

Writing the Thesis



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Writing the Research Paper

- General principles
- Ways of composing
- Revising
- Introductions and conclusions
- Structure
- Composition and style
- Using quotations
- Form: grammar, punctuation, footnotes

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General Principles

- Get to know yourself as a writer.
- Find your own voice.
- Write to an audience.
- Expect to discard some of your research.
- Expect to discover new things as you write.
- Rewrite!
- Keep a sense of perspective.

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Ways of Composing

- The “quick and dirty” method
- The “slow and clean” method
- Establish a writing routine.
- Do you ever experience writer’s block?
 - Need to overcome inertia.
 - Find strategies that work for you.
- The key is to get to know yourself as a writer.

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Revising

- Plan time to revise – *not* just proofreading.
 - It’s the final test of your arguments.
 - It may help you draw your best conclusions.
- Revise from large to small.
- Read from the perspective of your reader.
 - Revise a printed copy.
 - Read the manuscript aloud and listen.
 - Ask someone else to read it.

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Revising

- When you revise, look for...
 - Weak spots or omissions in the content
 - Logical organization
 - Coherence and flow of ideas
 - Transitions
 - Awkward or ambiguous sentences
 - Wordiness

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Write the introduction last.
- Purposes of an introduction:
 - Give your reader a working knowledge
 - Research question and/or thesis statement
 - Orient your reader to your paper

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Structure for an introduction:
 - Provide common ground.
 - Disrupt the common ground.
 - Resolve the problem.
 - Give an overview of your paper.

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Provide common ground.
 - Get the reader's attention (general statement, event, anecdote, quotation, striking fact).
 - Describe the context of the problem (shared understanding, general knowledge).

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Provide common ground.
- Disrupt the common ground.
 - Reject it: but, however, on the other hand, etc.
 - State the problem.
 - Condition: ignorance, misunderstanding, etc.
 - Benefit of resolving it; cost of not resolving it.

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Provide common ground.
- Disrupt the common ground.
- Resolve the problem.
 - State your solution or promise a solution later.
 - Thesis statement goes here.

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Provide common ground.
- Disrupt the common ground.
- Resolve the problem.
- Give a brief overview of the structure of your paper.

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Introductions and Conclusions

- Conclusions have several purposes:
 - Summarize your results.
 - Draw any new conclusions.
 - Show that you've proven your thesis.
 - Explore the significance of your work.
 - Call for further research if more is needed.
 - End with a coda (memorable quotation, anecdote, striking figure of speech, etc.).

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Introductions and Conclusions

- The conclusion can mirror the introduction:

Introduction	Conclusion
1. Opening quotation/fact	5. Gist of solution
2. Context of past research	4. Larger significance
3. Condition of ignorance	3. What is still not known
4. Cost of that ignorance	2. Call for more research
5. Gist of solution	1. Closing quotation/fact

From Booth, Colomb, Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 254.

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Structure

- Be logical (Badke).
- Don't tell the story of your research.
- Possible structures:
 - Chronological or logical
 - From evidence to claim (or vice versa)
 - Old to new
 - Simpler to more complex
 - Uncontested to more contested
 - Concessions, objections, affirmative evidence

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Structure

- Paragraphs (see Strunk & White #13)
 - My view: at least 3 sentences, no longer than a page.
 - Should be about one topic.
 - Topic sentence at beginning, middle, or end.
 - Coherent structure: definition, classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, least to most important, etc.
- Put complexity at the end.

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Composition and Style

- Focus on style *only* when you're revising.
- Style means finding your own voice.
 - Avoid mannerisms.
 - “Plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity.”
- Be explicit (spell it out!).
- Clarity is the most important quality.
- Use a thesaurus *only* to remind yourself of words you already know well.

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Composition and Style

- Don't preach!
- Use active voice (Strunk & White #14).
 - “*It was decided* to limit this discussion to the church Fathers of the first three centuries.”
 - “*I decided* to limit...” or “*The discussion will cover* the Fathers of the first three centuries.”
- But use passive voice to focus attention on the object of the verb:
 - “The first child labor law *was passed* in...”

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Composition and Style

- Use action verbs, not state of being verbs.
 - “One of the reasons for the definition of the canon *was* the challenge by Marcion. Another reason *was* the need to respond to heresies such as gnosticism.”
 - “Marcion’s truncated canon *challenged* the church to identify the books they recognized as having divine authority. Similarly, the church *responded* to the supposed secret tradition of gnosticism by reaffirming the public tradition embodied in the apostolic writings.”

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Composition and Style

- Avoid nominalization.
 - “Our development and standardization of an index for the measurement of thought disorders has made possible quantification of response as a function of treatment differences.”
 - Turn the nouns back into verbs.
 - “Now that we have developed and standardized an index to measure thought disorders, we can quantify how patients respond to different treatments” (Booth, Columb, Williams, 220).

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Composition and Style

- Try to avoid clichés.
 - If you can’t, don’t put them in quotation marks.
 - This calls attention to your shortcomings as a writer.
- Put yourself in the background (S&W #1).
 - Some say to avoid first person (“I”).
 - Use it to talk about what *you* have done.
 - Don’t use it to talk about your *subject*.

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Composition and Style

- “Omit needless words” (S&W #17).
- Watch parallelism (#19).
- Keep subject and verb together (#20).
- “In summaries, keep to one tense” (#21).
 - Historical events: past tense.
 - Written work, ideas: present tense.
 - Be consistent.
- “Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar” (cited in Strunk and White).

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Using Quotations

- Know when to quote.
 - When it’s especially memorable.
 - When you can’t say it better.
 - When the wording is critical to your argument (e.g., a primary source).
 - Avoid long quotations if possible.

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Using Quotations

- Quote sparingly.
 - Structure the paper around *your* arguments.
 - Use evidence to back up your statements.
 - Don’t let quotations carry your argument.
 - Avoid “quilting.”
- Interpret all quotations.

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Using Quotations

- Use single quotes inside double quotes.
 - To quote single words, use double quotation marks: The term “justification” in this passage means vindication rather than acquittal.
 - For quotations within quotations, use single quotation marks within double quotation marks: N. T. Wright argues as follows: “Like ‘gospel’ itself, ‘Lord’ carries two apparently quite different meanings...”

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Using Quotations

- Know how to introduce quotations.
 - Formal quotations: independent clause followed by colon or comma.
Paul urged the Corinthians to focus on love: “Make love your aim” (1 Cor. 14:1).
 - In-line quotations: incorporate into a complete sentence.
Paul urged the Corinthians to “make love [their] aim” (1 Cor. 14:1).
 - Indirect quotation: change pronouns, verbs, etc. to fit your sentence; no quotation marks.
Paul urged the Corinthians to make love their aim (1 Cor. 14:1).
 - Remember to make complete sentences!

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Using Quotations

- Know how to conclude quotations.
 - In-line at end of sentence: end punctuation inside quotes, note number outside. Wright argues that “justification is never independent of the covenant setting.”¹
 - In-line in middle of sentence: comma inside quotes, colon or semicolon outside. Wright argues that “justification is never independent of the covenant setting”; it does not stand on its own.² Wright argues that “justification is never independent of the covenant setting,” but he does agree that it is forensic.²
 - Block quotation: No quotation marks, note after period.

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Grammar and Punctuation

- Possessives: it's vs. its (#1).
- Commas for items in a series (#2).
- Semicolon to join independent clauses (#5).
 - “Irenaeus made significant contributions to the theology of the early church, for example, he developed the theory of recapitulation.”
 - “Irenaeus made significant contributions to the theology of the early church; for example, he developed the theory of recapitulation.”

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Grammar and Punctuation

- Use a semicolon before “however.”
 - Add this to S&W #5: When the second clause is preceded by an adverb.
 - “Irenaeus made significant contributions to the theology of the early church; however, his salvation history approach was soon abandoned for more philosophical methods.”
- Note how to use colons (#7).

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Grammar and Punctuation

- Prepositions don't count in agreement (#9):
 - “The color of the cars was blue.”
- Dangling modifiers (#11):
 - “As the spirit of the love between the Father and the Son, Grenz holds that the Holy Spirit ‘is both deity and person’ (p. 374).”
 - “In order to be a person of the Godhead, I believe the Holy Spirit is equal in deity with the Father and Son (Mt. 28:19).”

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Grammar and Punctuation

- Put “only” with the word(s) it modifies.
 - He only wants to drive this car [not buy it].
 - He wants to drive only this car [not that one].
- Commonly misused words/phrases.
 - Comprise = include. (Never “is comprised of.”)
 - Imply = suggest (speaker); infer = deduce (hearer).
 - Shall vs. will = an outdated distinction?
 - Split infinitives only for emphasis (“to boldly go where no one has gone before”).
 - “They” as a singular pronoun?

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Using Footnotes

- When to use notes (footnotes, endnotes):
 - To document material you’ve borrowed.
 - To provide resources for further study.
 - To cite additional evidence.
 - To deal with side issues.
 - To argue with other scholars (carefully!).
- Follow the appropriate style manual closely.
 - Turabian with footnotes.
 - Number consecutively within each chapter.

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