



Trident University International  
**Writing Style Guide**

Recommended for Students Pursuing  
an Associate or Bachelor's Degree

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## I. The Writing Process

This manual has been designed to assist Trident University students to write focused, organized, and well-supported papers at Trident University and beyond in future educational pursuits and/or the workplace. Indeed, written communication is an essential skill not only at the university level, but also in the real world.

Writing is a recursive process. It is a process of steps—each building on the other. After reading actively and thinking critically, the writing process begins. Along the way, writers continually ask themselves about their purpose and their target audience—checking for a clear thesis, supporting points, organization, grammar, and sentence skills.

The process of writing a paper consists of three parts:

### Planning

### Developing

### Drafting

PLANNING involves identifying one's audience and purpose, deciding on one main point, stating a thesis, and organizing ideas by grouping or with an outline.

DEVELOPING involves *interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating* (depending on the course or assignment), supporting the thesis through specific points, and explaining using details and examples.

DRAFTING involves actually writing the essay, and creating an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph, as well as addressing coherence, proofreading, and editing.

## II. Academic Writing

### Definition

Academic writing reveals what the writer *believes* and is supported by the *evidence* that has contributed to that thinking. It is not a story, description, or summary.

Most university writing assignments involve taking a stand on an issue. The purpose would be not only to inform and explain, but also to persuade the reader to respect your position.

## Tone

The tone used in Academic Writing may be different from your earlier experiences with writing. Academic Writing is never written in the first person unless specified. Unless we are responding to a question about our summer vacation, we **do not use** the *first person*, "I."

We also do not use the *second person*, approaching the reader as if we are writing a letter or having a conversation. That means **do not use** the following words: you, your, yours, yourself, yourselves, and don't (or any other command).

Remember that writing is more formal than conversation: Avoid slang, jargon, and conventional terms (*basically, things*, etc.).

## Characteristics of an Academic Essay

- ✓ It is an argument. It makes a point and supports it.
- ✓ The point ("claim" or "thesis") is debatable and open to interpretation. It is not obvious. The thesis is declarative and works best at the end of the introductory paragraph.
- ✓ There is a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.
- ✓ The body of the paper is divided by clear supporting points. Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence that states the main point of the paragraph. Assertions may be made without support.
- ✓ The primary source for support is from the text or other sources. Quotations are required when quoting from the text or other sources.
- ✓ When sources are used, an Academic Essay must be formatted in APA Style.
- ✓ A final draft should be edited carefully for grammatical correctness.

## Who Is Your Audience?

For most university writing assignments, you are writing for a general academic audience—your professor and in some cases your classmates. Academic readers need clear and logical writing that uses supporting points to inform, explain, and persuade.

Of course, various academic audiences differ. Readers in the Health Sciences would seek research from medical journals, while Business and Information Technology readers might focus on real-world applications. As a result, depending on the assignment and field, your readers may expect certain subject matter and varying types of evidence and methods.

## Analyzing Your Audience

The more you know about your audience, the more you will be able to target your writing. Ultimately you will be more successful after analyzing what your readers know, what they believe, and what they value.

Consider the following questions as you analyze your reader:

- Who are your readers?
- What do they know or want to know?
- What opinions do they hold?
- How might you appeal to them?
- How can you narrow your focus based on this information?
- What points would appeal most strongly to your readers?
- What details would persuade them?
- What might possibly offend them?

## The Thesis Statement

The most effective writing is centered around one main point. All supporting points, details, and examples are relevant to that one main point. Most of the time after reading an essay, you can sum up the main point in a single sentence; *that* would be the thesis.

Since the goal of academic writing is to inform, explain, and persuade, the main point must be extremely clear. Creating your thesis sentence can help you clarify your point and keep you on track as you write.

Avoid the cliché, “In this paper I will discuss...” Instead, use your thesis to achieve the following:

- *state* the specific topic to be addressed
- *express* the purpose of the essay
- *reveal* the perspective on the topic
- *provide* a “road map” for the essay

## Organizing Your Essay

When it comes to organizing your essay, try to find the way that best reveals the connection between your ideas. The way you organize your paper not only impacts the way your readers follow along, but also reinforces your support from introduction to conclusion. That stated, organization is extremely important.

An outline is one way to organize your thoughts before starting a draft. An outline can be very brief or quite detailed, but in either case, it serves as a guide. A solid thesis is the best start to developing an outline; it is the foundation of a paper that may be built from a deep-seated start.

## Informal Outlines

An informal outline can be as simple as a working thesis and three or more supporting points:

Working thesis: There are ways Illinois can address the increase in traffic on Chicago expressways.

- Convenient (and affordable) public transportation opportunities
- Incentives for carpooling
- Incentives for electric car motorists
- Work schedule alternatives

For an example of a more typical informal outline, let's suppose you were assigned a Sociology paper on the Amish people of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. An informal outline might look something like this:

Working thesis: While the Amish way of living may appear unusual to some, it nurtures a degree of simplicity and happiness that rivals our own everyday life.

### Characteristics that appear unusual to many

- Electricity is considered "worldly" and connects the Amish to the outside world, so most communities forbid it.
- The phone is forbidden to be inside the home and is instead kept in a shack or barn outside of the home.
- The Amish prioritize the Word of God over the rule of the government; as a result, the Amish use internal church discipline to handle infractions that others consider serious violations of the law.
- Land, which is traditionally kept within families, is usually passed on to younger sons rather than to older sons, or daughters.

- The Amish do not believe in modern luxuries like televisions, appliances, cars, and contemporary clothing.

### Admirable Characteristics of the Amish

- Children learn how to be farmers, homemakers, carpenters, and tradesmen. By the time they are teens, Amish girls know how to cook a full meal and boys understand farm operations.
- A large part of the closeness and survival of Amish communities lies in the fact that members are mutually dependent upon each other. Neighbors helping neighbors has been a long-standing bedrock of the Amish lifestyle.
- Since the Amish don't have hospitalization insurance, they combine efforts and funding to cover medical expenses for any member of their community in need of financial assistance. Each community appoints a leader for their mutual aid fund.
- The Amish are pacifists, and tradition dictates that they abstain from any acts of violence. They are also conscientious objectors, avoiding any involvement with the military.

This informal outline suggests an essay that naturally falls into two parts:

- 1) characteristics of the Amish that appear unusual to some
- 2) admirable characteristics of the Amish

### Formal Outlines

While creating an informal outline is an effective way to order your ideas before drafting an essay, a formal outline is necessary for longer, more substantial essays, especially those involving research.

A formal outline is more detailed than an informal outline. It reveals how the ideas relate to one another with specific details and examples.

Like the informal outline, a full formal outline includes the thesis statement at the beginning and lists the major points that support and develop the thesis. A formal outline, however, includes much more specific details. Beneath the major points are sub-points, details, and examples. A true formal outline is a "road map" of an essay draft.

With a working thesis and supporting points, the question might be asked, "How do I come up with the supporting details to 'fill out' each body point of my essay?"

Plenty of details and examples will strengthen your thesis and sustain your credibility as a writer, so you will need enough of them to make that happen.

Initially, supporting evidence may be based on your own experience or observations. This is typically early in a course when the building blocks of writing are being addressed and the assignments are more informative in nature.

Once the building blocks of writing have been mastered, formal Academic writing will include support from the writings of others—experts in the field. That is not to say that your own voice will be lost. Indeed, it is your main point or thesis that drives an essay. It is the expert opinion that you will select and carefully incorporate into your writing that provides the credible support.

As you think about the points you will use to support your thesis, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this point truly support my thesis?
- Does it seem accurate?
- Do I have enough support?
- Is it balanced?
- Will it persuade my audience?

### Facts, Statistics, and Expert Testimony

Student writers must be very mindful when using facts and statistics in their writing to support a thesis.

*Facts* are statements that can be verified either by observation or by reading a reliable account.

*Statistics* are facts expressed in numbers.

*Expert testimony* is statement from one with knowledge gained from study, research, and/or experience in a specific area.

Note the difference between fact and opinion in the following examples. Even if the statement is “fact,” would further support (or credit) be necessary if you used the statement in your essay?

- One acre is 43,560 square feet.
- Chili’s is the best restaurant in town.
- One in eight American children goes to school hungry every morning.
- All 16-year-old American males must register with the Selective Services.
- Abortion is wrong.
- Fewer homeowners have fallen into foreclosure since the new assistance programs became available.



## Paragraphing

An essay should be written in organized paragraphs, each one with a specific purpose and contributing some new idea in support of the thesis or main point of the essay. Ideas should be stated, developed, and illustrated with plenty of detailed evidence.

Essays may be divided into three sections:

- Introductory paragraph
- Body paragraphs
- Concluding paragraph

### Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph has three parts:

- An opening sentence that grabs readers' attention and encourages them to want to read on. This might be a powerful anecdote, a lively quotation, a story, or even a question. The opening sentence does not have to reveal the main point (or even topic) of the essay.
- A brief summary of the topic. The necessary background information can typically be provided in 3–5 sentences.
- A concise thesis statement at the end of the paragraph. A thesis is one sentence and states the main point of an essay. A thesis is never in the form of a question.

### Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs make up the support of your paper. The body paragraphs guide your readers through your writing. While the introductory paragraph draws them in, the body paragraphs focus the attention before the concluding paragraph wraps up the discussion.

Each body paragraph addresses a specific supporting point.

Each body paragraph should open with a **topic sentence** that spells out the main idea of the paragraph. In addition to establishing the focus of the paragraph, the topic sentence also relates the paragraph to the thesis of the essay, thereby supporting the thesis. The topic sentence is followed by sentences that clarify, illustrate, and support.

## Concluding Paragraph

The concluding paragraph in an essay remains longest in the mind of the reader. Here the writer has an opportunity to make a lasting impression. Before stating what a concluding paragraph *should* do, let's first note what it *should not* do.

- Never leave your readers half expecting you are planning to go on.
- Do not attempt to restate everything you have already stated in the essay.
- Never introduce new topics that will lead away from your main point.
- Never signal that the end is near with the obvious phrase, "In conclusion..."

Instead, consider the following:

- Conclude with a quotation that leaves your reader thinking about the issue at hand.
- Restate the thesis in an original, though concise manner.
- Suggest further study of the issue that has not been addressed in the essay.

## Achieving Coherence or Flow

Coherence is the quality of being logical and consistent as well as forming a unified whole. Quality writing proceeds in a sensible order by using various devices to connect words in a sentence, sentences in a paragraph, and paragraphs in an essay. These devices are called transitional markers.

We use transitions every day to help people around us follow our trains of thought. For example, you might say,

"On the way to class I received a speeding ticket, and as a result, I won't be going out tonight as planned."

"In contrast to the experience I had at my previous job, I am really enjoying my co-workers!"

"My children love their new school, in addition to finally being able to play on a sports team and sing in the school choir."

## Transitions

in other words	consequently	as a result
besides	moreover	finally
in addition	furthermore	next
similarly	in short	on the other hand
however	unlike	thus
nevertheless	finally	therefore
hence	indeed	on the contrary
in contrast	although	for example
for instance	to illustrate	with few exceptions
generally	of course	

### *A note on Sentence Skills...*

Finally, and extremely important, are sentence skills. No matter how wonderful the thesis, support, organization, and coherence of an essay, if a paper is filled with sentence skill errors, the overall appeal (and final grade!) will suffer. When an essay draft is near conclusion, it is crucial to proofread for error. Reading your work out loud is one of the best ways to catch mistakes, fix awkward sentences, and test whether what you have written makes sense. Reading your work at a later time often makes it easier to proofread and edit with a “fresh pair of eyes.” Be sure to note the following:

Grammar: sentence structure, tense, etc.

Punctuation: commas, period placement, quotation marks, etc.

Diction: word choice

Spelling: misspelled words and misuse of words

## **III. Argumentation**

The term *argumentation*, or *argumentative writing*, is often misinterpreted. Readers see the word *argue* and imagine *disagree* and *dispute*. To *argue* is to *give reasons for or against something*.

*Argumentation*, then, is *the act or process of forming reasons and drawing conclusions, and then applying them to a case in discussion*.

If argumentation is the act or process of forming reasons and drawing conclusions, and then applying them to a case in discussion, then a writer must begin with a specific issue about which people hold different opinions. Select a topic that engages your reader—one he or she cares about on some level.

*The Caribbean is a wonderful vacation destination for those in search of relaxation and sun.*

The sentence above is not an argument, per se, as it is unlikely that many would disagree with such a thesis.

*The diet of American people is the responsibility of the United States government.*

The sentence above may be considered an argument, as it is likely that some would hold a different opinion on the issue. Good questions to ask when considering a thesis statement for an argumentative essay include

- Do my readers hold different opinions on this issue?
- Is this issue relevant to my readers?

### Creating Arguments

When creating arguments, consider provocative arguments that will appeal to your readers:

- A highly debated public issue or controversy  
the immigration policy
- A local civic matter  
a zoning dispute over a dog park in your neighborhood
- Conflict of opinion or thought  
the impact of artificial sweeteners on one's health

Other ways to create an argument include:

#### Taking a stand on an issue

State an opinion and attempt to win the reader's respect.

#### Propose a solution

Rouse your audience to action!

#### Writing an Evaluation

Set forth your assessment of the quality of your subject.

## Claims

Argumentative writing involves a *claim*, an assertion of the truth of something that is often disputed or in doubt. Claims may be categorized into four categories:

- Claims of fact or definition
- Claims of cause and effect
- Claims about value
- Claims about solutions or policies

Claims of Fact or Definition require examining and interpreting information to resolve disputes over facts, circumstances, definitions, or the extent of a problem or issue. For example,

- *Abercrombie ads encourage sexual promiscuity among teenagers.*
- *Police brutality is not a major problem in Chicago.*
- *Bilingual education helps students learn a language more quickly and effectively than immersion programs.*

Claims of Cause and Effect argue that an individual, thing, or event caused another thing or event to occur.

- *Denying illegal immigrant children enrollment in U.S. public schools will reduce the problem of illegal immigration.*
- *The federal government should support the distribution of condoms to reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies.*
- *Anyone under the age of 18 accused of murder should be tried as an adult.*

Claims about value consider the rightness, worth, or appropriateness of an issue.

- *Research using fetal tissue is unethical in a civilized society.*
- *English-only legislation promotes cultural intolerance in our society.*
- *Allowing gays and lesbians to adopt children is immoral.*

Claims about Solutions or Policies argue for or against a certain solution or a policy approach to a problem.

- *Instead of worrying about childhood obesity, the U.S. government should focus on ways to out-educate the world, and that starts with a strong school system.*
- *The current retirement system for California educators is broken and must be repaired before even deeper debt occurs.*
- *The new employee-orientation program at Memorial Hospital must be reworked to secure a more effective nursing staff.*

## Gathering Persuasive Evidence

In order to persuade your reader to subscribe to your point of view, or thesis, it is important to gather facts, statistics, and expert testimony to support your position or claim. This evidence must be credible, reliable, up to date, and relevant. Remember that while the evidence you select may likely persuade those who already agree with your claim, or thesis, the challenge is to engage or persuade those who are undecided or who see things differently.

## Rhetorical Strategies/Appeals

There are three types of rhetorical (or persuasive) strategies or appeals used in arguments to support claims and respond to opposing arguments.

- *Logical Appeals (Logos) appeal to the reader's mind or intellect and rely on evidence that is factual, objective, clear, and relevant.*
- *Emotional Appeals (Pathos) appeal to the reader's heart and rely on language, facts, quotations, examples, and images that evoke an emotional response.*
- *Ethical Appeals (Ethos) appeal to the reader's sense of fairness and trust and rely on evidence that will make the reader trust them, respect their judgment, and believe what they have to say.*

Most effective arguments work on all three levels of appeal: logos, pathos, and ethos.

## Avoiding Logical Fallacies

A fallacy is either an illegitimate argument or an argument that involves irrelevant points. A fallacy lacks evidence that supports its claim and undermines the logic of an argument. It is important to avoid fallacies in your own arguments.

- *Oversimplifying*
- *"All-ness"*
- *Generalizing*
- *Begging the question*
- *Either/or reasoning*
- *Argument from ignorance*

Examples:

Oversimplifying: offering simple solutions to complex problems

*If we want to end drunk driving, let's send every violator to prison for life.*

All-ness: implying that something is true of an entire class of things

*Nurses are patient.*

Generalizing: presenting an example as proof rather than as illustration or clarification

*Italians are great chefs.*

Begging the question: arguing a statement already taken for granted.

*Cases of peanut allergies in young children have increased in the past decade.*

Either/or reasoning: oversimplifying by assuming that an issue has only two sides

*Either we stop coal mining, or we just learn to live with it.*

Argument from ignorance: declaring that a claim has to be accepted because it hasn't been disproved

*Just because other life forms have not been documented does not mean that they do not exist.*

## Argumentative Essay Format

Organizing an Argumentative Essay is similar, yet not identical, to the format of a traditional academic essay.

- The claim, or thesis, is stated in the introductory paragraph.
- An overview of the situation/issue/dispute is provided, along with any necessary or useful background.
- The reasons/points/evidence that support the claim, or thesis, make up the body of the essay.
- Acknowledgement of any opposing points of view (either conceding them or challenging them as appropriate) are included to make the claim stronger.
- Reaffirming the main point and proposing how the reader should respond is saved for the conclusion.

## IV. APA Style

University-level writing requires a thorough understanding of a given topic as well as the ability to locate and use sources in one's writing. Whether a student uses a single source or a handful of sources, it is essential to read, evaluate, and integrate the sources into one's own writing both effectively and ethically.

### Why Cite?

When including another's words, thoughts, or ideas within your own writing, it is required that you accurately credit each source, both in the text of a paper and in a Reference List at the end.

When you skillfully incorporate source information into your own writing while crediting each source conscientiously, the "research process" is in order.

### Identifying Credible and Reliable Sources

One challenge for university students involves the sometimes difficult task of determining whether a source is credible and reliable. The questions below may be used to evaluate the source in question and help determine whether it may be included in a university-level writing assignment.

- Who is the author of the source and what are his/her credentials?
- Who published the writing? Was it a company or corporation, a non-profit organization, an educational organization or institution, a government agency, or an interest group? How might this impact the content of the piece?



- What is the point, message, or purpose of the publication or site? Is it to provide information, to publish research, to sell a product, or to educate?
- What bias (if any) is present, and how does that impact the reliability of the source?
- What evidence is provided for the information or claims made? Do they appear reliable and credible?
- Where was the source found? A Google search result? An online educational database?
- When was the source published or created? Is the information up to date? Current research in certain areas like medicine and business requires more up-to-date information than other areas.
- When was the source last revised or updated?
- Why should the information from this particular source be included in your essay rather than that from other sources?
- Why (and in what way) is the information from this particular source relevant to your research question?
- How would the information from this source complement your paper? How would the information from this source support your thesis and provide additional evidence to appeal to or convince your readers?

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is

- the act of intentionally presenting someone else's words, thoughts, or ideas as your own,
- pretending that passages copied from an article are your own writing,
- dishonestly submitting a paper purchased from the Web,
- dishonestly submitting a paper written by a friend or colleague, or
- including the words, thoughts, or ideas of others without identifying their sources.

Plagiarism is an especially serious offense in a university because it presents an absolute disrespect for the intellectual work of others, which is the foundation of education, academia, teaching, and learning.

When using sources in your writing, always do so carefully and honestly by acknowledging the authors.