TO THE FACULTY

This handbook is the result of a sabbatical I was granted for the spring 2005 semester. The main purpose of the sabbatical was to write a handbook that would assist all students improve the writing they are assigned across the curriculum. A guiding principle throughout was that writing is central to a general education and that, if faculty agree about its importance, a guide should be available for students as they navigate their way through the higher education maze. This handbook attempts to provide a simple and concrete resource for students so that they can write more effectively in all their classes. Essentially, my goal is to reinforce the importance of writing throughout the curriculum by making our expectations of students as clear as possible, in turn enabling them to produce quality work. This handbook includes general information about writing at ECC, the writing process, the evaluation of writing, common writing problems, writing in the disciplines, the research paper, taking essay exams, and the support available for effective writing. My hope is that you agree about the importance of this handbook and will require its use by your students. I think that the time is right for a handbook of this sort on our campus so that we can best prepare students for their future...whether that entails further education or the job world. My thanks to the colleagues who answered questions, responded to emails, contributed sample essays, and read over sections of this document. You know who you are, and I could not have written this without you!

M.N.

TO THE STUDENTS

This handbook was written for you. As a student at ECC, you will be expected to write in the majority of your classes. Many college students are surprised to learn that writing does not only take place within English courses but also courses in math, psychology, art, humanities, history, biology, physics, computer science, etc. As you approach different assignments, I encourage you to use this handbook as a resource tool. Of course, the importance of writing in a college curriculum is no surprise to the faculty who agree that effective writing is central to a well-educated individual. Certainly this handbook is not a substitute for taking your composition sequence (English 101 and 102) as early in your education as possible. Instead, it is designed to assist you as you discover that writing is an integral part of every facet of your education. I have furnished you with some guidelines to help you understand the writing you will be asked to complete at ECC as well as a list of resources available on and off campus that can be used to help you improve your writing. I hope you find this handbook valuable as you begin or continue your education at ECC. To improve your writing is to improve your ability to think and, therefore, become a more effective human being, a more conscientious citizen, and a successful professional.
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SECTION I: WRITING AT ECC

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Writing is an important feature of many of the courses you will take at ECC. Faculty who assign writing in their courses do so because they recognize that it offers different insights into their students’ thinking and understanding beyond only tests.

ECC’s faculty support the value of writing across the curriculum and believe that writing is not only essential in courses within the English Department but also a crucial element of students’ learning in a variety of other courses as well. Though the formal teaching of writing remains the charge of the English Department, most faculty agree that students should consistently practice their writing, even after they have finished their English composition sequence. Writing effectively is not simply a course requirement, not merely a matter of faculty being “picky;” for the faculty, how effective something is written is a sign of a well-educated person and an essential component of a college education.

WRITING INSTRUCTION

Writing instruction at the college level obviously occurs in English classes, but it also takes place in other courses where writing is a component. This is because, in the last 20 years or so, there has been significant research that connects writing to learning and critical thinking. In the past, faculty may have recognized and assessed only a student’s final written product; today, however, faculty across disciplines frequently help their students in the various stages of the writing process. That is not to say that faculty do not value the final product or essay; of course they do. But they also acknowledge that writing is a process and that many things must transpire to contribute to the polished essay. Because of this recognition, ECC faculty often assist their students in planning, drafting, and revising their essays. Some instructors incorporate these elements directly into their courses while others may not. Regardless, you must understand that virtually all instructors expect you to adhere to the writing process whether it is a formal part of the class or not. For those times when you would like some additional feedback on your writing beyond your instructor’s, learn to take advantage of the many resources available through The Write Place, ECC’s on-campus writing center. At The Write Place, you will find a valuable supplement to classroom instruction and individualized attention to all your writing needs. Note that the main purpose of this writing center is not to edit your essays but rather to give you more substantive assistance like topic selection, thesis development, organization, and documentation. For more on The Write Place, see pages 48-49.

As you either start or continue your college education, it is critical to involve other students as well as faculty as you seek to improve your writing; with their feedback, you will often be well on your way to significant revision of your work, an expectation at the college level. This
suggestion often runs counter to the understanding that many students have—that writing is a solitary endeavor. Most faculty recognize the benefits of collaboration, both inside and outside the classroom. Of course, the writing you do will be your writing, but there is nothing wrong with getting suggestions and feedback from others. The sooner you recognize this, the sooner you will see significant improvement in your writing. A side benefit is that this process fosters the importance of working with others, a skill clearly important in the “real world” as well.

Writing courses at ECC often utilize collaborative teaching strategies, and you should take full advantage of them. As mentioned above, the formal teaching of writing is the responsibility of the English Department. Since writing is a central part of the curriculum, and because you will be writing in almost all your classes, you would be well-advised to take your English composition sequence (English 101 and 102) during your first year (or as soon as you are eligible if you are placed into a below-100 level course). While there are certain placement criteria to qualify for English 101, you should take it as soon as possible. Most students are surprised to learn how crucial English 101 and 102 are to their success in other courses. Those students who procrastinate and take their English courses right before they leave ECC often admit their regret and recognize how truly valuable taking those courses earlier would have been. For more specific information about placement in English courses and course descriptions, please consult the most recent college catalog. Beyond English 102, students interested in further developing their writing have a number of courses from which to choose: ENG 109 Expository Writing, ENG 110 Creative Writing, and a number of genre-based courses that are offered as demand dictates, including ENG 210 Fiction Writing, ENG 211 Playwriting, ENG 212 Poetry Writing, and ENG 213 Literary Non-Fiction. Several journalism courses are available as well, including JRN 130 Introduction to Mass Communications, JRN 131 Fundamentals of Journalism, and JRN 134 Newspaper Workshop.

**WRITING AS A PROCESS**

You will probably do your most effective writing if you think of any writing assignment as a process that includes a continuous cycle of prewriting, writing, revising, and editing. This process is often messy, time-consuming, and frustrating; in fact, most professional writers would agree with that description. But it also can be incredibly rewarding and stimulating when you have written something of which you can be proud (and which also receives a good grade). When you do not allow enough time for the process to transpire, you will not experience that feeling of pride and accomplishment. Essentially, then, this means you should not procrastinate. Though faculty do not expect you to run home and start a lengthy essay the day it is assigned (though I’m sure they would be delighted if you did!), they also assume that you have done more than written a first draft. When you wait too long to start, what you turn in as a “final” draft is, in your instructor’s eyes, really a first draft, and the grade usually reflects that. So give yourself enough time for the process to work. Though for some of you this will require a shift in the way that you do things, it will be well worth it. The following explanation of the writing process is a useful model to follow, regardless of the specific writing task you have been assigned.
PREWRITING

Sometimes you will be assigned a specific topic, and sometimes it will be up to you to determine one on your own. Even at this early stage, you need to be sure you choose a topic which you can develop within the assignment guidelines. Tackling a subject such as violence, for example, is not easily managed in five or six pages, but a topic such as the effect of violence in cartoons on a designated group (like children) would be more manageable. Regardless of the actual topic, the strategies below will help you generate material from which to begin your essay. A general rule of thumb here is that it is better to work from a wealth of information than not enough. The more “stuff” you generate, the better. Of course, not all of it will find its way into your essay (nor should it!), but that’s just fine. Remember, effective writing can be a messy process, and you will produce much that ultimately gets discarded. But, you will also generate a great deal of valuable information that will eventually find its way into your essay.

When approaching an assignment, there are some tried and true strategies that can help you generate ideas. Don’t be fooled into thinking that this is an optional step. More often than not, students who run into difficulties with particular writing assignments have not devoted enough time to this earliest stage of the process. Don’t let that happen to you. Some of these strategies might be familiar to you while others are new; learn to rely on a variety of them to generate as much detail and information as possible.

1. **Freewriting.** The creative side of writing is often in conflict with the logical side; in other words, students are often more concerned about mechanics or structure than they are about the ideas themselves. To combat this, set aside about 15-20 minutes and write freely. This means you do not stop. At all. The point here is to get in the habit of constant writing. Some students prefer to do this on paper while others prefer freewriting on the computer so that they can produce more material in the same amount of time. In either case, one of the main goals of freewriting is not only to record your thoughts (i.e., “I’m thinking about x, so I will write it down”) but to create thought as well. It’s almost as if the physical act of writing causes you to have ideas that you might not otherwise have, even if you thought for a long time. This is the magic of freewriting. Once your time is up, you can go back and read what you have written to see what is worth keeping. Of course, not all of it will be. Remember not to be too critical of yourself here; misspelled words and fragments are not a problem at this stage. The point is to get something down. After you read over what you have produced, pull out a key idea or phrase, write it at the top of another page, and do it all over again. Each time you do this, your focus becomes narrower.

2. **Dialogue.** Writer’s block often occurs from the physical act of writing, of actually putting words on a page. If this is the case for you, find someone willing to listen and talk about your topic. This initial feedback can be an important step as you discover what you think about your topic and possible means of developing it. Remember to take notes right after you talk so that you have a record to assist you later.
3. **Brainstorming.** This is basically free association on paper. In contrast to freewriting, which looks more like “real” writing with sentences and perhaps even paragraphs, brainstorming appears more like a list. As with freewriting, though, not everything on this list will be relevant, so be sure to drop those ideas that are unrelated to your topic. Again, as with freewriting, you may want to do this more than once, becoming narrower with your focus each time.

4. **Questions.** Technically, this is called *heuristics,* and the term refers to standard rhetorical procedures for discovery. They include questions (such as who, what, why, when, where, and how) that you can use to generate ideas or arrange thoughts. Of course, not all questions will be relevant for all writing assignments, so choose the most logical ones and jot down your responses.

5. **Clustering.** This is a method of “mapping” your ideas as they come into your mind. It is similar to brainstorming, though it is much more visual. To cluster, put a word, phrase, or sentence in a circle in the center of a blank page. Then, put every new idea that comes to you in a circle and show its relationship to a previous idea by drawing a line to another circle. The further you carry each branch or arm, the more detailed the information becomes. That kind of detail will be essential as you move to the drafting stage.

6. **Journaling.** This is not exactly a diary, but you can put anything in it you want. Carry around a small notebook and jot down whatever comes to mind. Besides being an excellent way to simply practice writing and try out new techniques, this is a great strategy to deal with new concepts. Eventually, this can become an excellent source for ideas and images and a way to understand your own creative process. The bottom line: the more you write, the better you will write. Period.

7. **Research.** Students often associate research exclusively with library work, but that is just one aspect of it. Research involves reading, but it can also be approached scientifically as well. Set up situations and try them out on your friends or on groups of strangers, or create and distribute a survey related to your topic. Besides giving you something to write about, this technique provides you with lots of specific evidence. Also, try interviewing someone to find out more about something that interests you. This kind of creative research is called field research, and it can often be as valuable, if not more so, than traditional “library” research.
WRITING

Once you feel as if you have generated enough information to draft your paper, it’s time to move to the writing stage. Write in a way that works for you; the key is to start. You might prefer to handwrite your first draft or to compose at a computer. In the long run, it does not matter as long as you begin. Some students get so caught up in the earlier stage that they delay writing the paper. This is another form of procrastination, and you should watch out for it. Remember this is just a first draft. Your goal is to get your ideas down as completely as possible. Do not worry about mechanics and spelling right now; too much concern for those things at this early stage often thwarts the creative process. Whatever you do, know that you will be revising what you write several times before you turn it in. Do not assume that what you write as a draft is good enough as the final essay. Revision is simply an expectation at the college level.

As you write, include your own observations and comments as often as possible if this is something that is acceptable to your instructor. Though often faculty want students to focus solely on information, making personal insights questionable, many faculty will encourage you to make the paper your own by presenting what you have read, experienced, or heard with an analytical view. Remember that your instructors are reading dozens and dozens of essays; anything you can do to set your own writing apart, to make it unique, can only be beneficial in the long run.

Though the writing you do at ECC will vary from class to class and instructor to instructor, one thing that remains constant is that virtually every essay will have a title, an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Of course, entire books are written on this subject, and you would be wise to have some kind of rhetoric (a traditional college English textbook) that explains these more fully. It’s as important as having a dictionary or a thesaurus. For now, though, here is a brief checklist to use to help you with each element.

Title

1. Does my title clearly communicate the content of my paper? Suggestion: be sure to put a title on everything you write! Also, do not simply mimic the description of the assignment (“My Personal Experience” or “Essay #1” is not likely to lure readers into your writing!)

Introduction

1. Do I have a thesis statement that includes the topic and controlling idea of my essay? Avoid “announcing” your topic (i.e., “In this essay, I will show you that….” At the college level, this is a bit too obvious.)

2. Have I captured my reader’s interest (done through quotes, statistics, anecdotes, examples—whatever you think will draw your readers into the world of your writing)? Remember that whatever approach you select should be appropriate to your topic.
3. Does my introduction establish the tone of the essay? Is that tone appropriate for the content of my essay?

4. Have I considered my audience?

5. Is my introduction short and to the point?

Body

1. Is each paragraph thoroughly developed? Keep an eye out for short paragraphs; in and of themselves, they are not bad, but they may be signs of lack of development.

2. Are the sentences within each paragraph related to the main point of that paragraph? Remember that a paragraph is a unit of meaning, and all sentences within a paragraph should relate to one another.

3. Have I used traditional patterns to develop my paragraphs: definition, description, example, classification, analogy, cause-effect, comparison-contrast, analysis? Of course, you will not use all of these in any given essay, but you should be comfortable enough with them that you can incorporate them into your writing when necessary. Remember that any composition text can provide complete explanations of these patterns.

4. Have I organized my paragraphs effectively: general to specific, specific to general, time, or space?

Conclusion

1. Does my conclusion summarize the main points of my essay without repeating them in an obvious way? (Suggestion: Avoid statements such as “In conclusion,” “To wrap things up,” and the like. Readers should know they are coming to the conclusion.)

2. Does my conclusion leave my readers with something additional to consider?
REVISING

Revising refers to making changes in the content and/or organization of your paper. This is very different from what most students think revising is: editing. They are separated here because they are separate processes. Think of revision as a step that includes large changes: refining your thesis, adding information, rearranging paragraphs, and making adjustments to your introduction and/or conclusion. Editing, on the other hand, includes smaller (though no less important!) changes: mechanics, punctuation, spelling, documentation, and manuscript appearance. If you expect to turn in a final product that is polished, both processes are absolutely necessary. Most writing teachers suggest you focus on revising first and then, when you are sure that the content is as you want it, turn your attention to editing. Below are some guidelines for effective revision; strategies for thorough editing are in the section immediately following.

Content and Purpose

Learn to read your writing out loud; this is a tremendously valuable revision tool and one that most students overlook. It may be awkward at first, but reading out loud provides a number of advantages: catching obvious mistakes (leaving a small word out, such as the, or inverting letters, like hte instead of the), “hearing” the flow of your writing, listening for transitions, etc. In addition, it’s a good habit to let others read your writing to you; to accomplish this, just print out two copies of your essay, find someone who is willing to read your essay, and listen, pencil in hand, ready to make changes.

As you read over your essay, you should be able to answer yes to the following questions. If any answer is no, you have some areas to revise.

1. Is my purpose clear?
2. Is my thesis clear? (These are not the same thing!)
3. Do I stick with my thesis throughout the essay? If not, where do I move away from it?
4. Are my main points clear?
5. Are my main points well-developed? If not, where do I need to add more support? What kind of support would be best to use?
6. Have I fulfilled the expectation of the assignment (purpose, assigned length, outside sources, etc)? In other words, have I written the essay I was supposed to write, or did I somehow head in a different direction?
Organization

As you read over your essay again, think carefully about the arrangement of your ideas. Remember that nothing in writing is accidental; the way your essay appears is the way you chose to write it. Being aware of the different choices available to you is your responsibility as a writer. Again, you should be able to answer yes to the following. If not, think about ways to improve the organization of your essay.

1. Does my paragraphing indicate that I have important points to make? A good rule of thumb: in a “standard,” typed academic essay, you should have two or three paragraph breaks per page. Any significant variation from this should be studied (though there may be a legitimate reason for this). The main point here is not to go on for pages without giving your readers a break.

2. Have I used transitions convincingly to show the connections between my ideas?

3. Have I arranged the paragraphs effectively?

EDITING

Though editing appears as the last step in the writing process, that may be a bit misleading. Many writers find that they edit as they write, which is fine. After all, it seems rather silly to overlook an error when you see it just because you are not officially in the “editing” stage. On the other hand, don’t assume that you will necessarily identify these possible errors in the earlier stages; there is no substitute for careful and thorough editing. Below are some specific suggestions to make your editing more effective.

Sentence Structure and Diction

Read your essay again, paying close attention to sentence structure and diction. You should be able to respond yes to the following questions; if not, consult any college English handbook for additional suggestions or for definitions of terms you do not understand.

1. Does my use of language (formal or informal) fit my subject and purpose?

2. Is my word choice specific, concrete, and exact?

3. Have I avoided clichés?

4. Have I included all words that are needed in my sentences?

5. Have I avoided wordiness? (Avoid constructions like: “In my opinion, I think that…” or “The most important thing above all else is…. “ These are repetitious and contribute to the “bulky” feeling sometimes inherent in student writing.)
6. Are my pronoun references clear? Pay special attention to indefinite pronouns, all of which are singular: everybody, anyone, somebody, etc.

7. Have I varied the length and structure of my sentences to add interest?

8. Have I avoided shifts in verb tense, person, and number?

**Punctuation and Mechanics**

Finally, turn your attention to line-by-line editing. You might find a ruler helpful to isolate individual lines. A good strategy to follow is to read through your essay several times as you edit but to look only for one possible error each time. Also, pay particular attention to the errors you know, from your previous experiences, you make. Isolating individual items in this way will allow you to spot (and fix) them more readily. Finally, remember that grammar checks and spell checks are wonderful tools and should be utilized to help you as you edit your writing. BUT, they do not catch everything! There is simply no substitute for thorough editing which you do, paper and pencil in hand. Most students sorely underestimate the amount of time needed for this kind of thorough editing; fifteen minutes per page is a good starting point. If you have questions about any of the terms, again a good college English handbook is indispensable. Below is a list of common writing problems to get you started.

1. Homonyms: there/their/they’re, its/it’s, too/to/two, your/you’re, affect/effect (hint: spell-check will not tell you which one you need; it will only tell you if you have spelled it correctly. That’s why there is no good substitute for simply knowing this stuff!)

2. Pronoun switching. Determine a pronoun case and stick with it.
   - 1st person: I, we (who is we anyway? Probably should avoid this.)
   - 2nd person: you=reader (rarely used in college writing)
   - 3rd person: he, she, it, they

3. Sentence boundaries: comma splices, fragments, run-ons, improper use of semi-colons

4. Appropriate sentence length and varied sentence patterns

5. Subordination and coordination

6. Transitions to help the reader navigate through the essay

7. Punctuation errors, especially commas and semi-colons

8. Agreement errors: subject/verb, pronoun/antecedent

9. Paragraph boundaries: single-topic/single-focus paragraphs

10. Comma use (after introductory elements and to separate two complete sentences joined by a conjunction are the two most common mistakes)

As should be obvious by now, the writing process is quite involved. It is necessary that you understand these steps and adhere to them with all your writing assignments so that you can produce your most effective writing. Your grades on those essays will likely improve as well.

One final suggestion: When you are in doubt about an assignment, you should talk with your instructor. Having made the assignment, he or she is best suited to address your questions and steer you in the proper direction. Never be afraid to do this. That’s why faculty are here!
THE WRITER'S ENVIRONMENT

Understanding the importance of the writing process and how it relates to your success as a college student are essential. However, there are several things you can do to create a personal environment that helps you develop and improve as a writer. Most teachers recognize that what you do outside class has a direct impact on what happens in class. Some “standard” strategies include keeping journals and writing independently, but there are other valuable suggestions as well that will foster your writing abilities; these are listed below.

1. READING: Most faculty bemoan the shift that has taken place in the last 10 years or so as it relates to students reading (or not reading, as is more often the case). Television, film, music, and videogames predominate in our society and diminish an interest in written language. Our fast-paced society often discourages reading because it lacks the visual stimulation provided by non-print media. This move away from the centrality of reading is evident everywhere: faculty observations, standardized test scores, students’ inability to understand a college-level text enough to discuss it. To combat this, you should understand that there is much research that demonstrates that habitual readers excel as writers. The more you read, the better you will write. It’s virtually automatic. Serious readers become more aware of how writing functions in the “real” world; a side benefit is that their own writing improves, and they become better critical readers of their own work. One way to establish this habit is to find a journal from your specific area of interest and read it for a semester or so. There’s no need to subscribe to the journal since you will find most of them in our library. The point is to get beyond the “headline news” reading and challenge yourself.

2. THE WRITE PLACE: The main goal of this writing lab (located in SRC 371) is to support classroom instruction. Remember that your instructor is always your first resource, but if he or she is unavailable, writing consultants at the Write Place can provide valuable assistance. Remember, though, that this is not an editing facility. The consultants, many of whom are also faculty, can certainly help with errors that you have and suggest strategies to avoid them, but you will find them most helpful with the planning and drafting stages of your work. Reference resources and materials are available at the Write Place as are handbooks for specialized writing tasks. For more on The Write Place, see pp. 48-49.

3. CONFERENCES: This was already mentioned but bears repeating. Informal conferences with your instructors can provide invaluable assistance as you work on your assignments. The informal setting creates a more relaxed atmosphere, one that often makes it more conducive for faculty and students to work together. This type of collaboration is quite common in the workplace, and you should work to develop these skills while still in college.

4. COMPUTERS: Most students do the majority of their writing on computers. If you have a home computer, then chances are you already do most of your writing on it. If you do not have a computer, however, there are many places on campus (ICT 126 is the main college computer lab) where you can have access to one to allow you the same advantages as students with their own computers. You will also find a number of classrooms equipped
with computers that allow you to do some of your work on them. Keep in mind, though, that computers are tools. They will not write the essay for you, but there are a number of things you can do with your writing on a computer that make your job easier: cutting, pasting, moving, and deleting are much easier on a computer than the old days when those revision acts required re-typing. There are also style analyzers and grammar checks available that will help you identify certain patterns in your writing. These programs have limitations, though: they will not improve your writing at the touch of a button. Rather, they can help you focus on some features of language you might otherwise ignore. So certainly take advantage of computers, but remember there is no computer that can write the essay for you!

**DEMYSTIFYING EVALUATION**

Students often have some misperceptions about the process of grading, and it is time to correct those. Evaluation has nothing to do with whether or not a particular faculty member “likes” you; many students think that this “likeability” is essential to receiving a good grade. From the faculty’s perspective, however, this is inaccurate. Faculty are more concerned with whether or not you are meeting the expectations of the assignments they create. In other words, have you completed the writing assignment you were given? This is always their main concern. The criteria for evaluation can vary from one writing assignment to the next, and your responsibility as a student is to adapt to those differences. For example, an assignment for an ethics course which requires taking a stand on an issue demands that the student understands the issue, has explored both sides of it, possesses a clear opinion, and has reasons and evidence to support that opinion. Writing for this assignment will be judged according to the goals of the assignment. Those goals might differ significantly from another assignment, for example, in a biology class, where the student is asked to report the results of an experiment clearly and accurately. One of your main responsibilities as a student is to be flexible and understand that different forms of writing have different purposes. When you have questions about how your writing will be evaluated, your instructor, again, should be your first resource. You might also ask your instructor if he/she has any examples of “good” essays you might read. See the section on “Writing in the Disciplines” for some of these examples as well as instructor feedback on why they are effective essays.

Remember, too, that sometimes evaluation can occur without a formal grade. For example, you might submit a draft that is returned to you with comments that encourage you to revise your work. Not receiving a grade does not mean your writing has not been evaluated because the comments themselves are intended to help you improve your writing. During the early stages of a writing project, responding to drafts without grading them is common practice in the English department to assure that the final, graded draft is as effective as possible; however, faculty in other areas often encourage students to submit drafts prior to the final due date for an assignment. Do not miss these opportunities! Sometimes you may be way off track with an assignment, and submitting a draft is one way to discover that. If you do not, then you will probably suffer the consequence of a lower grade than you might otherwise have received if you had asked your instructor for feedback on a draft.
Finally, remember that responding to student writing takes a lot of time. A lot of time! Faculty who offer this constructive criticism are doing it to help you improve, not to gain some kind of weird pleasure by pointing out any weaknesses you may have. Writing well is a reflection of who you are, and, like it or not, you will often be judged by the quality of your writing, especially in the workplace. Faculty know this and want to help you refine and improve your writing skills. Much research suggests that the ability to write well is one important element necessary for advancement in the professional world, and so faculty willing to take a critical look at your writing are only trying to help you in the long run.

**BASIC GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING WRITING**

Despite the earlier suggestion that criteria for evaluating writing should remain flexible, there are some general guidelines that can be useful as you think about your writing and whether or not it meets the assignment’s expectations. Though these guidelines are used in the English department and to assess general education outcomes for writing, they can also serve to set standards on any writing assignment. Note that these are NOT necessarily the criteria faculty will use to assess their students’ writing; those decisions fall to the individual instructors. However, they can be a useful guide as you think about whether or not your essay is effective.

- An *A* essay is strong in all areas on composition. It is particularly distinguished in content, containing an interesting, original thesis that is fully developed with concrete and vivid detail and language that is fresh and precise. The organization is clear and logical, while usage and mechanics show few if any deviations from the conventions of standard written English. What distinguishes an *A* essay in particular is the maturity of its thought.
- An *B* essay is solid in all areas of composition. It is distinguished by full development of a worthwhile topic and strong, logical organization. The paper shows few, if any, deviations from standard mechanics. Its diction is precise and appropriate.
- An *C* essay is a sound composition. It is characterized by a worthwhile thesis given sufficient treatment to validate it. The paper is orderly in its presentation of ideas and contains few deviations from standard English.
- An *D* essay is weak in one or more areas of composition. It is difficult to understand because of poor organization, inadequate development, vague thesis, errors in grammar, or frequent misuse of language. The *D* essay is poor composition, just barely passing work.
- An *E* essay is unacceptable in one or more of the areas of composition. It may contain several serious grammatical errors, imprecise or misleading expressions, illogical organization, or negligible content.

Remember, instructors judge a student’s work in the context of a specific assignment. A student who writes a good essay may thus receive a low grade if he or she fails to do the assignment in part or in full. Also, the grade is not a mere summary of the student’s performance in each area but expresses the essay’s overall effectiveness. Because lack of control in one of the major areas of composition often severely limits a paper’s effectiveness, an essay that fails in any one area may be given a failing grade.
SOME ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT WRITING

An earlier section of this handbook identified several strategies to help you revise and edit your writing. In this section, you will find some additional assistance as you polish your essays. These areas should be addressed before you submit your final work.

APPEARANCE

Should I type my paper?

Unless your instructor states otherwise, you should assume that any significant writing assignment should be typed. It makes your writing look more professional (which hopefully reflects the thorough job you have done), and it is also much easier on the eyes. Remember, faculty are not just reading your paper but often 60 or 80 other ones; this is hard work, and anything you can do to make the job easier will certainly be appreciated. Also, remember that a neatly typed paper cannot disguise serious problems with your essay.

Sometimes, handwritten assignments are acceptable, but it is best to make sure with your instructor first.

What word processor should I use?

The standard at ECC is Microsoft Word. Writing your documents in this format will make things easier for you, especially if you find yourself writing on campus as well as at home. If you do not have Word at home, then you should get in the habit of saving your files as rich text format (.rtf), which will allow you to move from another program, such as Word Perfect or Microsoft Works, to Word more easily.

If you are unfamiliar with word processing and want to learn more, many courses are offered through the Office Administration Technology department; consult a current schedule for courses and times.

Does my essay have an effective title?

Everything you write for college should have a title, and it should be given serious consideration, not simply tacked on as an afterthought. Essays with no titles or with unoriginal ones (i.e., “Essay #1” or “My Personal Experience Essay”) do little to draw readers in, and they often reflect poorly on the writer, you. Let’s say, for example, that you are writing an essay on cigarette advertising and its use of sexual images. A title such as “Cigarettes and Sex” is much more interesting than “The Role of Sexual Images in Cigarette Advertising” but not nearly as appealing as “Strike it Lucky!” (a reference not only to a particular brand of cigarettes but to sexual imagery as well). A reader encountering an essay with the last title is more likely to be intrigued and interested to read what follows. Try to do the same with your essays.
MANUSCRIPT GUIDELINES

What should my essay look like?

The following are some general guidelines:

1. Type all papers and use double-spacing.

2. Number your pages in the upper right corner. Most word processors have a pagination command, so be sure you know how to use it.

3. Your last name should appear on each page after the first (it’s best to put it right next to the page number).

4. Use a standard size 12 font. Faculty are well aware of what happens when students switch fonts. Also be sure the style you select is a readable one; Times New Roman and Courier New are most preferred.

5. Use standard 8½ x 11 paper.

6. Staple or paper clip your paper in the upper left corner; check first to be sure the pages are in order. Never fold over or rip corners to hold pages together.

7. Your instructor may have specific guidelines regarding the heading on your papers. If no guidelines are provided, your heading should look like this (double-spaced throughout, starting at the left margin):

   Your Name
   Your Instructor’s Name
   Course Number and Section
   Date
   Centered Title

Here’s an example:

   Michele Noel
   Dr. James Doe
   English 101-24
   May 1, 2005
   Strike It Lucky!

A few things to note about the title: Notice it is not bold-faced, italicized, quadruple spaced, or typed in a larger font. Students often do this, and it is inappropriate.
PARAGRAPHING/ORGANIZATION

Does my introduction appeal to my reader?

Writing, and writing well, is a matter of choices made by the writer. The more aware you are of the choices at your disposal, the better writer you will be. Except when it comes to things such as grammar and punctuation, there is never only one way to do something. This is certainly the case with introductions. Clearly your opening paragraph should attract your reader’s attention and generate interest, but this can be done through a variety of methods; the best method depends on your audience and purpose. In some situations, beginning with a direct quote (which should be documented) is the best approach; other times, you may find statistics or a personal anecdote work better. The trick is to know what your options are and be willing to experiment.

Students often devote very little attention to writing a good introduction, and they fail to realize how critical that introduction is to the overall success of the essay. To illustrate this importance, imagine the following scenario (I often use this example with my own students!): Your instructor walks in on the day a major paper is due, and he or she says the following: “For this essay, I have decided that I am going to read only 10 essays instead of 30. Hopefully, your essay will be one of the 10.” Now, you know this will not happen because, of course, the instructor’s job, to a large extent, is to assess your work. However, if you had to identify the criteria used to determine which 10 will be read in this hypothetical scenario, the safest bet would be the effectiveness of the introduction. If you do not foster reader interest there, you are likely not going to create it anywhere else. Even from a self-preservation standpoint, you know your instructor is reading many essays, and you want to be sure yours is the one that catches his or her attention, so special attention to the introduction is mandatory.

Does the order of my paragraphs make sense?

An organized essay contains a meaningful sequence of paragraphs; it’s not an accident. When you are in the early stages of drafting, paragraphing may not be that important because you are just trying to get everything down. Once you turn your attention to your readers, however, and recognize that someone else has to understand what you have written, paragraphing becomes more important. It’s helpful to think of paragraphs as signals to your readers since they indicate when ideas are shifting. Just as your essay is composed of many ideas, it should have many paragraphs to convey those ideas. All too often, students convey many ideas in one paragraph, and that is simply overwhelming to readers. There are even situations when students turn in entire essays that are single paragraphs; this is simply unacceptable at the college level.

Besides knowing when to break for paragraphs, you should also give serious thought to the arrangement of those paragraphs. Knowing what to say and when are challenges all writers face. Remember, though, nothing happens accidentally in writing, so think about the best order of your paragraphs based on your audience and purpose. Also, do not be afraid to change the order. Sometimes the first way is not the best; try a different order and see what you think.
METHODS OF DEVELOPMENT

Have I used appropriate methods of development in my essay?

Years ago, it would have been typical for writing teachers to ask their students to write papers simply to practice certain modes of development or methods of organization. These strategies, many of which are already familiar to you, included comparison-contrast, narration, causal analysis, classification, description, and argument, among others. The problem was that, outside of English classrooms, the methods had very little utility and often frustrated students who were simply asked to write “essays” but not told how to develop them. Today, students are instead given an assignment which requires the use of the methods identified above but has a separate purpose (not all in one essay, of course). Changes in composition theory support this shift and stress the importance of function or purpose before form rather than the reverse. Good writers recognize this as well, and it would be to your advantage to learn these methods but to recognize that they become important after you have identified your purpose with a particular essay. In other words, do not put the cart before the horse.

Let’s look at two examples. Consider the difference between the following two assignments:

A. Write an essay to a future employer about an experience in which you learned something meaningful or which you still need to figure out.

B. Choose a local issue about which you feel strongly and take a position on it. Remember to use strong reasons and evidence to support your position. You must also demonstrate evidence that you have acknowledged potential objections.

Assignment A suggests a narrative approach that likely will follow a chronological pattern. Beginning writers are usually comfortable with this approach and will have little difficulty writing the essay. This type of writing, while prevalent in English classes, may not be as common in other disciplines. It is only one type of writing among many with which you should be familiar.

Assignment B presents a different challenge: it asks the student to demonstrate an understanding of a local issue, analyze both sides of the issue, and then take a position on that issue and support it. It requires the student not only to define the issue but also to argue for or against it. In this essay, a narrative method of development would be ineffective as a guiding principle. The ordering of ideas will not be dictated by time and events but rather by logic and evidence.

Both assignments require appropriate, but very different, methods of development. Your job as a student and as a writer is to recognize these different situations as they arise and respond accordingly.
DETAIL / SUPPORT

Does my writing include a legitimate balance between the general and the specific, the concrete and the abstract?

Chances are, the specific details you bring to bear on your writing are what will make it unique and memorable for readers. Despite thoughts to the contrary, an unlimited number of writing topics does not exist. What does exist is great variation among writers. So, even though you may not be the first to write about a pivotal moment of adolescence (such as getting your driver’s license, prom, your first “real” party, whatever), why income tax laws should be changed, or the connection between television viewing and violence, you are the first to write about the topic from your point of view. Take advantage of this opportunity. Use detail that will appeal to readers and be appropriate to your topic at the same time.

DOCUMENTATION

If my paper includes outside sources, have I cited them properly?

Though a later section in this handbook is devoted to strategies to avoid plagiarism, a few words are appropriate now. Students sometimes are given misinformation about when they should and should not document their writing. It’s time to clarify that. Here is the bottom line: any time you are using a source’s words or ideas, the information must be documented. No ifs, ands, or buts! By operating with this overriding principle, you will avoid plagiarism. This is important to note because many faculty issue automatic failing grades to students who plagiarize. With recent technological advances (such as Google searches and the like), it is very easy to identify sources from which students are drawing parts of their essays; sometimes, students “download” entire essays from the web, and this is very easy to discover. Your best line of defense: simply don’t do it. Instead, follow the guidelines presented in any college handbook regarding the documentation of sources.

Students often allow themselves to get overwhelmed when documenting their papers. A few practical suggestions might reduce that likelihood. First, there is no single method of documentation. As you encounter different disciplines of study, you will discover they have preferred methods for documentation. Just accept it. Yes, life would be easier if you only had to know one approach, but life isn’t always easy. Fortunately, there are two that are most common at the college level: MLA and APA. Second, rarely will you be asked to memorize the information pertaining to the documentation of your sources. Instead, most instructors simply expect you to use the chosen method (MLA, APA, CBE, or any of a number of others) properly. Printed style guides as well as online resources are available to assist you with this. Basically, you will need to know what kind of source you have (online article, interview, TV show, encyclopedia, whatever), and then you will look for that “pattern” in the style guide. From that point, it’s basically fill in the blank. Third, try to find some concrete examples of papers incorporating the method you have been asked to use. Your instructor might have examples from former students that you can read, or he or she can direct you to professional journals that utilize that method.
MECHANICS

Have I proofread my paper for errors in punctuation, grammar, and spelling?

You are familiar enough with the rules of language, to know that there is something wrong with what you are reading right now. Though you could understand what I meant to write, the errors obviously interfere with effective communication. When the errors extend over three, five, or even ten pages, imagine how frustrated the reader (and your instructor!) might become. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that proper grammar and mechanics are important only in English classes. Faculty in other disciplines may reduce the grade an essay receives because of excessive errors or return it without a grade until it is more carefully edited. An essay that is full of errors reflects poorly on the writer (you), and as a result, readers (and your instructor!) might not take you very seriously. Fortunately, most of these errors are easily fixed or avoidable altogether.

To fix errors easily, take advantage of your word processor. Certainly spell-check can help with obvious misspellings (their for their, for example), but it does not always help with what are called contextual spelling errors (their vs. there vs. they’re); as long as you spell each one correctly, it does not tell you which one you need. Using an edit/find function might help, however. This enables you to type in a word (such as there) or mark of punctuation (a comma, for example), and the computer will find every time it appears. Now, certainly not all of the ones it finds are wrong; the advantage here, however, is that it isolates the word or mark of punctuation to allow you to scrutinize it more carefully.

One way to reduce your error rate is to pay attention to the errors you make. I know, that sounds very obvious, but most students ignore what writing teachers often call a “pattern of error.” This means that you might be prone to certain types of errors. In other words, if fragments are a problem for you, they are a problem each and every time you write, and so your responsibility as a writer is to work to eliminate that problem so that it disappears in all the writing you do; the problem should not appear over and over again. The “pattern of error,” however, is often different for each student. So your problem might be fragments while someone else struggles with commas. You need to know what your “pattern” is and work to minimize the errors. One way to do that is to keep a log that tracks your problem areas and ways to fix them.

Another way to reduce errors is to read your writing out loud. I mentioned this earlier, and most students underestimate its effectiveness. Something strange happens to us as we write: we often become very attached to what we have produced and, even when errors are present in black and white, our mind often prevents us from seeing them. I call this strange phenomenon “Willing things to be there when they really aren’t,” and reading out loud is one way to mitigate it. For example, let’s say you have written this sentence: “My family is very fun-loving and energetic, and they throw many parties.” When you read it silently to yourself, your mind is likely seeing this: “My family is very fun-loving and energetic, and the throw many parties.” The problem is, that’s not what your reader is seeing. You are seeing what you think you wrote or what you intended to write; your reader is seeing what is actually on the page. When this sort of thing
happens repeatedly in an essay, your reader (and your instructor) may not take what you have to say very seriously. So, again, the bottom line here is READ OUT LOUD. It is not an infallible technique, but you will be surprised at how many things you do catch this way!

A FINAL THOUGHT

None of these features of writing is more important than another. Your job as a writer is to develop proficiency in all of them. Successful writing requires that you do a lot of different things well; focusing on one thing only, such as content, will reduce your effectiveness as a writer. Similarly, a perfectly edited essay that bores readers with meaningless content will be equally unsuccessful. You need to develop and combine many abilities, and the more willing you are to recognize this, the more successful your writing will be. The most effective way to improve your writing, then, is to devote attention to all aspects of the writing process.
SECTION II: OVERCOMING WRITING PROBLEMS

A WORKSHEET TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION

It is extremely important that you understand exactly what your writing assignment is and what you must do to complete it as assigned. The dangers of procrastination have already been mentioned several times, and you already know that writing is a process that can take several weeks to complete, depending on the nature of the assignment. Notice that the components here mimic what was discussed in the earlier section on “The Writing Process.” The following worksheet should help you adhere to the features of the process and meet your deadlines as well. Remember that your instructor is probably not going to assign these different deadlines; more likely than not, you will just be given a final due date for the paper, so it is up to you to decide on reasonable dates for these different steps to be sure your final draft is as effective as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEPS IN PROCESS</th>
<th>DEADLINE DATES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Write a purpose statement for your paper based on the assignment. What are you trying to accomplish in the paper?</td>
<td>Statement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Establish some deadlines.</td>
<td>Due date:___________</td>
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<td>3. Understand the assignment:</td>
<td>Deadline date:___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>—limit focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>—work on thesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Identify sources if necessary:</td>
<td>Deadline date:___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>—read related materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>—locate available sources in library</td>
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<tr>
<td>—take notes from sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>—line up interviews for field research if appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>—keep track of sources for documentation purposes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organize main points:</td>
<td>Deadline date:___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—be sure you have support for each</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>—look for balance</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6. Write first draft: Deadline date:______________

7. Revise your first draft: Deadline date:______________
   — get another opinion on your draft (from peer or instructor)
   — go to the Write Place for help
   — allow your paper to sit over night (at least) so you can
     return to it with a fresh eye.

8. Prepare final draft: Deadline date:______________
   — carefully proofread your essay
   — check manuscript form
   — make a copy of your paper before submitting it to your
     instructor

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR

Although it might be really awesome and totally cool to, like, illustrate the importance of accuracy and correctness by writing a passage full of all kinds of dumb and stupid mistakes. Collage students often think that teaches, and most specially English teachers, is the only wins which really care about this kind of stuff. But the real truth is that good writing matters in the real world all kinds of good and important research suggests this to be the case. And it is the facultys job to help you develop these necessary skills. I admit, some faculty believed that pointing out errors is to overwhelming a task given our society’s apparent indifference to language, they think that its a hopeless. I, however, thought that collage students would get a kick out of a clever way to emphasise these errors. In any case, rather than gave you a list of errors, which most of you have seen before (see page 11). I decided to wrote this passage so you could preciate what it feel’s like to read prose littered with errors the averadge person could recognize.

This passage probably commits more than ten stupid errors and probably leaves out alot of others that are common place. Some could of been caught with a word processor if you both-ered to use it. Most students hope that eventually a computer will catch every thing. Making careful line-by-line editing unnecessary. If I was you, however, I would’nt hold your breathe!
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Faculty agree that one of their main responsibilities is assuring the integrity of the work students submit and, therefore, the integrity of the institution as a whole. Academic integrity is essential to intellectual growth; thus, honesty is expected in all student endeavors. Faculty have the right to develop their own guidelines and consequences when students fail to adhere to standards for academic integrity. Be aware that plagiarism, whether intentional or the result of careless inattention to documentation, often results in automatic failure of the assignment and could lead to an E for the course. Any form of cheating—on essays or exams or any other assignment—can have the same consequence.

Below is the English department’s plagiarism policy. Over the years, faculty have realized that much misinformation exists about plagiarism, what it is, and how to avoid it. This policy attempts to correct that misinformation and explain plagiarism in simple, concrete terms. Though this is not a college-wide policy, it does offer some useful suggestions about how to avoid plagiarism.

ECC ENGLISH DEPARTMENT POLICY ON PLAGIARISM:

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s written words or ideas as one’s own. Students are guilty of plagiarism if they submit as their own work:
• part or all of a written assignment copied from another person’s manuscript or notes
• part or all of an assignment copied or paraphrased from a source, such as a book, magazine, pamphlet or electronic document, without giving proper documentation
• the sequence of ideas, arrangement of material, pattern or thought of someone else, even though you express it in your own words; plagiarism occurs when such a sequence of ideas is transferred from a source to a paper without processes of digestion, integration and reorganization in the writer’s mind, and without acknowledgement in the paper.

Students are guilty of being accomplices to plagiarism if they:
• allow their paper, in outline or finished form, to be copied and submitted as the work of another
• a written assignment for another student and allow it to be submitted as that student’s own work
• keep or contribute to a file of papers with the clear intent that these papers will be copied or submitted as work of anyone other than the author; students who know their work is being copied are presumed to consent to its being copied.

At its worst, plagiarism is deliberate dishonesty, as is the case in copying work from a book or article and presenting it as one’s own, or in the case of copying another student’s work and presenting it as one’s own. Such a blatant, deliberate act amounts to academic theft and is a highly serious offense within the college community. A student guilty of deliberate plagiarism will receive an automatic grade of “E” for the entire course in which the plagiarism occurs.

Another kind of plagiarism may sometimes be the result of ignorance, fear or insecurity. This kind of plagiarism presents the words or ideas of other persons or writers without the proper
quotation marks, documentation, acknowledgment or citation of the source. For example, all words copied from another source must always be placed in quotation marks and correctly documented by author and page. Failure to do so is a form of plagiarism. Also, ideas and information which are not “common knowledge”—that is, broadly known to most high school graduates—must be documented by author and page. A student guilty of this type of plagiarism, whether intentional or out of ignorance, will receive an “E” for the assignment in which the misrepresentation occurs.

Cases of plagiarism or suspected plagiarism will be handled between the student and the instructor of the course. Subsequent actions may include notification of the appropriate dean and/or the counseling service.
As you progress through your college education, you will find yourself writing in virtually all your classes—sometimes in classes that you would never expect, such as math or computer science. But as I’ve already mentioned, writing has become an increasingly common means for students to display their knowledge. Surely you will still be taking exams, as they are an important element of assessment at the college level, but most classes provide multiple measures to assess student learning; one significant component is writing—whether it is in the form of short summaries of articles, essay exams, or research papers. In addition, you will find that, even though some traits of good writing remain constant across disciplines, there are often significant variations as well. Part of your responsibility as a college student, then, is to adjust to these different demands. Writing in math class is not exactly the same as writing in psychology or history or art. Your instructors will more than likely communicate their expectations to you, but it’s also helpful to look at some concrete examples to help you make these distinctions.

Below you will find several exemplary student essays from a variety of disciplines along with the instructor’s analysis of what contributed to the “A” grade. The main point here is to understand that, first, instructors outside the English department assign a significant amount of writing; that, second, these instructors value good writing; and that, third, your responsibility as a student is to understand and adapt to these different expectations.

Psychology Sample Essay

Psychology 212 (Child Psychology)

Mary Ainsworth is an important figure to us because of her knowledge of attachment and why it is so important to a child. She believed that attachment was an emotional bond between two people or animals that flourishes over time. This attachment is lasting, and if an attachment figure is lost, they cannot be substituted. This does not mean that another attachment figure cannot meet the same needs as the prior attachment figure, just not all of the needs. Ainsworth said that infants showed their attachments to caregivers in two ways. The first was by proximity-seeking behaviors. Here, infants try to be close to the attachment figure, such as climbing in his or her lap. The other way is by contact-maintaining behaviors. This is where infants want to maintain closeness between themselves and their caregiver. An example of this could be clinging to a parent’s chest because they want to remain physically attached (Berger 219).

Mary Ainsworth also held that there were two types of attachments infants could have with their attachment figure. Either a secure attachment or insecure attachment could be formed between the infant and other person. A secure attachment meant that the infant trusted
the attachment figure enough to be independent and explore his or her surroundings. They have confidence that the person will keep them away from danger and comfort them in a time of need. An infant is said to have an insecure attachment with someone if they are not confident in his or her surroundings and have great fear and anxiety, and sometimes anger towards the caregiver. There are two different kinds of insecure attachment. The first is the insecure-avoidant attachment which states that an infant is uninterested in the caregivers company and doesn’t care when they leave. The second type is the insecure-resistant or ambivalent attachment which is where an infant has great amounts of anxiety about his or her surroundings and is clingy, and also very upset when the caregiver leaves and sometimes upon arrival. A final type of attachment is classified as disorganized. This does not fit into the realm of the insecure or secure attachment. It is an inconsistent type of attachment that varies because of the caregiver’s behavior. The caregiver often sends mixed signals to the infant who makes it hard for him or her to form an attachment strategy. This can mean withholding a toy from an infant while using a friendly tone of voice. Often, in later childhood these infants become hostile and aggressive (Berger 219-220).

Mary Ainsworth believed that attachment was vital to the human species. Secure attachments between infants and caregivers lead the child to seek help from other people when needed, but perform tasks independently as well. They also exhibit better social skills from insecure attached children, such as making friends. On the other hand, insecurely attached children are not as cooperative and often do not learn as well as securely attached infants. It is important to say that attachment has the possibility of changing overtime. When a person changes his or her reaction to a child, the relationship changes as well.

An infant can develop normally if they have some sort of attachment figure. The desired relationship is always a secure attachment between caregiver and infant, but this is only the case for nearly two-thirds of children. If the caregiver is responsive to the child’s needs and encourages development, a secure attachment is likely to form. In contrast, if the child feels ignored or unsure of the caregiver, the attachment is likely to become insecure. It is also important to remember that a mix of things determine the attachment status between caregiver and infant. No single thing is solely responsible for this emotional bond.
Works Cited


**Instructor’s Comments (Dr. Cindy Hutman):**

The essay answers a question about Mary Ainsworth’s research into attachment and the value of attachment. The overall organization of the essay is clear. The student introduces the basic topic of attachment, defines it and explains Ainsworth’s research. The essay, then, discusses categories of attachment, the consequences of secure vs. insecure attachment. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of what might lead to secure vs. insecure attachment.

She uses full sentences, proper grammar and punctuation. She transitions smoothly from one topic to the next. The student writes in well organized, fully-developed paragraphs. Each paragraph contains a topic sentence and support sentences. She is careful to define the terms from the course that she has learned and she uses good examples to illustrate her point, when necessary.
Humanities Sample Essay

Humanities 216 (Ethics)

Essay question: Distinguish between descriptive ethics, normative ethics, and metaethics. Give an example of doing each.

The study of ethics can be approached in at least 3 different ways: descriptively, normatively, and metaethically. I will define each approach and consider female circumcision from descriptive, normative, and metaethical approaches. Along the way I will compare and contrast the different approaches.

Descriptive ethics is the approach in which one simply describes how some person or members of society make moral judgments, or describes their customs and how they behave. Take female circumcision for example. Female circumcision is the removal of the clitoris and, in some cases, the removal of outer labia, as practiced in some African cultures. It is usually done between the ages of 8 and 12. It is considered morally acceptable and expected within those cultures. The reasons given are that women are considered sexually clean when this is done, and it discourages extra-marital affairs by wives by reducing their enjoyment of sex. I have just described ethical decision making and the process by which the decision is made, that is, I have just done descriptive ethics.

Metaethics is to examine the logical structure of the norms or principles of justifiable behavior. For example, if one were to argue that it is up to a culture to decide what is right and wrong, and that the culture’s choice makes it right or wrong, then she has practiced metaethics. (That person would be a moral relativist.) That the practice is accepted within a culture makes the act of female circumcision moral in that culture. This contrasts with descriptive ethics in that metaethics does not simply describe behavior. At the metaethical level, one is trying to decide what makes an act moral or immoral. But, just because one has decided on the principles of behavior, it does not mean that she has decided what behavior is correct, yet.

To pass judgment on a practice, person, etc., is to practice normative ethics. For example, if one were to claim that the female circumcision is morally correct, he would be taking a normative approach to ethics. Such an approach contrasts with the descriptive approach in that it does not simply describe behavior; it passes judgment on that behavior. And it contrasts with the metaethical approach in that one does not decide what makes acts moral or immoral, he already
assumes that that has been decided upon. To illustrate, passing the judgment that female circumcision is morally acceptable if you are within a society that finds it so, depends on one already agreeing that what makes an act right in a society is that it is accepted by that society.

Although the three approaches are distinguishable, as I have shown in this essay, they oftentimes overlap: when one practices metaethics, for instance, one might also have to describe the behavior of a culture; when one practices normative ethics, one might also have to practice metaethics in order to decide how to judge an action; etc. For example: the moral relativist could argue for relativism (metaethics), examine a culture’s beliefs (descriptive ethics), and then pass judgment on a practice (normative ethics).

**Instructor’s Comments (Dr. Zacker):**

There are several characteristics that make this a good essay. They can be divided into three main categories: organization, the explanation of concepts, and language usage and style. As for organization, there is the overall organization and the organization within each paragraph. Overall organization includes the introduction, the body and the conclusion. The introduction outlines the body. The body contains a paragraph for each of the three concepts to be distinguished, addressed in a logical order. The conclusion pulls the information all together. Another possible structure for the conclusion would be to summarize the information in the body.

Within each body paragraph, there is a common organization. Each paragraph begins by giving a definition. An example is provided, and then that example is connected to the definition; that is, it is explained why it is an example of the definition. In the second and third body paragraphs, there is also a brief account of how the concept covered in that paragraph relates to concepts covered earlier.

The issue of the explanation of concepts can also be addressed by considering the paragraph organization. When an author explains a concept, she should give a definition, explain the definition and give an example. In this essay, due to time and space constraints, the explanation comes out in the example and is not a separate part of the account of the concept. If more time is available, then one should clearly explain a concept and not just give an example. One should always give examples whenever possible and why it is an example of that concept should be explained.

Finally, the language and style are quite economical. The essay is formal without being inacces-sible. Virtually every sentence is important in this essay. There are no extra words, no fluff! The essay does not say things like, “This is a very important concept.” A professor does not need to hear that. He assumes his subject matter is important. As a final note, many professors in the humanities find no problem with writing essays in the first person. In fact, many find it preferable. However, one should always check with his professor first.
English Sample Essay

English 101 (English Composition)

Everyday Buddhism

A few minutes off of Rt. 90 in Des Plaines, Illinois, a small group of Vietnamese-Americans gather every Sunday to celebrate their freedom and religion. From the parking lot, the Phat Bao Temple, nestled near a community park and painted a putrid salmon, appears to be nothing more than a small, decrepit school with an overgrown garden. The devotion and inspiration housed in the temple’s depths is unfathomable to a passerby.

A narrow, cracked door hides, unconvincing as an entrance, and creeks open to reveal a tiny, almost dark hall. Thin, rickety shelves line the walls where sandals and slippers mingle with shiny, wing-tipped shoes and expensive but respectable high-heels. It immediately feels immoral to continue wearing shoes, and every step beyond that point seems loud and destructive. The hall, instead of ending with a spacious steeple room as expected, leads to a humble meeting area. A few monks scurry past in anticipation of the service beginning in a few minutes. Groups of aging Vietnamese women gossip in hushed, quick whispers over food they are preparing. A monk rushing past pauses long enough to say, in broken English, “Welcome. Sit. Have coffee.” He motions to a teapot with a sweep of his arm and flashes a shy smile.

A middle-aged, high-class lady approaches with a stern look and snaps, “You here for service?” Upon an answer of yes, her scowl softens to a grin as she gestures towards a large room and exclaims, “Go in any time!”

Shoes are left at the threshold of this sacred room, and a short, gray-haired man bows slightly to newcomers and says in a soft, wise tone, “Welcome to our temple. I am Dr. Tu Tran and I can translate for you. I can answer any questions you have.” It is obvious why shoes are left behind; lush red carpet as rich as sod engulfs the floor of the gymnasium-sized temple, and the far end is lined with immaculate, delicate tiles. A slick, golden Buddha towers over drums of bone, creamy white candles, and hundreds of pink and lavender lotus flowers. From this majestic perch, he peers down at the peaceful worshipers at his feet. A mere ten people are scattered about the room in a meditative posture when the service begins.

A monk and his young protégé tap drums that send reverberating gongs around the room, and the worshipers rise together and chant. Their chants are monotone yet beautiful, shrill but
They kneel and bow, only to rise again, all the while singing. The monk beats a steady rhythm, but the mantras—often fading to hums—never seem to repeat. The routine flows effortlessly for almost an hour and ends abruptly when the worshipers file out doors to either side of the shrine, women to the left, men to the right.

After a few moments of silence and a young man tiptoeing past to gather prayer books, Dr. Tran returns, and, without prompting, his history unfolds. “I fled Communist Vietnam in 1975, and became a doctor here in Chicago. We made my house a temple because there were so many Vietnamese in our Sangha (a group of Buddhists with common practices). Now we have three temples in the area.” He answers questions, comparing Buddhist ethics and bodhisattvas to Catholicism’s Commandments and saints as he leads the way to the feast.

A woman rushes and exclaims, “Eat! Self-serve.” She nods with a proud smile towards banquet trays of dark salads, steaming rice and vegetables, and sesame ginger tofu. Contrary to her “self-serve” proclamation, she heaps a sturdy paper plate with the mysterious food and thrusts it at the nearest person.

At the first sign of hesitation, a young business man in a starched, pink dress shirt encourages, “Vegetarian. Is good!” He enthusiastically plucks a bite from his plate and holds it up with chopsticks, triumphantly.

Immediately after an initial taste, a man pokes the shoulder of the innocent outsider and forcibly asks, “You like?” Of course, an answer of no is taboo, and his next demand is, “Try the soup!” During the grueling meal, an ambassador of sorts named Bobby is sent to rescue any English speakers. His black hair is humorously spiked, and his English is comfortably flawless. He is the temple’s ambassador to young people they assume to be Christian. He asks a slew of questions and is sincerely interested in American opinions of his beloved temple.

Perhaps the atmosphere overflowing out of the Phat Bao Temple’s doors is best expressed through Bobby when he says, “We are sorry our service is not conducted in English. Most of our Sangha would not understand it as well. Please excuse us for talking in Vietnamese around you—I hope you can understand it is more comfortable for us.” Buddhists rarely say I or me. They consider themselves part of an ever-changing network of life, and their minds are forever open to new ideas. The Buddhists in Des Plaines are living examples of the philosophies and morals that founded their religion; they exude humanity and can invigorate even the most desolate of us.
Instructor’s Comments (Professor Gary Christenson):
The key to a good profile essay is incongruous detail, finding either the unexpected in the commonplace topic or making the reader aware of the heretofore unknown in the exotic. Danielle accomplishes both in this essay, describing the unlikely temple to be found in suburban Chicago, while exposing readers to the basic tenets of Buddhism, a virtual mystery to most Westerners, not to mention American Midwesterners. The naming, detailing and comparing expected of good descriptive writing fully shape this essay. Verbs are active voice and illustrative. Here monks don’t walk—they “scurry past in anticipation…” A “scowl softens to a grin.” And one “plucks a bite of food” from a plate. A well placed metaphor helps us see what readers can’t see—a cracked and narrow door that “hides unconvincing as an entrance.” Details propel this essay along, as well as varied sentence format. Finally, readers enjoy an unobstructed view of the topic as the writer steps aside through the narrative third person structure.
Reclaiming Higher Ground: Creating Organizations That Inspire Excellence

R. Warren Candy, vice president of generation for Minnesota Power, Inc., provides this summary of Lance H. K. Secretan’s 1997 book, Reclaiming Higher Ground: Creating Organizations That Inspire Excellence. Candy received his Bachelor of Science degree in Production Engineering from Swinburne Institute of Technology in Melbourne, Australia (Candy 306). Lance H. K. Secretan is an international business consultant that works out of Toronto, Canada. He focuses on coaching managers to inspire and motivate employees as well as building organizational customers for life (Candy 306).

In his book Reclaiming Higher Ground, Secretan argues that organizations need to create work environments that energize people by stimulating creativity and innovation through the “positive expression of the human spirit.” He expresses that the meeting the needs of employees and company profits need to be seen as equal goals. In addition, Secretan explains that companies need to “reclaim the higher ground” of restoring trust, integrity, emotion, and on-going learning in the workplace—not be absorbed in personality and ego gratification. Interestingly, he argues for the restoration of respect for the soul and to make workplaces spiritually safe and secure; furthermore, he believes that if companies do this, they will begin to flourish.

Hersey and Blanchard’s Life-Cycle Theory immediately came to mind with this article and is studied in MMT 101. The life-cycle theory of leadership relates to the leaders behavior towards a subordinate and that that behavior should relate to the subordinates maturity level. The focus on tasks and relationships should also change as the subordinate matures. Secretan refers to these changes as the “process of personal evolution”; this process consists of three stages. The subordinate in the beginning stage is immature, power and penalty are what they focus on. In the second stage, known as traditional, self-doubt and insecurities cause us to behave in ways that develop our personalities and egos to help us “fit in” with the others. The final stage, evolving, is the stage in which we have a higher consciousness and align our beliefs; we search for deeper fulfillment in our lives and a more soulful connection to our work.

In addition, leadership is studied in MMT 101 and is studied more extensively in MMT 155.
We know from prior research that effective leaders will “align the hearts and minds of their employees” as author Jon Katzenbach explained how to “emotionally charge” the behavior in employees (Katzenbach 73). We have studied McGregor’s, “The Human side of Enterprise”, and the positive influence that a leader with Theory Y assumptions will have on a subordinate’s maturation process (McGregor 61). Equally important are the research results we have learned from author Jim Collins and his findings in “Built to Last”; research involving companies with strong core ideologies and principles that are never compromised come to mind with this article (Collins 89). In a recent example, we have had a clearer understanding of James Kouzes’ findings on leaders with “credibility” who are people oriented leaders that possess sincere honesty and supportiveness within their companies (267).

Finally, we have taken a good look at Jim Collins’ work in “Good to Great” and the example of companies that went from “good to great” with leaders who possess a dual combination of personal humility and professional will. “Good to Great” taught us of the leader who demonstrates morality and is guided by his background of religious beliefs, experience (such as strong religious beliefs, cancer, near death experiences, significant life changes), educational background, and family and peer influence that produce a code of ethics (Collins 194). All of these books by credentialed authors support Secretan’s article in one way or another with regard to his beliefs of “reclaiming higher ground” by servicing humanity.

My experience of owning and operating a corporate travel agency for 15 years tells me that respecting the needs of customers, employees, partners, and vendors in receiving what they need will help you or the organization to receive what it needs. Something as simple and human as allowing subordinates to go to their child’s school play, the dentist, or take a much-needed break without grief from management is a relief to them. I found through my experience that when people and their lives are respected, their performance and dedication to me and my business was unmatched. The author refers to this as “delivery” and the “you before me” personality; be respectful of the needs of others and help create win-win situations and relationships.

For me, many important things came to mind with this article. My experience as a business owner created the opportunity for me to master a skill I enjoyed and exercise my love for people. The author stresses that we should energize our souls with “mastery” (doing whatever we do to the highest level we are capable) and “chemistry” (relating so well with people that they seek to have relationships with you). I had tremendous passion for my work and all of the people that
crossed my path. I developed close relationships from my heart with employees, customers, and even with brief acquaintances. I truly experienced the joy of “chemistry” throughout my business career with everyone from CEOs to car washers.

One final area of experience for me is with what the author calls “love before competition, hostility, and fear” (Candy 308). The author makes a profound statement that “life is not a battleground- it is a playground” (311). Secretan refers to the fact that organizations are constantly in the pursuit of defeating the competition, focusing on mistakes made and weaknesses instead of strengths—in my opinion, all of these things are complete energy drainers. They drain the life out of the people and then out of the organization. When I owned my company, I helped more than one competitor, on several occasions, to run their businesses; and my employees helped them out as well if necessary. I am not sharing this experience for purposes of being braggadocios about this effort, but in an effort to support Secretan’s beliefs on “love before competition.”

Interestingly, Secretan states that “the difference between whether an organization is mediocre or superb is determined by whether all its individual members are mediocre or superb. An inspired organization is simply the “sum of inspired souls” (qtd. in Candy 309). Life and business have become so fast paced for individuals. Leaders should allow people to work together, become more inspired at work, and enjoy their lives to their fullest—even in the workplace. I believe that these are some of the most important leadership concepts that I have studied. I know through my own experience, that these concepts/qualities are what contributed to my success as a leader and more importantly as a server to humanity.

In conclusion, managers need to practice being more human with people and enjoy the fulfillment that comes with win-win relationships that are much more meaningful. Unfortunately, so much of this wisdom comes with maturity or I believe that we would see these concepts being put to practice a lot more. Leaders can “regain higher ground” by letting go of their egos and putting their efforts into people. After-all, shouldn’t management be about people first?
Works Cited


**Instructor’s Comments (Dr. Linda Hefferin):**

Michelle has written an outstanding reaction paper, integrating concepts from the classroom as well as from the workplace to support her opinion of the assigned reading. She cites specific examples to strengthen her point of view. Further, she identifies other readings from the textbook such as the work of Collins, Kouzes, and McGregor as a means of adding credibility to her viewpoint. Finally, notice how Michelle gracefully concludes her paper with a strong reaction point that incorporates all of the above points, again separating this reaction paper from a typical summary paper or lower-level discussion assignment.
SECTION IV: THE RESEARCH PAPER

Many courses require research papers or lengthy reports to encourage individual study and research and to provide practice in writing. Despite the length, it is best to approach this type of assignment just as you would any other: it is a process. Keep in mind that the main objective of English 102 is to prepare you for exactly this kind of assignment, another reason to take it as early in your college education as possible. Also, what follows is a very brief summary of this process; entire books have been written about it, and you would be wise to purchase some kind of text about writing college research papers to assist you throughout your education. Many faculty in the English department use James Lester’s *Writing Research Papers*, but there are several other books which can provide this kind of assistance. This resource is as important as a dictionary, and you should have one throughout your college years and beyond. Finally, consult the library section under “Support for Effective Writing” (pp. 49-50) for additional suggestions about more effective research strategies.

A research paper is primarily a record of intelligent reading in several sources on a particular subject. The challenge of writing such a paper will not be as overwhelming as it may initially seem if you plan it out in advance and understand, again, that there is a process to follow. Trying to write a research paper the day or two before it is due is as close to academic suicide as you can get. Don’t put yourself in a situation where you find out what those consequences are.

The process for writing a research paper consists of the following seven steps although you may find that, at times, you do not proceed in a straightforward, linear manner. The first three steps will come before the last four, but you will find that the last four often occur in a cyclical fashion:

1. Choosing a Subject
2. Identifying Sources and Materials
3. Taking Notes
4. Outlining the Paper
5. Writing the First Draft
6. Revising and Editing the Paper
7. Polishing the Essay for Submission

Let’s look at each of these steps independently. Remember to use the “Worksheet to Avoid Procrastination” on pages 23-24 to help you.

CHOOSING A SUBJECT

Sometimes, depending on the class you are taking, you will be given a very specific topic about which you must write. At other times, you will be given a general subject (e.g., “Write about a meaningful event during the Civil War”), and it is up to you to determine a specific topic from that general subject. At still other times, you may be given almost complete latitude with topic
selection; this is often the case in the English department where faculty are more concerned with the process you follow in writing the paper and less about the specific topic you have selected. Regardless of the specific conditions under which you are writing, bring your own interests to bear on your topic selection as much as possible; your direct interest in the topic will make the project, which may take several weeks to complete, much easier to endure and more rewarding (in terms of a grade) in the long run. For example, the Civil War subject can be taken in many directions: economic, political, sociological, literary. You will write best when you choose an aspect of that subject which you find appealing. When in doubt, run your topic idea past your instructor (in fact, he or she may require you to submit a topic proposal anyway) to see if you are on track. It is much better to find out now, at this early stage, than three weeks into the project.

A warning: the most common mistake made by students in choosing a topic for a research paper is selecting one that is too general. A topic must be very specific to be adequately handled in anything short of a book. Believe it or not, 10-12 pages is really not that much space, so choosing a narrow enough subject will assure that you give it sufficient depth. The reference librarians, in addition to your instructor, can be valuable assets as you work to narrow your topic. Their job is to help students with exactly this kind of task, so take full advantage of them!

**IDENTIFYING SOURCES AND MATERIALS**

The main thing to keep in mind at this stage of your project is to be sure you are identifying legitimate sources. That is to say, be sure you are looking in the right place for source material. All too often, students will spend a few minutes looking for something (in the wrong place) and return to say, “There are no sources in our library on my topic.” In fact, this is rarely the case and, when it is, often you can order sources through interlibrary loan, which is a system through which academic libraries lend materials to one another. Use your common sense to determine where to look. For example, if you are writing a research paper on charter schools, it makes sense to look for that information in various education databases; simply using a search engine such as Google will garner you many more references than you can possibly read or use and, ultimately, wastes your time.

Your initial goal is to develop a working list of 10-12 sources which you think might be useful; keep in mind that you may not use all of them, but it’s a good starting point. These sources should be varied—that is, you should have a balance of books, journal articles, internet sources, and maybe even some field research (such as interviews or surveys—though this depends on the topic and the instructor). Though electronic sources are certainly easier to access than “traditional” ones, faculty often discourage students’ reliance on them. Surely much that is available on the internet has value, but not all of it. You should learn to be cautious and skeptical about these sources. One trick is to pay attention to the tag line—the letters that follow the “.” A .com site, for example, is a commercial one whereas an .edu site is educational in nature and a .gov site is one hosted by the government. Though not all .com sites are “bad,” they are typically trying to sell something, so the motivation behind them is different. Paying attention to these tag lines is an important first step in determining the credibility of your sources. In addition, the college’s library website (www.library.elgin.edu) has some information that will help you evaluate the websites you have located as potential sources.
TAKING NOTES

Once you have a set of sources, you need to start reading them and taking notes. Simply assemble them in some kind of logical order, and start “plugging away.” Of course, you do not want to begin on page one of a 300 page book and start taking notes; you will waste a great deal of effort that way. Instead, take notes based on your preliminary thesis, paying attention to ideas or concepts that not only support your position (if your paper is arguable in nature rather than informational) but offer other perspectives as well. It’s important to demonstrate to readers that you have not ignored the other side of your issue.

As you take notes on these sources, you have a variety of options. Of course, the easiest route is to just copy the information down directly, creating a direct quote. Be very cautious about this and try to resist the temptation as much as possible. Though direct quotes can add an important dimension to your paper by establishing credibility, they can also clutter your paper. When you quote too much, you are actually detracting from your effectiveness as a writer because readers are so busy trying to make sense of what all the “experts” are saying that they lose track of you, the writer. A good rule of thumb here is to allow direct quotes to account for no more than 15-20% of your final paper. Above all else, remember to give credit to the source of each quote; if you do not, it is considered plagiarism, a very serious academic offense (see separate section on Avoiding Plagiarism, pp. 23-24).

In addition to direct quotes, there are other ways to incorporate source material into your paper; the two most common are summary and paraphrase. With both of these options, you will need to give credit to the sources from which you took the information because it is not only the actual words that originate with those sources but the ideas as well. So, even when you write using your own words, as you would do with both summary and paraphrase, you must document accurately. Summary and paraphrase should account for no more than 50% of your paper. Therefore, when combined with direct quotes, about 65-70% of your paper will come from sources, leaving the remaining 30-35% to come from you—making connections, drawing parallels, offering insights, etc. Most students overlook this element and devote far too much space to their sources; remember that you are the guiding force here, and your presence as a writer should be evident throughout your paper. Your sources are certainly important, but they are there for support.

Most writing teachers suggest taking notes on note cards. Though college students often see this method as too much like high school, it actually will help you with the next stage of the process: organization. Note cards are easily moved and re-arranged; in addition, they force you to be concise because of their size. A few suggestions to make taking notes easier:

1. Be sure to put a title on the top of each card. Simply repeating your topic on 50 cards is not going to help, but a title such as “Important Dates” will tell you right away the contents of that card. Again, these cards are intended to facilitate the next stage.
2. Identify the source for the card. Be sure you know where this information is coming from and the page number(s) on which it was found; this will save you time in the long run.

3. Be sure you have some “personal” cards as well. These notes reflect your opinions and thoughts as you make your way through the process and will make the writing process, when you get there, much easier.

**OUTLINING THE PAPER**

It used to be that, when planning any type of paper, students were told they must create an outline first. Those students whose brains functioned in this way were perfectly delighted while others who found outlines too restrictive often wrote them after the paper was due just because they were required. This seems a bit counter-productive and illogical. For writing teachers then, those days are (mostly) gone. Today we recognize that students may organize their essays through a number of methods; writing an outline is only one of them. However, because of the scope of the research paper, writing an outline becomes essential. So, even if you are not an “outline person,” do yourself a favor and create one before writing the first draft. This will allow you to write your research paper in sections; it also will give you a clear, visual indication of whether or not you have adequately developed your topic. Though you do not necessarily need the same number of subpoints within each section of your paper, you also want to be sure your treatment is as balanced as possible.

This outline stage also enables you to avoid another common problem: rushing into writing. Take some time to reconsider your topic, purpose, and the research you have compiled. An outline is a guide to help you write the paper, so be flexible and realize that it can change. But it is a great starting point.

To start writing your outline, here are some steps to follow:

1. Review your notes to find the main subdivisions of your topic. Sort these cards into natural groups (see why note cards are so important?). Name these groups, and use the names for the main divisions in your outline.

2. Within each main division, sort the cards again to identify the subsections for your outline.

3. At this point, your work should begin to look more coherent and to take on some structure. If it does not, try going back and sorting again to see if another general pattern is possible. Remember, there is never only one way to do something in writing.
4. Using a traditional outline form is helpful to see whether you have created the balance noted above:

I.
   A.
      1. a.
      b.
   2.
   B.

Remember to use these labels only in the outline and not in your actual paper. Otherwise, it will look more like an extended outline than a paper.

**WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT**

Just start writing. If you think about it too long, you’re going to feel overwhelmed. So just start writing. But plan to write in “chunks.” Rarely does anyone have the energy to write ten pages in one sitting, but writing two or three does not sound that bad. This is where your outline comes in; start by writing one section at a time. Of course, this may take several days, which is another reason to avoid procrastinating.

As you write, here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Be sure your thesis is clear in your introduction.

2. Don’t worry too much about grammar and mechanics *now*; your goal is to write freely and concentrate on how you can best express your ideas to your readers.

3. Focus on unity and coherence. Keep things together that make sense together. Your outline will help with this. Be sure not to change your subject in the middle of a paragraph, and be sure that everything under one heading in your outline is about the same general topic.

4. Incorporate effective source material for support and document as you go. This is much easier than scrambling at the last minute to relocate sources.

5. Avoid short, choppy sentences as well as long, convoluted ones with more than one idea.

6. If you have not already, now is the time to start thinking about a title.
REVISING AND EDITING THE PAPER

If you have planned your work carefully and followed the suggestions above, you should be left with at least a few days to revise your paper; this is an essential step to the process, so do not mistakenly overlook it. Most of the suggestions made earlier in the “Revising” section apply here as well (see pp. 10-12). Some particular things to keep in mind when revising a research paper:

1. Try to set your paper aside for a day or so and return to it with a fresh eye. Do you prove your point? Is your argument effective? Have you supported your ideas convincingly? Are there other points you could/should make?

2. Check for proper documentation form. Though there is not enough space to cover this fully here, you must document properly. Chances are that your instructor has already told you which documentation system to use; unfortunately, there is no universal one, so as a college student, you have to be flexible and understand that various disciplines prefer different systems. Most liberal arts disciplines, for example, encourage the use of MLA (Modern Language Association) while many social science disciplines prefer APA (American Psychological Association). There are several other methods, but these are the two most common. When in doubt, always ask your instructor which system you should use. There are many websites that will assist you with this; one of the most common is Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL); the web address is www.owlenglish.purdue.edu, and its resources and handouts have proven tremendously valuable for students. ECC’s library homepage (www.library.elgin.edu) also provides documentation resources, including NoodleTools, which is a bibliography creation software to which ECC subscribes.

3. Be sure you have been cautious about using too many quotations. Remember the 15-20% rule. If you think you have too many quotes, “convert” some of them to paraphrases, but remember you must still document accurately.

4. Read the paper aloud to see if it “flows.” Also be sure to have someone read your paper to you. These are not the same.

5. Check for proper spelling and punctuation.
POLISHING THE ESSAY FOR SUBMISSION

Surely the content of your report is more important than the format, but an attractive appearance can go a long way to assure a favorable reception. The following guidelines should assist you as you assemble your final paper for submission; use these unless your instructor provides different directions:

1. The paper should be typed on standard paper and stapled or paper clipped (check which your instructor prefers) in the upper left corner. DO NOT FOLD. Longer papers of ten or more pages should be in a folder or cover of some sort.

2. Use one side of the paper only, double space, and incorporate adequate margins (usually 1” all around)

3. Include the following items in this order:
   - Cover sheet (title of paper, name of author, course number and name, instructor, date). Any research manual will have models for you to follow.
   - Text of paper, with the title repeated at the top of the first page. Beginning with page 2, pages should be numbered in the upper right-hand corner.
   - Any appendices (charts, maps, tables, etc) that do not fit into the main text (you may not have occasion to include these, but if you do, here’s where they would go).
   - Works Cited (MLA) or References (APA) page. This is an alphabetical listing of all the sources used in your paper. Remember that you may have an instructor who prefers a different system of documentation, so check first. Use any standard research manual to help you since there are too many variations to discuss here. Basically, all citations include authors, titles, and publication source, but the order of that information may vary slightly from one system to the next. Most instructors do not expect you to memorize this information, but they do expect you document correctly; essentially, that means becoming one with a research manual and using it properly.

4. Proofread your paper very carefully. Any minor corrections should be made neatly in black ink but only if you detect them at the last minute; otherwise, you should make them on the computer and reprint the page(s).

5. Before you turn in the essay to your instructor, make a copy of the paper for yourself (or be sure you have a copy on a disk or hard drive). Occasionally papers do get lost, so making a copy is insurance that you will get credit for your hard work.
SECTION V: PREPARING FOR AND TAKING ESSAY EXAMS

Throughout your education, you will encounter primarily two types of exams: objective tests and essay tests (or you may have tests that combine the two). Objective tests usually ask for specific pieces of information, and if you know these “facts,” you will likely do well. However, if you have studied different information, you may do poorly even if you possess vast knowledge of the subject. Essay exams, in contrast, give you an opportunity to use the answers to show what you actually know. As a result, you can prepare for an essay exam knowing that the questions will allow you to write about what you have studied.

Essay exam situations can be nerve-wracking for students, but below are some “tried and true” methods that will foster your success:

1. Pay careful attention to the time. If you have six questions to answer in 75 minutes, allow yourself ten minutes for each. When the time is up for one question, stop writing and begin the next one. There will be about 15 minutes at the end to finish the incomplete answers. Six incomplete answers will usually receive more credit than four complete ones.

2. Read through the entire exam through first—before you start. Know what you are facing. Be sure all directions are clear to you. Sometimes, for example, you may be given a choice of questions to which to respond (for example: “Choose three of the following five”). If you don’t catch this, you will waste valuable time responding to five questions when your instructor expected you to respond only to three.

3. Start with the question you know best. There is no rule that says you should start with the first question. Starting with the question you know best will reduce your nervousness and anxiety; your confidence will now be heightened, making it more probable that you will do well with the remainder of the exam.

4. Use your common sense. Generally speaking, a 30-point question requires you to write about three times more than a ten-point question. This is how your instructor thinks anyway, and so should you.

5. Pay attention to key words in the question. Words such as explain and identify differ from words like argue and compare and contrast. These words tell you exactly what your instructor is expecting in your response, so be sure to develop your responses accordingly. Students who do poorly on essay exams often misunderstand what they are being asked; sometimes underlining those key words can help keep you on track.

6. Take a few minutes to outline your responses. This planning time is essential to a well-organized response. To begin writing in the hope that the right answer will eventually turn up wastes precious time and is usually futile.
7. Include as much specific detail as you can. You need to talk the talk here. Use key phrases from readings, refer to specific lectures, incorporate the terminology of the discipline—do whatever will convince your instructor that you know your stuff.

8. Be sure to include an introduction and a conclusion. All too often, instructors are inundated with single-paragraph essay responses that go on for pages. At a minimum, an essay response should include three paragraphs: one each for the introduction, body, and conclusion. Of course, some responses will be longer than others, and so you may have several body paragraphs. This “complete package” will be satisfying to the reader, your instructor.

9. If you run out of time, at least jot down a few ideas or a brief outline for any questions that remain unanswered. This is far better than leaving them blank, which you should NEVER do.

10. Take a few minutes to read over what you have written. Though most instructors are more lenient when it comes to errors in essay exams as opposed to formal papers, you should not hesitate to correct any obvious mistakes you detect; these may include: misspelled words, omitted words, transposed numbers (1963 for 1693, for example), and incomplete sentences. Most faculty would prefer correct responses that may not be perfectly neat over clean responses that are riddled with errors.
SECTION VI: SUPPORT FOR EFFECTIVE WRITING

A common misperception exists among college students when it comes to writing, and that is that writing is (and should be) a solitary activity. Most writing teachers value collaborative learning and incorporate it into their classes. Certainly, at some point, writing must be a solitary activity; after all, you are the one who needs to sit down in front of your computer or with a blank pad of paper and a pen and start writing. But it need not stay that way from beginning to end. Professional writers share their writing with others all the time; you can too. Anyone is a potential resource; read your writing to anyone who will listen to it and ask for feedback. Establish informal peer editing groups with students in your classes and share your drafts with one another. Take your essay to your instructor and ask for some constructive criticism. All of these will help you to become a more effective and productive writer. There are some additional resources to which you may turn for guidance; each is described below.

THE WRITE PLACE

Located in SRC 371, the Write Place is an on-campus writing lab designed to assist all students with any writing assignment. Consultants in the lab, many of whom are faculty as well, are available to assist students in any of the following areas: grammar, punctuation, formatting papers, documentation style, speech outlines, vocabulary, and critical thinking about your own writing and ways to make it stronger. Inside the lab, there are computers, a printer, and various writing handbooks and reference books available for your use.

Though consultants are trained to work with all students at any stage of the writing process, your session will be more effective if you follow these suggestions:

1. Determine what kind of help you need. Saying, “I have a history paper to write, and I need help” is not as effective as saying, “I really need help focusing my thesis in my history paper. I’m writing about the influence of Martin Luther King on the Civil Rights Movement.” With the second example, a consultant will be in a much better position to provide assistance.

2. Come with supporting materials. These may include a course syllabus, an assignment description, perhaps even a textbook. Remember, the consultants can help you with your writing, but they are not experts in all the various content areas that exist on campus. In addition, assignments vary from semester to semester and instructor to instructor, so it’s always best to bring those materials with you.

3. Avoid the last minute rush. You’ve already been warned about the negative consequences of procrastination. Effective writing takes time, and if you feel like you need assistance from the Write Place, it will take even longer. Coming in several days before your paper is due or at the planning stages is a good idea.
4. Remember that this kind of tutoring is designed to guide and assist, not to complete your work for you.

5. The Write Place is not an editing facility. Certainly, a consultant will point out any patterns of error that appear in your writing and offer explanations about how to fix them. But the consultant WILL NOT edit your paper for you; that’s your job.

Though the hours may change slightly from semester to semester, generally the lab is open Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m and on Friday from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The phone number is (847) 214-7198.

**ECC LIBRARY**

The Renner Learning Resource Center (RLRC), located on the second floor of the SRC building, is the college library. You will find many valuable services behind its doors. As a college student, you should get in the habit of frequenting academic libraries like the RLRC; though they provide many of the same services as community libraries, they also specialize in helping students conduct research. Many of the resources at RLRC cannot be found at your local library, so don’t avoid using ECC’s library because you have one in your hometown; they are simply not the same.

The library offers assistance in the following areas as they relate to the writing you will do in your classes: citations and bibliographies, narrowing topics, private research appointments (though these are designed to help you with your research, not your writing), resource materials and style guides, general reference service, MLA and APA handbooks, and the NoodleTools bibliography creation software that can actually create your citations for you. The library staff will do their best to help you with whatever needs you have; take advantage of them!

In addition, you will find the library’s website tremendously helpful; the web address is www.library.elgin.edu. Whether you are on or off campus, you will be able to gain access to a large number of resources, including online databases, newspapers, the library catalog, interlibrary loan information and requests, how to evaluate web pages, help with searching on the web, assistance with MLA and APA documentation, and NoodleTools. The website also contains general information about hours of operation and other frequently asked questions.

Despite all these advantages, there are some things to keep in mind:

1. You are responsible for proofreading your own writing.

2. The library staff does not have access to word processing software other than Microsoft Word, so they cannot help you retrieve documents if they are not saved as either Word files (.doc) or rich text format files (.rtf). Many students actually think they are using Word at
home when in fact they are using Microsoft Works. Check into this before you become overly frustrated because you cannot access a file on campus.

3. You are responsible for making your own copies.

4. The librarians do not have spare disks. When you come to work in the library, make sure you have your own disk or jump drive to save what you have written. Sometimes, if you are lucky, they may have an extra one lying around, but do not count on it. Instead, come prepared with your own.

WEB RESOURCES

Over the last ten years or so, the internet has made writing and researching much easier for students. Certainly the actual writing remains your responsibility, but the ease with which you can gain access to materials borders on astounding for those of us who had to do it the old-fashioned way (i.e., typewriters!). Below is a categorized list of these resources, certainly not an exhaustive list, but a good starting point nonetheless.

• Search engines: Some of the best include Google, AltaVista, HotBot, and Yahoo; the college’s library provides links to each one on its webpage (www.library.elgin.edu). Also check out the guides developed by the library to help you evaluate web pages (found on the library’s website); not everything on the web is equally valuable, and the suggestions made are critical to assure yourself that you are using legitimate sources.
• Dictionary.com: a great place to go if you do not have access to an actual dictionary.
• General writing assistance:
  1. Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (www.owl.english.purdue.edu) includes a wide array of resources regarding all aspects of writing: organization, drafting, grammar and mechanics, documentation. There are also several handouts that you can print out for future reference. This is the one many writing teachers use in their classes.
  2. The Nuts and Bolts Guide to Writing (www.nutsandboltsguide.com) provides straightforward, practical advice about most aspects of writing.
  3. Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr. (an online version of the classic book; web address is www.bartleby.com/141/).
  4. Paradigm: Online Writing Assistant (web address is www.powa.org) is another helpful and user friendly resource covering most aspects of writing.
• Documentation: A number of resources are available here, including the library’s website, which has links to several styles as well as access to NoodleTools (which will help you gener-
• Citations: Citation Styles Online (www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/citex.html), the Modern Language Association (www.mla.org), and the American Psychological Association (www.apa.org).
• Grammar and mechanics:
  1. Purdue’s OWL (address above) is a great resource; it includes several handouts to print as well as Powerpoint presentations to view.
  2. Guide to Grammar and Writing (www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/) includes a number of resources, including interactive quizzes and information pertaining specifically to English as a Second Language (ESL) students.