

# WRITING BASICS

Writing Process: Essays, term papers, lab reports, etc. no matter the topic

- **Establish, narrow and define your topic:** State your thesis or theme in a sentence or two at most.
- **Define your audience:** Is it your instructor or your classmates who will critique your work? Keep your audience in mind as you write.
- **Plan ahead:** Set a time line and allow for unexpected developments and planned revision.
- **Gather resources:**
  - People: instructor, research librarian, tutor, subject matter experts, professionals
  - References: text book, reference works, web sites, journals, diaries, professional reports.
- **Research:** read, interview, experiment, gather data, etc. Take notes as completely as possible and document sources. Use index cards or a system in word processing.
- **Organize your notes with a prewriting exercise:** focused freewriting, brainstorming, mapping, and/or outlining.
- **Write your first (rough) draft:** Determine how you will develop your paper. For argument papers, develop your argument with solid logic in a reasoned argument to develop the theme and/or support the thesis. Will you compare or define? Will you criticize or describe? Refer to DEFINITIONS of WRITING TERMS handout.

## Your first paragraph

- **Introduce** the topic!
- **Inform** the reader of your point of view (for argument papers).
- **Entice** the reader to continue with the rest of the paper!
- **Focus** on three main points to develop.

The first paragraph is often the most difficult to write. If you have trouble, just get it down with the intention of re-writing it later, even after you have finished the rest of the paper. Remember this first entry draws your audience into your topic, your perspective, and its importance to continue with the rest. So:

## Development

- Establish flow from paragraph to paragraph (TRANSITION):
  - Transition sentences, clauses, or words at the beginning of paragraphs connect one idea to the next (see transition handouts for list of words and phrases and instruction for use)
  - Place topic sentences in each paragraph near the beginning; define their place in the overall scheme
  - Avoid one- and two-sentence paragraphs; they may reflect lack of development of your point.
- Keep your voice active:
  - *The Academic Committee decided . . . not It was decided by the Academic Committee.*



- Avoid forms of the verb "to be" for clear, dynamic presentation. **Before:** Avoiding "to be" *will also avoid* the passive voice. **After:** Avoiding "to be" *also avoids* the passive voice.
- **Use quotations to support your interpretations:**
  - Properly introduce, explain, and cite each quote
  - Use block (indented long quotes of 40 or more characters) sparingly as they break up the flow of your argument
- **Continually prove your point of view throughout the essay:**
  - Don't drift from or leave the primary focus of the essay.
  - Don't lapse into summary in the development—wait until the conclusion

## Conclusion

- Read your first paragraph and the development
- Summarize, then conclude your argument
- Refer back (once again) to the first paragraph(s) as well as the development. Does the last paragraph (or paragraphs in longer essays)
  - Briefly restate the thesis and main ideas?
  - Reflect the succession and importance of the arguments?
  - Logically conclude their development?
- Edit/rewrite the first paragraph to better set your development and conclusion.

## Revision

### **Take a day or two off!**

- **Re-read** your paper with a fresh mind and a sharp pencil. Re-read aloud as if you want to communicate with friends or family. The "listeners/audience" can be real or imaginary. You will hear your weaknesses and strengths and discover changes you need to make.
- **Edit, correct, and rewrite as necessary.**
- **Save each consecutive draft from the previous draft before making any changes** so that you have Essay Draft 1, Essay Draft 2, or Comparison Revision 1, Comparison Revision 2, etc. That way you can always go back to a previous draft for some item you may have written over. Save each in a folder marked with a keyword for that essay (ex: Lincoln Essay, Comparison Essay, Argument Essay)
- **Turn in** the rough draft and consecutive revised drafts as scheduled.
- **Celebrate** a job well done with the confidence that you have done your best.