



**Clues for College Writers**  
*Cracking the Mystery of Academic Writing*

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**Second Edition 1992 by  
Sandra Becker, Michael Birdsall, John Fagerson, Bob Gremore, and Chris Porter  
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## Introduction: Clues for Writing Assigned Papers

First, this guide gives you basic clues to follow in writing all papers. Then it gives you individual sections with step-by-step guidelines for fulfilling specific types of writing assignments. There are also brief, clear guides for using transitions, and revision and editing checklists for reviewing your drafts. If you refer to the suggestions below, to the guidelines for your specific assignment, and to the checklists, you should be able to save time and increase the effectiveness of your writing.

Not all of the following suggestions will apply to all forms of writing. Many of them, however, are basic to almost all types of writing. Go through the list, and take note of those that are appropriate to your particular assignment. Take them into consideration while you are writing your paper.

### Basic Clues to Follow in All Paper Writing:

- I. Make sure that you **understand the specific requirements** and limitations of the assignment. Ask your instructor questions if you do not understand, and/or call, write, or visit the Metropolitan State University Writing Center. **centerfolk@metrostate.edu**
- II. Prewriting: Make sure **you think through your ideas** for the paper before you actually start writing. A writing project involves several separate activities: planning, collecting data, drafting the first version, revising, editing, and proofreading. Planning is probably the most important because it will make the others go more smoothly. Set aside some time specifically to plan your document. Here are some things to think about when you plan:
  - A. **Determine the nature of your audience.** The people who will read the paper greatly influence the kind of information you present and the way you present it. Whom are you informing? Why are you presenting this information to them? How are they to use the information?
  - B. **Limit your topic so that it is workable.** The more specific your topic is, the less information you have to manage. For example, “Free Trade” would be an impossibly broad topic to cover, but “The Economic Effects of Free Trade on the U.S. Clothing Industry” might be workable. Get the purpose of the assignment clearly in mind. As you begin collecting information, state your topic in the form of a question or problem. For example, what effect will free trade have on the clothing industry?
  - C. **Assemble as much information as you can that deals with your limited topic.** Be reasonable about this. Obviously, a three-page paper would not require the review of as much information as a research paper would require. Don’t get so bogged down in information that you can’t write the paper.

**D. On the basis of that information, decide on your position.** Read over our information, paying attention to pro and con arguments as well as to facts and figures. Then decide what position you want to take or which way you want to approach the information.

**E. Decide what form of presentation is most appropriate for the approach you want to take and the nature of your audience.** For examples of possible forms, see **assignment guidelines**.

**F. Decide what general subtopics the paper should cover.** How many sections should the paper be divided into? What topics should be placed in each section? In what order should the sections be arranged?

**III. Writing the first draft.** Make sure that you keep in mind the following important points in drafting a paper.

**A.** After you have decided what approach you want to take, write down a purpose statement. Let your purpose statement help you limit your topic. You must make sure that your position or main idea is completely clear to your reader. The best way to do that is to begin with a purpose statement which does three things.

1. Tells the limits of your topic.
2. Expresses your position or main idea.
3. Gives a reason for that position (or indicates your approach or method of development if there are more reasons than can be listed in one sentence).

*Example:* "Since the continued economic health of U.S. industry depends on equalizing the international balance of payments, the free trade of ready-to-wear clothing will eventually benefit the U.S. clothing industry."

This statement      (1) limits the topic (ready-to-wear clothing, U.S. clothing industry)  
                                  (2) expresses a position (will eventually benefit)  
                                  (3) gives a reason (Since....balance of payments)

A purpose statement will also help you keep track of where you are going while you are writing the paper. This is especially appropriate in an essay type of paper, but all papers should have a main idea or clear governing concept.

**B.** After writing a rough draft, organize your paper so that each paragraph deals with a particular aspect of the problem and provides support for your paper's main point. Make sure that each paragraph or section follows

logically from the paragraph or section preceding it. Use repetitions of key words and concepts and transition words to emphasize the way sections relate to each other. (See **transitions**.)

- C.** Define any terms which are important to your presentation or which your audience might not understand.
- D.** Keep on track. Each sentence should relate to the topic and purpose of the paragraph it's in. Make sure the reader understands how the points relate to each other.
- E.** Make sure that your information is correct, and that you can provide proof of its being correct, that statements and figures are quoted accurately, and that you provide citations for all quotations, figures, paraphrases, and reused arguments.
- F.** Use the **Revision Checklist** and **Editing Checklist** both for reference while writing the paper and also for checking the paper when you are finished.

Questions? Call, e-mail, or visit the Metropolitan State University Writing Center.

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## Process for Preparing Any Assignment

The following pages present guidelines for writing many types of papers. Here is a list of things to think about before beginning any writing project.

- 1. Goal and Purpose:** What is the goal of this assignment? What is the instructor looking for? What am I supposed to demonstrate by completing this paper?
- 2. Method of Preparation:** How should I prepare for writing the assignment? (For example, should I consult five sources, choose three points of comparison, read applicable case studies and so on?)
- 3. Form:** What form should the paper take? (For example, should it be an essay, an interview report, a research paper?) How long should it be?
- 4. Content:** What content should the paper cover? How many sections should the paper be divided into? What content should be in each section? How long should each section be? In what order should the sections be arranged?
- 5. Evaluation:** What criteria will the instructor use in evaluation? Where in the paper is each criterion met?
- 6. Pitfalls:** What might go wrong while I'm writing? How can I avoid possible mistakes?

Don't hesitate to ask your instructor to clarify any of these points. You'll save yourself time and anxiety if you ask appropriate questions before you begin writing. A call or a visit to the Metropolitan State University Writing Center could help you get started, too.

**Note that we have not included guidelines for research papers.** The reason for this apparent omission is that research papers are more than scrapbooks of information. One should have a purpose for doing research beyond collecting data about a topic. Is your purpose to compare or contrast two or more concepts? To inform your reader? To analyze or interpret a theory, situation or problem? To summarize and evaluate current research about a topic? Once you have decided what your purpose is for doing research, you can then refer to a specific **assignment guideline** for directions. Additional information about how to tie your ideas together and how to document your research can be found in **Online Writing Resources**. **Metropolitan State University's librarians** can be a tremendous help in finding reliable, scholarly sources.

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# Organizing Material in Essays

Essays, research papers and other long documents often use the “classic essay format.” Documents using this format are divided into three parts: an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

## Introduction

The most important task the introduction serves is to give the reader a **preview** of the major points your paper will make. It’s sometimes a good idea to write the introduction last, after you already know what your paper says about your topic.

Ideally, the introduction should somewhere contain a single sentence that tells, in a nutshell, what major point your paper makes about its topic. Sometimes, it’s necessary to spread this **nutshell statement, or thesis**, over two or three sentences. Think of the introduction as a short telegram that summarizes the paper’s content.

## Body

For essays, research papers and other long documents, the body is organized into blocks of text called paragraphs. Paragraphs have a formal structure that you should follow. In the body of your paper, each paragraph should start with a one-sentence assertion about some part of your topic. That assertion is called a **topic sentence**. Its purpose is to tell your reader the paragraph’s main point. The **body** of the paragraph then provides detail necessary to explain or back up the assertion in the topic sentence. The **clincher** ties the whole paragraph together and often references the topic sentence. The body of most essays and research papers contains several paragraphs, all organized roughly like the one above.

## Conclusion

The conclusion should remind the reader of the paper’s major point. It can do that by restating, in different words, the nutshell summary of the introduction. The conclusion could also remind the reader of major ideas presented in the body of the paper. The conclusion is your last chance to make sure the paper accomplishes the purpose of the assignment.

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# Summary

- I. The purpose of a summary is to briefly state another author's major idea. You sometimes write a summary to show how well you understand a reading assignment. Brief summaries are very useful in essays and research papers. A summary uses your own words, not the author's, to convey the author's major ideas or points fairly and accurately.
- II. Before writing a summary, take note of the following to determine which ideas are the most important in the original work:
  - A. Repetitions of words, phrases, or concepts.
  - B. The introduction and the first and last chapters or paragraphs.
  - C. Titles and subtitles.
- III. A summary essay on a book often conforms to one of the following formats:
  - A. An introductory paragraph which captures the central points of the book and then succeeding paragraphs which discuss each of these ideas in more detail.
  - B. An introductory paragraph which summarizes the central ideas of the book and then a paragraph for each chapter.
- IV. Review your summaries (even short ones) for the following points:
  - A. How well you understand and express in your own words the author's central points.
  - B. How readable and coherent your summary is.
  - C. Proper credit given to the original author(s).
  - D. Use of the **Revision Checklist** and **Editing Checklist** in preparing your summary.
- V. Pitfalls:
  - A. Using the author's words rather than your own. If you cannot resist including some of the author's words because of their originality of expression, put the passage in quotation marks and cite it properly. (See **Online Writing Resources**.)

- B. Including too much detail; this makes it difficult for your reader to separate central ideas from supporting ideas.

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## Informative Paper

- I. The purpose of an informative essay is to present information in an organized and coherent fashion, but without expressing an opinion about the information. Points of views, pro and con, can be included, but they must be presented in an unbiased fashion. Your paper should do the following:
  - A. Enlighten your audience or give them usable material.
  - B. Present sufficient information for the needs of your audience.
  - C. Make clear from the beginning the purpose(s) of your presentation.
- II. Before you begin writing your informative essay, you should do the following:
  - A. Sufficiently research your topic to gain a solid understanding of your subject. (Your instructor may make specific suggestions for this background research.) **Librarians** can help, too.
  - B. Make sure that the opinions, facts, and figures which you intend to use are reliable and up-to-date.
  - C. Decide on the best way to present your information based on what your audience wants or needs to know.
    1. Should you organize the information on the basis of chronology, importance, or geography?
    2. What must be included and what can be eliminated?
    3. Do you want to set up a comparison? a cause and effect relationship? a process? a classification?
- III. Your informative paper should be presented in essay form and contain the following elements:
  - A. A clear statement of purpose early in the paper.
  - B. Citations for all quotations, paraphrases, or summaries of another author; facts and figures. **Online Writing Resources**
- IV. Your essay could be evaluated on some or all of the following points:
  - A. Quality and accuracy of your research. **Librarians** can help you find good, scholarly sources.

- B. Clear presentation of the information.
  - C. Clear, logical, and appropriate organization of the information.
  - D. Appropriateness and thoroughness of your information in light of your stated purpose, including the effective use of quotations, figures, and background material.
  - E. Documentation of sources. See **Online Writing Resources**.
  - F. Your use of **Revision** and **Editing Checklists** in preparing your paper.
- V. Pitfalls:
- A. Using another person's work without giving them credit.
  - B. Presenting a list of facts rather than organizing material into a single, coherent essay.
  - C. Presenting a biased view of controversial topics.
  - D. Dealing with too many facts rather than limiting the scope of your presentation.

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## Response Paper

- I. The purposes of a response paper can be:
  - A. To relate your observation of a work or event.
  - B. To show your personal reaction to a work or event.
  - C. To demonstrate your ability to validate your response. While your opinion is often the main point of this assignment, your opinion should be supported with explanations and specific detail.
  
- II. Before you begin writing the response paper, you should do the following:
  - A. Start with your overall impression. Listen to your thoughts. Write them down.
  - B. Decide what made you feel that way. Draft a paragraph on each idea, and give details and examples to support each point.
  - C. If you need more material, break up the work or event into its component parts. See list below.\*
  - D. Think about your definite response to any of these components and clarify them in your draft.
  - E. Determine what caused that response and write supporting details.
  
- III. Your response paper may be expected to contain all or some of the following elements. The Metropolitan State University Writing Center can help you work on any of these areas.
  - A. A clear statement of the nature of the work or event.
  - B. A statement of your overall impression.
  - C. An analysis of the component parts of that impression.
  
- IV. Evaluation: There is no “correct” answer in a response paper. Your response can be either favorable or unfavorable. The main criterion is how well you support your comments. Be careful not to rely merely on vague generalization. Be sure you refer to those specific aspects of the work which produced your response. Many instructors will expect you to follow the steps included in the **Revision and Editing Checklists**.

\*Components of works in various fields:

<u>Art</u>	<u>Drama</u>	<u>Music</u>	<u>Literature</u>
Medium	Theme	Rhythm	Theme
Subject	Acting	Harmony	Imagery
Organization	Setting	Melody	Prosody
Space	Dialogue	Texture	Plot
Line	Costuming	Timbre	Development
Color	Characterization	Performance	Diction
Texture	Timing		Tone
	Lighting		Metaphor
	Plot		Character
			Setting

V. Pitfalls:

- A. Failure to state your response clearly.
- B. Failure to mention what aspects of the work or event affect your response.
- C. Failure to show as well as tell. Support your reactions with examples from the work or event so that the reader sees the reason for your response.

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## Critical Analysis

- I. The purpose of a written analysis is to take a viewpoint toward a topic and attempt to prove the validity of that viewpoint. An analysis should do the following for the reader:
  - A. Help the reader make better sense of something that is already familiar. You should **explain** and **evaluate** your topic. Analyses often detail the component parts of a work, topic, or concept.
  - B. Demonstrate your ability to formulate and support a point of view (thesis) about your topic. You will base your viewpoint on your interpretation of a book or article you have read, data you have assembled, a situation you have observed, and so on.
- II. Before you begin writing your analysis, you should do the following:
  - A. Read the required book or article, gather the necessary data, and record your observations.
  - B. Ask **how** and **why** questions so that you interpret rather than describe your topic. (For example, how have historians presented Amazon cultures in the past? How have feminist historians recently interpreted Amazon cultures? Why do their interpretations differ? Why is it important to ask such comparative questions in the first place?)
- III. Your analysis should be presented in essay form, and may be expected to contain some or all of the following elements:
  - A. A statement of the position you are taking on your topic at the beginning of the paper.
  - B. Use of secondary materials from other books, journals, and so on to support your position if your instructor wants you to go beyond your primary source. Use **Metropolitan State's library** to find secondary sources. If you are analyzing a single book or article, you should use properly documented material from that source to illustrate your ideas. See **Online Writing Resources** for tips on documenting your sources.
- IV. Your paper may be evaluated on some or all of the following points. Writing Center consultants can help you work on any of these areas.
  - A. Your simple and direct statement of your central idea, or thesis. You might show your idea to your instructor before you do a lot of work on the paper.
  - B. Your supporting ideas.

- C. Your proper use of a text or texts to illustrate all the ideas you have expressed.
  - D. Your ability to ask and answer **how** and **why** questions about your topic.
  - E. Your ability to read a text closely or to research your topic sufficiently.
  - F. Your use of the Revision and Editing Checklists in preparing your paper.
- V. Pitfalls:
- A. Treating your reader as if he/she were not familiar with your topic and, therefore, including boring or unnecessary information. (For example, retelling the plot of a Greek play about Amazons which the class has already studied.)
  - B. Failing to ask enough **how** and **why** questions before the paper is written, making the central idea unclear or insignificant.
  - C. Describing rather than interpreting your topic. (For example, describing what scholars have written about Amazons rather than asking what these writings say about the course of human history.)

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## Comparison/Contrast Writing

- I. The purpose of comparison/contrast writing is to point out the similarities and differences among two or more topics, events, things, or opinions. It should help your readers to understand your topic more fully and enable them to form their own attitudes about that topic. It can be used as one method to develop almost any kind of assignment, or it may be used as an assignment on its own.
- II. Before writing, you should do the following:
  - A. Understand the instructor's specific requirements for format and content. Ask your instructor.
  - B. Define your purpose or goal in writing this assignment. In other words, clarify why you are writing it. Be as specific as you can.

*For example*, "This comparison of Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget will focus on how their theories influenced the teaching of reading."

*is more specific than*

"This paper will compare the ideas of Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget."

- C. Assemble as much information as you need to make an informed comparison. Be selective in choosing pertinent information, since you may be dealing with a large amount of material.
  - D. Decide on the points or grounds on which you will make your comparison. The points/grounds must be applicable to each item/person being compared.  
  
*Example:* Kennedy and Johnson will be compared on their backgrounds, accomplishments, and political styles.
- III. A comparison/contrast essay may be evaluated on some or all of the following. Writing Center consultants can help you work on any of these areas.
  - A. A clear statement of purpose at the beginning of your paper.
  - B. Proper citation for quotations, paraphrases, summaries, or ideas of another author, facts and figures.
  - C. Clear presentation of your plan for conducting the comparison: what will you decide to discuss first, second, third and so on? The reader should know the **what**, **why**, and **how** of your comparison.

D. Consistent follow-through on the points of your comparison.

*Example:* If you discuss the education of Kennedy, you must also discuss the education of Johnson.

E. The tying together of your comparison/contrast at the end by drawing conclusions about what the comparisons showed.

F. The extent to which you achieve your stated purpose.

G. Your use of the **Revision** and **Editing Checklist** in preparing your paper.

IV. Pitfalls:

A. Switching back and forth between the items being compared without careful transitions.

B. Shortchanging one of the items being compared.

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## Argument or Persuasive Essay

- I. The purpose of an argument essay is to take a body of information and suggest a particular way of organizing, understanding and interpreting that information. You are expressing a judgment (position) backed up by evidence, not merely your opinion. Your paper should do the following:
  - A. Present your position clearly.
  - B. Persuade your reader that your position is correct through the use of evidence, logic and expert opinion.
- II. Before you begin writing, you should do the following:
  - A. Sufficiently research your topic to gain a solid background. Your instructor may make specific suggestions for this background research, and the **librarians** can help, too.
  - B. Make sure that the expert testimony, facts and figures which you intend to use are realistic.
  - C. Think through your position on the subject, and consider possible objections to that position.
- III. Your essay may be evaluated on some or all of the following points:
  - A. Clear presentation of your position. This includes a clear and concise statement of purpose, probably at the beginning of your paper.
  - B. Proper citation of quotations, summaries, paraphrases, arguments of another author; facts and figures.
  - C. Quality and accuracy of your research.
  - D. Effective use of quotations, figures and background material.
  - E. Clear and logical organization of the paper.
  - F. The quality and originality of your own arguments in support of your position.
  - G. Your use of **Revision** and **Editing Checklists** in preparing your paper.
- IV. Pitfalls:
  - A. Relying on a quotation or paraphrase to convey your meaning and therefore not commenting on the quotation or paraphrase in your own words.

- B. Piling up facts in a list rather than organizing your material into a coherent essay.
- C. Expressing an opinion without supporting it with facts and figures.
- D. Writing superficially about many related topics rather than limiting the scope of your topic so you can deal with it thoroughly.

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## Annotated Bibliography

- I. The purpose of this assignment is to briefly summarize information or sources you have found about a particular topic. An annotated bibliography can do any or all of the following.
  - A. Present the most important sources you can assemble about a topic.
  - B. Answer specific questions about a topic.
  - C. Support an idea or position toward a topic.
  - D. Evaluate the usefulness of your sources.
- II. Before you begin writing your annotated bibliography, you should know the required number and kind of resources. Your instructor will specify how many sources you should include and how current those sources should be, and the **librarians** will help you find them.
- III. Your instructor may want your annotated bibliography to include all or some of the following sections:
  - A. An introduction which states the purpose of your bibliography, the questions your information answers, and/or the ideas or position it supports.
  - B. A summary of the major ideas of each of your sources in a paragraph or two. Before each summary, give complete bibliographic information (author, title, publisher, publication date, pages) using the citation format found in any research writing handbook. Consult your instructor for suggestions about such handbooks. The following is an example of an entry:

Jones, Joseph. "The Chemical Causes of Alcoholism,"  
Psychology Today, June, 1976, 21-48.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the Mayo Clinic have independently discovered a relationship between carbohydrate consumption and chronic alcoholism. Scientists at both institutions are currently testing the effect of low carbohydrate diets as part of the treatment for chronic alcoholics. Results, although tentative, indicate that this treatment mode is helpful in 73-75 percent of the cases tested. However, a five-year study will be necessary to confirm these results.

**Note:** Some instructors may ask you to **evaluate** your sources based on certain criteria. If so, include the evaluation in your summary paragraph.
  - C. A paragraph or two in conclusion to reemphasize certain concepts.

- IV. Your bibliography may be evaluated on some or all of the following criteria, and it's a good idea to have one of the Metropolitan State University Writing Center tutors read your bibliography.
  - A. The thoroughness of your research.
  - B. Your use of appropriate (current, respected, and/or scholarly) sources.
  - C. The use of summaries to fulfill the purpose of your bibliography as it was expressed in the introduction.
- V. Pitfalls:
  - A. Use of irrelevant materials (sources which say nothing related to the ideas presented in your introduction).
  - B. Failure to consult specialized or scholarly bibliographies, reference works, or journals.

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## Interview Report

- I. The purpose of an interview is to elicit and record information, opinions and experiences which are unique to the person interviewed. The individuality and personality of your subject should be evident in the written interview.
- II. Before conducting the interview, you should do the following:
  - A. Decide on your purpose for interviewing this person. What do you want to learn?
  - B. Research the aspects of the person's perspective on the topic in which you are most interested, so that you can ask informed questions.
  - C. Write up a list of questions or topics designed to ensure that you cover what you need to in the interview.
  - D. Inform the person of the purpose of the interview and assure them that their participation is voluntary. Understand and apply the University Policy on Human Subjects of research at **[www.metrostate.edu](http://www.metrostate.edu)**.
- III. Record the interview either on tape or in notes.
- IV. Before writing the interview report, you should do the following:
  - A. Understand your instructor's specific requirements for format and content.
  - B. Set up a goal, an end purpose, for the interview. Organize your transcript/notes so that they logically support that goal.  
  
*Example:* Your goal is to interview Ms. Jackson to find out the advantages and disadvantages of being a working mother. Your notes might be organized so that Ms. Jackson's comments about her job are all grouped together, as well as her comments on day care, on leisure, and so on.
- V. While writing the interview report, make sure you accomplish the following:
  - A. Inform your reader about your purpose for conducting the interview.
  - B. Provide any necessary background material on the person interviewed or his/her area of specialization.
  - C. Present the salient points of the interview. Relate them clearly and specifically to your purpose.

- D. Integrate direct quotations into the body of your discussion.
- E. Summarize the interview by restating both your purpose and the main points covered in the report.
- F. Use the **Revision** and **Editing Checklists** to polish your drafts.

VI. Pitfalls

- A. Including material and quotations which are interesting but not relevant to your purpose.
- B. Losing track of the individual in an avalanche of data and information.

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## Book Review

- I. The purpose of a book review is to set up and apply criteria for the content and quality of the book.

**Summary and evaluation:** Besides giving the reader information about the contents of a book, you will need to establish the value of the book. Evaluations are based on criteria or standards by which you judge the book. Some suggestions for criteria are given below.

- II. Before you begin writing the book review, you should do the following:

- A. Read the book thoroughly with attention to detail. Read any secondary sources which you think are helpful or which have been suggested or required by the teacher or the librarian.
- B. Decide what criteria are appropriate for the type of book you're chosen. To establish criteria, think through the response you had while reading the book. What were you expecting? Were you surprised or disappointed? What was the criterion involved? Then write about why the book either meets or fails to meet the criterion. Be sure to cite examples from the book to support each of your evaluations. If you need more criteria, ask yourself these questions:
1. Is the author adequately experienced and prepared? (See *Who's Who in America*, *International Who's Who*, *Directory of American Scholars*, and so on.)
  2. Does the book fulfill its stated purpose? Is the purpose necessary and worthwhile?
  3. Are the arguments logical? Are they well-supported?
  4. Is the book appropriate for its intended audience? Would it be of interest to other audiences?
  5. Is its style (the way it is written) helpful or distracting?
  6. Are the assumptions the author starts from warranted?
  7. How does the book compare to others in its field?

- III. Your book review may be required to contain the following elements:

A. **First paragraph:**

Usually names the author and title (and, if so requested, the place of publication, publisher, and date). States the subject matter of the book, its intended audience, and its general purpose.

**B. Second paragraph:**

Gives the thesis or main point the author is trying to prove. Then gives a brief summary of the contents, perhaps by listing the main themes or arguments the author uses to support the thesis. This paragraph should not be more than one-fifth of your review. You will be able to give more information in your evaluative paragraphs.

**C. Following paragraphs:**

Each paragraph makes separate evaluations based on one of the criteria which you have established.

**D. Concluding paragraph:**

Briefly gives your overall impression. How do the pros and cons balance out?

IV. Your book review may be evaluated on some or all of the following points.

- A. Appropriateness of your criteria.
- B. Adequacy of the support you give to the evaluation.
- C. Accuracy of your summary.
- D. Your use of the **Revision** and **Editing Checklists** in preparing your paper.

V. Pitfalls:

- A. Devoting a significant portion of the paper to telling what happened in the book. This is merely a summary; it does not evaluate the book's quality or analyze the effect of the book.
- B. Evaluating the book on the basis of inappropriate criteria. (For example, a fantasy should not be criticized for a lack of reality or a medical dictionary should not be criticized for its specialized content.)

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## Analysis of a Case Study

- I. One purpose of a case study analysis is to demonstrate your ability to apply a theoretical principle to a real-world situation.
- II. Before you begin writing your analysis you should do the following:
  - A. Understand the instructor's requirements for format and content.
  - B. Be sure that you understand the principle that the case illustrates. (For example, understanding cost-minimization or supply and demand)
  - C. Decide what you think is the problem presented by the case.
  - D. Once you have fully understood the problem, devise several possible solutions to the problem using the specific principle illustrated by the case.
  - E. Determine which of your possible solutions is the most appropriate by analyzing and/or quantifying each one.
  - F. Restrict yourself to the information presented in the case study itself.
- III. Your analysis should be in the required format and contain the following elements:
  - A. A statement of the final solution/decision you have made about the case study problem.
  - B. A brief statement of the problem as you see it.
  - C. A discussion of some solutions that could be proposed to solve the problem.
  - D. An explanation of the criteria you used in selecting a solution. How did you decide on the solution you chose?
  - E. A brief description of the actual calculations or techniques involved in analyzing each alternative.
- IV. Your report may be evaluated on some or all of the following points:
  - A. Clarity of your presentation of the problem.
  - B. Insight shown by your solution of the problem.
  - C. Appropriateness of the techniques you used to arrive at a solution.

D. Your use of the **Revision** and **Editing Checklists** in preparing your paper.

IV. Pitfalls:

A. Failure to integrate additional material. If you bring in outside material to support your solution, make sure that it logically supports what is already in the case study.

B. Failure to establish a close relationship between your solutions and the data of the case study.

C. Failure to use proper style. Case studies often use APA or ASA style. Call or visit the Metropolitan State University Writing Center for handouts,

or visit **Online Writing Resources** and print the handouts you like best.

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# Personal Journal

\* Note: Some instructors require journal submissions. These assignments have various requirements depending on the course objectives. They can include some elements of the personal journal described here, but they often contain features like summaries, analysis, reviews, or responses. The personal journal described here is seldom sufficient for college work.

- I. The purposes and goals of a personal journal are numerous; some of them are listed below. A journal is important for the following reasons:
  - A. To record observations, impressions, feelings, insights.
  - B. To preserve what might otherwise be forgotten.
  - C. To find out what you're thinking. Ideas have a way of fading if they are not written down. In fact, the very process of writing frequently produces new ideas.
  - D. To record practical applications of classroom theory.
  - E. To chronicle your educational and vocational goals.
  - F. To remind yourself of the questions and problems you may want to discuss with a supervisor or instructor.
  - G. To record experiences related to your main purpose, perhaps responses to reading, workshops, or travel.
  - H. To provide a lode to be mined later, either for reflection or writing assignments.
- II. Suggestions on how to go about journal writing:
  - A. Journal comes from the French word for "daily," and that's how often you should write in your journal. If you recollect only at the end of the week, you will have lost a great deal.
  - B. You have to be aware to keep a journal. Be conscious of what you see, hear, taste, feel, and smell, and read. Good journals depend on details.
  - C. Be conscious of what goes on inside you. Record your feelings and your reactions to events, situations, and readings during the day.

- D. However, you need not record every detail, just the significant ones: the critical incidents, the highs and lows, the turning points, the “aha” experiences when the insight breaks through.
  - E. Analyze what occurred during the day. “Why did that person respond that way?” “Why did I feel the way I did?” Sometimes your analysis will come several days after you first recorded the event. Insight travels at its own pace.
- III. Keep a notebook exclusively for this journal.
- A. Since you are the audience you are writing for, write what you want and the way you want.
  - B. However, if you will be asked to submit your journal, be sure to find out what your reader is looking for, and exclude irrelevant material. For example, if you’re keeping a journal to record your responses to required readings, you’ll leave out your feelings about the weather.
- IV. Evaluation: If a personal journal meets the goals you have selected, it has succeeded. A journal is like charity: it is its own reward.
- V. Pitfall: Trying to write large sections of the journal at one time. The ideas and reactions should be as fresh and immediate as possible.

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## Field Experience Report

- I. One purpose of a field experience report is to organize and evaluate a nonacademic experience and apply the experience to a specific learning goal. Conversely, you can apply your theoretical learning to the field experience.
- II. Before you begin writing your report, you should do the following:
  - A. Understand the instructor's specific requirements for format and content.
  - B. Decide on your goal in participating in the field experience. Why are you doing it? What do you expect to learn or get out of it? What concepts do you want to apply? What theories do you hope to test?
  - C. While in the field, keep consistent notes on your activities (times involved, benefits, readings, people encountered, projects and so on). Sometimes a daily **journal** is the most reliable vehicle.
  - D. Organize your notes so that you gather together all items relating to a single topic. In this way, you can easily use the material you've amassed.
- III. Your report should be in the required format and may contain the following elements:
  - A. Statement of your purpose in participating in the field experience.
  - B. Evaluation of the experience in light of this original purpose. Did the experience fulfill your expectations? What did you actually learn in the end?
  - C. Discussion of the main components of the field experience that contributed to your learning goal. Support your discussion with appropriate examples and/or data to convey the nature of the experience.
  - D. Discussion of any limitations that were part of the field experience. Indicate how each component or limitation contributed to what you learned from the experience.
  - E. A summary briefly recapping the salient points of the field experience in light of your goal.
- IV. Your report may be evaluated on some or all of the following points:
  - A. Clarity of your statement of purpose.
  - B. Extent to which you fulfill your stated purpose.

- C. Completeness of your data.
  - D. Application of the data to your learning goals.
  - E. Your use of the **Revision** and **Editing Checklists** in preparing your report.
- VI. Pitfall: The tendency to make the report into pure narrative, without setting up clear relationships between the experience and your learning goals.

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# Revision Checklist

The Revision Checklist is a handy tool for making sure your paper has done all the things it should do. Get away from your first draft for an hour or so after you finish it. Then come back to it and ask yourself each of the questions in the checklist. If you answer “no” to any question, this is the time to make changes and correct mistakes. This is also an ideal time to work with the Metropolitan State University Writing Center or your writing group. Good writers repeat the procedure after their second (or third or fourth) drafts.

Check the first and succeeding drafts of any writing assignment on the following points. Expect to revise several times before your draft(s) are ready for editing.

## Development

1. Is the purpose of your writing clearly stated in the beginning? Do you immediately let your audience know what you are trying to do and why?
2. Is your draft written with its audience in mind? Do you assume too much knowledge from your audience? Have you given the audience enough background information so they can pick up on the topic where your paper does? Do you avoid giving your audience obvious information or information it already knows?
3. Have you included enough information to make your presentation believable and complete, or do you need more examples, research data, explanations, and so on?
4. Does your draft cover all requirements of the assignment?

## Organization and Paragraphs

1. Have you arranged your ideas in the most logical sequence or would a different sequence be more effective? What is your strategy?
2. Does each paragraph have its own reason for being? In other words, does each paragraph develop a single idea? Is that single idea explicitly stated near the beginning (or at the end) of the paragraph?
  - a. Are your paragraphs too long? Several long paragraphs might indicate that you are dealing with too many ideas at once.
  - b. Are your paragraphs too short? Several one and two-sentence paragraphs usually indicate that you have divided ideas which could be united in a single paragraph, or that you have failed to sufficiently develop an idea.
3. Do you **show** as well as **tell** your audience what you mean in each paragraph by including examples, definitions, comparisons, quotations, statistics, descriptions,

case studies, analogies, references to other writing on the same subject, anecdotes, or restatement of key ideas?

4. Are paragraphs woven together by one of the following techniques?
  - a. Repetition of key words, concepts, or even sentences? (You confuse your audience if you use several different synonyms for the same concept.)
  - b. Use of connecting words and phrases such as **furthermore, in addition, however, on the other hand, in particular, in conclusion**?
  - c. Numbering the steps of your argument (first, second, third)?
  
5. Does your draft have an inviting introduction, an informative and insightful body, and a summarizing conclusion?

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# Editing Checklist

Check the next-to-last draft of your writing for:

## Sentences and Words

1. Is each sentence complete?
2. Have you eliminated unnecessary jargon and substituted plain English?
3. Have you substituted pretentious academic or bureaucratic language with language that sounds more natural and conversational?
4. Have you eliminated vague or overused words or expressions? (For example, have you used **today's society**, **several aspects** or **many things**?)
5. Have you eliminated strings of little words? (For example, have you used such phrases as the following: **to change policy in regard to** that problem at this point **in time**?)
6. Have you woven your sentences together?
7. Is every word indispensable? Could you cut needless words?
8. Have you varied your sentence structure?
9. Have you overused passive voice? ("It is seen" vs. "I see.")
10. Have you used strong verbs and nouns, vs. weak verbs and nouns coupled with unnecessary adverbs and adjectives?

## Mechanics

1. Have you checked for typos and incorrect spelling?
2. Have you checked a writing handbook for questions you have about punctuation or capitalization? Have you referenced a research writing handbook for questions about documenting your sources? See **Online Writing Resources** for more clues.
3. When you use pronouns like **she**, **her**, **he**, **him**, **they**, **them**, **it**, **which**, or **that**, can you find the specific words earlier in the text to which these pronouns refer?
4. When you use the word **you** in your text, do you intend to be more personal in tone or more directive, or are you lapsing into this method of expression unconsciously? Use the second person **you** throughout your paper or not at all.

5. When you have a singular subject for your sentence, is your verb singular as well, even though it is removed from the subject? Do plural subjects have plural verbs?
6. Is your verb tense consistent throughout the paper? Many papers written in APA or ASA styles, for instance, use the past tense. However, papers written in the humanities use MLA style, and the present tense is preferred.

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