

The Writing Center

A FREE Resource for Undergraduate Student Writers

Our friendly and enthusiastic peer tutors receive intensive training so that they can help you produce your best written work. Whether you're brainstorming ideas, outlining a paper, or proofreading a final draft, they can offer valuable suggestions and feedback.

Tutors can help with:

- Essays
- Proposals
- Résumés
- Short Stories
- Abstracts
- Lab Reports
- Research Papers
- Newsletter Articles
- Cover Letters

and more!

To make an appointment, visit us at:

writingcenter@mst.edu



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Building a Paper

By Freddy Ray Dugard

As a writing tutor, I've learned that by breaking an assignment down into four separate components, we can make the writing process easier. A simple analogy shows how this works: Writing is like constructing a building. With careful engineering, a building will be structurally sound and even visually pleasing. Likewise, with the right approach, a paper can be well-constructed and interesting.

Let's start from the beginning. To construct a building, we need a blueprint. When writing, an outline serves as a blueprint, providing a fundamental plan to communicate the purpose, content, and organization of the final product. Once we have a solid plan we can begin building!

To provide our skyscraper (or cathedral, or mansion—your choice) with strength and integrity, we need a solid base. A specific thesis statement can provide a strong foundation by fully addressing the assignment and clearly stating the writer's argument or main point. A strong thesis gives the reader the confidence to continue into the building.

The main door of our building is a strong opening sentence. The lobby is an introduction, providing specific background information about the topic. Just as a lobby often features a directory, so the introductory paragraph tells the reader what's ahead, stating the thesis or main

point, identifying the evidence for it, and indicating how that evidence is organized.

The reader then makes his way through the body of the paper, moving from body paragraph to the next much as one might climb a staircase from floor to floor. As he climbs, the reader sees the beams and other components that support the structure. These elements are the examples, support, and discussion. All are connected with the foundation, or thesis. Once we have constructed each floor, we can finally install the roof.

Just as a roof is the capstone of an entire structure, so the conclusion is the finishing element of a paper. It covers the whole building summing up the argument. From the roof, one often has a striking view, a new and often unfamiliar perspective. In much the same way, the conclusion may leave the reader with a particularly striking illustration, an especially powerful quote, or a new perspective on an image used in the introduction. But remember: The thesis statement—our foundation—now lies far below. There's no need to mention it again. From here, we concentrate on the building as a whole.

Now we have a finished structure that stands tall and solid. As though selecting windows, color bricks, and other aesthetic details, we can focus on word choice, style, tone, and other elements to create an architectural masterpiece.

MAY 7TH IS WRITE TILL MIDNIGHT

By Kate Dennis

We've all been there: You have a writing assignment due at the end of the year, and you put it off in favor of "more important" work. Your "Things To Do" list for the assignment has become a list of "Things You Forgot To Do." Luckily, the Writing Center can help. On Wednesday, May 7th, at our Write Till Midnight event, tutors will be available from 10:00am to—you guessed it—midnight.

The Writing Center's longest work day of the semester, Write Till Midnight attracts a number of students for whom it is convenient, or even necessary, to work late into the night. This event gives students a last-minute opportunity to wrap up an essay, report, or other document, with a little guidance from a Writing Center tutor.

The tutors strive to make Write Till Midnight sessions as productive as regularly scheduled appointments, but during Write Till Midnight, the Writing Center also creates a relaxed atmosphere on this otherwise hectic night. Refreshments are provided, including snacks and drinks, to fuel the late-night revision. Walk-ins are welcome, and additional writing tutors are on duty to make sure as many students as possible get the help they need.

Whether you've procrastinated on a paper or you just work well under the pressure of late-night writing, let us help you finish the semester with a solid assignment and the confidence that comes from a swig of soda and a slice of pizza.



From Rough to Ready: Revising Your Paper

Questions you can ask yourself to help you proofread and revise your paper step by step.

By Sarah Padgett

We all know that writing is an iterative process. We write, then rewrite, and rewrite again. But how do you know when that rough draft is polished enough? When is your paper complete? Proofreading and revision can seem daunting, but you can meet the challenge with a methodical approach that focuses on a series of key questions.

The introductory paragraph is the most important element of your paper because it determines the reader's first impression. Ask yourself: Does the introduction clearly state your thesis or main point? Does it indicate how you will support your point? Have you provided necessary background information? Finally, think about the tone of your introduction: Does it suit the paper's purpose? Is it formal or conversational? Flippant or serious? Enthusiastic or dismissive? What words or phrases create this tone? You may need to read your introduction several times, asking yourself each question separately.

From your introduction, move to the body of your paper, and address the organization of your argument or

analysis. First, did you structure your argument logically? Have you grouped related material into paragraphs? Does each paragraph begin with a clear topic sentence that introduces your reader to the contents of the paragraph? For each paragraph, have you supplied enough details, examples, statistics, anecdotes, or other support to make your main point? Do transition sentences link your paragraphs together?

To double check your organization, consider this: If you printed each paragraph on a separate page and mixed up the pages, could a reader put them in the right order based on content, topic sentences, and transitions?

Now that you've reviewed introduction, tone, and organization, you can address word usage, style, and mechanics. Read the paper aloud, looking for one specific type of mistake at a time. Begin with sentence structure. Are your sentences too long and complicated? Or are they too simple and choppy? Varying your sentence structure increases readability. Another style issue to consider is your use of passive versus

active voice. For example, avoid passive voice except when writing lab reports because active voice provides greater clarity. To ensure that your paper is clear and accessible, avoid jargon, slang, clichés, and repeated use of the same word. Look for ways to increase your use of lively verbs instead of relying heavily on forms of the verb "to be." The verb *to be* has its place, but more exciting, specific verbs can often replace it. Finally, look for typographical errors, including spelling errors, missing words, punctuation

“How do you know when a rough draft is polished enough?”

problems, subject-verb agreement issues, and so on. These may not affect your content or weaken your argument, but they leave a poor impression and prevent you from presenting your best work.

A fine line divides sufficient revision from obsession over every sentence, and you may have to write a few papers to find the best balance for you. The effort to revise, however, will pay off when your audience focuses on your argument instead of becoming confused or distracted by weak writing.



SUMMER TUTORING AVAILABLE

Tutoring will be available during both summer sessions. If you're in Rolla this summer and you need help with an assignment, a résumé, a cover letter, or any other document, we'll be happy to help. Check our website for opening hours.

Conquering the Blank Page

By Lara Edwards

Every piece of writing, from emails to novels, begins as a blank page. Many documents spend a lot of time this way while their authors stare with growing frustration at the screen or paper. For many writers, the most difficult part of even the easiest writing assignment is getting started. Some encounter this problem only occasionally; others, like myself, experience it regularly. But there's an easy way to overcome this problem.

The first step is to be sure that your writer's block isn't rooted in confusion about the assignment. Ask yourself: How would you explain the assignment to someone else? If you're not sure, you'll need to get some clarification from your

professor. You can also bring a copy of the prompt to the Writing Center and discuss it with a tutor. If you understand the assignment, but you're still stuck with a blank page, it's time for step two.

The second step is "free-writing." Think about the goal or topic, and write down every word, phrase, or sentence that pops into your head. Don't worry about whether your words are relevant or logical. And forget about organization and neatness. The idea is to get something—anything—down on paper because it's easier to revise than to start from scratch. Keep writing until you have enough on paper to begin organizing. Just half a page is often enough to start, and then you can go on to step three.

Reflect on what you've written. What does your free-writing say about the topic and your perspective on it? Why were these things so important that they popped into your head? Reconsider the goals or the prompt. How could the material in your free-writing be adapted to address them? Your answers to these questions can be the basis for a thesis and outline.

Next, give yourself a pat on the back: you have conquered the blank page and started writing! I have confidence in this method because I used it to write this article, but if you run into trouble during this or any other part of the writing process, we at the Writing Center are always willing to help.



We heard you!

You've asked for more privacy and fewer distractions, and we're making it happen! This summer, the Writing Center will get a makeover. New cubicles will provide greater separation between tutoring sessions, creating a quieter environment. Check out our new look this fall!



Meet Our New Tutors

Introductions by Kirsten Kelly



During the past Fall semester, the Writing Center staff welcomed five new tutors to the team. These newcomers were kind enough to share a bit of information about themselves.



Kate Dennis is a sophomore in Mechanical Engineering from Eudora, Kansas, whose favorite word is *effervescence*. Kate and her sisters speak Spanish to each other so her parents will not understand their conversations, and her favorite Beatle is Pete Best. Some of Kate's favorite times at the Writing Center were on Wednesday nights in fall semester when she worked with veteran tutors Kirsten Kelly and Sherry Smith. Her time in the Writing Center has taught her how to strengthen her own writing, and her favorite part of writing is getting to read different opinions. If she were not a Mechanical Engineer, Kate would be a Harry Potter Expert.



Joel Bierbaum hails from St. Louis. He is a junior in Computer Engineering. Joel prefers fantasy literature to science fiction because science fiction is too real. His favorite word is *lingweenie*, which he claims is a person incapable of producing neologisms. If he couldn't be a computer engineer, he would be a CIA Agent. Joel's favorite Disney movie is *Hercules*, and if he were a dinosaur, he would be a Therizinosaurus. His favorite part of writing is the opportunity to think more deeply about a subject, and his time as a tutor has taught him to be more patient with the writing process.

"Every tutor brings a new perspective to the Writing Center, and the five newest additions are no exception."



Emily Puleo is also from St. Louis. She is a junior in biochemistry who prefers fantasy literature to science fiction because magic beats science any day. Her favorite Disney movie is *Frozen*, and her favorite Beatle is John Lennon. She loves karaoke, and if Emily were a dinosaur, she would be an Apatosaurus, like Little Foot. Emily most enjoys the beauty of different forms of writing, and as a tutor she has learned that a person has to want to learn in order to be taught.



Cori Hatley is a civil engineering major in her third year at S&T. Cori was a military child who is most recently from Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Her favorite Disney movie is *The Lion King*, and her favorite soup is tomato basil with grilled cheese on the side. If Cori were not a civil engineer, she would be either a highly skilled nail designer or a high-altitude ball point pen repairer. As a tutor, Cori has truly been able to appreciate the diversity of S&T's campus, and her favorite part of writing is the ability to affect readers without speaking to them.



Tara Langan is a sophomore in mechanical engineering from St. Louis. Tara is always down for karaoke. Her favorite Disney movie is *Lion King 1½*, and her favorite word is *garbanzo*. The funniest times that Tara has at the Writing Center are those when she works with Freddy Ray Dugard. Her favorite part of writing is being able to organize her thoughts better, and as a tutor she has learned how to stay positive. If Tara were not a mechanical engineer, she would be an artist.

Tutors:

Joel Bierbaum
Computer Engineering

Kate Dennis
Mechanical Engineering

Freddy Ray Dugard
Mechanical Engineering

Lara Edwards
Biological Sciences

Cori Hatley
Civil Engineering

Arch Kelley
Computer Science

Kirsten Kelly
Biological Sciences

Leann Krieger
Electrical Engineering

Tara Langan
Mechanical Engineering

Sarah Padgett
Civil Engineering

Emily Puleo
Biochemistry

Sherry Smith
English

Natasha Stoneking
Psychology

Administrative Staff:

Dr. Kate Drowne
Director

Jeanine Bruening
Assistant Director

Brandi Washburn
Senior Secretary

Writing Center



Beyond Summary: How to Analyze a Text

By *Natasha Stoneking*

Many different strategies can be used to examine a text, including comparison, application to outside situations, evaluation, and synthesis. Summary and analysis are two relatively simple strategies that students are often called upon to use in college essays, so it is important to know the difference between them. In a general sense, a summary shortens a written work, while an analysis involves new ideas.

A summary condenses a passage while preserving the central details. Its purpose is usually to give readers enough background to understand an accompanying analysis. Therefore, the details emphasized in a summary depend on the focus of the analysis.

An analysis examines all or part of a text to develop a new or independent conclusion. It may focus on the central features of a text (e.g., an author's thesis or main point) or on subordinate points (e.g., how the author uses a particular symbol or image). An analysis is valid as long as it interprets the text correctly and is well supported with details from the text. Sometimes, radically opposing arguments can produce different analyses of the same document. The examples below illustrate the difference between summary and analysis and demonstrate the variation possible in analyses.

Original Text

Every time Johnny took a step onto the sidewalk in his suburban neighborhood, he shuddered. He knew that under exactly two layers of concrete was the diffuse skeleton of his late sworn enemy. He wondered, feet sweating, why Jane had to put it there (so far, he had not given into the temptation to wonder *how*—that

way lay madness). Why couldn't she have just let the garbage men take it away? Why couldn't she have ground it up into fertilizer? Wouldn't the bones go for good money in China? As grateful as he was to her, he couldn't help but wonder if it was spite that led her to go through so much trouble. Did she think that it would make him feel confident, walking over the shattered, defeated minerals that were once a scaffold for evil? Or did she want to force him to finally face this thing that made his Wednesdays a living hell?

Summary

When Johnny walks on his neighborhood sidewalk, he is anxious about the fractured skeleton of his dead enemy buried in the concrete. Jane put the skeleton there, but Johnny does not know how or why.

Analysis #1

Johnny is a coward because his enemy is dead and harmless, but he still worries about the skeleton. When walking over the bones, he shudders, his feet sweat, and he obsesses over alternative places for the skeleton. However, since the skeleton cannot hurt Johnny, he must be an especially fearful person.

Analysis #2

Johnny's enemy was terrifying, and Johnny has the right to be afraid of it. It created a "living hell" for Johnny on a weekly basis, its bones are described as a "scaffold for evil," and Johnny is still scared of it even though it is dead.

How Does Tutoring Work? What to Expect When You Visit the Writing Center

By *Leann Krieger*

Trying new things can be nerve-racking, but your first visit to the Writing Center doesn't have to be! Here's everything you need to know to make your visit successful.

The first step is to make an appointment. You can visit the Writing Center's website to make an appointment online anytime, or call the Writing Center during business hours. We also accommodate walk-ins whenever we can, but if you don't have an appointment, you may have to wait, and if we're busy you may not be able to see a tutor at all.

When you get to the Writing Center, you will be assigned to a peer tutor. After some quick paperwork (which will be sent to your professor to verify your visit), you and the tutor can get started.

Although every tutoring session is

different, your visit will follow some standard procedures. Your tutor will start by asking you if you have any questions about the assignment. Next, you'll read your paper aloud. Some students are nervous about this step, but it's a great tool to catch errors that you can miss when reading a paper to yourself. Reading aloud is helpful to both you and the tutor, and we recommend it even when editing your papers by yourself.

Your tutor will spend most of the session asking you questions to help you see your work from a reader's perspective and giving advice to help you improve both your paper and your writing skills.

Even if you haven't written anything yet, the tutor can help by explaining the goals of the assignment and

helping you brainstorm or outline.

A few things to keep in mind before your visit: Try to make the most of your session; no matter why you are here, you can gain a lot. Bring any materials that might be useful for the session, including anything you've already written. The prompt is especially important. The Writing Center tries to keep up-to-date prompts on hand, but sometimes prompts are not available to us. Finally, prepare for your appointment by thinking about questions you want to ask the tutor.

A Writing Center appointment is nothing to worry about. With a little preparation and a positive attitude, your session will be an enriching experience that can make you a better writer. We'd be happy to have you visit!