

Basic Writing Reminders

Writing is an important component in this class. I will expect you to bring everything you learned in ENGL 3 to your writing in this class, and I will grade your papers accordingly. Since we don't have time to review all of those tools for writing, here is a summary of the most important rules and tips to keep in mind while crafting effective and engaging essays.

CONTENT: Thesis and Argument

An effective **thesis statement** will

- *narrow* your topic to a single *specific* idea (evaluation of nature symbols in “Fern Hill,” *not* examination of tone in all of Dylan Thomas’s poetry);
- *analyze*, rather than describing (“Whitman uses free verse to create an independent, dynamic, and expansive self,” *not* “Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’ is a rambling, non-metrical poem”);
- argue a position that is *debatable* (you must be able to come up with the *anti*-thesis to your thesis);
- *stimulate curiosity* in your readers, and communicate why this topic matters enough to write a paper on it.

Your essay will make an **argument** about a text, using **claims** (the points *you* make, including your thesis and its sub-claims), **evidence** (concrete data from the text, e.g., line length, end rhyme, repeated use of the word “dark”), and **analysis** (the connections between the evidence and claims; evidence by itself does not *prove* anything). To be sure you are including adequate evidence and analysis for each claim, keep asking yourself “How do I know this claim to be true?”

ORGANIZATION: Outlining and Transitions

- In order to incorporate all your claims, evidence, and analysis smoothly into a coherent paper, you’ll need to plan the order in which to present all of these pieces of your argument. **Outlining**—no matter how informally—is the only way to do this and is absolutely essential to writing a clear paper.
- Use **transitional words, phrases, and even sentences and paragraphs** to make your line of thinking clear at every point in your paper; the reader should never have to do the work of figuring out how you got from one thought to the next. Concentrate especially on using transitions between paragraphs and sentences. See a grammar handbook for a list of transitional words and phrases (e.g., however, then, but, on the other hand, consequently, moreover, in fact, for example).

Crafting Effective PARAGRAPHS: Unity, Coherence, Development

EVERY paragraph you write (except short, transitional paragraphs) should be

- **Unified**—state the main idea in a **topic sentence** at the beginning or end of that paragraph, and make sure every sentence in the paragraph relates to that main idea;
- **Coherent**—every sentence should flow *logically* and *necessarily* from the sentence before it; use transitional words and phrases, repeat key words, and use pronouns appropriately to accomplish this;
- **Developed**—include sufficient examples, facts, and explanations to elucidate the paragraph’s main idea.

INTRODUCTIONS

- Your introduction is the most important paragraph of your paper: it has the enormous job of making the reader *want* to read the paper. So use a hook—**grab the reader’s attention**—and make it clear that this paper has something important and specific to say.
- Avoid the much-used but meaningless “Since the dawn of time” introduction: **do not be overly general** or sweeping in your introduction or in your claims. If it doesn’t have something directly to do with your narrow topic, it doesn’t belong in your intro. Realize that you have very little space in which to define your argument, and don’t waste it.

CONCLUSIONS

- Your conclusion also has a big job—it must wrap up your argument, as well as **make a lasting impression** on the reader. Do this by using the conclusion to consider the implications or contradictions of your argument, refer cyclically to an earlier point or image in the paper, or address the “so what” question. If you can’t think of something new to say, or of more than one or two sentences, you’re not ready to write your conclusion. Don’t squander this opportunity to bring your argument persuasively and eloquently to a big-bang finish.
- **DO NOT simply repeat yourself** in your conclusion, or conclude something larger than your paper can back up: stick to your own specific argument, rather than trying to draw implications for the world at large.

STYLE: Choosing words and crafting sentences

- Write **concisely**: most writing can be improved if cut in *half*! Be alert for empty words, repetition, and redundancy, and cut them mercilessly. Especially watch out for these useless but very popular structures: “it is” and “there are.” See Zinsser’s *On Writing Well* for a superb discussion of conciseness.
- **Choose your words** carefully: be aware of connotations and exact denotations; consult your dictionary when in doubt, and make your thesaurus dog-eared and well-loved. Learn to recognize and replace clichés, jargon, and vague language. Take the trouble to find that exact right word. Also, make your writing more exciting by using *active* verbs and avoiding passive verbs. This kind of work is rarely done sufficiently but is richly rewarding!
- Concentrate on improving **sentence variety**: branch out! Don’t just use simple sentences. *Combine* sentences with coordinating conjunctions (and, but, so, etc.) and with *semicolons*, and use subordination by adding dependent clauses (clauses starting with a word like “although,” “while,” etc.) to your sentences. Use a variety of sentence *lengths* to create different textures and effects in your writing.
- Use a variety of **sentence beginnings**: avoid always starting your sentence with the subject. Try beginning a sentence with a *prepositional phrase* (“Into this line bursts a cacophony of sound”), a *dependent clause* (“Although this character develops throughout the story, . . .”), an *infinitive phrase* (“To truly appreciate the figure’s complexity. . .”), or an *appositive/descriptive phrase* (“Rhyming only every few lines, this poem . . .”).

GRAMMAR, MECHANICS, AND PUNCTUATION (GMP)

We do not have time to review the intricacies of grammar in this class, but *I absolutely expect top-notch grammar* from you and will grade appropriately. This is, after all, *English 4w*. Consult a grammar

handbook if you have any hesitations over grammar and punctuation issues. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

A few common problems to watch out for:

- **Sentence faults**, namely fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences;
- **Pronoun errors** in agreement, reference, and point of view; the old who/whom dilemma; that vs. which;
- Unnecessary or missing **commas**; commas are a *very* commonly misused punctuation mark!
- Misused **apostrophes**—a personal pet peeve: *Do not* make the it's/its (contraction vs. possessive) mistake!!

FORMAT

- **Titles** of poems, songs, and short stories get quotation marks; titles of novels, films, or plays get *italicized* OR underlined.

- **Quote** from texts according to MLA guidelines:

Three or fewer lines of poetry or prose should be included *within the text* of your paragraph, set off with quotation marks, with all punctuation included as it appears in the original, and line breaks (for poems) signaled by slash marks: “We real cool. We/Left school. We/Lurk late. We” (lines 1-3).

Four lines or more should be *separated from the text* of your paper by skipping a line, indenting, and transcribing the original exactly as written. An extended prose quotation will be indented ten spaces on each side. Poem shown below:

We real cool. We
Left school. We
Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We (lines 1-4)

- Though you should refer to the text extensively when making any literary argument, you should use *long/extended* quotations only when absolutely necessary, e.g., when discussing a theme or technique that unfolds slowly over a long bit of text.

REVISING, Editing, and Proofreading

- **Revising** is the key to good writing. When you have finished your draft, put it aside for a while (even an hour will do, if that's all the time you can spare), then come back to it and look it over with a fresh eye. Most papers must go through several drafts before they attain the kind of clarity, organization, and insight that make them truly great. Try revising in stages—read once for organization and transitions, another time for style and clarity, another time to **edit** grammar and punctuation . . . you get the idea. So start writing early, and revise often.

- Always **proofread** your paper carefully before you turn it in: notice details of format, and look for typos, misspellings, skipped lines, missing or repeated text, etc. This is very hard to do when you print out your paper 3 minutes before it is due! There's no excuse for a paper full of silly mistakes that you should have had time to find and correct. *Be professional.*

- The following is the scan of the page from an article that Niko Besnier was working on recently. He had gone through several drafts of the text already, but in this particular revision he continued to make major changes to the text, as the handwritten scribbling on the printout demonstrate. The revision stage of writing is the most important stage, and when you have composed the initial draft of a text, the work has

just begun. You then need to go through the text several times, changing, moving, deleting, and inserting. Only after several successive editing stages will your paper be “ready” for consumption by your readership. The more you revise, the higher the quality of your arguments and style of presentation. (This correlation also stresses the importance of starting your work early; you cannot revise work produced under pressure, and the quality of the work will necessarily be inferior.)

In the same breath,

which gives them superiority over ~~the~~ girlfriends and wives of their "straight" male friends, who are allegedly constrained by ~~gender~~ decorum from engaging too obviously in the pleasure of sexual encounters. *Leiti* also talk of the emotional intimacy that "straight" men achieve with them, in contrast to their ~~own~~ girlfriends and wives. *Without how one of my informants said about his ~~last~~ married boyfriend, echoing themes he plays in his BF's life w/ the role that the BF's wife plays:*

I: He's got more stress with the real woman than- when- than with me. You know. And hhm, and there are things that we do that they don't do, that the lady doesn't do. . . . Physical things. Hmm and there are times, moments that we share, hm, just talking . . . That he doesn't do with his wife.
[Interviews 2001:4]

One of the more flamboyant *leiti* in Tonga is regularly taken to court for slander by young women with whom he has public fights, after he has made public statements to the effect that his ~~women~~ girlfriends' boyfriends "prefer" him to their own girlfriends. The claim, of course flirts dangerously with violations of sister-brother decorum, but is also potentially a too little close to the truth to be comfortable for anyone.

Romantic attachments between *leiti* and their "straight" boyfriends are limited by the fact that they can never be transformed into a sanctioned kinship alliance (i.e., marriage), and thus must remain ~~sexual in nature~~ illicit and hidden. They certainly cannot be sung about in *hiva kakala*, and they therefore remain even more subjugent than heterosexual sweetheart-sweetheart attachments. The same applies to the attachments from the perspective of the "straight" boyfriends, but they are redeemed as persons in that they are marriageable or married and, since sweetheart-sweetheart attachments of any kind are given no public face, "straight" men who enter in romantic relations with *leiti* suffer little social stigma. *Leiti* themselves buy into this rhetoric of impossibility, false-consciousness-like. While they speak longingly of the most intimate moments of their long-term sexual liaisons and affective attachments to married men, they also constantly put each other down for barking up the wrong tree, for giving priority to anti-social self-gratification, and for betraying their emotional vulnerability. (For an excellent theatrical portrayal of these conflicting discourses in a Samoan context, see the 1996 play *A Frigate Bird Sings*, by Samoan playwrights Oscar Kightley and David Fane, reviewed in Besnier 1997a). Put-downs and sarcastic comments not unlike the jokes that Joey cracks in the Miss Galaxy pageant at the expense of voiceless, disenfranchised contestants abound in the everyday lives of Tongan *leiti*.

Furthermore, while *leiti* "claim" to be ladies in certain respects, mainstream society impatiently meets these claims as highly frivolous for all fundamental purposes such as the reckoning of kinship (Besnier 1997b, and 2002). In particular, for the purpose of sister-brother dyads, *leiti* are brothers to their sisters, and thus they must keep secret both their sexual relations and their romantic attachments:

P: 'Oku ou faka'apa'apa au ki he'eku fanga tuafāfiné, 'oku ou faka'apa'apa au ki hoku fanga tuafāfiné. 'É? Ko e me'a pē ia 'a'aku e ka 'oku ou-, secret pē he 'ū me'a ko ē. (→
←) Kai ke u loto au ke 'ilo, 'o ma'u, 'o 'alu au e ongoongó, ke mā ai hoku fanga tuafāfiné, ē?
N: Pea ma- mā ai leva kimoutolu.

to:
sexual attachments + sexual liaisons -
UNsanctioned + secret

the latter
sexual + emotional attachments

re: bonds

response to

is ki

“Writing is difficult” –anon.

The Writing PROCESS

1. Identify purpose, audience, topic
2. Generate ideas. What kind of argument can you make about this topic or with this evidence? What themes emerge from your readings or observations?
3. Develop a thesis statement to organize your evidence and present the argument you plan to make.
4. Gather information and organize your ideas to address all the points brought up in your thesis statement.
5. Write your initial draft
6. Revise
 - 6a. Revise
 - 6b. Revise
 - 6c. Revise[Repeat steps 2-6 as necessary, in any order desired, until you attain a satisfying result.]
7. Edit and proofread

Step 1: Identify purpose, audience, topic

Purpose: to explain, entertain, express, persuade, inform, describe, analyze, recommend, summarize, instruct, hypothesize, . . .

Audience: Consider age, gender, interests, values, education.

How much does your audience *know* about your topic? How *interested* will they be? What kind of *vocabulary* should you use? What terms must you define? How much *background info* must you give? Will your audience be *sympathetic* or *adversarial* to your argument?

Topic: Consider your own knowledge about, interest in, feelings for, and thoughts on a topic as you decide whether / how to write about it.

Consider paper length—Make sure your topic is *sufficiently narrow* to allow you to develop a paper fully within the assigned page limit.

Generating ideas (Prewriting)

Freewriting: Focusing on an idea or piece of evidence,

- Set a time limit and write whatever comes to mind *without pausing at all*.
- Don't worry about grammar, spelling, organization, etc.
 - Harvest promising ideas from your freewriting and develop and/or narrow them with more freewriting, or other prewriting techniques.

Brainstorming:

- Proceed as when freewriting, but using phrases rather than sentences.
- Try it individually or with a group.

Clustering:

- Create a *visual* arrangement of ideas and logical connections.
- Use it to narrow topics, locate ideas that need development, and identify the logical and hierarchical relationships among ideas.

Keeping a journal

Answering questions (ask who? what? when? where? why? of your topic)

Formulating your thesis statement

broad area of interest
↓
topic
↓
question to answer
↓
thesis statement

children's games
↓
rules and structure of the game
↓
How are the Dani people's values and interpersonal relationship styles reflected in the rules and structure of the stick game?
↓
Children's distraction and fluid partnering during the stick game, as well as their acceptance of other children's interference, suggest that Dani culture is minimally competitive and values the independence of the individual.

Your thesis statement should
Narrow your topic to a single main idea;

Assert a position;
Express your opinion and attitude about the topic;
Stimulate curiosity in your readers;
Fit your purpose.

Organizing ideas—OUTLINING

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*The difference between a well organized paper and a holy mess
generally lies in the outline.*
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An outline does NOT have to be sophisticated; it only needs to show levels of ideas and the order in which you will write about them.

BEFORE writing:

1. List all the points you want to make.
2. Group them according to relationships.
3. Decide which ideas are major and minor / main topics and subtopics.
4. Decide the order in which you want to cover the topics.
5. Indicate logical connections/transitions between them.

DURING writing: outline what you have written so far when you are stuck, or to make sure you are staying on topic.

Writing your first DRAFT—some helpful and unorthodox tips

✍️ *Don't begin at the beginning:* start with the section/point that seems easiest to you, work to the end, then write your intro.

⚡ *Write quickly.* Get your ideas down as quickly as possible, without worrying too much about grammar, perfect word choice, spelling, etc.

♥️ *Write strongly.* Capture your initial passion and excitement about the ideas, or else you'll lose them. You can tone down your writing later.

📁 *Save all drafts and notes.* Save both hard and electronic copies, betting on the worst (it happens). Save multiple versions of your drafts, as you may decide to revisit ideas you've already deleted.

🛑 *When you take breaks*—finish a section or try to exhaust your current thoughts; if not, make notes about what you want to say next.

📞🧠 Write where you are free from distractions. 🎵📧 You'll get more done in two intense hours of work than in six hours of interruptions by friends, phone, TV, email, etc. Don't waste your time.

⌚ Set deadlines, plan breaks, break up your work hours. Setting aside a whole day to write a paper usually results in getting little done—the idea of spending an entire day writing a paper is just too awful. Plan shorter work periods with rewards at the ends of them. (Start early.)

🌀 When all else fails, take a shower—or do whatever makes your brain juices flow. Run. Sing. Sniff a rotten apple.

Stages of REVISION

I. BIG STUFF: Thesis statement (clarity, location, effectiveness), logical fallacies, assignment parameters

II. Overall organization

A. Unity

- Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
- Does each sentence relate to that topic sentence?
- Does each topic sentence relate to the thesis statement?

B. Development

- Is each topic sentence sufficiently developed?
- Does the essay provide enough evidence and supporting detail for the thesis statement? too much?

C. Coherence

- Does each paragraph lead logically into the next? Are there any gaps in logic within or between paragraphs?

III. Introduction, conclusion, and title

IV. Style—sentence variety, word choice, conciseness, action, parallelism, etc. Is the essay lively, engaging, and original?

Stages of EDITING

I. Sentence faults (comma splices, fused sentences, fragments)

II. Pronoun use (vague PNs, PN shifts, PN agreement)

III. Punctuation (especially apostrophes and commas)

IV. Subject-verb agreement; other grammatical problems

PROOFREADING

Check for format (spacing, font, margins, page numbers, etc.), spelling, typographical errors, homonym mistakes, etc.

Tips to help you catch your errors:

1. Read your paper aloud.
2. Use a ruler to help you focus on one line at a time.
3. Read the paper backwards, sentence by sentence.
- **4. PUT YOUR PAPER AWAY FOR A WHILE before you proofread

WRITING CONCISELY

 *Most writing can be improved if cut to HALF its original length!*



✂ Cut **repetition** (using the same word or words) and **redundancy** (using two words that mean the same thing):

☞ Preschool instructors play a *role* in the child's understanding of male and female *roles*.

☞ We should all *cooperate together* in order to bring this ordeal to its *final outcome*.

✂ **Combine** short, related sentences:

☞ The French and British collaborated on building the Channel Tunnel. The tunnel links France and Britain. The French drilled from Sangatte. The British drilled from Dover.

✂ **Reduce** clauses to phrases, and phrases to single words:

☞ The tunnel, *which was drilled for twenty-three miles*, runs *through a bed of solid chalk* under the English Channel.

✂ Cut **vague words** and **meaningless modifiers**:

☞ vague words: area, ASPECT, case, character, factor, field, kind, manner, nature, SITUATION, THING, type

☞ meaningless modifiers: a lot, absolutely, definitely, great, good, literally (usually misused), major, REALLY, totally, VERY

✂ Cut or reduce **wordy phrases**:

☞ including: at the present time, at this point in time, for the purpose of, in order to, DUE TO THE FACT THAT, in my opinion, in spite of the fact that

✂ Cut expletives such as **there is/are, it is/are**:

☞ *There are* many computer programmers who invent challenging games for children.

☞ *It is* necessary for Presidential candidates to perform well on TV.

✂ Change hidden verbs to ACTIVE verbs: ask **who's doing what?**

☞ The detective's examination of the closet was due to the police officer's suspicion of concealment of stolen goods by the homeowner.

☞ Who's doing what?

Tips for Writing the Essay Exam

Essays written in class require the same kinds of preparation and organization that you use for papers, but in less time. So be prepared to perform a condensed version of the writing process as you structure and draft your in-class essay:

- Read the exam question at least twice and make sure you understand it fully.
- Examine the words in the question and realize what they are asking you to do; look for words like *describe*, *define*, *explain*, *summarize*, *analyze*, *evaluate*, *interpret*, *compare*, *argue*.
- Make a *brief* outline of the main ideas you want to include in your essay, along with pieces of evidence you will use to support your argument/main idea. **This step is often omitted but is essential to writing a clear, strong essay; taking just a few minutes to sketch an outline, however messily, can greatly improve your exam essay in clarity and content.**
- Write a brief thesis sentence that responds directly to the exam question in specific ways. Include key phrases you can expand with supporting evidence.
- Draft your essay, beginning with your thesis statement and then supporting that statement with specific, relevant evidence. Write in clear, well-organized paragraphs—each with a strong topic sentence, related ideas, and logical transitions.
- Write legibly! Remember your teacher is reading dozens of pages of hasty handwriting, and your ideas will not register powerfully if your reader must struggle to discern them.
- Read and edit your essay in the final 5-10 minutes of the exam period. Find and correct illegible words or passages, misspellings, grammar errors, and omissions, and add important, relevant evidence where needed. This final revision step is also often omitted, yet can greatly enhance the effectiveness of your essay.

Tips for Writing the Short-Answer Essay

Treat a short-answer essay question like a miniature version of the essay exam: it still requires some planning and organization before writing, but on a much smaller scale and in still less time:

- Read the exam question twice and make sure you understand it fully.
- Examine the words in the question and realize what they are asking you to do; look for words like *describe*, *define*, *explain*, *summarize*, *analyze*, *evaluate*, *interpret*, *compare*, *argue*.
- Briefly consider the main idea or ideas you will use to answer the question, along with any necessary supportive evidence. Depending on the size and length of the question, you may or may not need to sketch a small outline.
- Draft your answer:
 1. begin with a **thesis statement** that expresses the main idea or argument of your answer,
 2. support that statement with specific, relevant **evidence**, and
 3. write your answer in the form of a clear, effective **paragraph**.
- Quickly reread your answer and edit for spelling, grammar, omissions, and legibility.