

Lesson 11: Lecture Notes

We use writing every day. Writing is an essential skill for college, work and life. Writing also is a part of the learning process and helps us to organize and focus our thoughts.

Academic writing requires planning, drafting, revising and proofreading. In college, a successful writer knows that writing is a process and allows time for each of these steps.

Some important things to consider in the planning stage:

Purpose: What is your purpose for writing? Are you writing a persuasive essay for PSY 101 or an objective analysis of an issue for ENG 101? Always make sure you understand the assignment and your purpose for writing.

Audience: Who is your audience? Are you writing for your instructor? For students in the class? Someone else? What kind of choices do you need to make in order to effectively reach your audience?

Context: In college you will be writing in an academic context. Your instructors will expect you to write in a professional manner with a certain level of formality. You should always use standard English, meaning that full words and sentences should be used. Avoid texting jargon, abbreviations and emoticons (smiley faces etc.). Standard capitalization should also be used (I not i etc.) and the subject matter should be appropriate for a college classroom.

Drafting your essay – keeping organized and focused

Most of the writing you will do in college will consist of stating a thesis and then supporting that thesis with specific evidence. Your essays will consist of these parts:

Introductory Paragraph/Thesis

Body Paragraph/Support

Body Paragraph/Support

Body Paragraph/Support

Body Paragraph/Support

Concluding Paragraph

Note: The number of body paragraphs you have will depend on the requirements of each individual assignment. Be sure you understand the required depth (minimum number of pages) for your assignments.

Now for a closer look:

Introductory Paragraph/Thesis Statement

An introductory paragraph “introduces” the subject of the essay to the reader and includes a thesis statement.

A thesis statement is a statement of the overall main idea of your essay. It is important to have a clear thesis statement so that your reader knows what to expect and can easily understand what you are trying to convey.

What makes an effective thesis statement?

An effective thesis statement *clearly communicates* your essay’s main idea. It tells the reader what your essay will be about and suggests the points you will cover.

An effective thesis statement is *specific*. For example, if you are writing a personal response to a piece of writing, your thesis should state *what* you think and the *main reasons why* (the points you will use to support your opinion).

An effective thesis statement is also *concise*. Simply state your overall main idea. Save your supporting evidence for your body paragraphs.

Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs are made up of evidence that supports your thesis. Each of your body paragraphs should be focused on ONE main point.

Additionally, each of your body paragraphs should begin with a TOPIC SENTENCE. Topic sentences most often appear at the beginning of paragraphs. A topic sentence should be a statement announcing what your paragraph is about.

Think of your topic sentence as a mini-thesis for your paragraph—a clearly stated overall main point.

All sentences in your body paragraphs should be connected to your topic sentence.

Support

In order to convince your reader of the ideas you are putting forth, you must develop your paragraphs with supporting evidence. Include enough supporting information or evidence in each paragraph to make your reader fully understand the point you are making. In other words,

back up your topic sentence with evidence. Your evidence should be SPECIFIC and clearly stated.

Where does evidence come from?

Evidence can come from many sources: Personal experience, memories, observations, hypothetical examples, facts, statistics, testimony from authorities or experts, studies and research. The kind of evidence you choose to include should depend upon your purpose and your readers. Also be sure you are following the specific requirements of your assignment. Remember that evidence needs to be SPECIFIC and CREDIBLE in order to be effective.

A place to start when looking for credible support is the subscription databases accessed through Lunder Library.

Concluding Paragraph

A conclusion should briefly review the essay's main points. It should also leave the reader with something to think about. Be sure not to introduce new ideas in your conclusion. For more ideas about writing effective conclusions, see page 77 in the Wadsworth Handbook.

Revising

Revising is an integral part of the process of writing in college. Here are some tips for revising your writing:

1. Review your assignment to make sure you are meeting your purpose.
2. Underline your thesis statement: Is it clear and concise? Does it state the overall, main idea of your essay?
3. Re-read your body paragraphs. Do your paragraphs stay focused on one main idea?
4. Re-read your conclusion. Did you summarize your main ideas?

After you have revised your writing on your own, have a friend or classmate read it. Better yet, make an appointment with a writing tutor in the Marden Center or utilize the online writing lab: http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/acaddept/writerscenter/online-tutoring.cfm

Even famous writers ask for feedback on their writing!

Proofreading

Proofreading is the last step in the writing process. Proofreading is looking at the small picture: Are your sentences grammatically correct? Do you have any spelling or punctuation errors? Have you followed your instructor's requirements for formatting the paper (heading, page numbers etc). It is very helpful to have someone else proofread your writing for you.

Lastly, a note on citing your sources: when you use information from a source (a book, article, web site, interview) you need to clearly show where the information has come from. If you fail to give credit to a source it is plagiarism and is a serious academic offense which can result in a failing grade on the essay or even a failing grade in the course.

The two main formats for citing sources is APA (American Psychological Association) and MLA (Modern Language Association). APA is used in the fields of psychology, sociology, science, medicine and education. MLA is used in literature and the humanities. Again, be sure you understand your instructor's expectations.

In ENG 101, you'll learn how to correctly cite your sources. In the meantime, check out this helpful website:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>