

Writing Basics

College-level writing differs from other styles of writing. College students are expected to write as scholars for scholars. As a scholar, you will engage in reading, critical thinking, debate, and, of course, writing. You will present ideas and themes that are relevant to the assigned topics. Your ideas and themes should be well-researched and supported, while also reflecting you.

College writing should address a topic or question that relates to the assignment posed by the instructor. As a writer, you are essentially tasked with communicating the theories, ideas, and philosophies of yourself and others in a manner that is relevant to your assignment. You must utilize the words of others in ways that strengthen your own personal ideas. Your writing will display the comprehensive research you have done on your topic, as well as your critical analysis of the subject matter.

Academic writing should present an *informed* argument. This means that although your personal opinion or perception regarding a particular topic should prevail throughout the main body of the paper, you must provide supporting statements and quotes from other scholars to back up your opinion. These statements will support the foundational argument of your paper. Consider a house. It starts with a solid foundation, and then the studs and beams support the actual structure of the building. This concept also applies to your paper.

The actual process of writing a college-level paper can prove intensive and perhaps different than the methods you've used to write papers in the past. The key word is *plan*. Avoid waiting until the last minute to write. Try organizing your argument and sources into an outline or mind map that you can use to write the paper. Planning is important when writing a paper that not only displays the knowledge gathered, but also demonstrates critical thinking and reflection.

BUILDING BLOCKS

No foolproof formula for writing an academic paper exists. The way you arrange the content of your paper will at least partially depend on the particular assignment. Writers use different strategies to write essays and research papers. If asked to write a research paper, it proves important to clarify whether you are required to analyze an issue or subject, or to develop an argument regarding the issue or subject. The manner in which you structure your content will vary accordingly, but if you follow the guidelines in this lesson, you will produce a paper that is masterfully structured, easy to follow, and scholarly in format. An academic paper should consist of an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Your task includes developing a strong introduction, a meaningful conclusion, and a body consisting of well-structured paragraphs. Your paper should flow nicely, with clarity, focus, and coherence. One of the best online guides to academic writing is [Purdue University's OWL Online Writing Lab](#). This site offers detailed guidelines regarding general writing issues, as well as guides for grammar, source documentation, and APA and MLA formatting. Add this site to your browser favorites.

INTRODUCTION

Revert back to your thesis statement for writing your introduction. What are you are going to write about? How will you attract your reader's interest to your paper's subject? A strong introduction gives you the opportunity to engage the reader, announce your topic, and provide a context for your topic. Introductions can provide difficult to write. Many students choose to write

the introduction after writing the body of their paper. For excellent guidelines on writing introductions, visit the [Dartmouth Writing Program](#).

BODY

Your paper will consist of paragraphs that together form a logical, cohesive flow of thoughts, ideas, and facts. Each paragraph will relate to your paper's main topic or a subtopic. Each paragraph will consist of a topic sentence and supporting sentences. You can think of supporting sentences as evidence to back up your topic sentence. Topic sentences relate to the outline or mind map. Paragraphs should transition easily from one to the next. The reader should have no difficulty following your train of thought.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is your chance to summarize the information presented in your paper—and it can prove a challenge to write. In a way, the conclusion takes the reader back to the beginning of the paper, but with a new perspective, increased knowledge, and greater understanding. It provides you with a final opportunity to convince the reader that your content is important and valid. The [Dartmouth Writing Program](#) offers several excellent suggestions to consider when writing your conclusion.