



Tips for Writing Essays

- ▶ **Start Early:** Give yourself at least two weeks to prepare an assignment.
- ▶ **Understand Your Assignment:** Read your assignment sheet carefully, and analyze the language of the assignment and its keywords. If you are unsure about the language of the assignment, its purpose, or your audience, seek help. Talk to your professor, your T.A., or an instructor at the Writing Centre.
- ▶ **Pre-write Before You Write:** There are a number of different tools that writers use to generate ideas before they begin to write: free-writing or listing random thoughts; brainstorming and clustering; or talking with friends. These activities can help you get ideas on paper and can give you some initial guidance that will make it easier for you to write your first draft.
- ▶ **Limit Your Subject:** Your random thoughts may take you in many different directions, even if most of the ideas are related, but you must limit your subject so that your theme will be unified and coherent. In addition, you must ensure that your essay can be written in the allotted time and within the allotted word count.
- ▶ **Do the Necessary Research:** If you're writing a research paper, do your readings. They will help you determine how to think about your subject and what special terms you need to use in your essay. Readings give you the expert opinions that you can incorporate into your essay to help support your argument.
- ▶ **Create a Working Thesis:** Your working thesis can be a preliminary main idea, or a question that you plan to answer. Don't worry if your working thesis changes as you write and do research – it is supposed to. Remember that a thesis statement is not simply a statement of fact, but an argument that you will support.
- ▶ **Create an Outline:** Your outline should contain the major points that you will make to support your thesis. Each point must connect to your thesis, and the outline, like the working thesis, can change as you go along. If a point doesn't seem to fit, re-examine the point and re-examine your thesis. It may be possible, or even necessary, to either change the point or change the thesis.

- ▶ **Write a Draft:** When you begin to write, you don't have to start at the beginning. Start with the section that is clearest in your mind, then go back and fill in the gaps. This is only a draft; you can worry about the connections between arguments once you have something on paper.
- ▶ **Write Your Conclusion:** Your conclusion should develop naturally, as an outgrowth of the introduction and body of your essay. In the conclusion, you should tell the reader what the highlights of the essay are and what the reader can learn from the essay. Read your conclusion, then read your introduction to make sure that they complement each other, and seem to belong in the same essay.
- ▶ **Rewrite:** Always rewrite your rough draft at least once. Read through your draft and write the main idea of each paragraph in the margin of your essay. There should be only one main idea in each paragraph, and the main ideas of each paragraph should follow a logical order, and should all connect to your thesis. Keep your audience in mind when you are rewriting. Write the essay as if the reader were reading over your shoulder and constantly asking you 'what does this mean?' or 'how does this idea or paragraph link to the last one?'
- ▶ **Check Your Citations:** If you are citing sources, check your documentation style. The three main styles used are APA, MLA and Turabian (Chicago); know what documentation style your professor expects.
- ▶ **Polish and Correct:** once you are sure that your ideas hold together, read your essay aloud. Listen for and correct awkward or wordy phrases, and mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation.