

STYLE GUIDE FOR WRITING IN HISTORY

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CONTENT

You need a **thesis**, that is, a generalization that interprets, explains, or makes a statement about the material. You should be able to state your thesis in one or two sentences in the opening paragraph. Your research -- i.e. the evidence you present -- is intended to support your thesis.

The building block of your essay is the **paragraph**. Each paragraph should make a point, expressed in a topic sentence that usually is the first sentence of the paragraph. The remaining sentences provide examples of the statement in the topic sentence and elaborate on it. Paragraphs should be a minimum of three sentences and should not shift topics. Avoid a series of short paragraphs. A transition word, phrase, or sentence should carry the reader from one paragraph to the next (common transition and connecting words are listed below under the Writing section).

End with a **concluding paragraph** that reiterates your thesis, pulls together the material discussed in the essay, and, hopefully, makes a concluding point.

Think carefully about the organization of your essay. In most instances do not organize it around each source. It is possible that the thesis will need to be revised after you have written out your first draft. You then need to revise the thesis, and possibly to reorganize your evidence to make sure it builds and supports the thesis. Prepare at least a rough outline and plan of organization before you start writing.

Writing is thinking. When you write you must express your ideas and arguments in a logical, clear, precise, and consistent manner. Your first pass at writing your essay is essential to clarifying your thesis and organizing the material, but much of it may need to be revised. Allow time to revise and rewrite.

FINAL AUTHORITY ON STYLE

The final authority on all matters of style can be found in the reference guide by Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Perfection Learning, January 1, 2010). A quicker reference of Turabian's guidelines (i.e. Chicago Style) can be found online, and on the class's writing website.

GENERAL WRITING

1. Write in the "active voice."

- In an active voice the subject of the sentence does the action.
- Examples of active voice sentences:
 - "Truman won the presidential election of 1948."
 - "Although everyone expected him to win, Dewey lost the 1948 presidential election."
 - "In 1948 the people voted to retain Truman in office."
 - "On December 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor."
- Examples of passive voice sentences:
 - "The presidential election of 1948 was won by Truman."
 - "Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese."
 - Notice that the subject of each sentence (1948 election, Pearl Harbor) does not do the action -- i.e. it is passive.

2. Write in the third person (avoid "I" and "you")

- Even when stating an opinion, generally phrase it as a declarative statement. The reader understands that it is your view.

3. **Write history in the past tense**
4. **Vary sentence structure and use compound sentences.**
 - Avoid a string of short declarative sentences. A compound sentence has two independent clauses, each of which could stand by itself as a sentence. The clauses are joined by a comma and a conjunction, or, if a conjunction is not used, the sentences are joined by a semi-colon
 - E.g. Thomas Jefferson supported a closer alliance with France. Alexander Hamilton favored closer ties with England. (that is two short declarative sentences)
 - Write: Thomas Jefferson supported a closer alliance with France, while Alexander Hamilton favored closer ties with England. (it is a compound sentence, with “while” being the conjunction)
 - Or write: Thomas Jefferson supported a closer alliance with France; Alexander Hamilton favored closer ties with England. (Since there is no conjunction, and the two clauses can be stand-alone sentences, a semi-colon should be used).
5. **Use transitional words, phrases, or sentences to carry the reader forward.**
 - See Transitions section later in this guide for a much weightier discussion.
6. Generally do not end sentences in prepositions
 - See Prepositions section later in this guide for a much weightier discussion.
7. **Generally put the time phrase at or near the beginning of the sentence.**
 - Write: “On December 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.”
 - You would put the date at the end to give it greater emphasis if the timing of events was your main point. For example, “The Army-McCarthy hearings, which finally exposed the senator to the American public, took place in May, 1954.”
 - Further, once you have announced a time frame, be it a date, decade, or era, the reader will continue to assume that you are discussing that time until you announce a different one. It is unnecessary to keep repeating a time period or era.
8. **Put the main emphasis of a sentence at the end.**
 - Your sentence should build up to its main point.
9. **Make sure the antecedents of pronouns are clear.**
 - When in doubt recast the sentence. Generally a pronoun refers to the immediately preceding noun (i.e. the antecedent).
10. **Express your findings, claims, arguments strongly, confidently, and be positive.**
 - A phrase such as: “It seemed as though...” should be used only when you wish to cast doubt on an interpretation or event or are unsure of the accuracy of a fact. Otherwise its usage suggests that you are tentative about your own findings.
11. **Do not use “etc.”**
 - If you are not providing a complete list, introduce the items with “for example” or “such as,” indicating that it is not an exhaustive listing.
12. **Avoid colloquialisms.**
 - Examples include: “phenomenal” for extraordinary; “tremendous” for exceptional or significant; “sure” for certainly or surely; “puts out” in the sense of “advances” (as in: “the article puts out the idea...”; “over the top” for excess; “flip side” for alternatively; “rolled around,” “popped up,” or “kicked into gear” to describe a new movement, trend or political party (try: “emerged,” “appeared,” or “coalesced.”)
 - Avoid “goes on” to mean “states” or “says”; “morph” or any version thereof to express change or transition; “a bunch” for any term of quantity; “positives” in any usage.
13. **Avoid slang and crude expressions always.**
 - It is not acceptable, for example, to say that “the Nazis sucked,” even if they did.
14. **Do not use contractions (e.g. can’t, didn’t).**
15. **Avoid empty words and phrases.**

- If you claim something is “important” or “revealing” or “insightful,” you must show why; to just say so does not make it so. Avoid terms such as “I think” and “I believe.” The reader assumes that the argument represents your views.

16. **Economy of words is always a virtue.**

- Avoid excess verbiage and needless repetition. For example, if you are writing about American history, to keep writing “in the United States” is unnecessary. If you writing about a particular time period, a year or a decade, one you establish the time frame it is unnecessary to keep repeating it or using a phrase such as “at that time.”

PUNCTUATION

1. **Commas are used:**

- to separate the clauses of a compound sentence with a conjunction (and, but, or, nor, so)
- to separate the items in a series
- to precede or set off a non-restrictive clause (a clause that could be omitted from a sentence without changing its meaning).
- to set off an introductory phrase at the beginning of a sentence
- to separate coordinating adjectives (e.g. “it was a vicious, bloody riot”)

2. **Semi-colon:**

- two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction must be separated by a semicolon. Remember that such transition words as “however,” “moreover,” and “therefore” are NOT conjunctions. Thus, in a compound sentence, if you are using these words to connect independent clauses there must be a semicolon.
- also use a semi-colon in a series where there are also commas

3. **Other punctuation:**

- Do NOT use single quotation marks to highlight a common term. Use single quotation marks only inside another quote.
- There are three types of dashes:
 - An “*em dash*” (written or typed as a double dash) is the width of the letter “m.”
 - The *em dash* is used in a manner similar to parentheses, an additional thought to be added within a sentence by sort of breaking away from that sentence—as I’ve done here.
 - Some word processing programs (e.g. Microsoft Word will automatically turn the double dash(--)) into a thicker dash (—) -- that is the *em dash*. Either is fine.
 - The “*en dash*” (written or typed as a single dash and is the width of an “n”) connects things that are related to each other by distance or range, as in the May–September issue of a magazine.
 - En dashes are also used to connect a prefix to a proper open compound: for example, pre–World War II. In that example, “pre” is connected to the open compound “World War II” and therefore has to do a little extra work (to bridge the space between the two words it modifies—space that cannot be besmirched by hyphens because “World War II” is a proper noun).
 - The *hyphen* (simply written or typed as a single dash) connects two things that are intimately related, usually words that function together as a single concept or work together as a joint modifier (e.g., tie-in, toll-free call, two-thirds).
 - The hyphen is technically supposed to be a little skinnier than the en dash, but I wouldn’t know how to type a hyphen vs. the en dash -- so when I type, my hyphen and en dash as the same thing.
 - a. For another discussion of the invigorating world of hyphens and dashes see <http://www.thepunctuationguide.com/em-dash.html>

- Avoid use of a slash, as in: and/or. In such cases, “or” is almost always appropriate.
- The colon is used after an independent clause to indicate a list or that a quote follows. Never use with “such as.” Do not confuse with a semicolon; the two are never interchangeable.
- Possessive. Generally add an apostrophe and “s” to make something possessive, but do not confuse the possessive and the plural: Lincoln’s Proclamations.
 - know the difference between these words; cities (plural), city’s (singular possessive), and cities’ (plural possessive).

NUMBERS

1. Never begin a sentence with an Arabic numeral, even a date. Write ‘In 1492...’ If you feel you must begin a sentence with a date, you have to write it out.
2. Write out all numbers below 101 and large round numbers, such as one thousand, ten thousand, two million.
 - Exceptions:
 - use Arabic numerals when giving a percent (even if it is 1 percent) or whenever there is a decimal point.
 - Do NOT use the % symbol; write out the word “percent.”
 - In sentences with both large and small number, all numbers are often given as numerals.
 - For money, as above, write out small even amounts, e.g. three dollars, twelve dollars, six pounds, two hundred thousand dollars. For large amounts which are not round numbers, use numerals preceded by currency symbol and follow by quantity: \$220 million. However, if the amount includes a decimal use, numerals regardless of the amount, as in \$1.08; \$200.50.
3. In writing dates with numerals do NOT include the ordinal, that is, “st, nd, rd, th”. Thus, write July 4, 1776 never July 4th, 1776. You may write 4 July 1776, but be consistent with this matter. (Word may automatically add the ordinal; if so, change it manually. Never assume that because Word does something it has to be right.)

QUOTATIONS

1. Quotations are evidence, they are not proof. In the case of long quotes in particular, their significance and relevance needs to be pointed out.
2. Quotes should flow with YOUR text; that is, attempt to interweave key phrases from the source into your own sentences, mixing direct quotation with paraphrasing, also making sure that the sentence is grammatically correct. Be careful -- if you over quote you are losing control of your own story.
3. Do NOT place a comma before a quote unless called for it by the sentence.
 - correct: Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream."
 - correct: The so-called “critical period” was not so critical.
4. Add missing words to a quotation with brackets: []. You might do this to make a quotation fit grammatically into your own sentence or to clarify the antecedent of a pronoun. Also use brackets to change case or capitalization of a quote to make it fit grammatically.
5. Long quotes (four or more lines) must be indented and single spaced. DO NOT use quotation marks. Wherever possible, break up long quotes. If the quotation is introduced with a full sentence, end the preceding sentence of text with a colon. If the quotation is introduced with a partial sentence, no punctuation is required unless called for by the sentence. Place the footnote number at the end of the quotation.
6. Commas and periods at the end of quotations go inside the quotation mark.
 - If the quoted words aren’t a question but the entire sentence is a question, the question mark goes outside the quotation marks. For example: Did he really declare, “I am not a crook”?

- If the quoted words are a question, put the question mark inside the quotation marks. For example: “How can you eat a tuna sandwich while hoisting a piano?” Betsy asked as she eyed his lunch.
 - For those rare occasions when both the quoted words and the sentence are questions, put the question mark inside the quotation marks. For example: Did the mover really ask, “Is that lady for real?”
7. Use [sic] to indicate an error in a quotation, either of spelling or fact, so the reader knows it is not your error. It is placed in brackets following the error.
 8. Use ellipsis, three dots, to indicate words omitted within a quotation. There is a space between each dot. If used at the end of a sentence, follow by a period, i.e., four dots. If the quote continues with missing material do not use more than three dots.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. All abbreviations must be written out on first usage with the abbreviation following in parenthesis. For example: “Robert Haley was the long-time director of the New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor (AICP).”
2. If you are using a term only two or three times, write it out each time unless it is a very commonplace term. Excessive use of abbreviations, particularly of unfamiliar terms, confuses the reader.
3. If you have many abbreviations in your text, include an alphabetical list either after the contents or as an appendix.
4. Generally, abbreviations of government agencies and other well-known organizations do not include periods. Thus: CBS, NBC, AFL-CIO, YMCA, NAACP, FBI, HUD, FHA, TVA, UN, US.

CAPITALIZATION AND TITLES

1. Do not refer to either historical figures, historians or other authors as Mr., Mrs., Professor, but do use Dr. for a physician. On first reference, always introduce the person with a descriptive phrase or sentence and life dates as appropriate, and always give the full name. However, do not unnecessarily repeat a title. For example, write “Senator Joseph McCarthy (Republican, Wisconsin)” or “Joseph McCarthy, the Republican junior senator from Wisconsin.” (Thus, you would not write: “Senator McCarthy, the Republican senator.”) Subsequent references generally just use the last name and do not usually repeat the title, unless the title is appropriate. An exception is always appropriate for clarity. Thus, if a figure had different roles at different times, use of a title may help for clarity. If a person had multiple roles at the same time, using a title can clarify in which role someone was operating.
2. Do not refer to historical figures by their first name; since they were not your friends, it is condescending (and untrue). An exception is always allowed to avoid confusion when referring repeatedly to two people with the same last name, such as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. However, refer to President Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt, not Franklin and Eleanor.
3. Be sparing in use of capitalization. Capitalize proper names, regions (such as the South, but not the adjective southern); names of political parties; titles with a person (as in “President Washington,” but write “the president vetoed the bill.”); specific names events (the Great Depression, the Civil War, The Draft Riots, Prohibition, World War II), but not trends (baby boom); days and months, but not seasons or numbers in dates. Do not capitalize centuries, but always write them out.
4. Names of ships, court cases, works of art, titles (books, films, magazines, newspapers, and websites) should be in *italics* or underlined (never both). Put titles of articles and dissertations in quotation marks.

FOOTNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Footnote all material derived from other sources except obvious common knowledge, but do not footnote sentence by sentence. Generally a footnote at the end of a paragraph is sufficient unless quoted material is included.
2. Place the footnote number after periods and quotation marks. Do not leave a space between a quotation mark and a footnote number.

LANGUAGE

1. The following pairs of words are completely different in meaning and NEVER interchangeable; learn the differences:
 - “Affect” and “effect.” Affect is usually a verb: “The weather affected the voter turnout.” Effect is usually a noun that refers to a result of some sort: “The effect of the low voter turnout was that the Republicans won.”
 - “Its” (possessive) and “it’s” (a contraction for “it is.”)
 - “Then” (in the past, or as a result of some sort: as in “If...then”) and “than” (defines a relation between two items, as in “I have more ice cream than you.)
 - “There” (indicating location) and “their” (possessive).
 - “Principal” (the leading or first in priority) and “principle” (an idea or belief).
 - The words “that” and “which,” although frequently interchanged, have different meanings.
 - “That” introduces a defining or restrictive clause or phrase -- to omit the phrase changes the meaning of the sentence; do not use commas before “that.”
 - correct: “The event that tore the Whig party apart was the fight over the Kansas-Nebraska Act.” (The phrase “that tore the Whig party apart” could not be omitted without destroying the meaning of the sentence).
 - “Which” introduces a non-restrictive phrase -- to omit the phrase would not change the meaning of the sentence; “which” is usually preceded by a comma.
 - correct: “The riot, which began over the draft, lasted four days.” (The entire phrase “lasted over four days” could be omitted without changing the meaning).
2. Avoid such absolutes as “perfect” (as in: “perfect example”). Prefer “is an example par excellence,” or “clearly demonstrates,” or “strongly suggests.” Also avoid such absolutes as “proves.” Rarely, particularly in historical analysis is anything perfect or total, and proof is an extremely high standard.
3. Avoid “due to.” Use “because.”
4. ALWAYS proofread. DO NOT rely on spell check; it will not pick up homophones -- two completely different words that sound alike but are spelled differently. Do not rely on grammar check either. Use your brain as the last line of defense against grammatical and spelling errors.

FORMAT

1. Text must be typed, double spaced, preferable with Times New Roman, or similar font, such as Calibri, Arial, or Garamond. Use 12 pt. font - never anything else.
2. Do not touch the default margins. For your reference, that means the left margin should be set at 1 ¼ inches.
3. I don’t really care, but for future reference for writing in a history class, the page numbers should be numbered at top right or bottom center, and starting with the first page of text (i.e. not a cover page).

6 Trait Student Writing Guide

Ideas	Organization
<p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — I have a clear, focused vision of what I want to say to the reader. — I know this topic like an insider and it shows. — I give my reader clear, accurate, insightful information. — I pulled information from several sources and wove it all together to make my own meaning. — Strong support makes everything I say convincing. <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — My thesis or key question is clear. — I answer some important questions. — I give the reader useful information. — I pulled information from more than one source. — Good evidence makes my main points believable. <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — You can tell what my thesis is, even if I don't state it. — I answer one or two key questions. — I give my reader a good overview of this topic. — I did some research, but also relied on what I knew. — I have some support -- I'm not sure if it's enough. <p style="text-align: center;">❖</p> <p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — I think you can figure out my thesis or main point. — I don't know enough to feel comfortable with this topic. — Most of what I say is simply common knowledge. — I didn't do a lot of research -- I relied on things I had heard. — My support is sketchy -- it could leave you skeptical! <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — My thesis is still coming together. — There are BIG gaps in what I know about this topic. — Some things I made up -- or I took my best guess! — I did little or no research. I just wrote. — My evidence will convince you only if you already agree with me. <p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — I don't have a thesis or main point. — I don't really know anything about this topic -- yet. — Without information, it was hard to write! — I wasn't sure how to do research. — My writing is detail-free. 	<p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — My organization will guide you like a light in the dark. — My lead sets up the discussion -- and invites you to be part of it. — My ending helps you draw important conclusions. — This piece is organized to make learning about this topic easy. — I show connections you might not even think of if I did not bring them up. <p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — My organization will help you make sense of the topic. — My lead invites you into the discussion. — My ending brings the discussion to a close. — The organization makes my thoughts easy to follow. — I connect ideas to each other -- or to a big picture. <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — This design works fine for this kind of writing. — My lead gets the discussion started. — The conclusion lets you know the conversation is over. — I don't think you'll ever feel lost. — The most important connections are clear. <p style="text-align: center;">❖</p> <p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — You might need to work to stay on track. — I think my lead goes one way, my paper another. — Maybe I stopped too quickly, or repeated things I had already said. — You might need to reread to figure out what is most important. — I just followed a formula for transitions: <i>First, Second</i>, etc. <p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — You might find yourself asking, "Where is this going?" — My lead is one everyone uses -- I'm not sure it fits. — My ending doesn't really wrap things up. — It's hard to follow this -- things come at the wrong time. — I didn't know how to connect ideas. <p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — My writing is random. There is no real design to it. — I don't have a lead. I just started writing. — I have no conclusion. I just stopped with I ran out of things to say. — My writing jumps from point to point. — Nothing goes with anything else.

Sentence Fluency

- 6**
- My sentences are clear, direct, and to the point.
 - You could read this very quickly and easily -- and not miss one important point.
 - My sentence beginnings make it easy to follow the flow of ideas.
 - My sentences show variety, but I avoided extremes of long and short.
- 5**
- My sentences are clear and direct.
 - The whole piece is very readable.
 - Sentence beginnings show how ideas connect.
 - I avoided sentences that were overly long or uncomfortable short.
- 4**
- Most sentences are clear and fairly easy to read.
 - There might be one or two spots I could smooth out.
 - I need better transitions and less repetition.
 - I could use more variety, but there's nothing too long or short.
-
- 3**
- Most sentences come clear if you read carefully.
 - Some bumpy moments make it hard to read quickly.
 - My beginnings (of sentences) are repetitious. They don't really show connections either.
 - I have some long, gangly sentences. I have short sentences too.
- 2**
- When I read this aloud, it's a bumpy ride.
 - You'll need to slow down and pay attention.
 - Most of my sentences start the same way.
 - Most of my sentences are too long or too short.
- 1**
- This is very tough to get through, even for me.
 - You'll have to fix things as you go.
 - It's hard to tell where sentences begin and end.
 - Are these even sentences?

Conventions

- 6**
- Even a picky editor will have trouble finding an error.
 - I read this silently and aloud -- the conventions bring out the meaning and voice.
 - I cited all sources correctly and used the right format.
 - *Optional:* My layout will catch your eye.
 - This is ready to publish.
- 5**
- I have some tiny errors -- you might not even notice!
 - I read this carefully. My conventions help show a reader how to read my text.
 - All sources are cited correctly.
 - *Optional:* The layout guides your eye to main points.
 - This is ready to publish with only light touchups.
- 4**
- You might spot some errors, but the meaning is clear.
 - I proofed this text, but I need to look again.
 - My citations need a few small corrections.
 - *Optional:* The layout is fine for this piece.
 - Some light editing should do the trick.
-
- 3**
- You will notice errors -- and they might slow you down.
 - I did not proof carefully -- and I missed too many things.
 - I need to recheck my citations carefully.
 - *Optional:* I have some problems with layout (such as tiny print).
 - This needs thorough, careful editing.
- 2**
- Errors jump at you. They get in the way.
 - This does not look edited. I left all the work to the reader.
 - Some citations are missing, or they're not done right.
 - *Optional:* I have serious problems with layout (such as no margins or unreadable fonts).
 - I need to edit this line by line.
- 1**
- Errors make my copy hard to read.
 - Even patient readers might give up.
 - I forgot about citing sources.
 - *Optional:* Layout? I didn't worry about it.
 - I need to read this aloud word by word, pen in hand.

Voice**6**

- My voice is professional and enthusiastic -- just right.
- I use my voice to welcome readers into the discussion.
- I feel confident that my message is important and interesting.
- I like this topic, and want you to like it too.
- I feel certain you will want to share this aloud and to publish it.

5

- My voice is professional and sincere. It suits my topic and audience.
- The voice in this piece reaches out to readers.
- Knowing my topic helps me sound confident.
- I like this topic. You can hear that in my voice.
- You will most likely want to share this aloud and publish it.

4

- My voice is sincere and appropriate.
- You can hear me -- especially in some parts.
- I sound confident in those parts I'm sure about.
- I like this topic all right -- most of the time.
- There are definitely some moments you will want to read aloud and/or publish.

3

- I think I need more voice -- or a different voice.
- My voice either fades away or takes over.
- If I knew this topic better, you'd hear more confidence.
- I have to work at sounding enthusiastic.
- It's not *quite* ready to share.

2

- I think I sound more like an encyclopedia than a person with a message.
- I couldn't get into it. My readers will hear that.
- It's hard to be confident when you don't know the topic.
- I think you'll need to work at paying attention. I did!
- This is *not* ready to share aloud, or to publish.

1

- It's the wrong voice -or it's just a whisper.
- I don't really care if anyone reads this.
- I don't know anything about this topic.
- I just wrote to get done.

Word Choice**6**

- Every word or phrase is chosen to make the message clear for the reader.
- I felt comfortable with terms I needed and used them well.
- I defined or explained things so the reader could follow the discussion easily.
- You won't find any wordiness or jargon in my writing.
- I write to inform my readers, not overwhelm them.

5

- My word choice makes the message clear.
- I know the language that goes with the topic, and used it correctly.
- I defined any terms a reader might not know.
- You won't find much wordiness or jargon.
- My word choice should help a reader understand this topic.

4

- My words make sense. They get the job done.
- If I used technical terms, I'm pretty sure they're correct.
- I think if I defined anything I needed to.
- Wordiness and jargon are not a real problem.
- I think a reader can make sense of this.

3

- You'll get the general idea!
- I tried to use terms correctly -- I didn't always know the right words for the moment.
- New Terms might not always be explained.
- Wordiness? Jargon? Could be a problem here and there.
- I think you can figure out what I mean if you try.

2

- Some of this is unclear now that I take another look.
- I couldn't seem to come up with the right words.
- I was too vague and general -- OR
- I just kept repeating myself...
- You'll have some work to do to make sense of this.

1

- This doesn't make sense, even to me.
- I think I used the wrong words -- it's confusing.
- The language is pretty vague, OR --
- It's just nonsense. I don't know what I wanted to say.
- It's anyone's guess what this means.

Domain # 1 - Ideas (Focus + Content)

Ideas can be conceived as an essay's **FOCUS** and **CONTENT**.

FOCUS is the point you are making -- the reason for writing your paper. Everything about your writing begins with that message. If you can choose your own topic, pick something important to you and that you know plenty about. If someone picks the topic for you, look for a way to connect it to what is important to you. That way, you can use what you know.

One of the secrets to good **FOCUS** is to keep it small. If your topic (or thesis) is too big (as in, "Everything You Needed to Know About the Presidents of the United States") you will wind up trying to tell too much and not be able to focus on any one long idea long enough to make it clear. Try to write "a lot about a little, rather than a little about a lot."

CONTENT is the detail in your paper. Surprise your reader with what you know. Don't spend time on things that anyone else could write. Don't just write "Artisans of the nineteenth century resisted the technology that promised to rob them of their skill." I just fell asleep! Well, actually I did not because I love that topic, but my point remains; bring that claim to life by adding supporting evidence -- events, quotes, theories, speeches, laws, documents, books, anecdotes. For example, you can tell the reader that the riflemakers at Harper's Ferry, Virginia resisted the installation of machines so vehemently they shot their boss when he tried to install a clock! Now that brings your claim to life.

One more hint: Make sure your ideas (claims and evidence) are crystal clear. Avoid such general statements as "The voyage from Africa was dangerous." I fell asleep again. Dangerous how? Write instead: "For those making the forced voyage to the Americas, they were first stowed away in coffin sized bunks below deck, often chained in groups of two or three." And then proceed to give us more specific details that help the reader envision what is happening. This can make or break your writing. Remember, don't just tell...SHOW too.



A quick definition of **IDEAS**:

The **IDEAS** are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme or thesis, together with the details that enrich and develop that theme.

- The topic is narrow and manageable
- A clear, central theme drives the writing
- Lots of showing (specifics) rather than telling (generalities).
- The details go beyond the obvious
- Quality of details matters more than quantity
- The ideas are fresh and original; shown from a unique perspective
- The author is writing from knowledge
- The readers' questions are anticipated and answered

Domain # 2 - Organization

The **ORGANIZATION** of your essay is vital because without a clear trail, your ideas collapse or crash into each other. It is the organization that gives your writing direction and helps the reader move through the ideas in a purposeful way.

Begin with a strong introduction (or, a lead) so you hook the reader right away. Think about your introduction working like a fishing lure or fly that dangles right in front of the nose of a fish until it just can no longer resist and takes a big, committed bite.

If you take a look at your whole piece of writing, it should carefully build to the most important moment or point you are trying to make. That is true of each sentence, each paragraph, and the entire essay. Toss your reader interesting details that work like stepping stones -- each getting the reader closer and closer to the key idea or event.

The order, or sequence, of your details is very important too. Ideas should not dive-bomb the reader out of the blue; they should come at just the right time to help the reader understand. Everything needs to fit together with a strong connecting line back to the main idea, or thesis.

Watch out for getting bogged down in trivial details, or “fluff.” In an essay with strong **ORGANIZATION**, connections between ideas are strong, which is another way of saying that bridges from one idea to the next hold up. The piece closes with a sense of resolution, tying up loose ends, bringing things to a satisfying closure, answering important questions while still leaving the reader something to think about. Good conclusions are tough, but do not allow yourself to lose steam. Bad conclusions mean unsatisfied readers.



A quick definition of **ORGANIZATION**:

The **ORGANIZATION** is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the logical and sometimes intriguing pattern of the ideas.

- An inviting introduction gets you started and then allows the writer (and reader) to dive from there
- Thoughtful transitions link key points and ideas
- Sequencing is logical, purposeful, and affective
- Pacing is under control (speeding up for a broad view of something, slowing down for an historical close-up)
- Conclusion wraps it up and leaves you thinking...

Domain # 3 - Sentence Fluency

SENTENCE FLUENCY refers to the way individual words and phrases sound together within a sentence and how groups of sentences sound when read in sequence -- i.e. one after the other. Sentence fluency is about the sound and rhythm of language. The way in which sentences are woven together affects not only the overall tone and voice of a piece, but also the clarity and meaning.

Read what you write aloud and listen to the flow of the language. Do you like what you hear? Does it make you sit up and take notice, or are you lulled to sleep by the sing-song sameness of each sentence pattern? Your sentences should be clear and make sense. Do you have what writers call “sentence sense?” It’s that sense that there is more than one way to say something, but some ways just sound better than others. Notice how your sentences begin and try to vary the length and beginnings of each sentence to keep your reader’s interest.

SENTENCE FLUENCY is the flow and rhythm of your sentences that makes your writing unique to you.

SENTENCE FLUENCY is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye. How does it sound when read aloud? That's the test. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement. It is free of awkward word patterns that slow the reader's progress. Sentences vary in length, beginnings, structure, and style, and are so well crafted that the writer moves through the piece with ease.

Being able to combine shorter sentences into longer, more mature sentences is a great writing skill to learn. Longer sentences can help you establish relationships that are hard to express in shorter sentences. To effectively combine short sentences, you need to recognize what the shorter sentences have in common -- what series of words, phrases or ideas can be pulled together into one longer sentence?



A quick definition of **SENTENCE FLUENCY**:

SENTENCE FLUENCY is the purposeful use of sentence components.

- The sentences are well constructed; they are complete and correct.
- The sentences vary in length, structure, and complexity.
- The sentences have varied beginnings.
- The sentences include creative and appropriate connectives.
- The writing has rhythm and cadence.
- The sentences showcase the meaning.
- A good writer:
 - uses different sentence lengths, structures, and beginnings
 - uses language that sounds natural, yet elegant
 - gives the writing an easy flow and rhythm
 - invites
 - uses complete sentences, and only uses fragments intentionally and with purpose

Domain # 4 - Conventions

CONVENTIONS are the rules of language -- spelling, punctuation, grammar/usage, paragraphing, and capitalization -- that make your text correct and easy for others to read. When you follow the rules, readers don't need to waste energy mentally editing; they can pay attention to your distinct focus, clever content, creative organization, and unique style.

CONVENTIONS are different from the other five domains because to improve those domains you have to revise -- to rethink and re-see your work. Editing is fixing -- making sure the text is as error-free as possible. The purpose is to make your paper readable to someone else. Sometimes mistakes in conventions get in the way and keep the reader from understanding your message. They also irritate some readers -- something no writer sets out to do deliberately.

Develop an editor's eye. Check everything. Then check it again. It's often hard to spot your own mistakes. Try reading aloud; it makes you slow down. You may also find it helpful to have someone else look at your work. Editing is a skill in itself -- quite different from writing. To be a good editor, you must practice. Teach yourself to read slowly and with care. Be honest; dare to see what is on the page.



A quick definition of **CONVENTIONS**:

CONVENTIONS are the mechanical correctness of the piece -- spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals, and punctuation.

- Consider all key components: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar and usage, paragraphing (indenting)
- The text is clean, edited, polished
- The essay is ready for a public audience
- Conventions are invisible because they are a non-issue (much like a referee or umpire -- you don't notice a good one!)

Domain # 5 - Voice

VOICE is YOU coming through your writing. It is what gives your writing flavor, personality, and style. Only you can give your writing this special touch because no one else sees the world quite the way you do. Honesty is important to create voice and style in your writing. You must say what you think and feel -- not what you think someone else might want to hear. This takes courage. This means to know yourself, listen to yourself, and trust those thoughts and feelings. Sometimes the very act of writing will help you discover what you truly think and feel.

Voice is the writer coming through the words, the sense that a real person is speaking to us and cares about the message. It is the heart and soul of the writing, the magic, the wit, the feeling, the life and breath. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, she or he imparts a personal tone and flavor to the piece that is unmistakably hers or his. And it is that individual something -- different from the mark of all other writers -- that we call **VOICE**.



A quick definition of **VOICE**:

VOICE is evidence of a personal and authentic imprint on the writing.

- The voice is appropriate for the audience and purpose
- The reader feels a strong interaction with the writing
- The author has taken risks, shows confidence in her or his writing
- If the writing is informative or argumentative, it reflects understanding and commitment to the topic

Domain # 6 - Word Choice

As you read and listen to other speak, you cultivate a rich vocabulary of precise and colorful words that allow you to say exactly what you want -- not come close, but nail it right on the head. This is the essence of good word choice. Every new word increases your power.

WORD CHOICE is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. In informative writing, strong word choice clarifies and expands ideas. In argumentative writing, purposeful word choice moves the reader to a new vision of ideas. In all modes of writing figurative language such as metaphors, similes and analogies articulate, enhance, and enrich the content. Strong **WORD CHOICE** is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary chosen to impress the reader, but more by the skill to use everyday words well.

In his book, *On Writing Well*, William Zinsser posits, “Verbs are the most important of all your tools. They push the sentence forward and give it momentum . . . flail, poke, dazzle, squash, beguile, pamper, swagger, wheedle, vex. Probably no other language has a vast supply of verbs so bright with color.” Learn to develop a critical eye towards the verbs in your work. Are they active, powerful, full of energy and panache?

Keep the vocabulary natural. Never write to impress or you will end up with sentences like this: “He cultivated his wan into the kitchen,” or “Our friendship was highly lucrative.” See what happened? In an attempt to use words that were bigger, these writers forgot to make sure they made sense. A thesaurus can be a good friend to a writer, but only if used with plenty of thought.

Your writing works best with specific words, carefully chosen to create a vivid picture in the reader’s mind. Play around with the words until they sound good.



A quick definition of **WORD CHOICE**:

Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.

- lively verbs
- original and deliberate choices
- strong vocabulary
- natural sounding
- specific nouns
- affective words and phrases
- minimal slang, clichés, and repetition

Copy Editors' Symbols

e	Delete the material.	There are six six traits.
(SP)	Spell it out.	I LOVE the ^{SP} 6 traits.
=	Close the gap.	Organi ^z ation is critical.
↓	Delete material and close the gap.	Barry Lane has a ^w ry sense of humor.
stet.	Return to the original.	Never ^{stet} ever write without voice.
^	Insert a letter, word, or phrase.	Mem Fox has ^{a powerful, original} voice.
^	Change a letter or letters.	He's a ⁱ slack writer.
#	Make a space.	The lead must ^{be} a grabber.
U	Transpose letters or words.	Gary Paulsen says, "Read ^{like} a wolf eats."
^	Insert a comma.	Write with voice, spirit, ^{and} detail.
o	Add a period.	Say what you think. ^o Tell the truth. ^o
^	Insert a semicolon.	Good conventions won't make up for lack of thought; [^] they cannot rescue voiceless writing.
^	Insert a colon.	Use these punctuation marks sparingly: colons, parentheses and exclamation points. [^]
1/m	Insert an em dash (like two hyphens).	Kate DiCamillo [^] what a fine writer. ^{1/m}
^?	Add a question mark.	Who stole my scoring guide? ^{^?}
v	Insert an apostrophe.	Garrison Keillor's ^v essay on letter writing inspired me.
=	Insert a hyphen.	Novelist [^] poet Maya Angelou rocks the room when she reads.
≡	Change lower case to capital.	Roald [≡] dahl never shrinks from reality—even if it's ugly.
/	Change capital to lower case.	The [/] ruth lies in the ^β etails.
¶	Start a new paragraph.	"What can one exclamation point tell us?" queried Watson. [¶] "You'd be surprised," retorted Holmes.
2 No¶	Run lines together. No new paragraph.	<i>Lonesome Dove</i> is a long book. ² ^{No¶} Of course, <i>Moby-Dick</i> is long, too, but not everyone finishes <i>Moby-Dick</i> .
" "	Add quotation marks.	^{" "} I try to leave out the parts people skip, ^{" "} said Elmore Leonard.
ital.	Italicize.	<u>A Prayer for Owen Meany</u> left me breathless—and laughing. ^{ital.}
	Align.	My favorite books are these: <i>Lonesome Dove</i> <i>Angela's Ashes</i> <i>Fried Green Tomatoes</i>
] [Center.] The Origin of Six-Trait Assessment [

TRANSITION WORDS

What are transitions and how are they used?

- transitions are phrases or words used to connect one idea to the next
- transitions are used by the author to help the reader progress from one significant idea to the next
- transitions also show the relationship within a paragraph (or within a sentence) between the main idea and the support the author gives for those ideas
- different transitions do different things....

Transitions may be "Additive," "Adversative," "Causal," or "Sequential."

Additive Transitions:

These show addition, introduction, similarity to other ideas, &c.

Addition:

indeed,
further,
as well (as this),
either (neither),
not only (this) but also (that) as well,
also,
moreover,
what is more,
as a matter of fact,

in all honesty,
and,
furthermore,
in addition (to this),
besides (this),
to tell the truth,
or,
in fact,
actually,
to say nothing of,

too,
let alone,
much less
additionally,
nor,
alternatively,
on the other hand,
not to mention (this),

Introduction:

such as,
as,
particularly,
including,
as an illustration,

for example,
like,
in particular,
for one thing,
to illustrate

for instance,
especially,
notably,
by way of example,

Reference:

speaking about (this),
considering (this),
regarding (this),

with regards to (this),
as for (this),
concerning (this),

the fact that
on the subject of (this)

Similarity:

similarly,
in the same way,
by the same token,

in a like manner,
equally
likewise,

also,
so too,

Identification:

that is (to say),
namely,

specifically,
thus,

Clarification:

that is (to say),
I mean,
(to) put (it) another way
in other words,

simply put,
Another way to say this would be
to

To put it differently,

Adversative Transitions:

These transitions are used to signal conflict, contradiction concession, dismissal, &c.

Conflict:

but,
by way of contrast,
while,
on the other hand,

however,
(and) yet,
whereas,
though (final position),

in contrast,
when in fact,
conversely,
still

Emphasis:

even more,
above all,

indeed,
more importantly,

besides
in fact,

Concession and Exception/Contrast:

but even so,
nevertheless,
even though,
on the other hand,
admittedly,
however,

nonetheless,
despite (this),
notwithstanding (this),
albeit
(and) still,
although,

in spite of (this),
regardless (of this),
(and) yet,
though,
granted (this),
be that as it may,

Dismissal:

either way,
whichever happens,
in either event,

in any case,
at any rate,
in either case,

whatever happens,
all the same,
in any event,

Replacement:

(or) at least,

(or) rather,

instead

Causal Transitions:

These transitions signal cause/effect and reason/result, etc. . .

Cause/Reason:

for the (simple) reason that,
being that,
for,
in view of (the fact),
inasmuch as,

because (of the fact),
seeing that,
as,
owing to (the fact),
due to (the fact that),

in that
since,
forasmuch as,

Condition:

on (the) condition (that),
granted (that),
if,
provided that,
in case,

in the event that,
as/so long as,
unless
given that,
granting (that),

providing that,
even if,
only if,
is contingent upon

Effect/Result:

as a result (of this),
consequently,
hence,
for this reason,
thus,
because (of this),

in consequence,
so that,
accordingly
as a consequence,
so much (so) that,
so,

therefore,
consequently,
appropriately,
unsurprisingly,

Purpose:

for the purpose of,
in the hope that,
for fear that,
so that,

with this intention,
to the end that,
in order to,
lest

with this in mind,
in order that,
so as to,
so,

Consequence:

under those circumstances,
then,
in that case,

if not,
that being the case,
if so,

otherwise

Sequential Transitions:

These transitions are used to signal a chronological or logical sequence.

Numerical:

in the (first, second, etc.) place,
initially,
to start with,

first of all
thirdly, (&c.)
to begin with,

at first,
for a start,
secondly,

Continuation:

subsequently,
previously,
eventually,

next,
before (this),
afterwards,

after (this),
then

Conclusion:

to conclude (with)
as a final point,
eventually,

at last,
last but not least,
in the end,

finally,
lastly,

Digression:

to change the topic
incidentally,

by the way,
on another note,

Resumption:

to get back to the point,
to resume

anyhow,
anyway,

at any rate,
to return to the subject,

Summation:

as was previously stated,
so,
consequently,
in summary,
all in all,
to make a long story short,
thus,
as I have said,
to sum up,

overall,
as has been mentioned,
then,
to summarize,
to be brief,
briefly,
given these points,
in all,
on the whole,

as has been noted,
hence,
in a word,
to put it briefly,
in sum,
altogether,
in short,

Subtle, but Significant differences between Persuasive Writing v. Argumentative Writing

<p>Goal of persuasive writing: To get reader to agree with you/your point of view on a particular topic.</p>	<p>Goal of argumentative writing: To get reader to acknowledge that your side is valid and deserves consideration as another point of view.</p>
<p>General technique of persuasive writing: Blends facts and emotion in attempt to convince the reader that the writer is "right." (Often relies heavily on opinion.)</p>	<p>General technique of argumentative writing: Offers the reader relevant reasons, credible facts, and sufficient evidence to honor the writer has a valid and worthy perspective.</p>
<p>Starting point of persuasive writing: <i>Identify</i> a topic and your side.</p>	<p>Starting point of argumentative writing: <i>Research</i> a topic and <i>then</i> align with one side.</p>
<p>Viewpoint presented in persuasive writing: Persuasion has a single-minded goal. It is based on a personal conviction that a particular way of thinking is the only sensible way to think. Writer presents one side— his side.</p> <p>(Persuasive writing <i>may</i> include ONE opposing point, it is then quickly dismissed/refuted.)</p>	<p>Viewpoint presented in argumentative writing: Acknowledge that opposing views exist, not only to hint at what a fair-minded person you are, but to give you the opportunity to counter these views tactfully in order to show why you feel that your own view is the more worthy one to hold.</p> <p>Writer presents multiple perspectives, although is clearly for one side.</p>
<p>Audience of persuasive writing: Needs intended audience. Knowing what they think and currently believe, the writer "attacks" attempting to persuade them to his side.</p>	<p>Audience of argumentative writing: Doesn't need an audience to convince. The writer is content with simply putting it out there.</p>
<p>Attitude of persuasive writing: Persuasive writers want to gain another "vote" so they "go after" readers more aggressively. Persuasive writing is more personal, more passionate, more emotional.</p>	<p>Attitude of argumentative writing: Simply to get the reader to consider you have an idea worthy of listening to. The writer is sharing a conviction, whether the audience ends up agreeing or not.</p>

Avoid ending your Sentence with a Preposition

Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

Although the rule on prepositions is not hard and fast, sentences that end in prepositions are often clumsy and inelegant, and when you have written such a sentence consider it a flag to be carefully reexamined. There are exceptions, based on emphasis and your good sense. Thus, you might write: "When Roosevelt embargoed fuel oil to Japan, he did not realize what he was getting into."

The common prepositions are: *about, above, at, before, between, by, during, for, from, if, near, since, to, towards, until, under, up, upon.*)

As a useful guideline, try to avoid ending a sentence with a preposition.

Examples:

- That is a situation I have not thought of.
(The word of is a preposition. Writers should avoid ending sentences in prepositions. This is because a preposition should sit before a noun or a pronoun.)
- She is a person I cannot cope with. ✗
(The word with is a preposition.)
- It is behaviour I will not put up with. ✗
(This example ends in two prepositions: up and with.)

Not a Serious Error

Where possible, you should avoid ending a sentence in a preposition. However, after shuffling the words so that the preposition is not at the end, the re-structured version often sounds contrived and unnatural.

Examples:

- That is a situation of which I have not thought. ✓
(This version is grammatically more pure than the one above. In this example, the word *of* sits before *which*.)
- She is a person with whom I cannot cope. ✓
- It is behaviour with which I will not put. ✓
(This example sounds extremely contrived -- i.e. not how a person, even a smart person obsessed with grammar, would talk.)

Reword to Avoid

Often, the best solution is to reword the sentence.

Examples:

- That is a situation I have not considered. ✓
(There are no prepositions in this sentence, and it has the same meaning.)
- It is behaviour I will not tolerate. ✓

Leave the Preposition at the End

If the sentence sounds too contrived after it has been reworded, another option is to leave the preposition at the end of the sentence.

There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. ✓ (Oscar Wilde)