Graduate Academic Writing & Professional Communication
Objectives/Learning Outcomes

- Participants will enhance their understanding of writing expectations at graduate level.
- Participants will be able to identify their current writing strategies and be aware of resources for expanding those.
- Participants will gain an understanding of professional written communication in the academy.
- Participants will be able to identify University resources and strategies to assist them in their writing efforts.
Why it Matters

- One of the biggest concerns expressed by graduate students, especially those returning to academia after a period of being in the workforce
  - Lack of confidence
  - Lack of time
  - Lack of skill in utilizing scholarly resources
- Ability to write professionally is a critical skill in business/industry
- Often thought of as a box to check off (e.g., assignment submission, thesis/dissertation completion)
- Higher expectations from professors
Graduate vs. Undergraduate Writing

• No official rules but should be difference between the two
• Purpose of writing
  • More than writing to fulfill an assignment – strive for broader relevance
• Often requires summarizing and synthesizing information (e.g., less reliance on direct quotes, emphasis on showing similarities and differences in the scholarly conversation about a topic)
• Vocabulary and formatting are specific to the field
• Should follow conventions of the discipline

Writing tasks become more complex the farther you go.
What Faculty Members Expect

• Professor/student relationships may be different (smaller number of students, mentoring into the discipline); may have more one-to-one or small group interactions.

• With that said, graduate students should know that what you can expect from your graduate instructors may be different from your undergraduate experience.
  • Amount of detail and step-by-step instructions
  • Amount of feedback
  • Expectations that students will correct their own work

• Faculty members are all different, even within the same programs.
Eats, Shoots, and Leaves (Truss, 2003)

• A reasonable command of grammar and mechanics is *expected* in graduate school.
  • Fundamental baseline for most disciplines; not the essence of academic writing but can have impact on how your work is viewed

• Grammar and mechanics matter in academic *and* professional writing.
  • Grammar: how we put words together to form sentences and paragraphs – fundamental structure of language (thewritepractice.com/grammar-vs-punctuation)
  • Mechanics: punctuation, capitalization, spelling, format

• Adequate grammar and mechanics promote clarity in writing.
  • Example: title of this slide vs. “eats shoots and leaves”
Writing Strategies

• Has to do with “how” you write; requires reflection to improve or expand
  • What is your main strategy for writing? Why?
  • Does it vary according to what you are writing?
  • What other strategy(ies) have you used?
  • What has worked for you?
  • What have you tried that did not work for you?
• One strategy is not likely to work for everything or all the time
  • Tip: Identify additional strategies early in your program.
General Tips

• Read the syllabus instructions for writing assignments as well as any rubrics included.

• *After* reading the instructions, ask questions if you need clarification.

• Use required style guide or specific conventions within it for your discipline unless directed to do otherwise (e.g., cover page, heading style, citation style).

• Be clear about the kind of writing assigned (e.g., literature review or research paper, reflective paper, demonstration of learning such as exam-style essay). In other words, know the purpose.
Tips, continued

• Make writing a routine practice.
  • Calendar
• Actively seek feedback.
  • Peers in your program
  • Readers outside your field
  • Writing Center
  • Faculty advisor/instructor
• Finish early enough to proofread and edit more than once.
  • Software?
• Know that revision is a good thing.
• Read – a lot!
Tips for Writing a Paper

• Structure your paper so that the flow is organized and clear.

• Generally, move from the broad to the specific and detailed ideas or do the opposite. Avoid going back and forth between these two ways of organizing.

• Connect ideas throughout the paper.

• Define terms and provide sources of information.

• Avoid casual language and clichés: use your professional voice.

• Cite!

• Follow instructions. (Yes, we notice!)
Clarity

• Know that writing clearly takes effort.
• State the goal, and do so early in the paper.
• Use concrete examples if appropriate.
• Avoid wordiness.
• Add structure with headings and subheadings and consistent constructions (e.g., if you indicate you will discuss Blue, Red, and Yellow, then do so in that order.)
• Use transitional phrases (e.g., however, in sum, in contrast to) and use them correctly.
• Keep sentence construction simple – one or two ideas
• Have someone else read your paper who has not been involved in that work. Ask them what they understand from reading the paper.
Professional Communication in Graduate School - Email

• It is common for students, including grad students, to email in much the same way they text, with brevity and informality being standard.

• Many, perhaps most, professors approach emails as closer to letters than text messages – more formal, more thorough and clear, more adherence to grammar and mechanics of writing.

• Both are valid ways of writing; however, it is important to know what approach fits who you are writing to and why you are writing.

• At the University, an approach more like a letter is the wiser approach.

• A relational touch is appropriate. We are all human – we do not need to communicate like automatons.
Email, continued

- Email
  - From your university account to professor’s university account
  - For clarification, request for meeting or letter of recommendation, agreed-upon topics, etc.
  - Clear and accurate subject line
  - Name of the class if about a specific class
  - Your full name
  - Reason for email
  - Use salutation (example: Dear Dr. Smith,)
  - Formal style (e.g., no “text speak” or slang)
  - Follow-up if no response, but only after sufficient time
Email, continued

Do not

• Ask your professor what course you are taking with them
• Ask for information that is readily available in the syllabus – look first, then ask for clarification
• Write an email when you are really angry
• Threaten your professor
• Write excessively long or complicated emails; consider a phone or face-to-face conversation instead
• Assume a more casual or social tone unless that is already negotiated
Professional Communication in Graduate School – Other Formats

While email may be the most common written communication between students and faculty, other formats also exist.

• Communication avenues in online course platforms: Tone and content depends on the avenue and the purpose (e.g., group communication for class projects may be much less formal than communication with professor)

• Memos: Memo formatting is fairly standard. Use professional, more formal tone.

• Letters: Business letter format is appropriate, with professional and formal tone.
WC Resources

Handouts
The CASA Writing Center has developed a number of handouts on various writing-related topics. We make these handouts available in the writing center and online in PDF format, as convenient guides and quick references to aid students in the writing process.

On Demand Resources
Dissertation Mentor
Library Research Guide

Documentation and Styles Formatting
APA Basic Formatting (7th Ed.)
APA Basic Formatting (6th Ed.)
APA Formatting References (7th Ed.)
APA Formatting References (6th Ed.)
APA Intext Formatting (7th Ed.)
APA Intext Formatting (6th Ed.)
Chicago Style Formatting and References
IEEE Intext Formatting
IEEE Formatting References
MLA Annotated Bibliography
MLA Basic Formatting
MLA Citing a Reprint
MLA Creating a Header
MLA In Text Citations
MLA Works Cited

Grammar
Articles
Independent and Dependent Clauses
Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers
Parts of Speech
Prepositions

Writing
Integrating Sources
Evaluating Print Sources
Research Matrix
Paragraph Development
Signal Verbs
Writing Lab Reports
Writing in the Sciences

Workshops on Demand
Introduction to APA 7th edition (Video)
Intro to Student APA 7th edition
Intro to Professional APA 7th edition
Introduction to MLA
MLA Source Integration
Literature Review
Engineering Lab Reports and Technical Writing (PPT Loop) by Dr. Chris Andrews
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