

WHAT YOUR PROFESSORS EXPECT FROM YOUR WRITING

ISU Writing Center



TOPICS

1. The two big reasons why professors assign so many writing assignments
2. The goals of academic writing
3. Approaches to grading your writing
4. Common elements of a rubric and tips for improving your writing
5. Additional tips for how to use instructor feedback

THE TWO BIG REASONS WHY PROFESSORS ASSIGN SO MANY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Writing allows you to provide insight into what you have read or learned, so your instructor can hear your opinion privately.
2. Writing shows how well you understand the material. It is a way for your professor to gauge how much you are learning.

So writing is a way to grade and assess your understanding.

Writing also allows your professor to provide you with detailed feedback about what you know, which a test does not.

The more you write, the better you get.

THE GOALS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Writing assignments, especially academic or researched writing assignments, are not given

- to simply prove that you have read or
- to summarize your research or a book.

You are past this stage!

THE GOALS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

- To analyze a topic
- To present an argument
- To solve a problem
- To add to a body of research or
to add to a conversation about a topic

APPROACHES TO GRADING WRITING

- Writing is subjective, but most professors look for certain elements in your writing.
- Professors are not only looking at your ideas, but at how well you expressed them.
- They are also looking to make sure you follow the rules of academic integrity.
- They use tools that keep their grading fair and neutral, but every professor uses their own tools.
- No two professors grade in exactly the same way, so ask questions.

COMMON ELEMENTS OF A RUBRIC AND TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR WRITING

The criteria professors use for grading commonly fall into certain categories, which a rubric expresses visually. They are:

- **Grammar and Mechanics:** punctuation, sentence structure, syntax, diction, and word choice
- **Content:** the quality and relevance of ideas, examples, arguments, and explanations in the paper
- **Support:** use of evidence, including info from outside sources
- **Formatting:** adherence to citation style and the look of the paper
- **Organization:** the structure of ideas and flow of the paper

The following slides will go into a little more detail
on each of these categories.

MORE ABOUT GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Grammar and mechanics might seem like tedious aspects of writing. But they are important! Why?

- Because if your meaning is not clearly expressed, you will be misunderstood
- Because constant grammar or mechanical errors makes you seem less credible
- Because in the work world, it will be advantageous to sound more professional

MORE ABOUT GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Grammar:

You should be aware of and follow the rules of English grammar. This includes subject/verb agreement, active/passive voice, using “who” and “whom” correctly, and so on.

Punctuation:

Pay attention to the proper use of periods and commas foremost. But also note whether you are using colons, semi-colons, and dashes properly. You can always consult a resource like the Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab) website.

Sentence Structure:

Vary your sentence structure. Use a combination of compound, simple, and complex sentences.

MORE ABOUT GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Syntax:

Your words should be arranged in such a way that your sentences make sense and express your points clearly and succinctly. Be as concise as possible.

Diction:

- Your word choice should be professional.
- You should avoid using “I” or “you” in a paper unless otherwise stated.
- Avoid using vague pronouns like “it” or “things.”

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

- Consult a resource like the Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab) website.
- Read your paper out loud, or have a friend read it out loud to you.
- Read examples of good writing and try to emulate the grammar.
- Access a presentation on grammar.

MORE ABOUT CONTENT

Many students believe grammar and mechanics are the main criteria on which a paper is graded. But in actuality, the content of the paper is just as—if not more—important.

Here are some points to consider:

- Be sure your papers are on-topic and answer all the questions set out in the essay prompt. Keep your main idea focused.
- Consider choosing a topic that is different from those topics everyone else is writing about.
- Include more information in your papers than just what was covered in class.
- Make sure your papers include a lot of your own words.

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR CONTENT

- Choose an original topic.
- Brainstorm—always brainstorm!
- Discuss your topic with others.
- Seek out different opinions on your topic.
- Try to explore a unique part of your topic.

MORE ABOUT SUPPORT

In academic writing, support is closely related to content.

While you surely have many great ideas and opinions, if you want your audience to trust and believe in your views, you need to offer support. You can say, “This brand of toothpaste is the best”—but it’s much more effective if you say, “8 out of 10 dentists say that this toothpaste is the best.”

People are more inclined to believe you if you can provide support, especially from someone credible. An important part of academic writing is the process of finding and presenting support for your assertions like this.

MORE ABOUT SUPPORT

Points to consider:

- Includes incorporation of sources, if they are required for the assignment. Are the number and types of sources used appropriate?
- Is there sufficient detail used to elaborate upon each point?
- The evidence offered should be credible and relevant.
- Your papers should follow the rules of logic and critical thinking. They should hold up to questioning.

TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SUPPORT

- Visit a librarian to get help finding sources.
- Make sure that you are not accidentally plagiarizing by reviewing the rules of paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting.
- Make sure each paragraph has details that support your point.
- Remember that support includes statistics and data but also examples and descriptions, case studies, expert opinion/commentary, and points that may require some explanation.

MORE ABOUT FORMATTING

Publishing in the field is a part of many professions. For this reason, your professors will ask you to write in the format most commonly used by people in your subject area. When your instructor asks you to write in APA, MLA, or Chicago Style, it's not to be picky; your professor is preparing you to be a professional in your field.

TIPS TO IMPROVE FORMATTING

- Be sure to ask what kind of format should be used in your class: APA? MLA? Chicago?
- As per the assignment or assigned format, follow the guidelines for the header, font type, and spacing.
- In-text citations or footnotes should follow the standards of the assigned format.
- As needed, consult resources like the Purdue OWL website, a style guide website (see next slide) or a manual for your citation style.

TIPS TO IMPROVE FORMATTING

Get used to “the look” of the format you are using. Consult style guides as needed. Here are some helpful ones:

Purdue OWL

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/general_writing_faqs.html

APA Style

<https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids>

MORE ABOUT ORGANIZATION

- All parts of the paper should be present including a hook/compelling intro section, thesis, topic sentences, and a conclusion, and any other part specified such as concessions, backgrounds, and solutions for persuasive papers, or abstracts.
- Use transitions between paragraphs and sentences like “in addition to,” “nonetheless,” “besides,” etc.
- Be careful not to repeat information. Instead, explain it thoroughly the first time.
- Each paragraph should include only one main idea, which is introduced in the topic sentence.
- Ensure that your main points align with your thesis. (Otherwise revise the thesis as needed.)

TIPS FOR IMPROVING ORGANIZATION

- Read your paper out loud.
- Be open to re-arranging the paragraphs.
- After you have written a draft, re-read the topic sentences and thesis statement.
- Have a friend read your paper and underline the topic sentences, thesis statement, and main points.
- Check for transitions between each paragraph.
- Be careful of copy/pasting!

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR HOW TO USE INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK

- When you get a paper back, remember to read your instructor's comments carefully! If you don't understand them, ask for clarification.
- Keep the papers you get back and review them to see what mistakes you're consistently making. Make a list of them, then find resources to help you address those mistakes.
- If you still can't correct the problems, come to the Writing Center for further assistance.

REVIEW

1. Writing assignments allow for a more individualized way for you to communicate ideas and for your professors to give feedback.
2. Academic writing in particular will allow you to work on analysis, presenting ideas, and problem solving.
3. Even though evaluating writing is a somewhat subjective process, most professors look for certain elements in your writing. And they look at both what you say and how you say it.
4. Rubrics often include these elements: grammar/mechanics, content, support, formatting, organization. Understanding each component can help you improve your writing. Also, look at the feedback you get! And ask your professor questions if needed.
5. Remember that the Writing Center can also help.