

A Checklist for Preparing Academic Papers

Preparing to Write

_____ 1. Be sure you understand what kind of paper the assignment calls for. Does it ask you, for example, to present data, analyze facts, summarize one or several works, explain cause and effect, discuss the literary or rhetorical impact of a work, argue for a specific policy? Accomplishing these different tasks entails different kinds of approaches and evidence, and they are not the only possibilities!

_____ 2. Be sure you understand the kind of evidence your professor considers appropriate for this assignment. Different disciplines may expect you to support claims in different ways. For example, are you to **provide** quantitative evidence, **explain** your own analysis and/or interpretation, **report** on the thinking of others, **evaluate** the thinking of others?

_____ 3. For what kind of audience does your professor want you to write? How knowledgeable can you expect your reader to be about your subject? For example, can you assume that your reader(s) have read the same text(s) you have? Are you writing to inform? to argue? to explain? to mediate? Answers to these questions can determine how much background material you should include.

_____ 4. Are you to use outside sources? Or are you to work only from an assigned text?

_____ 5. What kind of citation format does your professor expect you to use to cite sources? Are you expected to use parenthetical references? Should you use footnotes or endnotes? The two most widely used documentation systems, Modern Language Association (MLA) internal citation and American Psychological Association (APA) author-date style, are discussed extensively in the handbook used in English 001-002, and you can find helpful guidance about different systems on the Writing Across the Curriculum at Marquette Website.

Evaluating Your Draft

_____ 6. Have you used quotations to buttress your points, not to make your points? Is it clear how each quote fits with your point? If you have quoted at length, have you discussed at length? **Note:** Most long quotes in student papers would be more effective if shortened.

_____ 7. Have you made sure that quoted material matches the original exactly? Any changes you make in the original should be noted with brackets or ellipses.

_____ 8. Can a reader tell from the first paragraph or two what the purpose of your paper is? (Your answer should be **yes!**) Even if you are sure it is best to save your

"conclusion" for the paper's end, it is important that your reader understand from the beginning exactly what question(s) you are exploring.

_____ 9. Decide which sentence or sentences make the clearest statement of your most important point. Then decide if that sentence is where it should be in the paper. **Note:** In first drafts, it is common for thesis statements to be found in conclusions. Thus, **many drafts can be improved greatly by a revision that moves strong points from the concluding paragraph up to the introduction.**

_____ 10. Have you provided sufficient examples and evidence to develop and support your argument **appropriately for this course?**

_____ 11. Overall organization. Are your supporting paragraphs in the best order to make your overall point? Will it be clear to the reader how each paragraph contributes to the overall development of the paper's main points?

_____ 12. Paragraph organization. Are your paragraphs focused, unified, and cohesive? Do they move from clearly stated points to particulars that support and elaborate upon those points? Do you use paragraph breaks effectively?

_____ 13. Transitions and flow. Consider adding a sentence, or even a few words, to make the connections between ideas, paragraphs, and sentences absolutely clear to your reader. In some classes, sub-headings may be appropriate.

_____ 14. Spelling. Have you run a spell-checker **and** used a dictionary for words it flagged? **Warning:** Don't trust your spell-checker or grammar-checker to catch every mistake!

_____ 15. Mechanics. Have you proofread carefully, **from paper copy?** Be especially alert for the kinds of usage, syntax, or punctuation mistakes you know from experience that you are likely to make. **Note:** When in doubt, check a handbook.

_____ 16. Accuracy. Have you double-checked your citations for correct format and accurate information?