

New Student Orientation

Fall 2007

The United Library

Basic Paper Preparation

- A. Read broadly (in the library, in your course texts), attend lectures, and follow the class syllabus to determine topics of interest to you and/or the scope of the assignment.
- B. Start narrowing down your topic and expanding your knowledge by using the library resources and taking notes about ideas and points that are relevant to the topic as you are reading.
- C. If you are having difficulty, meet with your instructor or see a reference librarian who can assist you in finding resources or in narrowing your topic. Keep in mind, that some scholars can write an entire book on one chapter of the Bible!!! Pick a topic that is a size you can manage for your assignment.

Elements of a Good Paper

- A.. You must articulate a clear thesis statement. What are you trying to prove? Or What stance are you taking? (Though, avoid saying “In this paper I will prove” ---that is a bit elementary. Be more creative and subtle).
- C. The subsequent paragraphs should all provide evidence, support or illumination for your thesis.
- D. You need to have a clear conclusion.
- E. Papers should be well constructed with transition phrases, concern for grammar, attention to word choice, etc.

In short, think of a paper as a legal debate or trial. You are a lawyer who must prove a point. All of the paragraphs of the paper show the witnesses or evidence, or proof for your point. At the end of the trial, like a lawyer, you sum up your arguments. The goal is to “sway” or convince your audience (the reader) that your thesis or point is valid.

- F. Often, before writing, it may be helpful to create an outline.

Style –The art of writing well

- A. Transition markers are vital. You have to help the reader move between paragraphs by telling the reader how each paragraph and thought relates to the one before. Usual markers include the following categories (just some samples):

- 1) Time – immediately, after, before, last, later, earlier, prior
- 2) Concession—Granted, although, nevertheless, in any event

- 3) Addition – In addition, further, first/second/third, another, to illustrate, for example
- 4) Contrast – despite, however, by contrast, on the contrary
- 5) Conclusion – Consequently, finally, therefore, thus, in conclusion

B. Sentence structure – Vary your structure. Short sentences, long sentences, and compound sentences are all to be used. A paper with only short, simple sentences makes the reader feel like the author is boxing with him/her. Yet, a short sentence here or there in a forest of long sentences will have dramatic impact and can be used to emphasize a point.

C. Word choice – Try not to use the same word over and over again. Employ a thesaurus! (as opposed to :Try not to *use* the same word over and over again. *Use* a thesaurus!)

D. Make it pretty or dramatic—Don't forget that you can use other elements such as alliteration, rhythm, metaphor, examples to make your prose flow