

## A Word about Writing



The aim of any writing project is for you to explore a particular question or problem, developing an argument that encapsulates your solution concerning the question you are discussing. It is NOT intended that you 'write all you know' about the topic, or merely summarize the views of a textbook. In each of your classes, you may be asked to plan and develop a research topic of your own choosing. Once you come up with a research topic, think about your topic and do some background reading to help you narrow your topic to one that best suits your intellectual curiosity.

1. In selecting a research topic, think about your interests. What topic have you wanted to investigate in other classes but haven't had the opportunity to do so? What piques your interest? What presents a challenge to you? You may need to do some background reading to help narrow your topic of interest. When you have selected a topic, think hard about what the topic involves, what is the question that keeps coming forward? Do some analytical thinking about this, and about ways of approaching the question to explore its meanings and problems, and develop a response.
2. Start reading early, well before the assignment due dates. Find relevant references by following up bibliographies in a textbook and using the references listed in academic articles.
3. Always keep notes on the sources (articles) you are reading—author, title, journal title, year of publication and publisher, and the page number of all material. There is nothing more frustrating than not being able to track down where you found a useful quote.
4. Get into the habit of putting your notes in your own words, as it is a good way of checking whether you are following an argument. Always be careful to include quotation marks around any phrases or sentences that you take directly from the readings, otherwise you could easily slip into presenting an author's work as your own (that would be **plagiarism**, which as you know is an unethical practice!).
5. Now, to make an argument, you need to structure your writing. Work out an outline of the points you want to cover, the order in which they best support your argument, and suitable supporting evidence or specific examples you want to use.
6. It is important to use specific examples to illustrate and substantiate your points.
7. Wherever possible use diagrams, maps, graphs, and other illustrations to support your argument. Such visual materials are an important part of communication.
8. Keep to the set word/page limit—it is part of the exercise. To be able to develop your ideas concisely is an important skill, and working with a word or page limit gives you valuable practice. However, footnotes, reference lists, or any appendices do not come

into the word/page count—they are extra. It is important to be highly selective in what you include. Remember that you can summarize and condense material and reference the sources, you do not have to re-state it all in your paper.

9. Get someone else to read a draft of your paper. They don't have to know anything about your topic—but they should still be able to follow your ideas. They will quickly tell you if the ideas and information are unclear, or poorly expressed, if the paper is too long and repetitive or needs expansion on some points. You can also try reading your paper aloud, as this is a good way to find out how it sounds. Try to prepare your draft a few days or so before the paper is due to allow time for your own assessment and revision.

10. You should prepare an initial draft and then try to evaluate it, possibly several times, and where necessary change the structure or contents. Aim to polish the organization, your ideas and the clarity of your expression.

11. As a way of improving your expression, find an article that you have enjoyed reading and study how it is written—the structure and style the author has used.

12. Please keep a copy of your paper in case of problems.