Tips for Academic Writing

BEFORE YOU START:

- Reread the assignment and make sure you understand it. If not, ask your professor to explain it to you.
- Determine the purpose of your assignment/essay (e.g., to explain or describe an idea, to provide information, to persuade readers of a point of view, to move people to action, or to offer a combination of these?)
- Identify and assess your audience and their expectations: What do they already know about your essay topic? Why do they care about your essay topic?
- Generate ideas for your thesis by freewriting, mapping or clustering, or asking questions such as: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?
- Create a thesis statement that narrows the scope of the assignment's main topic. For example, if your main topic is "women voters," your thesis might be "changing voting habits among working class single mothers during primary and presidential elections will require that…." Thesis statements are how and why statements/questions.

WHILE YOU ARE DRAFTING:

- Start collecting supporting materials related to your thesis; keep all bibliographic information you will need later to create a "Works Cited" page.
- Read critically. Review supporting materials for credibility and begin selecting key quotes and other text that supports and/or refutes your thesis. Take notes only on what is relevant.
- Identify the main points of your essay that support your thesis.
- Organize and develop your ideas so that you begin to see what bits of information need to appear in the body of your paper. You may develop your ideas by describing a person, object, concept, or scene; by providing examples of your points; by providing facts and statistics, by defining key terms; by dividing concepts into separate parts; or by comparing/contrasting similarities and differences.
- Write your first draft in sections. Create the introduction, body, and conclusion— and not necessarily in this order.

WHILE YOU ARE REVISING:

- Read your latest draft for organizational structure: Use direct quotes only when necessary, cut material that is not relevant or redundant, avoid generalizations and

contradictions, and/or add additional research that further or better clarifies a point or enhances your thesis.

- Make sure each of your paragraphs begins differently but clearly connects to one another, as well as to your thesis.
- Create an outline of what you have written so far to see how your paper is organized.
- Check to see if in your introduction you provide just enough background information to set up the thesis, define pertinent key terms, establish the tone of the essay (e.g., formal, persuasive, serious, humorous, personal), and entice readers. If needed, revise your thesis to reflect the order of your essay.
- Revise your conclusion to include a summary of the key points you have already made; to remind readers of your thesis; and to end with a question, suggestion, quotation, a reference to an anecdote already mentioned in your introduction, a call to action, or a look towards the future.

FINALIZING YOUR ESSAY:

- Read your essay slowly and aloud while looking for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word choice. Try working backwards through the paper, reading the last sentence first.
- Copyedit your essay for factual/statistical errors.
- Copyedit citations for accuracy and style; crosscheck sources in the body of your paper with the "Works Cited."
- Proofread your essay for typos that your computer's grammar/spell checker will not catch! Most grammar/spell checkers will not catch "I am there fiend," fix "there" to "their," or change "fiend" to "friend."
- Proofread your essay to make sure the cover page has all the appropriate information. You should include your name, the title of the essay, the class and professor for which the essay was written, and the date.