GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR WRITING ESSAYS

The strength of your paper is not only derived from your ability to respond to the assigned essay question or "prompt", but also from how clearly and effectively you communicate your ideas in writing. Consider how you will use information from your sources and specific references to your readings to support the ideas that you are presenting and the position that you are putting forth. In order to do this well, bear in mind that university level and academic essays in general are thesis driven and evidence based.

Introduction: The introduction paragraph typically provides background and context to the topic that you are writing about. The kind of information that is required depends on the topic of the paper itself. Consider what the reader needs to know so that they can understand the thesis statement and the ideas that follow. You might want to define or explain a key term or concept, provide a broader framework for discussion, or identify the different sides of a particular controversy.

Thesis: The thesis statement expresses the "main message" of your paper. It generally comes at the end of your introduction, and it clarifies for the reader the point and purpose of your essay. It provides focus to the topic and prepares your reader for what follows. The thesis statement makes a contract with the audience. The author promises in a thesis statement to support this claim and only this claim. It is the most important sentence in your paper.

Paragraphs: You should divide your ideas into paragraphs that are clearly related to your thesis and which develop your point in a logical way. If you tend to "just write" then once you have done getting your thoughts down on paper, you should then review your structure to think about how best to organize or arrange your paragraphs and ensure that the ideas in your paragraphs are connected so that your reader is able to follow the logical sequence of your ideas. Strong paragraphs are characterized by their focus, adequate development and flow. Each paragraph should have unity – in other words, a focus and controlled idea – often presented in the form of a topic sentence which you use to control what you are saying and ensure that each of the points that you are making are related to that point. You develop your paragraphs by providing support – evidence, examples, analysis. These are linked together using transitional phrases and expressions. Remember that transitional phrases are not interchangeable. Overall, you should think about how your paragraphs relate to and connect with one another and the order of your points as you present them.

Citations: Whenever you include information from a reading or source, you need to clearly indicate where the material has come from. This is done using in-text citations. How you cite a source depends on what you say about it in the sentence preceding it. If you are quoting from a passage from a book, an online article, or a line from a poem then you might want to "introduce" the title or the author in the "lead in." If you do this, then you only need to provide the page number [or line number for poems] in parenthesis at the end of the quote. If you do not mention the author’s name or title of the article, then you should provide this in a parenthetical citation. Usually, you only quote when necessary – when there is something specific about the language or words used that is central to your discussion and the point you are making; otherwise, you should paraphrase or summarize the point and include a citation to indicate that it is not your own idea. Be sure to use the format required by your professor consistently throughout your paper and provide a list of the sources you have used in your Works Cited [if in MLA] or your References [if in APA] at the end of your paper.

Conclusions: Conclusions typically sum up the main ideas presented. While the introduction moves from the general to the specific, your conclusion can often move from the specific to the general. If there are any broader issues and relevant contexts that are directly related to what you have just been discussing, then indicate what those are.
Specific requirements as assigned by your professor:

- Word count/number of pages [double spaced]
- Citation style

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[http://pacs.ay.edu/wcconferencing/](http://pacs.ay.edu/wcconferencing/)