

Career Institute Young Adult Program Reading and Writing Project



WRITING



READING and THINKING

Project Purpose: To refine your reading, thinking, and writing skills so that you can present your ideas in a professional manner.

Goals:

- Become a better reader by carefully examining the text
- Become a better writer by learning a few basic writing skills
- Understand why increasing your writing skills will make you more valuable
- Understand why increasing your reading skills will enlighten your mind and increase your intelligence
- Develop the habit of using spelling and grammar check every time you write a paper

Check off List:

- Reading Assignment: Complete the reading assignment in the project packet
 - Reading Comprehension: Complete the assessment at the end of the reading assignment
 - Type a one page paper about your career goals, including an introductory paragraph, main idea, and conclusion
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Pre and Post Assessment

Project Goals	Pre	Post
Do you know why it is important to have good reading skills?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know why it is important to have good writing skills?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know how to structure a sentence?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know how to structure a paragraph?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know what a thesis is?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know why it is important to write with intention?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know why it is important to use formal language in writing?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know why it is important to be specific in writing?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know what it means to cite your sources?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know what format is generally accepted for writing professionally?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []
Do you know why it is important to be concise in your writing?	Yes [] No []	Yes [] No []

DID YOU KNOW...

Perhaps you've heard that no one cares about your grades once you leave the halls of academia. While that notion holds some truth, it is equally true that most potential employers do care about writing skills. They care so much that they bemoan the poor preparation of the entry-level pool of grads. In a labor force full of mediocre writers, someone who writes well is bound to stand out and succeed.



READING AND THINKING EXERCISE

As part of the Reading and Writing Life Skill project, you will be required to read the following Article below entitled “Seven Rules of College-Level Writing”. Once you are finished reading the article, please answer the questions below.

Seven Rules of College-Level Writing

By Holly Bailey-Hofmann, Language Arts Dept. , LA West College

Over the years you probably learned what “the rules” were for punctuation, grammar, etc., but now maybe you can’t remember exactly what they were, or you remember them incorrectly. Perhaps you learned English as a second language mostly by listening and speaking (as opposed to learning it out of a textbook...and likely the Americans you were listening to were probably not speaking English correctly themselves.) All of these factors add up to the fact that few adults today (let alone teens or children) speak English correctly. Even magazines, billboards, and movies get things wrong.

Every language changes and evolves over time, and the English language is no exception. It may be that some of the rules we observe today may not be the rules followed by our children’s generation. Thus these seven rules are not hard and fast, but meant to serve as a guideline for basic writing standards for college students and young professionals. They represent the major errors found again and again in student writing.

Rule One: Everything Depends on the Thesis

There are many words for thesis: **position, argument, stand, claim, premise...**

The thesis is the *controlling idea of the essay*, and cannot be too general or too specific. It cannot be a fact.

You cannot start writing and hope that a thesis will emerge; in order to be a successful writer, you must have your thesis in mind from the beginning.

That’s why Rule #2 is...

Rule Two: Write with Intention

Write with a plan. Perhaps in your high school English classes, your instructors were content to have you write more or less “freely,” based on how you felt about the topic, mainly as a way of warming you up to writing and disarming your negative inner voice. But now that you are sufficiently warmed up, it’s time to get serious. Few novels or screenplays are written that aren’t copiously planned out on anything from 3x5 cards to Excel spreadsheets. College-level writers should be able to make a list (a basic outline.) Conceivably, you can hold this list in your mind and work from it. But it’s a better idea to make a written one.

In your college composition classes you will also learn and practice various means of brainstorming, which prepares you to write. To brainstorm a student can freewrite, list, cluster or map--really, just about any method to plan what you write before you start writing! This helps you bring lots of ideas to the surface so you can look through them and generate even better ideas that are waiting underneath!

While you may have survived high school English classes by writing whatever came to mind without any preparation--just sitting down and “thinking onto the page”--you are now pursuing a higher education to become a professional. It’s helpful now to think of English class not as something to be “survived” but as a place where you are equipped to become an expert professional in your field. Strong reading and writing skills will enhance you in every profession.

Rule Three: Write in Formal (not Informal) Language

You can speak anyway you want to, or need to, to fit into your social or work environment, but in order to succeed in college and the professional environment, you’ll need to choose your words carefully according to established rules. This can seem like a drag, but it can also become a challenge, if you look at it that way. In effect, you can begin to play a game with yourself and others in which you mentally “translate” what you hear into correct grammar.

This rule also means you should avoid colloquialisms and abbreviations in writing.

A colloquialism is a figure of speech, or slang term. For example:

Dude, Where You At, Awesome, Off the Chain, Gonna, Gotcha, CYA, LOL

- Names and Numbers should be written out, not abbreviated.
- Do not refer to sources by their first names. For example, Dr. King is Dr. King, not Martin.

Rule Four: Be Specific

There are a number of words you should avoid using in college-level essays, and those include:

“they” (with no antecedent) “society” “nowadays” “these days”

All of these refer to specific groups/people/times that need to be specified. (Ex: doctors, baby boomers, students, the middle class, the 1990s, the late 20th century, etc.)

Now, before you have a heart attack, think about it: we speak in general terms because we don't have the facts at hand. Or, because it takes an extra thirty seconds to be more specific. Consider this: in my online classes, I often have students in other countries like Germany and Japan. We can no longer assume, as either students or professionals, that our peers / classmates / coworkers share the same time zone, the same references, etc. We must be specific in order to make ourselves clear.

It's amazing the way words can empower us. Making this change is a lot like developing a new muscle in your body that you haven't worked with a lot before; it's going to be uncomfortable at first, but then it gets easier, and finally, it pays off.

A sub-category of Rule 4 is to use specific, appropriate pronouns. It might be that you're using incorrect pronouns all the time and you have no idea, mainly because few people--even professors--speak in correct grammar!

Play along with me for a moment. **Everyone loves their mother, right?** Ok, this sounds reasonable. But it's (grammatically) wrong.

"Everyone" is singular and "their" is a plural, possessive pronoun.

No doubt most people feel that "their" indicates that (whatever is said) is true of most people. But guess what? It doesn't matter how we feel! The rules are the rules. To make it grammatically correct, we have two options: use a singular pronoun, or a plural subject.

Example:

Everyone loves his/her mother. (both singular)
All people love their mothers. (both plural)

Rule Five: Cite Your Sources

An important value in the professional world is accountability. Corporate CEOs are going to prison because they were not accountable to investors. They "overlooked" or even concealed important information in order to profit themselves.

One of the first and most fundamental ways you can establish yourself as a professional is to be accountable. Conceal nothing. Be open about what you do and how/why you do it. In the Humanities, as in many professions, we don't leave accountability entirely to trust; we have guidelines. And the most important one for writers is that they declare their sources.

There are no new ideas, right? Maybe, maybe not. But this is why citation is so important. If you suddenly make the random claim in your latest paper that Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster are one and the same, the scientific community is going to want to see your sources. The world wants to know; where did you get your information? (...Especially before we give you a corner office and a book tour.)

Because if your information, original or not, isn't documented, simply put, it isn't credible, and you won't be taken seriously. All this to say that all of the disciplines in the Humanities, including Science, Psychology, Philosophy, History, Languages, etc. have specific guidelines for citing (referencing) source materials.

The format used by English composition and literature professionals is called MLA format. Different classes may use different formats. Be sure to check with your professor. MLA stands for Modern Language Association, a professional organization that makes the rules for English grammar and citation. There are similar organizations in other countries that make the rules for their languages.

You are not expected to memorize all the citation formats. That's why your English profs assign an MLA handbook every semester to guide you. It is a reference book in which you can look up the rules as you go. (And all the guidelines are also available on the internet, for free.) But the most important thing is for you to be aware of the necessary format, and be able to look it up, in order to show that you are accountable for what you write, and that your sources are reliable and traceable.

If a professor, on his/her syllabus, does not indicate what format students need to use in the class, ask. Remember, you are not simply trying to pass the class, you are trying to uphold standards of professionalism.

Rule Six: Be Concise!

Gosh, so many rules! But you're going to be a better writer when you finish reading!

Let's say Mr. Boring, your high school English teacher, just got divorced, so he assigns a ten page paper to make the students all just as miserable as he is. Right? Sometimes that's how it can feel, anyway. The point is, chances are that most of your writing life has been devoted to filling in the space, with whatever sounds important and educated until you have reached the page minimum. This is a habit you'll need to break!

Maybe you've gotten real good at saying absolutely nothing, to the point where you don't even realize you're doing it...you just sit down and start writing and it comes out!! But guess what...that's not going to get you far in the workplace. If you give your boss fifteen pages of busy talk, there are 500 or more people (in L.A., anyway) just as qualified as you are—or more so—waiting to take your job. Does that inspire you to take Rule Six seriously?

It's time to stop thinking about education as "student vs. teacher." We've all had bad teachers, myself included, but that's no reason to perpetuate bad writing habits that are only going to hinder you professionally. The English class is, admittedly, an artificial context for writing. But it is meant to prepare you for the job where you will know what you're talking about and be ready to say it. Therefore, it's time for you to stop looking at assigned work in terms of page minimums, and see it for what it is: a challenge. How can I fill five pages with well-researched, timely information that matters to the world, when at this moment I have no idea about the topic, and perhaps, little interest in it? Now that's a challenge.

**In short, whereas you're used to saying more about less,
a college-level writer can say less about more.**

Sit with that thought for a moment. Your essay may come back to you with entire sentences or paragraphs crossed out. The notes might say, "Redundant" or "Unnecessary." Or even, "This adds nothing to your argument." Ouch! Should you be insulted? On the contrary. Professors take their own time to correct your work so that your writing can grow. And just like working new muscles, it's going to hurt. It's like being told, Hey, you need to lose a few pounds. But if you can leave your ego out of it, in the end you'll be glad. And your writing will start to sizzle!

Here's a quick example of using conciseness.

WORDY

In this essay I am going to talk about the importance of drugs in our culture.

Why all the throat clearing? Just say it already!

CONCISE

Drugs are central to American culture.

And then I'm going to ask, illegal drugs? Legal drugs? Both? But now that you're being concise, these issues become more obvious and can be addressed more quickly.

Rule Seven: Don't Use "I" (or "We" or "You")

To be a college-level writer, you must leave behind your reliance on personal experience and opinions to build your essays. Your essays must now be built by research, facts, authoritative sources, etc. To underscore this point, you must abandon the habit of using "I" based sentences. You don't need to say "I think" to voice an opinion. Your name is on the essay, after all. It is enough to say, "Smoking is dangerous." It sounds more formal and convincing than saying, "I think smoking is dangerous."

When you talk with friends at a party or between classes, and people express opinions, do you ever mentally dismiss the opinions with which you disagree? Probably. Now, do you want your readers to do that to your essay? When we phrase things in the third person ("Smoking is dangerous") we separate the idea from ourselves and our opinions and it has more credibility and formality.

Remember, you're training for a professional career, in which (to varying degrees) you will be trying to convince your readers, listeners, etc. You want to learn how to communicate with authority, so that even if you have no authority on which to stand, your writing/communication will still be powerful and effective.

"But," you argue, "the only person reading my essay is the professor!"

The implication is that the professor has to read it, no matter how bad it is. And that may be true. But when's the last time poor quality got you a good grade? So STOP WRITING FOR THE PROFESSOR OR THE CLASS, and write for its own sake. Don't

write what you think the professor wants to hear; support for an opinion is more important than what the opinion is.

It doesn't matter what I think about what you think about an issue. It only matters that you try to convince your readers, by means of solid writing, support, and formal tone. Write for "readers"—meaning, any colleague, friend, or relative, who could read it. In your classes you will learn how to be mindful of who your audience is.



FUN FACT:

A 1992 survey of 402 companies reported by the Associated Press noted that executives identified writing as the most valued skill but said 80 percent of their employees at all levels need to improve.

Reading Comprehension Exercise

1. The Controlling Idea of an essay is known as the _____.
2. The thesis of the essay is most effectively formulated during the writing process. T F (circle one)
3. List the 4 brainstorming exercises suggested by the author that help the writer "write with a plan", and use a Google search to provide the definition for each word.
 1. _____ Definition: _____
 2. _____ Definition: _____
 3. _____ Definition: _____
 4. _____ Definition: _____
4. It is like, completely OK to use slang that all yer peeps R down with when writing papers and stuff; just like U write when U txt your BFF. LOL. T F (circle one)
5. According to the article, which format should be used for professional citations? (select only one)
 - ___ ALA (American Language Association)
 - ___ MLA (Modern Language Association)
 - ___ WLS (World Language Standards)
 - ___ AWS (Association of Writing Standards)
 - ___ WRS (Writing & Reading Standard)

Conclusion - Ending (Summarize the main idea of the paper)

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Business Letter

Begin your letter by typing today's date on the top left-hand side of the page. Type your return address, then the address to where the letter is being sent. Go down 2 spaces and type the person's name or department. Go down 2 spaces, indent 5 spaces, and begin typing your letter.

[Insert Today's Date]

Go down 2 spaces

First & Last Name

Your Address

City, State, Zip Code

Go down 2 spaces

Career Institute

Career Mentor Name, Job Title

10722 Arrow Route Suite 808

Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730

(909) 481-0270

Go down 2 spaces

Dear Career Mentor:

Go down 2 spaces

Write a paragraph introducing the different things you were able to complete at the end of this project.
Go down 2 spaces

In this part of the letter you can give examples of what you learned, while enrolling into your certification training program. You can also talk about your career plan and if you have any alternatives.

Go down 2 spaces

In this part of your letter you would finish by talking about what you have learned while completing this project. Here are some topics you can use as examples; I now know why college or vocational training is important. You may want to talk about what you experienced when apply for financial aid, how you plan on paying for you education or training, and how this will improve your life.

Go down 2 spaces

Sincerely,

Go down 4 spaces

[Sign your name here]

First & Last Name

Action Plan

Project: _____

State three things that you have learned while completing this project, and explain how you will apply them into your daily life.

Knowledge/ Skills Learned	How Will You Apply It