



## Academic Writing Basics

Every discipline has its own conventions, but there are some rules that apply to any college writing situation. The following tips are some of the most important things to remember when approaching any college-level writing project.

### Visit the Writing Center early and often

- In-person: Luther Hall 116
- By email (students in cohorts only): [writingcenter@csp.edu](mailto:writingcenter@csp.edu)
- On the web: <http://web.csp.edu/writing/> (available as a link from the CSP home page)
- By phone: 651-603-6233

### Remember that writing is a process

Pre-writing → Planning → Drafting → Revising → Editing → Proofreading

- Don't work through all of these stages in one sitting.
- These stages are fluid and often overlap.
- You can visit the Writing Center during any of these stages in the writing process.

### Know your audience and purpose before you begin writing

- Are you writing for your classmates? Experts in the field? Your professor? Depending upon your audience, you will need to adjust how you include terminology, explanations, examples, and definitions.
- Are you writing to inform? To persuade? To argue? To reflect? Be sure you are clear about your purpose before writing; this will make the writing process more efficient and help ensure you fulfill all of the assignment's requirements.

### Include a clear, concise thesis

- Your thesis should: (1) state the topic to be discussed, (2) convey the essay's purpose, (3) indicate your perspective on the topic, (4) use specific language, (5) provide a "road-map" for the rest of the paper (indicate supporting points and the order in which they'll be addressed). --adapted from the *Simon & Schuster Handbook* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. by Lynn Quitman Troyka
- A thesis is not "In this paper I will discuss . . . ." The thesis should be a direct statement of your perspective on the topic
- If you struggle with writing thesis statements, try answering the question: "What is the most important thing I want my reader to know after he/she reads my paper?" Or, fill in the blank: "What it all boils down to is \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Use an appropriate academic tone**

- Don't use second person. That means don't use the following words: you, your, yourself, yourselves, and don't address the reader directly as if you are writing a letter or having a conversation.
- Remember that writing is more formal than conversation: avoid slang, jargon, and conversational terms.

### **Properly cite all sources**

- Be sure you understand the conventions of APA, MLA, or the citation style your instructor requires.
- If you use a source's exact words, set them off with quotation marks and cite the source(s).
- If you borrow an idea from a source—even if you say it in your own words—cite the source(s) that provided the information.

### **Use transitions to connect ideas**

- Each time you begin writing about a new idea, include a phrase or sentence that shows how the new idea relates to the one you just finished discussing.
- Include a sentence at the end of one paragraph or the beginning of the next that explains how the ideas in one paragraph relate to the ideas in the next paragraph.

### **Include a topic sentence for each paragraph**

- The first sentence of each paragraph should indicate what the rest of the paragraph is about. It is not always the FIRST sentence. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence, which is a sentence indicating the main idea of the paragraph. The other sentences in the paragraph should back up that idea. DO not cram your paragraphs full of competing main ideas.
- Think of the topic sentence as an explanation of the paragraph's main idea.

### **Avoid fragments and run-ons**

The easiest way to make sure you are using correct, complete sentences is to be certain you have one complete idea per sentence.

- Make sure each statement in your paper has a subject (the who or what doing the action), and a verb (the action).
- Review punctuation rules so you know the proper uses of commas, semicolons, colons, periods, etc.

### **Read your work out loud**

- 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.