

# STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVELY WRITING COLLEGE PAPERS

## **1) Getting Started/Research Process**

- Do all of your reading. It's hard to write well about what you don't know.
- Start early. College papers usually require more time than high school papers do.
- Read the assignment carefully. The directions will help you focus. Understand what the instructor has in mind and what you will be graded on. You may be asked to write a report, an issue analysis or an argumentative document.
- Stick to the purpose of the assignment, but choose a topic or angle that interests you.
- Talk to someone to get your ideas flowing.
- Take time to brainstorm and jot down ideas.
- Set internal deadlines for each step of the assignment.
- Look for information in your textbooks, course packs, libraries and on the internet. Also consider primary research methods such as surveys and interviews.
- As you conduct your research take notes on the key concepts, opinions, and issues that you discover. Remember, to keep a record of all your sources of information.

## **2) Argument/Organization**

- Organize your notes into logical groups to identify holes in your research.
- Look for a main point to your findings or argument to determine your thesis statement.
- Your thesis statement is the central idea of your piece of writing. Your entire document will build and develop your thesis.
- To get started on your thesis statement, focus your thoughts and information on a dominant question you seek to answer and try to answer that question in one or two sentences.
- Make sure your introduction maps out the rest of your study (gives a sense of what is about to come).
- Back up general statements with specific examples, evidence, or quotations.
- The paragraphs in the main body generally have the following structure:
  - A topic sentence that states the idea that the paragraph will develop.
  - Other sentences that offer evidence to support the topic sentence.
  - A concluding sentence ties the evidence together or prepares for the idea of the next paragraph.
  - To bind paragraphs and sentences so that they flow smoothly, you can use transitional expressions such as first, however and in addition.

### 3) Style

- Write to express, not to impress. You can make your writing colorful, but use your own language or voice. Be sure you are stating your ideas clearly.
- Consider who your audience is and adapt your style accordingly.
- Understand the expectations of your instructor and the department.
- Make sure the beginnings and endings of sentences stress main ideas and move from old information to new.
- The subjects and verbs of sentences should focus on key actors and actions.
- Make sure your writing is emphatic (equally important ideas are linked through coordination and less important ideas are de-emphasized through subordination).
- Use an active voice.
- Cut unneeded words and repetition.
- Reduce word groups to their essence and combine sentences where appropriate (be concise).
- Vary sentence lengths and structures to hold the reader's attention.
- Avoid biased language and clichés.
- Use specific, concrete and appropriate words

### 4) Revising

- Set your essay aside for at least a day before revising. This allows you to approach it with a fresh perspective and greater clarity.
- Read your rough draft aloud to catch any errors. Proofread several times.
- When editing, read for content and organization first, grammar and diction later.
- Visit your instructors during office hours for feedback.
- Visit the Sweetland Writing Center.
- When revising your paper use the following as a checklist of things to think about:
  - Does the paper conform the purpose of the assignment?
  - Does the paper demonstrate the thesis statement?
  - How effectively are the paragraphs arranged for the paper's purpose?
  - Does the paper flow smoothly?
  - Is the paper convincing?
  - How well does the evidence used support the thesis and the main points?
  - Is the tone of the paper appropriate for the audience and does it create an appropriate mood?
  - Have you used sources appropriately and cited everything?
  - Does the title convey the paper's content accurately and interestingly?
  - Does the introduction engage the reader?
  - Does the conclusion provide a sense of completion?
  - Does the format of the paper suit the audience and the assignment guidelines?
  - Check for spelling and grammar mistakes.

Sources: <http://www.ipl.org/div/aplus/step6.htm>

The Little, Brown Essential Handbook for Writers by Jane E. Aaron

## Library Resources for Research

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### *SearchTools*

<http://searchtools.lib.umich.edu>

Use **Find Articles** to locate and access individual Library databases, including those below...

### *PsycInfo*

The best resource for scholarly journal articles, empirical studies and book chapters in Psychology and related fields.

### *GenderWatch*

Indexes international publications devoted to women's and gender issues.

### *ProQuest Research Library*

Find articles from both popular magazines and scholarly journals

## Where to Get More Research Help

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### *Librarian Office Hours*

Right here in the Newberry CLC, Wednesdays 1-4pm

### *Ask Us Now! & AOL Instant Messenger Services*

IM with a librarian at [www.lib.umich.edu/askus/askusnow.html](http://www.lib.umich.edu/askus/askusnow.html)  
or AIM ScreenName **UMLibraryAskUs**

### *UGLi Reference Desk*

Open Mon-Thurs: 10am-10pm, Fri: 10am-5pm, Sun: 1pm-10pm

## Citing Sources & Bibliography

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### *RefWorks* – [www.refworks.com/Refworks/](http://www.refworks.com/Refworks/)

Save citations from databases and easily format them into any style (APA, MLA, etc.) for your paper.