

Paper Guidelines

Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago

NOTE: These paper guidelines are general guidelines agreed upon by the Department of English. Individual instructors, however, may have separate requirements for their courses or for individual paper assignments. Make sure that you consult with your instructors so that you understand the specific demands for each of the papers assigned in your classes. All students are encouraged to make appointments at the Writing Center to discuss their work (312-413-2206).

Technical Elements:

- Papers must have name, date, course, and section number/leader (if applicable).
- Pages should be numbered, using Arabic numerals (1,2,3, etc.).
- Print on only one side.
- Font: standard fonts are 12 point Times Roman (this font) or Courier.
- Title: think of a title for your paper that captures a reader's attention and that represents the subject of your paper. Make it original and interesting. Do not italicize, or put quotations around, your own title. You cannot use the name of the work you are writing about as the name of your paper.
- Margins: 1 inch on all sides. This tends to be the default setting on most computers, but check your computer's settings if you are not sure.
- Double-spacing: there should be a space between lines of text in your paper. Do NOT skip extra spaces between paragraphs (some word processors automatically do this, so change the setting). Do not reduce or expand the amount of space between lines.
- Attach pages: with a staple. Do not hand them in as loose sheets, or you will be responsible when they get lost.
- Page limits: stay within them. They are there for a reason. If you are running over or under a limit, discuss this with your instructor.
- Titles of works: titles of longer works (novels, epic poems) are underlined or *italicized*. Titles of shorter works (short stories, lyric poems, essays) are in "quotation marks."
- Tense: with few exceptions, literary works are discussed in the present tense. For example, "Mary Shelley writes...." (not wrote) or "When Victor Frankenstein decides to flee..." or "Here, the creature represents...."

Basic structure:

- Your paper should have an introduction with thesis, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. For most assignments, you should build your argument around well-chosen passages in prose or poetry that you explain with reference to the point you want to be making.
- Introduction: craft an introduction that captures your reader's attention. Speak about the specific texts or situations you want to address--do not use overgeneralizations like "In all of nature," "In all of humanity," "Since the beginning of time," or "Throughout all history."

- Thesis: a thesis is an opinion about the work you are studying, which you can then support with evidence from the text(s). Aim for a thesis that is original, imaginative, and argumentative--do not merely summarize the work you are examining. Usually the thesis is in your introductory paragraph. A thesis statement that contrasts your claims with the work of other critics or commentators adds force to your views.
- Supporting paragraphs: think of these paragraphs as the foundation for the thesis you state early in the paper. Offer carefully chosen evidence with explanations of its significance or relevance to your argument.
- Stay on the point of the paper: do not wander from your thesis. Consistently focus on the author(s) or text(s) that you are addressing, and consistently argue the main point that you have articulated in your introductory paragraph.
- Conclusion: Come back to the thesis or main point of the paper, although avoid simply restating it. You should support your original claim, but stretch your mind a bit here and think about further implications of your work. For instance, you could encourage your reader to apply your thoughts to other works by the author you are studying, or to issues/problems that you have not had time or space to treat in your paper.

Paragraphs:

- Topic sentences: topic sentences help both reader and writer to get their bearings on where the individual paragraphs are headed. They appear in many places in a paragraph—at beginning, middle, or end; sometimes they are even “implied.” The larger issue is that you want your paragraphs to make sense in relation to each other, and use language to express the relation.
- Cohesion: paragraphs should address a single point--avoid wandering. Ask yourself whether the sentences in the paragraph are staying close to the paragraph’s main idea.
- Evidence: use quotations and/or specific examples to support the points you are making. Avoid broad generalizations and summary that do not relate to your quotations/examples.
- Analysis: quotations and examples should be followed by explanation and analysis that seek to connect the evidence to the paper’s thesis. Analysis is based on a reading of the text you are examining, and it should take account of the genre of discourse about which you are writing. For instance, when you analyze a poem or a novel, a character is not a real person and cannot be judged as one; your like or dislike of a character cannot be the endpoint of your reading.
- Logic: paragraphs should follow each other in a logical and effective sequence in order to expand upon the argument set forth in the first paragraph or thesis.
- Transitions: make sure that you create a strong sense of connection between one paragraph and the paragraph(s) preceding it and following it. This can be done by using linking words or by repeating key words, phrases, etc. from the previous paragraph.

Sentences:

- Check your sentences to make sure they observe the conventions of standard edited English, including such matters as syntax, spelling, and punctuation. Look out in particular for some common errors:
 - *comma splices (when a comma is incorrectly used--instead of a semi-colon or a comma plus a conjunction--to separate two independent clauses)
 - *incorrect punctuation
 - *subject/verb agreement
 - *run-on sentences
 - *short, choppy sentences that should be combined
 - *imprecise word choice
 - *awkward phrasing
 - *repetition, redundancy
 - *spelling errors (there is no excuse for this in the era of spell check; also make sure that you have the titles and authors of works spelled correctly)
 - * colloquial language that does not address the actual concepts or words in the text(s) you are examining.
 - *sentence fragments
- Like paragraphs, sentences need to make sense in relation to each other. Use connecting words and a coherent logic that makes it clear how one thought proceeds from another. Remember: the only way to express the set of logical connections you're making is by showing it through words, phrases, and sentences. Do not leave it up to your reader to guess at your meaning.
- Read your work aloud. See if it makes sense as you read it, and see if one sentence flows to the next.

Quotation:

- The proper way to quote from poetry is to use a slash to indicate a line break between lines in shorter quotations: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense" (Keats 1-2). For quotations longer than three lines, use a "block quote." This is a quotation entirely indented from the left and without quotation marks. Keep quotations double-spaced even in block quotes (unless your instructor tells you otherwise). For most works assigned for your class, you can note by author and page number for the first mention: (Mitchell 16). After that point, you may use the page number for prose or line number for poetry: just (36) or (223), followed by a punctuation mark. If a quotation mark immediately follows a quote and citation, put the quotation's page/line citation after the quote mark, but before the following comma, period, or other punctuation mark: "my quote" (4).
- Always follow quotations with either footnote or notation of line numbers in parentheses as noted above. With poetry, use the stanza format that is shown in your text; do not adjust to the way you want it to look.

- Do not quote more lines than you can actually write about.

Secondary Sources:

- For quotation and documentation of secondary sources, please see style manuals recommended by your instructor. Frequently used manuals include the MLA Style Manual and The Chicago Manual of Style. Be sure always to credit external sources accurately and completely. In general, you can use the following format for external sources unless specifically directed to do otherwise by your instructor.

For a Book: Author, The Title of the Book, (Place Published: Publisher, Year), pages.
For example: Edgar Rosenberg, From Shylock to Svengali (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1960), 7.

For an article: Author, "Title of Article," Title of Journal, Volume (Date), page number. For example: Michael Ragussis, "Representation, Conversion, and Literary Form: Harrington and the Novel of Jewish Identity," Critical Inquiry, 16 (Autumn 1989), 115.

For internet sources: Author, "Title of Article," Title of Journal, volume if applicable, date <url> (date of access), text division if applicable.

For example: Thomas Pfau, "The Melancholic Gift: Freedom In Nineteenth-Century Philosophy and Fiction," Romantic Circles Praxis Series (June 2008), < <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/philcult/pfau/pfau.html> > (April 26, 2009), 3.

- Bibliographies or works cited are generally not necessary if you provide footnotes. If your instructor asks for a bibliography or works cited, however, make sure that it is formatted properly according to the appropriate style, and make sure that it is consistent with your notes.

Academic Integrity:

- Plagiarism is a serious offense. It can (and often does) result in failure in a course or expulsion from the university. It involves, but is not limited to, the theft of ideas and/or words from sources other than your own thoughts. It is simple to avoid being accused of plagiarism: cite the sources from which your work is taken, using proper documentation methods as described above.

Revision:

- Always take time to revise and rewrite. Put your work aside and return to it, correcting it for technical accuracy, clarity in explanation, and coherence in argument. You are the author: make the work your best, and take pride in what you write.
- Try reading your work aloud. If a sentence doesn't sound right, it probably isn't written well. Make revisions accordingly.

- It can be helpful to have a friend or colleague read your work and comment on it. He/she can ask you about crucial questions that you still need to answer, or about points that you still need to clarify.