



ESSAY WRITING TIPS

When You Begin to Write

1. Start early! Give yourself at least **2 weeks** to prepare an assignment.
2. Take special care to read and **understand the assignment**. If your professor has given you an assignment sheet with topics or questions on it, make sure you understand the **key words** for the topic you have chosen. The question is often a guide that sets out the parameters of the assignment: what you can and cannot do in the essay. It will give you some clues about the best way to **organize your information**, and how much information should be included in your essay.
3. If your professor recommends some articles or books to read to help you understand the topic, **do these readings!** They will help you determine how to think about the subject and what special terms you need to incorporate in your essay. Readings give you the expert opinions that you will incorporate in your essay to prove your argument.
4. Make sure that the **introduction** to your essay outlines the context of your essay, presents your argument, or thesis for the essay, and also gives the reader an indication of the way in which you will develop your argument. Therefore, try to have a clear plan of how you will prove your argument. You should have three or four major points that you want to make in connection with the thesis and you should indicate to the reader what you will talk about first, second and third in your essay.
5. Take special care to craft a reasonable thesis statement. The thesis of your essay has two parts: topic and argument. Make sure that your **topic** is narrow enough, and that you have a specific purpose in writing this essay. Often, the narrower a topic is, the easier it is to gather research on it. Also, keep clearly in mind what it is you want to inform or persuade your reader of – this is the **argument** of your essay.
6. Check to see that you have included enough **evidence** in your essay to support your point of view. In an essay for English or Film Studies, the evidence will be quotes from the text or film you are analyzing. In a History or Philosophy essay, it will be ideas and quotes from experts who have analyzed the event you are studying. In a geography essay it will be statistics and quotes from studies done on the topic.
7. Always pay special attention to your **conclusion**. The conclusion should summarize the important points you have made in the essay. It should not include new material, but could

point the way for further study, (based on the analysis you have done) or to the selection of the best solution to the problem you have outlined.

Going from first draft to second draft

8. Don't worry about grammar, spelling or punctuation errors in your writing until you are sure you have said what you what to say as clearly as possible. Write first — ***edit*** later.
9. When you read over your first draft, make sure that every paragraph is clearly linked to your thesis statement, or argument. This is known as the ***coherence*** of your argument. If this link is unclear, you should write in the explanation of how it links to the main idea.
10. Make sure that each paragraph deals with only one main idea. The rest of the paragraph should explain that idea, and bring in evidence to prove that idea. Try not to include information in the paragraph that destroys its ***unity or cohesion***.
11. When you write, try to imitate the language that you will find in academic essays in journals and books that you read in your courses. Often the language of a magazine like Time or Newsweek is too informal in ***tone and style***. Writers for these magazines may use sentence fragments, colloquialisms and vocabulary that are inappropriate for formal academic writing.
12. Make sure you know what documentation style your professor expects when you are citing sources in the text of your essay. Some professors recommend a book which outlines the documentation format that they prefer. Others choose one of the three main style sheets that are used in the Humanities and Social Sciences: APA (American Psychological Society) MLA, (Modern Languages Association) or University of Chicago Style Manual (Turabian).

Always Remember:

13. Never write your essay the night before it is due. No matter how good you are at writing, this will only be a first draft which may contain the gist of what you want to say, but which will lack the coherence and polish of a second or third draft.
14. Get help! After you have written your first draft, or if you are having problems completing your first draft, come to Writing Services in the Huron College Library.