

Writing Tips

Composing Written Responses and Reports

If you're an adult learner, the chances are that you already have considerable writing experience. You also know that writing can be stressful, especially if it is the only means available to communicate what you've learned to your instructor.

The following suggestions are offered to boost your writing skills and better prepare you for the written exercises, exams and papers required in your program.

1. Deciding What to Write

If you have a choice of topic with your writing assignment, the following guidelines may be of help:

- Give yourself time to select a topic.
- Choose something that you know well and/or is of interest to you.
- Limit your topic so that you can complete it in the prescribed length and time.

2. Writing the Essay or Term Paper

Once the topic has been selected, follow the steps outlined below:

- a. **Brainstorm as many questions as you can** about the topic.
- b. **Edit and organize the questions** in outline form.
- c. **Narrow the topic** to a manageable scope.
- d. **Research the topic** using your course materials, the library, and resource people in the community. Start by checking for relevant books and articles in the reference section of your required course text(s).
- e. **Record relevant information from each reference** on a separate card or sheet of paper. Be sure to include a full citation.

f. **Select a format for your paper** based on one of the following formats:

- chronological
- comparative
- topical
- problem-solution
- opinion-reason

g. **Organize the information** using the selected format.

h. **Write a rough draft**, including the following six elements:

- Title page (opt.)
- Introduction
- Body
- Transitions
- Conclusion
- References

i. **Edit and revise the draft**, using the format required for typewritten papers (APA format).

The Basics of Good Writing

It is very difficult to start from nothing and produce good academic writing, because it is very hard to organize your material and write about it at the same time. Here are some suggestions for planning your next writing assignment:

1. **Plan your writing.** Before you start writing, find a way to organize your material so that you know what you are going to write about, in what order, and what you're going to say. Try writing an outline. Try writing your ideas down on the back of an envelope, or a piece of old paper. It doesn't have to be beautiful, it just has to help you think about what you are going to say. Use whatever method works for you, no matter how strange!

2. **Ignore the language!** When you plan your writing, don't worry about the language. Concentrate on what you are going to say. Write in notes so that you don't have to think about verb agreement. Don't waste time worrying about spelling. You can think about all these aspects of writing after you've decided what you are going to say. If you spend a lot of time fixing all the prepositions and conjunctions in an early draft you are not going to be willing to cut out paragraphs or sentences that you later realize aren't necessary, or to change them substantially. So don't put a lot of effort into proofreading until you are sure that what you want to say is the best you can come up with, then you can spend more time on fixing up the writing so that the punctuation, spelling, etc. is correct.

3. **Write and rewrite!** More experienced writers rewrite more times and more substantially than less experienced writers. Are you surprised? Good writing takes time for everyone. The better a writer you become, the more you will see that the first thoughts/ideas/writing that comes out of your head and onto the page can be improved. So give yourself time to rewrite so that your readers see the best of your thoughts and writing, not the best you could come up with at the last moment.

4. **Find readers!** Ask people to read what you've written. Ask friends, ask professors, ask your writing advisor in languages. But don't wait until your writing is "perfect" because then if people suggest changes you won't want to make them! Give people drafts and let them know what sort of feedback you want: comments on organization? on ideas? on your language? on the technical aspects of what you've written?

5. **Keep writing!** Good writing takes practice. The only person who can make you a better writer is you. So work at it, show your work to other people, and rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.

There are plenty of writing handbooks and guides available. They can give lots of useful hints and tips, but if the methods they suggest do not work for you then use a different method: there is no one way to write.

Additional Resources

Note: Whenever possible, several links have been included to provide alternative resources. Keep in mind that the sheer volume of information available through the Internet makes it impossible to include all of the relevant electronic sources for a given course. You are therefore encouraged to search out additional resources on your own using the search option of your choice.

Bauman, M. G. (2003). *Ideas and details; Guide to college writing* (5th ed.). Thomson/Heinle.

Hoffman, G. & Hoffman G. (2003). *Adios, Strunk and White: A Handbook for the New Academic Essay* (3rd ed.). Verve Press.

Ramage, J. D. & Bean, J. C. (2005). *The Allyn and Bacon guide to writing* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.

Spencer, C. M. & Arbon, B. (1996). *Foundations of writing : Developing research and academic writing skills*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Publishing Group.

Strunk, W. & White, E. B. (2005) *Elements of style illustrated* Penguin Press.

Zinsser, W. K. (2006). *On writing well: The classic guide to writing nonfiction* (30th anniversary ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

[Guide to Writing a Basic Essay](#)

[Common Errors in English](#)

[Dictionary.com](#)

[Texas A & M University Writing Center Handouts](#)

[The Research Paper](#)

[University of Richmond Writing Center](#)

[Purdue University's Online Writing Laboratory \(OWL\)](#)