

EVALUATING DRAFTS

Throughout this semester, you'll be spending many class periods critiquing and evaluating drafts written by group members and fellow students. When you evaluate writing in process, you will be doing more than simply looking for proofreading and editing matters such as punctuation and grammar. Use the questions below when reading drafts, especially during class periods devoted to working on your individual papers.

1. The title. Does the paper have an interesting and/or helpful title?
2. Introduction. Can you easily find and understand the writer's thesis statement? Does the introduction prepare you for what will follow in the essay? Did the writer find a way to interest you in the topic or is the paragraph merely a summary of the main ideas? Is the introduction long enough or is it simply two or three sentences that don't develop the point of the paper?
3. Body. Do each of the paragraphs have a topic sentence that helps the reader know the purpose and content of the paragraph? Are the ideas fully developed and explained? Were there enough examples, details, and points to make the main ideas clear and understandable? Do the paragraphs break at logical places or are they too long or too short?
4. Transitions. Did each of the sentences and paragraphs flow well or could transitional words and phrases help the reader from point to point? Are there abrupt stops and starts in the flow? Does each paragraph logically follow the one before?
5. Word Choice. Are all the words and phrases appropriate for the college audience? Are there slang and informal expressions like "a lot" that could be more precise? Are the nouns specific or vague? Does the paper stay in the same person or are there shifts from 3rd to 1st or 2nd? Does the writer avoid "you" phrases?
6. Conclusion. Do the final paragraphs pull the essay together or do they seem "tagged on" and not part of the flow? Does the conclusion seem rushed and underdeveloped?

WORKING ON DRAFTS

1. One way to begin working on your drafts in both group and individual papers is to build your papers in segments. It's often difficult to think out introductions and conclusions until after you've developed the body and created the flow of your content. So if you work on the middle paragraphs first, you can create the core of your paper in sections and then come back to add transitions between paragraphs and determine your thesis sentence. After you know the direction of your paper, then you can decide how to interest the reader with a good introduction and pull your points together at the end.
2. Many students like to hand-write their rough draft and bring this in for the first day of workshops. For most students, this will greatly diminish the value of these sessions. The more your peers have to work with, the more feedback you can get. In addition, you'll lose much time having to then type up a new draft including any notes you gained in the class discussions. New typing errors, spelling problems etc. can pop up that could have been caught in the first workshop.
3. Later this semester, we'll be working on integrating research sources into your papers. One technique taught to fiction writers is to first write descriptions of a scene including the setting and movement before inserting the dialogue. This technique can also help papers using quotes from sources. Once you know what points you're going to make, write a first draft before inserting the quotes and citations. Then come back and add this material. This way, you can avoid your paper reading like a cut-and-paste job of many quotes with transitions added later.

BUILDING A STRUCTURE

Author Steven Frank believes that writers should structure essays with the conclusion in mind. "In organizing an outline, you want to save your best point for last. For the essay about my dad's first car, I'm building up to my favorite part: the time he crashed the Buick.

"In the 10 years that my father drove his Buick, he got in only one accident. He was cruising around downtown Portland when something caught his eye. That something was the long leg of a woman stepping out of Meier & Frank's department store. It was such a beautiful leg and belonged to such a beautiful woman that it caused my father to rear-end the delivery truck parked in front. This second case of love at first sight put a huge dent in his first."

TIPS TO MAKE C (AND D) PAPERS BETTER

1. Make your claims stronger by cutting wordy 1st person phrases. You don't need to say "I believe the number of puppy mills in Lancaster can be reduced with stronger law enforcement." Instead, say: "Better law enforcement would reduce the number of puppy mills in Lancaster."

2. Remember--your purpose is not to share your opinions but rather to persuade the reader of your points with evidence and logic. You can make the same points but be more appealing to your reader by focusing on the material, not your personal reactions or responses.

3. Avoid vague pronouns. For example, rarely should "you" be used in formal essays. For example, "You should always keep firearms locked in appropriate cabinets" should be more specific. "Responsible gun owners should keep firearms locked in appropriate cabinets." Your reader, in this example, might not be a gun owner, so the "you" doesn't apply.

Likewise, "it" is often vague. "'It's been claimed Pennsylvania has the worst roads in the United States."

Better to be specific: "Override magazine published a survey showing many truck drivers believe Pennsylvania has the worst roads in the nation."

3. Learn to avoid passive verbs. For example, "This proposal was made by the legislature in hopes of appealing to disgruntled voters." Better: "The legislature made this proposal to appease disgruntled voters." Your sentences can be more active by placing the subject at the beginning of a sentence.

"The ball was thrown by John" is better phrased as "John threw the ball."

4. Do not rely on spell checks! They won't catch errors like the "Untied States of America." They are often incorrect regarding punctuation.

5. Major comma errors will cost major points. The most important of these are comma splices. "The cost of doing business includes health insurance, employers need to accept this as a normal part of their expenses." As phrased, these are two sentences. Can break them in two, add a coordinating conjunction, use a semicolon, or add words to make the first clause subordinate. In this example, an "As" at the beginning would make the needed change. Or an "so" after the comma would work.

Note: Coordinating conjunctions are known as FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. Need a comma before these words IF what follows can stand alone as a sentence. "The job is not done, but American border guards are trying" needs a comma. "The job is not done or even started" does not. If there is a noun after the conjunction and the clause can work as an independent sentence, put in the comma.

6. Informal expressions will be heavily marked. For example, using "a lot" will cost points. Use "children" and not "kids." Do not use exclamation points in formal writing.

7. When using sources, for both flow and credibility, use phrases like "According to," "Smith claims, believes, asserts, notes" etc. Even when cited, this places the information or opinion clearly in the writer's mouth. Without such phrases, it can be unclear if you're stating these opinions as your own based on research or are accepting information from one place as fact. Remember--just because something is in print doesn't make it so. And on-line

sources are often unreliable. So if you present information without phrases showing that someone else made this claim first, you're responsible for factual errors.

MOST FREQUENT PROBLEMS WITH CITATIONS

Much material regarding the MLA style of citations is in your textbook; many students like to use online sources to help them properly prepare a "Works Cited" page. While this list doesn't cover everything you'll need to know this semester, below are the most common problems on freshman papers.

1. Many students believe that if a paragraph relies on one source, they don't need to include a citation until the end of the paragraph. This is not correct. As soon as you begin giving information you obtained from a source, begin citing immediately! You don't need to cite each and every sentence, but citations should be frequent and follow proper MLA style. Look at the models at my website to get ideas on this. Also note all direct quotes should be cited.

2. In text citations should be short. Web addresses should be on the "Works Cited" page and not in your paragraphs. Do not include full titles of articles in your citations. If an article title is "Comments on the First Amendment," your citation should be simply ("Comments"). The exceptions to this happen if you have several articles beginning with the same word. If so, will need an extra word or two to clarify which one you mean.

3. Your citation should include the first word(s) used on your "Works Cited" page so a reader can quickly find the source you're referring to. For example, if your source has an author, use author's last name and not the name of the newspaper or website. For example, the citations should be (Sharp) and not ("Mental") for this listing:

Sharp, Dudley. "Mental Retardation and the Death Penalty."
prodeathpenalty.com. April 19, 2003
http://www.prodeathpenalty.com/Articles/Sharp_MR.htm

4. Make sure you alphabetize your "Works Cited" page. Note that titles that begin with articles should be listed as:

"Legal Ramifications of Excessive Self-Defense, The.
Voter's Guide to the 16th District, A."

5. When a sentence ends with a direct quote, the end punctuation goes inside the quote marks:

"Binge drinking remains a problem on our campus." (Johnson)

If your sentence ends without a quote mark, the period goes after the citation. However, if the sentence ends with a question mark, this goes before the citation:

How many deaths must occur before drivers will take this problem seriously? (Daniels 12)

6. Unless inside a direct quote, don't use exclamation marks.
7. When citing or quoting sources, remember to use the past tense. If your quote comes from any source, it was published in the past.
8. Get very familiar with what is expected on the "Works Cited" page. An article title and web address is not sufficient.
9. Use ellipses only in middle of quotes; they're not needed at beginning or end. Don't, for example, include a quote like ". . . Johnson added that these numbers are inflated" ("Rising.") Use ellipses only when omitting words in the middle of a quote: "Johnson added that doctors need be more aware of these costs . . . They should be more sympathetic with underemployed workers."