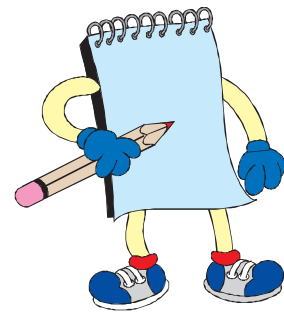




# ACADEMIC WRITING CHECKLIST & TIPS



The checklist below will help you revise and polish drafts of academic papers. After checking your draft against these 14 points, ask an LRC tutor to help you in areas that need work or that you don't understand.

## CHECKLIST

YES ? NEEDS WORK

|  | YES | ? | NEEDS WORK |
|--|-----|---|------------|
| 1. Is your <b>thesis clearly stated</b> near the beginning of the paper? (Thesis = main idea)  |     |   |            |
| 2. Is your <b>thesis narrow enough</b> to be proved in a paper of this length?   |     |   |            |
| 3. Is your <b>thesis reasonably interesting</b> or original?   |     |   |            |
| 4. Have you included <b>enough evidence or proof</b> to persuade someone who disagrees with you?   |     |   |            |
| 5. Have you chosen your <b>evidence or proof</b> carefully and <b>explained</b> how it proves your point?  |     |   |            |
| 6. Have you <b>anticipated and answered</b> intelligent questions and objections to your idea?   |     |   |            |
| 7. Have you <b>avoided mere summary</b> ? (unless your instructor has specifically asked for a summary)  |     |   |            |
| 8. Have you <b>used quotations</b> with care? (Too many quotations seems like padding. Too few may give the impression you have done no reading on the subject.) |     |   |            |
| 9. Are your <b>paraphrases really your own words</b> and style of writing? (Do they sound like the rest of your paper?)  |     |   |            |
| 10. Is your paper <b>logical</b> ? Have you eliminated oversimplifications and contradictions?   |     |   |            |
| 11. Is your <b>sentence style straightforward</b> and concise? (No wordiness or gobbledegook)  |     |   |            |
| 12. If appropriate have you given enough <b>documentation and page references</b> ?  |     |   |            |
| 13. Is your <b>grammar</b> basically correct? Have you proofread the final copy?   |     |   |            |
| 14. Is your <b>organization easy to follow</b> ? Is it somewhat like the diagram on the other side of this sheet?  |     |   |            |

WANT MORE HELP? Read the tips on the other side of this sheet. You may also want to read Chapter 15 of *When Writers Write*, a book available in the LRC.

The secret of good academic writing – the type you often have to do for history, psychology, and other courses – is the assumptions you make about the person reading your paper. In academic writing, it's best to assume that the person reading and grading your paper is not your real teacher but is someone we'll call your teacher's twin. Not only does your teacher's twin not know who you are, he or she also:

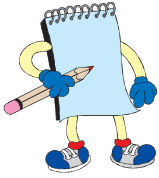
1. **Is impressed by new, original ideas** and is turned off by mere summary of what's been said in class or what the book itself says. (The exception to this is if your teacher has specifically asked for a summary.)
2. Initially **disagrees** with your ideas/interpretations/reactions.
3. Can be **persuaded** to agree with you if you give enough evidence and explain logically enough.
4. **Resents** being told to take your word for anything – and so expects precise, detailed proof, often including **page references** and **enough documentation** (title of book, author, etc.) so he/she can look things up for him/herself.
5. Is **insulted** if you do not **anticipate** and **answer** his/her intelligent questions and objections.
6. Expects academic papers to avoid slang, be written in reasonably correct grammar, and follow a pattern that looks something like this:

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Paragraph | State your thesis, briefly listing the <u>main points</u> you'll make.  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Paragraph | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain your <u>first point</u>.</li> <li>2. Offer evidence.</li> <li>3. Explain how your evidence proves or explains the first point.</li> </ol>   |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Paragraph | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain your <u>second point</u>.</li> <li>2. Offer evidence.</li> <li>3. Explain how your evidence proves or explains the second point.</li> </ol> |
| Other Paragraphs          | Continue pattern.   |
| Last Paragraph            | Conclude quickly, briefly restating the points you've made.   |

Notes:

1. **Each** paragraph should be clearly "linked" back to the thesis. This link to the thesis should be made clear to your reader.
2. You may have an introductory paragraph before the thesis, and one point may require more than one paragraph.

In short, good academic writing usually requires that you persuade your reader to accept your ideas/interpretations/reactions on the basis of the evidence you offer and how logically you explain that evidence. It's the type of writing that's sometimes called "argumentative."



## THE WRITER'S PLANNING GUIDE

- ◆ It's usually easier to write something if we break the writing process into smaller bites. That way we can tackle just one bite at a time.
- ◆ To use this planner, start with the due date at the bottom and work your way up the sheet, deciding when you will plan to have the various steps completed. Then make a commitment to yourself (and perhaps to an LRC tutor) to have each step done on time.

### DATE

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| _____         | 1. <b>DOODLE.</b> Make lists or freewrite to get started. (Relax. No one will see the doodle but you.)  |
| _____         | 2. <b>MAKE YOUR FIRST DRAFT MESSY.</b> (Make a commitment to yourself or LRC  |
| (target date) | tutor.) Regard the first draft as your chance to discover what you really want to say. Use colored paper to remind yourself it's "just a draft." Don't worry about your first few paragraphs – you'll change them later anyway. |
| _____         | 3. <b>TAKE A BREAK.</b> (Put your draft away for at least a day. This step is both the  |
|               | easiest and the most important.)  |
| _____         | 4. <b>REREAD WHAT YOU'VE DRAFTED.</b>   |
| (target date) | ➤ Look at your <u>last</u> paragraph or two. That's where you'll discover what you really wanted to say. Consider moving the last paragraph (with revisions) to the beginning.  |
|               | ➤ Look at your draft the way your intended reader would. What questions would your reader have? Answer them. Would they have objections? Answer them.   |
| _____         | 5. <b>GET OUT YOUR SCISSORS AND TAPE – OR USE "CUT AND PASTE" ON</b>  |
|               | <b>YOUR COMPUTER.</b> Cut your paragraphs apart. Move them around. (This is even easier on a computer.) Discard some. Write new ones as necessary.  |
| _____         | 6. <b>SHARE YOUR DRAFT WITH A FRIEND OR LRC TUTOR.</b>  |
| (target date) | ➤ Ask your friend to role-play your intended reader – where would <u>that reader</u> (not your friend) be puzzled? Bored? Annoyed? Make notes; revise your draft.   |
|               | ➤ Read your draft aloud to your friend. How does it sound to you?   |
|               | ➤ Ask your friend to read the draft aloud to you. Listen for spots that are hard to read, so you can polish them later.   |
| _____         | 7. <b>REWRITE AND POLISH YOUR SENTENCES.</b> (Eliminate wordiness first; that   |
|               | way you can "see" your grammar and style more clearly.) Read your final version aloud to yourself. How does it sound?   |
| _____         | 8. <b>KNOW WHEN TO STOP.</b> (Much polishing can make writing worse instead of  |
|               | better.)  |
|               | ➤ Put the final copy away and take a break. You'll "see" it more clearly later.   |
|               | ➤ Proofread carefully, beginning with the last paragraph and working your way forward.  |
|               | ➤ Don't let "stage fright" get you. Ask a friend or LRC tutor to read over the final version – and tell you if it's good enough to hand in.   |
| _____         | 9. <b>FINAL COPY.</b> (Make a copy for your own files.)   |
| (date due)    |   |