



**TRIDENT
UNIVERSITY**

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

GRADUATE WRITING HANDBOOK

ALLISON DEEGAN, ED.D.

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Graduate-Level Writing Skills..... | 4 |
| Before You Begin—Try a Refresher Course | 4 |
| Chapter 1: GRADUATE-LEVEL WRITING IS DIFFERENT..... | 5 |
| Understanding Your Audience..... | 5 |
| Components and Narrative—Deconstructing Papers | 5 |
| Components versus Narrative Exercise | 5 |
| Time..... | 6 |
| Original Writing and Scholarship | 6 |
| Gathering Your Initial Tools | 7 |
| Dissertation/Thesis/Paper Writing Books—Pro or Con? | 7 |
| Chapter 2: RESEARCHING AND SOURCES | 8 |
| Where and How to Find Research and Sources for Your Writing Projects..... | 8 |
| Too Little, Too Much, Just Right | 8 |
| Evaluating the Quality and Value of Sources | 8 |
| Reading in the Shower | 9 |
| Article Dissection Guide | 9 |
| Chapter 3: DEVELOPING GOOD WRITING HABITS | 11 |
| How to Review Literature with a Critical Eye..... | 11 |
| How to Organize and Incorporate Various Sources into Written Assignments | 11 |
| How to Be Your Own First Reviewer—How to Diagram Your Work | 12 |
| Paper Diagramming Guide | 12 |
| How to Complete Assignments on Time—Preparing a Completion Map..... | 13 |
| Completion Map | 13 |
| Beyond Citation—Formatting for Clarity..... | 13 |
| Rubrics and Outlines—Knowing and Understanding Them..... | 14 |
| Document Template Guide | 14 |
| Chapter 4: DRAFTING AND FEEDBACK..... | 15 |
| Writing Quickly, But Editing Slowly (Multiple Times) | 15 |
| Microsoft Word | 15 |
| Helping Your Reviewer Provide Useful Feedback | 15 |
| Microsoft Word Comment Dialogue Guide | 16 |
| Incorporating Feedback While Maintaining Your Voice | 16 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Answering a Question with a Question | 17 |
| Developing a Reviewing and Revising Calendar | 17 |
| Reviewing and Revising Calendar | 18 |
| Chapter 5: SYNTHESIS VERSUS OPINION | 19 |
| Leveraging Your Expertise and Network as Foundational Sourcing..... | 19 |
| What You Know Is Not Only What You Have Read— Converting Practice into Scholarship..... | 19 |
| Resume/Knowledge Guide | 20 |
| Developing Synthesized Sections of a Paper from Multiple Sources..... | 20 |
| Testing for Opinion and Supporting Your Opinion | 21 |
| Chapter 6: REVISING..... | 22 |
| What Have You Learned about Graduate-Level Writing?..... | 22 |
| reviewing and Revising Graduate-Level Writing..... | 22 |
| What Resources Are Available to Assist You in Your Graduate-Level Writing? | 23 |
| Achieving Scholarship..... | 23 |
| Next Steps?..... | 23 |
| APPENDIX 1: THE PLAGIARISM SPECTRUM— A TURNITIN WHITE PAPER (Excerpt) | 24 |

GRADUATE-LEVEL WRITING SKILLS

Graduate-level writing is different from most academic writing. It has its own techniques and language.

This handbook will help to orient and guide you in understanding how to meet the high standards required for graduate-level writing.

You will learn to locate and utilize resources, which are critical skills for success in graduate-level writing.

The goal is to develop skills and confidence in your graduate-level writing so you can meet and exceed all master's and doctoral program requirements.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN—TRY A REFRESHER COURSE

If it has been a while since you enrolled in any college course, or if you are struggling with writing in general, you may benefit from taking a refresher course.

The Trident Writing Workshop is a great place to start—to review, to learn new things, and to feel more confident as you proceed to graduate-level writing.

Check out the self-paced course: <https://mytlc.trident.edu/index.php?page=workshop&action=eng095>

Be sure to read through the entire workshop, and bookmark the link for easy reference to any content that is particularly helpful to you.

Try the exercises and discuss them with your professor or graduate-level writing mentor.

CHAPTER 1: GRADUATE-LEVEL WRITING IS DIFFERENT

UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

One of the reasons graduate-level writing is different from other student writing is that your professor is no longer your only audience. Writing for your professor is your first goal, but dissertations, theses, and more in-depth course papers (such as capstones) are intended to be shared with a broader academic audience. When writing at the graduate level, the student must not only meet (and even strive to exceed) all of the standards of great academic writing, but also contribute something original and useful to engage that broader audience.

Who is the audience for graduate-level writing? Professors, researchers, and graduate students:

- The American Educational Research Association (AERA) is a significant resource for understanding who you are writing for (<http://www.aera.net/>).
- The California Educational Research Association (CERA) is another great resource (<http://www.cera-web.org>).

Faculty members will be your most useful resources as you work to complete your dissertation, thesis, capstone, or other academic papers. Get to know your faculty members by learning about their backgrounds, research interests, and requirements. The Trident website is a good starting point.

COMPONENTS AND NARRATIVE—DECONSTRUCTING PAPERS

Graduate-level writing requires mastery of two different—and sometimes conflicting—skill sets: component writing and narrative writing. Component writing means you are following a carefully developed plan, outline, and rubric, and making sure that you write and “cover” every component required. Narrative writing means the content is polished so that it is cohesive, clear, succinct, and properly executed and cited. Writers who are naturally good with component writing must develop their narrative skills, while those with a natural narrative style must hone their skills with components.

COMPONENTS VERSUS NARRATIVE EXERCISE

- Gather your course/paper/assignment rubric and review it carefully.
- Gather your course/paper/assignment syllabus or specific requirements and review them carefully.
- List all the components you need to cover (or use your rubric/syllabus/assignment as a checklist) and keep that checklist at the top of your document as you work.
- If writing a narrative comes more easily to you, stop writing after each subsection (or component) and double check to see if you have adequately covered it before moving on. Attempting to write a whole paper/document (or much of one) before reviewing for components can be risky.
- If completing components comes easier to you and writing narrative is more challenging, stop after **each** component is done and review that segment of work for: flow; transitional sentences that guide the reader to what comes next; perfect grammar, spelling, and word usage; typos; and

sentences that are too long and wordy. In other words, no matter what content is included, how well does it read?

- After you cover components **and** narrative for each section, move on to the next section of your draft.
- At the end of your draft, go back over the entire document, first for components only, and then for narrative flow.

TIME

How long does it take to write an article, a thesis, a dissertation, or a major paper? A lot longer than you probably think. Graduate-level writing is a multifaceted task, done over a long period of time, requiring continual reviewing of what you have already done. Each writing session will take time, so allow for it. A good rule of thumb is to allow at least two hours for writing each page (providing you have all the research and other materials you need at hand, and you have read them and made notes). Sometimes you need more time, sometimes less.

Not all time is the same. Time where your brain is rested and your distractions are minimized is much more productive than time when you are too tired to focus. You may need to schedule “non-thinking time” in order to rest and restore your ability to produce graduate-level writing.

Here are some resources on managing time and staying fresh to write:

- A perspective on managing the process: <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/how-i-learned-stop-worrying-and-love-dissertation>
- Setting deadlines and managing time: <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/surviving-dissertation-tips-someone-who-mostly-has>
- Taking breaks to keep working: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/jobs/take-breaks-regularly-to-stay-on-schedule-workstation.html>

ORIGINAL WRITING AND SCHOLARSHIP

Original writing and scholarship are the minimum acceptable standards for **all** graduate-level writing. The good news is that all graduate-level writing is also, in part, a synthesis of the work of others. You have to do your own research, but it is deeply informed by the work of others. You utilize this work from others by reading, critiquing, synthesizing, and citing it as part of your research. If you do not cite it, you cannot use it. If you use it, you must cite it. Citation helps your reader understand the “journey” of your paper, thesis, or dissertation—how you got where you ended up and why. It actually adds a layer of legitimacy to all of your work.

Do not plagiarize, either intentionally or casually. Utilize Turnitin to check your work (or have your professor do it). Learn the “bright line” (it is not a “fine” line) between being influenced by someone’s work, which is acceptable, and copying someone’s work, which is not acceptable. Carefully review the attached excerpt from a Turnitin white paper for instructors ([Appendix 1](#)). It will help you understand what faculty looks for and how to avoid plagiarism in all your written work.

GATHERING YOUR INITIAL TOOLS

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition, (<http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx>) will be among your most significant resources. It is the definitive citation and format (and even practice) guide for academic papers, including theses, dissertations, and articles. You can get a copy at the link above if you do not have one.

The Concise Rules of APA Style, Sixth Edition, (<http://www.apastyle.org/products/4210004.aspx>) is also an invaluable resource. It is slimmer and more portable, and quicker for looking up many APA questions—but not all, which is why you need the complete guide as well. You can acquire a copy at the link above if you do not have one.

Learning APA style, if it is new to you, may be challenging. Certain requirements of APA style are counterintuitive and differ in many large and small ways from MLA format. APA style is difficult to memorize, so always have your guide(s) at hand when you work (and wherever you go—you never know when you will need to look something up).

APA has a free, online tutorial that is a good companion for its guides. Practice or learn for the first time at <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>.

One of the best resources on academic writing is the OWL—the Online Writing Lab—sponsored by Purdue University at <https://owl.English.purdue.edu/owl/>. Bookmark this site and schedule the time to read its offerings in great detail—it has many helpful tips, samples, shortcuts, and solutions. Spend some time on this site and explore all that it has to offer. Many of the questions you have as you write can be answered by a visit to the OWL.

Remember when we mentioned the importance of knowing your audience? Ask your faculty members for their best tools and resources, so you have many choices of where to find reference material.

Do not forget you can use the Trident Writing Workshop as a refresher course and a resource as you work on papers: <https://mytlc.trident.edu/index.php?page=workshop&action=eng095>.

DISSERTATION/THESIS/PAPER WRITING BOOKS—PRO OR CON?

If you find or are referred to some writing books that you find helpful, by all means use them. Most are more helpful with “getting” you to write rather than “guiding” you on how to write. Be cautious however, because no one book (especially one that is not from or endorsed by Trident) can truly guide you. You must seek guidance from many places, many references, and many people. Start with your department’s requirements or what is available from your professors before purchasing books on writing papers, theses, or dissertations.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCHING AND SOURCES

WHERE AND HOW TO FIND RESEARCH AND SOURCES FOR YOUR WRITING PROJECTS

Libraries and beyond: Access to the Trident Online Library

- Make sure you have a full understanding of how to use the Trident library.
- Be aware that certain databases are better for your project than others.

When you find a guiding or important study, look at its list of sources. It is a useful technique for gathering a lot of research to review. All of the sources may not be relevant to your final paper, but some will. Some sources will be non-articles, such as reports or internal documents. As you review and gather them, keep careful track of where they are from and their author(s). Also, some of your sources will be people that you meet through your network and via referrals.

Become a “deep search” expert, starting with deep Googling (first 100 results, minimum) and Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/?hl=en>). Search for ideas and studies in Google Scholar, and gather the full article version through the library’s online database access.

TOO LITTLE, TOO MUCH, JUST RIGHT

How to know you have gathered enough research

Review successful examples in the AERA Online Paper Repository of presented papers, 2010–present: <http://www.aera.net/Publications/OnlinePaperRepository/AERAOnlinePaperRepository/tabid/12720/Default.aspx>.

Get an idea about how many sources you need for the length of the article/presentation you are writing. Follow the rubric for minimums, but gather enough to tell the full story your paper needs to tell. Start with a goal and exceed it. No need to pad your reference list with research you barely use, **but** also avoid relying on just a few sources—remember you are synthesizing, so the list of research you review needs to be long enough to address everything you write.

EVALUATING THE QUALITY AND VALUE OF SOURCES

Utilize the citation data (number of sources cited, number of times a source is cited by others) found in online library databases. When you get search results in databases, look for how many other authors are using that source—it can speak to its value (or sometimes just its popularity). This is information for you to use to evaluate your sources (in addition to reading and reviewing every article you may want to include in your research review). It does not mean you must use the often-cited work only, or avoid the often cited—whatever suits your own paper is what you need.

Use the “epiphany” test. Be sure to include any source that makes you feel as if a lightbulb has come on—some approach or data analysis that helps you better understand what you are researching. That will be a high-quality source.

READING IN THE SHOWER

Techniques for quickly reviewing and incorporating sources

- Since you will review a great deal of research—perhaps many hundreds of articles—to write your paper, article, thesis, or dissertation, categorize as you read, marking each source as “important,” “maybe important,” or “not likely to be important,” so you can focus on the most useful ones first.
- Read whenever you have the chance.
 - Waiting for a large block of time in which to read is unwise—read in bits and pieces, pages and paragraphs, whenever you find 10 minutes.
 - You will not likely have the luxury of reading each source through in one sitting, in a relaxed environment, with no distractions.
 - At best, you will get through the full text of the articles you need to read; at worst, it will be challenging to keep track of what you have and have not read.
- Keep a highlighter on your person at all times, along with a bag of articles (or electronic copies) to read whenever you have time.
 - Accomplish your article burden one bit at a time; make notes on the actual article (hard or electronic copy) so you can easily pick up where you left off.
 - Leave notes to yourself about anything you need to recheck or resolve so you can dive right back in when you have time to read again.
- Many highly influential articles will need to be reviewed in great depth: you will read, take notes, synthesize concepts, and include quotes and references in your document. Use this approach for articles that you know are important to many areas of your thesis.
- Many relevant articles will be reviewed with much less depth. Engage in more than skimming but less than deep reading and study. Use this approach for articles that are interesting and add some value to your thesis, but are not part of the main case you are making.
- File away anything that is fully read and annotated.
- Use the following Article Dissection Guide to help identify the depth of the review needed for each article.

ARTICLE DISSECTION GUIDE

How did I find it?

- Referenced in an important article? Apply **Full** Dissection
- Searching key words and concepts? Apply **Medium** Dissection
- Referenced in a less important article? Apply **Light** Dissection

Full Dissection Checklist

- Copy of the entire text
- Note of full APA citation (in case you need it—you do not want to have to search for it again)
- Note of several points from the abstract that are relevant to your topic
- Read and make careful notes, including other sources.
- Summarize each section with notes as you read.

- Highlight anything you may consider quoting in your paper.
- Mark where the paper's headings, outline, or concepts mirror yours.
- File away in the proper category of "important" articles to read again.

Medium Dissection Checklist

- Copy of the entire text
- Note of full citation in APA (in case you need it—you do not want to have to search for it again)
- Note of at least one point from the abstract relevant to your topic
- Read the article and make notes on anything that seems relevant.
- Look for other cited sources that may be equally or more relevant.
- Read the author's summary carefully to check relevance.
- Highlight anything you may consider quoting in your paper.
- If it turns out it is not relevant, set it aside (but do not toss it out—put it in a file and save for later—you never know if you will need it).
- File away in the proper category of "maybe important" to review again.

Light Dissection Checklist

- Copy of the entire text
- Note of full citation in APA (in case you need it—you do not want to have to search for it again)
- Note of at least one point from the abstract relevant to your topic
- Read the relevant section and make notes on what seems to pertain to your topic.
- Look for other cited sources that may be equally or more relevant within the section you have read.
- Read the author's summary carefully to check for relevance.
- Highlight anything you may consider quoting in your paper. If it turns out it is not relevant, set it aside (but do not toss it out—put it in a file and save for later—you never know if you will need it).
- File away in the proper category of "no" or "maybe."

Know that you will review **many** sources that you end up not using—that is just how graduate research and writing works.

CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPING GOOD WRITING HABITS

HOW TO REVIEW LITERATURE WITH A CRITICAL EYE

Much of the research and literature you will gather and review will be valuable, and you will include it in your paper, article, thesis, or dissertation. Some sources, however, will not have much value. You can categorize them as “no” or “maybe,” or discard them altogether. You must develop the confidence to critique sources and deem them irrelevant, useful, or even poorly researched, so that every source you present in your own work is perceived by your reader to give value to your overall thesis.

The best way to develop this critical eye is to read with a focus on what is relevant to your topic (or, better yet, have an outline) and to read a great amount. You can evaluate with confidence when you are widely read, especially within the literature of a specific topic. You will get to know the great authors, the good ones, and those who are not very valuable. You are the one who decides what to include, so choose wisely.

HOW TO ORGANIZE AND INCORPORATE VARIOUS SOURCES INTO WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Read, Highlight, Review, Categorize, Quote, or Synthesize

- **Read** through the entire article (if it is “important” or “maybe important”). If you get the sense from the abstract or after reading a little that it is not important, stop reading and put it aside for later (when you will thumb through it quickly looking for anything of value).
- **Highlight** as you read, to make your review process easier. Select anything that catches your eye. If you highlight the whole article, that is too much. If you barely highlight anything, the article might not be important. Capture the one or two things of interest and move on to another article.
- **Review** everything you have highlighted, and if you have not made notes yet, make some notes to guide you when you pick up the article again.
- **Categorize** the article as “important,” “maybe,” “not very important,” or “no” (for articles that are just wrong for your study). Whether using hard copies or electronic copies, keep these categorizations clear and available so you do not waste time on sources that will not contribute to your writing.
- **Quote** from all the articles you plan to include. Uncited direct quotes may not remain in the final version of your paper, but inserting the actual quotes into your draft document will help you decide whether to generalize, synthesize, use the information to back up other points or authors, or to keep the direct quotation intact with proper citation. (Remember to always include a page number so you do not have to go back to complete your citation if you retain the quotation.)
- **Synthesize** the information from several authors in support of a specific point you want to make. This does not require using direct quotations. However, you cannot synthesize easily if you do not have the exact quote or excerpt to review. Cut and paste the quotes into your draft, and then you can compare and contrast them in order to synthesize.

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN FIRST REVIEWER—HOW TO DIAGRAM YOUR WORK

Before turning in work, you need to review it multiple times for multiple issues. Your professor is not your editor—he or she is there to help with conceptualizing and learning the process, not to find your typos or correct your APA formatting.

If you do not read your draft and it contains many mistakes, the reader will think that either you did not know, or you did not care—neither of which is good. Diagramming your paper can help you become a better reviewer of your own work. Hoping to “catch” everything in a paper you have read many times is foolish—it is difficult to see mistakes after a few readings, especially if you are the writer.

Work with the Paper Diagramming Guide to try to catch your own errors before you hand anything in.

PAPER DIAGRAMMING GUIDE

- Did you match your work against the rubric, assignment, or outline?
- Is everything covered?
- If it is a draft, and everything is not covered, did you alert your reader (e.g., “Section 2 is rough/not finalized yet—focus on Section 3”)?
- Did you highlight **every** citation in the document and **every** citation on your reference list?
- Did you check the APA formatting?
- Did you highlight every heading and subheading, and check for clarity and APA formatting?
- Did you include an in-text citation for every reference on your reference list?
- Did you include a reference for every in-text citation in your paper?
- Did you provide enough citation?
 - Visual check—long paragraphs with few citations are usually problematic.
 - Never go more than two or three declarative sentences (that state facts) without a **clear** link to its citation—unless you are discussing your own findings. Waiting too long to cite, or going on too long after a citation, makes the reader start to wonder if they are reading your opinion. When the reader thinks, “Where is this from?” you are in trouble.
- Did you use spell-check and grammar-check?
- Did you read through the paper again, specifically looking for errors in spelling and grammar/usage? The computer cannot catch everything.
- Did you search and replace recurring errors electronically, so you did not miss any?
- Did you strike a balance between guidance and repetition?
 - Tell me what you are going to tell me, tell me, and then tell me that you told me. This is a good technique for graduate-level writing but should be used only for transitional material (between sections or chapters, and very rarely between paragraphs). If you overuse this technique, you will be repetitive, and readers hate that.
- Is every required component covered, clearly labeled, and integrated into the whole paper?
- Does the narrative flow and read as though an actual person (not a robot) wrote it?
- Following the Paper Diagramming Guide, and reading through your paper multiple times to spot or fix one issue or another, is usually much quicker than trying to read the paper once and fix everything.

HOW TO COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME—PREPARING A COMPLETION MAP

Timeliness is nearly as important as quality. Professors (and for your articles, editors) are busy and have many, many things to read. Making them wait, even if you think it will improve your work, is usually not a good thing (unless specifically arranged in advance, on rare occasions, for very good reasons). Getting work done on time usually means making sacrifices in your personal or work life. As you work through the graduate program, you will begin to learn how long things take (reading, reviewing, outlining, drafting, diagramming, perfecting, etc.). That knowledge will help you realistically schedule your tasks when using a Completion Map (see below).

COMPLETION MAP

- When is the assignment due?
- What are my commitments for the next five days?
- Which large blocks of time can I schedule and commit to?
- Which smaller blocks of time can I schedule and commit to?
- Which materials do I need to gather to prepare for each large and small block of time? (You may be using some of the smaller blocks to organize and prepare for the larger blocks.)
- Depending on which task you are working on, assign a time limit to it (e.g., one hour to review citations).
 - Include finding and organizing research, reading and taking notes, outlining the paper, writing all components required by the assignment or rubric, checking narrative for flow, checking transition sentences for cohesion, perfecting APA style (including checking whether there is enough citation), checking spelling/grammar, getting questions answered by your professor or chair, etc.
 - Using a grid or list, make a line item and time allowance for **every** element that you identify as a part of writing and completing the document.
 - Double the time you have assigned to each task (seriously).
- Practice developing a completion map by reviewing an assignment you have already done and reflecting on how long each part of it took to do.

BEYOND CITATION—FORMATTING FOR CLARITY

APA is not just for citation—there is a whole set of rules for formatting. Knowing them (or having good samples and templates to utilize) will make the writing process easier. Even if your audience is only one professor, you still need to think of the “reader” as a broader group. Some readers may not work in your specific area or know the literature or “scenery” you are writing about. Your job is to guide them through what you have read and what you have come up with.

Your readers begin to lose confidence in your writing and, potentially, in your scholarship, if they are confused. At first, readers think the confusion is their fault—they are lost, they do not know what you are saying—did they miss something? They flip or scroll back and look for clarification. When they cannot find it, they begin to think it is your fault, that you just did not lay out items in a clear enough manner for them

to understand. They start to lose confidence, disengage, and miss the good things you have already presented or will present (if they continue reading). Thus, clarity is paramount.

Every sentence must make sense vis-à-vis the sentence before and after it. **Every** declarative statement (outside of your findings) must be supported by citation. You must write for a non-expert—without being condescending—in order to impress a subject matter expert. Headings and subheadings (and sub-subheadings) are the greatest tool to orient the reader. Use them correctly and in abundance. Short paragraphs, fully cited, with clear subheadings to ground them within larger sections of a paper, are easy to read and understand. Anything else begins to distract and confuse the reader.

RUBRICS AND OUTLINES—KNOWING AND UNDERSTANDING THEM

There is probably already a specific, detailed outline available for the papers you need to write. Check both the rubric for the program you are enrolled in, and any specific paper guide. Inventing your own master outline is not a good idea—use the one provided by your professor or department. However, adapting the required outline to fit the needs of your paper is a very good idea.

Use an outline as the “high-level” organizational structure. Add your own sublevels under virtually every section to “map out” exactly what you intend to write. If you have questions on any aspect of the rubric or paper/departmental outline, ask your professor or your graduate-level writing coach before you start writing. You do not want to spend any time working in the wrong direction.

Samples of completed dissertations, theses, or capstone papers are very helpful references, especially those from the same area in which you are researching; but be careful—they come in many, many formats, and you need to understand, follow, and master the Trident format required by your specific department/degree plan.

DOCUMENT TEMPLATE GUIDE

Developing a personal template document to work from will help you stay organized.

- Begin your document right inside a copy of the approved outline or format.
- Adapt the outline or format document to fit the needs of the assignment or project.
- Put notes to yourself in this document as you work on and complete various sections.
- Apply the [Paper Diagramming Guide](#) to every substantial portion of the document. (This is somewhat like “cleaning as you cook” to avoid tackling a huge mess at the end.)
- If you are handing in work before your document is finished, discuss it with your professor, and see if they will accept your template version, or if they want a clean document. It may be helpful to show them how you are working and what you are thinking. Remember, though, this does not give you leave to turn in a disorganized mess. Even if your professor agrees to review your “working” document, you still need to clean it up to the best version possible.
- Practice creating an assignment template document within an outline.

CHAPTER 4: DRAFTING AND FEEDBACK

WRITING QUICKLY, BUT EDITING SLOWLY (MULTIPLE TIMES)

Once you have researched your sources, checked your assignment parameters, and created your template document, it is time to start writing. Rather than thinking of writing as a huge, terrible chore you need to do, think of it as quick bursts of analysis and inspiration, producing something that you will later convert into cogent narrative, again with quick bursts of analysis and inspiration.

The more confidence you have in your “fixing” or editing skills and your ability to perfect your document, the more quickly you can write. The internal critic will not hold you up because it knows that the external critic is waiting with the skills and the time to make the document perfect. Thus, you begin to write quickly. Writing quickly is a good and necessary approach, but it does not eliminate the need for citation, citation, citation. Writing and then going back to find the citations for what you know to be true is OK—that is how much writing is done.

MICROSOFT WORD

Most students will be using Microsoft Word, which has many editing tools that will help you write more quickly, perfect more thoroughly, and process feedback more effectively. If you are not using MSWord, look for similar editing tools in the program you are working with.

- If you have expert skills in MSWord, you probably already understand much of its functionality. If you do not have expert skills, consider purchasing a shortcut guide to learn the basics, such as: http://www.amazon.com/Microsoft-Introduction-Reference-Instructions-Shortcuts/dp/1936220814/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1439588417&sr=8-5&keywords=beezix+quick+reference+cards
- You may also consider using one of the free online formatting and tip guides specifically for dissertations, such as: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/files/services/exploratory/pdfs/word2010fordissertation.pdf>

Trying to format manually, without using MSWord tools or waiting to begin formatting until the paper is already written, is bad practice. Make your paper as clean and well-formatted as possible as you go, and then go back to perfect it. Practice Microsoft Word tools on shorter documents before using them on longer documents or your dissertation/thesis. This approach is especially important when using new techniques that take a while to master—like using “search and replace” or setting up an automated Table of Contents.

HELPING YOUR REVIEWER PROVIDE USEFUL FEEDBACK

Your reviewer (or reader—always think of anyone who looks at your work as your reader) cannot read your mind. Do not assume they know the kind of feedback you need or want. Take into consideration all the parameters of your current assignment or your paper’s rubric or outline, and determine the specific kind of feedback you would like.

The kind of feedback you want depends on where you are in your paper's progress and what your efforts have been to date. If you have done your best work, and you are nearly finished, let the reader experience the paper in its whole form and see how it reads. By all means, ask for specific feedback on parts you are less confident about. If, as is more often the case, you are in various stages of completing parts of the paper, you need to let your reader know the conditions.

Ask for help on specific sections and/or on specific aspects of the paper. For example, you can alert your reader that you are not done with the introductory section yet and will revise it once the document is more complete. Then tell them exactly what feedback you are looking for (e.g., Is the conceptual framework clear? Are you synthesizing the major sources correctly? Does the narrative flow? Are the transitions engaging? Does part 3 follow the rubric? etc.). It is up to you to tell your reviewer what you want. They may have assignment specifics to read and grade for, but they can also be directed to what you want specifically.

MICROSOFT WORD COMMENT DIALOGUE GUIDE

"Comments" in Microsoft Word is a great tool for your reader to provide feedback. But it is also a great tool for you to talk to your reader. Do not use the comments function to provide reams of explanation and qualification to your reader—use it for notes and questions.

Ask your reader for help on specific sections or issues by highlighting them in text or in the comments. Be sure to delete any comment (made by your reader or yourself) that you have addressed so you do not get confused. Insert questions for your reader asking about specific sections or issues. Keep notes to yourself in the comments to alert your reader about areas you are still deliberating over.

Make sure you let the reader know at the top of the document that you are using comments as notes to them and yourself. You can also use in-text notes in your draft documents, but be sure you highlight, bracket, or make the text bold, to make it clear that these are questions for the reader. Delete all the notes and comments when you finalize your draft.

INCORPORATING FEEDBACK WHILE MAINTAINING YOUR VOICE

Writing an academic paper, article, thesis, or dissertation is a deeply involved project, and a very personal one. Your work should be just that—yours. You wrote it, from your point of view. It is not supposed to be all about or only about the research you reviewed—you need to bring your own voice to your writing.

When you receive feedback from your reader or professor, you must be prepared to take their notes if doing so improves the document. If you do not understand how the change improves the document (or meets the requirements of the assignment), you need to clarify with your professor or reader. If you disagree with a note or comment, you **must** talk it out with your reader/professor. You cannot simply ignore it (or blindly follow it) if you feel it disrupts the flow of your paper.

The more hard work and thorough scholarship your reader sees in your document, the more willing they will be to negotiate or discuss notes and comments with you. If you are ill-prepared or passive in the process, they may just want you to take their advice and move on. Do not put yourself in that position.

Keep your reader's confidence by working hard and producing polished work; then you have leave to discuss how you want your document to flow.

ANSWERING A QUESTION WITH A QUESTION

- Try responding to some of the questions or comments you receive from your reader with questions of your own.
- Generate your own questions to get clarification or greater understanding of what your reader is thinking as they read your paper.
- Do not fall into “electronic remove” and only dialogue with your reader through email or the comments function. If you do not feel that things are getting clearer, pick up the phone and talk things through.
- Sometimes your questions let your reader know what you are thinking more quickly than what you have written in your paper. Do not be afraid to ask exactly what you do not understand about their comments, about the assignment in general, or about the whole process.
- Although you may respond to a comment with a question, you usually still need to address the issue raised by your reader. Sometimes, however, it is only clarity that is needed, not rewriting.

DEVELOPING A REVIEWING AND REVISING CALENDAR

Just as you need to map out a schedule for writing and completing your papers, you need to schedule and plan the time to have them reviewed by your instructor and for you to revise them. You may have heard the saying, “Writing is rewriting,” and that is true. It is extremely rare for a first draft to come back with no comments and nothing more to be added.

Even though it may require less writing in terms of page length, revising/rewriting often takes longer than initial drafting. You discover additional challenging problems to solve; you need to address difficult areas of the paper you may have been avoiding; and you may be surprised by feedback and need to do more research. All of this takes time.

Your professor or reader has a schedule, too, which must be considered. Reading and marking up your paper takes a lot of time. Often, last-minute requests cannot be accommodated. This means you should always consider the deadline for your paper or assignment to be much earlier than the last possible date. Getting your work to your reader earlier means a less pressured reading, more time for comments and markup, more time to go back and dialogue with you, and more time to review your revisions. Working in a “last-minute” manner right up to the final deadline does not actually give you more time—it takes away time from the critical review/revision process.

REVIEWING AND REVISING CALENDAR

- Developing a reviewing and revising calendar is not a solo task—you must include your reader and their schedule in the process.
- Know your reader’s preferences before you start the assignment, so you can allow for the time they need. They may need 24 hours to read and provide feedback. They may need a week. You will not know unless you ask specifically. (Include page length—they can read 10 pages a lot faster than 50 pages.)
- Put your reader’s lead time on your due date calendar and try to allow for it. Place their best reading time into your deadline and strive to be one of the first to turn in work rather than one of the last, right at the deadline.
- Reconcile your reviewing and revising calendar with your document completion map so you are always looking at the full lifecycle of your paper (from conception, to submission, to review, to revision, to perfecting) and always know the big timeline picture.
- While you are waiting for feedback, work on something else (especially issues that you alerted your reader you were not done with yet).
- When you get feedback, immediately schedule time to work on the revisions—do not wait. Revisions get harder to complete the longer you wait.
- If you do not understand any part of the comments/feedback, get clarity quickly by discussing it with your reader. This will help you retain plenty of time to work on revisions.

CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS VERSUS OPINION

LEVERAGING YOUR EXPERTISE AND NETWORK AS FOUNDATIONAL SOURCING

Your personal and professional networks are rich sources of ideas, referrals, research questions, data, and other types of assistance. Do not be afraid to leverage your network to gain access to resources, sites, or information that can assist you in your writing and research projects. Your “adjacent” network—that is, connections of your connections—is also a vast resource that you are able to leverage.

If you have not used LinkedIn, or have not used it to the fullest extent, now is the time:

- LinkedIn for Educational Leaders: <https://www.linkedin.com/topic/educational-leadership>

People want to assist others who are interested in their work, or with whom they share significant interests or experiences. Approaching them is easy when you align with work they are doing or groups they are part of. It is easy to progress from being a stranger to a colleague, even if you never meet. Leveraging and expanding your network is important because scholarship requires research **and** experience. Your colleagues’ experience can do much to enrich your research.

One of the main goals of research is to synthesize the work of others. True synthesis is much easier if you have a broader understanding of a field, a site, a practice, or an issue. You can gain that understanding from colleagues, even if you never work with them. One of the most important benefits of networking for sourcing and research is validation of your own experience. The more you meet and/or dialogue with colleagues whose experiences resonate with you, the more you can mine your own workplace or career for support for your research projects.

WHAT YOU KNOW IS NOT ONLY WHAT YOU HAVE READ— CONVERTING PRACTICE INTO SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship is its own form of synthesis—you select what you research in part because of your experiences, and these are converted into interests. Then you synthesize these experiences with what you read as you research. Your own professional/personal experiences may be the most important data you possess. Pairing your experiences with the influential research data of your guiding authors can make for a powerful presentation in any type of paper.

Be careful to retain the academic voice and not just write about what you know (or what you have done or seen). The most effective technique is to write about the topic or issue and infuse it with what you know. Write about yourself only when the topic is specifically about you (which sometimes it is—it may be necessary to incorporate your professional or personal perspective), but save it only for those circumstances.

Synthesis is the goal of academic research. If we did not seek to synthesize, we would just get all the information we needed from one paper—we would not need other takes on an issue. We seek synthesis because we view issues and challenges differently to a greater or lesser extent. What influences you, which findings excite you, or whether an analysis changes your view are individualized experiences. Thus, we seek to take in a lot of information (and read a lot of studies) in order to reach a place of

understanding. As the writer, your job is to synthesize this information and layer it with your own findings.

There is a facet of synthesis that is interpretation or analysis. As the writer, you have a lot of freedom (while following the assignment guidelines) to determine how that synthesis is achieved. You decide what goes with what and what is connected to what, sometimes making that connection for the very first time, which is among the most exciting versions of synthesis.

Great synthesis starts with you—you are a version of synthesis in a way, as you look at a particular problem, issue, or circumstance. Review your own background or resume and look for the synthesis that is right in front of you—you could uncover an approach that greatly expands your network and thus greatly informs your scholarship and writing.

RESUME/KNOWLEDGE GUIDE

If you have a current resume (updated in the past six months), prepare to review it for personal synthesis. If you do not have a current resume, update it immediately. Copy all of the content of your resume (even if it is a long CV) into a Word document.

- Search each section of your resume text for keywords. Keywords in this instance are anything that is relevant to the paper, assignment, article, thesis, or dissertation you are working on.
- If you see many keywords that relate to your topic, begin with your personal network first. You likely know people who can help with your research.
- If you do not see many keywords in your resume text that relate to your topic, get your updated profile and resume on LinkedIn (or another professional network that you like) and begin the process of searching for new colleagues who can contribute their experience to your knowledge base and your writing.

DEVELOPING SYNTHESIZED SECTIONS OF A PAPER FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES

Applying synthesis to your writing can be challenging. It is human nature to want to catalog everything you have read, every source that is important to your paper, and how you have formulated your thesis. However, your reader does not want to read about every single source or piece of research. They want to read a paper about what you have learned and see what your own research has contributed. They do not want to relive the experience of writing your paper. Thus, you must synthesize.

Your reader also does not want to read a book report—one piece of research analyzed, followed by the next piece, and the next. That is not scholarly writing, and it is not synthesis. Think of writing for synthesis as describing the journey as a whole rather than each step of it. Even research articles that are on different topics or that disagree on a specific topic can be synthesized together to strengthen a point you are trying to make in your paper.

The formula for writing an effective synthesis of research is to take a topic/issue from one perspective, a topic/issue from another perspective, and then synthesize both sources in your understanding of that topic/issue. The following is an example of how that might look in a sentence: Many authors have studied

substance abuse awareness programs for middle school students, some emphasizing abstinence and health, while others focus on community support and talk therapy (Jones, 2001; Smith, 2009).

You can include multiple sources (be sure to follow APA format), taking the significant point from each article that contributes to your overall thesis. Sometimes the point is in the form of similar findings, which can strengthen a point of your own (or of one of your guiding authors). This sentence is an example: In the post-NCLB era, school districts nationwide have struggled with teacher evaluations as a means to raise test scores (Aaron, 2006; Clay, 2011; McDonald, 2010; Zirn, 2014).

Synthesis sends a powerful message to your reader—your paper is well informed and you, as a writer, know what is happening in the research world. It informs both what you choose to study and how you have studied it. It also indicates that you are capable of scholarship.

Use synthesis stylistically to emphasize big points and to connect disparate points, so your reader is assured that your topic is properly introduced and grounded in research before they get to your individual take on it. It makes them better readers (and better consumers) of your scholarship if you synthesize the scholarship of others to introduce your issue and your writing.

TESTING FOR OPINION AND SUPPORTING YOUR OPINION

There is a place for your opinion in academic writing, but academic writing, while personal, is not personal writing. You demonstrate your opinion to your reader in the topic you select, the research you gather to inform your approach to a topic, and in the way you frame your data gathering and analysis. Unless your topic and methodology are specifically suited for it, your paper should not be about you. Since the paper is not about you, stating what you “think” undermines your writing and your scholarship.

As you synthesize research and transition from one section of your paper to another, you can inject your opinion and a small amount of declarative content that is not specifically cited, to reinforce the information you have selected. This synthesis or transitional language should be viewed as necessary for flow, coherence, or even the logistics of the paper—to help the reader understand more about your work (not about you). Your paper should not be thought of as a place to tell them how you feel.

Look at a phrase such as, “The importance of this issue in public education cannot be overstated.” Though the sentence expresses an opinion, you have (hopefully) just provided the backup for that conclusion prior to stating it. The statement is now a proper introduction to the subject of how public education is reacting to the issue. The reader will not read it and think, “Wow, I guess this writer really feels this way.” Instead, they will think, “I guess this is an important issue that cannot be overstated.” They will be informed, not merely persuaded.

All of the research you gather and review informs and supports your opinion. When you present it as synthesized information, properly introduced and transitioned through, you create powerful scholarship.

CHAPTER 6: REVISING

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT GRADUATE-LEVEL WRITING?

No matter which stage of your graduate program you are in, you will likely never feel as if you know it all. That is part of the process. Feeling confident as a writer, however, is something you should strive to achieve. Confidence as you tackle course papers, whether they are theses, dissertations, or other significant papers, is an important asset. In most situations, confidence as a writer comes from revising. Whether your revisions are directed by faculty or advisor feedback, or they are organic to your process and progress as a writer, you must accept that revising is the pathway to perfecting your paper and ultimately to scholarship.

The best approach for a graduate writer is to accept that you are your own first editor. The work you do in reviewing, revising, perfecting, and meeting (and even exceeding) the standards set out for you is the best chance you have to maximize faculty feedback, lessen the time it takes to complete and perfect your work, and achieve scholarship. Your work begins as soon as your draft is completed. As your own first editor, you must prepare a draft that addresses the assignment and/or all specific requirements, and is as clean and complete as possible for faculty review—for **all assignments**.

Graduate-level writing is different, in part because of all the baggage and requirements that surround it. Different—even challenging—does not mean impossible. You have gotten this far—you can do it. You have the skills to review and revise your own work both before you turn it in and after receiving feedback. Assessing your confidence in the role of a graduate writer, and then as your own editor, is an important step in developing confidence. Reflect on what you have learned, what insights you have developed, and what challenges remain as you complete the revision process.

REVIEWING AND REVISING GRADUATE-LEVEL WRITING

- What is the biggest surprise to you about graduate-level writing?
- As a writer, what strength will be most useful to you?
- As a writer, what challenge is still troubling to you?
- Much of graduate-level writing is about understanding the specific requirements you need to fulfill and the general protocols of academic writing. Have you learned more about these?
- Can you see the knowledge gained in prior/shorter papers as a useful tool for the process of writing a long paper, capstone project, thesis, or dissertation?
- Do you feel confident (or more confident than you were before) about how to complete or improve writing projects?
- Do you feel confident in fulfilling the role as your own first and final editor in order to produce refined scholarly writing?
- Do you know where and how to get help with your writing?

As you assess your skills and experiences and reflect on your progress, set some concrete writing goals for your next project or course.

Feel free to share your assessment and reflections about revising and writing with your professor, advisor, or graduate-level writing coach.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO ASSIST YOU IN YOUR GRADUATE-LEVEL WRITING?

Make a list of all the resources you have to help you with your graduate-level writing. Start with your course professor, your advisor, your dissertation chair, your graduate-level writing coach, trusted colleagues at work, a family member or friend whose intellectual prowess and/or writing ability you admire, and peers (if they have time). To this list, you might add hired coaches or editors, informal advisors who can help by reviewing small sections, and support professionals available through Trident, such as librarians and program administrators.

Do not forget the many books, articles, websites, and other materials that may assist you as you write your paper, thesis, or dissertation. Utilize as many resources as you need until you feel confident you are meeting and exceeding the standards of graduate-level writing.

ACHIEVING SCHOLARSHIP

Improving, completing, and ultimately sharing your graduate-level writing are important goals. As you reflect on the revision process and on your writing talents, challenges, and requirements, think about the end goal—publishing your work in scholarly journals or completing a significant writing project or milestone. This book may provide some inspiration (and some examples) as you proceed through the graduate program:

- Writing for Peer Reviewed Journals: Strategies for Getting Published, by Thomson and Kamler
<http://www.amazon.com/Writing-Peer-Reviewed-Journals-Strategies/dp/0415809312>

NEXT STEPS?

Let your professor and/or your graduate-level writing coach be your guide:

- What is the level of your writing at this point?
- What do you need to do to improve and finalize your current papers/projects?
- If you are using this handbook while working on an SLP or Case Assignment, chart the progress you have made and discuss it with your professor, advisor, or graduate-level writing coach.

APPENDIX 1: THE PLAGIARISM SPECTRUM— A TURNITIN WHITE PAPER (EXCERPT)

Trident University International utilizes Turnitin (www.Turnitin.com) to detect deficiencies in originality for all student work. In order to inform educators and students about the most common types of plagiarism detected using its technology, Turnitin has developed a white paper titled “The Plagiarism Spectrum.” Below is an excerpt from that paper describing the most common forms of plagiarism. Students can avoid plagiarism by recognizing how it can occur while they are researching and writing.

If you focus on developing original content for all written assignments and utilize Turnitin guidance, plagiarism should not be a problem. If you need help, discuss the issue with your professor or writing coach and ask to review your Turnitin reports on specific papers so you can learn which originality errors are being flagged by the software.

Excerpt:

The Plagiarism Spectrum is a guide to help educators, students, academics, and writers recognize the various forms of plagiarism. This spectrum moves plagiarism beyond the black-and-white definition of “literary theft” to one that captures the nuances of how plagiarism can take form.

As part of this study, Turnitin surveyed both higher and secondary education instructors to take a measure of how prevalent and problematic these instances of plagiarism are among their students. The Plagiarism Spectrum ranks the types of plagiarism by intent and then provides data on the prevalence and problematic nature of type based on the feedback from 879 survey respondents.

10 TYPES OF PLAGIARISM ORDERED FROM MOST TO LEAST SEVERE

1. CLONE: An act of submitting another’s work, word-for-word, as one’s own.
2. CTRL-C: A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.
3. FIND–REPLACE: The act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.
4. REMIX: An act of paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.
5. RECYCLE: The act of borrowing generously from one’s own previous work without citation; To self-plagiarize.
6. HYBRID: The act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.
7. MASHUP: A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.
8. 404 ERROR: A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources.
9. AGGREGATOR: The “Aggregator” includes proper citation, but the paper contains almost no original work.
10. RE-TWEET: This paper includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text’s original wording and/or structure.

FREQUENCY SCORES

The survey data indicate that of the plagiarism types, the “Clone” appears to be the most prevalent as well as problematic. The alignment between the severity of type (where it ranks in terms of intentionality) and the problematic nature of the type highlights how frequent instances of intentional plagiarism are occurring on academic campuses. Not far behind is “CTRL C,” which shares with the Clone the same unacknowledged appropriation of content or copy from another, single source.

The “Mashup” ranks behind the Clone in prevalence, but falls lower in the scale of severity. The high prevalence score reflects how often student papers manifest the mixing of unattributed source content, with the lower severity score leaving the door open with regards to intent. With the Mashup, an instance of plagiarism may very well be unintentional--the result of a lack of information on using sources appropriately or maybe because of cultural differences (educational systems in other countries are more accepting of students copying work).

“Remix” and “Recycle” also rank high in prevalence, though educators found these instances to be less problematic. Particularly, with Remix, the low problematic score seems to suggest that educators take a kinder view to this type. Although the student’s intent may have been to purposefully paraphrase content from multiple sources, that intent may potentially be a reflection of their inexperience with doing research papers or with writing academic papers in general (hence the lower problematic score).

Near the bottom of the prevalence standings are the “Hybrid” and the “404 Error,” a proxy for how difficult it may be for students to engage in these types of plagiarism.

PROBLEMATIC SCORES

With regards to both the Clone and CTRL C, their high problematic rankings reinforce the seriousness of the intent behind the plagiarism, but also underscore the challenge that educators encounter in identifying this type. In keeping with this difficulty, the “Mashup” also appears relatively high on the problematic scale.

“Re-tweet” and “Remix” garnered especially low problematic scores, serving as an implicit acknowledgement of how common poor paraphrasing is as a practice for student writers. At the same time, the low scores seem to support the view that educators accept paraphrasing as a step in the process of students learning how to acquire and incorporate new knowledge when writing papers.

The “Aggregator” and “Recycle” also register lower on the problematic scale. Given that both types involve more original effort (as opposed to original writing) is likely the reason for the lower scores.

Reference: Turnitin, LLC. (n.d.). *Instructor insights into the 10 types of plagiarism*. Oakland, CA: Turnitin, LLC.