

HOW TO WRITE
YOUR FIRST
UNIVERSITY ESSAY

What are the
3 main differences
between high school papers and university papers?

Time: University papers take longer to research and write.

Language: Use less. Be specific. NEVER use four words when one will do.

Integrity: Academic integrity is showing evidence of understanding that scholarship is a community practice.

Writing to communicate is:



FIRST, THINKING through a page or a keyboard to determine your own response to the material you've encountered.

**GENERATING CONTENT
TAKES TIME.**

You need to read, make notes, ask questions in your notes, find something else to read that will help your thinking, read more, write more notes, argue with the author...

Don't make this stage in the process harder by editing as you write. Editing *while you write* is like pulling a shirt out of the washing machine, folding it, and putting it back in.



How do I relate to this material?

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

What's the primary point I want readers to take away from my essay?



WHAT?! MY THESIS CAN *CHANGE*?!



YUP! AND *THAT'S* NOT A BAD THING!

When you think you've generated enough content to work with, start thinking about **YOUR READER**

Can my TA and course instructor easily identify my thesis?

Does my thesis make clear **what** I've decided is arguably true, based on my reading and writing so far?

Does my thesis explain **how** I'm going to prove, or at least support the argument I'm making?

Does my thesis tell the reader **why** the argument I'm making matters?

DEVELOP A STRONG THESIS

Select the best points from the content you've generated to support your thesis.

Make sure your thesis addresses the assignment.

Don't just propose – persuade!

Don't just exhibit – argue!



Hypothetical Essay Question: Analyze the challenges in confronting the problem of child soldiers.

“People who enlist child soldiers should be imprisoned for life.” **Mere opinion**
For what reasons, and according to whom?

“Many conflicts have relied on child soldiers.” **Which ones? So what? Too vague**

“Forcing children to serve as soldiers is against the principles of the International Declaration of Children’s Rights.” **Can I argue with this? A fact. Too self evident**

“This essay will examine the problem of child soldiers.” **Mere intent**
Examine it how and for what purpose?

Time to see if you're getting a good sense of what a university-level thesis might look like – imagine you're writing an essay on the problem of child soldiers.

You are working toward a thesis that is **more arguable** than mere opinion, mere intention, mere fact, or merely obvious.

Think what, how, and why.

Please go to [Menti.com](https://www.menti.com),

enter **89 67 28**, and

rate the thesis statements you see.

Now that I have a working thesis and lots of content,
what more could my instructor be looking for?

ORGANIZATION
CLARITY
CONCISION



THE PARAGRAPH: NOT JUST A RECTANGULAR BLOCK OF TEXT!

Abcdefg hijklmnopqrstuvwxyzab cde fghij
klmnopq rstuvw xyza. Bcdefg hijkl mnop rstuvw
xyzabc defg hijklmnopqr stuvw xyzabcde fghi jkl
mnopqrs tuvwx yzabcd efghij klmnopq rst. Uvwxyz
yzab cde fghij klmnopqrs tuvwx yzabcd efghijk
lmn opqr stuvw. Xyzabcd efghijk? Lmnopqrst
tuvwxyzabcd. Efg hijklmnopqrstu. V? Wxyza.
Bcdefg. Hijklmnopq rstuv. Wxzz!

EVERY. SINGLE. PARAGRAPH.

1. Every paragraph starts with a transition * from the previous paragraph to the next PARTICULAR POINT you are making about some aspect of your thesis.
2. Every paragraph continues with evidence, illustration, argument, synthesis, paraphrase; whatever you choose to include in the middle of the paragraph goes to SUPPORT THE POINT YOU MAKE IN THE FIRST SENTENCE.
3. Every paragraph finishes with WHY THIS POINT MATTERS.

What is The Point of This Paragraph?

We think of communication as an essentially human practice, but it's is a survival activity among most forms of life on this planet. The dance patterns of bees in their hive help to point the way to distant flower fields or announce successful foraging. Male stickleback fish regularly swim upside-down to indicate outrage in a courtship contest. Male deer and lemurs mark territorial ownership by rubbing their own body secretions on boundary stones or trees. And frightened dogs often place their tails between their legs and run in panic.

--Adapted from Olivia Vlahos, *Human Beginnings*

How to Create a Reverse Outline

Label each paragraph in under three words. The label has to be highly specific; it must indicate exactly what the paragraph is about. Be RUTHLESSLY honest. Make a list of the labels from first to last. This is now an overview of your paper as it is.

IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO LABEL YOUR PARAGRAPHS?

Maybe you have more than one main point in that paragraph, which means you need to edit.

DOES THIS OVERVIEW MAKE SENSE?

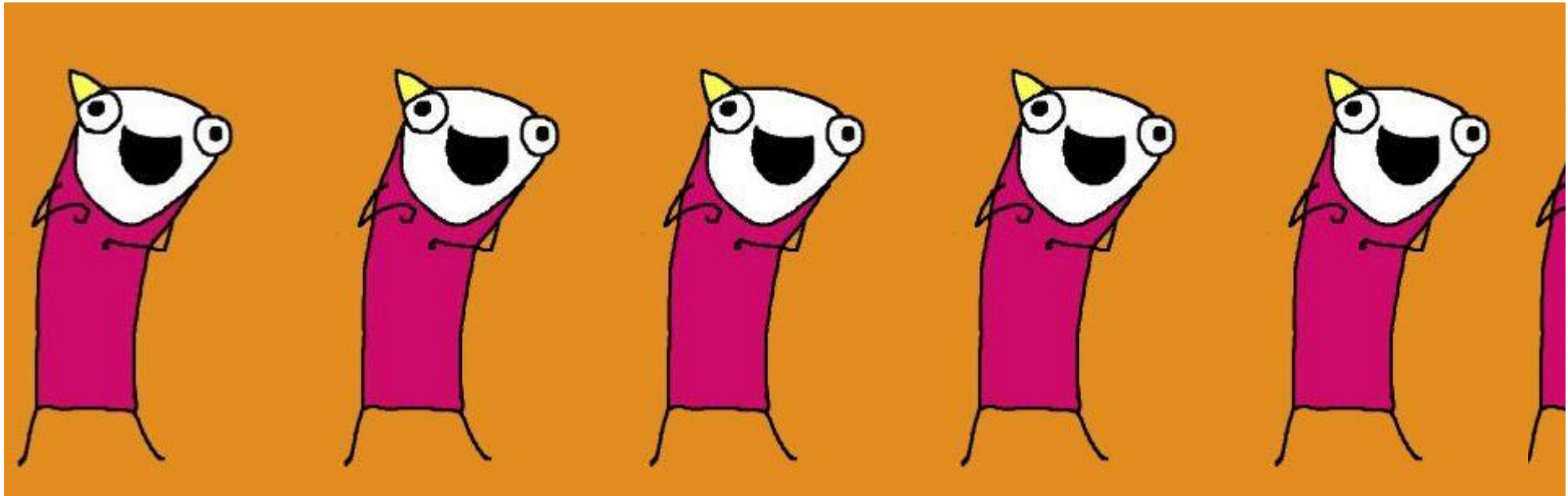
Maybe you will see a better sequence for your paragraphs. Don't be afraid to change the order; often re-arranging your points produces more clarity for the reader.

ARE THERE REPETITIONS IN THE LIST OF LABELS?

Maybe you need to merge two paragraphs into one.

THE SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY

- WHAT IT IS
- WHY IT MATTERS
- HOW TO BE IN IT



To show your academic integrity, make clear who you know and how their ideas contextualize your own.

“I think Canada has to commit time and money to solving the child soldiers problem. See that guy, Jones (2015) on the left? He agrees with me!”

“Smith (2013) there disagrees, but I can show how her thinking is wrong on that point.”

Anderson (2010) there behind me in the glasses is an expert on PTSD in child soldiers, and I interpret her ideas as support for my thesis too.”



to be best
point of view.
Credibility [the]
quality of being
believable or t
ublished

Now that you know **why** academic integrity matters, you need to know **how to show it**.

PARAPHRASING & Documenting **QUOTING & Documenting**

Set the source aside as you are writing your paraphrase. Don't even LOOK at it! Write the main point of what you just read. Write it as though you're telling it to someone who needs the information but has to catch a bus in two minutes.

Go back to the original again, to see if your paraphrase pretty much captures the main point in the original. Repeat as necessary.

Include a citation!

Quote only when the specific language is part of your point.

Paraphrasing is usually better.

Integrate quotations. **Not**

Lady MacBeth feels guilt, "Out damned spot!"

but

Lady MacBeth's guilt is evident when she says, "Out damned spot!"

Include a citation!

Before last questions, please go back to Menti.com and input code

89 67 28

to provide brief feedback.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR WRITING
BETTER THAN IT ALREADY IS, BOOK AN
APPOINTMENT ONLINE AT

QUEENSU.MYWCONLINE.COM

