



WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Writing at Hunter

This handout is a guide to some of the important writing challenges you are likely to encounter as a Hunter student and offers basic strategies concerning the writing process and general information about required courses with significant writing and designated formats for research and documentation. The ability to express yourself clearly, communicate comprehension of subject matter, and apply critical thinking and analytical skills through writing is crucial to your academic success. Therefore, you must develop a writing process—a way to write papers that gives you the opportunity to demonstrate that ability in all your academic writing.

As a college student, you are likely to encounter certain types of writing assignments and writing situations in your various courses, from reaction papers to lab reports, from in-class essay examinations to formal research papers. You may need to learn specialized formats and vocabulary for writing in particular disciplines, and you will need to master one or more styles of documentation for citing sources in your writing. As a Hunter student, you will be required to take English 120 and English 220 as well as discipline-based significant writing courses. English 120 is Hunter's freshman composition course, which will introduce you to the college-level academic essay, help you develop your writing process, and give you an opportunity to practice important writing skills. English 220 is a second-year course with the focus of writing about literature. Both courses incorporate multiple writing assignments, including a documented essay/research paper.

THE WRITING PROCESS

When working on a writing assignment, many students focus on the end product: the final draft, the finished essay, the grade. They are likely to do a better job, however, if they re-focus on the process by which they will create the product. Every student's individual writing process is different, but in general the set of tasks that are necessary to successfully write an academic paper is identifiable and applicable to all papers from across the disciplines.

Almost all academic writing assignments call for a response to a reading, either a text assigned in the course syllabus or a source found by research. Therefore, reading is usually the first step of the writing process. It is important to be an active reader, using note-taking techniques and summarizing. The principle of analytical, critical reading should also be applied to the assignment itself to make sure your paper responds appropriately and satisfies the assigned requirements.

Writing is thinking. Teachers give you writing assignments to see what you think about what you read. Whichever invention technique—freewriting, brainstorming, questioning—you use, it is important to think first, and then write the paper, even on exams. What is the main point you want to make about the topic?

You need to explain to the reader how you arrived at that point and what evidence you have to support it. Your explanation needs to be focused, coherent, developed, logical, the product of critical thinking. Organize your thoughts, using an outline or rough draft to order your ideas and

evidence. At some point in your academic writing, you will be required to write a formal outline, and it is difficult to write a long research essay (15-20 pages) without using an informal one, a list of notes to yourself about how you are going to order your ideas and evidence. So it is a good idea to practice using outlines early in your academic studies.

Then write the paper. Notice that while writing can be employed in every step—summarizing, freewriting, outlining—the act of writing the paper itself usually takes place in the middle of the process. Every paper can be improved with revision. Revising does not mean correcting errors; it means, literally, to see again: reading your work over with a critical eye and considering what improvements can be made in the argument and organization, as well as the expression. It may mean rereading the research, rethinking your point, reordering the outline, restating the evidence. The writing process is recursive in that you give yourself the best chance to write the best paper you can if you go back over the steps and write more than one draft.

And everyone knows you should proofread your papers before you hand them in. Many student writers proofread too quickly and miss errors they could have corrected. Leave yourself time for this step so you can slow down, take care, and listen carefully to your writing. Give yourself the best chance to find and fix your mistakes, to apply your language skills as thoroughly as you can. Read actively, think critically, organize logically, write clearly, revise as necessary, proofread carefully—practice the writing process.

ENGLISH 120: EXPOSITORY WRITING

As a Hunter student, you will have to take English 120, an introductory expository writing course (unless you have taken an equivalent course at another college or had an Advanced Placement course in high school). This course or its equivalent is a prerequisite for many disciplinary courses and for all other English courses at the college. In English 120, you will learn how to expose your thinking to others by developing your skills in writing academic essays. Through reading, discussions, writing, and rewriting, it teaches students to generate, explore, and refine their own ideas; to analyze and evaluate intellectual arguments; to take positions, develop thesis statements, and support them persuasively; and to write with standard acceptable grammar, varied sentence structure, logical organization, and coherence.

Writing essays is a developmental process that uses revision to assist writers to become more aware of academic conventions and their own ability to logically discuss their thoughts on a topic. Revision, therefore, is built into a number of the essay assignments, which are based on course readings and research and require students to state their thinking on topics in well-constructed thesis statement that is developed through explanation and use of textual evidence. Essays constructed from these assignments are first evaluated on the basis of the organization and clarification of ideas, on detailed attribution and use of sources, and then on conforming to the conventions of grammar and mechanics.

Student writing in English 120 is assessed through a portfolio, which consists of five mandatory writing assignments and may include preliminary drafts depending on the discretion of each professor. Required assignments for the portfolio include a pre- and post-semester reading response essay, an annotated bibliography, an 8-10 page documented essay/research paper, and a 2-3 page reflective essay. For the documented essay/research paper, the research needed to investigate your topic and make your argument will go beyond assigned texts and require that you gather information from sources (usually books, academic journals, newspapers, and/or

Internet sites). Most importantly, you must provide documentation of your sources: every time you quote or paraphrase in your paper you must cite the source, and you must append a bibliography or list of Works Cited to your essay using MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style.

ENGLISH 220: INTRODUCTION TO WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

Once you earn credit for English 120, you are required to take English 220, an introductory course on writing about literature. This course incorporates analytical writing and close reading in British and American fiction, drama, poetry, and literary criticism as a means to further develop critical writing and research skills. Writing assignments are meant to be multi-genre; the major assignment is a documented essay/research paper using MLA documentation style. Students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of literature as well as more extensive experience with academic writing. This course is the prerequisite to all English courses above 220.

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

Rhetoric is the practice, by various methods, of persuasion. Most papers in most college courses try to persuade a reader that a particular point of view or argument is valid and reasonable. Argumentation is the most common rhetorical strategy in academic writing, and most academic essays are expected to have a thesis, a statement of what you intend to argue.

A writing skill that is called for in support of many different rhetorical strategies is summary, which includes the main points of a reading; however, a summary is not just a restatement of the original text. It is an analysis of the text breaking it down into its constituent parts, its ideas, and examining how they work and evaluating those ideas to find the main ones. Summary assures active, critical reading.

Student writers are also often asked in assignments to respond to a reading. The response can be anything from a freewrite to a research essay. A book report or critique is one kind of response, which usually requires the writer not simply to summarize, but to offer insights and opinions, usually including a thesis. Theater and film reviews take much the same form, as do many assignments in Art History.

Another common assignment is to compare and contrast two or more texts, concepts, historical periods, etc. To compare, discuss common characteristics, similarities; to contrast, discuss differences or points of divergence from common structures or parallel dynamics.

The narrative-descriptive method is another common approach to essay writing. It often is assigned early in your college career (Describe your neighborhood) and later, when you have gained experience and expertise in a field (in case histories and descriptions of fieldwork). This rhetorical mode is often the basis for a process-analysis, which analyzes a case study, an historical account, a lab experiment, etc.

These rhetorical strategies, most of them introduced in Expository Writing, will be useful in the writing you do in the rest of your academic career. Writing assignments in a variety of disciplines often require one or more of these strategies to successfully fulfill the requirements and carry your point effectively and convincingly to your readers.

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The English Department at Hunter offers a number of academic writing courses (Intermediate and Advanced Expository Writing, Theory and Practice of Expository Writing, Essay Writing), and, as part of Hunter's General Education Requirement, many departments schedule designated significant writing courses. But, in fact, a majority of courses at Hunter, at every level, across the curriculum, require writing of some kind.

Different departments and disciplines require different kinds of writing. Most of the sciences, for example, require lab reports, which present the results of laboratory experiments and can be written in several different formats. Like research essays assigned in the upper levels of some of the social sciences, these reports include abstracts (summaries of the reports or the research findings), descriptions of the experimental or research methods, a statement of the results, and an interpretation of the significance of the results.

Once in your major, you may have to write an annotated bibliography as part of a research project or as an assignment in and of itself. Such bibliographies include short summaries of each work listed, focusing on the significance of that work in relation to the research topic. Research assignments in different disciplines can require that you use particular documentation styles, such as those designated by the APA (American Psychological Association), common in many of the social sciences, ASA (American Sociological Society), required in some sociology courses, AMA (American Medical Association), standard in some sciences, and the Chicago Documentation Style (Author-Date system), used in papers for Hunter's History Department. The MLA, which is introduced in English 120, is used for most humanities courses, including English, Philosophy, and Classical Studies.

Some writing assignments, like the lab report and the annotated bibliography, may not call for a thesis. Papers in the Philosophy department, for instance, may ask that you put forward a proposition, a statement not to be argued but discussed from various points of view and judged not for its validity but for its complexity. Your essay, then, need not be persuasive with regard to a particular opinion but must be interesting and thoroughly thought through. Most writing assignments, though, will require some kind or level of argumentation.

GETTING HELP WITH YOUR WRITING

RWC (located on the 7th floor of library in the Silverstein Student Success Center: rwc.hunter.cuny.edu) offers tutorial assistance to all Hunter students for help with generating and developing ideas, essay organization, grammar and editing, and general difficulties with writing in any course, undergraduate or graduate. The Center provides regularly scheduled weekly tutorial sessions as well as drop-in assistance. The Center also offers a changing schedule of workshops on a variety of writing issues, extensive handout materials on all aspects of the writing process, and online services including links to other resources. The Hunter College Library has vast resources of information for you to use in your writing and trained staff to help you access those resources. has vast resources of information for you to use in your writing and trained staff to help you access those resources.