Basic Academic Writing Tips

- Carefully read and follow the assignment directions. Ask the professor to clarify if needed.

- Be simple and clear but not too casual. Say what you mean (don’t try to be wordy or academic). Say it in the appropriate tone.

- Most papers should have an introduction with a thesis statement/main idea, body paragraphs that support this main idea, and a conclusion. (see handouts on How to Organize a Paper and Thesis Statements)

- A sentence has the following 3 components: a subject (the actor in the sentence), a predicate (the verb or action), and a complete thought (an independent clause).

- A paragraph is made up of sentences that form a unit. Each paragraph should relate to the main idea (or thesis) of your paper. Paragraphs should also be coherent, logical, and well-developed with evidence and details. A paragraph generally has the following components:
  - a main idea/topic sentence
  - an explanation of the idea
  - an example
  - an explanation of the example
  - sentences that complete the paragraph’s idea or transition to the next paragraph.

- **Word Choice**: be precise, use variety, be careful with unfamiliar words/using the thesaurus.

- **Avoid clichés**. They are too vague, general, and colloquial (including: in modern society, throughout history, in this day and age).

- **Be concise**: Replace phrases with words. Don’t use unnecessary **qualifiers** (for example: very, really, a lot), but do use them when you are not making an absolute or universal claim (Women *seem to be* smarter than men. Not: Women are smarter than men.).

- **Use active voice and forceful, engaging verbs**
  - Jones wrote the paper in 2020. (Not: The paper was written by Jones in 2020.)
  - The Bible contains 66 books. (Not: There are 66 books in the Bible.)

- **Revise, Revise, Revise** (see handout on Editing and Proofreading)
  - Reconsider arguments, review evidence, refine purpose, reorganize paper, revive stale prose, fix errors (proofread)
  - Ask: is it worth saying, what you wanted to say, if a reader will understand it, does it fit the assignment? Does it follow the thesis and introduction?

Sources and Useful Resources
https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/index.html