

COMMUNICATING
IN
**WRITTEN
ENGLISH**

**A Guide to Prepare for College
Reading and Writing**

VICTOR GREEN

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**A Guide to Prepare for College
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INTRODUCTION FROM THE AUTHOR

Hello English Students,

Many of us struggle to understand the writing of others and with being able to create our own written works. While the written word is a cornerstone of communication in all modern languages and civilizations, it is something that many people struggle with on a daily basis. The entire basis of English courses from grade school through the highest levels of education in universities is to understand, improve, and apply techniques that will make one a better communicator.

Communication is the essential purpose of any language. **YOU TAKE LANGUAGE COURSES TO BECOME A BETTER COMMUNICATOR.** That is it. There is no other reason for any language-based course than to become a better communicator. Communication in the English language can take place through a variety of ways including written, verbal, and multi-media presentations. The primary mode of communication that we are concerned with in this book is the written work. History has proven that the written word can be the most effective and undeniably is the longest lasting form of communication in human history.

From the Bible to the U.S. Constitution, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Steven King, from the Odyssey to the Harry Potter series the written word has been used as a form of conversation, education, history, sharing ideas and information, entertainment, and forming contracts and agreements. The forms and purpose of the written word are numerous and through diligent study, and lots and lots of practice, it is my belief that you will not only be able to understand the various forms of written work but will also be able to create them to express yourself in a way that will allow you to get your point across to any audience that you choose to address.

This is not something you will be an expert at immediately. It will take practice, practice, **PRACTICE!** You would not expect to just pick up a baseball bat and hit a homerun, nor run a mile in under six minutes your first time around the track. Just like everyone must train and practice to

become a better athlete, everyone must also train and practice to become better readers and writers. Just like in athletics there will be some that are naturally better than others, but everyone must practice to become better than they are today. Those that do not practice do not become better. Those who practice will continue to grow. The mind is like a muscle with unlimited possibilities, as long as you are willing to train and practice the skills you want it to have then it will continue to grow.

The purpose of this book is to expose you to the basics of understanding and creating effective communication in the English language. Many of my freshman English students come to their first semester of college unprepared for the rigors of college level reading and writing. This book contains information that will bridge the gap between what you learned in secondary school and what you need to know to prepare for the reading and writing that will be required in college, whether your last academic experience was a few months ago or a few decades ago. The goal of this book is to prepare you for English 101 and the college reading and writing experience so that you will be successful in all your communication endeavors. The information contained in these pages exemplify what I have found to be the most useful for students over the last two decades of using various curriculum and strategies. I have attempted to make the information both easy to understand and simple to implement.

Remember, much of what is presented are all suggestions as there are many paths to creating effective communication. Some of the advice and techniques that are given may seem contradictory at times, this is because there is more than one way to get to an acceptable result. These techniques are useful but should never be seen as unbreakable rules, find what works for you and use it. If it does not work for you, do not use it. Some of the information in this packet may be a new revelation to you while some of the information will be a reminder of information, technique, and style that you have learned at some point in the past. Either way it is my hope that something in this book will benefit you in the class you are about to take and beyond.

Sincerely,

Victor Green
English Instructor

Reading Analysis

Honing Your Analytical Skills

In both professional and personal matters the strength of your analytical skills will mean the difference between success and failure in various activities including how well you can understand a report, write a report, solve personnel or technical issues, manage and execute projects, solve both large and small day-to-day problems, or read a newspaper or internet article for information or pleasure. If you have neglected your analytical skills in the past, you should reconsider and improve on this important cognitive function.

Analytical skills are important for:

- gathering information and reporting
- solving complex problems
- making well-informed decisions
- summarizing statistical data
- identifying trends
- streamlining processes
- executing projects effectively
- ... and many other tasks.

The following are eight tips that will help to increase your critical and analytical reading of the written word.

Eight Critical Reading Strategies

1. **Previewing:** *Learning about a text before fully reading it.*

Previewing enables readers to get a sense of what the text is about and how it is organized before reading it closely. This simple strategy includes seeing what you can learn from the headnotes or other introductory material, skimming to get an overview of the content and organization, and identifying the rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation is the circumstances of an event around the writing which consists of the issue,

the audience, and a set of constraints. It is important to understand the issue that has inspired the writing as well as what audience the writing is directed towards, and what influence it is attempting to accomplish. The constraints are limits or conflicts brought about by persons, events, objects, and relations that can limit decisions and actions presented in the writing.

2. *Contextualizing:* *Placing a text in its historical, biographical, and cultural contexts.*

When you read a text, you read it through the lens of your own experience. Your understanding of the words on the page and their significance is informed by what you have come to know and value from living in a particular time and place. However, the texts you read were all written in the past, sometimes in a radically different time and place. To read critically you need to contextualize, to recognize the differences between your contemporary values and attitudes and those represented in the text. To understand the text, you must understand the time and place as well as the values and attitudes of both the writer and the intended readers of that period.

3. *Questioning to understand and remember:* *Ask questions about the content.*

When teachers ask you questions about your reading there is a purpose. These questions are designed to help you understand the reading and to respond to it more fully. By exploring a text through questions, we are able to understand the new information through a variety of ways and perspectives. However, the best perspective for retaining information may be your own. As you read through the text for the first or second time write down the questions that you would like answered. With this strategy you can write questions anytime and answer them as the information becomes available. For difficult academic readings you will understand the material better and remember it longer if you write a question for every paragraph or short section and answer it. Each question should focus on a main idea from the text that is expressed in your own words. Do not just copy parts of the paragraph as this does not make it personal and you will not remember or understand the information as well.

4. *Reflecting on challenges to your beliefs and values:* *Examining your personal responses.*

The reading that you do in any class might challenge your attitudes, your unconsciously held beliefs, or your position on current issues. When you read a text for the first time make a mark, such as an X, in the margin at each point where you feel a personal challenge to your attitudes, beliefs, or status. Make a short note in the margin about how you feel or about what in the text created the challenge. Once you have finished reading look again at the places you marked in the text where you felt personally challenged. What patterns do you see? How and why do you feel challenged?

5. *Outlining and summarizing:* *Identifying the main ideas and restating them in your own words.*

Outlining and summarizing are helpful strategies for understanding the content and structure of a reading selection. Outlining reveals the basic structure of the text, whereas summarizing gives a synopsis of a selection's main argument. Outlining may be part of the note taking process, or it may be done separately. The key to both outlining and summarizing is being able to distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting ideas and examples. The main ideas form the backbone that hold the various parts and pieces of the text together. Outlining the main ideas will help you to discover this structure. When you make an outline, use your own words to help you better remember the content, do not use the text's exact words.

Summarizing is very similar to outlining; in fact, it begins with outlining. However, instead of merely listing the main ideas, a summary recomposes the ideas to form a new text. Summarizing depends on a close analysis of each paragraph and requires creative synthesis. The main ideas and supporting information should be reemphasized in a manner that you will best understand and remember. Putting ideas together again, in your own words and in a condensed form, shows how reading critically can lead to a deeper understanding of any text.

6. *Evaluating an argument:* *Testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional impact.*

Writers make claims that they want the reader to accept as true. As a critical reader, you should not accept anything on face value but learn to recognize

every claim as an argument that needs to be carefully evaluated. An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support. The claim asserts a conclusion which is an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view that the writer wants the reader to accept. The support includes reasons (assumptions, values, and shared beliefs) and evidence (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) which give readers the basis for accepting the conclusion. When assessing an argument, you need to be concerned with the process of reasoning as well as its truthfulness. Reasoning and truthfulness are not the same thing and should not be thought of as such. For an argument to be acceptable, the support must be appropriate and relevant to the claim and the statements must be consistent with one another.

7. *Comparing and contrasting related readings:* *Exploring likenesses and differences between texts to understand them better.*

Many of the authors we read are concerned with the same issues and/or questions, but they approach how to discuss them in different ways. Finding a way to fit a text into an ongoing discussion or debate helps increase the understanding of why an author approached an issue or question in the way he or she did.

8. *Allow enough time to read and understand:* *Take the time to read, reread, and read again to make sure the material is understood.*

Reading critically is not a quick process and many students do not set aside enough time to properly understand the material. Students often read everything either too quickly or all at the same speed. Reading speed should vary based on the importance of what is being read. If you follow the previous steps for critical reading and know what you are looking for you can better distinguish information that can be skimmed from information that needs to be more closely examined. This will help you get the most from your reading time.

Critical reading will be difficult at times and will cause you to struggle. Be willing to go through this struggle as it will bring about positive results in the end. Do not get hung up and dwell on single tough details in your first reading. Instead, remember the confusing passages and continue to read with the idea that what seems difficult to understand at the moment may be

cleared up as you read more. You will hopefully understand these difficult passages once you have read through the material once or twice. If confusion still persists, seek out a classmate or your instructor for clarification. If you have missed something do not be shy about reaching out, once a confusing passage has been clarified it will often help us to understand confusing material that we face in the future.

Remember to read all course materials multiple times for the best Analysis

All material should be read at least three times. Read it through once so that you can go over the information without worrying about analyzing or retaining the information. Hopefully, this first readthrough will be enjoyable. Next, read actively through the material a second time taking notes, highlighting important information, and writing down unanswered questions. Then read through a third time reviewing the material and answering any questions that you have written down. If you still have unanswered questions after the third read through either read it again or it is time to consult an outside source such as a classmate, your instructor, or the internet. If you have not set aside enough time to read through the material three times, then you have not set aside enough time to fully grasp the information you will be reading.

Academic Writing

Formal Academic Writing

Formal academic writing is clear, concise, focused, structured, supported by evidence, and has a formal tone and style. It does not have to be complex with long sentences and words that most of us have never seen before. A common misconception about formal academic writing is that it can hardly be understood by those who never went to college. On the contrary, formal academic writing should be understood by most people who are able to read when done properly. Formal academic writing should communicate the message of the writer to the readers so they can completely understand what is meant. When the writer presents solid information or a solid argument the reader will understand the message. The goal is to be understood.

It is important that everyone have a solid foundation in the basics of academic writing. We will begin with sentence structure; however, we will not be going over everything that could possibly be discussed on proper sentence structure and grammar. Some of us remember the terms and grammar rules from elementary and secondary school, others may not remember them but automatically follow the rules from rote memory, while some have forgotten, or never learned, the proper terms nor structure of writing. As mistakes in sentence structure and proper grammar are common mistakes made by English 101 students it is best to give a reminder on those grammar and structure issues that result in the most common problems.

How to Create a Proper Sentence

The building block of each paragraph is the sentence. It is vitally important that each of your sentences are written in proper formal academic writing so that it will be both understood and up to the rigor expected of a college student. Each sentence must be punctuated correctly and be a complete sentence.

Most sentences have common characteristics. Every sentence should contain:

- A capital letter at the beginning

- **A subject**
 - Examples include – *I, he, she, it, research, sailboat, Natural History Museum, etc.*
- **A verb**
 - Examples include – *is, are, have, believe, became, found, etc.*
- **A complete idea**
- **A full stop at the end**
 - Examples of a full stop are a question mark (?), exclamation point (!), and most commonly a period (.) which will almost be exclusively used in academic writing.

While a sentence will always contain a **subject** and a **verb** , it may also contain a **compliment** . A **compliment** is a word or phrase that follows the linking verb and identifies or describes the subject.

The following is an example of a sentence with the parts broken down:

The results of the study confirmed the scientist’s hypothesis.

The results of the study	confirmed	the scientist’s hypothesis.
subject	verb	compliment

The previous sentence is an example of a simple sentence because it consists of only one **clause** . A **clause** is a group of related words that contain a subject to tell the reader what the sentence is about and a verb, so the reader knows what the subject is doing. Each clause contains essential information. The most common types of clauses are independent and dependent.

An **independent clause** is one that can stand alone as a sentence.

A **dependent clause** is usually a supporting part of a sentence.

A **Compound Sentence** is made of two simple sentences. These are usually joined together with a comma and transition word such as: *and, but, so, yet.*

A compound sentence can also be connected by a semi-colon, without the transition word. Both examples are shown below:

The professor failed to submit his research proposal by the deadline, so he was denied the research grant.

The professor failed to submit his research proposal by the deadline; he was denied the research grant.

Complex Sentences combine an independent clause with a dependent clause. In the following examples the **independent clauses are shown in bold** and the dependent clauses are not.

Although the result of the study was inconclusive, **the committee decided to implement the policy.**

If the results of the study confirm the scientist's hypothesis, **it will be a major breakthrough in the world of marine biology.**

Notice how the independent clause could be its own sentence, but the dependent clause would not make sense on its own because part of the message is missing. By combining an independent clause with a dependent clause, we create a **Complex Sentence**. In the examples above the dependent clause came first and was separated from the independent clause by a comma. However, when you begin the sentence with the independent clause there is no need to use punctuation to separate the clauses.

The committee decided to implement the policy even though the study was inconclusive.

It will be a major breakthrough in the world of marine biology if the results of the study confirm the scientist's hypothesis.

Notice that when the independent clause is placed first it is separated from the dependent clause by using a signal word such as: *even though, if, although, as, because, instead, though, when, whenever, where, or while.*

Compound-Complex Sentences contain different types of sentences to create a unique structure. These usually have two or more coordinated independent clauses that work towards the same message and one or more dependent clauses. The example below is a common and useful type of compound-complex sentence.

The on-campus debate was canceled, *after various protests* , as it was determined to be unnecessary and controversial.

This sentence contains two independent clauses that make up a compound sentence. The *dependent clause* in the middle could be taken out of this sentence and it could stand on its own. However, the dependent clause is inserted in the middle of these independent clauses to bring additional information or clarification to the sentence, thus creating a **compound-complex sentence**.

Incomplete sentences

Students often start sentences but then fail to finish them. This results in sentences that cannot be understood because the ideas are incomplete. This is one of the most common problems. It is so common that these sentence fragments will often be found at least once or twice in essays written by freshmen college students. The reason for these sentence fragments is often that the writer knows what they want to say but fails to write it fully down before beginning the next sentence. Fixing them is simple as all you must do to complete them is add more information. Here are a few examples of sentence fragments and how they can be completed.

Incorrect: If the results of the study confirmed the scientist's hypothesis.

Correct: If the results of the study confirmed the scientist's hypothesis, *it would be a*

major breakthrough in the world of marine biology.

Incorrect: Teaching machines may someday.

Correct: Teaching machines may someday *replace classroom lectures.*

Many times, although not always, when a sentence begins with a conjunction it is a dependent clause and needs to be clarified with an independent clause. Conjunctions are words that are used to connect clauses or sentences such as *if, but, and, although, as, because, since, until, etc.* If a sentence begins with these pay special attention to ensure that the message is clear and you have a complete sentence.

Run-on sentences

Students will also often write one sentence and then keep on writing, running into another sentence. **Run-on sentences** are a common problem

where the writer creates one long sentence that contains two or more complete thoughts without proper punctuation. As run-on sentences usually contain several complete thoughts, which could be broken down into smaller more effective sentences, the problem can be corrected by rearranging the sentence. Below is an example of a run-on sentence and how it could be corrected.

Run-on: The survey shows that more than 90% of the population agrees that tobacco use causes cancer however only 28% of tobacco smokers want to quit smoking.

There are several ways that this run-on sentence could be corrected:

Use a full stop between the two independent clauses

The survey shows that more than 90% of the population agrees that tobacco use causes cancer. However, only 28% of tobacco smokers want to quit smoking

Use a semicolon between the two independent clauses

The survey shows that more than 90% of the population agrees that tobacco use causes cancer; 28% of tobacco smokers want to quit smoking.

Use a comma and linking word between the two independent clauses

The survey shows that more than 90% of the population agrees that tobacco use causes cancer, and 28% of tobacco smokers want to quit smoking.

Change the less important idea into a dependent clause, creating a complex sentence.

More than 90% of the population agrees that tobacco use causes cancer but only 28% of tobacco smokers want to quit smoking.

The way in which you will adapt the run-on sentence into a complete sentence, or sentences, that can clearly express your thoughts will depend on your writing style. Whatever you are comfortable with will work. What is important is that you identify run-on sentences and correct them so your message will be clear.

Complete sentences consist of a complete thought that can make sense on its own. Complete sentences always contain a subject, a verb, and if necessary, a complement. Whether it is adding information to avoid incomplete sentences or rearranging your information to avoid run-on sentences, you can master creating effective sentences by following the information that has been presented.

Active vs. passive writing.

The active voice is preferred in academic writing. In the active voice the subject is the performer of the action. In the passive voice the subject is the receiver of the action. Pay attention to the following example sentences and how the subject is presented.

Active voice: **Dr. Smith** conducted the study in 2015.

Passive voice: The study was conducted by **Dr. Smith** in 2015

Active voice: **Genetic information** is encoded by DNA.

Passive voice: DNA encodes **genetic information**.

While both the active and passive voice can be used in academic writing it is best to use the active voice as it has the advantage of being clear, assertive, and direct. The active voice is better for academic writing that presents a strong argument to your audience. The passive voice directs the reader to focus on the information or argument being presented, not the writer. This can make the reader believe that the writer is trying to evade responsibility for the writing and stance presented. Passive writing can also feel flat or uninspired. Whenever possible use the active voice as it sounds assertive and direct. The active voice makes it easier for the reader to understand your message. Use the active voice for argument and persuasion; if you must use the passive voice do so while presenting information.

A word on comma use.

Improper comma use plagues the many essays I receive from my students each semester. This improper comma use usually falls into two categories, the overuse or underuse of commas. Some students, love to throw commas, all around, as seen in this sentence, so that if, spoken aloud the pauses

created, by these commas would, result in something resembling, lines recited, by, William Shatner. Other students will write entire paragraphs or even the entire essay without the use of any commas for separation or clarification as evidenced by this sentence. Based on my discussions with students both the overuse and underuse of commas are the result of well-meaning advice that was giving to them by past instructors. Many teachers will tell their students that a comma represents a pause in their writing, so if they read their sentence out loud they should put a comma wherever they naturally pause. Due to the variety of ways in which people speak this can lead to an interesting array of where commas end up being placed. If you have ever been given this advice, forget it! Instead focus on how commas help us better get across our message and avoid confusion when we communicate.

Another area of confusion is that there are so many rules for using commas, and those comma usage rules vary by writing association styles and location. The Oxford comma is a great example. The Associated Press Stylebook does not ban the Oxford comma, but it does recommend using it only when clarification is necessary. We are going to discuss the comma use that will be most useful for your academic writing, however there are other forms of commas use that will not be touched on that you can learn more about by visiting your local library or the internet.

Commas help us to better communicate our message to the reader by doing four things that bring clarity. Commas help join messages together, help to fill in gaps, add information to a sentence, and separate words in a list or sequence.

Joining commas connect two complete thoughts with a comma that is followed by one of the connecting words *and*, *or*, *but*, *yet*, or *while*:

Efforts have been made to reduce pollution, and the effects have been noticeable.

Large cities in California have instituted toll roads, while the major interstates are free.

Gapping commas are used to indicate that one or more words have been left out as it was not necessary to repeat some of the words that have already occurred in the sentence:

Jupiter is the largest planet and Pluto, the smallest.

The Roman Empire era was well known for its conquest and politics, the Renaissance for its art and philosophy.

Bracketing commas set off an interruption which brings clarity to the sentence but could be removed from the sentence without ruining the message. Bracketing commas always come in pairs unless the interruption would come at the beginning or end of the sentence.

The general, who was often hard and indifferent, celebrated the victory with his troops.

The Rose Parade is held in Pasadena, a suburb of Los Angeles.

Listing commas separate the words in a list or sequence. Listing commas are used to separate three or more words or phrases in a list. These commas can often be replacements for the words **and** or **or**.

Research can be gathered from *The Times*, *The Post*, or *The Independent*.

Each morning breakfast consisted of eggs, bacon, and toast.

These four comma uses are the most common. If your comma use does not fall into one of these four categories you may want to reevaluate why you are using the comma and consider removing it if it does not serve a purpose within the context of your sentence.

The Oxford comma

The Oxford comma is the final comma that is placed before a coordinating conjunction in a set of three or more objects. These coordinating conjunctions include **and** or **or**. There is much controversy and differing opinions over the use of the Oxford comma as it is often optional and in many English-speaking countries is not a common practice. This has led many to believe that it is not important and therefore should not be used.

While the use of the Oxford comma is optional it is important as the meaning of most, if not all, sentences change drastically without it. The following examples and explanations will make this clear.

Example 1: James brought us apples, bananas and oranges.

Example 2: James brought us apples, bananas, and oranges.

In Example 1 the Oxford comma is not used. Therefore, we can conclude that the two fruits at the end, “bananas and oranges” are considered as one grouping because they are not separated by a comma. In Example 2 the oxford comma was used, changing the whole structure of the sentence. Now we can be sure that there are three specific groups of fruit: apples, bananas, and oranges.

This may not seem like an important detail when discussing the items brought to a picnic, but as we use the Oxford comma in a variety of ways the importance of the clarification will become obvious.

Example A: Olivia carpooled with her best friend, a lawyer and an engineer.

Example B: Olivia carpooled with her best friend, a lawyer, and an engineer.

When we look at Example A it appears to be telling us that Olivia’s best friend is both a doctor and an engineer. The absence of the Oxford comma allows us to think that the two terms (a lawyer and an engineer) describe her best friend. However, when we add the Oxford comma after the conjunction the whole sentence now has a new meaning. Example B tells us that Olivia carpooled with three different people: her best friend, a lawyer, and an engineer.

Example 1: He dedicated his speech to his parents, Steven Spielberg and God.

Example 2: He dedicated his speech to his parents, Steven Spielberg, and God.

According to Example 1 it appears that the speech was dedicated to his parents, namely Steven Spielberg and God. This may confuse readers as they could comprehend that his parents are literally ‘Steven Spielberg’ and ‘God,’ or at least those are their names. To avoid this confusion and ambiguity the comma is essential. Example 2 show us that the speech is clearly dedicated to his parents, to Steven Spielberg, and to God.

Example A: Jennifer loves to eat, her children and her dog.

Example B: Jennifer loves to eat, her children, and her dog.

According to Example A it appears that Jennifer loves to eat. Unfortunately, what she loves to eat is her children and her dog. This may be humorous or horrifying depending on your perspective, and while this may obviously be a stretch of the imagination it shows the problem and confusion in the grammar. The Oxford comma is essential once again to avoid the confusion of the grouping in this sentence. Example B shows us that Jennifer loves to eat, loves her children, and loves her dog.

The Oxford comma will always ensure that your message is clear and understood. It may be optional, but using it is the only way to ensure that your message will not be taken out of context. There is no harm in using the Oxford comma. However, failing to use it can cause great confusion. Whenever possible use the Oxford comma.

*** Side Note:** If you are attending college or university in the United States of America the Oxford comma is required by all three of the major writing styles. The American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), and Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) all require the Oxford comma in their style guides. If you attend school in the USA become familiar with using it.

Putting those Sentences Together

Hopefully, you now understand how proper academic sentences should be formed. Soon these sentences will need to be put together to form paragraphs. The size and development of your paragraphs will depend on the needs of your essay and subject matter. One of the dangers that many students fall into is that they are dependent on one or two types of sentences and use these exclusively to write all of the sentences in their paragraphs. This leads to dull and tedious writing. To make your writing feel fresh and interesting it is important to vary your sentence length and use both simple and complex sentences so that the reader's mind will remain active and not become hypnotized by the droning of similar sentences.

Sentence structure and variation matters. One of the best examples of this advice comes from Gary Provost. You may have seen the following example floating around the internet, used in an English course, or you may have read one of his excellent books. Pay attention to how the sentences and paragraphs are laid out and structured. See for yourself how the sentence structure effects the reader's experience.

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals – sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader’s ear. Don’t just write words. Write music.”

-Gary Provost

This is excellent advice for all writers, both academic and non-academic, and hopefully you will see the importance of it. Remember that your topic, information, and support will all play a large role in what is said through your sentences and paragraphs, but it is also important to pay attention to how that information is structured. A good writer should write the information and points to be made into a variety of structures. This increases the reader’s interest in the writing. Interested readers retain more. Regardless of how interesting the topic may be, if the writing is dull the reader will have to drudge through the paper and will probably have little interest in continuing to read the essay or article. Do not write just to write. Put care and style in your writing. Make the structure and style of your writing just as appealing as the topic and information you will be presenting. This will allow both the information and your writing style, or voice, to develop and shine for all to see.

How to Create an Effective Paragraph

A paragraph is a group of sentences that are placed together in one block that will express one main idea. It is important to remember that each paragraph should focus on only one main idea. If you find that your paragraph is exploring two or more main ideas then you need to do some revising and break up these main ideas so that each one is explained in its own paragraph.

A proper paragraph will follow these guidelines:

- The first line of the paragraph should be indented
- The paragraph should have one main idea
- The main idea should be presented in a topic sentence
- The topic sentence should be supported by all other sentences
- There should be a line break before and after each paragraph to separate it from the other paragraphs.

The topic sentence in the paragraph should clearly explain why this topic is important and what will be discussed about it. Every other sentence needs to explain something about the main idea or give a relating example so that you add information and clarity to your topic or stance. This may be done by explaining the idea, giving evidence or examples that relate to the main idea, or by adding details or expanding on the idea to give it more depth or to bring in connections that the reader may not have considered. The writer should never assume that the reader will understand the point they are trying to make. Instead, it is important that they write clearly and thoroughly explain their information and stance about the topic so that there is no doubt in the reader's mind the message that is trying to be conveyed. Some may worry that they will over explain the topic, do not worry about this. More information is always better than less. When you go back over the paragraph during your final revision you can make the decision of what is best to keep and what is best to delete before you submit the final draft.

Various Academic Writing Advice

Numbers in Academic Writing.

Many students struggle with the proper way to write numbers in their essays and other academic writing. The general rule is that when writing

small numbers, one to ten, that they should be spelled out. Larger numbers, those above ten, should be written as numerals. This rule also follows for number places. Instead of writing *1st*, *3rd*, or *5th* the writing should be expressed as *first*, *third*, or *fifth* .

Of course, there are some exceptions. Small numbers can be represented as numerals in formal writing when showing a sequence of numbers, comparison, or when listing a location or business that contains a low value numeral in its name. The following sentences show an acceptable use of this.

The 5th Element clothing store first opened its doors on 7th Avenue in New York City in 1987.

The Chicago Cubs surprised everyone when they won the World Series in 2016 with an 8-7 lead over the Cleveland Indians in the final game.

Pay attention to the context that is being used, stylistically it is better to write

There were over one thousand people present

than it is to write

There were over 1,000 people present.

On the other hand, writing

The distance between the sites was 357 miles

looks better than

The distance between the sites was three hundred and fifty-six miles.

If what is being discussed is a technical number or statistic it is better to use numerals. If a general, or averaged, large number is used it is better to write out the number.

The rules for using numbers in academic writing will vary between academic disciplines and there are always exceptions, but in general follow the rule that if the number is ten or below, write it out. If the number is above ten then it should be written in numeral form. When in doubt follow the advice of your professor or do an internet search to see what guidelines are most likely to apply in your course or field of study.

The Difference between colon and semicolon

Students of all levels are often confused on the proper use of colons and semicolons. If you understand the proper use of these two features of writing it will immediately set your writing apart as someone who knows proper grammar. Even though these are a common area of misconception, understanding them is simple. What follows are some of the most common uses of both colons and semicolons.

Colons (:) are used in a sentence to show that something is to follow, such as a quotation, list, or example.

A colon can introduce a list

The university offers master's degrees in three areas: the natural sciences, psychology, and humanities.

It must be noted that a colon should not be used when the listed items are incorporated into the flow of the sentence as in the following example:

The university offers master's degrees in the natural sciences, psychology, and humanities.

A colon can be used between independent clauses when the second explains or illustrates the first.

A college degree is still worth the effort: recent surveys revealed that college graduates earned roughly 70% more than those with only a high school diploma.

A colon can be used to emphasize a single word or a phrase at the end of a sentence.

After six months of testing the data showed one obvious answer to the study: inconclusive.

One hundred test subjects, over five thousand tests ran over six months, both test groups and control groups were consistently monitored: this study should have been groundbreaking.

A colon can be used to introduce a quotation after a complete sentence.

Thoreau ends his essay with a metaphor: "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in."

Colons can also be used in non-grammatical ways such as:

Time – 10:37 a.m.

To express a ratio of two numbers, with no space before or after the colon – 2:5

In Biblical references – Proverbs 18:15

Semicolons (;) are used in a sentence to join two complete thoughts or two independent clauses that could stand alone as complete sentences.

Semicolons are used to join two independent clauses without a coordinating conjunction such as *for, and, but, or, yet, so, etc.*

There is mounting evidence of the dangers of vaping; some people deny it.

The semicolon takes the place of the conjunction, if the conjunction is added in the semicolon must be dropped as in the following example:

There is mounting evidence of the dangers of vaping, yet some people deny it.

Semicolons are used to join two independent clauses that are joined by a transitional expression such as *accordingly, for example, consequently, so, thus, and nevertheless.*

Plastic waste continues to contaminate the oceans; consequently, marine life is dying.

Semicolons are used in list with internal commas.

The three largest cities during the American Revolution were Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New York, New York; and Boston, Massachusetts.

These list with internal commas can sometimes be complex

The twelve study participants are a diverse group: three are from Los Angeles, California; two are from Atlanta, Georgia; three are from Houston, Texas; three are from London, England; one is from Tokyo, Japan; and the participants are from various faith backgrounds including Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and Shintoist.

Colons and semicolons are acceptable in all academic writing. While they can also be used in creative writing, this is discouraged. If you are in a creative writing course, or are writing a story of any kind, avoid using these two punctuation marks. They usually interrupt the flow of a story and make it feel more academic, which can ruin the experience for many readers. If you are not sure if a colon or semicolon should be used in a sentence the best thing to do is not to use one. It is better to err on the side of caution and avoid using either of these punctuation marks in the wrong way. However, if you understand their use and can use them with confidence, they will improve your academic writing.

Final Words on Sentence and Paragraph Creation

To ensure that your writing is correct read over your sentences out loud and be sure to pause as indicated by the punctuation. Review each sentence to see if it can stand alone as a complete thought. If it does not, then it is not a complete sentence and will need to be rewritten so that it completes the idea that you want to present. Review the comma use to be sure it is there for a reason and is understandable. Review the structure of your paragraph and the variation of sentence lengths to ensure that your writing is interesting and flows well. Pay attention to the information presented and the style of your writing so that you can learn what works and what does not work. This may be challenging at first, but as you grow and improve as a writer this will hopefully be easier to accomplish.

With any technique the more that you use them, and use them correctly, your mind will automatically begin to adjust your writing style to include the better technique and habits. Therefore, continued writing and revision is important for your essay composition skills. The more your writing improves the easier it will be to write essays, reports, journals, and anything else that would be required of you. You will always have to go through the revision and editing process to ensure that your writing is the best it can be, but the more you practice the better your first drafts will get. This will in turn make each essay easier to write and your final drafts even better.

Essay Writing –

Common Types of Essays

In almost every subject, students will have writing activities and assigned essays. These may range from short essays which only require a few paragraphs to average and large multi-page papers that take many hours or days to complete. The first step is usually to decide what topic to discuss. The topic may be assigned by the instructor or the instructor may allow the student to choose their own topic. Once the topic is decided upon the next big decision that essay writers face is what type of essay to employ. This in turn brings up many questions: What kind of writing style is suitable? What tone is best? What techniques work for the selected topic?

Students need to understand the most common essay formats and the difference between each type of essay so that the appropriate essay type is chosen for their topic. The following are six common types of essays that can help students write the best essay for any assignment:

1. **Persuasive or Argumentative essay**

A Persuasive or Argumentative essay makes a claim or position regarding a subject for the main purpose of persuasion. It is usually presented with statistics, expert opinions, data, and well-supported arguments about a claim or controversy. Support is important as it brings legitimacy to the writer's claim or position. When using an argumentative tone in essay writing, it is essential that the issue being discussed is two-sided and the writer must take a stance. It is important that the main argument be clear, exact, and highly focused.

2. **Comparison and Contrast essay**

A Comparison and Contrast essay takes two subjects and identifies their similarities and differences. A good comparison and contrast paper must have a valid basis for comparison, a limited focus, and interesting information. When writing essays using the compare and contrast style it is vital that the purpose for comparing and contrasting the two subjects is made clear. This purpose is important because it provides the focus for the paper.

3. Descriptive essay

The purpose of a Descriptive essay is to provide a vivid picture of a certain person, place, object, or event. It offers concise and vivid details that allow the reader to imagine the subject described. Descriptive essays explain the *what, why, when, where, and how* of a topic.

4. Definition essay

In a Definition essay the writer presents a meaning of a term, concept, or idea that goes beyond the objective definition offered in the dictionary. Essay writers must provide a more focused and exact description of the term than what is offered in reference sources. Some examples may be anecdotes, analogies, illustrations of its implied meaning, or negation which is giving examples of what it is not to reinforce what it is.

5. Narrative essay

A Narrative essay tells a story through a sequence of events. This type of essay is told from a defined point of view, usually the author's, and revolves around a single motif or central point. It offers sensory details and specific information to engage the reader in the elements and sequence of the story. Verbs must be vivid and precise.

6. Evaluation essay

The purpose of the Evaluation essay is to form judgment on certain ideas, places, services, etc. based on clear-cut criteria. An informed opinion is critical to the proper development of this essay. It is important to use facts, statistics, and other authoritative resources to establish and organize the criteria and to present a substantial analysis and evaluation.

These six common essay types will give you a foundation in understanding what is expected of the essay type and setting a tone. Each essay has a specific goal for communicating an idea. The writer crafts the essay to accomplish that goal by choosing the best structure type to present their information. When it comes time to choose an essay type for your assignments refer to these descriptions. It is likely that one of these six common essay types will be what you are looking for.

Basic Tips for Writing an Effective Essay

Students often dread the task of writing an essay. While essays are usually a requirement for a course, to earn a scholarship, or to be accepted into an internship program many students feel overwhelmed with the task. Essays are often a large project. However, there are steps that students can take that will help break the task into manageable parts. These steps make drafting an essay easier and increase the probability of producing a successful essay for any topic.

The following seven steps will help you to write a successful essay.

1. **Pick a topic.**

In your courses you will either be assigned a topic to write about, or you will be given the freedom to write on a subject of your choice. If you are given a topic you should think about the type of essay that you want to create. It could be a specific analysis, a general overview of the subject, or an argument to sway your reader to a specific stance on the topic. The choice is yours to make and will affect the composition and tone of your finished essay. If necessary, narrow your focus so the essay will not be too broad. An essay that has too broad of a focus is often doomed to fail because there is too much information. Keep it simple and interesting.

If you are not assigned a topic you will have more freedom but also more work to do. While this may seem daunting, it will give you the opportunity to choose a subject that is interesting or relevant to you. The first task to complete should be to define your purpose. All academic essays fall into one of two purposes: to Inform or to Persuade.

Throughout this process remember to evaluate your options with your purpose and goal in mind. If your goal is to inform and educate, choose a subject that you already have knowledge of or have studied. Research and gather information on the topic and then present it in an interesting manner. If your goal is to persuade, choose a subject that interests you and that you can bring a fresh perspective to. Choose a topic that has at least two sides, or perspectives, do research on both sides of the argument, and then decide which side of the topic you will be arguing for. Some topics are better suited for a persuasive paper than an informative one but be careful about

choosing a topic that you are personally passionate about. All too often students choose a persuasive topic that they are passionate about and instead of creating an effective argument they end up writing an essay that is biased and only confirms their preexisting opinions. Avoid this by choosing topics that you can write about in a fair and objective manner. Whatever your goal is, if you are interested in your topic it will make writing much easier.

If you are having trouble deciding what to write about you will need to do some research on topics that you find interesting. Think about what interests and excites you and write down these subjects. Do an internet search, visit the library, or talk with classmates for ideas. Once you find something that has sparked your interest be sure that you have found enough information on the chosen topic so that you will have enough to write about to create an effective paper.

2. Prepare an outline or diagram of your ideas.

To write a successful essay you must first organize your thoughts. When you take what is already in your head and put it to paper it allows you to see connections between ideas more clearly. Once you have these ideas written out you can rearrange them so that you can create an outline with a clear and effective message. Once you have an outline it will serve as the foundation of your paper. Two methods to jot down and explore ideas are an outline or a diagram.

To create a diagram, write your topic in the middle of a page. Then draw several lines branching out from the topic, draw at least three lines but you may draw as many as you need, next write down your main ideas at the end of each of the lines. You may draw more lines from these main ideas to highlight any thoughts or details that you would like to include about these ideas.

To create an outline, write your topic at the top of a page. After the topic begin to list your main ideas and make sure to leave space under each main idea. Use this space to list other smaller ideas or details that relate to each main idea. If you do this it will allow you to see connections and links which will help you write a better organized and effective essay.

3. Write your thesis statement.

Once you have chosen a topic and sorted your ideas into categories, you need to create a thesis statement. The thesis statement declares the point of your essay to the reader. The first step in creating your thesis statement is to look at your outline or diagram and see how the main ideas work together. What is the main topic of your essay? What is your essay trying to say about that main topic?

The thesis will have two parts. The first part states the **topic**, and the second part states the **point of the essay** or **your stance on that topic**. For instance, if you were writing about Steven Spielberg and his impact on film production, an appropriate thesis statement would be, *“Steven Spielberg has impacted the world of film production through his many films that have changed the ways films are marketed, special effects are used, and he began the era of the blockbuster film.”* This thesis statement shows that the **topic** is how *“Steven Spielberg has impacted the world of film production through his many films”* while the **point of the essay** or **stance** is to discuss how this has been done by *“changing the way films are marketed, special effects are used, and he began the era of the blockbuster film.”*

4. Write the body.

The body of your essay is where you are able to argue, explain, or describe your topic. Each main idea that you developed in your outline or diagram will become a separate body paragraph, or section with several paragraphs, within the body of your essay.

Each body paragraph follows the same basic structure. The introductory sentence should introduce the main idea. Next, write out each of your supporting ideas in sentence format. As you write out the supporting ideas leave a few lines between each point so that you can go back later and give detailed examples to support your position. These examples will help to link together your small ideas and will also give support to your main position or argument.

5. Write the introduction.

Sometimes it is better to write the introduction first, other times writing the introduction after the body will make it easier to create an introduction that

is captivating and will lead into the points you will make later in the essay. Once you have developed your thesis and the overall body of your essay, you need an introduction. A good introduction should attract the reader's attention and show the direction or focus of your essay.

An attention grabber is a great way to begin. You can use shocking information, a story, dialogue, a quote, or a summary of your topic. Choose a method that you believe will do well to introduce your topic and lead into your thesis statement, which will be the final sentence of your introduction.

6. Write the conclusion.

The conclusion brings closure to your topic and summarizes your overall ideas. The conclusion also provides a final perspective on your topics. Do not introduce any new information in the conclusion, new information should only be brought up in the body of your essay. The conclusion should bring together the most effective points you have made throughout the body in a final effort to make your point. The conclusion should consist of three to five strong sentences. Reinforce the point you made in your thesis statement and your conclusion will wrap up the essay well.

7. Add the finishing touches.

Once you write your conclusion, you may believe that your essay is complete. Wrong. There are still many small details that must be looked at before we can decide if the essay is both complete and the best possible finished product.

Review the order of your paragraphs. There are two structures that are often seen as the most effective in presenting your points. In the first structure the strongest points should be in the first and last paragraphs within the body, with the other weaker points falling in the middle paragraphs. In the second structure you can place the strongest points in either ascending or descending order, the points will be made from strongest to weakest or from weakest to strongest. The structure of your essay will be your decision. Check the order of your paragraphs to see if they both make sense and allow a smooth flow of information. If your essay is describing a process, such as how to make a pizza, be sure that your paragraphs fall in the correct order.

Review the instructions or prompt for your essay . Many instructors and scholarships require different formats. Double check the essay requirements to make sure that your essay has followed these directions and is in the proper format.

Revise and edit your entire essay at least twice. To “*revise*” your work means to read it and change it to make it ‘sound better’ or to better communicate what you mean. Review your writing, flow, style, grammar, and spelling. The first revision should focus on revising the major problems. Check to see if the essay makes sense. Make sure that your sentences and transitions have a smooth flow and add any final phrases that will help to connect your thoughts or ideas. Once all these larger issues are in order check for proper grammar and spelling, then fix any mistakes. All essays should be written three times. The first draft is to get your ideas and support on paper, the second draft will correct any communication issues, and the final draft will ensure that the spelling and grammar are all correct.

You have just written a great essay, *Congratulations!!!*

A note on essay writing

Essay writing can be tough, but like any other activity it will become easier with practice. When in need of what type of essay to write or what to include do not be shy or timid, ask an instructor, assistant, peer, or your college writing center for guidance.

Always start the essay writing process early. Starting this process late is a recipe for disaster and stress. Allow yourself enough time to properly plan, write, revise, and edit your essay. Start writing your essay two or three weeks before the due date. This will ensure you have enough time to complete all of the steps and turn in the best possible result.

The Five-Paragraph Essay

One of the most common formats for essay composition is the five-paragraph essay. Although it is not the only format for writing an essay it is a useful model to keep in mind. As you begin to develop your composition skills this format can be adapted, expanded, and varied to create an unlimited variety of essays. The following advice will help you to better understand how to construct a proper essay.

Parts of this section on The Five-Paragraph Essay are adapted from the works of the late Harry Livermore who developed many useful materials for English students. I have used many of his materials for my students over the years, with his permission, and have found them to be an invaluable asset. I recommend conducting an internet search to find many of the materials that Mr. Livermore developed for the English classes at Cook Senior High School in Adel, Georgia. I have found his materials and method of explaining English concepts to be very useful for both my high school and college students over the years.

What follows is an adaptation of Harry Livermore's advice on crafting a five-paragraph essay which has been combined with my own advice and suggestions which have been useful for my English students. An essay example is also included.

The Introduction

The introduction paragraph is the first contact your readers will have with the essay. It should go without saying, yet it is vital that it must be said, that it is important to both captivate your reader and get your message across in a clear and concise manner in these first few sentences. Many students misunderstand the purpose of the introduction while others are so poor at getting their point across that the introduction paragraph leaves the reader confused. The following advice is given so that you will understand the purpose of an introduction paragraph, understand how you can create an effective introduction, and know what are the many mistakes students make when writing their introduction so that you can avoid these mistakes.

Creating a Proper Introduction

The introduction paragraph sets the tone for the entire essay and needs to accomplish two tasks:

- It should catch the reader's attention so that he or she will want to read more.
- It should let the reader know what the essay is going to be about and the direction it will take.

The second task can be accomplished through a carefully crafted and well-developed Thesis Statement. Writing a thesis statement has been discussed earlier in this document and can be learned in a short amount of time, although mastering it will take more time. The first task, catching the reader's attention, is more difficult. We will take the time to go over several options and tips that you may use to develop an introduction paragraph that will interest the reader. Unfortunately, there is no way to write something that will interest every reader, but our goal should be to create an introduction paragraph that will interest a good amount of readers.

There are many ways that have been developed and proven effective to catch the attention of readers. Both students and professional writers, who write for magazines, newspapers, or blogs use six basic strategies to create a “hook” that grabs a reader's attention:

- Anecdotal
- Historical Review
- Surprising Statement
- Famous Person
- Set the Scene
- Declarative

What follows is an explanation of each of these “hooks” with examples from real magazine articles, blogs, or essays to illustrate the explanations.

1. Anecdotal: An anecdote is a very short story. Everyone loves to listen to stories. Begin the essay by telling a small story that leads into the topic of your paper. You can use your personal experience, someone you know, or that of someone famous. Your story should be a short episode, not a full

story with characters, a plot, and setting. A well-placed story will capture the reader's attention and they will want to continue reading your paper to see how it ties into your message. A Word of Warning: do not let your story consume the paper. Remember that it is an introduction, not the entire essay. From *Rework* by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson.

Polar explorer Ben Saunders said that during his solo North Pole expedition (thirty-one marathons back-to-back, seventy-two days alone), the 'huge decision' was often so horrifically overwhelming to contemplate that his day-to-day decision-making rarely extended beyond "getting to that bit of ice a few yards in front of me." Attainable goals like that are the best ones to have.

[This is an anecdote, a little story about one man who made a dangerous solo trek to the North Pole. That is the lead-in to an article about making attainable goals in business. In this article the author explains that it is not easy to imagine traveling across the North Pole, but we can visualize a few yards at a time. By showing Saunders small and attainable goals we can see the logic of breaking down a company's journey and using small goals to achieve long-term progress and success.]

2. Historical Review: Giving a brief historical review of a topic can help it to be better understood by the reader. This will lead them into the discussion of the essay by knowing and understanding something of the topic's past. A biographical presentation of an important individual, an overview of a currently evolving court case, or a controversial social issue are some of the many topics that could be better understood by including a historical review into the introduction. To be most efficient it is important that the historical review is brief and outlines the major issues that impact the topic to be discussed. As with the anecdote, be sure that the historical review does not take over the paper as it is just an introduction to the larger aspects of your essay.

From *Integration Turns 40* by Juan Williams in *Modern Maturity*, April/May, 1994.

The victory brought pure elation and joy. It was May 1954, just days after the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in Brown v. Board

of Education of Topeka, Kansas. At NAACP headquarters in New York the mood was euphoric. Telegrams of congratulations poured in from around the world; reporters and well-wishers crowded the halls.

[This article reviews the historic Supreme Court decision that started school desegregation before going into the topic of the article which is school segregation in the present time.]

3. Surprising Statement: A surprising statement is an introductory technique that is often seen in magazine articles and newspaper editorial or opinion pieces. There are a wide variety of ways to create a statement that will surprise the reader. The statement can be surprising because it is disgusting while other times it can be shocking or joyful. Statements can sometimes be surprising simply because of who said it. A surprising statement can catch the reader's attention and as we see it used in so many sources, we know that it works.

From *60 Seconds That Could Save Your Child* by Cathy Perlmutter with Maureen Sangiorgio in *Prevention*, September, 1993.

Have a minute? Good. Because that may be all it takes to save the life of a child—your child. Accidents kill nearly 8,000 children under age 15 each year. And for every fatality, 42 more children are admitted to hospitals for treatment. Yet such deaths and injuries can be avoided through these easy steps parents can take right now. You don't have a minute to lose.

[This article begins with a surprising statistic; 8000 children die each year from accidents. The article continues by listing seven easy actions a person can take to help protect a child against accidents. These range from turning down the water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to putting firearms under lock and key.]

4. Famous Person: Many people like to know what celebrities say and do. Using an example of a famous person at the beginning of an essay usually gets the reader's attention. Just mentioning the famous person's name will get the reader's interest, but this technique will work even better if you provide a quote from that person or something he or she did that will tie into the topic of your essay. Even though the statement or action may not

be clearly relevant, a clever writer can convince the reader that it is relevant.

From *Dear Taxpayer* by Will Manley in Booklist, May 1, 1993.

The most widely read writer in America today is not Stephen King, Michael Crichton or John Grisham. It's Margaret Milner Richardson, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, whose name appears on the "1040 Forms and Instructions" booklet. I doubt that Margaret wrote the entire 1040 pamphlet, but the annual introductory letter, "A Note from the Commissioner," bears her signature.

[This is the first paragraph of an article about Margaret Milner Richardson. The author used the names of three famous modern American writers to get a reader's interest. Notice that the first name on his list is a name that is probably more widely known than the other two. Stephen King has been around for some time now, and everyone, from teenagers to grandparents, know his name whether they have read his books or not.]

5. Set the Scene: This technique creates a mental picture to help introduce the essay to the reader. By using words that describe how things look, feel, sound, smell, and taste it peaks the reader's curiosity and makes the reader want to know more. It can be easy to lose oneself in the mental picture and forget the point of the topic, so be sure to also stay focused on the point that is being made and supported with the thesis statement.

From *The Hidden Dangers of Caffeine* example essay.

It is everywhere we go. Sold on almost every street corner and found in almost every home. Cups of it are held in the hands of students, workers, homemakers, and celebrities. Many swear they cannot live without it. Americans love coffee. Many wonder what makes this brew so popular. Today, coffee is not only a physical stimulant but it is also a fashion accessory, coming in hundreds of varieties and serves as the focal point of many social functions and daily activities. This favored drink of Americans has come to define our lives and tastes, but this drink is doing more damage to the health and well-being of individuals than the positive light that it is constantly being given.

[This description paints the picture of coffee consumption in the United States and how it has become synonymous with the way many people live their life. The importance that some put on this drink along with the variety of ways it is created and consumed is presented to show the reader the importance it plays in the lives of many. The thesis changes the mental picture that has been set up from a product that is indispensable to one that may also be doing damage. This sets up the main topic of the essay which is the dangers of caffeine consumption.]

6. Declarative: This technique is one of the most common, however, it must be used with care or the writer may defeat their whole purpose of using this technique which is to get the reader's attention. In this technique the writer simply states straight out what the topic of the essay is going to be about. Many students make the mistake of using either a quick declarative statement or overexplaining the declaration, this results in the reader not being engaged in either. The key is to give just enough information to interest and engage the reader. This technique can be difficult to master but can result in a straightforward and effective message.

From *The Tuition Tap* by Tim Lindemuth in K-Stater, February, 1994.

In the College of Veterinary Medicine and Engineering, for example, nearly one-third of the teaching faculty may retire by the year 2004. In the College of Education, more than a third of the professors are 55 years old and older. The largest turnover for a single department is projected to be in geology. More than half of its faculty this year are in the age group that will retire at the millennium, says Ron Downey of K-State's Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. The graying of K-State's faculty is not unique. A Regents' report shows approximately 27 percent of the faculty at the six state universities will retire by the end of this decade, creating a shortage of senior faculty.

[This is a straightforward introduction that gets right down to the topic of the aging of the faculty of Kansas State University. There are no historical reviews, no surprising statements, no anecdotes, no quotations from or about famous people. This is a discussion that leads to further discussion about the topic. The biggest difficulty about this type of introduction is that it can get boring when done incorrectly or when it fails to give enough information for the reader to understand the purpose. In these cases, it is not likely to get the interest of anyone except those who are already interested in this subject. Use this pattern with caution.]

These introduction techniques can give a boost to your writing. Practice them. Try using two or three different techniques for your introductory paragraph and see which introduction is best. Finding the right style and tone for your audience takes practice. With practice you will soon understand and find the right introduction paragraph and tone for each of your essays. Remember, the thesis statement is an important part of your introduction, it will emphasize the topic and your stance or direction to the reader. The introduction paragraph should first catch the reader's attention and then lead into the thesis statement which will let the reader know what you are going to say about the topic.

Some writers prefer to write the introduction paragraph first while others prefer to write it after the body paragraphs have been created. To some it is beneficial to write most of the essay first so that they will know what the introduction will lead up to, this way they have information to inspire the construction of the introduction paragraph. Other writers prefer to write the introduction first to set the tone and direction and then work on the body paragraphs. Either way is acceptable, try both and see what works best for you. The introduction will be tweaked or rewritten in the revision process so the first draft of your introduction can be constructed whenever you feel is best.

DO NOT DO THIS in an Introductory Paragraph

Many students believe that the introduction paragraph either must explain everything before getting into the essay or must scream out for attention to get the reader interested. Both can be huge mistakes that will turn off a reader before they finish the first few sentences. Many students make various mistakes in creating their introduction paragraph which sets the essay up for failure before it even begins. What follows is an outline of these mistakes so that you will never make them yourself.

Do not announce your intentions. Do not flatly announce what you are about to do in an essay.

In this paper I will...

The purpose of this essay is to...

Do not be so obvious, show some style and find a better way to interest your reader. Get into the topic and let your reader perceive your purpose from the thesis statement of your introduction paragraph.

Do not apologize. Avoid phrases like the following:

In my [humble] opinion...

I am not sure about this, but...

Never give the impression that you do not know what you are talking about or that you are not enough of an expert in this topic so that your opinion would not matter. Your reader will devalue your opinion because you do. The reader does not need to know your credentials, or lack of them, to find your writing valuable. Let the readers form their own opinion of your essay and expertise, do not make it for them.

Do not use a dictionary or encyclopedia definition.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, a widget is...

If these are common words why bother, and if they are uncommon words a dry dictionary definition is not the best way to get a reader interested. Definitions can be useful later in the essay but are usually better when they are original definitions given by the writer for a specific purpose. Avoid direct dictionary definitions as they can be tacky and overdone.

Do not pander.

Saying what you think your audience wants to hear just to satisfy them or make them happy gives the wrong tone for an academic essay. There is no reason to constantly praise Shakespeare as a genius or John F. Kennedy as an amazing president. Let the reader understand your points on the topic from the evidence and arguments that you present, not by consistent unnecessary praise.

Do not dilly-dally and clutter.

Get to the point. Be confident in your writing and keep it concise and relevant. Babbling on and writing things that are not relevant to the overall message of the essay is a sure way to distract and disinterest the reader. Many writers find it useful to write a filler, or warm-up, paragraph (or two, even) to get them into the essay. This sharpens their own idea of what they are communicating, and then they go back and delete this first paragraph which was just a running start to get the ideas flowing.

The mistakes that we have just reviewed are the most common made by students in the introduction paragraph. Recognizing these mistakes is the first step in preventing them in future writing. If you have done any of these before do not stress out over it as these are mistakes that many students make. Now you know what they are and why they should not be included in your essay. Use this information wisely and never make these introductory paragraph mistakes again.

The Five-Paragraph Essay

Structure

The five-paragraph essay is the basic example of the essay format. If you can understand the structure and purpose of the five-paragraph essay it will be possible to understand and create essay of any shape, size, and structure. To better understand this basic essay format a detailed outline of the five-paragraph essay structure is presented.

The Introduction

Introductory Paragraph

Earlier the section *Creating a Proper Introduction* gave several different ways to get your reader involved in your essay. These can help you to begin your essay writing, which can be the most difficult task, and show you what is necessary to get the reader involved. The introduction paragraph should introduce your topic in a manner that engages the reader to keep reading and find out what you have to say about it.

The introduction paragraph should include the thesis statement. The thesis statement tells the reader what the essay is about and also lets them know the direction of the essay. The final sentence of this paragraph should also have a transitional “hook” which transitions the reader from the introduction paragraph to the body of the essay.

The Body-

Body — First paragraph:

The first paragraph of the body should contain the strongest argument, example, or point being made. The first sentence of this paragraph should include a “reverse hook” which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the introductory paragraph. The topic for this paragraph should be brought up in the first or second sentence and this topic should relate to the thesis statement from the introductory paragraph. All sentences in this paragraph should relate to or support the topic for this paragraph. The last

sentence of the paragraph should include a transitional hook to tie into the second paragraph of the body.

Body — Second paragraph:

The second body paragraph should contain the second strongest argument, example, point, or an obvious follow up to the first paragraph in the body. The first sentence of this paragraph should include the reverse hook which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the first paragraph of the body. The topic for this paragraph should be brought up in the first or second sentence and this topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. All sentences in this paragraph should relate to or support the topic for this paragraph. The last sentence of this paragraph should include a transitional hook to tie into the third paragraph of the body.

Body — Third paragraph:

The third body paragraph should contain the weakest argument, example, point, or an obvious follow up to the second paragraph in the body. The first sentence of this paragraph should include the reverse hook which ties in with the transitional hook at the end of the second body paragraph. The topic for this paragraph should be in the first or second sentence and this topic should relate to the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. All sentences in this paragraph should relate to or support the topic for this paragraph. The last sentence in this paragraph should include a transitional concluding hook that tells the reader that this is the final major point being made. This hook also leads into the final, or conclusion, paragraph.

The Conclusion

Conclusion Paragraph:

The conclusion paragraph should give the reader a reminder of your arguments, examples, or points made and should reinforce what you have presented on the topic. To ensure that your conclusion paragraph does this include the following:

- Try to use an allusion, or reworking, of the pattern used in the introductory paragraph.
- Restate the thesis statement in a new manner, using some of the original language or language that "echoes" the original

language. (The restatement must not be a duplicate thesis statement.)

- A summary of the three main points from the body of the essay.
- A final statement that gives style or power to completing your essay and signals the reader that the discussion has come to an end. In a persuasive essay this is usually called the “Call to Action,” which is a statement that tells the reader what action they should take and how or why to do it.

A Sample Essay

The following is a sample essay by Harry Livermore. The essay itself is on the left column while the details and information about the essay and how it functions is found on the right column. From this example you should be able to comprehend the structure and style choices while gaining a better insight on why the writer crafted it the way that he did. Pay attention to the details and think about how you may be able to include some of the same techniques in your own essays.

1Stephen King, creator of such stories as Carrie and Pet Sematary, stated that the Edgar Allan Poe stories he read as a child gave him the inspiration and instruction he needed to become the writer that he is. 2Poe, as does Stephen King, fills the reader's imagination with the images that he wishes the reader to see, hear, and feel. 3His use of vivid, concrete visual imagery to present both static and dynamic settings and to describe people is part of his technique. 4Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" is a story about a young man who kills an old man who cares for him, dismembers the corpse, then goes mad when he thinks he hears the old man's heart beating beneath the floor boards under his feet as he sits and discusses the old man's absence with the police. 5In "The Tell-Tale Heart," a careful reader can

The introductory paragraph includes a paraphrase of something said by a famous person in order to get the reader's attention. The second sentence leads up to the thesis statement which is the third sentence. The thesis statement (sentence 3) presents topic of the paper to the reader and provides a mini- outline. The topic is Poe's use of visual imagery. The mini- outline tells the reader that this paper will present Poe's use of imagery in three places in his writing: (1) description of static setting; (2) description of dynamic setting; and (3) description of a person. The last sentence of the paragraph uses the words "manipulation" and "senses" as transitional hooks.

observe Poe's skillful manipulation of the senses.

1The sense of sight, the primary sense, is particularly susceptible to manipulation. 2In "The Tell-Tale Heart," Poe uses the following image to describe a static scene: "His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness . . ." Poe used the words "black," "pitch," and "thick darkness" not only to show the reader the condition of the old man's room, but also to make the reader feel the darkness." 3"Thick" is a word that is not usually associated with color (darkness), yet in using it, Poe stimulates the reader's sense of feeling as well as his sense of sight.

1Further on in the story, Poe uses a couple of words that cross not only the sense of sight but also the sense of feeling to describe a dynamic scene. 2The youth in the story has been standing in the open doorway of the old man's room for a long time, waiting for just the right moment to reveal himself to the old man in order to frighten him. 3Poe writes: "So I opened it [the lantern opening]--you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily--until, at length, a

In the first sentence of the second paragraph (first paragraph of the body) the words "sense" and "manipulation" are used to hook into the end of the introductory paragraph. The first part of the second sentence provides the topic for this paragraph--imagery in a static scene. Then a quotation from "The Tell-Tale Heart" is presented and briefly discussed. The last sentence of this paragraph uses the expressions "sense of feeling" and "sense of sight" as hooks for leading into the third paragraph.

The first sentence of the third paragraph (second paragraph of the body) uses the words "sense of sight" and "sense of feeling" to hook back into the previous paragraph. Note that in the second paragraph "feeling" came first, and in this paragraph "sight" comes first. The first sentence also includes the topic for this paragraph--imagery in a dynamic scene. Again, a quotation is taken from the story, and it is briefly discussed. The last sentence uses the

single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye." 4By using the metaphor of the thread of the spider (which we all know is a creepy creature) and the word "shot," Poe almost makes the reader gasp, as surely did the old man whose one blind eye the young man describes as "the vulture eye."

words "one blind eye" which was in the quotation. This expression provides the transitional hook for the last paragraph in the body of the paper.

1The reader does not know much about what the old man in this story looks like except that he has one blind eye. 2In the second paragraph of "The Tell-Tale Heart," Poe establishes the young man's obsession with that blind eye when he writes: "He had the eye of the vulture-- a pale blue eye, with a film over it." 3This "vulture eye" is evoked over and over again in the story until the reader becomes as obsessed with it as does the young man. 4His use of the vivid, concrete word "vulture" establishes a specific image in the mind of the reader that is inescapable.

In the first sentence of the fourth paragraph (third paragraph in the body), "one blind eye" is used that hooks into the previous paragraph. This first sentence also lets the reader know that this paragraph will deal with descriptions of people: ". . . what the old man looks like . . ." Once again Poe is quoted and discussed. The last sentence uses the word "image" which hooks into the last paragraph. (It is less important that this paragraph has a hook since the last paragraph is going to include a summary of the body of the paper.)

1"Thick darkness," "thread of the spider," and "vulture eye" are three images that Poe used in "The Tell-Tale Heart" to

The first sentence of the concluding paragraph uses the principal words from the quotations from each paragraph

stimulate a reader's senses. 2Poe wanted the reader to see and feel real life. 3He used concrete imagery rather than vague abstract words to describe settings and people. 4If Edgar Allan Poe was one of Stephen King's teachers, then readers of King owe a debt of gratitude to that nineteenth-century creator of horror stories.

of the body of the paper. This summarizes those three paragraph. The second and third sentences provide observations which can also be considered a summary, not only of the content of the paper, but also offers personal opinion which was logically drawn as the result of this study. The last sentence returns to the Edgar Allan Poe-Stephen King relationship which began this paper. This sentence also provides a "wrap-up" and gives the paper a sense of finality.

Improve your Academic Writing

Academic essays are to be written using formal language. This does not mean that you must use language that is comprised of huge words which few people understand. Instead formal academic writing is clear, concise, focused, structured, and backed up by evidence. To ensure that your writing fulfils the requirements of formal academic writing please follow this advice.

1. Do not use contractions

Contractions are the words formed from two abbreviated words, such as *don't*, *can't*, and *it's*. Please write the full words. Contractions are part of informal writing and should never be used in formal academic writing.

Besides this distinction, contractions automatically make your writing seem less assertive and therefore weak. Look at a few of the following examples:

Contraction	Written out
don't	do not
can't	can not
it's	it is
shouldn't	should not

These are just a few examples but when you put these into a sentence you should understand that writing out the full word is more assertive and powerful than using contractions. ***“Don't do that,”*** can seem a casual scold while ***“do not do that”*** is an obvious command, although both statements have the same basic meaning.

There are a few exceptions where using contractions are acceptable in formal academic writing, those are:

- When reproducing a direct quotation that contains a contraction, leave the contraction as it appears in the original quote.
- When using an idiom that contains the contraction such as “don't count your chickens before they hatch,” there is no reason to

change the contraction. It would be odd if you did as the idiom is so well known.

- When writing a paper about language and contractions are a focus, you will need to be able to use them as a linguistic example to properly discuss them.

Other than these examples, follow the formal context and write out the full words.

2. Do not use colloquial vocabulary

Colloquial vocabulary are words and expressions that are used in everyday spoken language. They often do not provide the exactness needed in an academic setting.

An example is:

‘Retirement is something most of us must face sooner or later.’

This could be replaced by the more formal:

‘Retirement is inevitable.’

Also avoid other types of conversational language such as figures of speech, clichés, and idioms. For example:

Colloquial Expression	Formal Alternative
above board	legitimate
reached a happy medium	reached an acceptable compromise
get through it	survive, penetrate
part and parcel	intrinsic to
easier said than done	more difficult in practice
beyond a shadow of doubt	definitely
in recent years	recently
pay lip service to	support through words but not through actions
got out of hand	was no longer under control

a stumbling block	point of contention
explored every avenue	investigated alternatives

3. Avoid using run-on expressions

Run on expressions are phrases such as *and so forth*, *and so on*, or *etc.* These expressions inform the reader that there is more that could be listed and discussed. This can leave the reader wondering what else could be discussed or may make them feel that the writer was not confident or did not know what else could be discussed. Instead of ending the sentence with a ‘run on,’ complete the sentence properly.

For example:

Informal (includes run on)	Formal Alternative
Doctors must take into consideration patients' dietary needs resulting from allergies, medication, medical conditions and so on.	Doctors must take into consideration patients' dietary needs resulting from allergies, medication, and medical conditions.
Popular forms of music are rock, hip hop, country, etc.	Popular forms of music are rock, hip hop, country, rap, and jazz.

4. Do not use rhetorical questions

A rhetorical question is a question for which no answer is expected. A rhetorical question is given when the writer assumes the reader knows the answer, or when the writer goes on to answer the question in the text. Such questions are inappropriate for academic writing as readers might not know the answer. A better reason to avoid rhetorical questions is that the point being made could be more strongly and clearly expressed as a statement. Do not risk your point being misunderstood, make a clear statement instead.

Informal (includes rhetorical question)	Formal alternative

Industrial sites cause vast amounts of environmental pollution, so why do we still use them?	The questions surrounding the continued use of pollution producing industrial sites remain.
What is a team? A team can be one person but will usually end up including many more.	A team can include one person but usually involves many more.
The question is, however, does the "Design School Model" provide a practical solution to the problem of how to formulate strategy?	It is questionable whether the "Design School Model" provides a practical solution to the problem of strategy formulation.

Notice that you can change your rhetorical questions into statements and still be effective in an essay.

5. Place adverbs within the verb

In informal English, adverbs are often placed as clauses at the beginning or end of sentences. In formal academic writing adverbs should be placed within the verb group rather than in the initial or final positions.

For example:

Informal	Formal Alternative
Then the solution can be discarded.	The solution can then be discarded.
The blood is withdrawn slowly.	The blood is slowly withdrawn.

6. Avoid Beginning a Sentence with a Conjunction.

Do not use a conjunction to begin a sentence unless it is necessary for the clarity of the sentence. Beginning a sentence with a conjunction can be acceptable but many students overuse this technique, which adds extra words to a sentence that are unnecessary. The general rule for any writing is that unnecessary words should be avoided. Look at the two examples below:

But the most important factor is how the student chooses to use it.

The most important factor is how the student choose to use it.

And the manner the research was conducted was not consistent.

The manner the research was conducted was not consistent.

Coordinating conjunctions such as **and, but, so** or subordinating conjunctions such as **if, because, although** can be used to begin a sentence, however it is best not do so unless it is necessary. In most cases delete the conjunction from the beginning of your sentence and it will make it stronger and clearer.

Proofreading Marks Guide

Working with a partner to revise and edit your paper is a great practice as your partner will probably catch some of the mistakes that you will miss. This is because we are often blind to our own mistakes, as we know what we want to say, so we do not catch the small mistakes in getting our message across, spelling, or punctuation that may be obvious to someone else. It is not required that you have a revision and editing partner but if you do it will help your writing. You and your partner can exchange papers and work together to improve each other's assignments and overall writing. This will result in both better grades and better overall communication through writing.

The next page gives commonly used proofreading marks with an explanation of their meaning. It is provided to help you learn the marks and how to use them. When working with a revision and editing partner it is best to print your essays and exchange them. I have found that students can identify mistakes easier on a physical copy. Working from a physical copy also makes it easier to retain why or how the mistake was made so that it can be avoided in the future. This will be a benefit to both partners in the improvement of their writing skills. These proofreading marks will not be seen on digitally submitted work as a different comment and tracking system is used. Whenever possible, edit on physical documents with your partner as it will improve your writing faster. However, if digital is the only way to exchange work it is better than not doing it at all. This proofreading marks guide will be a good reference towards improvement to those who are still submitting physically printed work. If your instructor is grading physical copies of your work, you may see some of these marks on your graded essays.

Symbol	Meaning	Example
	Delete	The the laptop is useful
	Close up, no space	The lap top is useful
	Delete and Close up	The micro-processor
	Insert word or letter	going forward we are
	Insert space	going forward we are
	Transpose	going forward
	Insert comma	The microphone and the keyboard
	Insert period	Set up the microphone.
	Insert apostrophe	The microphone's sound
	Insert colon	Collect the following:
	Insert semicolon	the microphone; however
	Insert hyphen	Sixty-eight
	Insert quotation marks	A total eclipse of the heart
	Capitalize	The President
	Lower case	The Elevator
	Parentheses	The two parts (microphone and speaker) are
	Brackets	To the upper tier
	Spell out	It has approx. three uses

Keys to Success in English 101

As this book is meant to prepare you to succeed in your first college English class, and beyond, it will be useful to discuss a few things you can do to succeed in your first semester and for years to come. The following seven *Keys to Success* will help you in every course.

Listen to your Instructors

From the first day of class your instructor will inform you of what to expect from the course, textbook, assignments, exams, as well as what they expect from you. Pay close attention in the first classes as some instructors will make these expectations very clear and simple while others are more ambiguous. As you get to know the instructor over the course of the semester it should be easier to gauge what they expect of you, and what they value as important knowledge that you should gather from the course. If you can better understand the expectations of the instructor, then you can better complete your assignments and exams in the manner that the instructor wants. Remember that all instructors are different, and it is important that you pay attention and learn the style and expectations of each. You will enjoy some courses and others you may not. What is important is that you learn as much as you can from each of them so that you can excel in that course and be ready for what challenges may come your way in future courses.

Some students make the mistake of believing that each course is somehow sectioned off and will have no effect on the other courses, or themselves. However, every course a student takes will help to inform and develop them in some way, shape, or form so try your best to allow the influence of each course to be a positive one that helps develop your knowledge and skills. This will create a better you. It starts by listening to and understanding the instructor. Every instructor and course is different, but you will do well to learn from them all.

As instructors and courses are different you may even hear contradictory claims or requirements from different instructors, even in the same content areas. This is because they have two different views on what is important and how to best teach or practice their subject matter. In my English courses

I insist that students not use any contractions in their essays. I do this so that we follow proper formal academic writing. Some English instructors do not care if their students use contractions in their essays as they believe that not allowing contractions is too formal and ridged. If you found yourself in my course, or one of these other instructors, it would be best to follow the example and requirements set by the instructor. However, in the case of contractions they are not a part of formal English and by not using them your writing will be stronger and no penalty would result from using the full words. On the other hand, if you regularly use contractions in your essay writing the essays will appear casual and your grade may suffer when corrected by instructors who follow the proper procedures of formal academic writing. Every instructor will expect something different from your writing, be sure to know what your instructor expects from you. To be safe, always write within the college standard for every course.

When it comes time to take notes in class do not worry about taking notes on every detail that is presented in the course materials or lectures. Identify what information is most important or relevant and pay special attention to that. If you get to know the instructor's teaching style you will be able to identify the difference between the information that is the most important and the information which is supplemental or used to illustrate and support the vital information. Focus on original insights and the conjecture of the instructor. This is information that is unique to them and that you will not find in a textbook. If you actively listen to what the instructor wants you to understand it will save you time and energy because you will be focusing on the most important information while saving time wasted on the generic information that can be read from the textbook or looked up later

It is best to get to know your instructor's teaching style and expectations as early as possible. Getting to know the teaching style and actively listening to your instructor is a habit of all motivated students. Set up good academic habits early. These will serve you best in the future.

Know your Textbook and Writing Handbook

In most freshman English courses two textbooks will be assigned: a reader, which is a collection of essays or literary works, and a writing handbook. Sometimes the textbook will be a reader and writing handbook in one. For the assigned readings be sure to read each three times as discussed earlier in

the *Reading Analysis* section. The first reading should be done for pleasure and to gain the information, the second reading should be done to analyze the work and write down any questions or concerns, and the third time should be to find answers to the questions brought up in the second reading and gain a better understanding of the text.

The writing handbook is an invaluable resource that will help you with college level writing in the current course and throughout your college career. This handbook will give you the information you will need to best compose an essay. Get to know this writing handbook as soon as you can. Find out how to locate information by using the table of contents and index so that you will have an easier time finding information later as the need arises. This book will prove useful while working on finding a topic, organizing and composing the essay, and especially when it comes time to revise and edit your work. Your writing handbook will be a dependable source of reference that you can use for many years to come. I still have my copy of *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White which is now well worn and has served me well for over two decades.

Use the Provided Resources

Many instructors and colleges will provide a variety of resources for you to use. Take advantage of all these resources because they can be a positive influence and make life easier during your transition into college. These resources will be preapproved to meet the standards of your instructor and college so you will not have to worry about misinformation.

Internet resources are an excellent source of information, but always beware as there is much misinformation on the internet as well. While your textbooks should be your main source of information there is nothing wrong with supplementing them with online resources. Try to stay focused on websites that are established and have a good reputation. Your professor or textbook may suggest websites to visit. Check out resources available through other college websites as well. Be wary as some websites offer subpar or even dishonest and damaging information. Stay clear of anything questionable and focus on the information that your instructors have provided.

Use your College Writing Center

College Writing Centers are a fantastic resource that college freshmen should take advantage of. This is a place where students can find extra help and information for essay composition. They also have trained tutors that will offer individual assistance on the writing process.

Writing centers are the place that highly motivated students go to help them compose their essays, correct grammar errors, ensure their citation format is correct, and make connections with tutors and other students. Never feel embarrassed about taking advantage of the resources available at the writing center, they are there to help all students and want to see you succeed.

Be Prepared for Essay Writing

In English 101 you will be writing essays. In fact, you will be writing essays in nearly all of your college courses. Be prepared to write many essays each semester and set aside time so that you can write each one properly. Essay writing is a task that takes time, but it is also one of the best ways to assess a student's knowledge, critical thinking skills, and composition skills all at once.

Be prepared to go beyond the five-paragraph essay. While you may still write the occasional short essay or standard five-paragraph essay, you will begin to develop essays that are more in-depth, use various organizational methods, and are longer. Do not feel intimidated by the idea of longer more complex essays. If you understand the process of the five-paragraph essay you already have the skills to create any size essay, from a five-paragraph essay to a ninety-nine-paragraph dissertation. There will still be an introduction paragraph, a thesis statement, and a conclusion paragraph. The major change will be that instead of three body paragraphs you can use as many as you need to fully explain or argue your message and these paragraphs can be arranged in a variety of styles. If you understand the process and structure of the five-paragraph essay you have the foundation to build upon so that you can master any length and style of essay.

Do Not Plagiarize

Ensure that you understand what plagiarism is and do everything that you can to avoid it. Plagiarism is using someone else's phrasing and research

and then presenting it as your own original work. This will get you into trouble with both your instructor and the college or university. Be sure that your work is always original in thought and composition. Understand how to properly cite and paraphrase the information that is used in your essays. If you are having difficulty understanding plagiarism your instructor, college writing center, or the official websites on citation styles can help you with this.

There are also many websites that will offer to sell you essays. Do not use this service as this is also plagiarism. This is not only dishonest to the instructor when determining your grade, but you are cheating yourself. By purchasing an essay and allowing someone else to write it you are not gaining the knowledge and understanding that comes with creating and developing that essay. Colleges and universities have harsh penalties for those who cheat and plagiarize, however even if you are never caught the damage you have done in robbing yourself of the opportunity to grow and learn will show itself eventually. The goal of education is to gain knowledge and develop your skills, if you are not doing this for yourself then you are not gaining what you should from the college experience. Future employers expect a certain level of knowledge and skill from college graduates and if you do not learn how to develop these skills in college your shortcomings will eventually show themselves in the workplace. Do yourself a favor and always do your own assignments and work hard to develop your skills and knowledge through every course. The pride gained by knowing you have done it on your own is invaluable and the confidence you will have in other courses, and your future career, will shine through. Do not cheat yourself, improve your knowledge and skill at every opportunity.

Focus on Learning, Not your Grades

The focus of many students each semester is what they must do to earn a perfect grade in the course. This type of thinking is wrong and needs to stop. The focus of every student should be on learning and mastering the concepts presented in the course, not on what task they must do or the rote information they must recite to get the best grade. Many students endure high levels of stress when earning the best grade is their primary concern. Others try to do the bare minimum to either get an 'A' or pass the class,

which results in the same meager improvement. If the focus is on learning, understanding, and mastering as much as you can from each course you will earn a good grade and the course will be engaging and enjoyable. When the focus is on the grade the required concepts may be learned along the way, but the information will not be retained as well. It serves the student better to be more concerned with retaining and mastering the concepts as best they can so that they can use this knowledge for the rest of their life.

I would much rather have students who are concerned with learning as much as they can, thereby bettering themselves, rather than ones that are obsessed with their grades and GPA. It is much better to earn a 'C' or 'B' in a course and come out with a solid understanding of the subject matter than it is to earn an 'A' but not be able to have an intelligent and informed conversation about the subject matter. Most students who care more about learning and bettering themselves, regardless of the grade they earn, usually end up earning high grades while retaining the material better. If you can master the information and earn an 'A' that is great. If you earn a lower grade that is nothing to be ashamed of, it is a great accomplishment if you have learned and grown from that course. Grades are temporary, the knowledge and skills gained last forever.

This is Not the End

The ability to better communicate your ideas through writing, as well as better understand the writing of others, is the focus of this book.

Understanding the concepts presented will prepare you to begin your college level reading and writing journey and be ready for ENG 101. Read and write every chance that you get. Read material that challenges you.

Focus on your writing during the revision and editing of each essay. Identify your mistakes and change them, this will help you identify the mistakes you are prone to making so that you can consciously avoid them in the future. This will save you time in the editing process and improve your writing. Identify your strengths and capitalize on them when you can. The more you read and write the more your skills in reading analysis and writing composition will improve.

This is not the end, as academics we must strive to always educate, develop, and improve ourselves. Grow from the concepts you have learned in this book and continue to add to your knowledge of communicating in written English with each course that you take. Improve yourself through each class session, reading, and assignment. Our goal should always be to improve ourselves through knowledge and critical thinking so that we can consistently make a better version of ourselves each day. This same advice was given to me long ago and I have strived to live it each day. I hope that you join me in this journey of continual improvement.

I wish you the best in your educational journey!

May it be a benefit and enjoyable for you.

About the Author

Victor Green holds a master's degree in English from National University and has been teaching English at the high school and community college level since 2007. Before that he was involved in the production of various independent film and stage productions. He currently lives in Southern California with his wife and family. He started GreenBean Media in the summer of 2020 to fulfil his interests in writing and other creative outlets. Find out more about Victor at www.greenbeanmedia.com .