

# **Successful Academic Writing Strategies and Key Writing Center Resources**

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# 1. EPISTEMIC WRITING REQUIRES PRACTICE

- High stakes and low stakes
- Begin low stakes to prevent writer's block (Letter to your mother)
- Use (advisor's) writing as model
- Keep a journal and write daily (punch clock)

## 2. PROCESS

- Pre-writing or invention (brainstorming, mapping, journals)
- Writing
- Re-writing or re-vision (the stretch) 25-75%
- Editing (proofreading as a kind of reading)

Break the assignment into pieces with due dates. You can begin with the method section.

# 3. RESPONDING TO WRITING

- Murray Handout asks different questions of different stages. The author can suggest the criteria that concern them (not grammar)
- Respond to early drafts globally
- Fast turnaround counts
- Positive helps: identifies what works increases motivation and reduces writing block

## RESPONDING TO DRAFTS OF PAPERS

Some ideas adapted from Donald M. Murray, *A Teacher Teaches Writing, Second Edition* (Boston, MA: Heinle, 2004) and from *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing, Fifth Edition*, eds. Cheryl Glenn, Melissa A. Goldthwaite, and Robert Connors (Boston & New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2003).

### QUESTIONS TO ASK OF AN EARLY DRAFT:

- \* What is the writer's main point (or does the writer have more than one)?
- \* Does this main point respond to a significant question or problem? (or does it effectively respond to a particular assignment?)
- \* Is the writer's main point interesting, surprising, illuminating?
- \* Is the main point easy to locate, or hidden somewhere in the body of the essay?  
Does everything in the draft support the main point?
- \* Is there enough specific information to convince readers of the writer's argument?
- \* Is the information in the draft correct?
- \* Are there points in the draft where you would like to hear more about a topic or an example?
- \* Are there points in the draft where you would like to hear less about a topic or an example?
- Does the draft have an individual voice that makes you want to keep reading?
- Does the draft appropriately address its target audience? (actually I see this more mid-stage)
- \* What do you think would improve this draft?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK OF A MID-STAGE DRAFT:

- ✧ Is the draft's title intriguing and informative?
- ✧ Is the draft's opening paragraph compelling? Does it clearly lay out the question to be answered, why it is important, and what thesis will be argued in response to it?
- ✧ Is the writer's argument easy to follow, or do you get lost in places?
- ✧ Is it clear why each paragraph follows from the previous one and leads to the next one?
- ✧ Are all of the paragraphs adequately developed, or are some of them "paragraph fragments"?
- ✧ Does the information inside each paragraph belong together, and is it presented in an effective order?
- ✧ Is the writer's argument convincing? What would make it more so?  
  
Has the writer included enough specific examples to make his or her case, and where would more support be helpful?
- ✧ Has the writer considered counter-arguments and responded effectively to these?  
  
Has the writer effectively incorporated source materials? (for example, quoting or paraphrasing where needed and commenting upon what is quoted)
- ✧ Are there places where information seems out of place? How might the material be reordered?
- ✧ Are there parts of the paper that could be cut?
- ✧ Are there parts of the paper that you'd like to see expanded?
- ✧ Is the ending of the paper memorable? Does it enhance and complicate our sense of the writer's initial thesis, or simply repeat it?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK OF A LATE STAGE DRAFT:

Is the paper easy to read and to understand?

\*Is the paper's tone appropriate to its task and its audience?

Are the sentences grammatical? (If not, what are the main places where something becomes unclear or awkward? See if you can discern a pattern of grammatical problems for the writer to focus on.)

\*Are there rewordings you can suggest where sentences are not clear?

Are the commas, semicolons, periods and apostrophes in the right places?

Is the writing lively and interesting to read?

\*Are most of the verbs active and many of the nouns concrete?

\*Are the word choices precise and specific?

Are there sentences that can be cut down (or cut out)?

Are words spelled correctly?

\*Are quotations worked gracefully (and grammatically) into sentences and paragraphs?

\*Are sources documented according to designated guidelines?

\*Is the paper formatted correctly? (font, indentations, pagination, etc.)

## 4. WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINE

Clash of *pedagogies of general writing strategies* (freshman composition) and *the situated nature of writing*

**Genre** (reports, proposals, dissertations),  
**Methods** (interview, observations, citation style), and **Discourse/Jargon** (show talk, shop talk)



# 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

- *Conversation* to create new knowledges and discourses
- Not thesis/support or claim/evidence, but rather question/answer or problem/solution
- Literature reviews cluster the scholars that preceded and notes their *omissions, flaws, next step, and/or implications*

# *THEY SAY, I SAY: Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*

Some say x, some say y, I say z

Templates from Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein

Disagreeing is easiest!!

X's claim that \_\_\_\_\_ rests upon the questionable assumption that \_\_\_\_\_.

By focusing on \_\_\_\_\_, X overlooks the deeper problem of \_\_\_\_\_

# MORE TEMPLATES

Agreeing and Disagreeing

X is correct that \_\_\_\_\_, but she is on dubious grounds to claim \_\_\_\_\_

Although I concede that X \_\_\_\_\_, I still insist that \_\_\_\_\_

Whereas X provides ample evidence that \_\_\_\_\_, Y and Z's research on \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ alternatively demonstrates \_\_\_\_\_

# MORE TEMPLATES

## Agreeing with a Difference

X is surely right about \_\_\_\_\_ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown \_\_\_\_\_

X's theory of \_\_\_\_\_ is useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of \_\_\_\_\_

# WRITING IS A PRACTICE MORE LIKE BASKETBALL THAN LIKE READING A BOOK

- Read articles and dissertations to discover conventions, BUT apply them in your writing.
- Writing groups will hone your skills of reading and writing reflectively
- You can hire an editor when you are all through the process.