Review of Strategies for Writing College Papers

If you have taken ENG 101 and 102, you are already familiar with most of the information in this handbook, but it may serve as a useful review.

This handbook is organized around the problems college students frequently have with writing.

- Writer's Block
- Prewriting and Organization
- Drafting and Revision
- Research and Documentation
- Avoid Plagiarism
- Proofreading

Writer's Block

If find yourself agonizing over every writing assignments, crumpling up sheet after sheet of paper or deleting every sentence after you write it, there are a few strategies to try. Most important, allow yourself plenty of time to write multiple drafts. Trying to write a paper the night before it's due invites a lot of emotional turmoil and almost guarantees writer's block. Here are some other tips:

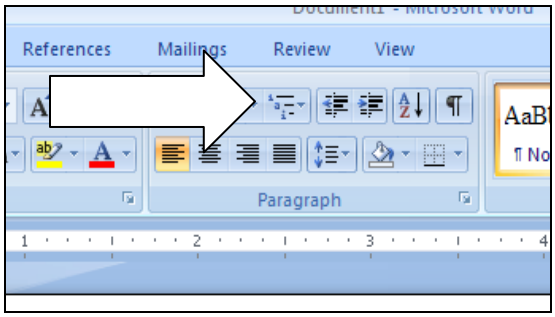
- Do lots of prewriting.
- Resist the urge to edit rough drafts.
- Allow enough time for drafts to lie fallow for a few days before you revise.
- Save your mechanics corrections for the last editing.

Prewriting

The more prewriting you do, the less likely it is that you will block when you come to writing your first draft.

- An outliner can help in the brainstorming process.

- To use the MS Word version, click this icon.



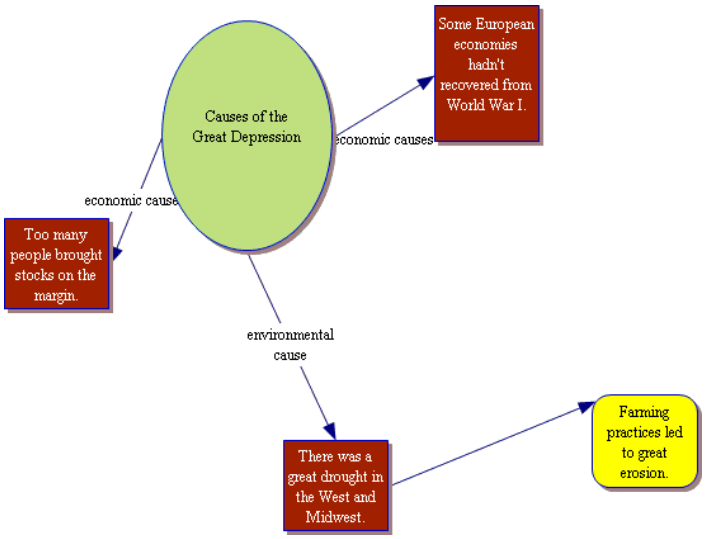
- Every time you hit Enter, you add a new level.
- Tab and Shift Tab toggle you between subtopics and higher level topics.

Most people prefer to start with a simple topic outline. It may be helpful for you to proceed from a topic outline to a topic sentence outline that gives you a better sense of what will be in each paragraph:

Topic Outline	**Topic Sentence Outline**
1) Benefits of bike path from Williamstown to North Adams.	1) A bike path from Williamstown to North Adams would provide construction jobs during a weak economy, would attract tourists to the Northern Berkshires, and would provide recreational opportunities for residents.
2) Results of the Ashuwillticook Trail.	2.) The Ashuwillticook Trail attracts thousands of bikers, walkers and skaters every year.
3) Planning Committees.	3.) The Mohawk Bike Trail is being planned by government agencies, local non-profits, and private citizens.

Inspiration

- Inspiration is a prewriting program that is available in the Tutoring Center.
- You can start with a free-form web to record your ideas as they come to you.
- You can add arrows showing relationships later.
- You can even label the relationships.
- Colors and designs can help you clarify your plan. Here's what an Inspiration web might look like:



One of the great things about Inspiration is that once you create a free form web, you can toggle to a more conventional outline that might look like this:

Cause of the Great Depression

I. Too many people brought stocks on the margin.

II. Some European economies hadn't recovered from World War I.

III. There was a great drought in the West and Midwest.

    A. Farming practices led to great erosion.

If you'd like to try Inspiration, come into the Tutoring Center, and we can show you how to use it.

Backwards Outline

Many writers like to start with a rough draft rather than an outline. If you prefer this approach, see if you can produce an outline from your rough draft. This exercise is a good test of whether your paper is well organized. An outline may also give you a sense of where there are gaps in your support or evidence.

Research as Prewriting

- If you can't think of what to say, do more reading about your topic.
- When you take notes on your research,
    - Paraphrase rather than write direct quotes from your sources.
    - Write all the information you need for a bibliography entry and citation in your notes.
    - If you use a source from the Web, copy and paste the URL into your notes. Highlight the addresses and right click. Select copy. Be sure to record your date of access.
- If you have an outline, key your research to it.

Drafting and Revising

- Try to avoid doing too much editing while you're writing the draft.
- Let the draft sit for a couple of days before you start editing and revising.
- Many writers find it helpful not to look at the earlier draft when they write a revision.
- Remember, a revision is a "re-seeing" the paper—not just correcting a few surface errors.

Thesis Statement

Early on in your drafts begin thinking about your thesis statement.

- A thesis statement is one sentence that sums up the main point you want to make to your readers.
- Usually comes toward the end of the first paragraph.
- In your early drafts, it's good to start with a hypothesis rather than a firm thesis.
- Don't be afraid to change your thesis during the course of writing the paper.

- Try writing your introductory paragraph after you've written the rest of the paper.
- When you have a reasonably clear thesis in mind, reread your draft.
- Eliminate or revise any of your material that does not directly contribute to proving your thesis.
- Make sure you restate or comment on your thesis in your conclusion.

Checking the Structure of Your Paragraphs

- Paragraphs typically start with a topic sentence that sums up the main idea of the paragraph.
- As a general rule, try to have at least three items to support and develop each topic sentence.
- How do the paragraphs look in your paper? Are there too many long paragraphs, say longer than half a page? Are there too many short paragraphs, just a sentence or two?
- You may want to vary paragraph length for a particular effect; for example a transitional paragraph might be very short.

Transitions

Make sure that you have good transitions between paragraphs and even between sentences. Here are some transitional words or phrases that can help (from Landsberger website):

Addition:
also, again, as well as, besides, coupled with, furthermore, in addition, likewise, moreover, similarly

Consequence:
accordingly, as a result, consequently, for this reason, for this purpose,
hence, otherwise, so then, subsequently, therefore, thus, thereupon, wherefore

Generalizing:
as a rule, as usual, for the most part,
generally, generally speaking, ordinarily, usually

Exemplifying:
chiefly, especially, for instance, in particular, markedly, namely,
particularly, including, specifically, such as

Illustration:
for example, for instance, for one thing, as an illustration,
illustrated with, as an example, in this case

Emphasis
above all, chiefly, with attention to, especially, particularly, singularly

Similarity:
comparatively, coupled with, correspondingly, identically, likewise, similar, moreover, together with

Exception:
aside from, barring, besides, except, excepting, excluding, exclusive of, other than, outside of, save

Restatement:
in essence, in other words, namely, that is, that is to say,
in short, in brief, to put it differently

Contrast and Comparison:
contrast, by the same token, conversely, instead, likewise,
on one hand, on the other hand, on the contrary, rather,
similarly, yet, but, however, still, nevertheless, in contrast

Sequence:
at first, first of all, to begin with, in the first place, at the same time,
for now, for the time being, the next step, in time, in turn, later on,
meanwhile, next, then, soon, the meantime, later, while, earlier,
simultaneously, afterward, in conclusion, with this in mind,

Summarizing:
after all, all in all, all things considered, briefly, by and large, in any case, in any event,
in brief, in conclusion, on the whole, in short, in summary, in the final analysis,
in the long run, on balance, to sum up, to summarize, finally

Diversion:
by the way, incidentally

Direction:
here, there, over there, beyond, nearly, opposite, under, above,
to the left, to the right, in the distance

Landsberger, Joe. "Study Guides and Strategies."
March 10, 2009,
ttp://www.studygs.net/wrtstr6.htm

Conclusion

- Do you have conclusion?
- Does your conclusion comment on or restate your thesis?

- Did you change your mind or refine your thought in the course of writing the paper?
- If so, be sure to go back and rewrite your thesis.

Academic Documentation Formats

There are two common documentation formats used for most college papers.

- MLA--Modern Language Association for research papers in the humanities.

- APA--American Psychological Association for research papers in the sciences.

There are handbooks for MLA and APA in our library. Most composition handbooks summarize these two styles. For an online resource, try this site:

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

These formats are not difficult to use but they require great precision in following instructions and examples. It is beyond the scope of this review to go into detail on these formats, but the Purdue site can quickly give you detailed instructions with many examples.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offense and can result in severe penalties. Here is the BCC definition:

> Plagiarism – Includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials. This would also include material that is obtained from the computer.
>
> --BCC Student Policy Guide, p. vii

Here is the BCC process for handling cases of plagiarism as a disciplinary matter:

> Plagiarism is a form of dishonesty in writing. When a student uses another writer's words and/or ideas and presents it as his/her own, he/she is plagiarizing. The faculty and staff at Berkshire Community College consider plagiarism a serious offense and encourage students to produce their best work, using their own ideas and language. When a student does use another writer's ideas and wording to support his/her own writing, he/she must give that writer credit. If a situation arises in which an instructor suspects a student of plagiarizing and the problem cannot be resolved between the instructor and the student, then the instructor may refer the case to the Dean of Academic Affairs who would then follow Due Process Guidelines to resolve the problem. If the student feels unjustly

charged with plagiarism, he/she could use the grievance process in this policy guide as a means of resolving the problem.

--BCC Student Policy Guide, p. 19.

Examples of Plagiarism

Often students plagiarize without meaning to. Here is an example of how one student plagiarized by staying far too close to the original wording:

Original	**Student Paper**
The mighty United States government, despite exposing its agents to hair-raising personal risks and spending millions of dollars, is losing an uphill battle to throttle production of narcotics around the globe.	The powerful United States government, in spite of exposing it's agents to extreme personal risk and spending millions of dollars, is losing the battle to cut production of narcotics around the world.
In Colombia and other drug growing countries, every thrust by Washington and cooperating governments is parried by ruthless and elusive traffickers who wield incredible power and money. So far they have been able to keep flowing a stream of narcotics that costs thousands of lives and inflicts immeasurable social damage in America.	In Columbia and other drug-growing countries, every act by Washington and cooperating governments is answered by ruthless and elusive traffickers who possess incredible power and money. So far, they have been able to keep circulating a flood of narcotics that costs thousands of lives and creates immeasurable social damage throughout America (Mcbee 52).
Adm. Daniel Murphy, who heads efforts of the Reagan administration to halt the drug flow, concedes a feeling of disappointment. "We've doubled our efforts since 1982," he says. "Yet we're facing a greatly enlarged cocaine supply on the world market. It has increased by a third."	Adm. Daniel Murphy, who leads efforts of the Reagan administration to stop the flow of drugs, conveys a feeling of disappointment. "we've doubled our efforts since 1984", he says. "Yet we're facing a greatly enlarged cocaine supply on the world market. It has increased by a third." (Mcbee 52).

In the model above the student has made several errors that technically constitute plagiarism. Although he made an effort to document his sources, some material that is nearly a direct quote has no citation, and some material that is cited is so close to the original wording that it should have been quoted directly. Note also that the student made some grammatical and factual errors in copying from the original.

Remember, it is not enough to include a citation. If you use material from a source and do not put it in quotation marks, the material must be in your own words. If you do quote, make sure the wording is absolutely accurate. If you are ever in doubt about whether to cite or not, you are better off to include the citation.

How to avoid plagiarism

- Be absolutely clear on what constitutes plagiarism.
- Record your sources at the time you're doing your research.
- Paraphrase material rather than using extensive direct quotes.
- Read the material carefully, then close the book and write a paraphrase in your own words.
- Check the original to make sure your paraphrase is not too close to the original.
- If you do quote, use quotation marks.
- Write a citation immediately.

Using Tutors

It's a great idea to have someone else look at your drafts. The Tutorial Center has faculty drop-in hours to look at your papers. Their sign-up sheets are posted on the cabinets on the left as you enter the center. The Tutoring Center also has peer tutors who can work with you on papers, and the Tutoring Coordinator frequently consults on writing. Finally, eTutoring allows you to work with a professional tutor by e-mail.

Here are some tips to help you get the most out of a session with a writing tutor:

- Talking through your ideas is a good prewriting exercise.
- When you do bring in a draft, make sure it's as good and correct as you can make it.
- It's a waste of everyone's time to have a tutor make corrections you can make yourself.
- Come in with some ideas about the issues you want to discuss.
- Be prepared to allow time for the tutor to read your paper.