Academic Writing

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Structure: The Bare Bones

• Introduction
  • Engages the reader
  • Provides context for the paper’s main argument
  • Introduces an arguable thesis

• Body
  • Provides supporting evidence for the thesis
  • Addresses opposing arguments

• Conclusion
  • Restates the thesis
  • Summarizes and connects the paper’s main points
  • Provides questions for further research
Introduction

• Engaging the reader
  • Make the topic relevant to the reader
    • Explain the overall significance of your topic
  • Pique the reader’s interest
    • Offer a surprising statistic
    • Begin with a gripping or unusual statement
    • Tell a brief story or provide a narrative

• Providing context
  • Introduce discourse surrounding the issue
  • Introduce the key terms of the issue
Introduction: Thesis Statement

• Must be a statement—not a question
• Must be contestable (others are able to disagree with it) OR promise new information about a topic
• Must take a clear, strong, and objective position
  • Avoids subjunctives: might, maybe, probably, etc.
  • Avoids subjectives: I think, I feel, I believe, in my opinion, etc.
• May include a brief summary of the paper’s main points
• Should not be too broad or overly specific
• Governs the direction of the paper
  • All points presented in the paper should support the thesis statement
• Usually falls at the end of the introductory paragraph
Thesis Statement?

• I think Brother Jed should be banned from MSU, because I find his political views offensive.
• Given the number of students who continue to smoke in undesignated areas, is the recent campus-wide smoking ban effective?
• Because of the growing number of campus assaults, MSU needs to provide stronger security.
• The University Recreation Center has cost millions to construct—and it is still unfinished.
• It is important for students to eat healthy foods.
Setting the Tone

- Be objective
  - Avoid personal pronouns (depending on the discipline): “I/me/my” statements
    - In my study, I proved…
  - Avoid use of the second person: “you” statements
    - As you can see from the results of the study…
- Use appropriate vocabulary and language
  - Consider your audience: formal vs. conversational
- Use specific rather than vague terms
  - Ninety percent vs. a lot
  - Items, ideas, elements vs. things or stuff
- Vary sentence structure
Setting the Tone

• Avoid contractions
  • Can’t, won’t, don’t, we’re, etc.

• Avoid idiomatic expressions and slang terms
  • On the ball, piece of cake, beat around the bush, etc.

• Avoid meta-discourse: drawing attention to the writing process or the paper
  • While doing research, I found some studies about…
  • As mentioned previously in my paper…
Setting the Tone

• Write in active rather than passive voice
  • Active voice: lets the reader know who is responsible for the action
    • Heather and Toni baked the cake for thirty minutes.
  • Passive voice: hides who is responsible for the action
    • The cake was baked for thirty minutes.
  • To change from passive to active voice, ask yourself who or what did the action, then add this information to the beginning of the sentence
    • Passive: The cake is being eaten by Heather and Toni.
    • Active: Heather and Toni are eating the cake.
- Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that introduces the specific point being made.
- In each paragraph, focus on a single point or idea.
- Use transition sentences to connect ideas and paragraphs.
- Organize paragraphs in a logical, cohesive order.
  - Points should build on one another.
Conclusion

• Restating the thesis
  • Remind your reader of the thesis statement
  • If your points have supported the thesis, this should happen naturally

• Summarizing and connecting the paper’s main points
  • Offer a brief overview of your main points
  • Explain how these points work together to support your thesis

• Providing questions for further research
  • Note the limitations of your own research
  • Offer direction for future study on the topic
    • This can take the form of a question
The Three Elements of Academic Writing: The Meat

• Assertions: arguments within academic writing
  • Thesis statement and supporting points
• Context: the conversation that already exists about your topic
  • History of the topic
  • Discourse: what experts have already said
    • Literature about the topic (articles, essays, etc.)
• Evidence: facts that support your argument
  • Sources must be credible and academic in nature
    • Peer-reviewed articles
    • Studies conducted by reliable outside parties
    • Unbiased statistics, interviews, reporting, etc.
Academic Writing

• If you follow these guidelines in terms of structure and content, your writing will be academic and your arguments sound. In turn, you will be more successful as a student and a professional.
THANK YOU!

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For questions about…

The Absent Professor Program & Prefects
http://AbsentProf.MissouriState.edu

Group-Led Educational Experience (GLEE)
Formerly:
The Supplemental Instruction Program (SI)
http://SI.MissouriState.edu

The Writing Center
http://WritingCenter.MissouriState.edu
WritingCenter@MissouriState.edu

Diana Garland
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For questions about…

Subject- Area Tutoring
Math Drop-In Tables
Focused Drop-In Tables
Study Skills Specialists