HOW TO WRITE YOUR FIRST UNIVERSITY ESSAY

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The Writing Centre: Student Academic Success Services
What we’ll cover within the next 50 minutes:

CONTENT: THINKING CRITICALLY TO ARRIVE AT YOUR THESIS
FORM: PARAGRAPHING POINTS AND USING EVIDENCE
STYLE: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONCISIOON AND CLARITY
...AND A FEW HELPFUL POINTERS
"I suspect the biggest difference between writing a high school paper and writing a university paper will be ... "
WHAT YOUR READER IS LOOKING FOR:

Critical thinking
Engaging with ideas
Connecting ideas
Persuasion
Logical organization
Concision and ...
WRITING CONTENT IS:

Paying attention to your response to experience, others’ opinions, events, new information, thoughts and feelings.

Thinking, through a page or a keyboard, to determine your response to experience, opinion, events, etc.

Producing text to later be shaped, edited, refined, tossed...
EVIDENCE

**Einstein Proof** – You come across information that reveals a note-worthy person or scholar agrees with the point you are trying to make.

**Case Proof** – A case in which your opinion is validated and/or the opposing view isn’t.

**Fact Proof** – Includes statistics and objective information.

**For Example Proof** – Includes examples that support your primary claim.
Am I interested in this? Why? Why not? How do I relate to this material?

Would talking to someone help me figure out what I think?

If I have an idea about this material, how do I get the confidence to believe it’s a good idea? What is the larger point I want readers to take away from my essay?

Why am I even doing this?
DEVELOP A STRONG THESIS - your conclusions, your argument, the final stage in your critical thinking. You're about ready to start organizing your paper when you have this.

Ensure that what you plan to say addresses all parts of the question.

Don’t just propose – persuade! Don’t just exhibit – argue!
Editing while you write is like pulling an item out of the washing machine, folding it carefully, and putting it back in the washing machine.
BUILD A BETTER OUTLINE

Benefits

Helps you to organize your ideas and keeps you focused

Clarifies the relationships among your points

Lines up your sources and their uses

Helps you avoid summary or stream of consciousness writing

Components of a helpful outline

Begins with a thesis statement

Is organized into sections, paragraphs, and points

Contains sentences that express each main point in support of the thesis

Indicates where examples and evidence will be used
Once you learn to have these, the most important elements in the structure of your essay, in good form, PUTTING YOUR ESSAY TOGETHER GETS A LOT EASIER.
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<td><strong>1. What</strong> (the point)</td>
<td>The main idea to be discussed (best introduced in a topic sentence, the introductory sentence of your paragraph)</td>
<td>1-2 sentences</td>
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<td><strong>2. How</strong> (the proof)</td>
<td>The evidence used to substantiate the point or back up the argument: examples, paraphrases, summaries, etc.</td>
<td>2-4 sentences</td>
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<td><strong>3. Why</strong> (the comment)</td>
<td>Commentary outlining the significance or implications of the preceding material</td>
<td>2-4 sentences</td>
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<td>Your explanation of how and why these ideas fit together: relationships, contrasts, conclusions, implications, etc.</td>
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Transitional words or phrases in your paragraph’s topic sentence help your reader see the progression of your logic.

I.E. “The benefits of eating kale are clear, but eating too much kale can cause digestive problems.”
Much like a howler monkey in a family dwelling, the larger orangutan will destroy several rooms in an hour, making it an even more dangerous “pet” than the howler. Michelle and Rick Dusterson describe the devastation wrought on their home by Bunny, an orangutan they bought from a friend. The Dustersons experienced flooding, furniture destruction, and “remarkable hostility” from Bunny (Dusterson, M. “Sad Story”. Journal of Sad Stories, 2014). Pet stores offering orangutans for sale do a disservice to both the primates and the customers, neither of whom will cohabit in an urban setting with any comfort or happiness. Even the limited degree to which we can communicate with primates tells us that they have a strong dislike for condo living.

A short sample paragraph from an essay on why people shouldn’t buy large primates to keep as housepets.
Five questions to ask yourself when revising your paragraphs:

Can you state the point of each paragraph within a single phrase?

Have you developed the main point’s details in each paragraph?

Does every sentence relate to the paragraph’s main point?

Are there smooth transitions starting each paragraph?

Does this paragraph support my thesis?
BE CONCISE

Use plain language to show confidence.
Choose precise terms.
You rarely need that adjective.
(Not ‘wonderfully helpful’ -- just ‘helpful’.)
Use language to get your reader THROUGH your paper with ease.
Your reader is interested in your thinking, not your access to a thesaurus or your ability to stretch a phrase out to the breaking point.

We, as human beings, need to consider the needs of the many as well as the few in order to provide social safety networks for all, since we live in a democratic nation. (33)

Democracy requires equal benefits for all citizens. (7)

This essay will examine and explore the complex, dynamic relationships between our digital communications (Internet, email, IM, text, etc.) and the degree to which our mental health is impacted by these communications. (32)

Social media use and mental health are intertwined. (8)
INTEGRATING EVIDENCE INTO THE ESSAY

Quotations
A quotation is an exact reproduction of another person’s words. Use quotations sparingly, and generally only if the author uses language that cannot be replicated in a paraphrase.

Paraphrasing
If you take a section of text and put it in your own words, you are paraphrasing. This tactic usually centers on a single phrase, sentence or paragraph rather than a summary of the entire work.

Summary
Summaries are the perfect way to reference a large piece of text. Summaries are especially useful when writing shorter papers; you can reference a lot of reputable sources with a minimal amount of text. 

http://www.essaytigers.com/blog/incorporating-evidence-into-paper
It appears to have been the case that in your former schooling experiences, up to and including the period of time in which you attended high school, there was encouragement, if not outright demand that you both inflate and puff up both the idea you have wished to express and the ways in which you sought to convey that idea, which really had the effect of significantly increasing the potential risk of unwittingly creating huge punctuation errors, not to mention the additional and equally problematic offense of producing textual constructions which practically disable any comprehensibility on the part of your gentle reader.

NOW IS A GOOD TIME TO START LEARNING TO BE CONCISE.
Scintillate, scintillate, globule aurific,
Fain would I fathom thy nature specific,
Loftily poised in the ether capacious,
Strongly resembling a gem carbonaceous.

Robert Barrass, *Scientists Must Write* (60)
Failure to indicate when words and ideas in your writing originate with someone else is PLAGIARISM.

ACCIDENTAL PLAGIARISM IS STILL PLAGIARISM.

To understand Queen’s University’s expectations of you with regard to academic integrity, go to

http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/students-at-queens/academic-integrity

AND...
AVOIDING ACCIDENTAL PLAGIARISM

*Wednesday, October 7*

in

Room 121,
Stauffer Library, at
2:30 P.M.

AVOIDING THE FIVE MOST COMMON STUDENT WRITING ERRORS

*Thursday, October 15*

in

Room 121,
Stauffer Library, at
2:30 P.M.
IF YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR WRITING BETTER THAN IT ALREADY IS, BOOK A WRITING CENTRE APPOINTMENT ONLINE AT HTTP://QUEENSU.MYWCONLINE.COM

Visit: Stauffer Library, first floor NE corner
Phone: 613-533-6315
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Twitter: @SASS_LS