

**21W.011      Writing Tips: Essay #2      Fall 2015**

**General advice: Think carefully about your format: A/B or A/B/A/B and your reasons for choosing it.**

1. Provide sufficient context (historical/social) for readers to understand the importance of the topic. Define **keyterms** that you use in the piece. Use a **glossary of terms** (appended to the essay) if you have over 5 **keyterms**.
2. Map your comparative argument early in the essay. Note that you do not have to cover all perspectives about your issue. You do, however, need to include the most important ones. If there are secondary arguments that you cannot cover, tell the reader. Check that you have a roughly equal number of sources representing different positions; check for different types of sources (e.g., scholarly articles, books, newspaper articles, etc.). Note holes or gaps in your arguments and seek sources. **Don't caricature views that are not your own. If you have trouble representing alternative views, adopt the neutral "educator" voice for your first version of the essay.**
3. When writing, use the parts of your outline as subheads to help you track the flow of your argument. Remove subheads (or some subheads) before submitting the essay. Seek balance in presentation of differing views.
4. See if you can organize historical data into a timeline and statistical data into charts, tables or graphs (inserted in a page or appended to the end). If you have more than two charts or tables within an essay, extend page length accordingly. The same rule applies to photographs and other visuals (e.g., diagrams, timelines).
5. Introduce a writer before quoting from him/her for the first time.  
(e.g. "Historian Joan Smith claims..."). Always cite sources; do not leave the reader in doubt as to the source of an idea or statistic. Avoid long block quotes.
6. Change 75% of "being" verbs to action verbs, passive verbs to active verbs.
7. Check for "breaks in voice" in your essay. Sometimes, these changes are planned and desirable (as in from a personal prologue to a more academic body). However, other times "breaks in voice" occur because of breaks in a writing pattern or uncertainty as to argument.
8. Read intro and conclusion together as "bookends". If you identify similar problems in each (e.g., vague language, conceptual confusion, flat style), check for this issue throughout the essay. Identify the relation between the two.
9. Fact-check your essay thoroughly. Facts to be verified include: historical facts and dates (e.g., of elections, court cases, wars, laws passed), statistical claims (e.g., "57% of Americans in 2010 earned below..."), scientific, technical, medical and legal information, etc.

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