

Writing A+ Papers



Provided by:
Student Development Office
UNT Dallas Campus
8915 South Hampton Road
Dallas, Texas 75232-6002
972-780-3632
studentdevelopment@unt.edu

Writing Papers Self-Assessment

Read the following statements and rate your current writing habits. Try to be as honest as possible so that you will obtain accurate results.

1=Not at All
2=Sometimes
3=Always

- 1 2 3 Term papers provide me with an opportunity to learn and explore new and interesting topics.
- 1 2 3 I begin the process of research and outlining for a paper as soon as I receive the assignment.
- 1 2 3 I have someone proofread my written work before I turn it in.
- 1 2 3 I make several revisions of my written work before I hand in the final draft.
- 1 2 3 I plan each step of the research and writing process so that I can complete my written assignments on time.
- 1 2 3 If I use the words or ideas from another work in my paper, I always cite the source.
- 1 2 3 I know how to correctly format bibliographies, works cited lists, and footnotes.
- 1 2 3 I always speak with my professor in advance about choosing a research topic and completing the written assignment.
- 1 2 3 I turn my written assignments in on time.
- 1 2 3 When typing a paper on a computer, I keep two backup copies-a paper copy and a computer disk copy.
- 1 2 3 In collecting information and conducting research, I consult several different resources, including library catalogues/databases, periodical indexes, and the reference librarian.

Analyze your responses to these questions. Notice the questions that you responded to with a “3”. These are your strengths. Next, notice the questions that you responded to with a “1” or a “2”. These areas may be where you have room for improvement.

Why should I improve my writing skills?

Every college student should develop good writing skills. Professors expect your work to be expressed in clear, professional language. Employers expect college graduates to have strong writing skills. All professions require individuals to write at some point. Some examples of work responsibilities that demand good writing skills are:

- Writing resumes and cover letters
- Composing office memos
- Keeping a written log of work experience
- Writing financial, productivity, or progress reports
- Documenting important events
- Writing job descriptions
- Writing procedural guidelines
- Writing letters
- Preparing a teaching curriculum or lesson plan

What types of college papers will I be expected to write?

Persuasive Papers involve taking a position on a particular issue and supporting your position using evidence and reasoned argumentation.

Response Papers often ask for you to reflect on a particular reading assignment and to offer key insights about the text.

Analytical Essays require critical reflection into a particular text, theory, or school of thought. Critical reflection should include a detailed analysis of key points and relationships between ideas.

Research Papers are usually the longest, most extensive writing assignments you will do. These require in-depth research into a particular area of scholarship, such as a certain scientific theory, a famous author, or an important historical event. It may be your responsibility to choose a particular topic or area of study. When doing so, it is important that the scope of your paper not be too large. A more narrow scope will allow you to more adequately analyze and critically reflect on a certain area of scholarship. It is usually important for your research paper to have some sort of a thesis statement. Unless your professor says otherwise, a research paper does not consist merely of a review of literature. Through critical reflection on your research, your paper should put forth a particular idea.

CAUTION

Don't underestimate the amount of planning and time required for writing college papers!

8 - Step Plan to Writing “A” Papers

Step 1: Develop a Time Line

- Estimate the amount of time it will take to complete each step of the writing process.
- Do not procrastinate. Begin your research as soon as you receive the writing assignment. Be aware that adequate research could take a few weeks to an entire semester to complete, depending on your assignment.

Step 2: Decide on a Topic

- Investigate potential topics by reading your required textbooks, discussing the assignment with the professor, and by doing research in the library.
- Choose a topic that is meaningful and interesting to you.
- Make sure that your topic meets the requirements of the assignment.
- Do not choose a topic that is too broad (example: 20th Century History). If your research topic is too broad you will have to write an entire book, or many books, to complete your work.

Step 3: Gather Information

Consider all types of information resources.

- **Periodical databases** cross-reference periodical materials such as journals, magazines, and newspapers by subject, author, and title. Some will provide references to articles, others will include abstracts (brief summaries) of the article and some will include the full text of the article. You can search periodical databases through the “Electronic Resources” page on the UNT Dallas Library webpage: www.unt.edu/unt-dallas/library.htm. A tutorial for electronic research is available under the “Electronic Resources” heading.

- **Library catalogs** list all resources within the library by title, author, or subject. The UNT Dallas Virtual Library catalog is computerized. You can also search other Metroplex library catalogues from the UNT Libraries homepage (www.library.unt.edu).
- **Internet search engines** search databases and indexes on the Internet. Some professors encourage the use of Internet sources, while others do not permit them. Check with your professor to determine if these resources are allowed. For information to help you determine the credibility of a website, visit the UNT Libraries homepage and click on “Resources for Library Research.”
- **Reference librarians** are trained experts on using information resources in a library system. They can help you identify what resources are available and teach you how to use them. At UNT Dallas, contact Leora Kemp, Librarian, at 972-780-3625 or email her at lkemp@unt.edu.

Step 4: Read and Organize Your Information

- Record all the reference information (author, title, date, publisher, and page references) for each resource. You may do this by printing the initial page from the computer source, starting a reference page for your paper, or writing down the info on index cards.
- As you read each source, begin collecting the information you will use in your paper. This can be done in a variety of ways:
 - a. Print out the article from the database or copy the article from the periodical/book. Highlight important information that corresponds to your topic.
 - b. Cut and paste passages into a new word document. Make certain you include all reference information for correct citations.
 - c. Write down information on 3x5 index cards, including reference information.
 - d. Create a working annotated bibliography in a word document. Make a list of your references. Under each reference record a brief summary of the source and a brief explanation of how you might use the source in your paper.

- If you want to use a direct quote, include quotation marks and use the author's exact words. Refer to your writing style manual to assure correct citation methods when using quotations. Anytime you use someone else's words or ideas you must cite the source.
- If you want to paraphrase an author's words (put into your own words or summarize), you must cite your source. Never take credit for an idea that is not your own.
- Re-evaluate your topic. Do your references accurately reflect your assigned topic? Does the information gathered support your chosen position? Do you need to modify your point of view?
- Define and develop a thesis statement. A thesis statement is a sentence that represents the main idea of the paper.
- Identify main ideas that support the thesis statement.
- Support main ideas with arguments, evidence, and explanations.

Step 5: Outline Your Paper

Re-read the assignment as detailed by your professor. Based on the assignment, answer the following questions before outlining your paper:

- What is the purpose of your paper?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Has the professor provided an outline or suggested a framework to use when writing the paper?
- Write your thesis statement at the top of your initial draft.
- If your professor has provided or suggested an outline, use it. If not, consider how you want to organize your main points (chronologically, general to specific, etc...).

Step 6: Write the Rough Draft

- Use your outline to guide your writing.
- Try not to spend a lot of time editing your paper during the rough draft. Later you will have opportunities for revision.
- Include supporting information/evidence, facts/data and details/specifics for all your points.

- Avoid plagiarism! Be sure to cite sources when quoting or paraphrasing (putting into your own words or summarizing) someone else's ideas.
- Avoid self plagiarism! Self plagiarism occurs when a student uses all or part of a paper written for one course to fulfill a requirement for another course. It is only acceptable to use a paper twice if and only if both professors agree to it.
- If you want to use a direct quotation, use quotation marks and note the page number. If you paraphrase, do not include quotation marks but DO include the page number. Refer to your style manual (APA, MLA, etc.) for the specifics in regard to citation. Some classes will require a specific writing style. If not, be sure to pick a style and use it consistently throughout your paper.

Step 7: Revise and Edit Your Paper

Many students submit first drafts because of poor planning or because of a mistaken notion that good writers need not revise. **All papers need to be revised!** Ideally, you should revise your paper four times.

- Revision 1: Review your work immediately after you finish your draft.
- Revision 2: Wait a day or two and revisit your paper after you have had some time away from the project.
- Revision 3: Ask friends, roommates, and/or relatives to read your paper and provide you with feedback. Some professors are open to receive your paper for an initial reading and critique. Check with your professor and provide sufficient time for this to be accomplished. At some campuses, Writing Labs exist for the specific purpose of helping students with writing assignments. Use these resources for your benefit.
- Revision 4: Read your paper one more time and make final corrections.

Step 8: Type and Print Your Final Draft

- Use the Spell Check and Grammar functions found on your computer.
- Double-check your format to make sure you are following the guidelines for your assignment.

- Use a legible font. (Most professors expect a 12-point font and standard one-inch margins.)
- Always staple multiple pages.
- Number your pages. (Use your computer's header/footer option or automatic numbering function.)
- Include a title page which follows your format's guidelines.
- Keep a back-up of your paper (floppy disk, paper copies, etc).

Petrie, T., Landry, L.P., & Edwards, K.B. (1998). Achieving personal and academic success. Denton, Texas: RonJon Publishing, Inc.

Notes: _____

Additional Resources

www.library.unt.edu

Click on "Resources for library research" for tips on how to evaluate credibility of websites, find examples of how to cite Internet resources in APA format, get writing tips, and much more.

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

The On-line Writing Lab of Purdue University. This site offers several pages of information to help students with writing projects.

Burns, S. (1976). *An annotated bibliography of texts on writing skills: Grammar and usage, composition, rhetoric, and technical writing*. Garland: New York.

Lenmark-Ellis, B. (1971). *How to write themes, term papers, and college autobiographies*. Barron's Educational Series: Woodbury: New York.

Strunk, W. (1972). *The elements of style*. Macmillan: New York.