

1. WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Students in different countries are taught to write papers in different styles. What is excellent writing in one country may not be considered good writing or even understood in another country.

When writing academic papers in the United States, it is useful to follow these guidelines.

	KEY GUIDELINES	WHAT TO AVOID
INTRODUCTION	<p>Write from general to specific:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start with general context / situation. 2. Briefly discuss the debate / issue. 3. State your thesis / argument (what you will prove). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is too much background information before you get to the thesis. ■ There is no clear thesis or argument; too indirect.
PAPER STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make the structure and order of the paper clear (in the thesis for a short paper or the next paragraph for a long paper). ■ Follow the order that you outline at the beginning of the paper. ■ For longer papers, use section headers to make the structure clearer. ■ Use “signal phrases,” such as <i>first</i>, <i>next</i>, <i>finally</i>, <i>however</i>, to make the structure of the paper and argument clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The structure of the paper is not clearly stated. ■ The structure of the paper does not follow the outline you provide in the introduction or the second paragraph. ■ There are no signal phrases or section headers to guide the reader.
PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE AND SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Usually write the main idea of the paragraph in the first sentence (the topic sentence). ■ Follow this structure for each paragraph: <p style="margin-left: 2em;">Topic Sentence (main idea)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your supporting point 1 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. specific evidence b. specific evidence 2. Your supporting point 2 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. specific evidence b. specific evidence <p style="margin-left: 2em;">Concluding Sentence (optional)</p> ■ Always cite (note) the sources (books and articles) you use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The main idea is hidden or missing. ■ The paragraph is not focused on one main idea; includes unrelated ideas. ■ Ideas are repeated rather than developed. ■ Generalizations or opinions are given instead of specific evidence. ■ Evidence is provided, but the argument is missing. ■ Other authors' work is used without being cited.
STYLE AND WORD CHOICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Write clearly and concisely (without extra words). ■ Use specific, precise words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overly complex sentences ■ Indirect statements ■ Vague words; overstatements