How to Write Well in Your Classes

October 20, 7 PM ET
Presenters—Amy Sexton, Dawn Maslar, & Brenda Remus
Kaplan University Academic Support Center

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Tuesday, October 20 @ 7 pm ET
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Please click here to view this recorded workshop:
http://khe2.adobeconnect.com/p4n12bumwdy/
Agenda

- Why write?
- Assignment Breakdown
- Writing in Mathematics
- Writing in the Sciences
- Writing in Technology
The National Day on Writing is sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. It occurs on October 20 of each year, and this year marks the 7th annual National Day on Writing. This year, you can celebrate the National Day on Writing by sharing your writing with the hashtag #WhyIWrite.

- Sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English
- Occurs October 20 each year
- Twitter® chat: #WhyIWrite
- Why do you write?
Good writing skills actually help you learn better – no matter what the subject is, learning to write well can help you be a better student. Good writers are able to summarize, identify main ideas, ask relevant questions, make meaningful connections, and make meaning of the reading and learning that they are expected to achieve in their classes and beyond. All of these things help you learn.
Analyzing Assignment Instructions

There are typically 4 main sections of an assignment’s instructions.

1. **Introductions** *(Get everyone on same page. Provide purpose. Place assignment in context of whole course.)*
2. **Thought Provokers** *(Start generating ideas.)*
3. **Actions Required** *(Reading, research, writing. This is the core assignment.)*
4. **Hard Requirements** *(Length, resources, format, etc.)*

*Tip:* Consider highlighting or underlining the introduction, the thought provokers, the actions required, and the hard requirements.
Introductions

Example: *For your Final Project, you apply theory to a case study.* You will write a 5–7 page paper that applies each of the models, that you studied in Units 3 through 7, to the personality development of the case study that you chose in Unit 2.

- Provides purpose of the assignment.
- Places unit in the context of course.
- *Tip:* Review all unit material first before starting.
Thought Provokers

Example: What are the stereotypes associated with this topic? What kinds of underlying assumptions might there be about this topic? What changes in perspective might be necessary?

- If provided, these are open ended questions, separate from actions required.
- Thought provokers ask students to inventory and connect course content to their own valuable perspectives, backgrounds and experiences.
- Thought provokers help students begin to interpret, hypothesize, and synthesize course content.

Thought provokers get students to inventory and connect ideas from readings, seminars and discussions, and merge those new ideas with students’ own valuable background and experience.

Thought provokers help students begin to interpret hypothesize, and synthesize course content.
Actions Required: Heart of the writing assignment.

Example: Identify how professional roles, personal characteristics, job responsibilities, employer expectations have changed. Explain some of the new roles the professional should be familiar with, and be sure to share how history, theory, and laws have influenced change in the field.

Activity: How many actions are required? What are the action verbs?

- This is the heart of assignment.
- Look for action verbs. Underline them.
- Complete every action listed.

Actions Required: Heart of the writing assignment.

Example: Identify how professional roles, personal characteristics, job responsibilities, employer expectations have changed. Explain some of the new roles the professional should be familiar with, and be sure to share how history, theory, and laws have influenced change in the field.

How many actions are required? What are the action verbs?
Tip: Underline the action verbs.
Tip: “Action Required” may provide clues to organizing.

- Example: **Identify** how professional roles, personal characteristics, job responsibilities, employer expectations have changed. **Explain** some of the new roles the professional should be familiar with, and be sure to **share** how history, theory, and laws have influenced change in the field.

- Students might use the 3 actions required as an outline for the essay.

  I. Introduction.
  II. Identify.
  III. Explain.
  IV. Share.
  V. Conclude

Tip: “Action Required” may provide clues to organizing. Sometimes assignment instructions will provide clues to thesis statements, paragraph organization, and more. Some assignments will provided directives on audience and purpose. **Identify how professional roles, personal characteristics, job responsibilities, employer expectations have changed. Explain some of the new roles the professional should be familiar with, and be sure to share how history, theory, and laws have influenced change in the field.**

A student might use the 3 actions required as an outline.

  I. Introduction.
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Hard Requirements

Example: Write a well-written, 750-1000 word, scholarly paper in APA format with no abstract.

- Often, assignments will include the hard details, logistics last.
- These details would include
  - genre (letter, essay, report)
  - length requirements
  - format requirements
  - source requirements
- Tip: Determine the requirements and highlight them.

Hard Requirements

Often, assignments will include the hard details, logistics last. Follow these carefully. If you are off on length or number of sources, it could be an indication that you might be off task. Some instructors adhere to word counts more than others, but being under or over 10% might be a red flag.

These details would include genre (essay? Report? Answers to questions?) length requirements, format requirements, and source requirements.

Determine the requirements and highlight them.
Tips to Estimate a Writing Plan

A 1000 word essay in APA style is about 4 essay pages.
Most scholarly essays average 2 paragraphs per page, so a 1000 word essay might be 8 paragraphs.
Consider how many actions are required, and if they can be broken down to fit number of paragraphs.
Break down topic into as many main points as number of paragraphs.
# Introduction

Often written in paragraph format.
Fairly rigid. Understanding should not vary.
Puts the assignment in the context of course.
Understand the assignment’s place and purpose.

## Thought Provokers

Often open ended questions.
Answers flexible/varies from student to student.
These are meant as idea generators.
Usually, no “right” answers.

## Action Required

Uses action verbs. (Write, analyze, argue, discuss, answer etc.)
The response is flexible here/ varies from student to student.
Indicates what to include, often suggesting an organizational plan.
Usually, no “right” answers, but each action should be covered.

## Hard Requirements

Lists requirements for length, sources, formatting, etc.
The response here is rigid, fixed, and should not vary, much.
Levels the playing field. All follow same hard rules to allow all same success!
Rules should be followed here. Don’t stray more than 10% over or under words/sources.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
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should be covered.
The action verbs indicate the things to do, and often the order in which they should be done.
Usually, no “right” answers, but each of the actions should be covered.

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What Writing Looks Like in Mathematics:

- Short answers or long answers
- Proofs or projects
- Formal Papers – research paper in math
- Portfolio of your best works

- Research papers, reports, and journal articles are often done by people working in the field of mathematics.
- Math is often the foundation of the articles in science and engineering journals.

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Portfolio of your best works

Research papers, reports, and Journal articles are often done by people working in the field of mathematics
Science and Engineering journals - math is often the foundation of the articles
Tips for Writing in Mathematics

- Don’t confuse writing with showing your work
- Writing in math is more than demonstrating that you did your homework.
- Writing in math is to demonstrate how well you understand ideas and concepts.
- Computations go hand in hand with the context of your work
- Goal of writing in mathematics: to communicate mathematic reasoning and ideas CLEARLY to another person.

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Tips for Writing in Mathematics

- Follow basic grammar rules – use language precisely and correctly (avoid using “it” as you write in math).
- Use of formulas is what makes math writing different than other areas of writing.
- Read your work out loud once you have completed your mathematical writing.
- Use mathematical notation accurately – pictures, graphs may help.
- Write as simply and directly as possible.
- Write for your audience.
- Don’t get discouraged if at first you don’t succeed.
- Writing in math takes practice – you can only learn how to do it by doing it!

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What Writing Looks Like in the Sciences

- “Science is more than a body of knowledge. It is a way of thinking; a way of skeptically interrogating the universe….” -- Carl Sagan, 1996 interview
- Science proceeds according to the Scientific Method:
  - Ask a Question
  - Observe / Conduct Background Research
  - Formulate a Hypothesis
  - Test the Hypothesis with an Experiment
  - Draw Conclusions

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Research results are typically published in peer-reviewed journals, also known as scholarly journals.

Submissions to these journals are vetted by an editor and then by a panel of experts in the field.

This insures that only credible work gets published.
What Writing Looks Like in the Sciences, cont’d

• Structure of published work tends to mirror the Scientific Method:
  - Abstract (summarizes work)
  - Introduction
  - Background
  - Materials and Methods
  - Results
  - Discussion
  - Conclusions

• College lab reports follow similar structure.
Scientific papers are each building stones in the storehouse of scientific knowledge.

Scientific writers cite (refer back to) those previous studies that relate to their own research efforts.

“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” -- Sir Isaac Newton
There are also science journalists and book authors who share science with the general public:
- Carl Sagan
- Rachel Carson
- David Quammen
- Stephen Hawking
- Jane Goodall

These authors provide exciting accounts, in clear prose, about the latest scientific discoveries.
1) Avoid Jargon (needlessly complicated language). The goal is clarity not obfuscation (confusion).

Examples:

- Members of an avian species of identical plumage congregate. (Birds of a feather flock together.)
- Surveillance should precede saltation.
- All articles that coruscate with resplendence are not truly auriferous.
- A revolving lithic conglomerate accumulates no congeries of minuscule verdant bryophyte.
- Missiles of ligneous or petrous consistency have the potential of fracturing my osseous structure, but appellations will remain sempiternally innocuous. (Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.)
Two Tips for Writing in the Sciences

Support your ideas with evidence from research.

- For most scientific rigor, use peer-reviewed journal articles.
- For writing college papers, use peer-reviewed sources if required; otherwise, make sure sources are highly credible.
- Credible sources are written by named persons with credentials in the field or by respected institutions such as universities or government agencies.
- Evaluating Sources podcast

2) Support your ideas with evidence from research.

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Evaluating Sources podcast
Why Writing Well Matters in the Sciences

As a scientist, you can make the most amazing discoveries, but if you cannot communicate them to others successfully, no one may ever know about your work.

Scientific results need to be replicable; this means that other scientists need to be able to repeat your research and get the same results. If they cannot understand what you have done, this will not be possible.

Success in writing for the public depends upon your ability as a writer to make complicated ideas easy to understand.
What Writing Looks Like In Technology

Types of Writing in Technology Fields

- Comments in programming & web projects
- E-mails
- Project management documents
- Requests for change
- Request for Proposals (RFPs) & proposals (responses to RFPs)
- Service Agreements
- Security Policies
- Training manuals & user documentation
- White Papers

Comments in programming & web projects - important because they allow you or someone else to understand your thought process in writing that particular section of code. Six months to a year later you won’t be able to remember why you coded a button to behave in a particular way.

E-mails – Depending on your position you will communicate with others via email and now-a-days company wikis. It will be important for you to get your point across, especially if trying to explain to someone how to do something.

Project management documents – In technology fields you will often be working on projects – these projects if done correctly, have many documents that you use to keep the project on track from start to finish.

Requests for change – If you are working on a computer system, and you want to see a change to it, you will have to be able to request that change be made. You will want to be able to accurately describe what is wrong and how you think it should be changed.

Request for Proposals (RFPs) & proposals (responses to RFPs) – Companies want a new technology implemented or have an existing one
upgraded, but don’t have the necessary resources to do so internally; they will send out an RFP, and other companies who provide that type of service will reply with their proposals. There are also other similar documents such as Request for Quotation – when the work is more straight-forward such as purchasing hardware and software.

Service Agreements – a document between the provider and the customer that outlines what type of service will be provided. This could be between the two companies or between an IT department and the departments it supports within the company.

Security Policies - provides detail documentation on a company’s security policies.

Training manuals & user documentation

White Papers
Tips for Writing in Technology

- Know your audience.
- Clear and concise (it is not prose writing).
- Keep it simple.
- When providing instruction start each step with a verb, try to keep instruction in chunks of five to seven steps but no more than nine.
- When writing proposals to answer an RFP – follow the instructions that were provided.
- Look for templates or sample documents and use those as guidelines.

Tips for Writing in Technology

Know your audience and write to that audience. If you are writing for an end-user or CEO, you won’t use as much technical jargon as you would if writing to a programmer or engineer.

Clear and concise (it is not prose writing) – shorter is sweeter.

Keep it simple – often less detail is better – don’t get too much into the weeds as you can lose the attention of the reader.

When providing instruction, start each step with a verb; try to keep instruction in chunks for five to seven steps but no more than nine. This is something I was taught years ago, and I always try to follow it. I want to know what I need to do, and then tell me what is going to happen.

When writing proposals to answer an RFP – follow the instructions that were provided – often there will be very specific instructions on what and how to include information. If these instructions are not followed, your proposal may never be looked at by those making the final decision.

Look for templates or sample documents and use those as guidelines - There is a wealth of information on-line, and depending on your company, your employer may have many examples for you to look at. Don’t be afraid to ask.
Resources

- Hallmarks of Effective Writing (Workshop)
- What Every Student Needs to Know About College Writing (Workshop)
- Revision Checklist
- Editing Checklist

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Come visit us. Most centers offer paper and/or project review, as well as live tutoring hours. We can be found under the My Studies tab, then Academic Support Center.
On the main Academic Support Center page, you will see all of the centers, as well as the services offered by each.
Contact Information

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Writing Center

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