

## HUMANITIES AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION STUDENT WRITING GUIDE

This guide is intended for general use in Humanities and Western Civilization courses at the University of Kansas. It is specifically designed to aid students with writing assignments in Western Civilization I and II courses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS Page Number

PART I—TYPES OF WRITING 2-7

1. THE ESSAY EXAM 2

2. THE BASIC ESSAY 3-

GUIDELINES 3

STRATEGIES 3-

ANALYSIS 3-4

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING 4

ARGUMENTATION 4-5

3. THE RESEARCH PAPER 5-6

4. THE IN-CLASS ESSAY 6-7

PART II—WRITING TIPS 8-11

1. THESIS STATEMENTS 8

2. INCORPORATING REFERENCES 8-10

3. GRAMMAR AND STYLE 10-11

ACTIVE/PASSIVE VOICE 10-11

DICTION 11

### Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is a direct violation of intellectual and academic honesty. While it exists in many forms, all plagiarisms refer to the same act: representing somebody else's words or ideas as one's own. The most extreme forms of plagiarism are a paper written by another person, a paper obtained from a commercial source, or a paper made up of passages copied without acknowledgment from any format including online sources. Paraphrasing or summarizing authors' ideas or quoting even limited portions of their text without proper citation is also an act of plagiarism. Plagiarism in any of its forms is not tolerated by the University of Kansas or the Humanities and Western Civilization Program. It constitutes grounds for a failing grade for

the course as well as the assignment in question. It is also grounds for academic probation, suspension, or expulsion as the individual case may warrant.

To avoid plagiarism, see Part II, #2 of this guide for information on correct citation of sources.

(Adapted from The University Writing Center, California State University, Los Angeles

[http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/write\\_cn/plagiarism](http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/write_cn/plagiarism))

2

### THE ESSAY EXAM

#### KNOW WHAT THE QUESTION ASKS

Read the instructions carefully. Based on the number of questions and their value, decide on the time to allocate to each response and the order of your answers. The question limits the subject matter for you and often provides a structure for the answer.

>Decide what you are being asked.

>Look for multiple tasks.

>Identify key words. The following key-word glossary provides meanings of many operative terms:

**Analyze:** to break down or put together aspects of a whole in order to determine its nature.

**Classify:** to place similar persons or things together in a group.

**Compare:** to bring out points of similarity and difference, with emphasis on similarities. Contrast: to stress

differences.

**Criticize:** to point out the good points and bad points of a situation or idea.

**Define:** to give a clear, concise identification of the class to which a term belongs and how it differs from other things in that class.

**Describe:** to recount or create a word picture in sequence or story form. Discuss: to examine and talk about an issue from all sides.

**Evaluate:** to make a statement of negative and / or positive worth and to back the statement with evidence.

**Explain:** to bring out in the open, to make clear, and to clarify.

**Illustrate:** to call forth specific examples, which create a verbal picture of a situation, rule or principle.

**Interpret:** to explain, translate, or show a specific application of a given fact or principal that is beyond previously cited examples or instances.

**Justify:** to tell, in a positive form, why a position or point of view is proper.

**List:** to provide information in a sequenced order.

**Outline:** to organize a set of facts or ideas in terms of main points and sub points. Prove: to give logical evidence as a base for clear, forthright argumentation.

**Review:** to examine or to summarize in chronological order key characteristics or reasons.

**State:** to present a concise statement of a position, fact, or point of view.

**Summarize:** to present the main points of an issue in condensed form. Synthesize: to put together parts to form a whole.

(This list of terms is condensed from *Writers, Inc.: A Guide to Writing, Thinking & Learning*.)

#### ANSWER THE QUESTION

An essay exam is not the same as an essay. This is not the time for an elaborate introduction, nor is it appropriate to save the best for last. Answer the question directly. Begin with your thesis statement. If you have difficulty writing a thesis statement, look at the question. It may easily turn itself into a thesis statement for you.

Avoid tossing in everything you know. The question is likely to ask you to demonstrate more sophisticated

knowledge than merely listing information. It includes operative verb(s) to signal how you are expected to work with the material; therefore, select appropriate facts and details to support the case you are making. Keep looking back to your thesis statement to confirm that you are on the topic.

Tie ideas together throughout your essay, and look over your answer before turning in your paper or bluebook. An essay exam response is not usually a polished piece of prose, but the writing should convey, rather than conceal, the message.

3

#### THE BASIC ESSAY GUIDELINES

Many of the writing assignments you will be asked to complete in HWC classes will fall into one of the following categories, or combine two or more of these strategies.

1. Analysis
2. Compare/Contrast
3. Argumentation

Your instructor will provide you with specific instructions for all writing assignments, but the following guidelines may prove useful in constructing your writing plan.

1. Identify the topic and author(s) of your or your instructor's choice. If you are selecting the material yourself, make sure that your selection of writer and work are viable for the assigned question.

2. Write a thesis statement that clearly links your author and subject. (See "Thesis Statements" p. 8).

This statement should indicate how you will present the ideas of your essay and the order in which you will

do so. For many essays, it is a good idea to include a thesis paragraph early in your paper to fully explain your purpose in writing.

3. Gather evidence. Search for passages in the text(s) that connect your author(s) to the essay topic (i.e. passages that prove your thesis). Make a list of these passages so that you can refer to them as you write

your paper. You may want to quote directly, paraphrase or cite significant textual excerpts throughout your essay. (See “Incorporating References” pp. 8-9).

4. Organize your essay from your thesis statement. Let it function as the map to the larger territory of your thought. It is a good idea to make an outline at this stage of the writing process that lists your main points or units of thought. There is no single formula for an effective essay, but you should devote at least one paragraph to explaining each main point you raise.

5. Find the words to express your ideas. This is a good time to decide what key words and concepts you will use throughout your paper to convey your message, and to begin linking textual passages identified in step three with these key terms. You should also plan your conclusion at this stage. You will need a final paragraph to tie ideas together and remind your reader how all of your information proves your initial purpose.

#### WRITING STRATEGIES

##### ANALYSIS:

The goal of this strategy is to separate and explain parts of an idea, work or character for the purpose of better understanding of the whole. An Analysis paper usually involves discussion of a single text. The following outline illustrates a simplified analysis model that incorporates aspects of argumentation and can

be expanded for comparison contrast writing described below. Consult the section of this Guide on “Incorporating references” for help in quoting and paraphrasing textual material.

4

Sample Outline for an Analysis of *Antigone*

Introduction (1-2 paragraphs)

Identification of topic Antigone’s behavior

Thesis statement (What you will say Antigone’s irrational behavior leads to about the topic) her downfall

Clarification of subtopics of thesis Antigone’s words and actions: her defiance of Creon; her suicide

Body (2 or more paragraphs)

Subtopic #1: Words Antigone’s angry dialogue with Creon

Textual support Quotation from II. 500-574 of the play

Explanation Interpretation of Antigone’s zeal & intemperance

Subtopic #2: Actions Antigone’s suicide

Textual support Paraphrase events described in II. 1330-1375

Explanation Final evidence and explanation of determination & impatience

Conclusion (1- 2 paragraphs)

Restatement of purpose/thesis Antigone’s behavior

Review of evidence Antigone’s words and actions

Result Antigone’s responsibility for her downfall

##### COMPARISON / CONTRAST:

1. This writing strategy shows similarities and differences between two or more things. Your first task is to

identify how the two things—authors, topics, ideas- (x and y) differ, or how they are similar. This identification should form the basis of your thesis statement in a comparison/contrast paper.

2. Plan the structure of your paper. Decide if you will compare your items on a point-by-point basis (xy, xy,

xy) or discuss each item separately, and then draw a general comparison or contrast in your conclusion (xx,

yy, xy).

3. For either case outlined above, make sure that you explain each author's views on the subject in question and show where they agree or disagree. Adequate textual evidence—quotations, paraphrases or references—is essential for a convincing comparison/contrast paper.

#### ARGUMENTATION:

1. There are certain things you cannot argue. Is chocolate better than strawberry? Is Voltaire a more enjoyable writer than Locke? Separate preference from reasoned judgment.
2. After you identify an arguable topic, determine if you will need to approach it inductively (specific to general) or deductively (general to specific).
3. Identify the basic premises of your argument. Which premise will begin your paper (i.e. your thesis statement) which premises need support? What textual evidence will serve as such supporting evidence?  
5
4. Determine what additional writing strategies you will employ in your argument. Almost all persuasive papers require a measure of analysis, comparison and critical synthesis to describe the subject.
5. Avoid emotional appeals in this type of writing, and test the logical sequence of your thoughts.

#### THE RESEARCH PAPER

The research paper gives you the opportunity to think seriously about some issue or question of interest to you in relation to the texts of the course. It is a quest for knowledge through your own thought as well as through consulting the work of others. It also gives you practice in important skills such as organizing information into coherent thoughts and writing a substantial work within a set time frame. Whatever the topic, the paper should integrate and critique the literature of the field that is relevant to the topic. But integrating and criticizing is not the only obligation of such a project; the paper should also educate readers,

including the instructor, by providing unique insight into the topic.

#### Focus the Topic

Your topic needs to be focused so that you have something to argue through your research. After reviewing your sources, confirm that you have focused the topic by following the procedure described in “Thesis Statements” on page 8. Throughout your research and writing, you can use this statement as a touchstone to

confirm that you are staying in focus.

#### Write a Prospectus

Your instructor may ask you to write a prospectus to confirm the appropriateness of the topic. The prospectus consists of a brief description of the following:

- >what you plan to write about (topic)
- >what you plan to argue (thesis statement)
- >why this is a topic worth knowing more about
- >what special angle or approach you plan to pursue

#### Prepare to Research

Now that you have a manageable topic, use your initial review of sources and your own curiosity about the topic to create an outline as a guide for further reading and thinking about your paper. This outline can be in

standard form or may just be a jotted list of concepts.

Next, develop a working bibliography. Journals, books, or online sources are likely to be the most appropriate sources for this type of paper. Now is the time to adopt a citation system for use in this paper. Refer to the section on “Incorporating References” on page 8 in this Guide.

#### Research

This paper should be fully documented; that is, every factual statement should be backed up with a notation

of its source including a page reference. Therefore, it is important to take notes systematically. Whether you take notes on cards, on sheets of paper, or on a word processor, list the source and page number at the top of the page as well as a key phrase to lead you back to a specific point in the outline. Include only information that fits the heading on that card, or screen. You will want to put most of your notes in your own words. Write a direct quotation only when it is the best possible way to state the idea. Make certain that you use quotation marks so that later you will remember to use quotations accurately in the paper itself. In either case, be sure to document your sources of information in your paper. When notetaking is complete, return to your thesis statement. Based on the new information you have collected, do you need to modify the statement? Do you need to modify your outline?

6

## WRITE THE PAPER

### Plan

Develop a plan for the paper by revising your working outline into a formal outline of the key points to include. Check the points on the outline against the thesis statement. How will each go back to the thesis? What do you know about each? Check what you have written against the thesis statement. Are you on topic?

Modify the key words on your notecards to adjust them to the new outline: Some cards will probably have to be rearranged; some will no doubt be set aside. Depending on your own approach to writing, you can use the notes to

>refine your outline into sentences to check the logic of your argument.

>start drafting—a sort of extended free writing.

>start writing methodically, using the outline you drafted as a guide.

### Draft

Whichever strategy matches your style, initiate a draft. If an introduction doesn't come to you, start with the thesis statement and keep writing. As you use your notes, keep track of the origin of your outside information by including in the draft the source information that is on your notes. *Remember, it is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism.* Indicate *the origin of information that is new* to you, whether it is quoted directly or summarized, by citing your sources. If you do not cite material, you are claiming it as being your own—a major ethical claim.

### Revise

Your first draft will require revision. To get to what needs reworking, read the entire paper. What works? What does not? Ask yourself these questions:

#### Have I

>explained why I conducted this research?

>clarified how this research fits into existing research in this field?

>given all necessary details and reported the results of my reading?

>confirmed the logic of my reasoning and inference?

## THE IN-CLASS ESSAY

Your instructor may schedule an in-class essay as part of the Western Civilization curriculum. While students often dread this type of assignment, most students produce clear prose and succinct information when they have less time for unnecessary elaboration. Keep in mind that your instructor will not expect a polished final product, but will expect you to transmit information and sustain a point of view in a readable

manner. Some tips to keep in mind for in-class writing include the following points:

- Your instructor will inform you of the reading(s) to be covered in the essay. Read the material carefully. No amount of other preparation can substitute for knowing the subject matter.
- Use the first five minutes of the class period to jot an outline of what you want to say.

7

- Leave a half page at the beginning of the essay so that you can insert a first paragraph that accurately introduces the completed essay.
- If your instructor permits you to use your book during the exercise, quote, paraphrase, and cite judiciously. A brief reference to the text is best in this type of writing.
- Leave five minutes to edit your paper. But, never try to recopy your essay at the last minute.

Remember, you will not be graded on handwriting, but on the clarity and quality of thought

8

## WRITING TIPS

### THESIS STATEMENT WRITING

Thesis statements establish for your readers both the relationship between ideas and the order in which the material will be presented. As the writer, you can use the thesis statement as a touchstone to help you develop a coherent argument. In the thesis statement you are not simply describing or recapitulating the material; you are taking a specific position that you need to defend. In other words, a well-written thesis is a tool for both writer and reader.

### NARROWING THE TOPIC

Once you have the general topic, the following questions will help you narrow to a thesis statement.

1. How do I state the assigned topic clearly and succinctly ?
2. What are the most interesting and relevant aspects of the topic?
3. In what order do I want to present the various aspects, and how do my ideas relate ?
4. What is my point of view and my approach to the topic ?

### WRITING A THESIS STATEMENT

1. Using the topic information, develop this formulaic sentence:

I am writing about \_\_\_\_\_, and I am going to show \_\_\_\_\_

What you write in the first blank is the topic of your paper; what you write in the second blank is the approach to that topic. For example, a sentence might be:

I am going to write about moral and ethical judgments offered by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, and I am going to show that these are not practical for political leaders in today's world.

2. Next, refine the sentence so that it is consistent with your style of writing. For example: Machiavelli's approach to morality and ethics in *The Prince* is no longer a useful model for political leaders.

This revision becomes a thesis statement for your project.

As you write, refer back to your working thesis often to make sure you are following the route you established at the beginning. But remember, thesis statements can always be rewritten while revising your work; just be sure that the body of your paper reflects your thesis in both content and organization.

(The above information is incorporated from Patrick Hartwell in *Open to Language*)

### INCORPORATING REFERENCES

#### USING OUTSIDE INFORMATION

1. Weave the research data through the paper rather than patching a paper together with bits of research. Here are some suggestions to help you incorporate reference material effectively. Paraphrase when possible.

9

2. Paraphrase, citing your sources, unless the material is best stated as a quotation. Paraphrasing requires restatement of the material in your own words, while conveying the same ideas or conclusions as the original that you are citing. Remember, you need to cite the source for all material that you have paraphrased and give the author credit for the original idea.

3. Introduce and comment on quotations.



- *MLA* style requires double spacing with a blocked quotation.
- The final punctuation in a blocked quotation precedes the parenthetical citation so that the blocked quotation remains in tact.

#### CREATING A WORKS CITED PAGE

Under the in-text citation system, a list of works cited in the document is attached on a separate sheet after the text of the document. In *MLA* form, that list is called a Works Cited page. Many people know this list as

the bibliography. (A Works Cited page includes only those sources actually cited in the document whereas a bibliography may include additional resources.)

#### Journal with Continuous Pagination

Alphabeta, Zoe. "Ethnic Groups in Madison County." *Ethnicity in America* 36 (1995): 202-8.

#### Book by a Single Author

Zelinsky, Wilbur. *Ethnic Groups: Everywhere in Everyplace at Every Time*. Harveyland MN: Itsagood Press, 1995.

#### A Republished Book

Mill, J.S. *On Liberty*. 1859. Ed. Elizabeth Rapaport. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978.

#### GRAMMAR AND STYLE

##### Active and Passive Voice:

Readers find active voice (the subject does the action) easier to read than passive voice (the action is done to

the subject). Therefore, writers should revise with an eye to active and passive structures.

11

##### Passive Voice

Sometimes passive voice is useful. Use passive voice when

> you do not want to name the actor.

*Socrates was put to death.*

>the receiver of action is more important.

*Socrates was convicted by a jury of citizens*

>when needed for a transition of thought.

*Socrates spoke in his own defense. His defense was thought to be insufficient.*

##### Active Voice

Active voice is preferable because it pinpoints responsibility for action. To make passive constructions active:

>place the doer of the action in the subject position.

*Socrates drank the death potion.*

>restructure the sentence or add more information.

*The jury convicted Socrates of corrupting the youth of Athens.*

>change the verb

*His defense failed to convince the jury.*

##### Diction:

##### Transitions:

Transitional devices serve as signposts for the reader. These devices may include repetition of key words, use of synonyms, entire sentences or paragraphs, or words or phrases (for example: *but, nonetheless, in addition, similarly*) that establish the relationship between your ideas.

##### Wordiness:

Avoid words that provide little information. Words such as *good, very, interesting, pretty, fine, bad, and awfully* are vague and force readers to create their own interpretations, a risky proposition at best in my opinion.

Avoid filler phrases like those in the left column. Replace them with examples from the list on the right.

##### INSTEAD OF USE

due to the fact that

because



owing to the fact that  
the question as to whether  
in the event that  
it is necessary that  
there is reason to believe. . .  
utilize  
in my opinion. . .

since  
whether  
if  
must  
*omit* phrase  
use  
*omit this phrase*