

Pointers for Academic Writing

- I. Two assumptions that most professors make:
 - A. Well organized is well understood.
 - B. A professional appearance means a professional attitude.
- II. Well organized means:
 - A. The introduction is concise with a clear thesis statement.
 - B. Each paragraph deals with one easily identifiable topic (or aspect of the thesis).
 - C. Each paragraph (or group of paragraphs) uses specific examples or evidence to support your point.
 - D. Supporting material (especially quotations) is explained or interpreted by the student.
 - E. The conclusion is concise and does not introduce new topics.
- III. III. Professional means:
 - A. Your paper gives the professor what s/he asked for.
 - B. Your paper is not just a first draft.
 - C. Your paper has been edited for errors. Proofread your work.
- IV. Specific suggestions:
 - A. Provide a clear thesis statement. Present your thesis in the form of a statement. Your thesis statement should be placed near the beginning of the paper. “ A good thesis states the writer’s **clearly defined opinion**, ... asserts **one main idea**,...has something **worthwhile** to say, ...is **limited to fit the assignment**, ...is **clearly stated in specific terms**, ...is easily recognized as the main idea and is often located in the first or second paragraph”¹
 - B. Follow-up your thesis statement with an **essay map**, a few sentences that outline the major parts of your paper.
 - C. Write a topic sentence for each paragraph that shows how it relates to your original thesis.
 - D. Logically defend or explain your thesis. Your paper should have an obvious organization or outline. Each major **paragraph** or section should:
 - 1. Provide **a statement which explains or defends** part of your thesis.
 - 2. Sufficiently discuss or **explain** your statement so that the professor does not have to guess at your meaning.
 - 3. Support or provide **evidence** for your statement in the form of examples, logical reasoning, facts, and/or summaries, paraphrases, or quotations from sources identified in your text (a footnote is not enough).

¹ Jean Wyrick, *Steps to Writing Well* (Boston: Thomson/Heinle, 2002), 33-37.

4. Show or explain **how the evidence you provide supports** your statement. **Do not let the evidence speak for itself.** Although you may think the relationship between your statement and your evidence is obvious, unless you explain it yourself, the professor may assume you do not understand it. It is your job to interpret the sources.
 5. Provide **transitions** between paragraphs or sections of your paper.
- E. **Do not over quote.** Remember that the professor already knows what the experts think. The professor wants to know what you think. Introduce all summaries, paraphrases or quotations with the name of the source. Use Chicago Manual of Style for footnotes and bibliographies.

Helpful Websites and Resources

Reading Critically:

- <http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/lardnerawl/chapter1/custom5/deuxe-content.html>
- <http://critical-reading.com/criticalreadingthinkingtoc.htm>
- http://www.salisbury.edu/counseling/New/7_critical_reading_strategies.html
- <http://www.angelfire.com/ks/kmstrong/eight.html>
- Adler, Mortimer. *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 1940.
- Barnett, Sylvan and Hugo Bedau. *Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing: A Brief Guide to Argument*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.

Writing:

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/>

Grammar/Punctuation: The two websites listed under writing also explain grammar and punctuation rules. There are exercises with answers to check if you understand the rules.

Any writing handbook:

- Allyn & Bacon Handbook, *A Writer's Reference, etc.*
<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/writersref6e/Player/Pages/Main.aspx>
- Beason, Larry and Mark Lester. *A Commonsense Guide to Grammar and Usage*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.
- Raimes, Ann. *Grammar Troublespots*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Chicago Manual of Style:

- <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocChicago.html>
- http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch10_s1-0001.html
- http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch14/ch14_toc.html
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Slade, Carole. *Form and Style*, 13th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.