

WRITING RESEARCH/ TERM PAPERS

INTRODUCTION

Folks, going on the basis of years of experience in scholarly writing (both as a student and as an instructor), I have written this document in the hope that what I have learned will be of help to you in meeting one of the principal course requirements in the humanities and social sciences in colleges and universities: the research or term paper. For most people—including myself—writing is a painful process (because it requires, at the minimum, an extraordinary amount of cognitive discipline). Therefore, anything that can help in easing this task ought to be welcome. Right? (Smile, buddy! This is also an altruistic endeavor!)

Before we begin, however, let me say a word or two about the purpose of writing term papers: please be assured that the purpose is not to make your life difficult. The term paper is an effort at assisting you in acquiring one of the most fundamental and essential skills required of an educated person: the ability to write effectively. Even those of you who hate to write anything that is longer than a sentence will discover that writing does not end with graduation. You will never be able to escape writing. In fact, I can absolutely guarantee you this much: at the very minimum, beginning with your first job application letter, and then going on to writing reports for your bosses, and others, as you advance in your career, you will find that the writing skills acquired at this stage of your college life will turn out to be of “lifesaving” importance to you. In other words, if you intend to succeed to the fullest potential possible in your career after graduation you will soon realize that being able to write is just as important as being able to speak.

The significance of writing, however, does not stem from practical job considerations alone. From the perspective of education, there are two other very important reasons for learning how to write: writing enhances your capacity to think (which in turn raises your level of intelligence); and it permits you to communicate the product of your thinking to others. The corollary of this fact is that writing consists of a two stage process: the “*think-writing*” stage which involves putting down your thoughts on paper as you think, and the *dissemination stage* which involves reorganizing and ordering those thoughts for presentation or dissemination to those you are writing for. Depending upon the context, writing for dissemination will take different forms. In the academic context all writing for dissemination (with the exception of creative writing) takes the form of scholarly writing, of which the term paper is a common example.

This document is divided into three parts where the first part (methodology) provides you with information on how to go about researching and writing term papers, while part two comprises specific instructions on style and format of the paper that you will be submitting for this class, and the final part tells you how I will grade your paper. Enjoy!

PART ONE: METHODOLOGY

TYPES OF PAPERS

There are four principal types of term papers one can write, depending upon which one or more of the following tasks is to be the *main* objective: description, argumentation, explanation, or analysis. Note, however, that this categorization does not imply that a particular type won't incorporate some elements from one or more of the other types. (This point will become clear as you read on.)

1. The Descriptive Paper

This type of paper is concerned mainly with providing the reader with factual information about a person, place, thing, or an idea by means of description. Description is principally concerned with providing answers to questions that begin with words like “What is...?” or “How does...?” (rather than words like “Why do...?”). Therefore, in a descriptive term paper you do not present to the reader a specific point of view or a position (termed a “thesis”—or more simply a point, as in “What is your point?”). An example of a descriptive term paper would be one that describes the life cycle of, say, the okapi. It should be noted, however, that depending upon the topic you are dealing with, the way in which you provide the information and the facts you select to describe can allow you to *implicitly* present a particular point of view. For example, a factual paper describing Johannesburg can be easily written to lead the reader to think that this particular city is either an awful place that tourists must stay away from at all cost, or that it is a wonderful and exciting place that all tourists should visit. (By the way, what is an okapi? And where is Johannesburg?)

2. The Position Paper

A term paper in which you are asked to explicitly adopt and present a particular position or point of view (usually referred to as a “position” term paper) involves mainly argumentation. The purpose here is to persuade or convince the reader to accept a particular point of view, or a particular idea, by means of logical reasoning. In such a paper the main issues revolve around the question of what ought to be (rather than what is). A term paper on the topic of “gun control” or “smoking in public places” or “anti-abortion” would be an example of an argumentative (or position) term paper. In other words, a position term paper always adopts a clearly stated position right from the very beginning on whatever subject or topic the paper is about, and then proceeds to develop arguments in support of the position. It is important to remember, however, that in carrying out this task the writer usually begins by presenting both sides

¹ You are welcome to share this document with others, if you think they will benefit from it.

(with rare exception) of an argument, before going on to marshal all the relevant information that will support the author's side of the argument, while attacking the other side. A position paper, therefore, is not just an unsupported statement of opinion.

3. The Explanatory Paper

The purpose of the explanatory term paper is to explain to the reader the "how" and/or "why" of something by describing it. And the subject is usually some form of natural or human action or process. Term papers in science subjects, such as biology and physics, tend to be explanatory term papers. For instance, a term paper on the law of gravity would be an explanatory term paper. Note, however, that the explanatory term paper must also incorporate elements of the descriptive term paper; for, in order to explain how something works, you must begin by first describing it.

4. The Analytical Paper

An analytical term paper is one that incorporates elements from all the other three types of papers described above. That is, while it seeks to advance a particular position or point of view, it will do so in an indirect way: through the process of description and analysis. Analysis is a form of reasoning that involves separating a complex issue into its different logical parts in order to understand it; this is accomplished by seeking answers to a set of usually interrelated questions of the type that begin with the word "Why...?" Analysis is concerned at its heart with explanations on the basis of weaving together facts, ideas, concepts, theories, and so on. Methodologically—and this point cannot be overemphasized—analysis is a product of what is commonly known as *critical thinking*.²

In other words, the analytical term paper does not simply provide information; it provides the information in order to advance a point of view (a thesis). For example: a term paper that goes beyond simply describing the events of the U.S. Civil War, by addressing the question of *why* this war occurred, would be an analytical term paper.

An important point to note about analytical term papers is that they are usually constructed on the basis of logically related layers of questions. Taking the example just mentioned: in asking the question why the Civil War took place, the paper's objective would not be simply to provide an answer to this immediate question. Rather, in answering this question, the paper may be attempting to answer another underlying question: namely, was the Civil War fought in order to free African Americans from slavery? Yet the answer to even this question may not necessarily be the principal objective of the paper. Behind this question there may be another question, the real question: which is, Why did the abolition of slavery not lead to the ending of legalized racial discrimination against African Americans.

Now, in providing the answers to these interrelated questions that build on each other, the paper would be advancing a thesis that could go like this: the Civil War was ultimately about conflict between the interests of the Northern industrial and Southern agrarian capitalists, that arose within the context of the preservation of the Union at a time when the resolution of a major conflict often involved war rather than the democratic process (such as a referendum). Consequently, the Civil War had little to do directly with freeing African Americans from slavery; therefore, not surprisingly, racial discrimination did not end with the ending of slavery.

Although the analytical term paper is similar to a position term paper in that the objective of both is the same—to persuade the reader to accept the authors' positions or theses—it differs from a position term paper in at least two ways. First, an analytical term paper, as just noted, raises a question (or a set of questions) regarding a particular topic, and proceeds to answer the question(s). It raises the question(s) in order to support a particular thesis, which itself will be concerned with explaining something or solving a "problem." Second, the reader does not have to be told explicitly at the beginning of the paper what the position of the writer is, regarding the subject or topic of the paper. Therefore, while an analytical term paper does take up a position (even if it may be written to appear as if it does not), usually it is not as explicit as in a typical "position" (argumentative) term paper.

The majority of term papers in colleges and universities, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, tend to be papers of the analytical type. In this course, unless I tell you otherwise in class, you are expected to write an analytical term paper—regardless of what topic you are assigned by me or asked to choose for yourself.³

STAGES OF PRODUCING THE PAPER

As scholarly writing, the term paper comprises, on one hand, the final written product of the interaction between the two activities of researching and thinking, and on the other, the dissemination of this product in a special style (or format). (This style involves the use and presentation of such things as citations, bibliographies, footnotes, etc. according to specific rules that are universally understood and accepted [see below]). Therefore, regardless of whether the topic of your paper has been assigned by me or you have chosen it

² Students are always being told by teachers, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, that among the central objectives of their courses is to teach students how to think critically. But what is critical thinking? Critical thinking is, at once, an attitude of mind and a set of cognitive skills that is specific to truly democratic societies. If one were to describe the essential characteristics of critical thinking then would emerge with these:

- a fiery passion for truth;
- a profound belief in the value of honest research;
- patience and open-mindedness to take seriously the views of others;
- a deep sense of commitment to the acquisition of knowledge and information on a variety of issues, both, personal as well as public;
- uncompromising honesty in confronting personal biases, prejudices, stereotypes, etc.;
- the cultivation of the ability to conduct "thought-experiments";
- the recognition that education encompasses much more than training for specific career goals;
- possession of limitless curiosity regarding all kinds of subject matter; and
- a refusal to make judgments that are not based on reasoned reflection.

³ Even in the case of those term papers that require you to review a book, film (or some other work of art), or write a biography, you are expected to adhere to the methodology of the analytical term paper. For example, if you are asked to write a biography, you would ensure that all the information you present would be in support of some thesis. At the very minimum, the thesis in a biographical term paper would be the generic biographical thesis. This thesis is that the relevance of writing a biography of a given person is that he/she made some significant contribution (or conversely wrought significant destruction) to one's life, or one's community, or one's country, or even the world; and that this contribution (or destruction) was possible as a consequence of a dialectical interaction between specific elements in the personal history of that person and specific factors in the political, social, cultural, economic, etc., environment in which s(he) lived. Your biographical term paper must be written in such a way as to support this generic biographical thesis. The implication of this, then, is that even in the case of a biographical term paper, you must use such devices as references, quotations, footnotes, etc. that one would use in analytical term papers.

yourself, in producing the term paper you will have to go through four principal stages: (1) preliminary thinking, (2) researching, (3) “think-writing” and (4) dissemination.

Stage 1: Preliminary Thinking

Before you even begin your research determine exactly what your term paper is to be about, and what you are expected to do with the topic or subject; that is, what type of term paper you are being asked to write. Once you have determined the topic of your paper and the type of paper you have to produce, you must begin to generate ideas about your topic that can help you to begin your research. I call this process *preliminary thinking*. How does one generate ideas about a topic even *before* formal research has begun? The following strategies can help:

1. Write your topic down on a sheet of paper and carry it with you everywhere you go. Whenever you have free moments (such as when you are on a bus or a train or when waiting in a particularly long queue) take the paper out and think about the topic. The idea here is that when you are at this preliminary thinking stage, your entire mind, as much as is possible, must be consumed with thoughts concerning nothing else but only the topic of your term paper.

2. Talk about the topic to friends on campus. This technique is especially useful if there are several friends gathered together, say, at a table in the cafeteria.

3. Talk about the topic to other teachers. Most teachers, depending upon the subject they teach, will have some ideas, even if they may be only in the form of questions, about almost any topic you present them.

4. Depending upon your topic, apply one word questions of the following type to your topic: “Why,” “Where,” “How,” “What,” “When,” and so on.

Stage Two: Research

The research stage permits you to collect the information you will need to carry out the task(s) of your term paper. The research stage is absolutely essential, because even if you feel you already have all the information you may need to do your term paper, you will still need evidence (in the form of references) to back up what you say in your paper. When you are at the research stage, the following tips may prove helpful:

1. Your research must begin by determining what the “key” or main words of your topic are. How does one arrive at these words? Through preliminary thinking and reading about the topic as you begin your research. After the research is well underway, you will be able to find additional key words. You acquire new key words through what I call the “snowball effect” as you do the literature search. (“Literature” here refers to all the material that has been written on the topic you are researching.)

In other words, as you find more material on your topic, you will be able to identify more key words (which in turn will permit you access to more material). The key words are absolutely essential to locate information through subject catalogs, indexes, etc. If you imagine the different subject catalogs, indexes and so on to be “knowledge buildings” that contain different “information rooms,” then the key words are the “keys” that will open for you those rooms that contain information potentially useful for your term paper.

2. When using the electronic catalog called BISON at the U.B. libraries website, make a habit of noting the subject headings and key words that appear with any *relevant* item you have found to help you locate more material in the catalogue.

3. If you have absolutely no idea where to begin to look for information on a topic, start by first reading everything about it that may be in your course materials (including the online class readings). Thereafter, look for information in the general encyclopedias, such as *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, and if available, subject encyclopedias and dictionaries, such as an encyclopedia of social sciences, or a biographical dictionary, and so on.⁴ If you do find relevant information, check also to see if the encyclopedia provides you with a list of suggested readings or a bibliography to help you find additional information. After you have consulted the encyclopedias, compile a preliminary list of reading materials on your topic (that is, a bibliography) by consulting general databases that are not subject-specific, such as *Academic Search Premier*, *Cambridge Journals Online*, *Digital Dissertations*, *Jstor*, *Project Muse*, and *Taylor & Francis Online Journals*, followed by subject-specific periodical indexes, such as *ERIC*, *International Index to Black Periodicals*, . If you are still unable to generate enough bibliographic material from these sources then consider using the *Science Citation Index Expanded* (the title is misleading because this index also covers the arts, humanities, and the social sciences).⁵

4. Whenever you find a journal article or a book that is relevant to your topic, find additional material by following up on the bibliography (or reference citations) in it.

5. When looking up periodical articles, try to avoid sources that are not refereed.⁶

6. Take notes as you do your research. Make a habit of summarizing *in your own words* relevant information you locate in journal articles and books.

7. Always make sure that you write down the full bibliographic information of the source of a journal article or a book chapter. (See Part Two below for examples of how references should be formatted.)

⁴ Examples of such databases include: *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online*, *Encyclopedia of Islam Online*, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, *GenderWatch*, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, *Oxford African American Studies Center*, and so on. Please do NOT use *Wikipedia* as a first step; it should be used as a last resort (that is, in those rare instances where there is simply no information available from U.B. libraries-based print and/or electronic sources). So, what is wrong with *Wikipedia*? As a user-maintained source, the reliability of the information that it provides is uneven because almost anyone can write for *Wikipedia*. On the plus side, however, *Wikipedia* can be useful for the *Preliminary Thinking* stage (and also for generating a preliminary list of key words—depending upon your topic). While we are on the subject of sources, learn also to use the U.B. libraries online research tools for accessing information produced by (or for) all branches of the U.S. government, such as *CQ Electronic Library*, *FedStats*, *GPO Access*, *Government Periodicals Universe*, *LexisNexis Congressional*, *Thomas*, and *U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection*.

⁵ Of course, in directing you to consult these various sources the assumption here is that you are familiar with the basic outlay of the U.B. libraries website.

⁶ A refereed or peer-reviewed journal is one where an article submitted to it for publication is first reviewed *before* it is published (to determine authenticity, validity, etc.) by the author’s research peers appointed by the journal but without the knowledge of the author as to who they are. (This process is sometimes referred to as “blind refereeing.”) The journal will tell you if it is a peer-reviewed journal in the section that provides instructions for submitting articles to the journal. Examples of peer-reviewed journals include *Comparative Education Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Harvard Law Review*, *African Studies Review*, and so on. Examples of sources that are not refereed are magazines that you buy on newsstands, such as *National Geographic*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and so on. Such sources should be used only as a last resort and primarily for topics that are only currently in the news.

8. Learn how to effectively extract relevant information from an article (or book) by quickly figuring out its style and structure through the process of skimming. Depending upon the article or book you are examining, skimming will permit you to rapidly answer questions of the following type:

- Is it possible to get an accurate summary of the material by simply reading the introduction and conclusion?
- In exactly which paragraph(s) does the author state what he/she is intending to show or prove?
- Are there any references? (If so are they extensive enough to be useful?)
- Is there a bibliography? (If so, does it have the potential to be useful?)
- Are there any subheadings? (If so are they useful?)
- Are there any explanatory footnotes or end notes?
- Are there any appendices (and if so what do they contain?)
- Who is the publisher of the material? (A commercial press? A university press? An organization? A government agency? etc.)
- Who is the author? (A university professor?—if so, at which university? A journalist? A government employee? etc.)

9. Depending upon the type of term paper you have been assigned, guide your research by asking yourself questions such as the following when you have found a particular article or book that you feel is or may be relevant to your topic:

- What position is the author taking on the topic?
- Is the author's position explicitly stated, or does the reader have to figure it out on the basis of the information the author chooses to present and the style in which the information is presented?
- What implicit assumptions is the author making about her/his position?
- Do you agree with the author's position (and if yes, why? and if not, why not?)
- From what theoretical perspective is the author writing?
- Does knowing the name of the publisher (or sponsor) of the journal (or book) provide a clue as to why the author has adopted a particular thesis? (If so, how much credence should one place on the thesis?)
- Does knowing the key references the author uses provide a clue as to why the author has adopted a particular thesis? (If so, how much credence should one place on the thesis?)

10. Do not waste the time of librarians by asking them to find information on your topic for you—especially before you have made every effort to do your own preliminary research. Remember, although reference librarians are trained professionals, they are not your professors, and they cannot be expected to know everything. You should ask for help from librarians either when you are unable to locate specific material in that library, or when you already know what information you are looking for, but you have failed to determine if there are sources available that provide the specific information you need. Incidentally, you should beware that excessive reliance on librarians can sometimes be fatal to your research; you may run across one who stops you from pursuing your research further by telling you, falsely, that the information you seek is not available (either because of ignorance, or because he/she does not want to help you because of overwork or laziness or prejudice—or a combination of all three).⁷

11. If you are using a library that you are unfamiliar with, check to see if there is an information rack (usually found near the reference desk) containing library maps and other information guides.

12. If you are lucky enough to find an article or a book that covers your topic exactly, then note this: the research stage is probably still not over. You must continue to look for more material to allow you to provide additional information. In any case, you will need more than one reference in order to meet the minimum reference requirements (see below).

13. Get to know the difference between *primary sources* and *secondary sources*. Depending upon the term paper you are writing, you may be asked to include primary sources. A primary source is an information source with information that has not been “recycled,” meaning it is the original record of events or original description of events or other data. Examples of primary information sources include: newspapers; government records, government documents and reports; business reports and documents; statistical data; census data; marketing research data; historical documents, such as diaries, letters, etc.; legal records and documents; business records; laws; court proceedings and decisions; speeches by prominent persons; opinion polls; autobiographies; and so on. When a researcher writes a journal article or a book based on primary sources, the article or book then becomes a secondary source for anyone else who consults the article or book. Note that all articles, with rare exception, in traditional academic journals can be considered secondary sources.

14. Learn to use the interlibrary loan system. Almost all libraries have a system of obtaining materials for you, at little or even no cost, if they don't have them and are available at some other library—this may include libraries in other countries! Of course, considerable lead time is required to be able to use the interlibrary loan system; this in turn implies that the earlier you begin your research the better.

15. The more information you collect, the less difficult it will be to meet your minimum page requirements. Term papers will always appear to be too long to write when you have insufficient information because you did not bother to do adequate research.

16. Keep a detailed log of all your research activities, especially taking care to note even those information sources you looked at, but did not find useful. Such a log may prove helpful should it be necessary to convince me that although you pursued your research diligently, you were unable to find adequate information on your topic.

Stage Three: “Think-Writing”

The purpose of this stage is to write in order to think. Here you will be writing for yourself and not for anyone else. At this stage you will be writing down your thoughts about your topic on the basis of information you have collected. Through this process, you will determine what material is useful and what needs to be discarded, generate ideas, and generally get a feel for what shape your term paper will take at the dissemination stage. When you are at this stage, the following tips may prove helpful:

1. At this stage your thoughts do not need to be organized in any particular way; nor does the writing have to be grammatically correct. This is not the stage for producing the final draft of the term paper. This is the stage for digesting the information you have collected and for developing ideas on how to use this information.

⁷ Librarians are like any group of human beings in any profession. There will be many among them who are dedicated and wonderfully helpful (especially in light of the fact that they are often grossly underpaid), and then there will be some among them who are plain “jerks” who should be banished from the profession.

2. If you took notes during the research stage, then these can form part of this “think-writing” process.

3. Use a lot of paper to do your writing so that if you need to add material to a particular point or idea you are developing, it will be easy to do so. Here is a suggestion: fold the sheets of paper longitudinally and use the left half as a margin for additional notes when necessary. (You can obtain paper for free by looking in recycling bins located next to printers in computer rooms.)

4. At this point, do not be too concerned with how you will logically bring together the different themes, points or ideas you develop on paper. Your principal concern here is to work on developing the different but relevant themes, points, ideas, etc.—separately from each other if necessary. For example: suppose you have been asked to write a term paper on student violence in high schools, it is quite likely that your term paper will have the following parts to it: (i) description of the nature and extent of the problem of violence. (ii) The effect of this violence on the educational process in schools. (iii) Analysis of the school factors contributing to the violence. (iv) Analysis of the societal factors contributing to the violence. (v) Possible short term strategies that can be adopted to solve the problem. (vi) Possible long term strategies to solve the problem. Now, when you are at the think-writing stage, it is quite possible that the first thoughts that you write down may concern one of the factors (e.g. the media) in item “iv” and the last thoughts before you move on to Stage Four may be on item “ii.”

5. Do not be too concerned if you find that the quantity of written material you are producing appears to exceed the total number of pages required for the term paper. When you proceed to the next stage, you will find that some of the material you have written at this stage can be discarded.

6. Wherever possible create appropriate short headings for the different pieces of material you write.

7. As you digest information and write down your thoughts, aim to separate out on paper the following three basic types of information: factual information (tells us what is happening), explanatory information (tells us why it is happening), and prescriptive information (prescribes what ought to be happening).

8. Depending upon what kind of term paper you are writing, you may have to use some or all of the following “devices” in the course of writing your paper:

- Performing thought experiments. (Experimenting in the mind with material one is analyzing by creating different scenarios and seeking answers to questions of the type that begin with the words What if this...?)
- Using examples to illustrate the points one is making.
- Using analogies to illustrate the points one is making.⁸
- Presenting arguments in a *logical* step-by-step style.
- Using deductive reasoning.⁹
- Looking for and answering all the key counter-arguments that may be presented to your thesis. Ignoring potential counter-arguments does not strengthen your paper, it merely weakens it. (This, in a sense, involves playing the “devil’s advocate.”)
- Taking into consideration all the key counter-facts. (Counter-facts are facts that run counter to, that is do not support, your thesis or argument.) If your thesis cannot accommodate the counter-facts, then it is necessary to modify or even abandon the thesis and replace it with another. You must never ignore counter-facts in the hope that no one reading your paper will be alert to them. To do so is to engage in intellectual dishonesty by negating the primary goal of all research: the search for truth. Moreover, you run the very high risk of getting a poor grade on your paper.

9. When composing your paragraphs, make sure the statements that make a point/thesis and statements that provide information supporting that point/thesis are logically ordered (sequenced).

10. When assembling the paragraphs in each section of your paper, make sure that the paragraphs that make a point or a thesis and paragraphs that provide information supporting that point or thesis are logically ordered (sequenced).

11. Be sure to note (and act accordingly) that term papers are not based on personal opinions, even if these opinions may be based on personal experience. Personal experience is not a substitute for research. In fact, in the academic arena (an educational environment such as the one in a college or university), there is no place for personal opinions that are unsupported by research. The academic arena is not a democracy in the sense that you are entitled to hold just any opinion you like. For example, no matter how much you may believe that the earth is flat or the moon is a big ball of cheese, you are not entitled to that opinion—at least you are not allowed to express it in a scholarly paper. (Of course, outside the academic arena, you can hold any opinion you like, no matter how outrageous or asinine.) All “opinions” must be based on evidence and logical reasoning; in which case they cease to be opinions and become ideas, arguments, and theses. Most importantly: since it can be logically assumed that a student is someone who is in the process of becoming an educated person, and has not yet become an educated person, no key idea or argument or thesis or fact presented by a student in his/her term paper is acceptable unless it is backed by references. At the same time, it should also be stressed that an unwillingness to accept an idea, argument, thesis or facts that the student comes across in class lectures or in text books is itself not permissible, unless he/she can present competent (scholarly) counter evidence. (Interestingly, in the absence of evidence, such unwillingness usually sur-

⁸ An “analogy” is similar to an “example,” but it is not the same as an example because it works a little differently: while it does not possess similarities in all respects (as in the case of a true example), an analogy shares a sufficiently large number of similarities to permit you to legitimately conclude that it must also be similar in respect to the point you wish to illustrate. Consider the following: Let us assume that I want to make the point that “there is a sucker born everyday.” To illustrate this point I can direct you to the following example: until recently, scam artists earned millions of dollars from people who fell for junk mail offers that informed you that you had won a vacation trip to Florida (even though you had not entered any contest with such a prize), and to get the tickets for the trip you were asked to send them \$19.95. (Today, this type of “something-for-nothing” scams have moved to the internet and are delivered through spam e-mail. Remember, spam only exists because of suckers.) Now, I can use this same example to make a completely different point, but this time I will use it as an analogy. Consider the following: Let us assume that I want to make the point that over the many years I have been teaching, I have increasingly come to witness the fact that larger and larger numbers of students are doing everything they can to dodge the required course work, but while still expecting to get an “A” at the end of the semester. And one possible reason, among others, for this behavior is that we are living in a culture where “get-rich-quick” schemes are extremely popular (which suggests that people want to become rich quickly without any work on their part). Consequently, students growing up in such a culture may think that they can do the same in their education: get “A’s without doing the necessary course work. Now, in making these two interrelated points, I can use the above “example” (of the vacation con game) and use it to serve as an example in the case of one point (about the popularity of get-rich-quick schemes), and as an analogy with respect to the other point, the main point (about student belief in gain without effort). In other words, the con game example becomes an analogy if I were to say the following: just as there are suckers who believe they can vacation in Florida for \$19.95, there are students who believe they can get an “A” in a course without doing the required course work. (Question: do you think this applies to you?)

⁹ This is a type of reasoning where the truth of a conclusion is established on the basis of the truth of its premises. Consider the following example of deductive reasoning: all trees require water to survive and grow. On the basis of this premise, we can conclude that trees cannot grow in deserts. In other words, one does not have to obtain any direct evidence—for example, by visiting all the deserts in the world—to arrive at this conclusion.

faces because the idea, or argument or thesis interferes with one's prejudices or insecurities.) In other words, when a person is in the status of "student," he/she is logically assumed to lack the "scholarly authority" to either present or negate ideas, arguments, theses or key facts without recourse, by means of references, etc., to supportive evidence provided by those who have this "authority."¹⁰

Stage Four: Dissemination

The dissemination stage is the stage where you use the extensive notes you have generated during the *think-writing* stage to produce your term paper for "public" release (even if the "public" in this instance may be only myself). In this final stage the objective is to organize and structure the written material you have already produced at the think-writing stage into a well-written, coherent term paper. Whereas in the preceding stage you were writing for yourself, now you are writing for others. The dissemination stage is just as important as the other preceding stages, even though in this stage you are less concerned with the content of your paper than with the *structure* and *format* of the paper. The following tips may prove helpful when you are at this final stage of the writing process:

1. A term paper always, I must emphasize *always*, has a three-part *structure*: introduction, body, and conclusion—with the body taking up the majority of the pages.¹¹ (For example, in a ten-page term paper, the introduction may take up half a page to one full page, while the conclusion may take up one to three pages. The remaining pages would be devoted to the body of the paper).
2. The introduction is where you introduce to the reader the objective or purpose of your term paper. It is in the introduction that the reader must be given the "map" of the "journey of knowledge" s(he) is about to undertake by reading your paper. In other words, by the time the reader has reached the point where the body of your paper begins, s(he) must be clearly aware of what your paper aims to do.
3. In general, a well-written introduction will begin with at least two critical paragraphs: the *opening paragraph* and the *synoptic paragraph*. The opening paragraph is the first paragraph, and its purpose is to introduce the topic (or subject or theme) of the paper. The synoptic paragraph follows the first paragraph, and it summarizes very briefly the principal points you intend to make in your paper. (Depending on the length of the paper and the complexity of the topic, the synoptic paragraph can be split into two or more paragraphs.)
4. The *body* does what the introduction said the paper will do. Specifically, it elaborates on the principal points outlined in the synoptic paragraphs of the introduction. That is, it is in the body of the paper that you provide the reader with the relevant information in support of your points—information ranging from facts and examples to citations and "thought-experiments." The body is usually divided into sections, made up of one or more paragraphs, with each section corresponding to a single point or idea.
5. The conclusion does three things: briefly restates what you said your paper was going to do, summarizes what you have done in the body of the paper, and ends by making a general statement about the relevance, implications, etc. of what you have said in your paper. If the reader of your paper decides to read only your conclusion, then s(he) must come away with a fairly accurate idea of what your whole paper is about.
6. Determine the *organization* of the body of your paper by grouping together in a logical order the headings you generated in the preceding stage. (For example, depending upon your topic, the grouping can be on the basis of type of information: factual, explanatory, or prescriptive.)
7. When writing the term paper always imagine that the paper will be read by someone who is not familiar with the topic of your paper. Do not write it with the idea that the only person who will read it is myself (even if that may be true). You must always have an imaginary audience before you when you write, besides the teacher. One implication of this point is that you must back up the information you present with relevant reference citations. Write your paper with this general approach: assume that the person reading your paper is intelligent, but do not assume that the person is knowledgeable about the topic of your paper. In other words, do not expect the reader to "fill in the blanks," so to speak.
8. Term papers are always—repeat *always*—written in a particular style or format (e.g. the APA style [the style developed by the American Psychological Association], the MLA style [the style developed by the Modern Languages Association], the Chicago style [the style developed by the University of Chicago Press], and so on). Much in the same way that the format of a letter you write to a friend or a relative is very different from the format of a letter you write to a prospective employer, the format of a term paper is very different from, say, a set of notes you prepare for yourself on a topic. The format determines how you structure the following basic elements of scholarly writing: reference citations, headings, footnotes, endnotes, references, bibliographies, quotations, tables and figures, and page numbering. It is not up to you (or even me) to decide how you format your paper; you have to follow established conventions that have been developed over the centuries by scholars, printers, and publishers. These conventions are referred to as "style." For example: whether a quotation should be single spaced or double-spaced, whether it should be indented, and so on; these are all questions of format that are resolved by a given style. In the U.S., there are three popular styles that scholars in the arts and social sciences use: the MLA style; the APA style and the Chicago style. For all term papers you write for me you will be using the APA style, but with a slight modification. (See Part Two below for exact instructions concerning the style or conventions you will use to format your paper.)
9. When you have reached this stage, you will of course be using a computer to write the term paper. Now there is a danger here to which you must pay absolute attention: the possibility of losing your paper because of some computer glitch. How do you avoid this danger? Simple, make a back-up copy every few *minutes* on a removable device.
10. Your term paper must be completely free of language that is racist, sexist, and so on.

¹⁰ "Scholarly authority," here, refers to the authority of the scholar who has traveled the road of scholarship and research far, far beyond that of the student; and equally importantly, has had this scholarship and research evaluated for authenticity and validity through formal and informal processes of peer review. Note: usually, the formal peer review process takes place *prior* to publication of one's research/scholarship and the informal one occurs after publication via, both, published and unpublished reviews of the publication. (In one sense, the informal peer review process never ends as long as the publication is available to the public through one means or another: libraries, bookstores, etc.)

¹¹ In fact, I would go so far as to say that almost any type of writing will have this three-part structure either indicated explicitly (by means of subheadings for instance) or expressed implicitly. Consider, even a brief e-mail will, usually, have a three-part structure. (Incidentally, have you noticed that this document itself has a three-part structure.)

11. Learn to use transitional (connecting) devices to help you to link together statements, paragraphs and groups of paragraphs into a coherent whole. The following are some examples of these writing devices:
- Transitions that restate: “that is,” “in other words,” “to restate,” “to recapitulate,” etc.
 - Transitions that establish cause: “for,” “since,” “as,” “because,” etc.
 - Transitions that establish a result or effect: “consequently,” “therefore,” “thus,” “so,” “then,” etc.
 - Transitions that illustrate: “for instance,” “for example,” “such as” etc.
 - Transitions that establish contrast: “even though,” “even so,” “on the other hand,” “nevertheless,” “but,” “yet,” “still,” “in contrast,” “however,” etc.
 - Transitions that add information: “finally,” “furthermore,” “also,” “again,” “moreover,” “in addition,” “above all,” “in the first place,” etc.
 - Transitions that establish time: “next,” “meanwhile,” “as soon as,” “during that time,” “before,” etc.

The best way to learn how to use transitional devices is by carefully studying them in actual use, by examining journal articles and books by scholarly writers.

12. Learn to break up your term paper into paragraphs that are not too long and not too short. (In general, a paragraph made up of less than two or three sentences is too short, while a paragraph that exceeds two thirds of a page is too long.) Remember that the paragraph contains sentences that together concern no more than one main idea or point.
13. Break up your term paper into sections by using appropriate headings. (A section is made of a number of paragraphs concerned with a common theme.) Two headings, besides other headings, that should always be present in a term paper are “introduction” and “conclusion.”
14. Term papers are usually written in the third person (she, he, they, etc.) and NOT first person (I, myself, we, etc.).
15. Learn how to use punctuation appropriately by consulting a grammar book—such as Shertzer (1986). You should be able to use, at the very minimum, the following punctuation devices with no difficulty: period, comma, semicolon, colon, apostrophe, question mark, dash, parentheses, ellipses, and quotation marks.
16. Learn how to use explanatory footnotes—though sparingly. Explanatory footnotes contain information that is relevant to the paper, but the information is usually considered not absolutely essential. (Footnotes are notes that appear at the bottom of a page; and they are usually referenced in the text by means of a number. This document has several footnotes; examine them to see what they do.)
17. Use direct quotations sparingly and only when it is absolutely—repeat, *absolutely*—essential. (Of course, all quotations must be appropriately referenced.)
18. Do not express general opinions without providing evidence (in the form of reference citations) to back up your opinions.
19. Do not under any circumstances plagiarize material. Plagiarism is an offense that is punishable by death (which in this instance will mean an F grade for the *entire* course).¹² Plagiarism refers to the use of ideas and/or words of someone else without giving credit in order to pass them off as your own. In other words, for every main idea, fact, etc., and for every direct quotation there must be appropriate reference citations provided.
20. When you have finished writing the entire paper, do not assume that it is ready for dissemination. The paper is your first draft, and it will require further attention (in the form of revisions). Your paper will be ready for dissemination only after you have revised the paper (by correcting spelling and grammatical errors, and where necessary, adding new ideas, deleting information, moving paragraphs around, changing headings, etc.). It is well to remember that no piece of writing can ever be perfect; all writing is “work in progress.” Therefore, do not hand in the first draft of your paper.
21. To assist you with improving the technical aspects of your term paper (spelling, grammar, style, etc.) learn to use effectively writing tools such as the following: the dictionary (e.g. *Webster’s College Dictionary* by Random House), the synonym dictionary (e.g. *The Synonym Finder* by Rodale), the thesaurus (e.g. *Rogel’s International Thesaurus*), the word menu dictionary (e.g. *Random House Word Menu*), the English usage dictionary (e.g. *Fowler’s Modern English Usage*), and the dictionary of sayings and phrases (e.g. *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*). If you do not know what these writing tools do, you will find it worthwhile to examine them—they are available in the reference section of the library.
22. ALWAYS leave time (at least three days) after you have finished the first draft of your term paper before making final revisions. Trying to produce a term paper at the last minute is not the best strategy for writing an “A” grade term paper.

Conclusion

I hope you will find the information I have provided in this first part of the document useful, even if you may not be able to use all of it at one time. If you would like more information on writing term papers you will find the following books helpful: Mulkerne and Mulkerne (1988); Howard and Barton (1986); and Strunk and White (1979). This last book should be used together with the book on grammar mentioned above. See also the “Short Guide to Writing” series published by Harper Collins (e.g., A Short Guide to Writing about History, by Richard Marius). If you are willing to devote time, perhaps during the summer break, to learning the skills necessary for effective writing, there is an excellent book I highly recommend to you: Cavina (1995). Another very useful book and one that goes beyond writing is Ellis (2006) which tackles almost everything about being a successful student. Do not forget the study/writing guides accessible through the link on the main class home page.

REFERENCES

(for Part One of this document)

- Cavina, Kristan. *Critical Thinking and Writing: A Developing Writer’s Guide with Readings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995.
- Ellis, Dave. *Becoming a Master Student*. 11th Edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.
- Howard, V. A. and Barton, J. H. *Thinking on Paper*. New York: William Morrow, 1986.
- Mulkerne, Donald J. D. and Mulkerne, Donald J. D., Jr. *The Perfect Term Paper*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

¹² Ideally, if it were up to me I would want a person guilty of plagiarism to be barred from any school for a period of at least three years, and to have their transcript marked permanently.

PART TWO: FORMAT/STYLE INSTRUCTIONS

Please read these instructions on how your paper should be presented very carefully, *before* starting work on your paper:

1. I will assign you the topic for your term paper.
2. In addition to reading the preceding portion of this document (part one), please also familiarize yourself with the resources that appear via the link titled "Writing Research/Term papers: Citation Formats" on the class home page.
3. The objectives of the term paper assignment, besides the opportunity to learn more about the issues covered in this course, are to enhance your ability to:
 - (a) think and write intelligently *in consonance with the academic culture of a research university*. (<-- Read this line again.)
 - (b) do effective library based research.
 - (c) identify relevant material during the research process.
 - (d) succinctly summarize scholarly work in your own words.
 - (e) follow written instructions.
4. Your term paper must be TYPED and presented in the following format/ style:
 - **Length:** If this course is a *graduate* class, then no less than **TWENTY** and no more than **twenty-five** pages (not counting the cover page and the reference page). If this course is a one hundred or two hundred level undergraduate class *and* you are a **senior** as per school records, then no less than **FOURTEEN** and no more than **seventeen** pages (not counting the cover page and the reference page). For all others no less than **TEN** and no more than **twelve** pages (not counting the cover page and the reference page)
 - **Due date:** As specified on the class home page or in the syllabus packet. I will not accept a late paper without assigning penalty points unless you have a **documented** reason for not meeting the deadline. Note: In either circumstance, you must still obtain clearance from me before handing in your late paper.
 - **Paper Size:** 8.5 x 11 inches.
 - **Paper color:** white or natural (if using recycled paper).
 - **Binding:** The only acceptable binding for your paper is a staple in the top left hand corner. You may submit your paper in a folder with pockets. Reserve the left pocket for the actual paper itself, and the right pocket for all other materials (e.g. the photocopied first pages of references--see below--etc.)
 - **Margins:** No more and no less than one inch all around. (This is the standard or default margins on almost all computer word-processing programs.)
 - **Typeface/Font:** Times Roman in **10pt** (the default in MS Word is 12pt, change it to 10pt).
 - **Spacing:** DOUBLE throughout the document including between paragraphs (there should be no extra space between paragraphs).
 - **Footnotes:** You must have a minimum of two **explanatory** footnotes in your paper.
 - **Quotations:** Not required, but if you do have them then they should be indented seven spaces from the left margin, and they should be separated from the text by a line space. NOTE: Your paper should have no more than two direct quotations that are twenty words or more in length. Moreover, no direct quotation can exceed 100 words in length.
 - **Citations:** Reference citations should appear in the text itself in this form: open parentheses, author's last name, comma, year of publication, colon, page number, close parentheses. For example, if I had referred to a book by Strunk and White in the text then the citation would appear as follows: (Strunk and White, 1979:16). Reference citations in footnotes should also be in the same form.
 - **References:** The number of references must not be less than TEN. NOTE: References that are part of the required readings for the course do not count toward fulfilling this requirement.
 - **Type of Reference Sources:** Your reference sources must comprise at least **TWO** or more of each of the following types of sources:
 - A refereed journal article (ask a librarian if you do not know what this means).
 - A scholarly book.
 - A Ph.D. dissertation (accessible online through the libraries database--ask a reference librarian for help if necessary)
 - A government report or document.
 - If you are unable to locate certain materials for your topic (e.g. a PhD dissertation) then document the steps you took to try and find the material (but came up empty handed).
 - If you obtain material from the worldwide web then it must have an author who is affiliated with a government agency, or a reputable organization or an educational institution. Anonymously written material will not be acceptable.
 - **For each reference provide a photocopy of the title page (if the source is a print or web article), OR of the title page together with the contents pages (if the source is a book). Failure to provide this material will automatically incur an F grade for the paper.**
 - Please note that, as a general rule, the more references you have (as long as they are relevant and appropriate) in your paper, the better. All references must be grouped alphabetically under the heading 'references' at the end of your paper.

- **Reference style:** Use the APA style. Remember to use the correct style for sources obtained from the world-wide web!
- **Page numbering:** Page numbering must be continuous and page numbers must appear centered at the bottom of the page.
- **Cover page:** Your paper must have a cover page with the following information on it: title of your paper, your name as it appears in the school records, course number and title, semester, year, and my name as it appears above. All information must be centered on the page and in the same typeface and font as the text of the paper.
- **Plagiarism:** This is an offense and it is punishable by death (which in this instance will mean an F grade for the entire course). Plagiarism refers to the use of ideas and/or words of someone else without giving credit in order to pass them off as your own. In other words, for every main idea, fact, etc., and for every direct quotation there must be appropriate references provided.
- **Headings:** Appropriate headings must be provided in your paper including these two: 'introduction' and 'conclusion.'

PART THREE: GRADING

1. When I grade written submissions I follow this three-step procedure:

- I skim through all submissions to get a sense of the quality of what you guys have given me.
- I carefully go through them again to identify a paper that I consider as the best when compared to that of others (this does *not* necessarily mean that this paper will be the most ideal, that is an "A-grade" paper).
- I grade all the papers using the best one as the benchmark.

2. Your paper will be graded on the basis of the following points distribution:

- 100 points for how well you follow the preceding style/format instructions.
- 15 points for spelling.
- 15 points for grammar.
- 50 points for organization (this refers to matters such as use of headings, types of paragraphs, sequencing of paragraphs, etc.).
- 150 points for content quality (this refers to the quality of the actual information you present in your paper).
- 50 points for references (this refers not only to the quality of the reference material you found, but also how well the references are cited in the text of your paper).
- 20 points for overall quality of the paper (this refers to how well the paper is presented as a scholarly work in general from the perspective of both format and content).
- Total number of points = 400

3. Please note that a grade above a B on a term paper is rare in my classes. Your paper has to be *exceptionally* well crafted—in terms of both content and style/format—to merit a grade above a B.

END OF DOCUMENT