



How to Write an Essay

Planners' Writing Exchange

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Fall 2011



what's on the agenda?

- The basic lessons
- Drafting an outline
- Quoting / paraphrasing
- How to summarize
- Creating a coherent body
- Revising a draft



the basic lessons

- Introduction
 - Methods and Materials
 - Results
 - Discussion
 - Conclusion
- **The basic lessons**
 - Drafting an outline
 - Quoting / paraphrasing
 - How to summarize
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the basic lessons: introductions

An introduction should:

- Explain a current situation
- Explain a research question
- Show the significance of a research question (i.e.: why is it important)
- Give an Answer

the basic lessons: body

When focusing on the body of the essay,

- Identify themes that unite your paper (and use vocabulary consistently)
- For each concept, select 1 key term that will run through the body of paper
- Make sure key concepts are distinctive (i.e.: one per section)
- Each concept should be like a mini paper (i.e.: intro sentence that defines what you aim to prove, 'the meat' or evidence that supports your first sentence, and a concluding sentence that ties the paragraph(s) together.



the basic lessons: bring in evidence

- Weave in evidence
- Explain evidence
- Acknowledgements and responses – it's ok to acknowledge there are exceptions or descending thoughts on the subject.

drafting an outline

- Create an outline.
 - Experts say it is easier to just begin writing and get your thoughts out on paper rather than try to craft each sentence carefully.
 - Once you have a full draft, begin editing.
 - Plan ahead – easier said than done but if you let the paper sit for a day or two and come back to it, it's easy to spot the weak areas.
- The basic lessons
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quoting / paraphrasing / summarizing

Kate L. Turabain's "Principles for Choosing Summary, Paraphrase or Quotation"

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quoting / paraphrasing / summarizing

“Principles for Choosing Summary, Paraphrase or Quotation”

- Summarize: when details aren't important enough to eat up space.
- Paraphrase: when you can state what a source says more clearly or concisely than the source does, or when your argument depends on the details in the source but not the specific words.
- Quote: because the words themselves are your evidence.
 - The quoted words are original, well expressed, or otherwise too useful to paraphrase.
 - The passage expresses your key concepts so clearly that the quotation can frame the rest of your discussion.



how to summarize

Kate L. Turabain's "Creating a Fair and Relevant Summary"

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how to summarize

“Creating a Fair and Relevant Summary”

- Summarize only if readers can understand without knowing details. If readers need more than just the gist of what a source says, don't summarize: quote or paraphrase.
- Decide why the information from the source is relevant to your argument. What reason does it support? What does it add to that support?
- Pick out the most important sentences in the source that are most relevant to a specific part of your argument.



how to summarize

Creating a Fair and Relevant Summary (continued)

- Paraphrase sentences; list the paraphrases in the order they occur in the original
 - Add other information that the reader might need to understand what the source says.
- Ensure the information flows nicely from your own sentences to a quote and back again to your own thoughts.



creating a coherent body

- The six elements to creating a strong paper
 - The basic lessons
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creating a coherent body

Look for these six elements to ensure your paper will flow well.
Does your paper have...

- A sentence in each section and subsection that states the point.
- A clear indication of where each section ends and the next begins.
- Each section relates to the one before and after it.
- A strong role that each section plays in the whole.
- Key terms that run through the whole paper.
- Key terms that run through each section.



creating a coherent body

- **A sentence in each section and subsection that states the point**
 - Highlight the key sentence for each section that states the point. Then highlight the key subsection sentence in another color. Does each key sentence reflect your main points? Can the sentences stand alone?
- **A clear indication of where each section ends and the next begins**
 - As you begin each section, you can guide the reader by using key words such as First, Second, Last, and also use the last sentence of each section to help segway to your next main thought.
- **Each section relates to the one before and after it**
 - Just as you connected the reader to each section, make sure your sections flow well together.

creating a coherent body

- **A strong role that each section plays in the whole**
 - Ask ‘what question does this section answer?’ ‘Why is this section relevant?’ If you can justify each section, your paper will read more smoothly and have depth.
- **Key terms that run through the whole paper**
 - These key terms help the reader to understand the theme of the argument and what key elements you are focusing on within your paper.
- **Key terms that run through each section**
 - Using key terms for each section allows the reader to understand each section more clearly. Circle key words that your report highlights. If you don’t find 3 to 4 words per page, you may need to think about working your key words into the paper more often.



revising a draft

Revising is just as important as writing;
maybe even more

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revising a draft

- The only time to use a 'top down' approach:
- Check the body first.
- Then check the organization, sections, paragraph, sentences and finally spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Edit hard copy vs. on computer.
- Last, go back and check your introduction and conclusion. What are you trying to prove? If they don't work, revise.
- Trade papers.
- Let it sit for a few days, then repeat above steps!

questions?

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:30pm
 Wednesdays 1:00 – 5:00pm
 Or by appointment

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Planners' Writing Exchange Noon Lectures

September 7: How to Write an Essay

September 28: Sentence Structure

October 12: Guest Lecture

November 9: 'Term Paper Trade'

12:00 - 12:45pm TBH Room 223

fall office hours:

Tuesdays 3:30 - 5:30pm

Wednesdays 1:00 - 5:00pm

Room 230 TBH

Questions?

Contact Elli Cosky, DURP Writing Assistant cosky2@illinois.edu