But when a student receives substantial help from someone outside of the class, to the point where someone else is doing part of the work for the student, then the instructor can no longer view the product as the student's own work. When this happens, the student has compromised the trust that is necessary to the educational environment, and the instructor has no choice but to deem the work as plagiarized.

The best way for you to ensure that the issue of plagiarism becomes a dead one at Fontbonne is to engage actively and conscientiously in the *process* of writing. Starting your papers early, discussing them with your instructor, and working through successive drafts will make any question of plagiarism moot—and will contribute greatly to successful writing. In addition, you should save all of your drafting materials for all of the papers that you write at Fontbonne, even after the class is over. Saving this material will give you a satisfying record of the development of the paper while enabling you to catch any errors in documentation. Take pride in your efforts; if you continue to save your papers over the course of your college career, you'll be amazed at the amount of good work that you produce. Over the long term, your growing portfolio of papers will enhance your appreciation of the personal investment that you have made in your college education.

It's also a good idea to talk with your instructor about the issue of plagiarism whenever you have any questions. Fontbonne instructors are more than happy to discuss such matters, and you should never be hesitant about asking for any kind of clarification. If you are unsure about whether the help you have received is appropriate, ask your instructor. If you are unsure of how to acknowledge your sources, or whether or not you may utilize work from another course, then you should likewise ask your instructor. Just as it is your responsibility to ensure that your work is completed in a timely and ethical manner, so it is your instructor's responsibility to answer your questions and to help you with any problems that you may be having with a given assignment. The fundamental issue is one of honesty, and honesty goes hand in hand with conscientious academic efforts and open communication.

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