GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE WRITING

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1. Dismiss any writing myths you've adopted, such as --

A- You're born a good writer, or B- Anyone can write well. Or C- Writing clearly and persuasively is easy. Clear, effective writing takes practice and feedback. Remember, "Engineers who cannot write and speak well wind up working for those who can." Tutorials are mandatory (2-3 per term), and I'm here to demystify the writing process and help you improve your writing, no matter how well you write when the term begins.

2. When you schedule a 20-minute session with me -- please prepared with an outline, some paragraphs or a draft to discuss. Bring a question about what needs strengthening, such as organizing your ideas logically, identifying a thesis for an essay (answer a question you find intriguing) or unpacking overly complex, confusing or vague sentences. Each of our meetings can be for either brainstorming or for editing.

3. Our goal in writing is to help you develop a sense of mastery over your writing and expression. Writing is simply a <u>skill</u>, like driving, and there are rules of the road, which become second nature as you practice, giving you <u>confidence</u>. Talking about your writing and ideas increases the complexity AND clarity of your expression. It is not enough to do it via email. TALKING about writing helps you to figure out your strengths and weaknesses.

4. On beginning to write: After reading and some thought…

    *   Decide on one question that intrigues you, and that you have some feeling about. What is the answer to that question?

    *   That is the nub of your essay, or your <u>thesis</u> – that is, your <u>answer</u> to a research <u>question</u> on a given <u>topic</u>. [Topic >> research question >> thesis or answer to Q.]

    *   Write notes about 3-4 of your most important points. What evidence supports your observations? What might your peers want to know about this question?

    *   Now organize your thoughts and evidence, outlining the points you'll make in some logical way -- this will change drastically, if you write a good paper and edit it well.

    *   Write a draft, revise it and revise it a couple more times (not just minor edits).

5. While you are writing your first draft, do NOT start editing, or interrupting yourself. Let the ideas, questions, whatever flow FREELY at first. Be kind to yourself. You want to A -- brainstorm first, to get your ideas down, then B – edit and reorganize sections, then C -- READ ALOUD, polish, correct and read it all again & again. Avoid the standard five paragraph formula for essays, or make it meaningful if you do use it.

6. Effective writing is about making a sound and persuasive argument. An argument means a) expressing a point of view and understanding of an issue you have studied, b) supporting your point of view with evidence c) which you interpret for your reader clearly and persuasively.

   Have pity on your reader! Anticipate points she/he may not understand, taking care to explain clearly. Then include answers to arguments your reader may have with points you make.

7. Generally, in your opening, you want to tell us what you will tell us and how; then tell us, (the body of your paper), using evidence, examples and arguments; and finally, tell us what you told us, why it's important and what that may lead to (conclusion). Write/revise you OPENING paragraph LAST, since only then will you really know what you've done in your essay.

8. Once you have your major points, evidence and conclusion nailed down, construct your opening paragraph with a compelling first sentence. Now you are clear what the paper is about and your opening paragraph tells us what your question is, the answer you have decided on, and the reasons you use to support your argument. Support your single idea (only one per paragraph, normally) with examples, visuals, brief quotes or references to events or persons mentioned in the content you've studied. Include only details that bear directly on your claim or argument. The engine (power) for this paragraph is your informed conviction and the relevant detail you use to support it. The paragraph should be focused , with no irrelevant details. Two or three vivid or convincing details are better than ten, which can overwhelm. (Less is often more, when explained carefully and clearly.)

9. Once you have written at least one strong paragraph, keep going! Then use the best graphs as a model for the others. You're making a winning team of arguments, as it were. Be sure to open new paragraphs for each new idea; page long graphs suggest you haven't separated ideas. Develop your paragraphs by comparing and contrasting, applying logical analysis, detailing a process, using chronology, or other methods. Don't forget to use transitions between ideas.

10. For the first assignment, write two pages of paragraphs like the above, double-spaced. [If the oral medium is easier for you for getting your ideas organized, record yourself on tape, then transcribe and rework your ideas.] Reading your topic sentences for each graph should lead a reader through the argument of your paper, regardless of length.

11. Once you have your ideas and arguments formulated, write a complete draft, then another draft, then read it aloud and ask yourself:

    - Do I care about the claims that I'm making?

    - Have I stated them clearly, concisely and with vivid detail?

    - Are my supporting details on point and as strong as they could be?

    - Is my central idea interesting (do I have one?), as well as my supporting arguments, taken together? Do they make sense?

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Spring 2012