



# **A Survivor's Guide to College Writing**

**by John Freed, Ph.D.**

**Brandman University**

**of the Chapman University System**

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*In order to arrange for on-site, student writing workshops  
or writing-across-the-curriculum, teacher in-service training,*

*contact the author*

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## **A Survivor's Guide to College Writing**



by John Freed

*dedicated to my son who confessed to me after his masters degree ceremony  
that this small guide got him from high school dropout to graduate degree*

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## Who Needs A Survivor's Guide ?

For you students returning to undergraduate school after an extensive or even brief interruption between the segments of your college education or those returning to pursue graduate degrees or credentialing certifications or especially advanced, college-prep high school students angling for highly selective universities, this guide should provide a large measure of comfort.

After reading it, I hope you discover that you may have been more anxious about your writing ability than you needed to be. **Doris Lessing** encourages all of us life-long learners, "That's what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way."

This guide will hopefully also reconcile what often sounds like conflicting advice about expository writing that you might have received from your high school teachers and receive from various college professors and your fellow students.

The purpose of this guide is a very pragmatic one: to give you an "all-at-once" overview of a particular type of academic expository writing required in nearly every college class. It will certainly enhance the quality of the dialogues that you will be having with your instructors about the various ways to improve your written or other presentation work.

**NOTE:** At the end of this short guide is a copy of an "Advanced Expository Writing Grading Rubric" assessment instrument that I use to facilitate this dialogue with students and faculty.

## Why a Writing-intensive College Curriculum?

We know that we can teach pigeons consistently to peck out the right answers, but we also know that we're not teaching them how to think, solve other problems or teach other pigeons. In a writing-intensive college curriculum you will be asked to do something a pigeon can't do. You will be asked to write, and to write a great deal, because we believe that the act of writing trains and develops the act of thinking.

And we also strongly believe that the main evidence that you are a college-educated person is that you write like one. This is the primary goal of our writing program, and it is at least an ancillary goal of every single course that you take at a liberal arts college like Brandman University of the Chapman University system.

*We're old-fashioned, and we don't mind it.*

There is an educational television program called "The New Literacy: An Introduction to Computers." In a way the title is an emblem of the way that many in higher education have divorced "old fashioned" verbal literacy and devoted themselves to sexier new partners.

In many quarters of American higher education little attention is being paid to instilling a high level of "genuinely" verbal literacy. In a recent survey of its courses in the 40,000 plus student Pennsylvania State University system fewer than 5% of its courses required any type of writing beyond short answer or multiple choice responses. In a writing-intensive curriculum such as ours, however, the proportions are exactly reversed.

*Even Harvard:*

A study of Harvard graduates in the eighties based on three writing samples - the pre-admission essay required of in-coming freshmen, a final essay that completed the freshman composition course cycle and the senior thesis - suggested that, although the best work was the final essay in freshman composition, the worst piece tended to be the writing in the senior thesis. The study pointed out the relative lack of concern with writing after freshman English manifested in much of the Harvard curriculum. At a liberal arts college we expect our seniors to write better than our sophomores.

*The act of writing heightens the act of thinking and living*

I could make much of the pay-off for all this work to improve your writing. I could mention that Chapman University has such high pass rates on various professional

examinations or point to the number of students we have had who went on to graduate schools. I won't do much of that though because we do not intend to teach effective thinking and writing at a liberal arts college because of the prospective big "pay-off." Thinking and writing, and behaving well for that matter, contain their own best rewards because they are what make a human being most human. **A.E. Housman** said it much better than I could:

Let a man acquire knowledge not for this or that external and incidental good which may chance to result from it, but for itself; not because it is useful or ornamental, but because it is knowledge, and therefore good for man to acquire. . . [It] is part of man's duty to himself.

The act of good writing is also the act of right thinking. **Judge John Roberts** in his Senate Supreme Court confirmation hearings stated it this way:

Some opinions just do not "write." I have found from personal experience and from observation that going through the process of writing an opinion often leads to a change in views. The discipline of writing helps lead you to the right result.

**Anäis Nin**, the diarist and psychoanalyst, put the centrality of writing to life this way:

We. . . write to heighten our own awareness of life. We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection. We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it. . . to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth. . . to expand our world, when we feel strangled, constricted, lonely. . . . When I don't write, I feel my world shrinking.

## What Does this Guide Provide?

*“To write an essay, the student must know everything at once.”*

There is a peculiar paradox to the teaching and learning of writing at the college level: your first essay will often be evaluated as rigorously as if it were your last. As one of my writing teachers, **S. Leonard Rubinstein**, put it, “To write an essay, the student must know everything at once. What the student must know simultaneously, the instructors can provide only sequentially.” The paradox simply stated is that with regard to writing you should have already completed your college- curriculum before you wrote your first paper.

*A Survivor’s Guide* is an attempt to resolve some of this paradoxical nature of college-writing by providing a snapshot of the “everything at once.” It is not an attempt to substitute for a detailed course in composition although it certainly could be a supplement for one, nor is it presumptuous enough in a few brief pages to stand for a detailed writing handbook or guide to professional research paper documentations in all the variety of formats and academic and professional fields (Consult the “Selected Bibliography” at the end of this book for these).

What follows are those essentials of college-level expository writing that we expect to implant and expect back from those students we certify as college graduates. The principles have been reduced to as few as possible. These are the same principles that drive our own expression in our research, our teaching and our own writing.

*“If you wish to be a good writer, write.”*

The truest sentence in this guidebook was written early in the second century by the Greek **Epictetus**, “If you wish to be a good writer, write.” The whole quotation has a philosophic ring to it:

Every habit and faculty is confirmed and strengthened by the corresponding actions, that of walking by walking, that of running by running. If you wish to be a good reader, read; if you wish to be a good writer, write.

The truth is that writing is a skill like playing tennis, not a body of knowledge like American history. No one “knows” writing. You exercise and develop your writing ability as you write.

Another distinction between writing and playing tennis, of course, is that if you are indifferent to tennis you can still be more or less successful in your college career. If

you are indifferent to writing, you'll be dead in the water at any college or university worthy of the name.

*The tennis and writing analogy extended:*

Like the rules of tennis, the “essentials of effective writing” are deceptively simple and direct. However, you don't become a good tennis player by memorizing the rules. If you want to be a good tennis player, you have to play a lot of tennis. Similarly if you want to be a good writer, you have to write. . . a lot. (Of course, you could do this on your own. The Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, **Larry McMurtry**, writes for four hours every day of the year before he does anything else that day. Very few of you , I am sure, have that kind of discipline. I know I don't.)

You will also be required to do many kinds of writing, but don't let this confuse you. I hope this guide demonstrates that the main principles of effective expository academic writing stay pretty much the same whether it is an economics study, a book review for history, a lab report for physics, your senior thesis in education, an assigned essay on poetic diction for English, or a “reflection” paper for religious studies.

The next sections of this guide contain the “everything that you need to know at once.” I recommend that you first read them through completely and then refer back to the relevant sections as you venture through your own real time experiences with college writing.

*Write your inner convictions:*

**Ralph Keyes** in his wonderful book *The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear* states this unequivocally:

The more I read and write, the more convinced I am that good writing has less to do with acquired technique than with inner conviction. The assurance that you have something to say that the world needs to hear counts for more than literary skill. Those writers who hold their readers' attention are the ones who grab them by the lapel and say, “You've got to listen to what I'm about to tell you.” It's hard to be that passionate. It means that you must put your whole poke on the table. Yet this very go-for-broke quality grabs and holds a reader far more surely than any mastery of technique.

## The Writer's Tool Box

All college-level writers need certain basic tools: an industrial-strength dictionary and thesaurus, a computer-assisted word processor and a presentation style manual.

### 1. A heavyweight dictionary and thesaurus are a writer's main tools.

To lighten your load they are both freely available electronically on the web. Developing a large lexicon (word bank) and being able accurately to reference it should be primary goals of a college student. Simply put good writing is putting the right word in the right place. These books are the keys to discovering the exactly right word.

### 2. Computer-assisted word processing is a necessity at the college level.

Since you will be expected to do extensive writing in practically every course that you take in a writing-intensive curriculum and since "ninety percent of writing is rewriting," it doesn't make much sense that the vast majority of your rewrite time should be taken up by mechanically re-keystroking the entire piece or handwriting it. Add to this such delicious treats as an on-line dictionary and thesaurus, automatic spelling checkers, footnote formatters and the expertise of a professional secretary at your disposal 24 hours a day, and you have my arguments that every college student should have a computer-assisted word processor.

If you don't own a computer, now is the time to buy one. A good one in 2009– a name brand laptop portable with wireless internet access – is available for under \$500.

*About word processing:*

a. It is an essential practice to work with a standard word processing program. Microsoft Word is a typical standard at most colleges. But the really good news is that you can download and use for free software that is completely compatible with MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint for FREE.

For the free MS Office Suite level productivity software for both Windows and MAC OS's link to OpenOffice: <http://www.openoffice.org/>. Did I mention that it is free? I use this program for all my current writing.

b. Make back-up copies and hard copy (printed-out versions) of your most important work frequently. **Everyone** who has used word processing has a horror story to tell. I hope it doesn't take that

“unrecoverable disk error” or hard drive crash to drive this lesson home to you.

c. Keep at least one electronic copy of all your work for as long as possible. This is in case your work gets accidentally lost, or you are required to revise it, or you are appealing a grade change or you want to use it for your writing portfolio.

d. Rename the various versions of a paper on file with consecutive numbering or dating so that you hand in the most recently revised version and don’t accidentally over-write a file that you want to save.

e. Do not trust computer spelling checkers exclusively. They cannot distinguish “there” from “they’re” from “their.” They’ll all be spelled correctly even if misused. The spelling checkers, however, are terrific at catching typos. Make the spell check the **third** last thing you do. And actually reading your paper aloud to a friend word by word with a red pen in your hand to be the next to final thing that you do.

f. In my experience so-called “Grammar Checkers” have limited value at the college level with one exception: they tend to do a good job at marking the use of passive voice. Most academic writing tends to be too passive. This could also be said about most Academics in general. (Did you notice how smoothly I hid behind the passive voice in the previous sentence?) A Grammar Checker will flag your passives and inquire whether or not you intend them. It’s a good question to ask.

The famous **Strunk and White** *Elements of Style* ([located here](#)) states rather categorically, in item number ten: “Use the active voice. The active voice is usually more direct and vigorous than the passive. . . .The habitual use of the active voice . . . makes for forcible writing.”

g. Don’t be seduced by the special print-out capabilities of computers and laser printers. No matter how attractive your paper looks, it will succeed or fail on the quality of the written work it contains. You are better off spending extra time re-phrasing your work than selecting elaborate type fonts. For our purposes the best papers are the most accurately written and readable. Toward this end you should avoid distracting your audience with odd looking fonts and non-standard presentations.

h. Beware of “cut and paste.” It is very tempting to create a Frankenstein monster out of parts of old papers and smatterings of research.

### **3. Style manuals and documentation formats are required at the college-level.**

Your professor may have a very specific presentation format in mind for assigned work. If so, he or she will either refer you to a standard manuscript guidebook in the field such as the “Modern Language Association’s Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,” (MLA) or the “Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association” (APA) or else hand out a style sheet unique to the requirements of his course.

Take your professor’s directives very seriously. If they are unclear, ask her for clarification because finding a proper documentation format is **your** responsibility.

If your instructor does not direct you to one and you want to go beyond the short forms that I present below, a fairly comprehensive hyperlinked guide to Documentation Style Formats is provided by the Chapman University System Library [located here](#).

#### **a. Use a standard guide and be consistent in its use.**

Whatever style manual you choose, including this one, be consistent in its use. You are not permitted to pick and choose whatever features you like best from the various guides. The appeal to the authority of a standard guidebook is always sound.

#### **b. Computer printed papers make for happier readers.**

Ideally all papers should be computer printed on white, 20 pound bond 8 1/2" X 11" paper using a 12 point type font. All papers should be printed on one side of the paper only and double spaced.

#### **c. Use standard margins:**

Standard margins are 1 inch on all four sides - left, right, top and bottom. Paragraph indentation is typically five spaces. Indentation for long quotations is ten spaces. These indented quotes should also be double spaced but not set off by the addition of any other quotation marks.

**d. Proper title format and a clearly identifiable heading are required.**

You should provide a title for all papers - centered at the top of the first page. Your own title should be neither underlined nor in quotation marks, but rather simply capitalized and separated from the body of the paper by triple spaces. For example the title of this guidebook is the following:

### A Survivor's Guide to College Writing

For shorter papers (fewer than ten pages) your name, course number and section, nature of the assignment and date should appear flush left and double spaced above the title on the first page. The page number should be in the upper right hand corner of each page following your last name.

Longer papers (more than ten pages) should have this title and author information on a separate title page as detailed by your chosen style format specifications (i. e. APA).

#### **e. Papers need to be properly fastened and unbound.**

Although MLA recommends a discreet paper clip, it is my opinion that papers are best held together and read when they are stapled at a 45 degree angle in the upper left hand corner.

Fancy bindings, although impressive in the business world, are often awkward to handle when evaluating a paper. They should be avoided unless clearly required by the nature of the assignment or the instructor's instructions.

#### **f. Neatness is nice, but correctness is all.**

Proofread and make whatever corrections are necessary to the paper **before** you hand it in. Although neatness is nice, correctness is all. If you don't have the time to re-print it, a single line through a word is sufficient for deletion, and a caret ^ on the line and the correction in the space above the line is proper. There are no "typo" error excuses; there are only errors.

If you have the time, print out a cleaner copy. If you don't have the time, try to make it.

The overall presentability of your paper reflects your seriousness of purpose.

## The Paper Itself

### Collecting, Shaping and Re-Shaping:

Every writer experiences three very distinct stages in a writing project - **collecting** material, **shaping** the content, and then **re-shaping** or **revising** the paper after it has been edited or evaluated. Although professional writers often experience them more or less simultaneously, for the sake of discussion I am going to separate them. The first two, **“collecting and shaping,”** are what **Peter Elbow** calls the growing or “producer” stage and the cooking or “editor” stage. He believes that they should be insulated from each other so that you can let yourself go wild generating raw material and later ruthlessly cut out whatever doesn’t fit:

When there are cycles to be gone through, do each one to the extreme - keep yourself from being caught in the middle. You can’t be a good, ruthless editor unless you are a messy, rich producer. But you can’t be really fecund as a producer unless you know you’ll be able to go at it with a ruthless knife.

The third stage is often overlooked; it is the “reflection” or **re-shaping** that a writer needs to do after the paper has been evaluated, in order to revise it and improve as a writer.

Each writer approaches these stages differently; some write more or less mechanically by way of formal outlining (a good example of a formal outline is this guidebook’s “Other Student Examples”); others believe writing is a mystical operation. (The Greeks shrugged their shoulders and credited the divine intervention of the **“Muses”**). No matter which approach you take, before you hand the paper in, you need to read it somehow through the eyes of your prospective audience and self-edit it accordingly.

What follows is the compass to A Survivor’s Guide to College Writing. In part one, “Collecting,” My colleague, **John McCarthy**, offers some advice on getting started. In part two, “Shaping,” I elaborate on the essay checklist that I hand out to all my classes whenever I make an expository writing assignment. And in part three, “Re-shaping,” we offer some suggestions on what to do when you get the graded paper back.

### Collecting

John McCarthy advises his students to begin collecting material for a paper project by “asking questions. . . lots of questions.” He elaborates this way:

If a topic is assigned or you are given a specific question, you need to make it your own. The questions at the end of the chapter of a textbook are just the author's questions, and a question or topic from the teacher is the teacher's.

No matter how you get a question or topic, you need to take ownership of it. If you're trying to explain something that's not yours, that you're not involved in, how can you expect the reader to get involved? Even in an assigned topic, your first job is to find something that interests you and that you want to tell someone about.

Questions are a good way to get yourself involved in the process. They come in three flavors:

**a) Vanilla.** These are usually questions that start with "Who," "What," "When," or "Where." They provide information that may be important and that you can use as detail, but by themselves they can't provide the basis for a paper.

**b) Chocolate.** These questions start with "How" or "Why" usually, and sometimes with "What" ("What makes or causes something to occur?") These are the types of speculative questions whose answers can lead to a paper.

**c) Vanilla - Chocolate Swirl.** These questions start with a "who-what-when-where," but then lead to a "why-how." You might start by asking where the peace treaty ending WW II was signed, and then question why it was signed there, how it altered Japanese-American relations, or what effects occurred because it was signed where it was signed. The first question wouldn't lead to a paper by itself since it is merely factual, but the follow-ups surely could.

Once you have a set of questions you can live with for a while and want to explore, you have to come up with a debatable statement, one that requires agreement or disagreement.

Some examples are "Nuclear power is very hazardous." "In certain situations, capital punishment can be justified." "The recent Iraqi War was not a 'just' war." "Lady MacBeth was as much a victim of a man's world as Duncan was."

Be sure to express these as complete sentences that predicate something about the subject not as mere topics like "The Federal Budget" or "Hurricane Season in Houston." Also be wary of assertions that "waffle," are too limited (or not limited enough) or that nobody cares about. The latter might sound like, "It could be said that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play only minor roles in Hamlet." That's hardly news. If instead you maintained, "The announcement that 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' is the real

climax of the play making *Hamlet* the first absurdist play,” you have a hypothesis worth exploring.

*Working hypothesis:*

Now that you have a working hypothesis, you need to generate the material to defend and support that hypothesis.

The following are techniques of “process writing” that have proven very effective in generating material. All of them are based on a particular mind set: Your goal is to collect as much information as you possibly can. There’s no “good” stuff or “bad” stuff at this stage. There’s only “stuff,” and the one with the most “stuff” wins.

*Brainstorming:*

We are all more or less familiar with the concept of “brainstorming.” Just write down any ideas (words or phrases) that you might have related to your topic no matter how silly or seemingly off the point. The goal is continuous writing for a specified period of time [let’s say ten minutes] or a certain number of ideas [again let’s say ten]. Following this, you can group ideas under certain headings, choose one group, and do more brainstorming as necessary. You can brainstorm questions, too. This is good if you already have decided on your working hypothesis and you’re trying to generate more ideas to develop the argument. Another way to brainstorm is to cluster ideas.

*Clustering:*

Clustering is a type of brainstorming that has been popularized by the book *Writing the Natural Way* by **Gabriele Lusser Rico**. Here is the author’s description of how the clustering technique works:

To create a cluster, you begin with a nucleus word, circled, on a fresh page. Now you simply let go and begin to flow with any current of connections that come into your head. Write these down rapidly, each in its own circle, radiating outward from the center in any direction they want to go. Connect each new word or phrase with a line to the preceding circle. When something new and different strikes you, begin again at the central nucleus and radiate outward until those associations are exhausted.

A. Write a word cluster around the words “Civil War”

B. Now do a word cluster around the more limited subject “Causes of the Confederacy's Final Defeat.”

Rico gives her rationale for why clustering seems to work:

There is no right or wrong way to cluster. It is your Design mind's shorthand and it knows where it is headed, even if you don't. Trust it. It has a wisdom of its own, shaping ends you can't really evaluate yet. This wisdom has nothing to do with logic; should you try to apply logic to what you have just clustered, this sense of knowing where you're headed will be destroyed. Then you simply begin to write. The words will come; the writing takes over and writes itself.

*Free Writing:*

Promoted by **Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow**, “free” or (non-stop) writing is a technique which is also similar to both brainstorming and clustering but skips their implied “pre-writing” planning and goes immediately to the actual writing of complete sentences. The goal is still to keep the pen moving forward without pre-editing and without regard for making sense or making connections. It is best to time this activity for no more than thirty minutes at a stretch.

Miraculously the more you write the more you will start making sense. It's a basic human instinct. The ancient Greeks had a line, “All was in chaos until the mind of man arose and made order.” All real writers have a basic trust in that instinctual process of order making. But it only works as long as you keep writing.

*Treeing:*

Treeing is the logical next step to “brainstorming,” “clustering” and “free writing.” The purpose of “treeing” is to develop the hierarchical relationship between and among your ideas. Your goal here is to connect related ideas by drawing lines. Adjust the sets and subsets until you are satisfied that there is an organic structure. There should always be some “reason” why point B follows point A and precedes point C. That's all there is to it. As you write the actual paper, be open enough to go with the natural life that will try to emerge and rearrange your points to respect the growth of the new organism.

*From working hypothesis to thesis statement:*

You've arrived at a clearly debatable statement or assertion about a particular subject. You've explored other alternatives and your own free associations, and you've generated a certain bulk of ideas. Now you need to select the material that supports your hypothesis. Essentially what you do is provide backing, either evidence or logic, that proves what you're saying is true. So, even though the assertion may start out sounding like a hypothesis with "I think. . ." you will want to finish with an "It is. . ." type of thesis statement.

*A brief aside about research:*

Almost all good, college-level writing requires pushing your resources beyond what's in your head and whatever material might be lying around your room to quote from. As a result all students need a good orientation to their university library resources (including web-based electronic searches, access to CD-ROM based material) and most importantly navigating and critically assessing the web-based resources.

**Latour** points out the essential value of research or references to a writer's authority:

A paper that does not have references is like a child without an escort walking at night in a big city it does not know: isolated, lost, anything may happen to it. On the contrary, attacking a paper heavy with footnotes means that the dissenter has to weaken each of the other papers, or will at least be threatened with having to do so, whereas attacking a naked paper means that the reader and the author are of the same weight: face to face.

The techniques of proper research for each discipline, however, are beyond the modest scope of this guidebook, but don't forget that you will eventually need to learn and employ them.

*Meanwhile, back at the paper:*

The eleventh hour is approaching and you've been avoiding the serious drafts long enough (I did say "drafts"; if you don't go through at least three you're short-changing yourself). The presumption is that research of whatever type has been completed. You can't put it off any longer. Get a good night's sleep (or at least take a few hours nap). Turn off the television and disconnect the phone. Proceed directly to a clean, well-lighted and sound-insulated place. Start writing now with your most absolute attention.

**Peter Elbow** recommends fast writing. Essentially, he suggests breaking each draft session into two halves.

In the first half, you do extended free writing without stopping to edit. He feels that if you try to edit while getting the text on paper, you might never get beyond the first paragraph. You'll have time later to go back to cut out or revise those first sentences. This becomes the raw material that your editing and subsequent drafts will refine into more precious metal.

When you get to the halfway point, take a break of let's say fifteen minutes; walk around the block; eat a candy bar. Now in the second half of your session go back to edit (shape, arrange, clean up) what you have. Ideally you should go through at least three of these cycles or drafts, but, of course, you have to do at least one in order to have anything to hand in at all. Only now is your paper beginning to look as it will in its final form. Only now do you have enough material to be shaped into a presentable form.

## **Shaping**

“Shaping” is the writing of the actual paper that you expect someone else to read. No matter how many or few you do, in the “next to final draft” you need to read the paper as though through the eyes of your audience. (At the college-level this is most often your instructor).

It’s also an excellent idea to read your “next to final draft” aloud to one of your more critical friends [**William Blake** reminds us, “Opposition is true friendship.”] with a pen in hand and make whatever last minute corrections you can. You will be surprised what an ear can pick up that an eye misses. After all you’ve logged a lot more hours listening and speaking than reading and writing.

*The first principle of readability:*

I have a policy to read any piece of student writing only as long as it is “readable.” When the words become a jungle of letters, when the sentences become unrelated, when the main point has long since been lost, when the only substantiation for an argument is the writer’s assertions, I stop reading and commenting, draw double lines, write a large “U” for “unsatisfactory.” The paper has not even earned the right to be read, much less considered as a college-level paper.

My students may squawk, but their rewrites instantly become more readable. What I’m doing of course is very simple - providing a dose of reality therapy. No newspaper editor in the world would spend even a minute on a piece of writing that was not in a presentable form. No screenplay reader would expend more than ten seconds on a submission that was full of misspelled words or ungrammatical sentences. No bank vice-president is going to plow through a branch manager’s incoherent report.

Outside-of-school it is rare that someone is paid to read your writing. Your writing has to offer the readers its own intrinsic value to compensate them for the time they are devoting to reading it.

We are paid to read your writing, but never expect us to spend more time commenting on what you wrote than you spent writing it. Always respect your reader, and your reader will respect you.

## **My Checklist for Expository Academic Writing**

I designed the following “Checklist for Expository and Argumentative Writing” to help you determine the readability of your essay more systematically. Check each item against your paper and put a large question mark at each point that needs further work.

## I. EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

**PURPOSE:** The paper fulfills the requirements of the assignment. (Whether you were responding to someone else's assigned topic or were generating your own, a reader after reading the paper should not have to ask, "Why was this written?") A paper that does not directly address what was assigned or do what it set out to do is liable to receive no credit.

Before you attack your final draft, you might want to write a "statement of purpose," in which you remind yourself of the original focus and scope the paper was supposed to have. "Does this fit in with what I said I was going to do and what the assignment requires?" A statement of purpose begins, "In this [argumentative, descriptive, analytical, reflection, or whatever] paper [lab report or whatever], I want to . . . [then state your assertion. ] You can use this to keep the paper on track. Straying from your original plan is not necessarily a bad thing at all, but it is a good idea periodically to check on where you stand with your own "statement of purpose" and adjust your material accordingly.

**AUTHORITY:** You have some authority to write on your subject, and you have established that authority somewhere or somehow in the paper.

Usually this is accomplished by the sheer weight of the specific factual evidence and/or references that you present in the paper. "Authority" does not mean that you are an expert, but you must show the reader the worthwhile information that you have accumulated on the subject at hand. Only God could get away with the "Ten Unsupported Assertions." For mortals "mere assertions" neither prove nor explain nor illustrate anything.

**AUDIENCE:** You have considered the limitations and interests of your intended audience. You would not write the same paper on the building of a bridge, let's say, for a class of fifth graders and a group of engineering students.

Who is your audience for a college-level writing assignment? Two deadly answers are "the teacher" and "anyone who might pick this paper up." The former will freeze you ("What can I tell my Economics professor about free enterprise?"); the latter provides no input. ("Anyone" needs to know practically "everything"). One of the most wasteful things you can do in a college-level paper is fill it with background information or plot summaries that an educated person would already know. Assume your audience at least knows the text or subject that you are working on, but does not yet know the points you are trying to make. A good audience to have in mind is one of your other college professors - preferably one you feel has liked your work. A generic college professor is reasonably well read, open to other points of view, and generally the intellectual equal of

the teacher who made the assignment in the first place. The difference is that he or she is not overly familiar with your topic, and you have to explain and prove it.

## II. INTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS:

**THESIS STATEMENT:** The exact nature of your intention with respect to your material should be clear and discoverable early on in the paper. Since the thesis is ultimately the statement embodying purpose and exerting control over the material in the paper, comments on papers lacking a clearly stated thesis are likely to indicate the reader's frustration or bewilderment. "What are you trying to prove?" "???" "What exactly is your point?" "I don't see what your purpose is." Be sure that you are not just writing "about" a subject, but have postulated a debatable statement.

**Ponsot and Deen** simplify the distinction between hypothesis and thesis in a formulaic way. Sophisticated writers are usually more subtle and engaging in their approach:

The first paragraph introduces and formulates a hypothesis (sometimes mistakenly - since prematurely - called a thesis) which proposes the writer's idea about the subject. The final paragraph restates the idea about the subject in the light of the evidence of the middle; if that evidence is adequate, it is earned as a thesis statement.

**THESIS LIMITATION:** The scope of the paper is limited in such a way so that the topic can be explored in some depth within the space allotted. A five page paper needs to be more tightly limited in scope than a twenty page paper and so on.

Take for example a general topic on the Civil War. If you have only ten pages to fill, it would be inappropriate to tackle "The Economic Ramifications of the Union Embargoes" since you could easily write a doctoral thesis-length study. "The Economic Effects of the Union Blockade on Charleston in the First Years of the Civil War," may prove to be perfect. It is also possible to be too limited in your topic. You might find it very difficult to get ten pages out of "The Inflation in the Price of European Women's Hats in Charleston during the Civil War."

**ORGANIZATION:** A good essay's structure is **organic**; **there should be some logic to why a particular point precedes or follows another one.** Transitions between different points should be either obvious or explicit. Topic sentences for paragraphs should be apparent and function as guide posts through the paper.

Could you build a fairly meaningful outline from the opening sentences of your paragraphs? Is there one and only one topic per paragraph? Is your topic sentence easy to find in the paragraph or relatively implicit? Is it supported by what you wrote in the rest of the paragraph? Do the ideas link together within the paragraph? Do they link together between paragraphs? In other words, is there a reason why paragraph three follows two and precedes paragraph four? If you can re-write the paper scrambling the paragraphs at random, you have not yet organized your paper.

**SUBSTANTIATION:** There is concrete evidence and/or illustration for every important judgment, inference, generalization and abstraction. Judgments, inferences, generalizations and abstractions have to be earned. This is closely related to logic below.

You will want to head off instructor's editorial comments that might read: "Provide specifics," "Illustrate," "Supply facts," "Details needed," "Too general," "Give examples."

**LOGIC:** The statements and/or arguments are logical and coherent. Logic involves the form of an argument or the relation between evidence and conclusion. Objections to illogical thinking include such terms as "Logic?" "Proof," "This sounds like a contradiction," "It doesn't follow," "Your premises are unclear," "Shaky thinking," "Fuzzy," "This doesn't necessarily follow." [*See the extended presentation on avoiding logical fallacies in the following section.*]

**STYLE:** The choices involving words, sentence structures and paragraphs, manifest clarity and appropriateness. Another way of saying it is, "put the right words in the right places." Judgments about style are probably the most subjective. Comments like "jargon," "wrong word," "awkward," "This reads like an elementary school essay," often sound either exasperatingly trivial or monumentally insulting.

Some good questions to ask yourself about style are the following: Is the paper clear and relatively easy to read? Is it written to the audience in "their" language"? Do you use action verbs consistently? Is there variety in sentence length? Have you avoided or explained or properly used any jargon for your intended audience? Leonard Rubinstein put it nicely, "Style which attracts attention to itself and not to what it says is bad."

**GRAMMAR AND CORRECT STANDARD ENGLISH USAGE:** These are basic requirements. Strictly, errors in grammar are those relating to the structure of the language or substandard constructions, such as "Bush don't care for labor unions." The term is also used to cover mistakes in usage. Sentences which make no sense may also be tagged with "ungrammatical." Correct spelling of all your words is also a minimal requirement in a college-level paper. At the college level any teacher is justified in lowering the grade of or even failing a paper solely on its grammatical failure.

Proofread your final draft very carefully. (There are no “typographical” errors; there are only errors.) A word processor with a spelling checker can be more valuable and reliable than the eyes and reliability of a friend although getting someone else to read the paper before you hand it in is always valuable. Each instructor will use some type of more or less standard correction symbols to mark these errors. (A representative sample of these appears in “Editor’s Symbols”).

### **Some Notes about Logic and Logical Fallacies:**

Logical support for an argument is essential to its credibility. Logic is much too involved to treat adequately in the limited format of this guide. Nevertheless it is important in every piece of writing that you start sensitizing yourself to making logical statements and avoiding logical fallacies.

**NOTE:** *As important as logic is, one should also be very aware of the many other means of rhetorical effectiveness. That subject, however, requires a far more extensive discussion than is possible within the narrow parameters of this writing guide.*

#### *Logical Fallacies:*

Very simply logical fallacies are errors in reasoning that subtly pass for worthwhile arguments. A careful reader is good at detecting fallacious appeals. A careful writer avoids them; they can seriously undermine his or her own argument. What follows is a generous sample of common logical fallacies you should avoid:

1. **Hasty Generalization** — making a generalization from too few examples or insufficient evidence. “People who have tattoos are dangerous. I know a couple of them who are in real trouble.”

2. **Selected Instances** — proving a point by selecting only those facts which substantiate it, ignoring facts which disprove it. Even though the arguer knows of cleaner dorms and other students, he states, “Students can’t keep their dorm rooms clean. Yesterday Joe’s room was so filthy he didn’t have space on the floor to throw away the pizza box.”

3. **Arguing by extension** — taking your opponent’s reasonable statement and making it an extreme or absurd one. “You say vocabulary study is important. What possible importance is it that I know the meaning of ‘sesquipedalian’?”

4. **Argument by diversion** — diverting the argument from the main point to some subsidiary issue where you are more sure of yourself. “Our suburban high school is not a

Taj Mahal. Why, last year there were more than 500 drownings that could have been prevented if people had only learned how to swim in an Olympic-sized pool like ours.”

5. **Argument by irrelevant objection** — objecting to a very minor point in the example or illustration; denying a fact brought forward when that fact is not really important. “There weren’t 500 drownings; there were only 498.”

6. **Supposing that the mean between two extremes is always true**; the fallacy that the truth always lies in the middle. “Some people say voting should begin at age 18; others, at age 21. Nineteen and a half must be the best solution.”

7. **Non-sequitur** — defending a statement by bringing in another statement which does not in fact prove it. “Communism must be the best form of government; after all they got a satellite up first.”

8. **Arguing in a circle**— the conclusion is a mere restatement of the first premise. “It’s all right for me to drink because it’s a free country.”

9. **Asserting the consequent** — stating a supposition that leads to a conclusion, saying the conclusion is right, therefore the supposition must be right. “If Bugsy Siegel had been a great man, they would have made a movie about his life, right? Well, they did make a movie out of his life; so he must have been a great man.”

10. **Denying the antecedent** -- stating a supposition, then the conclusion; saying the supposition is wrong; therefore the conclusion is wrong. “If we could clear away all slums, we could reduce delinquency. We can’t clear away all slums; so we can’t reduce delinquency.”

11. **Equivocation** — using a key word in a double sense. “The Bill of Rights guarantees ‘liberty.’ Then why do we have to obey all these stupid parking regulations?”

12. **Begging the question** — wording your argument so that the proposition that has yet to be proven appears inevitable. “There has to be a God because I would not have been able to make the statement, ‘There has to be a God,’ unless God had first created me.”

13. **Ad hominem** — attacking the person rather than his or her argument. “Ted Kennedy’s national health insurance plan is absurd. How can a man of his moral character be taken seriously?”

14. **Concurrency** — because two events happen at the same time the arguer assumes one is the cause of the other, but a cause has to happen previous to an effect. “Lyndon Johnson was responsible for the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.”

15. ***Post hoc ergo propter hoc*** — Assuming that merely because a fact is antecedent to another that it is the cause of the second. “I ate a cheese sandwich for lunch, and now I have an upset stomach. I’ll never eat cheese sandwiches again.”

16. **Many questions** — hiding a presupposed statement when asking a “yes /no” question. “Have you stopped cheating on your exams?”

17. **False analogy** — implying that two things have similarity in all respects when it exists only in one or two. “Hair is like grass. If you cut it too short, it won’t grow again.”

18. **Appealing to authority** — basing your argument just on the strength of who said it and quoting a person who is really not an authority on the subject in question. “Dorothy Parker was highly critical of women’s rights, and she was the best female writer in America at the time.”

19. **Overcoming resistance to a doubtful proposition by introducing acceptable statements.** “You admit that students are human and that human nature is fallible. Then it is obvious that the honor system will never work.”

20. **Tabloid thinking** — over-simplifying complex issues and stating them in such a way that they fit into the thought patterns of the mob. “Why argue for pacifism? Don’t you know how many Americans were behind the Persian Gulf War?”

### **Re-Shaping:**

*“Ninety percent of good writing is re-writing.”*

What you do after you get the paper returned is what will determine whether or not you will improve as a writer. My own writing has convinced me that “ninety per cent of writing is re-writing.” Re-shaping or learning how progressively to revise your writing draft after draft is the real work of an experienced writer. At each draft level your paper should lie more comfortably along the guidelines in this book.

### *Hieroglyphics:*

Probably the most misunderstood aspect of the evaluation of written work in college is the variety of responses that you receive back from your instructor. Whereas we do expect some type of uniformity in presentation of your paper, you should not expect a reciprocal uniformity of responses back.

Some of your papers will be returned looking like the wall in an Egyptian tomb - full of symbols and strange scratchings. Others will look as pristine as the day they were handed in with the modest addition of a comment like “Nicely done” and a grade written on the last page. Some instructors will arrange for a lengthy conference in their offices or engage you in a lengthy phone or e-mail exchange. Others will create a dialogue by writing in your margins almost as much as you wrote yourself in the paper.

*The instructor’s primary objective is to communicate and improve your writing.*

In any case believe it or not the instructor’s objective is to communicate with you as productively as possible. When an instructor comments on a paper, he is talking to it and to you. Listen. You are also entitled to an understanding of that communication. Ideally every writer meets personally with his or her editor for a lengthy dialogue about how to improve on the piece of writing submitted. The ideal is seldom achieved in other than one on one instructional settings. We pride ourselves at liberal arts colleges with being accessible to our students; however, we can’t read your minds. It is your responsibility to inform us if you are unsure either what was right or wrong with your paper or what you can do or should have done to improve it.

The process of writing is this inextricable *pas de deux* between a writer and his or her reader, and there is nothing that will improve your writing more than a close reading and evaluation by an informed editor. Remember our educational goal is not completed when we simply evaluate or grade your writing; we’re out to improve it.

*Getting some objective distance from your work:*

**Quintilian** in A.D. 80 wrote, “There can be no doubt that the best method of correction is to put aside what we have written for a certain time, so that when we return to it after an interval it will have the air of novelty and of being another’s handiwork.”

Consider your instructor’s conversations with you and your paper as the short cut to this distancing. Toward facilitating this dialogue at University College we use the Academic Writing Grading Guide that is at the end of this book.

*From Rewrites to Portfolio to Publication:*

Rewrite as often as you can. Take pride in your work, because it represents you far more than you realize.

Finally show respect for your own writing by maintaining some type of portfolio. All artists, and a writer is certainly an artist, keep the best of their work in a portfolio to learn from, to show off for assessment purposes. Whether it is kept in a cardboard box marked “My college work” or on a computer flash drive or floppy disk, you should select your best written work from each term and store it.

You might surprise yourself years from now and discover that what you did here, “wasn’t half bad.” You might even believe in it enough to get it published or publish it yourself on the internet.

## Editor's Symbols

To help you with the dialogue between your instructor and your paper here is a fairly lengthy list of standard editing symbols with some illustrative examples. In all likelihood your instructor will use fewer than these. In some cases he or she will hand out a correction sheet to help you decipher individual usages.

ABB (Incorrect abbreviation)

*Marked Text:* 49 a.d.

*Revised Text:* A.D. 49 or just “in the year 49” (NOTE: B.C. follows the date as in 49 B.C. In the spirit of political correctness BCE [Before the Common Era] and CE [the Common Era] are the more current usages.)

ADJ/ADV (Adjective/adverb error)

*Marked Text:* He writes as good as he can.

*Revised Text:* He writes as well as he can.

AGR (Subjects and verbs need to agree as do pronouns and their referents.)

*Marked Text:* The team's management locked out their employees.

*Revised Text:* The team's management locked out its employees.

*Marked Text:* Either her friends or Sally are harassing Jim.

*Revised Text:* Either her friends or Sally is harassing Jim.

CAPS or NO CAPS (Incorrect capitalization also sometimes UC or LC for “Upper Case” or “Lower Case”)

*Marked Text:* His reeboks cost over a hundred dollars.

*Revised Text:* His Reeboks cost over a hundred dollars.

*Marked Text:* Jim Bowie sold his farm in the South and headed West.

*Revised Text:* Jim Bowie sold his farm in the South and headed west.

CF ( Comma fault- there are many varieties)

*Marked Text:* It was later than he thought, she had already said her goodbyes to the rabbit.

*Revised Text:* It was later than he thought; she had already said her goodbyes to the rabbit.

COMBINE (Combine more of your sentences because they are showing the relationships of the ideas they contain.)

*Marked Text:* Henry V ordered a slaughter of his own prisoners. They were French. This action was caused by a perceived atrocity. The atrocity was the murder of his baggage boys.

*Revised Text:* Henry V ordered the slaughter of his French prisoners because of an “atrocity” committed against his baggage boys.

DICTION (Consider a different word choice. Most college-level writing fits best with an informal to a technically more formal word choice that has neutral emotional connotation.)

*Marked Text:* I was ticked off by the failure of the Federal Reserve Board’s attempt to protect the dollar’s value overseas.

*Revised Text:* I was disturbed by the failure of the Federal Reserve Board’s attempt to protect the dollar’s value overseas.

DEVELOP (The marked statement needs further explanation and/or more specific factual support.)

*Marked Text:* Bush has done much to help the poor in America unlike the late Reagan Administration. Reagan's sole contribution was in appointing minorities like Clarence Thomas.

DOC (Check on the exact method for documenting your sources whether it is the MLA, APA or ACS. )

FRAG (Incomplete sentence fragment)

*Marked Text:* Even though Hitler had sent a half million troops into Russia. He was able to occupy and govern the rest of Europe.

*Revised Text:* Even though Hitler had sent a half million troops into Russia, he was able to occupy and govern the rest of Europe.

JARGON (The use of technical jargon can severely limit your reading audience although for the "initiated" audience such usage may be a more economical use of words.)

The following example passage from a critical theorist's essay on Punk slam dancing in the book *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture* might as well be in Greek for the uninitiated reader:

"Class essentialist conceptions of objectivity give primacy in their determination of genuine or 'intentioned resistance' to verbal and conscious modes of intentionality and signification over those which are verbal and unconscious."

MM (A misplaced modifier is usually the adjective, adjectival phrase or clause that is too far away from the word it modifies.)

*Marked Text:* The priest pointed out the mosaics to the tour group framed and mounted on the wall.

*Revised Text:* The priest pointed out the mosaics framed and mounted on the wall to the tour group.

MSS (Check manuscript format directions.)

PASS (Unnecessary or suspicious use of the passive voice)

*Marked Text:* Prime interest rates are lowered arbitrarily immediately preceding a national election.

*Revised Text:* The Federal Reserve Board appointed by the president arbitrarily lowers the prime interest rates immediately preceding a national election.

PRED (Faulty predication [use of the verb])

*Marked Text:* A characteristic that is enviable is a person who is a honest.

*Revised Text:* An enviable characteristic is honesty.

PROOF (Supply evidence or specific factual support for the marked statement.)

PRON (pronoun error)

*Marked Text:* When a person joins the Army, you give up some of your civil rights.

*Revised Text:* When you join the Army, you give up some of your civil rights.

PUNC (punctuation error)

‘ apostrophe (Usually used to show possession or to indicate a missing letter.)

Examples: The bishop’s letter appeared in the newspaper.

Don't blame me for not turning off the lights.

Its [No apostrophe] battery had been dead for months.

It's [Apostrophe used for the missing letters of "has"] been a terrible year; my dog died, and I bet a great deal of money on the New Orleans Saints.

[ ] brackets (Typically the author's insertion in a direct quote.)

Example: Eliot wrote, "He [James] was the finest writer in the language."

:

colon (Usually precedes a listing of a series)

Example: The tour will travel to the following cities: London, Paris, Amsterdam and Florence.

,

comma (The most used, underused, overused and abused of punctuation marks. There should always be a reason for its use. If you have a question, look it up in a handbook.)

—

dash (Not to be confused with a hyphen. A dash is used most often to emphasize an insertion in a sentence similar to a set of brackets.)

Example: Max Cady in Cape Fear is a sociopath— not unlike a former neighbor of mine in Pittsburgh -- who actually enjoyed inflicting discomfort on others.

. . .

ellipses (usually indicate an omission in a quoted text)

Example: Anais Nin put it this way, "We . . . write to heighten our own awareness of life."

!

exclamation (Should be used rarely in expository essay writing)

-

hyphen (usually connects compound words or splits words at the syllable to fill out a line of printed text)

Example: The Greek city-state was a political aberration.

- . period (Punctuates a complete declarative sentence)
- ? question mark (Punctuates a complete interrogative sentence)
- “ double quotation (In American convention to indicate a direct quotation from another source)
- ‘ single quotation (Indicates a quotation within a quotation)
- ; semi-colon (Used in compound sentences to separate the independent clauses in the sentence from each other)

Example: The FBI handles the national surveillance of potential terrorists; the CIA is responsible for their international surveillance.

REDUNDANT (Saying it once is usually saying it best.)

REPHRASE (The marked sentence could be expressed more clearly.)

RUN-ON [fused] (Two or more independent sentences fused together in a single sentence without proper punctuation and/or linking words.)

*Marked Text:* It was autumn leaves and footballs filled the air.

*Revised Text:* It was autumn; leaves and footballs filled the air.

SHIFT (Unnecessary shift in number, tense voice, person tone or diction)

*Marked Text:* Football linemen receive much less pay than quarterbacks in spite of the fact that a lineman suffers more injuries.

*Revised Text:* Football linemen receive much less pay than quarterbacks in spite of the fact that they suffer more injuries.

SP (Spelling error - Look up the word in a dictionary.)

S/V (Incorrect subject/verb agreement)

THESIS? (Your thesis statement either does not appear in the paper or it does not control what you have included.)

TOPIC? (Your topic sentence either does not appear in the paragraph or it does not control what you have included. Similar to the point above.)

TRANS (Transition elements between paragraphs or sentences are either missing or unclear.)

*Marked Text:* Lucy is crazy. Jim intentionally lies.

*Revised Text:* Lucy is crazy, but Jim is worse; he intentionally lies.

VARIETY (Vary your sentence structures. Usually the problem is that you are only writing in simple sentences.)

WORDY (Too many words to say too little - Peter Elbow maintains that you gain a reader for each word you cut.)

WW (Wrong word chosen — Look up the exact meaning in the dictionary.)

*Marked Text:* Hitler's troops were decimated in the Russian campaign. (NOTE: to be "decimated" accurately means to be reduced by 10%.)

*Revised Text:* Hitler's troops were annihilated in the Russian campaign.

¶ or [no ¶] (You need a new paragraph at this point. Or do not start a new paragraph.)

X (or cross out) (Obvious error - delete)

^ (Insert omitted words here.)

# (Improper form of the numeral)

[something circled] (Incorrect usage)

### **On the variability of grading :**

Don't be discouraged or draw too many conclusions from any single evaluation of a paper. Every university student at one time or another has had a strong suspicion that success or failure on papers has more to do with "who is doing the evaluation" than with "what or how well she wrote." More extensive experience with college work will serve as a corrective to that belief, but there will always be a measure of subjectivity in the weighting of the factors of effective expository writing by individual professors. What I'm trying to say is that human variability will exist as much with the evaluation of your writing as it does with any human activity that involves skill and talent. (This is the reason behind having so many judges for competitive gymnastics, diving and figure skating).

In a recent study 100 experienced English teachers were given the same essay to grade. The grades did range from A to F, but by far the greatest frequency clustered around a fairly narrow range, let's say between B- and C+.

In a 1992 study that compared high school and college English teachers on their ranking of the elements of writing there was much more agreement than disagreement: "Educators at both levels said writing a unified essay ranked first, followed by using supporting detail. . . . They also placed high on the list the importance of students' knowing how to edit and how to arrange an argument logically."

In order to articulate better the criteria for academic writing assessment and its specific application to improving your writing we at Brandman University College employ a grading guide, a copy of which is at the end of this book.

## **Why Write Research Papers?**

The details of research paper writing is so discipline specific that it is outside the scope of this brief writing guide; however, the concepts behind writing research papers themselves should be emphasized:

### **1. Demonstrates the methodology of a discipline:**

Term paper writing is a good way to introduce students to the working methods of a particular discipline. The term paper, especially in the humanities and social sciences, is analogous to laboratory work in the sciences. The term paper should help students become aware of how a given discipline operates; what kinds of material it handles; and how it evaluates evidence; what reasoning it uses; what kinds of truths it can discover; what kinds of truths are beyond its limits. You become a historian not by memorizing facts but by acting like a historian. A term paper requires that you act the part of historian, psychologist, literary critic, etc.

### **2. Declares independence from your teachers:**

A term paper begins the process of liberating a student from her teachers. By introducing students to the source materials of a discipline, professors are handing over the keys to their kingdoms. It is no small accomplishment to learn to use the basic encyclopedias, reference works, bibliographies, journals and texts of a given field. For good or ill, most research must be built on the findings of those who have gone before, and no student can be considered proficient in his or her field until he or she has mastered its course materials.

### **3. Stretches your competencies:**

No other kind of assignment can provide the depth that a term paper requires. Courses - even advanced ones - are necessarily general. There is rarely time in class to pursue an idea or line of reasoning in any detail; the term paper, on the other hand, demands that a student learn quite a lot about a particular part of a subject. No other experience can reveal the depth and complexity of a subject as well as a term paper assignment. After doing the research for a term paper, the student should feel intellectually stretched and be more appreciative of his or her discipline's complexity and rigor.

### ***A Cautionary Word about Plagiarism***

Colleges expect the highest ethical standards from every member of their communities. Academic dishonesty in any form compromises the integrity of the very nature, aims, and purposes of a university. The severity of the penalties underscores an institution's seriousness about this matter.

Plagiarism (meaning "kidnapper" in Latin) is an all too common and insidious form of academic dishonesty. A plagiarizer is a thief who steals the words or ideas of another person and presents them as his or her own. People who buy research papers and hand them in to instructors are among the most corrupt of plagiarizers.

Sometimes students plagiarize unintentionally because of ignorance, believing that they must acknowledge indebtedness to a source only if they quote verbatim from it. Such people are misinformed. If in a paper you use the words or ideas of a published source, you must credit the author appropriately whether you a) quote verbatim, b) paraphrase (i.e., express someone else's idea in your own words) or c) summarize someone else's idea.

Here is a helpful rationale for proper documentation from a McGraw-Hill publication - *The Short Handbook for Writers*:

Documentation means including notes within your paper to tell readers where you located specific ideas and information and also including a list of your sources at the end of the paper. Documentation has two important functions: to give credit to the sources you have consulted and to enable your readers to look up the original material. Documenting also protects you against possible plagiarism: it distinguishes your thoughts and words from those of your sources.

Matters of common knowledge (for example, the dates of Eisenhower's administration) need not be documented; however, if you write in your paper that one of Eisenhower's nephews was a Communist Party member living in Moscow during the fifties you had better acknowledge your source.

Your instructor will tell you that careful note-taking, attention to accuracy, and utter honesty in documenting your sources will help you avoid the charge of plagiarism. Remember that it is better to over-document than to under-document a research paper. And remember also that if you have any doubt concerning documentation or lack of it, you should consult your instructor **before** you hand in the paper.

*To Prevent Plagiarism Use Proper Documentation:*

Generally the proper documentation [i.e. attribution] of your use of source material will protect you from the charge of plagiarism. For most college-level courses there are three main types of documenting your research: the **APA** (the American Psychological Association); **MLA** (the Modern Language Association) the Modern Language Association and the University of Chicago style formats.

Psychology, education and most of the other social sciences use APA; English, foreign languages and some other humanities fields use MLA; and many of the history and political science fields use The University of Chicago.

The style manuals for other disciplines are listed in the selected bibliography at the end of this guidebook. There is also a fairly comprehensive list of hyperlinks to style manual resources on the Chapman Library website [located here](#).

*What is most important:*

What is most important is that you can recognize plagiarism when you see it and can rectify the situation **“before”** you hand the paper in. After the fact is too late and can mar your professional career.

There is a great self-directed tutorial on “How to Recognize Plagiarism” designed by the School of Education at Indiana University at Bloomington that is [located here](#).

## **Extra Scoring Bonus**

### **Suggestions for Writing the In-class Essay or Comprehensive Examination**

Only a true “beat-the-clock” adrenaline junky could really look forward to taking a timed, in-class essay examination. The instructor himself faces hours of squinting at barely legible handwriting, listening often enough for faint echoes of his own voice. There is a method to the madness, however. To pursue facts alone is truly a trivial pursuit. To be able to make sense of those facts and communicate them in an orderly and substantial way is a mark of genuine knowing. The ability to see what a particular problem or condition is, and to devise a strategy to cope with it, is what education is all about. To do it all under a certain amount of pressure is even a further proving ground for success in the life beyond college. The In-class Essay Examination is that proving ground. What follows are some practical suggestions to help you meet the test.

1. Read carefully all of the essay questions and follow the exam instructions to the letter. If the professor says to answer four questions, answer four questions not three. Technically, if you only wrote on three, your professor has the right to give you no higher than a 75% on that exam. If you are unclear about the exact instructions, get your professor to clarify them before the exam begins. Also note the point value of each question and distribute your time proportionally. (This is like playing a board game. Don't pay more for Baltic Avenue than you do for Park Place.)

2. Before beginning answering any one of the questions, make a brief outline in the margins of your blue book of the chief points of all of the questions that you are going to answer. Include in that outline quick notes on the supporting details that you will want to include in your answers. This is an important tip because, as you start composing the answer to a particular question, your mind will automatically start to “block out” other information. Your quick notes will remind you what you knew at the start of the exam when your mind was clearest

3. Above all, don't panic. Spend the first part of the exam answering the questions you know best then proceed to those you know less well. As you start clicking off answers, you will miraculously start calming down and gaining confidence. Since the “act of writing is also the act of thinking,” it frequently happens that you actually will know more at the end of an examination than you thought you knew at the beginning.

4. Being specific and concrete in your answers will earn more points than being general and abstract. Also note that you get no points for irrelevant material. In fact some professors even deduct points for it since its insertion indicates a lack of understanding of the question asked.

5. Finally don't forget that you are expected to write an essay. A good essay examination is just as much an "essay" as it is an "examination." All the principles listed in this guide under "A Checklist for Expository and Argumentative Writing" apply to an **in-class essay** if not exactly to the same degree. Especially note the "Audience" recommendations in that checklist.

6. Answer *the question that is asked*. What follows are some brief explanations for some common terms used in essay examination questions.

a. **Analyze** - You are expected to break your subject up into its component parts and show how the part contains the whole. "Analyze e.e. cummings' use of imagery in his 'Cambridge ladies' poem."

b. **Comment (also Critique)** - State your opinion on the matter referenced and support that opinion with illustrative examples. "Comment on the break-up of the former Soviet Union."

c. **Compare** - (This usually also implies **Contrast** as well.)- Show the similarities and differences between two subjects. "Compare Shakespeare's Othello with the Othello in his source."

d. **Define** - Present the meaning of a particular term and differentiate it from similar terms. You are almost always expected to provide illustrative examples of the term. "Define 'Christian Humanism' as it applies to Thomas More's Utopia."

e. **Describe** - Use description to show what your subject looks like or narrate what happened. "Describe the process of mitosis."

f. **Discuss (also Examine and Investigate)**- Examine a particular subject in detail. "Discuss the causes of the War of 1812."

g. **Evaluate** - Make a judgment on the relative worth of something. "Evaluate the Canadian National Health Care System."

h. **Interpret** - Explicate the meaning of. "Interpret the severe decline in the prime interest rate over the last two years."

i. **Outline (also List, Review and Summarize)** - Give the main points. "Outline the United States' involvement in Southeast Asia between 1945 and 1965."

j. **Prove (also Demonstrate)**- Provide logical reasons for or against a statement. "Demonstrate that the following statements are fallacies."

## **A Selected Bibliography of Field Specific Style Manuals**

### **The Humanities and Business**

#### *English Literature and Foreign Language Study*

Gibaldi, Joseph and Achtert, Walter. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. New York: The Modern Language Association.

#### *History, (also most Business and Economics)*

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

#### *Journalism:*

*The Associated Press Stylebook*. Ed. G. P. Winkler. New York: Associated Press.

Jordan, Lewis, ed. *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage: A Desk Book of Guidelines for Writers and Editors*. New York: Times Books.

#### *Legal Studies*

Rombauer, Marjorie. *Legal Problem Solving, Analysis, Research and Writing*. St. Paul: West Publishing.

*A Uniform System of Citations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Law Review Association. [for general citations]

### **The Natural Sciences and Mathematics:**

#### *Biology*

Council of Biology Editors. *Style Manual Committee. CBE Style Manual: A Guide for Authors, Editors, and Publishers in the Biological Sciences*. Bethesda, Md.: Council of Biology Editors.

*Chemistry*

Dodd, Janet S., ed. *The ACS Guide: A Manual for Authors and Editors*. Washington: American Chemical Society.

*Mathematics*

American Mathematical Society. *A Manual for Authors of Mathematical Papers*. Providence, R.I. : American Mathematical Society.

*Physics*

American Institute of Physics. *Style Manual for Guidance in the Preparation of Papers*. 4th ed. New York: American Institute of Physics.

**The Social Sciences:**

*Psychology, Education and many of the other social sciences*

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, D. C. American Psychological Association.

*Sociology*

*American Sociological Association Style Guide*. Washington, D. C. American Sociological Association

**Advanced Expository Writing Grading Rubric  
by John Freed (revised August 2009)**

*Exemplary* = *A grade range*

*Above Average* = *B grade range*

*Satisfactory* = *C grade range*

*Unsatisfactory* = *C-/D/F grade range*

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Exemplary (A grade range)</i>	<i>Above Average (B grade range)</i>	<i>Satisfactory (C grade range)</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory (C-/D/F grade range)</i>
<b>Match with the assignment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The paper meets or exceeds the minimum number of pages required for the assignment and its content is an obvious response to it.			<input type="checkbox"/> The paper does <b>not</b> meet the minimum number of pages required for the assignment and/or has no relationship to the assignment.
<b>Overall Logical Persuasiveness</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> There is a strong and convincing logical necessity between the supporting materials presented and the conclusion of the thesis or hypothesis.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are some lingering doubts about the logical necessity between the supporting materials presented and the conclusion of the thesis or hypothesis.	<input type="checkbox"/> There is a marginal association between the supporting materials presented and the conclusion of the thesis or hypothesis.	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no logical necessity between the supporting materials presented and the conclusion of the thesis or hypothesis. A reader is very unlikely to be persuaded by this argument.
<b>Quality of Analysis and/or Interpretation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer demonstrates original and significant analysis and/or interpretation of source materials. His particular contribution to the subject is impressive.	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer demonstrates significant analysis and/or interpretation of source materials. His contribution to the subject is clearly evident.	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer demonstrates minimally acceptable analysis and/or interpretation of source material. He appears to make very little original contribution to the subject.	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer demonstrates insufficient analysis and/or interpretation of source material and makes no contribution to the subject.
<b>Thesis statement</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The thesis is stated in a clear, concise and thought provoking manner and is limited enough to be developed in some depth within the parameters of the paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> The thesis or argument is discoverable but either not articulated precisely enough as an hypothesis or the topic may be too broad or narrow for the size of the project or paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> The thesis is not explicitly articulated and/or not limited enough or too limited for the size of the project or paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> There is no discoverable thesis or argument to determine whether it is properly limited or not.

<b>Title and Introduction</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The title and introduction are engaging, and accurately anticipate the approach taken in the paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> The title and introduction reflect fairly accurately the content of the paper but do little to generate reader interest.	<input type="checkbox"/> The title and introduction are more confusing than elucidating.	<input type="checkbox"/> There appears to be very marginal or no connections between the title and introduction and the contents of the paper.
<b>Evidence (Substantiation)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer always substantiates abstractions, judgments and assertions with specific illustrations, facts and evidence appropriate to the assignment and/or discipline.  The reader gains important insights.	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer nearly always substantiates abstractions, judgments and assertions with specific illustrations, facts and evidence appropriate to the assignment and/or discipline.  The reader gains some insights.	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer seldom substantiates abstractions, judgments and assertions with specific illustrations, facts and evidence.  The reader gains few insights.	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer does not substantiate often vaguely worded abstractions, judgments and/or sweeping generalizations.  The reader is often confused, unconvinced or even misinformed.
<b>Organization</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the paragraphs are logically and organically arranged as sub-topics or sections of the paper's main thesis statement, hypothesis or instructor posed question. The reader can easily follow the writer's line of thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/> Nearly all of the paragraphs are logically and organically arranged as sub-topics or sections of the paper's main thesis statement, hypothesis or instructor posed question. For the most part, the reader can follow the writer's line of thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/> In general, the paragraphs are logically and organically arranged as sub-topics or sections of the paper's main thesis statement, hypothesis or instructor posed question. The reader has some difficulty following the writer's line of thinking.	<input type="checkbox"/> The paragraphs appear to be randomly arranged. The reader cannot identify a line of reasoning.
<b>Language</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The language is consistently professional and appropriate for an academic research paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> The language is generally professional. For the most part, it is appropriate for an academic research paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> The language is not consistently professional or appropriate for an academic research paper.	<input type="checkbox"/> The language is often too colloquial and not appropriate for an academic research paper.
<b>Sentence Structure (Style)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Sentences are well-phrased and varied in length and structure. They flow smoothly from one to another.	<input type="checkbox"/> Sentences are well-phrased and there is some variety in their length and structure.	<input type="checkbox"/> Some sentences are awkwardly constructed. The reader occasionally has difficulty making sense out of them.	<input type="checkbox"/> The errors in sentence structure are frequent enough to be a major source of confusion for the reader. There is little or no variety in the sentence structure throughout the paper.

<b>Word choice (diction)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is consistently precise and accurate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is generally good. The writer often goes beyond the approximate word to find the most accurate one.	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is merely adequate, and the range of words is limited. Some words are used inaccurately.	<input type="checkbox"/> Many words are chosen inappropriately, muddling the sense of the piece.
<b>Standard English Grammar, Spelling, and Mechanics</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> There are no apparent errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are a few errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling that are easily fixable in another round of editing.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are a number of errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling making the paper appear to be <b>not</b> college-level material.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are numerous and distracting errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling disqualifying the paper from college-level submission.
<b>Use of References</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Compelling evidence from numerous professionally legitimate sources is given to support claims. Both primary and secondary sources are used appropriately and extensively throughout paper. Attribution is clear and fairly represented.	<input type="checkbox"/> Many professionally legitimate sources that support claims are presented and attribution, for the most part, is given.  Both primary and secondary sources are used.	<input type="checkbox"/> Several claims are substantiated by questionable sources. Although attributions are occasionally given, the reader is often confused about the actual source of the information and ideas.  Limited primary and/or secondary sources are used.	<input type="checkbox"/> References are seldom cited to support statements.  The paper lacks primary and/or secondary sources.
<b>Quality of References</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> References are principally professional in nature. The reader has strong confidence that the information is credible.	<input type="checkbox"/> Although most of the references are professionally legitimate, a couple may be debatable (e.g. popular magazines or nonprofessional websites). The reader may be uncertain of the reliability of some of the sources.	<input type="checkbox"/> Several of the references are suspect with regard to their objectivity. The reader is skeptical of much of the material presented.	<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the references are from sources that are clearly dubious. The reader has serious doubts about the value or usefulness of the material presented.
<b>Documentation Format and Academic Integrity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The writer always acknowledges the work of others by utilizing a standard documentation format such as APA, MLA or Chicago. The chosen format is used accurately throughout the paper and in the Works Cited section.	<input type="checkbox"/> The chosen documentation format is used consistently but with some minor errors.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are frequent errors in properly citing the work of others in terms of format. There may also be questionable use of unacknowledged source material that borders on academic dishonesty.	<input type="checkbox"/> The format of the documentation is not in any recognizable documentation format such as APA, MLA or Chicago. There may also be consequential questions about the writer's plagiarizing in the paper.

<p><b>Paper as Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper demonstrated a superior understanding of meeting the course's or program's learning objectives.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper demonstrated a highly competent understanding of meeting the course's or program's learning outcomes.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper demonstrated a sufficient understanding of meeting the course's or program's learning outcomes.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper demonstrated an insufficient understanding of meeting the course's or program's learning outcomes.</p>
<p><b>Final Rhetorical Effectiveness</b></p> <p>The writer meets the interests and needs of the particular audience and succeeds in his or her intended purpose--honestly engaging the subject and establishing her or his authority by offering a persuasive and factually supportable analysis.</p>				

## The Last Words

What I'd like you to remember from this guidebook is, "All good writing regardless of type should have a perceivable direction (purpose or thesis), a principle of organization, substance (specific evidence or concrete illustration), logic, a sense of the writer's authority and basic presentability (acceptable grammar, spelling, and format). The very best writing also has an economy of words (not unlike good poetry), development (not unlike a good narrative), and interest (not unlike a good drama). All good writing shares the characteristic of being 'readable'; all bad writing of being 'unreadable.'"

Finally never forget that writing and reading are inextricably related. I'll give the final final word on the subject to **William Safire**, the word pundit for the *New York Times*:

Guides to writing - some in print, others in software - continue to proliferate; . . . But nothing helps the aspiring writer more than reading fine writers in action.

### **A Note about this Publication and New Media's Gift Economy**

The original print edition of this Guidebook cost **\$4.95**. This updated and hyperlinked, electronic edition has been produced under the Creative Commons License and is distributed for **free** under the hosting auspices of SCRIBD.

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<http://www.scribd.com/doc/20760202/A-Survivor-s-Guide-to-College-Writing-by-Dr-John-Freed-rev10-2009>.

**John Freed, Ph.D.**

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