

# **How to Write a Paper**

**- Some Guidelines**

# Introduction

## Reasons for writing (term) papers

- Disseminate knowledge
- Learn more about the subject
- Think more deeply about a topic
- Large number of real-world skills developed
  - Data collection
  - Data assimilation
  - Critical analysis
  - Interpretation
  - Exposition
  - The written word is critical in private, government and military sectors of society

It is worth doing well

Frequently a large weighting in course grades

Frequent concern to employers

## Preamble

- Read, read, read
- The very best way to learn to write well is to read well-written articles
- Pick a favorite paper, similar to your's in topic and style, and use it as a model.
- Watch out for plagiarism, real and accidental, make appropriate use of citations

## I. Collecting Information

- Opinions are only worthwhile if they are backed up by facts and arguments.
- Collect information
- Look at the work and opinions others
- Look at your textbook but require much more
- Library as a resource – dendritic approach, be careful to select the best branches
- Pitfalls of the internet

## II. Recording Information

- Record and review before and during writing
  - Mark source with pencils or highlighting pens – not recommended
  - 3"x5" index cards, note information and source (carry with you at all times)
  - Summarize a chapter/section on sheet

### III. Thinking About the Topic

- After you have read as much as you need, DO NOT just start to write.
- Think about what you have read, mull over it on a walk, or discuss it with friends.

*The professor already knows about what you are writing (!?) and is looking to see how well you assimilate, understand and critically analyze the topic. It is no use at all to just present your reading notes stuck between an introduction and a conclusion.*

Thinking about it is the most important stage of writing a paper.

## IV. The Plan

- Sketch out on paper several ways of presenting your topic and your thoughts.
  - Connected argument
  - Series of related headings
  - State, prove and defend a *thesis*.

You **must** always write out a plan. It will help you to be clearer both in papers and in tests. It is in fact another way of thinking about your topic.

 **Storyboard**

## V. Writing and Editing

- You cannot expect to just write out a paper and hand it in.
- Typo's alone will demand at least one re-type.
- WRITE - keeping an eye on your paper plan. Do not worry about spelling and grammar. Write, write, write, --- rubbish can be sorted out later/
- WRITING and EDITING are different skills.
- EDIT (sort out rubbish) – rearrange, rewrite, correct spelling and grammar, watch style.

Almost everybody thinks that what they are writing is bad at the time they first write it: your aim is to find a way around this mental block. Storyboarding really helps.

## **VI. Finishing Touches**

- Appearance matters
- Use the journal style
- Eliminate spelling and grammatical errors
- Check references, forward and backward
- Type the paper cleanly

Vernon Booth

“Communicating in Science: Writing a Scientific Paper and  
Speaking at Scientific Meetings (2nd Edition)”