



VILLANOVA  
UNIVERSITY

*Writing Center*

# How to Write a College Paper



## **A Guide from the Villanova Writing Center**

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## **Welcome to the Writing Center!**

The Villanova Writing Center is located on the second floor of Old Falvey Hall, room 202. Writing center tutors will work with you one-on-one for a 50-minute session at whatever point in the writing process you may be. To set up an appointment with the Villanova Writing Center, students can call the Writing Center main desk at 610-519-4604 or simply walk in any time during our hours of operation.



### **Hours:**

**Monday-Thursday:** 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

**Friday:** 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

**Sundays:** 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Writing Center Staff suggests that you make appointments well in advance, especially during midterms and finals. Tutoring sessions often fill up quickly! Also, look for our 'Midnight Madness' events during midterms and finals when we extend our normal hours.

**Website:** <http://www.villanova.edu/artsci/vcle/writingcenter/>

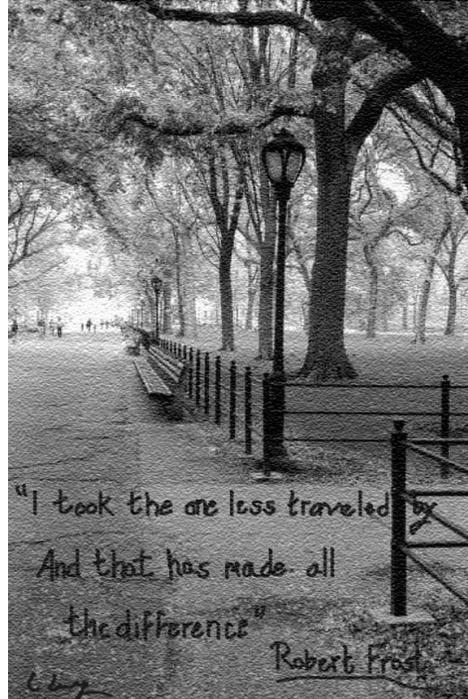
## **Writing Center Mission Statement**

Writing is one of the most difficult tasks for a college student, whether you're an incoming freshman or a graduate student. Many of the tutors are your peers and classmates, responsible for handing in the very same paper assignments as you. Others are professional writing tutors, bringing their real world experience into the center to assist you with anything from job applications to personal statements. Still others are graduate students, making their talents and encouragement available to you. Regardless of which category we fall into, we all understand how demanding the writing process is, and we are confident that we can lend a hand with yours. We're here six days a week, ready and willing to serve your writing needs. We encourage visits at any stage. You don't need to have a formal draft with you; feel free to bring a flash drive and work on our computers. You can also bring your own laptop. We do ask that you bring in your assignment to your tutorial, and engage with us as we delve into the writing process for 50 minutes of your valuable time. Although we can't guarantee an "A" on every paper, we can guarantee you will come away more confident with your writing process, and more comfortable applying your skills to future writing assignments at Villanova and out in the world.

Stephen North puts it best when he says the main goal of a Writing Center is to "produce better writers, not better texts." To do so, we try very hard to provide the most comfortable and relaxed atmosphere to work on your writing process. We're not all English Majors; we come from a variety of majors, disciplines, and professions. We're excited to invite all members of the Villanova community to use the Writing Center as a valuable and free resource. We, the tutors, have worked very hard and trained for an entire semester to be sympathetic, non-judgmental, and supportive listeners for your texts and writing concerns. Our flexible, non-directive approach will enable you to take control of your session and take responsibility for your paper. We are not responsible for grading your papers, nor will we pass judgment on a professor's grade.

We in the Writing Center operate under Villanova's academic integrity policy. Our tutorials are student-centered and require a collaborative effort; it takes two people to make a session successful. Contrary to popular misconception, the Writing Center is not a proofreading service or a fix-it shop. If you're concerned with grammar, we can teach you ways to overcome your grammar issues. Most importantly, it is up to you to give us a call (610-519-4604) or stop in to schedule your appointment. Be sure to make your appointment in advance. We see over 5,000 appointments a year and would love you to be one of them! There is an eager and energetic group of dedicated writers in Old Falvey waiting to work with you!

## Getting Started



Everyone finds it challenging to conceive of the basic argument for a paper. We slump before our computer, watching the cursor blink and praying that somehow the paper will decide to spontaneously write itself. Unfortunately, paper topics do not just appear. Only by laying the groundwork with careful thought and analysis can we expect to discover the best path to take in our writing. Provided below are some suggestions for helping you get started on the road to a successful essay.

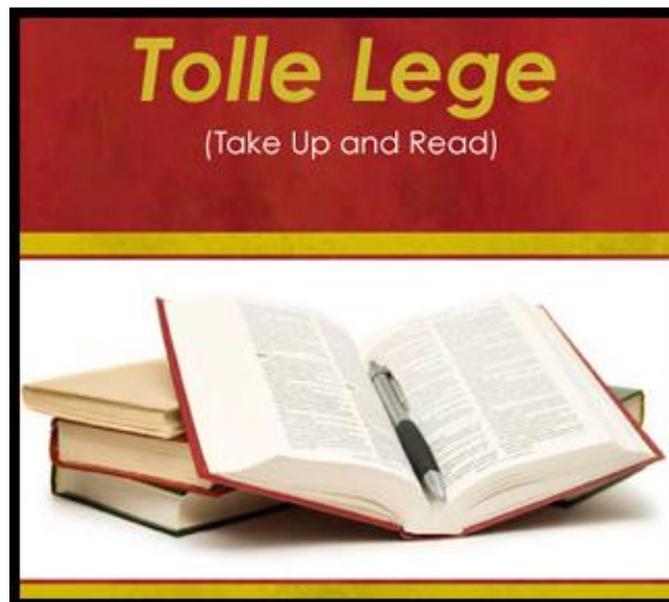
### Reading Towards Writing

When writing a paper, it is important to first understand the information that you are reading about. Below is a list of suggestions for getting the most out of what you read.

- **Read (or at least skim) all parts of the reading.** Sometimes the cover, title, preface, introduction, illustrations, appendices, epilogue, footnotes and "about the author" sections can provide you with valuable information.
- **Identify the genre of the reading.** What kind of a reading is it? (Journal article? Mass media? Novel? Textbook?) Why was it written? Who does the author assume is going to read this work? (Books about politics written for an audience of political scientists, for example, might be very different from books about politics written for the general public, for historians, or for sociologists.)
- **Consider the author.** What do you know or what can you learn about this person? Why did he or she write the book? What sources of information and/or methods did he or she use to gather the information presented in the book?
- **Consider why your instructor assigned the reading.** How does it fit in with other readings, class discussions, major course themes, or the purpose of the class?
- **Get out a calendar and plan your reading.** Plot the number of days or hours that it may take you to complete the reading. Be realistic. It may help to read one chapter of the reading and then revise your calendar—some readings take longer than others of a similar length.
- **As you read, record your reactions and questions.** Any reaction or question is valid, from the specific ("What's that word mean?") to the general ("What's her point?"). Write them down now so that you'll remember them later. These reactions and questions can serve as material for class discussion, or they can be the jumping off point for brainstorming a paper.
- **Read with a friend.** Find someone else who is reading the same book. Set reading goals together and plan to share your reactions to sections of the reading before class, after class, over e-mail, and so on.

- **Visit your instructor during office hours to discuss the reading.** Your instructor will set aside hours when he or she will be available to meet with students. This is a great time to talk about the reading, ask questions, share your reactions, and get to know your instructor. You can do this with a friend or in a small group as well.
- **Think about what is missing in the reading.** Issues, events or ideas that are missing, left out, avoided, or not discussed/addressed in the book might be important. Thinking about these omissions can give you a critical perspective on the reading by showing you what the author (consciously or unconsciously) doesn't want to deal with.
- **If you know you will have to answer a particular question in response to the reading, read with that question in mind.** Sometimes faculty will give you essay questions in advance. As you read the text, refer back to those questions and think about your emerging answers to them.

*(From the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center Handout "Reading Towards Writing" which can be found at <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/readingwriting.html>>)*



### **Reading the Assignment**

A frequently overlooked, though undoubtedly essential, aspect of the writing process is the complete understanding of the task at hand. This may seem simple enough at first glance, but college writing prompts are rarely so straightforward, and an outstanding response will certainly require an investigation of some depth. Assignments usually ask you to demonstrate not only that you have immersed yourself in the course material, but that you've done some thinking on your own that goes beyond the parameters of class discussion. Fortunately, if you've put the time into getting to know the material, then you've almost certainly begun to think independently. Often the central idea of a question hinges on a few important words within it. Try to isolate those words- perhaps by underlining- and be sure not to lose focus of them as you brainstorm and write. This will go a long way in simplifying your task. If, having read the assignment carefully, you are still confused by it, don't just stare at the page and get frustrated. Ask your professor for some clarification. Having written the assignment, your professor will surely be able to explain any misunderstandings, and may even be willing to suggest some sample responses or prospective topics. Knowing the expectations of an assignment can help when you are feeling puzzled. You may want to consult your professor even if you think you have a good subject. A good idea can be taken too far if it moves outside the scope of the question. Being aware of what your professor considers the boundaries of the assignment will help keep your paper grounded and your focus sharp. It is helpful to approach your professor from the very first writing assignment. Remember, in most cases you will only have this professor once, and a single semester is a short amount of time to get to know the caliber of writing your particular instructor wishes to see. Head on over to office hours and the Writing Center early in the semester and allow yourself ample time to find your writing stride.



### Finding a Topic

With your professor's guidance assuring you are on the right track, you are now ready to narrow down your ideas. Here are some tips for coming up with topics for your paper.

- Brainstorming- You probably already know your personal style of brainstorming, but every once in a while it helps to try a new method. Some popular models include:
  - **Freewriting** – Freewriting can help alleviate the pressure to relay perfect, complete ideas from your brain to the paper, and it can free your thoughts to pursue paths and connections between ideas that may not have been immediately observable to you. Think of freewriting as a stream of consciousness, an unmediated path from your mind to the paper or screen: the act might force out some thoughts you are hesitating to articulate or help you visualize the methods by which you can reach conclusions.
  - **Listing**– Like freewriting, listing helps to create an unmediated avenue from your brain to the paper, but instead of spinning an uninterrupted thread of ideas, it encourages you to pluck out individual thoughts, words, or questions as they come. Listing might be a more natural form of brainstorming for those who think sequentially or find comfort in organization.
  - **Asking Questions** – THE BIG SIX (**Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How**) are the six fundamental questions journalists ask as they research and craft news stories. By asking yourself [and attempting to answer] the Big Six questions about your topic or assignment, you might discover a potential thesis or organizational strategy. You might also pursue other types of questions, such as comparisons/contrasts, definitions, and relationships to deduce what sort of questions your topic generates AND which questions you feel you can answer.
    - After you have tried out one or more brainstorming techniques, try to hone in on the ideas or notions that you may have circled around multiple times – or identify the trains of thought that inspired the most active storms. For more information on these techniques, visit the Villanova Writing Center website at <http://www.villanova.edu/artsci/assets/documents/vcle/writingcenter/handouts/Brainstorming.pdf>

## Know Your Audience

*"Write to express, not impress. That admonition reminds students to write with the reader in mind as they strive for CLARITY."*  
~Dr. Ellen Bonds

What you write, or at least the way you write it, is bound to be impacted by the identity of your audience. Once you've decided on an idea, take a minute to reflect- consider who will be reading your paper and whether they are likely to be persuaded by the argument you will be making. If you don't have a particular intended audience in mind, or if you say that your essay is for "everybody" or "society" or "people interested in this topic," your writing will tend to be as general as your intention. If you see yourself as addressing a real reader, you will have a much clearer understanding of your purpose, and your reader will feel more involved. The worst thing you can do when writing an argumentative essay is to insult your audience. If you do, you can be sure they won't even consider the merits of your case. Be careful not to take such a strident stance that you risk alienating your readers; stick to the facts and don't let your passion get the best of you. If you are writing to a specific person or group whose feelings you are familiar with, you can tailor your paper to them by playing to those tendencies. Identifying your audience can also help dictate the appropriate tone for your paper. If your audience is of a higher academic caliber, a more formal tone would be appropriate. If you know your audience will consist of classmates, perhaps a less elevated lexicon would be better. Make sure to explain your points in a way that will be accessible to your audience. If you have trouble identifying your audience, ask your professor who he or she has in mind.

## Avoiding Common Errors in Logic and Reasoning

When you break down the parts of a paper into thesis, premises, and evidence, constructing an argument sounds deceptively easy. In practice, as you know, it can sometimes be difficult to judge whether you have communicated a logical defense of your ideas. Once you have been working on an essay for a while, you can get so caught up in the details that it becomes impossible to see the arguments as a whole or recognize gaps in your reasoning. One strategy you can use to gain perspective on a paper is to show it to a friend and ask her to identify where the structure of your argument or your ideas are unclear. You can also use the list below to guard against some common mistakes.

- **Unstated or invalid assumptions.** An assumption is a statement or idea that you accept as true without proof or demonstration. Assumptions should not be used at all in papers for the sole reason that they cannot be defended by logical means.
- **Prejudices or Stereotypes.** Make sure that you are not prejudiced and that you haven't stereotyped anyone in your paper. The best way to ensure against these is to have a friend or Writing Center tutor read your paper. If the author you are citing is prejudiced, make sure to state that the prejudice is of the author and is not yours.
- **Appealing to the Emotions.** When students write papers to defend an opinion or a particularly controversial thesis, they sometimes inappropriately attempt to persuade their reader by appealing to their emotions. This tactic is not successful because it does not provide the concrete facts that are necessary in an argument.

*(Adapted from Princeton University Writing center Handout "Avoiding Common Errors in Logic and Reasoning"*  
[http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing\\_Center/WCWritingResources.htm](http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing_Center/WCWritingResources.htm))

## Nuts and Bolts: Writing the Paper

Now that you have read your required reading, understood the assignment, and found a suitable topic, you are prepared to move on and begin to write the paper.



### Developing a Thesis

*“Yogi Berra is quoted as saying: ‘If you don’t know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else.’ I would edit this to say that when writing a paper, if you don’t know where you are going with your thesis, then you will wind up somewhere else. Use an outline, mind map, etc., but know how you want to organize your key points in your thesis.” ~Dr. Nancy Kelley*

The thesis is the lifeblood of the piece, the idea running through the paper’s veins, infusing it with life. Readers are used to finding thesis statements contained in the first paragraph. Since it is the central idea of your paper, it should be easily recognizable to your reader. It is not necessary for your thesis to be contained within a single sentence. Multiple sentence theses may be more fitting in certain cases. Crafting the perfect thesis takes time and several revisions. Tutors at the Writing Center are happy to work with students to develop this vital element of your paper.

### Keep in mind that your thesis statement should:

- **Be original.** Remember that a thesis is the main idea of YOUR paper, so your main argument needs to be your own. It is acceptable to use ideas presented in class, but you must be sure that your thesis builds upon those ideas and brings the argument to a higher level.
- **Make an argument.** A thesis is an *interpretation* of a subject, not the subject itself. If your thesis is something that is generally agreed upon or accepted as fact then there is no reason to try to persuade people. A good debatable thesis does not simply summarize, but *makes an argument*.
- **Be specific.** You can help ground your thesis in defensible facts by focusing on specific facets of your subject. Stay away from grand universal statements, cliché’s and abstract ideas. For example, “Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet are classic figures” should be replaced by something like “Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet each embody the tragic figure as the love that distinguishes their characters also leads to their downfall.”
- **NEVER** become a list or a question. It is solely the goal and direction of your paper.
- **For more tips** visit the Villanova Writing Center 30 minute workshop on devising a debatable thesis: <http://www.villanova.edu/artsci/assets/documents/vcle/writingcenter/handouts/TheDebatableThesis.pdf>

## Developing an Argument

The main point of an academic essay is persuasion. The structure of your argument and the strength of your supporting details, therefore, play a vital role in the persuasiveness of your paper. Listed below are a few ways to begin to create your argument.

- **Why Do You Believe Your Thesis?** Another way to think about how to develop an argument is to remember what made you believe or consider your central idea in the first place. Since you thought it was a sufficiently reasonable or interesting claim to consider, you probably had a reason for thinking so. If that reason was compelling enough for you, it might also be compelling enough for your reader. This initial observation is a good place to begin thinking about a thesis and an argument. If, after you go back and review the material, you decide that there are a sufficient number of related themes, details, and techniques, you are on your way toward being able to make an argument.
- **Arguments and Analysis.** Once you have a general sense of a potential argument, you will go through a procedure similar to the one that produced your thesis in the first place. You need to express as precisely as you can what the argument is, and then refine it. You should think about the various steps of the defense you are going to make. Perhaps the support for the thesis is complex and has to be developed in pieces. If you are unsure how to proceed, think about what you've read and work up a tentative formulation of an argument. If you are writing a research paper, you can continue your research and read material that might help you to decide whether you are right. Your reading may suggest new arguments or refinements of your original one. For each step in the defense of your argument, you will need to provide sufficient *evidence* and an *analysis* of that evidence. What kind of evidence you provide will depend, of course, on the type of paper you are writing—a sociology paper might require research data; a history paper might present material from primary documents; an art history paper might include a careful interpretation of several paintings. But no matter what evidence you use to support your argument, you also need to analyze the evidence—that is, explain clearly to your readers exactly how the evidence you have offered supports your argument. If you merely string together a series of assertions or facts, expecting that your reader will be able to see the connection to your central point, you are sidestepping your responsibility to answer the question of why your thesis is valid or plausible.
- **Counter-Arguments.** One way to strengthen your argument and show that you have a deep understanding of the issue you are discussing is to anticipate and address counterarguments or objections. By considering what someone who disagrees with your position might have to say about your argument, you show that you have thought things through, and you dispose of some of the reasons your audience might have for not accepting your argument. Once you have thought up some counterarguments, consider how you will respond to them—will you concede that your opponent has a point but explain why your audience should nonetheless accept your argument? Will you reject the counterargument and explain why it is mistaken? Either way, you will want to leave your reader with a sense that your argument is stronger than opposing arguments. When you are summarizing opposing arguments, be charitable. Present each argument fairly and objectively, rather than trying to make it look foolish. You want to show that you have seriously considered the many sides of the issue and that you are not simply attacking or caricaturing your opponents. It is usually better to consider one or two serious counterarguments in some depth, rather than to give a long but superficial list of many different counterarguments and replies.

*From the Princeton University Writing Center handout 'Developing an Argument'*

[http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing\\_Center/Handouts/pdfs/DevelopingAnArgument.pdf](http://web.princeton.edu/sites/writing/Writing_Center/Handouts/pdfs/DevelopingAnArgument.pdf) and the UNC Writing Center handout "Arguments" <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>

# Mastering Introductions



And suddenly there it was, the perfect opening for Tommy's novel, lying at the bottom of his bowl of Alphabet Soup.

Many students find it difficult to begin writing their papers. They have a thesis statement and they have a logical outline but they cannot write the first few sentences of their paper. What makes a good opening? You can start with specific facts and information, a keynote quotation, a question, an anecdote, or an image. But whatever opening you choose, it should be directly related to your focus. A snappy quotation that doesn't help establish the context of the essay or that does not contribute to the argument at hand will only mislead readers. Be as direct and specific as possible. This means you should avoid two types of openings:

- The "History of the World" opening, which aims to establish a context for the essay by getting a long running start: "Ever since the dawn of civilized life, societies have struggled to reconcile the need for change with the need for order." What are we talking about here, political revolution or a new brand of soft drink? Get to it.
- The "Funnel" opening, which starts with something broad and general and 'funnels' its way down to a specific topic. If your essay is an argument about state-mandated prayer in public schools, don't start by generalizing about religion; start with the specific topic.
- Keep in mind that clear, direct openings do not present themselves ready-made. Just like your thesis, a good opening must be revisited and revised as many times as necessary. After delving further into your argument, you may find that certain elements of your original idea have been molded in the process of contemplating and writing. It is essential to modify your introduction accordingly, updating it as your paper develops.

*Taken in part from the Harvard University Writing Center handout "Beginning the Academic Essay"*  
<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Begin.html>

## Conclusions: The Big Bang?

Besides introductions, the most difficult task for a writer tends to be the conclusion. According to Villanova Writing Center Director Professor Mary Beth Simmons, it is best to "say what you have to say and then get off the page." This, like most things involved in the writing process, is easier said than done. One may be tempted to provide a summary of the argument just presented and then end with a big bang. Yet many of the most well written conclusions do not end with any climactic phrase at all. Below are a few useful strategies for writing an effective conclusion which omit the tempting big bang ending.

- Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers from their own lives into the "place" of your analysis, your conclusion can provide a bridge to help your readers make the transition back to their daily lives. Such a conclusion will help them see why all your analysis and information should matter to them after they put the paper down.

- Your conclusion is your chance to have the last word on the subject. The conclusion allows you to have the final say on the issues you have raised in your paper, to summarize your thoughts, to demonstrate the importance of your ideas, and to propel your reader to a new view of the subject. It is also your opportunity to make a good final impression and to end on a positive note.
- Go beyond the confines of the assignment. The conclusion pushes beyond the boundaries of the prompt and allows you to consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings.
- Make your readers glad they read your paper. Your conclusion gives your reader something to take away that will help them see things differently or appreciate your topic in personally relevant ways. It can suggest broader implications that will not only interest your reader, but also enrich your reader's life in some way. It is your gift to the reader.
- Play the "So What" Game. If you're stuck and feel like your conclusion isn't saying anything new or interesting, ask a friend to read it with you. Whenever you make a statement from your conclusion, ask the friend to say, "So what?" or "Why should anybody care?" Then ponder that question and answer it.
- Synthesize, don't summarize: Include a brief summary of the paper's main points, but don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.

#### Some poor conclusion ideas are:

- The Unnecessary, lengthy summary
- The empty cliché: "so ends the analysis of myself and the question of who am I has been answered in brief form."
- The trite truism: "and in conclusion, let me say..."
- The waste basket ending: do not try to fit in the final paragraph all the things you did not have room for in the body of the paper.

*Taken from the UNC Writing Center handout "Conclusions"*  
<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/conclusions.html>

## Revisions and Recommendations

Now that you have completed the initial draft of your paper, you are ready to begin revising it. We suggest that you take a few days, or hours if you are pinched for time, away from your paper before you begin the revision process. You may also ask a friend, professor, or Writing Center tutor to read your initial draft and make comments to direct you in revisions and editing. Below are a few suggestions for revision:

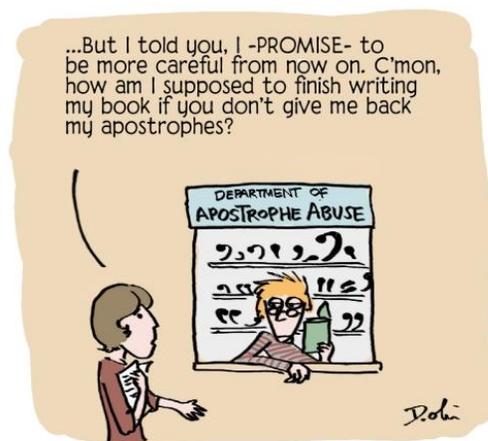
- Have a hard copy of your paper. It is easier for the eye to pick out editing concerns when your copy is in paper form.
- DO NOT RELY ON MICROSOFT WORD SPELL-CHECK OR THESAURUS. Although spell-check can catch many spelling errors, it cannot identify every incorrect word. For example, if you type the sentence "The patience prognosis was good," spell-check cannot tell you this is the wrong form of the word. In this context, you are looking for "patient's." Similarly, the 'right click thesaurus' does not always provide a reliable replacement word. Using a word from the right-click list can stick out as a red flag that you do not know the exact connotations of that word. It is best to use a word you are familiar with, even if it is not the most sophisticated.
- Read aloud. Reading your paper aloud helps you to hear the sentence level concerns of your paper as well as the concerns regarding the organization of your prose and argument.
- Less is more. The basic rule for strong academic writing is to say everything relevant in as few words as possible. These suggestions can help make your writing more concise:
  - Write what you mean—nothing more and nothing less.
  - Trust and respect yourself as a writer enough to not overstate what you mean.
  - Study sentences in your first draft to see what you can delete without losing meaning.
  - Read each paragraph aloud. Be sure that all sentences support the topic sentence.
  - Keep concrete, specific examples. Cut out extra words, empty phrases, weak qualifiers, negative constructions, and unnecessary "to be" verbs.

- Also, watch for sentences and clauses beginning with *it is*, *this is*, and *there are*.
- Check for overall unity and clarity. As previously mentioned, the shape of your argument can change through every stage of the writing process. Use your revision time to make sure your piece retains coherence from the first paragraph to the last. Answering the following questions can help:
  - What is the main point of your paper?
  - Does the introduction clearly introduce the point?
  - Is there a thesis statement near the beginning (in the first or second paragraph) that clearly and concisely asserts the main point?
  - Does each paragraph help to advance your main line of thought? Does any paragraph digress from that line of thought? Does each paragraph fit in with the other paragraphs surrounding it?
  - Is your tone—your attitude toward the subject—consistent? (If not, you may want to reexamine your attitude toward the topic.)
  - Does the conclusion show that the essay has reached its goal?

*Taken from the BYU Writing Center handout "Revision"*

<http://english2.byu.edu/writingcenter/handouts/revision/revision.htm> and from George Mason University Writing Center handout "Revising and Editing for Conciseness" < <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/resources-template.php?id=16>>

## Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Grammar and Punctuation



INKYGIRL.COM: Daily Diversions For Writers  
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Everyone has that one grammar rule they simply cannot remember no matter how many times he or she sees it corrected on a paper. Perhaps in these cases, those marks scrawled in red pen over papers handed back just don't stick. Allow us to introduce you to Grammar Girl. Grammar Girl, also known as Mignon Fogarty, presents writers with "quick and dirty tips" to help remember how to use correct grammar in these sticky situations. Her witty remarks often make it easy to remember these tips. Below are some of the most frequent grammar mistakes and some quick and dirty avoidance maneuvers. You can find these tips and more on Grammar Girl's website: <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/comma-splICE.aspx>.

- **Comma Calamities:** Commas are tricky because there are so many different ways you can use them, but one of the most common ways to use commas is to separate two main clauses that are connected by a coordinating conjunction. That just means that when you join two things that could be sentences on their own with a word such as "and," "but," or "or," you need a comma before the conjunction: **Squiggly ran to the forest, and Aardvark chased the peeves.** Squiggly ran to the forest is a complete sentence, and Aardvark chased the peeves is also a complete sentence. To join them with a comma,

you need the word “and” or some other coordinating conjunction. If you just put a comma between them, that's an error called a comma splice or a comma fault: **Squiggly ran to the forest, Aardvark chased the peeves. (wrong)** It's easy to see in that example why the error is called a comma splice: it's because the comma is used to splice together two complete sentences when that isn't the function of a comma. The good news is that it's easy to fix a comma splice once you're aware of the problem. Because the two clauses are complete sentences, you can treat them that way and use a period where you had a comma.

- **Apostrophe Abuse.** This topic also comes up in the news when there's a writer's strike or teachers strike. Does the strike belong to the writers or teachers, or are the words *writers* and *teachers* adjectives that tell people what kind of strike is happening? If the words are possessive, we need an apostrophe, but if they're adjectives, we don't need an apostrophe. It's a lot easier to see the difference when you're dealing with singular words. For example, if you're talking about green bean casserole, *green* is an adjective that tells people what kind of beans you use. But if Mr. Green has an award-winning bean at the state fair, you'd talk about *Green's bean*, with an apostrophe. When the phrase includes a plural, as with *writers strike*, it can be a tougher call. I believe it's pretty clear that the writers don't own the strike, and that the word *writers* is there to tell us more about what kind of strike it is. So I'd leave out the apostrophe. On the other hand, I'd include the apostrophe in *homeowners' association*, at least when the homeowners actually own or control the association that manages their property.
- **Who or Whom?** First, to know whether to use *who* or *whom*, we need to talk about the difference between subjects and objects because you use *who* when you are referring to the subject of a clause and *whom* when you are referring to the object of a clause. I know: subject and object sound pretty abstract, but it's easy. If we think about people, the subject of the sentence is the person doing something, and the object of the sentence is having something done to them. If I step on Squiggly, then I am the subject and Squiggly is the object. Still having a hard time remembering? Here's my favorite mnemonic: If I say, "I love you," you are the object of my affection, and *you* is also the object of the sentence (because I am loving you, making me the subject and you the object). How's that? I love you. You are the object of my affection and my sentence. It's like a Valentine's Day card and grammar mnemonic all rolled into one.
- **Further or Farther?** The quick and dirty tip is to use “farther” for physical distance and “further” for metaphorical, or figurative, distance. It's easy to remember because “farther” has the word “far” in it, and “far” obviously relates to physical distance.
- **Ending a Sentence with a Preposition.** Just as Harry Potter was unfairly labeled “undesirable number one” in the latest J.K. Rowling book, ending a sentence with a preposition is often unfairly labeled “undesirable grammar construction number one” by people who were taught that prepositions have a proper place in the world, and it's not at the end of a sentence. A preposition is a word that creates a relationship between other words. It's been said that prepositions often deal with space and time (1), which always makes me think of *Star Trek*. For example, the prepositions *above*, *by*, and *over* all say something about a position in space; the prepositions *before*, *after*, and *since* all say something about time. Here's an example of a sentence that can end with a preposition: *What did you step on?* A key point, you might say the Quick and Dirty Tip, is that the sentence doesn't work if you leave off the preposition. You can't say, “What did you step?” You need to say, “What did you step on?” to make a grammatical sentence. I can hear some of you gnashing your teeth right now, while you think, “What about saying, 'On what did you step?’” But really, have you ever heard anyone talk that way? I've read long, contorted arguments from noted grammarians about why it's OK to end sentences with prepositions when the preposition isn't extraneous (1), but the driving point still seems to be, “Nobody in their right mind talks this way.” Yes, you could say, “On what did you step?” but not even grammarians think you should.
- **Suspicious Semi-colons.** Semicolons separate things. Most commonly, they separate two main clauses that are closely related to each other but that could stand on their own as sentences if you wanted them to. Here's an example: "It was below zero; Squiggly wondered if he would freeze to death." The two parts of that long sentence that are separated by a semicolon could be sentences on their own if you put a period between them: It was below zero. Squiggly wondered if he would freeze to death.

## Polishing your Prose

- **Review your topic sentences.** As mentioned before, a writer must be responsible for guiding her readers through the paper. When polishing your final product, re-read your transitions and topic sentences of each paragraph. If you took just the claim of each paragraph and put them together, these sentences should add up to a thorough, relevant, well-divided

course of argument. Try doing this, then ask yourself: 1) if a step is missing from your argument; 2) if any 2 paragraphs make identical arguments; 3) if any paragraphs are irrelevant.

○ Taken from Dr. Lauren Shohet's *Guidelines for Papers*

- **Passive Voice.** In the passive voice, the phrasing of a sentence excludes the active subject and replaces it with the object of the sentence's action. As a result, the phrase becomes wordy and clunky. In most cases, avoiding the passive voice results in clearer, more concise sentences. This is a common mistake and an easy one to spot and fix once you train your eye to do so. Here are some examples of eliminating the passive voice:

- "The image is used to show that Othello believes in love."
  - **Step 1:** remove the word 'is'
  - **Step 2:** remove the other words which were necessary with 'is'
  - **Step 3:** rewrite the sentence as "The image **shows** that Othello believes in love."
- "Scientist X is of the opinion that the research is valid."
  - **Step 1:** remove the word 'is'
  - **Step 2:** remove the other words which were necessary with 'is'
  - **Step 3:** rewrite the sentence as "Scientist X **validates** the research."

## The Fine Line Between Plagiarism and Citation

*"Do your own writing. When you walk down the aisle graduation day you'll hold your head high knowing that everything you handed in was your own work." ~Dr. Joanna Scholz*

### Villanova's Academic Integrity Policy regarding Plagiarism

#### Statement of Purpose

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Academic integrity is vital to any university community for many reasons. Students receive credit for doing assignments because they are supposed to learn from those assignments, and the vast majority do so honestly. Anyone who hands in work that is not his or her own, or who cheats on a test, or plagiarizes a paper, is not learning, is receiving credit dishonestly and is, in effect, stealing from other students. As a consequence, it is crucial that students do their own work. Students who use someone else's work or ideas without saying so, or who otherwise perform dishonestly in a course, are cheating. In effect, they are lying. Such dishonesty, moreover, threatens the integrity not only of the individual student, but also of the university community as a whole.

Academic integrity lies at the heart of the values expressed in the University's mission statement and inspired by the spirit of Saint Augustine. When one comes to Villanova, one joins an academic community founded on the search for knowledge in an atmosphere of cooperation and trust. The intellectual health of the community depends on this trust and draws nourishment from the integrity and mutual respect of each of its members.

#### Code of Academic Integrity

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The following are some rules and examples regarding academic dishonesty. Since academic dishonesty takes place whenever anyone undermines the academic integrity of the institution or attempts to gain an unfair advantage over others, this list is not and cannot be exhaustive. Academic integrity is not simply a matter of conforming to certain rules; it must be understood in terms of the broader academic purposes of a Villanova education.

#### A. Cheating:

**While taking a test or examination, students shall rely on their own mastery of the subject and not attempt to receive help in any way not explicitly approved by the instructor; for example, students shall not try to use notes, study aids, or another's work.**

Such cheating includes trying to give or obtain information about a test when the instructor states that it is to be confidential. It also includes trying to take someone else's exam, or trying to have someone else take one's own exam.

**B. Fabrication:**

**Students shall not falsify, invent, or use in a deliberately misleading way any information, data, or citations in any assignment.**

This includes making up or changing data or results, or relying on someone else's results, in an experiment or lab assignment. It also includes citing sources that one has not actually used or consulted.

**C. Assisting in or contributing to academic dishonesty:**

**Students shall not help or attempt to help others to commit an act of academic dishonesty.**

This includes situations in which one student copies from or uses another student's work; in such situations, both students are likely to be penalized equally severely. (If the assisting student is not enrolled in the particular course, the student's Dean will formulate a suitable and equivalent penalty.) Students are responsible for ensuring that their work is not used improperly by others. This does not include team projects where students are told by their instructor to work together.

**D. Plagiarism:**

**Students shall not rely on or use someone else's words, ideas, data, or arguments without clearly acknowledging the source and extent of the reliance or use.**

The most common way to acknowledge this reliance or indebtedness is to use footnotes or other documentation. It is the students' responsibility to show clearly when and where they are relying on others - partly because others may wish to learn from the same sources from which the original writer learned. Since this indebtedness may be of many kinds, some definitions and examples of plagiarism are listed below.

- Using someone else's words without acknowledgment. If you use someone else's words, not only must you give the source, but you must also put them within quotation marks or use some other appropriate means of indicating that the words are not your own. This includes spoken words and written words, and mathematical equations, whether or not they have been formally published.
- Using someone else's ideas, data, or argument without acknowledgment, even if the words are your own. If you use someone else's examples, train of thought, or experimental results, you must acknowledge that use. Paraphrasing, summarizing, or rearranging someone else's words, ideas, or results does not alter your indebtedness.
- Acknowledging someone else in a way that will lead a reader to think your indebtedness is less than it actually was. For example, if you take a whole paragraph worth of ideas from a source, and include as your final sentence a quotation from that source, you must indicate that your indebtedness includes more than just the quotation. If you simply put a page number after the quotation, you will lead the reader to think that only the quotation comes from the source. Instead, make clear that you have used more than the quotation.

The examples above constitute plagiarism regardless of who or what the source is. The words or ideas of a roommate or of an encyclopedia, or notes from another class, require acknowledgment just as much as the words or ideas of a scholarly book do. Introductions and notes to books also require acknowledgment.

The examples above constitute plagiarism even in cases where the student uses material accidentally or unintentionally. So, for example, a paper can be plagiarized even if you have forgotten that you used a certain source, or even if you have included material accidentally without remembering that it was taken from some other source. One of the most common problems is that students write a draft of a paper without proper documentation, intending to go back later to "put in the references." In some cases, students accidentally hand such papers in instead of the footnoted version, or they forget to put in some of the footnotes in their final draft. So the fact that the wrong draft was submitted is not a defense against

an accusation of plagiarism. In general, students are held accountable for the work that they actually hand in, rather than the work that they intended to hand in. Furthermore, students are responsible for proper documentation of drafts of papers, if those drafts are submitted to the professor. In general, students are responsible for taking careful notes on sources, and for keeping track of their sources throughout the various states of the writing process. Notes must clearly identify the information you have obtained and where you acquired it, so that later you can acknowledge your indebtedness accurately. Do not look at a source without having something handy with which to take such notes.

You need not provide footnotes for items that are considered common knowledge. What constitutes common knowledge, however, varies from academic field to academic field, so you should consult with your instructor. In general, the harder it would be for someone to find the fact you have mentioned, the more you need to footnote it.

#### **E. Multiple submissions of work:**

**Students shall not submit academic work for a class which has been done for another class without the prior approval of the instructor.**

In any assignment, an instructor is justified in expecting that a certain kind of learning will be taking place. Handing in something done previously may preclude this learning. Consequently, if a student hands in work done elsewhere without receiving his or her instructor's approval, he or she will face penalties.

#### **F. Unsanctioned collaboration:**

**When doing out-of-class projects, homework, or assignments, students must work individually unless collaboration has been expressly permitted by the instructor. Students who do collaborate without express permission of their instructor must inform the instructor of the nature of their collaboration. If the collaboration is unacceptable, the instructor will determine the appropriate consequences (which may include treating the situation as an academic integrity violation.)**

Many Villanova courses involve team projects and out of class collaboration, but in other situations, out of class collaboration is forbidden. Students should assume that they are expected to do their work independently unless cooperation is specifically authorized by the teacher.

#### **G. Other forms of Dishonesty**

**Acting honestly in an academic setting includes more than just being honest in one's academic assignments; students are expected to be honest in all dealings with the University. Certain kinds of dishonesty, though often associated with academic work, are of a different category than those listed above. These kinds of dishonesty include (but are not limited to) the following:**

- Misrepresenting oneself or one's circumstances to an instructor (for example, in requesting a makeup exam or a special due date for an assignment, or in explaining an absence).
- Forging parts of, or signatures on, official documents (including both university documents, such as drop-add slips or excused absence slips, and relevant outside documents, such as doctors' notes).
- Taking credit for work in a team-project even when the student has made little or no contribution to the work of the team.
- Stealing or damaging library books.
- Unlawfully copying computer software.

These serious offenses will be handled by the University's disciplinary procedures.

#### **Penalties:**

##### **Individual Course Penalty.**

The academic penalty will be determined by the student's instructor. Typically, a student who violates the academic integrity code in a course will receive an F for the course, or, at the discretion of the instructor, a less severe penalty. Students who feel that the penalty is too harsh may appeal their grade through the normal University procedure for resolving grade disputes.

##### **University Penalty.**

Students who violate the code of Academic Integrity are also referred to their Dean for a University

penalty. Two kinds of penalty are available. A full academic integrity violation is a Class I violation. Typically a student with two Class I violations will be expelled from the school. In some cases, the Dean may choose to treat a violation of the Academic Integrity Code as a Class II violation. Class II violations are usually appropriate for less serious cases, or in cases where there are mitigating circumstances. Typically a student may receive only one Class II violation during his or her four year career as an undergraduate. All subsequent violations are treated as Class I violations.

Students who have committed an academic integrity violation will be expected to complete an educational program, supervised by the student's college Dean, to help the student come to a fuller understanding of academic integrity. Students who fail to complete the educational program to the satisfaction of the Dean, and within the timelines specified by the Dean, will have a hold placed on their transcript until the program has been completed.

Students who receive an academic integrity penalty may, if they believe that they have not committed an academic integrity violation, take their case to the Board of Academic Integrity. Detailed descriptions of the University's Academic Integrity Policy are available from department chairs and deans.

<http://www.villanova.edu/vpaa/office/facultyservices/policies/integrity/code.htm>

## How to Avoid Plagiarism: Citing sources effectively

You've already heard the warnings about plagiarism. Obviously it's against the rules to buy essays or copy chunks from your friends' homework, and it's also plagiarism to borrow passages from books, articles, or Web sites without identifying them. The purpose of any paper is to show your own thinking, not create a patchwork of borrowed ideas. But you may still be wondering how you're supposed to give proper references to all the reading you've done and all the ideas you've encountered. The point of documenting sources in academic papers is not just to avoid unpleasant visits to the Dean's office, but to demonstrate that you know what is going on in your field of study. It's also a courtesy to your readers because it helps them consult the material you've found. So mentioning what others have said doesn't lessen the credit you get for your own thinking—in fact, it adds to your credibility. That's not to say that questions about ownership of ideas are simple. The different systems for typing up references are admittedly a nuisance, but the real challenge is establishing the relationship of your thinking to the reading you've done. Here are some common questions and basic answers.

- **Can't I avoid the problem by just listing every source in the bibliography?** No. You need to integrate your acknowledgements into what you're saying. Give the references as soon as you've mentioned the idea you are using—don't wait till the end of the paragraph. That may mean naming authors ("X claims" and "Y argues,") and then going on to make your own comment.
- **If I put the ideas in my own words, do I still have to clog my pages with all the names and numbers?** Sorry—yes, you do. In academic papers, you need to keep mentioning authors, pages and dates to show how your ideas are related to those of the experts. It is sensible to use your own words to save space and help connect ideas smoothly. Whether you quote the passage directly in quotation marks, paraphrase it closely, or just summarize it rapidly, you need to identify the source then and there.
- **But I didn't know anything about the subject until I started this paper. Do I have to give a reference for every point I make?** It is always safer to over-reference than to skimp. You can cut down the clutter by recognizing that some ideas are "common knowledge" in the field, or taken for granted by those knowledgeable about the topic. Facts easily found in reference books are often common knowledge: the date of the Armistice of World War 1, for example, or the present population of Canada. In some cases, information covered in class lectures doesn't require acknowledgement. Some interpretive ideas may also be so well accepted that they don't need referencing—that Picasso is a distinguished modernist painter, for example, or that smoking is harmful to health. Always check with a professor or TA if you are uncertain about a specific point falling into the category of common knowledge.

- **So what exactly do I have to document?** With experience reading academic prose, you will soon get used to the ways writers in your field refer to their sources. Here are the main times you should give acknowledgements. (You will notice many different formats in these examples)
  - **Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.** If you use the author’s exact words, enclose them in quotation marks. Lengthy quotes require special indentation and are called ‘block quotes.’ Be sure to refer to style guides for your particular paper, since the length at which quotations require special formatting varies from MLA to APA, etc. It is seldom worthwhile to use a long quote. They tend to take up valuable space in your paper which would be better used on analysis. In literary studies, quote a sentence of prose or a couple lines of poetry of the work you are analyzing and comment on them. In other disciplines, quote only when the original words are to summarize the idea you want to discuss, emphasizing the point relevant to your argument. Be sure to name some sources even when you are not using the exact original words.
    - **E.g.** As Morris puts it in *The Human Zoo* (1983), “we can always be sure that today’s daring innovation will be tomorrow’s respectability” (p.189). [APA system]
  - **Specific facts used as evidence for your argument or interpretation:** First consider whether the facts you’re mentioning are “common knowledge.” When you are relying on facts that might be disputed within your discipline—perhaps newly published data—establish that they’re trustworthy by showing that you got them from an authoritative source.
    - **E.g.** In September 1914, more than 1300 skirmishes were recorded on the Western Front [traditional endnote/footnote system].
  - Distinctive or authoritative ideas, whether you agree with them or not: The way you introduce a reference can indicate your attitude and lead into your own argument.
    - One writer (Von Dankien, 1970) even argues that the Great Pyramid was built for the practical purpose of guiding navigation. [APA system]
    - **\*Tip\*** Remember that at this level of scholarship, writers do not just ‘say’ anything. Instead of using statements such as “Von Dankien says,” go for more hard-hitting word choices which give the author a bit more credit. Try “Von Dankien claims/argues/asserts/believes etc.”

*Taken in part from the University of Toronto Writing Center handout “How Not to Plagiarize.”*

The quotations above give you just a few examples of the references that should be cited in your papers. Unfortunately, they could not possibly cover the innumerable instances when you will have to decide which is the appropriate course. Nevertheless, the consequences of plagiarism are far too steep for uncertainty or risk-taking. We strongly suggest that you ask your professor or a Writing Center tutor if you ever have any question as to whether to cite a particular reference. If you do not have the time to ask someone, you would be well served to abide by this one rule: It’s always better to over-cite than to not cite at all.

Andrea Lunsford’s [Easy Writer](#) is a reliable, easy to use handbook with comprehensive citing instructions for most styles. The book in its most current edition can be found in the Villanova Book Store. It is a valuable resource and a good investment. You can also find the book in the library or in the Villanova Writing Center’s collection of reference books to be used in the center.

Some reliable websites with effective citing tips and examples include:

- MLA: <http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/mla2009.pdf>
- APA: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- Chicago: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)
- **\*TIP\*** **DO NOT** rely on sites which claim to ‘generate’ the perfect citation after you ‘plug in’ the appropriate information. Many of these sites were programmed years ago and no longer provide the most current form of citation. If you want to be sure you have

cited correctly, it is best to check official style sites such as the above or a manual published in a recent year.

### So long for now...

We've done our best to make this as complete a guide to writing as can fit in this space. We are confident that adhering to this advice paired with your own skills as a writer will help you to succeed in the world of college writing. Of course, it is not really feasible to compile all the things you need to know for every writing assignment into one small packet, but this is why we have a Writing Center! Until then, good luck and happy writing!

#### **Hours:**

**Monday-Thursday:** 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

**Friday:** 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

**Sundays:** 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Writing center Staff suggests that you make appointments well in advance, especially during midterms and finals. Tutoring sessions often fill up quickly! Also, look for our 'Midnight Madness' events during midterms and finals when we extend our normal hours.

**Website:** <http://www.villanova.edu/artsci/vcle/writingcenter/>

