

Basic 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 argument, body paragraphs that support this main idea, and a conclusion. (see guides 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 guide to Editing and Proofreading)

Reconsider arguments, review evidence, refine purpose, reorganize paper, revive stale prose, fix errors (proofread)

Ask: is it worth saying, is it 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