

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

student
writing
guide

- Reading
Research
& Writing
Strategies



Welcome to the University of Minnesota

This guide has been designed to help first-year and transfer students become more effective writers. Please read it through, since it contains immediately useful information to help you with learning and writing at the University. As you progress in your coursework, you will find it useful to refer back to the information about effective reading, research, and writing strategies.

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*WHAT DO I NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT
UNIVERSITY
WRITING?*

*HOW CAN I
SUCCEED WITH
WRITING AT THE
UNIVERSITY?*



Section I
writing
at the
University

“SUCCESS COMES TO A WRITER,
AS A RULE, SO GRADUALLY THAT
IT IS ALWAYS SOMETHING OF A
SHOCK TO HIM TO LOOK BACK
AND REALIZE THE HEIGHTS
TO WHICH HE HAS CLIMBED.”

P.G. WODEHOUSE
LOUDER AND FUNNIER

The Role of Writing

LEARNING TO WRITE is a life-long task: one that begins in childhood, is enhanced by formal education, and is further refined through an individual's personal, social, and professional experiences. At the University, writing is how scholars – from undergraduate students to faculty researchers – explore ideas, conduct research, and communicate learning. Writing and learning are inseparable, which is why the teaching of writing is a responsibility shared by all departments at the University of Minnesota.

WRITING AT THE UNIVERSITY IS GUIDED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- **Effective writing requires practice.** A primary goal of the writing requirements at the University is to offer ongoing writing practice, so you will have the opportunity to develop your writing skills.
- **Effective writers are able to write for a variety of audiences.** They understand that effective writing depends on *context* – who is writing what to whom, in what settings, and for what purposes. For this reason, you will write in many different kinds of courses, to audiences ranging from your peers to senior scholars and scientists.
- **Effective writers are also able to produce a range of different kinds of writing.** The nature of the writing done in University courses varies considerably: you will be writing in multiple disciplines, and in multiple genres (lab reports, essays, summaries, personal reflections, creative writing, and so forth). As your education progresses, you will work more and more within a specific discipline with its own writing conventions.
- Because no one course can meet all these goals, **the collective goal of ALL writing at the University is to prepare students to communicate effectively in a variety of situations both within and beyond the University.** In your personal, professional, and civic life, you will need to be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances and needs. The skills involved in effective writing apply to a great deal more than “simply writing”: they are the means to professional development, to critical thinking, and to intellectually active participation in the world.

This guide is designed to help you develop as a writer by outlining techniques, strategies, and suggestions for making the most of your writing experience at the University.

How (& Why) University Writing is Unique

DEPENDING ON YOUR previous education and writing experience, university-level writing may present unique challenges. The following notes and suggestions are general statements that should apply to most writing at the University. After reading this section, please refer to **Section II: Strategies for Successful Writing** for more detailed discussions of these topics and the writing process.

How Do I Move from High School to University Writing?

ONE OF THE FIRST and greatest challenges incoming University students face is the change in what is expected of them and their work. The following statements from first-year University of Minnesota students speak to the concerns these changes often raise.

“For these assignments, we’re all supposed to come up with different papers and ideas, rather than a situation where everyone writes the same thing. The number of choices and possibilities can be over-whelming.”

“Profs and TAs don’t spend a lot of time going over the assignments; they expect you to ask questions if you don’t know what to do.”

THE ABILITY TO WORK independently and to take an active role in achieving your goals is a valued and crucial skill at the University and beyond. In the course of your University education, **you will be expected to be self-motivated and proactive:** University learning is learning where *you* do the bulk of the work, and it is *your* responsibility to ask questions and seek assistance when things are unclear. Likewise, because writing is so important to learning, there are rigorous expectations of your writing at the University, at both the level of mechanics (e.g., grammar, spelling, and presentation) and content (e.g., the ideas you present and explore in your writing). Although you may find yourself occasionally working in cooperation with others, you will most often be called on to work independently, to develop your own

ideas and draw your own conclusions – in short, to take an active and engaged role in your writing, thought, and education as a whole.

BECAUSE WRITING is an important part of your overall University education, you should expect to do a significant amount of it in many of your courses. As a result, **you will be asked to write using many different, and sometimes unfamiliar, formats and styles.** In courses designated “Writing-Intensive,” instructors will inform you about how to write in a particular field of study. However, the majority of the courses in which you will write will not provide structured assistance with your writing: in general, your instructors will not spend much (if any) time explaining how to write within their disciplines. Here again, take an active role in your education, and seek out the resources you need. Talking to instructors and/or teaching assistants between classes, for example, can clear up confusion you might have in how to approach specific writing assignments.

“I found it difficult to keep up with the different styles and standards for papers. It seems like every department has a different way of writing, but they don’t always tell you how to do it.”

“Grading is really different from high school. I still can’t get over the idea that ‘C’ means you did everything right!”

“Stuff I used to do for extra credit is expected.”

“Late papers are NEVER accepted in the classes I’m taking this year.”

BEING A UNIVERSITY student requires that you be mindful of a number of standards and expectations, both in general and specific to writing. Academic writing (the kind of writing you’ll be expected to do in most of your courses) requires proper evidence, documentation of sources, effective and appropriate use of language, and polished presentation. Furthermore, the standards and criteria for evaluation are designed to be uniform and objective – and for many may seem stricter than in high school. For example, under the University’s uniform grading policy, a grade of “C” is a mark of *meeting* the requirements of a course or assignment, not falling short of them. In other words, what is evaluated at the

University is how well your work, alone, relates to the assigned or required tasks. **You should not expect that effort and improvement automatically lead to high grades, but should expect to be held – and hold yourself – to higher standards as your education progresses.**

What Do Instructors Expect?

WRITING THAT IS CONSIDERED “EFFECTIVE” has successfully met the expectations of a target audience. When writing for a course, you want to meet the instructor’s expectations as they have been presented in the assignment. **Expectations will vary by instructor, course, and department or discipline.** Often, the instructor will make these expectations clear; if he or she does not, or if you have lingering questions, you should always ask.

The following statements made by professors are representative of what many instructors expect. For more thorough discussions of how you can meet these expectations in your writing, see **Section II: Strategies for Successful Writing.**

“One of the most basic things I look for is a clear response to the assignment.”

“When students can clearly state what they’ll be writing about in their paper, they can successfully construct focused arguments that don’t go off track, and their readers know what to expect and can be confident in what they’re about to read.”

CLARITY & PURPOSE:

Responding to the demands of the assignment is very important for instructors. Meeting these expectations involves more than just speaking to the specific things the assignment asks you to write about. You will also need to address the assigned purpose and audience and to comply with the assignment’s specific process and format guidelines. To do this, you should work to state and maintain your focus in your paper, be it in a clear statement of purpose, definition of problem, or articulation of thesis.

See **Section II.C: Writing Strategies, “Approaching Writing as a Process”** for more detailed discussion of these topics.

ORGANIZATION, COHERENCE, & DEVELOPMENT:

Academic writing requires consistent and logical organization with adequate development of claims, ideas, and insights. As a whole, your writing should be clear and coherent, with logically organized ideas, transitions within and between paragraphs, and support and development of your thesis or purpose.

For further organizational and developmental strategies, see **Section II.C: Writing Strategies**, “Getting it Down” and “Getting it Together.”

“I would not give an ‘A’ on a paper if it were unclear or poorly organized – even if the ideas themselves are interesting.”

“An intriguing idea that isn’t developed is disappointing. Arguments are made or broken in their development, and if the ideas aren’t expanded upon or clearly connected to each other, they’re not convincing.”

“It can be frustrating when a student’s writing doesn’t meet the requirements of the discipline. Part of learning how to think in a field of study is learning how to write in it.”

“In my discipline, we have a very specialized vocabulary that is central to our ideas and methods. When students use this vocabulary appropriately, it shows that they understand both the material and the way our professionals think.”

FLEXIBILITY & DISCIPLINARY APPROPRIATENESS:

Because you will have to write in a variety of situations, instructors will expect you to be flexible and adapt to writing in their disciplines. In addition to paying attention to different stylistic expectations, you should also use language that is precise, clear, and appropriate to a particular discipline’s way of writing.

For further discussions, see **Section II.C: Writing Strategies**, “Approaching Writing as a Process.”

ORIGINALITY & ENGAGEMENT:

Many instructors look for evidence of critical reading and thinking, a willingness to “think beyond the lecture” and really grapple with central ideas. Because this expectation will particularly depend on the instructor and type of assignment, you and your instructor should discuss your ideas beforehand if you wish to deviate from the demands of the assignment.

Section II.A: Reading Strategies and **Section II.C: Writing Strategies** both provide suggestions for developing more effective critical reading and thinking skills.

“The most interesting and exciting papers I read bring in new ideas or reframe class material in new ways – I appreciate it when students question course material.”

“So long as what the student writes relates clearly to the topic I’ve assigned, I value creativity in examples and organization.”

“When students make claims in their essays that relate to course material but are unsupported by a reference to that material, the effectiveness of their writing suffers.”

“One of my greatest concerns in student writing is when a student simply strings quotations or citations together, rather than making their own argument in their own words. I want to hear what they think about the material and how they have made it a part of their base of knowledge – not a recital.”

“Because plagiarism is such a serious concern in academic writing, students need to understand that properly acknowledging sources is central to being part of the academic community.”

APPROPRIATE SUPPORT:

When writing a researched academic essay, accurate and appropriate support of your ideas is important. While many types of writing will require that your claims are supported by evidence or ideas from other sources, the words and ideas of others should never overwhelm your own. Finally, you are responsible for documenting your sources accurately and appropriately.

See **Section II.B: Research Strategies, “Using Sources Responsibly”** for more information on how to use and document supporting sources.

PROPER EDITING & PRESENTATION:

Academic writing requires a polished, professional presentation. Because presentation reflects on the overall quality of your work, you must carefully proofread and edit for mechanical, grammatical, and other errors is critical before you submit your final draft.

See **Section II.C: Writing Strategies, “Getting it Together”** for more information.

“No matter how interesting and appropriate a student’s ideas might be, if a paper is riddled with mechanical errors, I question his or her commitment to doing quality work.”

AS YOU CAN SEE, while instructor expectations may vary in their specifics, they also speak to a general set of standards that you will be expected to meet. Though this can all seem overwhelming, it doesn’t have to be. The writing you’ll do at the University builds on your previous writing experience (and you are probably already meeting many of these criteria in your work). The next section of this guide will give you strategies for approaching those expectations and aspects of the writing process that may be less familiar.

Section II

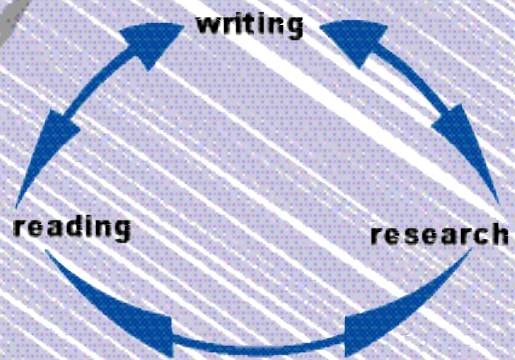
Strategies for Successful Writing



“READING MAKETH A FULL MAN;
CONFERENCE A READY MAN;
AND WRITING AN EXACT MAN.”

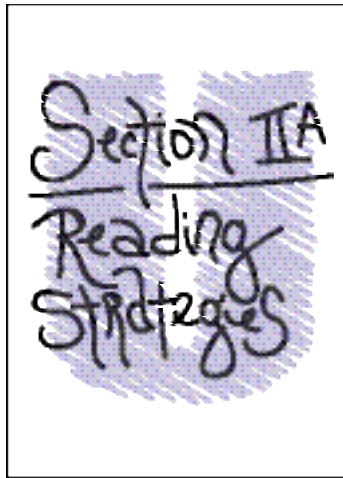
SIR FRANCIS BACON
ESSAY 50: “OF STUDIES”

IT IS IMPORTANT TO understand that writing is not just putting words on paper to turn in, but a dynamic process that involves effective reading and research strategies.



While these three components of the writing process have been separated in the following pages to provide you with helpful strategies and suggestions, they are interdependent. Moreover, writing is not usually a simple, linear process that follows clearly-ordered steps. As drafts evolve, more thinking or research may be necessary. In turn, more thinking and research may lead you to revise your ideas (and even your thesis). Finally, being able to read your own writing effectively and critically is crucial in refining your work.

What follow here, then, are points of reference to keep in mind whenever, wherever, and however you write.



MOST, IF NOT ALL, of your courses will assign a significant amount of reading. You'll be asked to read a variety of texts: chapters of scientific textbooks, sets of mathematical problems, stories, plays, poems, novels, essays, and all sorts of articles. Often, you'll be asked to respond critically to what you read, in your writing and in class discussions. To succeed at the University, you will need to develop effective reading skills, and this section is designed to help you in that process.

Working with the Text

OBVIOUSLY, IF YOU'RE reading this guide, you can "read." But reading *effectively* isn't so simple. In fact, effective reading involves a number of skills and processes that vary depending on the type of text being read and the purpose or purposes you have in reading it.

Experienced, critical readers don't simply "encounter" or react to what they read – they engage in a dialogue with it, asking questions of it and making demands on it. Taking an active role is what "effective reading" is all about. And effective reading, like effective writing, is an ongoing process that involves experience, practice, and reflection.

"I HAVE ALWAYS READ *IN* BOOKS RATHER THAN *THROUGH* THEM AND ALWAYS WITH MORE PROFIT FROM THE BOOKS I READ *IN* THAN THE BOOKS I READ *THROUGH*; FOR WHEN I SET OUT TO READ *THROUGH* A BOOK I ALWAYS FELT THAT I HAD A TASK BEFORE ME, BUT WHEN I READ *IN* A BOOK IT WAS THE PAGE OR THE PARAGRAPH THAT I WANTED, AND WHICH LEFT ITS IMPRESSION AND BECAME A PART OF MY INTELLECTUAL FURNITURE."

OLIVER WENDALL HOLMES
LIFE AND LETTERS OF
OLIVER WENDALL HOLMES, VOL. I,
BY JOHN T. MORSE, JR.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, we can understand the differences between less-experienced readers and experienced, effective readers in the following ways:

LESS-EXPERIENCED READERS:

May assume that experienced, effective readers read fast – and they should too.

May read everything at the same speed, without distinguishing information that can be skimmed from that which should be more closely examined.

May not set aside enough study time for reading and rereading. If they do not understand a book or article on first reading, they may assume that it is the teacher’s job to explain it to them rather than their own responsibility to engage and even struggle with the reading.

May have difficulty seeing ideas from another’s perspective.

May have difficulty determining and understanding an author’s context, purpose, and intended audience.

May be intimidated by texts, and therefore unwilling to interact with or question them.

EXPERIENCED, EFFECTIVE READERS:

“Preview” or “survey” the text before detailed reading begins, looking for clues related to its purpose, its relevance, its difficulty, and its familiarity with ideas they already know.

Are willing to struggle with the text in order to understand it. For the experienced reader, first readings are like “rough drafts” which reveal the text’s main points, while later re-readings refine one’s understanding of the text’s finer points, assumptions, and contradictions.

Don’t get hung up on single, tough details in first readings. Rather, they hold confusing passages in “mental suspension,” continuing to read with the idea that what seems difficult to understand now may be cleared up as they go along.

Are familiar with the structure and “rhythm” of academic writing. Experienced readers can separate parts of arguments (e.g., thesis idea, evidence, preview, counterarguments) in order to understand how these parts work to support the author’s thesis.

Read with a pen or pencil, highlighting key statements while noting their own questions, points of agreement or disagreement, references to related ideas, etc. In other words, experienced readers enter into a dialogue with the text, mark it up, and “make it their own.”

“WHAT’S A BOOK?
EVERYTHING OR NOTHING.
THE EYE THAT SEES IT
IS ALL.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
*JOURNALS OF RALPH WALDO
EMERSON*

Developing Critical Reading Practices

PART OF BEING an effective reader, then, is approaching texts with a *critical* eye, to evaluate what you read for not just *what* it says, but *how* and *why* it says it. Being an effective reader also means being able to evaluate your own practices, always working to improve how you read. With this in mind, the following strategies (inspired by John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996) are fundamental to developing your critical reading skills:

- **Work to understand and explain your own reading strategies and how to improve them.** Do you read too quickly or slowly? Do you lose your focus? Can you scan for key information or ideas?
- **Work also to identify what you’re reading for.** Are you reading only for general content? For data? For arguments that support or contest your thesis? For specific information, or for general thematic concerns? For information you know that you’ll need, or for information to get you thinking about what you’ll need? Knowing why you’re reading a given text can help you organize both your reading and how you can use it.
- **Be proactive and engage with the text to get the most out of it.** In a notebook, on self-stick notes, or in the margins of the text, make note of 1) those words that you don’t understand so you can look them up later, 2) key parts or points, even those you find confusing, 3) points where ideas match up with each other, and 4) your own reactions to presented ideas. Also, note where and how the text relates to lectures or class discussions, as well as general or specific questions you might wish to ask your instructor in class or office hours.
- **Ask yourself if you can explain both “what the text says” and “what it does.”** In other words, can you both 1) provide a summary of the text’s key claims and theses, and 2) understand the text’s purpose, what it seeks to do (to report or state facts, to contest a certain idea, to persuade, to open new inquiries, etc.)? Keep in mind that all texts filter reality – distort, persuade, and arrive at different conclusions – and that all texts are trying to change your view in some way.
- **Attempt to understand how every writer’s background and purposes influence how and what they write.** Reading a text critically requires that you ask questions about the writer’s authority and agenda. You may need to “put yourself in the author’s shoes” and recognize that those “shoes” fit a certain way of thinking.
- **Remember that re-reading is a part of effective, critical reading.** Reading critically is not a fast process. If your first reading is for basic information and evaluation, subsequent readings can take on different levels of focus (on style and tone, on details, on examples, on intellectual or ideological tradition, etc.). Just as having more than one conversation with another person leads to closer understanding, conducting a number of readings leads to a richer and more meaningful relationship with and understanding of a text.

FINALLY, REMEMBER that effective *reading* is central to both effective *research* and effective *writing*. In the research process (discussed in the next section), using these reading strategies will be central in evaluating sources. Finally, working to enhance your critical reading practices – especially in paying attention to construction, rhetoric, and tone – can benefit your own writing directly. When you understand how what you read is written, you can incorporate those techniques into your own writing and writing process.



CONDUCTING SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH is another component of effective writing. Your ability to locate and isolate key information in a specific text will rely on developing and applying the effective **Reading Strategies** that were discussed in the previous section. But how do you “do” effective research? Where should you look for sources, and on what basis should you choose one over another? And when writing, how should you strike a balance between your own words and ideas and those of your sources?

This section will give you suggestions and strategies that apply to most University writing assignments and situations. Further discussions of discipline- or department-specific research questions can be found in **Section II.C: Writing Strategies, “Writing In and Across the Disciplines.”**

Doing Research: An Introduction

Designing a Research Strategy

RESEARCH IS A PROCESS that involves many steps. To save yourself time and to get the most out of your research, we suggest you plan your research in advance. This can be achieved by establishing a research strategy – a plan for what you will (and won’t) need to undertake in your research.

To begin developing your research plan, ask the following questions:

What are the general expectations for what you will be writing?

Here, pay attention first to the assignment. What is the expected scope of your writing? How many issues, ideas, and/or concepts will you need to address? What is the expected length? Longer and more expansive papers allow for more complete exploration of a topic, which requires more resources and depth of discussion. By contrast, for a very short paper you might find all you need in a few good sources.

What type of paper are you writing?

This involves considering the *genre* of the writing you will be expected to do. Different types of papers require different types of sources – for example, a policy report will often require the use of governmental and legislative documents and studies, whereas an essay on an artistic movement might involve looking at artworks, reviews, critiques, and histories. (See **Section II.C: Writing Strategies** for more detailed discussions of how to understand and approach assignments and genres).

What kinds of sources are expected and acceptable?

Again, take a cue from what you already know from the assignment. What, if any, types of sources are recommended? Are any explicitly disallowed? Will your topic require scholarly sources alone (books, journals, etc.), or also popular or periodical sources (magazines, newspapers, etc.)? If you are unclear about what is and is not acceptable or expected, consult your instructor.

How much time can you devote to research?

Managing your research time is as important as managing your writing time. Keep in mind that you will have to allow enough time both to find sources and evaluate them – in other words, more time than you may initially think. While situations will vary depending on the type of paper you’re writing, you should allow significant time for research, both before writing and as your writing progresses.

How will you keep track of your sources?

All sources used in research writing must be clearly and accurately documented. You should have some means of recording all of your sources: databases you’ve searched, keyword strategies you’ve used, and complete reference information for the books, articles, and websites you’ve found. Carefully documenting and recording your sources will help you organize your ideas and your eventual bibliography, and is crucial to avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism discussed later in this section.

Starting Research

EVEN WITH A CLEAR strategy, starting your research can be the most difficult part of the process. With so much information at your disposal, both in print and online, where and how should you begin?

Familiarizing yourself with the resources offered by the University of Minnesota Libraries is a crucial first step in beginning and conducting research.

“KNOWLEDGE IS OF TWO KINDS.
WE KNOW A SUBJECT OURSELVES,
OR WE KNOW WHERE WE CAN FIND
INFORMATION ON IT.”

SAMUEL JOHNSON

FROM *BOSWELL’S LIFE OF JOHNSON*, 1775

Many students find it most useful to **visit a selection of library locations**. First-year students may want to begin with the three larger libraries: Wilson on the West Bank, Walter on the East Bank, and Magrath on the St. Paul campus. By going to the libraries and exploring them in a “hands-on” way, you can get the very best sense of how the libraries are organized, what services they provide, and the ways in which you can access their vast resources. Meeting with a reference librarian can help you understand the assistance and expertise they provide. Furthermore, many materials can only be accessed at library locations, and by exploring the library’s holdings you may find related materials on the shelves that you otherwise might not have considered.

Evaluating Sources

ONCE YOU HAVE found your sources, you must decide what to use and how to use them. For each source, you will need to evaluate its relevance in relation to your claims or thesis and choose specific, appropriate information and citations that you might integrate into your paper.

Effective reading practices, like those discussed in the previous section, are central to efficiently evaluating and selecting potential sources from your research. To determine the relevance, usefulness, and authority of the sources you find, you should also ask the following general questions of each text:

What is the purpose of the text?

Some texts aim to present facts and statistics, while others argue for particular points of view; most mix the two. Because different papers will call for different kinds of texts, it is important that you can identify the reason and function of a given source. Use your critical reading strategies to understand the source's purposes and positions.

What is the content of the text?

Here, you will need to assess both 1) how well the source covers the material it says it will cover, and 2) how well it meets the needs of your project. Clearly, the first thing to consider is whether the source contains information you need. Also, consider factors like the scope of the text (is it a broad overview of a topic, or does it focus on specifics?), its evidence and supporting documentation (both what kinds of sources the author uses and how she uses them to make her point), and its intended audience (is it written for a general or more specific audience – such as scholars in a particular field?).

Is the text authoritative?

With all information, you must consider the source. Is the author an expert in the field? Where is she employed, and what else has she written? Likewise, is the publisher well-known and reliable? Established publishing houses, universities, museums, and other educational or research institutions are often reliable publishers, and what they publish will likely have gone through extensive peer or editorial review.

Is the information in the text timely?

Some disciplines and topics, such as the sciences and health sciences, require the most current information available. Others, such as history or art, value both current and older material. In either case, note when a source is published, and whether there are more current editions of the source that might better deal with your topic.

“SOME BOOKS ARE TO BE TASTED,
OTHERS TO BE SWALLOWED,
AND SOME FEW TO BE CHEWED AND DIGESTED.”

SIR FRANCIS BACON
ESSAY 50: “OF STUDIES”

Using Online Sources: Special Considerations

USING THE INTERNET for research is a double-edged sword: while it provides quick and easy access to an almost unlimited array of sources, it is also difficult to determine the credibility of these sources and easy to become overwhelmed. In addition, while some instructors actively encourage use of online sources, many also discourage it, for precisely the reasons just listed. The best advice for students is this: *Before using online sources in your writing, you should always consult your instructor.*

“THE ONLY HUMAN VALUE OF ANYTHING, WRITING INCLUDED, IS AN INTENSE VISION OF THE FACTS.”

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
SELECTED ESSAYS

Evaluating online sources also requires some special considerations:

What is the site's purpose?

Does this site exist to inform, to present opinions, to report research, or to sell a product? Is it intended for a specific audience (targeting a specific age group, a political affiliation, etc)? Does its presentation (colors, images, pop-up advertisements, etc.) affect its message or reveal its affiliations?

Who is the site's or page's author?

Who is responsible for the administration of the website and the content of its pages? Are their interests and affiliations clearly stated? What are their credentials, background, and experience?

Who supports the site?

Check the site's domain name to determine any bias or affiliation that may not be stated in the text. Domain names can give some clues as to a site's owner (“.gov” denotes a government site, “.org” a non-profit organization, “.edu” a college or university, and “.com” and “.net” can both denote commercial or private sites). Do the sites that your source links to tell you anything about its affiliations?

Is the site or page credible?

Does the site or page contain documented facts, with cited sources of information? Or is it editorial in nature, with its content based in personal opinion? Is it professionally created and maintained, free of typos or format errors? Is it published or administered by a reputable source? Examining sites that link to your source can also be a good indicator of how credible a source is among others interested in your topic.

Is the site or page timely?

When was the site last updated, or the page published? Is the content up to date? Are the links current, or have they expired?

Using Sources Responsibly

Documenting Sources

WHENEVER YOU USE SOURCES – whether you directly quote an author, use his or her ideas, use data from a report, or paraphrase a position – you must *always* provide a citation that gives credit to the author(s) whose words, ideas, or research you used. This requires careful and consistent notation of all of your sources (and the information taken from them) during your research. In your final draft, you should include a complete list of sources cited (this may be called a “reference list,” “bibliography,” or “works cited”).

You need to follow specific rules when citing sources and making your reference list. Your instructor

“I AM REMINDED OF THE PROFESSOR WHO, IN HIS DECLINING HOURS, WAS ASKED BY HIS DEVOTED PUPILS FOR HIS FINAL COUNSEL. HE REPLIED, “VERIFY YOUR QUOTATIONS.””

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL,
A CHURCHILL READER,
EDITED BY COLIN R. COOTE

may require you to follow a particular style, such as MLA or APA. To learn how to cite your sources completely and consistently according to a particular style, consult a style manual. Style manuals can be found online or in print, and most first-year writing courses will require that you purchase one. Some manuals are specific to particular disciplines, while others are more general. While every reference style uses the same basic information (e.g., author, title, publisher, year), each style arranges that information differently. To ensure that your research records are complete, consult your instructor or style manual before taking notes.

The University of Minnesota Libraries website offers a resource called RefWorks that can help you organize your sources. RefWorks is a web-based citation manager that allows you to create a personal or group database of citations, to import reference information from library databases, to automatically generate bibliographies in a number of citation styles, and to keep and maintain your citations on the RefWorks server for personal access from any location.

“NEXT TO THE ORIGINATOR OF A GOOD SENTENCE IS THE FIRST QUOTER OF IT.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
JOURNALS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Balancing Your Ideas with Those of Others

FIRST AND FOREMOST, the purpose of using supporting sources is simply that: to support and direct your own claims and arguments. One of the pitfalls of being a less-experienced writer is the tendency to let an author's words, ideas, and claims overwhelm your own, or to take them out of context to suit your intentions rather than those of the original author.

Responsibly integrating sources into your writing requires maintaining a sometimes delicate balance between the ideas you gain from your research and those you develop on your own in response to the assigned topic.

While different types of writing assignments and genres can call for different ways of using sources, you should keep the following key points in mind:

“I HAVE SUFFERED A GOOD DEAL FROM WRITERS WHO HAVE QUOTED THIS OR THAT SENTENCE OF MINE EITHER OUT OF ITS CONTEXT OR IN JUXTAPOSITION TO SOME INCONGRUOUS MATTER WHICH QUITE DISTORTED MY MEANING, OR DESTROYED IT ALTOGETHER.”

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD
DIALOGUES OF ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

- **The words you write should always, overwhelmingly, be your own.** While the authors of your sources might be experts in their field, when you write on a topic, *you* become the “expert.” While it may be intimidating to try to take that position of authority, and it may seem that your words couldn’t express an author’s ideas better than the author herself, remember that this is *your* paper, and *your* take on the topic. Thus, your voice both should and *can* be dominant in your writing.
- **Avoid stringing quotations together to make your point or explain a given author’s perspective.** Unless an author’s exact words are critical to the exact point you wish to make, work to put the author’s ideas in your own words, condensing them into general but accurate statements of the “gist” of their position (remember: if you do this, you still must cite your source, and your words and sentence structure must be different from the original text). Just as part of effective reading is the ability to understand the “big picture” an author paints and how it relates to others’ ideas (yours included), part of effective writing – and, by extension, effective thinking – is developing the ability to summarize others’ positions and integrate them into your thought and writing.
- **Reserve direct quotations for points of emphasis.** Less is almost always more here: a single, well-chosen and well-positioned direct quotation is *far* more effective than a number of excerpts taken directly from a source.

Avoiding Plagiarism

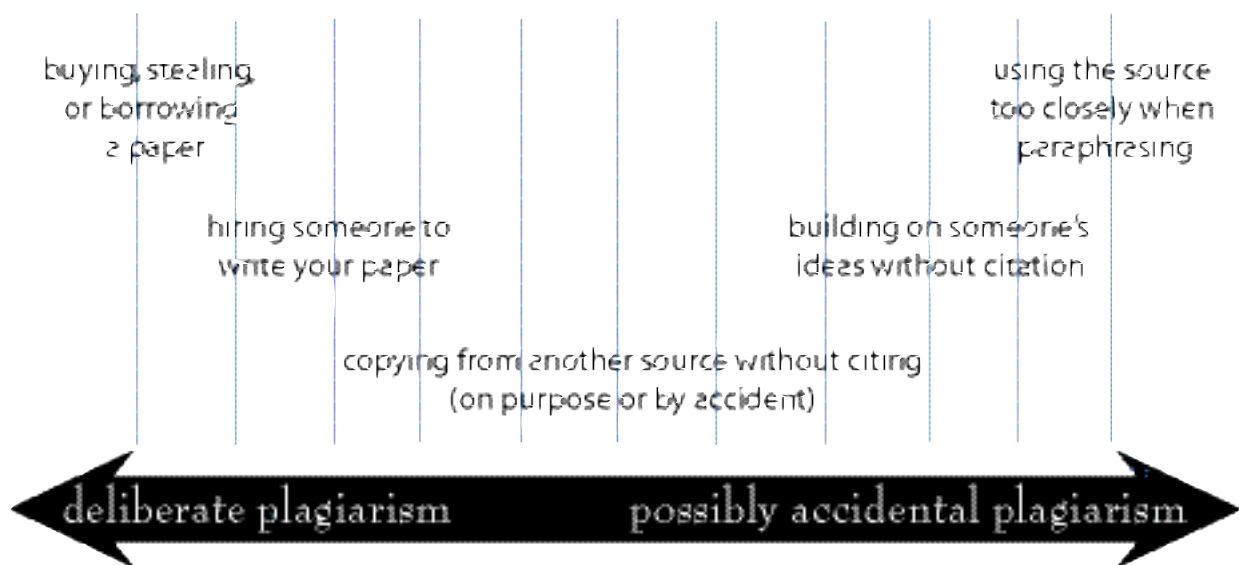
ALTHOUGH THE WORK of responsibly using and documenting your sources may seem tedious, it serves an important role in your place at the University. Learning – and writing – at the University level involves putting your voice into a conversation with others, and treating those voices with the same respect as you would expect. On one level, citing your sources gives your readers the opportunity to seek them out and learn more, but more importantly, being careful and conscientious with the words and ideas of others can help you avoid one of the most serious academic offenses: plagiarism.

What is plagiarism?

Simply put, plagiarism is representing someone else’s intellectual property as your own. Intellectual property can take many forms – a whole term paper, an idea or insight, a photograph, a drawing, a song, a unique way of wording something, a discovery, etc. Plagiarism is a serious offense in academia, and is the equivalent of theft: scholars build their careers on their research, ideas, and innovations, and any unacknowledged use of the fruits of their labor is not only disrespectful – it is impermissible.

Plagiarism can also take many forms. While most students only equate plagiarism with copying or buying another’s paper and presenting it as their own, plagiarism is much more than this. **Plagiarism occurs whenever another’s words, ideas, research, or claims are used but not cited.** Indeed, because the definition of plagiarism is much more expansive than most are aware, many students plagiarize regularly and don’t even know it.

Plagiarism can be understood as a continuum of practices that range from intentional or “deliberate” plagiarism to non-intentional or “accidental” plagiarism. The *Online Writing Lab* at Purdue University provides us with a helpful diagram to show the spectrum of plagiarism:



<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

Why do students plagiarize?

Students may *intentionally* plagiarize for a number of reasons. The Council of Writing Program Administrators (www.wpacouncil.org) has listed a number of possibilities, which include the following:

- Fear of failure or of taking risks
- Poor time-management skills, or planning poorly for the time and effort required for research-based writing
- Not understanding the importance of academic writing conventions
- Not recognizing the seriousness of the consequences of cheating (at the discretion of the instructor, these could include failure of the course, and even expulsion)

“WRITING IS ONE OF THE FEW PROFESSIONS LEFT WHERE YOU TAKE ALL THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT YOU DO.”

ERICA JONG
THE CRAFT OF POETRY,
EDITED BY WILLIAM PACKARD

More commonly, students may *unintentionally* plagiarize – for example, a writer might use ideas or sources without providing full credit or citation, paraphrase too closely to the source’s words and sentence structure, or assume that a given idea is “common knowledge” and hence does not need to be cited. As Purdue’s *Online Writing Lab* (see URL on the previous page) also notes, the “mixed messages” of University writing may also contribute to these types of practices and misunderstandings: students are regularly told to use the words and ideas of others but also to be original and contest those ideas, to model their writing on their sources but use their own words and voice, and so forth. These types of practices, then, are usually the result of misunderstanding what does and does not count as plagiarism.

Neither case, however, is acceptable; in fact, many instructors will not take these differences into consideration at all.

How can I recognize and avoid plagiarism?

Because plagiarism can be understood as a number of different practices, recognizing and avoiding those practices that could be considered plagiarism can seem tricky. Intentional plagiarism is the easiest to avoid – you only need to do your own work, in your own words, on your own. But crossing the line into non-intentional plagiarism is all too easy. To develop responsible habits that will keep you on the safe side, ask the following basic questions whenever you integrate any type of research into your writing:

- ***Are all uses of exact words, phrases, and specific terminology from a source contained in quotation marks and properly cited?***
- ***Are specific ideas, insights, or data from sources cited, even if they’re put in your own words?***
- ***When summarizing or paraphrasing, are both your words and the sentence structure different from the original text?***
- ***Are all sources listed in a bibliography or works cited page?***
- ***Is all source and citation information complete and accurate?***

AS YOU CAN SEE, the responsible use and consistent recording of *all* of your research is crucial. Because the penalties for this type of scholastic dishonesty are severe, *all* students need to familiarize themselves with what constitutes and is considered plagiarism.

Joining the Academic Conversation

DOING RESEARCH EFFECTIVELY and using sources responsibly are central to being a part of the academic community. Again, when you write a paper that involves research, you put your voice and ideas in dialogue with others. The next section will provide you with a number of writing strategies that can help you make *your* part of this conversation even more effective, engaging, and compelling.

“THE GREATEST BOOK IS NOT THE ONE WHOSE MESSAGE ENGRAVES ITSELF ON THE BRAIN . . . BUT THE ONE WHOSE VITAL IMPACT OPENS UP OTHER VIEWPOINTS, AND FROM WRITER TO READER SPREADS THE FIRE THAT IS FED BY THE VARIOUS ESSENCES, UNTIL IT BECOMES A VAST CONFLAGRATION LEAPING FROM FOREST TO FOREST.”

ROMAIN ROLLAND

JOURNEY WITHIN



IN ADDITION TO the reading and research strategies we've already presented, this section is designed to help you understand and develop strategies to apply to the many writing situations you will find yourself in at the University.

As always, your instructors are your most important resource when you have questions about a particular writing assignment. Writing centers are also available to help you improve your writing abilities and self-confidence. Consult the website writing.umn.edu for links to further resources and information.

Approaching Writing as a Process

AS WE NOTED in the introduction to **Section II**, it is important to understand writing as a *dynamic process*, and not simply the “last step” in fulfilling the requirements of an assignment. The paper you produce emerges from a process that involves the strategies for effective reading and research discussed in previous sections, requires using a number of techniques and strategies specific to writing, and moves through several stages of development.

There is no single writing process that works for all writers, or in all situations. The process of writing can be intensely personal and individualistic: what “works” in terms of how you organize your thoughts and writing may be quite different from what “works” for the person sitting next to you. In this section, then, you'll find general strategies that are helpful for most writing situations. However, the order in which you might undertake these stages, and even which stages you find necessary to take, is up to you. As you experiment with different processes and techniques, write in different situations, and become a more experienced writer, you will develop a set of processes that work well for you and that will become a part of your identity as a writer.

“ANY METHOD IS RIGHT,
EVERY METHOD IS RIGHT,
THAT EXPRESSES WHAT
WE WISH TO EXPRESS,
IF WE ARE WRITERS ... ”

VIRGINIA WOOLF
THE COMMON READER,
FIRST SERIES

Part of developing your own set of successful writing habits will likely involve making use of current technologies for writing, including word processing, e-mail, discussion boards, and the web. Becoming familiar with these technologies can help you streamline the review, revision, editing, and research processes.

Whatever strategies or stages ultimately work best for you, *starting* the writing process requires that you determine how and where to begin.

Identifying the Task at Hand: Working with Assignments

MOST OF THE WRITING you'll do at the University will be to fulfill an assignment. While this may seem simple enough, successful writing requires some special considerations.

“ONE SITS DOWN FIRST;
ONE THINKS AFTERWARD.”

JEAN COCTEAU

The first step in writing effectively for an assignment is to determine what the assignment asks you to do. In general, writing successfully for an assignment requires that you ask the following, basic questions:

What is the necessary content of this writing?

Using the assignment as your guide, determine the topic or topics that will be discussed, the expected scope of discussion, and the types of information to be included and considered.

What is the purpose of this writing?

Apart from fulfilling an assignment and writing about a particular topic, consider the general purpose of your writing: to explain a topic, to explore or critique an idea, to argue for a particular point of view, to express an experience, to compare and contrast different ideas or information, and so forth.

For what audience is this writing intended?

While your instructor is your primary “audience,” take into account the kind of audience that your writing addresses (for example, other students in the class, professionals in the field, people unfamiliar with your topic, etc.). When writing, consider their level of expertise or knowledge about what you'll be writing, and what they need to know for your ideas or claims to be effective.

In what context does this writing fit?

The question of audience is related to the more general context of your writing. This context includes the accepted ideas, and conventions of expressing and understanding those ideas, in the particular field – or *discipline* – in which you're writing (for example, chemistry, sociology, economics, philosophy, etc.). See “**Writing In and Across Disciplines**” later in this section for further discussion.

What kinds of format and style are appropriate for this kind of writing?

Considering the context of your writing also includes an understanding of different *genres* of writing, some of which are discipline-specific, that call for different styles and formats of writing (for example, lab reports are different from personal narrative essays).

What process (or processes) might this writing call for?

Finally, all of the questions above can help you determine the writing process (or processes) that will be most effective for you in this particular situation.

Often, instructors will make the answers to these questions clear in the assignment itself; however, you may encounter assignments that *aren't* so clearly structured. Also, some instructors may assume that you will know how to approach a type of assignment and writing that is familiar to them, if not yet to you.

EVEN IF AN ASSIGNMENT is relatively clear, the following suggestions can increase your success in meeting both spoken and unspoken expectations:

- **Consult your instructor or teaching assistant with any questions you have.** Your instructors know best what is expected of you, and should be eager to clarify their expectations. Use them as a resource before you begin your writing and throughout your writing process if new questions arise. Because there are many students for each instructor or TA, it is best for you to be proactive. Also, be respectful: consult your syllabus to see how your instructor prefers to hold such discussions (e.g., in office hours, over e-mail, before or after class), and be prepared with specific questions to ask so that you both can make the most of your time together.
- **Determine the *genre* of the assignment.** One key marker of what is expected in an assignment is the *genre* of writing you are asked to undertake. Simply, “genre” means kind or type. Written genres share characteristics including purpose, types of language, format, scope, and use of sources. The following are some key genres in which a first-year University student might be expected to write:

Opinion piece	Summary
Personal reflection	Lab report
Critical response	Researched essay

First-year writing courses at the University offer practice in a variety, but not all, of these genres. Again, being flexible to the demands of different genres – and being willing to seek information when those demands are unclear – is part of growing as a writer.

- **Use your critical reading strategies on the assignment itself.** Reading your assignment carefully will provide you with insight into what is expected, and whether and in what ways you might take the assignment into exciting new territories. **Look for specific words** to determine what kind of writing you will be expected to do: “analyze,” “develop,” “explore,” “describe,” “summarize,” and “compare” (for example) all ask you to do different but specific things. **Underline or highlight** key words, phrases, and sentences in the assignment, noting the difference between which portions tell you “what to do” and those that can point you to “how to do it.” Finally, **re-read the assignment as you write:** are you appropriately responding to those questions of content, purpose, audience, and context in your writing process?

“TO SEE WITH ONE’S OWN EYES,
TO FEEL AND JUDGE WITHOUT
SUCCUMBING TO THE SUGGESTIVE
POWER OF THE FASHION OF THE DAY,
TO BE ABLE TO EXPRESS WHAT ONE HAS
SEEN OR FELT IN A TRIM SENTENCE OR
EVEN A CUNNINGLY WROUGHT WORD
– IS THAT NOT GLORIOUS?”

ALBERT EINSTEIN
IDEAS AND OPINIONS

Writing In and Across Disciplines

Putting your assignment in the context of its discipline is another part of determining how to proceed with your writing. Each discipline (or field of study) has its own way of writing – its typical forms, research conventions, and special language. These specifics include the genres of assignments described above: in a psychology class, students might write up a two-page summary of a scholarly article; in contrast, in a biology class, students might draft a lab report. Accordingly, these different genres may also call for different writing processes and research strategies. Finally, each discipline will have its own technical vocabulary, important parts of which you will be expected to master and use appropriately.

In addition to the general questions of content, purpose, audience, context, format/style, and process noted earlier, keep the following specific questions in mind when writing in a particular discipline:

- *What types of texts are good **writing models** (journals, articles, books, studies, etc.)?*
- *What **writing resources and people** are available in this department?*
- *What **reference materials** are available (handbooks, sample papers, style guides)?*
- *What types of **evidence** are valid / appreciated / strongest in this discipline?*
- *What is the specific **documentation style** used in this discipline?*
- *What is considered **appropriate use of sources** in this discipline?*

“THE PROBLEM IS NEITHER TO WRITE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE NOR TO WRITE DIFFERENTLY. THE PROBLEM IS TO WRITE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE AND YET TO WRITE DIFFERENTLY.”

OSCAR W. FIRKINS
OSCAR FIRKINS: MEMOIRS AND LETTERS,
EDITED BY INA TEN EYCK

WHILE THESE CONSIDERATIONS (and yes, there are others you may encounter!) may at first seem daunting, writing according to different disciplinary models and expectations is not only inevitable at the University, it is also crucial to your development as a writer and thinker. Through these varied writing experiences, you will learn how to write persuasively and appropriately to a wide variety of audiences – a skill that is valuable well beyond the University.

To find out how best to write in a course you are taking, do one or more of the following:

- Consult with your **instructor** about what is expected.
- Examine your required **course texts or other readings** to get a sense of the style and tone of writing in a particular field. Pay attention to how authors present information, construct arguments, and integrate research into their work as a model for your own.
- Visit the **departmental website** to see if it contains writing advice and recommended handbooks and bibliography styles.
- Visit the Center for Writing’s **Student Writing Support**, which holds a number of books and guides to discipline-specific writing. Consultants are also available to answer questions.
- Check the list of online resources listed at the **Center for Writing website**, writing.umn.edu.

“Getting it Down”: From Ideas to Drafts

Brainstorming and Planning

AFTER DETERMINING THE EXPECTATIONS of the assignment, you can begin to plan your writing. This planning should consider both what you will write and how you will structure the process of writing. Exploration and the generation of ideas – not perfection – are the goals here, and the following suggestions may be useful to that end:

- **Experiment with different approaches in planning and generating ideas for your writing.** To determine the content of their writing, some find it most helpful to brainstorm ideas, jotting down notes in stream of consciousness to put all possible ideas and angles on paper, and then return to the assignment to see which best fit and fulfill its demands. Some prefer a more visual approach, diagramming ideas in a map. Still others are more organized, outlining key points in a framework to be “filled in” later by the writing itself. What will work best for you is for you to discover; testing different methods will help you do this.
- **Keep an open mind.** In the planning and brainstorming stage, don’t close your options: focus more on the generation of potentially useful ideas. Throughout the writing process, it is important to remember that your ideas may change as you write. A willingness to remain open to new possibilities while you attend to the various demands of the assignment, genre, and audience is a difficult but crucial skill to develop: it is often new ideas that emerge through your writing process that will set your writing apart, and enable it to excel.
- **Remember your notes and research (if any).** At this stage, if your assignment requires the use of sources already at hand (e.g., course readings), you should make a list of what you might need to use, and where. Depending on the assignment and what works best for you in terms of formulating ideas, you may either use the sources as a starting point for generating and organizing your ideas, or look for places in ideas you’ve already brainstormed where sources might support, direct, or advance your argument. You can also refer to class and text notes: these can help you isolate and develop useful ideas. At this point, you don’t have to know exactly what passages to cite directly or refer to, but you should keep your sources in mind and be open to how they might color or complicate the ideas you already have. Finally, remember that as you write, revisiting your research notes and conducting additional research may be necessary.
- **Plan ahead and make time for all parts of the writing process.** Time management is an essential part of the writing process, and should be part of the planning phase. Whether you plot out your course on a calendar or in a notebook, or use tools like the University Libraries Assignment Calculator, determining how much time you can afford to spend on each part of the process is crucial. When you structure your time, you are more likely to spend enough time in each stage to make your writing successful, allow for enough time for whatever types of revisions (large and small) or additional research you may find necessary as your writing develops, and avoid the kinds of “panic situations” that can lead to all-nighters, anxiety, poorly-constructed writing, and even plagiarism. Structuring your writing along a schedule (and, of course, keeping to that schedule) will make a writing assignment of any size or scope more manageable.

“WHEN THE CREATIVE URGE SEIZES ONE – AT LEAST, SUCH IS MY EXPERIENCE – ONE BECOMES CREATIVE IN ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE.”

HENRY MILLER

*THE BOOKS
IN MY LIFE*

Drafting and Organizing: Focusing Your Central Question or Thesis

ONCE YOU HAVE a general sense of what and how you will write, a major challenge can be holding

“BUT TO MAKE, TO MAKE IS THE THING. AND ONCE SOMETHING IS THERE, TEN OR TWELVE THINGS ARE THERE, SIXTY OR SEVENTY LITTLE RECORDS ABOUT ONE, ALL MADE NOW OUT OF THIS, NOW OUT OF THAT IMPULSE, THEN ONE HAS ALREADY WON A PIECE OF GROUND ON WHICH ONE CAN STAND UPRIGHT. THEN ONE NO LONGER LOSES ONESELF.”

RAINER MARIA RILKE

LETTERS OF RAINER MARLA RILKE 1892-1910

yourself to that plan as you organize and write your initial drafts. While you should be open to using ideas that may come to you as you write, you should also stay on task and be prepared to make specific choices about 1) what ideas you will discuss in your paper, and 2) how those ideas should be organized to best support and focus your central question or thesis.

This stage may also require some experimentation on your part to find the best approach. Whether you outline first and then draft, write a draft and later decide on what to include and how to organize it, or do both simultaneously, this is the stage

in the process where your writing takes its initial shape and content – but is by no means the only or last stage. In these early stages, keep the following points in mind:

- **Selecting information and ideas is critical.** Deciding what you should or want to discuss is important; deciding what you *don't* need to discuss is even more so. When writing and organizing your initial draft, make sure that all ideas you introduce and claims you make are in support of your thesis and meet the requirements of the assignment. Remember too that you may add or cut information as you revise.
- **Remind yourself of genre and disciplinary constraints.** The general structure of your paper will in large part be dictated by the genre and discipline of the writing. Obviously, a 2-page lab report will require quite a different structure than a 10-page researched essay, and some genres (like personal reflection pieces, free writing, or journal writing) require very little in terms of formal organization. Still, because most writing at the University will be formal academic writing that will require that you support a thesis or central question, you will want to organize your ideas coherently, logically, and persuasively.
- **Pay attention to the content, order, and relation of paragraphs.** Most generally, a paper of any size is organized into a series of paragraphs that progressively advance and support its thesis or central question. (In longer papers, these paragraphs may relate to and support larger subtopics that still follow from the overall thesis). Simply, paragraphs are the building blocks of your writing: they give it structure and shape. Each one should deal with one key idea or topic in relation to the overall thesis. It may be helpful to consider every paragraph as a “miniature essay”: each should be clearly focused, often with a topic sentence at or near the beginning, and sufficiently developed from that topic sentence. Thinking about how you develop, organize, and connect your paragraphs with transitions can be a useful tool for both drafting and organizing.

“Getting it Together”: From Early to Final Drafts Reviewing, Reorganizing, & Revising:

THE PROCESS OF WRITING your first draft often helps you figure out your thesis and work through your most important ideas. Once you’ve completed your initial draft, you will need to revise and reorganize your work to reflect these important changes. Many writers are reluctant to do this, either because of the amount of time already spent on the first draft or because they don’t think they can – or should – improve on what they’ve already written. The point, however, is this: a first draft is called a *first* draft for a reason. Just as effective reading involves rereading, **effective writing involves rewriting.**

“I HAVE REWRITTEN — OFTEN SEVERAL TIMES — EVERY WORD I HAVE EVER PUBLISHED. MY PENCILS OUTLAST THEIR ERASERS.”

VLADIMIR NABOKOV

STRONG OPINIONS

Revision means *much* more than proofreading for mechanical errors (indeed, this is a later, “polishing” step, as discussed later in this section). Revision is important and significant work that, once again, can require making difficult choices in order to clarify and strengthen your writing and ideas.

When reviewing your draft for revision, ask the following questions:

Does the paper fulfill the assignment’s expectations?

Before you put any more time and effort into your draft, it is important to make sure that what you are writing fits with your instructor’s expectations. Look back at your assignment or consult with your instructor to confirm that you’re on the right track; it can be very frustrating to complete a second or third draft and then find out that you need to start over.

Is the overall structure of your paper clear and logical?

Don’t be afraid to reorganize the order of your ideas after you’ve written an initial draft, or even to modify your thesis in light of how what you’ve written has developed. Because your ideas may change and deepen as you write, and because new ideas may emerge, you may need to reconsider which points deserve more attention and how these points now relate to each other. Read your paper as carefully and critically as you would any other author’s, bringing in the critical reading strategies discussed in **Section II.A: Reading Strategies**. Overall, check that you present a clear and effective introduction, an accurate thesis statement, a sequence of main ideas that directly supports that thesis, and a conclusion.

Do you support your ideas or arguments with sufficient evidence?

Keeping your audience, genre, and discipline in mind, make sure that evidence and other support is provided where appropriate. Look for ideas that are not supported or fully developed or explained. Adequate support is central to a credible claim, and credible sources are likewise central to providing solid support and development to your ideas. This may require that you revisit or reconsider your notes and researched sources, or that you conduct additional research to lend more support to important but underdeveloped ideas. See **Section II.B: Research Strategies** for notes on finding, evaluating, and using sources.

Is each paragraph well-structured?

Each paragraph should have one main idea, expressed clearly. Make sure not to overload your paragraphs with two or three main ideas. In addition – and especially if you’ve reorganized your ideas – check that appropriate transitions between paragraphs are present, and that ideas are not presented more than once without an express purpose in doing so.

Are your sentences clearly written and appropriate to the discipline or genre?

Check to see if your main idea is presented clearly at the front of each sentence. Work to eliminate any unnecessary words, and to make sure that your language is formal enough for an academic paper (avoiding slang, conversational language, and unclear statements). Also, check against other texts in the discipline and/or genre you’re writing in to be sure that you are working within its conventions. Finally, make sure that you have defined (directly or by illustration or discussion) any new or technical terminology for your reader.

Is your prose graceful and compelling?

Consider the interest of the reader and how you’re working to maintain it: Do you vary your word choice and sentence length? Do you write in the active voice? Is your language concise? Is your tone persuasive and convincing?

Are your sources (if any) all appropriately integrated and cited?

Check that sources are used and integrated into your writing correctly and appropriately (see **Section II.B: Research Strategies** for further discussion). Also, consult a style guide to complete your citations and works cited page correctly, making sure all sources are appropriately noted and accounted for.

Seeking Feedback

EFFECTIVE AND THOROUGH review and revision involves seeking feedback on what you’ve written. You can seek feedback on your draft in a number of ways. While it may seem easiest to simply review the paper yourself, it can often be difficult to distance yourself from your writing and look at it from an outsider’s point of view. Still, using the critical reading skills outlined in **Section II.A: Reading Strategies** on your own writing can be a valuable way to understand and improve your own work.

“I AM BOUND BY MY OWN DEFINITION OF CRITICISM: A DISINTERESTED ENDEAVOUR TO LEARN AND PROPAGATE THE BEST THAT IS KNOWN AND THOUGHT IN THE WORLD.”

MATTHEW ARNOLD,
ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

You can also seek the feedback of others – be they friends, parents, instructors, or writing center consultants. Having someone else read and critique your work will give you a true “outsider’s point of view,” and can direct your attention to previously unnoticed questions and problems. While this can also be a source of anxiety for some writers, there are two things to keep in mind: everybody writes in stages, and writing is meant to be read by others.

Editing and Proofreading

EDITING AND PROOFREADING are essential aspects of effective writing. However, they are the later steps in the ongoing process of brainstorming, planning, drafting, and revising. Rushing or ignoring any of these earlier steps can lead to a paper that is unclear, underdeveloped, and *very* difficult to correct in the late stages of the writing process.

When you are ready to proofread and edit your draft, you should do so carefully and thoroughly. While previous strategies concerning reviewing and seeking feedback will still be helpful, consider also the following strategies:

- **Leave yourself plenty of time** for all steps of the writing process, including editing. By making and following a timeline for the paper, you are more likely to have time to finish everything with the proper amount of care and attention. Also, keep in mind that it may be best to lay your paper aside for a day or so before proofreading and editing, as you may be more likely to catch errors or notice structural problems if your writing isn't so "fresh" in your mind.
- **Get acquainted with your resources.** You don't need to memorize every grammatical and citational rule that may apply to the genre or discipline in which you're writing – you can look them up. Take advantage of the resources available to you: dictionaries, thesauruses, handbooks, citation guides, handouts from class, librarians, and writing center consultants.
- **Know your weaknesses.** Keep a list of errors you tend to make: it will help you know what to look for when you edit. You can also read the paper once for each error type – if you're only looking for one thing, you'll be more likely to notice it.
- **Read your paper aloud.** Often, when we read silently, our eyes skip over small errors, awkward or run-on sentences, and typos. By reading out loud, you force yourself to notice everything from spelling and word choice to the structure of sentences. You can also have someone else read your paper aloud and tell you where they are confused.
- **Read your paper backwards.** Another way to force yourself to notice small details is to take things out of context. Try reading your paper backwards, sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph, so that you are focusing on the text, not the ideas.
- **DON'T RELY SOLELY ON COMPUTER HELP!** Spell-check and grammar-check tools are useful, but they do *not* constitute or substitute for proofreading. Develop and follow your own editing strategies, and don't be fooled into thinking that computer tools alone are adequate for the job

AS YOU HAVE SEEN, effective writing requires a number of interdependent considerations and processes. These guidelines for effective reading, research, and writing strategies are a good foundation for successful writing in most situations: use them as a starting point, allow yourself time to experiment with a variety of processes and strategies, and always seek help whenever you have questions about your specific writing situation.