General Guidelines for Writing Essays

I. General Paper Format.
All papers are to be double-spaced typed with 12 size font, Times New Roman or Arial, and 1" margins on all four sides.

II. Heading.
Half an inch from the top, on the right side of the paper, you should have your header. It should contain your last name, a couple of spaces, and then the page number.

Example: Smith 1

III. Student Information.
Beneath the header (not in it), in the top left-hand corner of the paper, you should have the following information. (It should also be double-spaced typed):

Your Name Example: John Smith
Prof. Verschage Prof. Verschage
Class-Section Eng. 1113-005
Date 23 Jan. 2008

IV. Title.
A. After the student information, double space, and then type the title of the paper. The title should be centered on the page, written in 12 size font, Times New Roman or Arial (like the rest of the paper).

B. Your title is the first attempt at grabbing your readers’ attention and motivating them to want to read your work, so be creative with your title.

C. In considering what to use for a title, it should accomplish two things: (1) indicate (or provide a hint to) the topic of the paper, and (2) indicate the perspective that you will be taking on that topic.

V. Introductory Paragraph.
A. After the title, double space, and then begin typing your introductory paragraph.

B. Remember to indent 5-7 spaces at the beginning of each new paragraph, rather than use wide margins.

C. The introductory paragraph should contain the following three (3) elements:

1. Lead-in.
The purpose of the lead-in is to creatively grab the readers’ attention and draw them into the paper – motivate them to want to read more.
2. **Set-Up.**
   The purpose of the set-up is to lay the foundation for the discussion that's to follow in the body of the paper; this may include a brief discussion of some general background information.

3. **Thesis Statement (or claim).**
   The thesis statement is a single sentence that comes at the end of the introductory paragraph that asserts one overall point you want to make (or argue) in and through the course of the paper. In other words, if you could boil the content of the paper down to one single sentence, what would it say?

**VI. Body Paragraphs.**

A. Each paragraph is a little essay in itself with its own beginning and its own ending. Each paragraph, on average, will range in size from 8 sentences or 100 words (at its shortest) to 3/4 page double-spaced typed at its longest. An average size paragraph at the college level is approximately a half-page in length. Note: Dialogue would be the exception to this rule. Remember, begin a new paragraph each time a new person speaks, regardless of length.

B. Each paragraph should in some way support, develop, elaborate upon, and/or reaffirm your thesis statement.

C. If outside sources are used in your paper, then your body paragraphs should contain the proper ratio of ideas: 70% or more of the content should consist of your own perspectives and insight (as well as what is considered to be "common knowledge" in that area of study), and up to 30% of the paper should consist of documented materials that's used to support, illustrate, and demonstrate the point you're making at that point in the paper.

D. If outside sources are used, then your documentation should adhere to the assigned or specified guidelines. In this course, that means your parenthetical (in-text) documentation should adhere to MLA guidelines.

E. Each paragraph must also declare its allegiance to the paragraphs immediately before and after it.

F. Your ideas should flow smoothly from one idea to the next.

G. Each topic sentence (for each paragraph) must somehow hook onto the paragraph above it and must include some transitional word or phrase. For example,

   1. you may simply repeat a word from the sentence that ended the paragraph above it.

   2. you may bring down a thought that was left hanging from the previous paragraph.
3. you may use transitional words. Good transitions help the reader to move smoothly from one point to the next. In a well-written paper, the reader can see how and why the writer moves from point-to-point. Some common transitions are the following:

a) to show when more of the same idea is coming, use
   and, also, additionally, in addition, another as well, besides, equally, important, further, furthermore, next, finally

b) to show time or a sequence, use
   first, second, third, and so forth, meanwhile, soon, soon after, afterward, later, after a while, immediately, yesterday, today, tomorrow

c) to show a place or location, use
   adjacent to, above, across, beyond, below, under, on the opposite side, to the left or right, in the background, in the foreground, nearby, close and hand

d) to show comparison or similarity, use
   like, likewise, similarly, in the same manner, also

e) to show contrast or difference, use
   but, however, nevertheless, yet, on the contrary, although, at the same time, even so, even though, conversely, on the other hand, still

f) to draw a conclusion, use
   so, therefore, thus, consequently, as a result, finally, accordingly, as a consequence, in conclusion, due to, for these reasons, because of

g) for emphasis or to reiterate a point, use
   to repeat, in fact, truly, again, indeed, to this end, with this in mind, for this purpose

h) to emphasize an example, use
   for example, for instance, a case in point, as an illustration

i) for summarizing, use
   clearly, it is clear that, therefore, consequently, it can be seen that, in any event, as a result, to sum up, in summary, this, in brief, in short, as I have said, as has been noted (Try not to use “In conclusion”)

j) to indicate a paraphrase or summary, use
   that is, in other words, in short, to conclude, to sum up

k) to concede to an opponent’s point: granted that, no doubt, to be sure, it is true that

4. The best way to achieve harmony and form in writing is to carry an idea from one paragraph to another. If you are describing the grape-growing process in one paragraph,
the next one might point out some of the more desirable areas for grapes. The third paragraph may discuss the vinter's labeling procedure. A single thread of thought should connect them all.

H. Your paper's organization and ideas should be coherent and provide appropriate emphasis. The important ideas in your paper should stand out.

Some Advice in Writing Your Body Paragraphs:

1. Avoid transitions that merely add without showing why. 

   Phrases like "Another interesting point is..." or 'One might also take a look at' tend to make the reader think that the writer is trying to pad his paper or throw in unimportant details.

2. Use enumeration sparingly, for emphasis.

   This can be effective if used well, but too often, writers use numbering as a rigid and too strict and plodding transition. Phrases like, 'In the first place...', 'Secondly...', or 'Thirdly...'

3. Fill in the logical connections to help the reader follow your thoughts. Take special care to take your reader along when an argument moves systematically through a number of essential steps.

   Introduces main point........................ It is plain that

   Begins to enumerate reasons.................... Here are some reasons for...

   Elaborates on one of several points............. The second of these...

   Summarizes what precedes........................ In short...

   Raises a possible objection..................... Yet...

   Concedes a point.................................. It is true that...

   Returns to the original trend of thought........ Nevertheless...

   Draws a balanced conclusion..................... At the very least

VII. Conclusion.
A. The conclusion paragraph should flow naturally from the body paragraphs.
B. Its first line should be indented 5-7 spaces.

C. It should contain the following four (4) elements:

      The conclusion paragraph should begin with you re-affirming the paper’s thesis
      statement (same idea – different words).

   2. Summary of Main Points.
      After the affirmation, you should summarize and emphasize the main ideas presented in
      the body paragraphs.

   3. Discussion of Implications/Applications.
      Next, the conclusion should include a discussion of the possible implication and/or
      application of the paper’s overall argument and/or the main ideas. Move the discussion
      out beyond yourself. How will the ideas discussed in this paper affect others?
      (implications) or What are you expecting your readers to do once they’ve read your
      paper? (applications)

   4. Creative Closure.
      At the end of the conclusion, provide a creative ending that gives the reader a sense of
      closure. This can often be done, for example, by ending the paper with the same image
      or thought that began the paper, giving readers the sense that they’ve come full circle.

VIII. Appendices (optional).
      Appendices are for visual images, photos, charts, graphs, etc.

      A. Centered at the top of the first appendix, write Appendix A; the second, Appendix B; the
         third, Appendix C, etc.

      B. Underneath Appendix A (B, C, etc.), place your visual image, photo, chart, graph, etc.

      C. Underneath the visual image, photo, chart, graph, etc., write a description of it. At the end
         of the description, write the source information and page number (if applicable).

      D. You should only have one visual image, photo, chart, graph, etc., per appendix page.

IX. Notes (optional).
    The Notes page is for extended definitions or explanations, or related or supplementary
    information.

    A. The word Notes should be centered at the top of the page.

    B. Begin the first note with a superscript number one, and then the definition, explanation,
       related or supplementary information. It should end with the source information and page
       number (if available) in parentheses. Then do the same on all the following notes.

    C. The numbers should be written in consecutive order, and should correspond to the
superscript number given in the text of the paper.

X. Works Cited. (If outside sources are used)
A. The words Works Cited should be centered at the top of the page.

B. Only sources used in the construction of the paper should be listed.

C. Sources should be written in alphabetical order, according to the author’s last name or the title of the article or web page. And if the title of the article or web page begins with the word A, An, or The, then you use the second word to place it in alphabetical order.

D. Sources should be formatted and written in accordance to MLA guidelines.

XI. Taboo Words/Phrases.
The following words and/or phrases should not appear in your papers unless they are being used in a direct quote.

A. you, your, yourself, yourselves.

B. clichés

C. slang terms or phrases

D. street jargon

E. I think…, I feel…, I believe…, in my opinion…