

Writing at the college level involves new expectations that may require new strategies. While specific genres of writing have distinct purposes, college writing helps you develop skills such as thinking critically, communicating professionally, and articulating yourself well. Although common writing expectations and strategies are listed below, always follow assignment guidelines and write with your audience in mind.

General College Writing Expectations

Writing as a college student can seem daunting, but drawing on your previous writing experience and relying on instructors and campus resources can help to ease the transition. Although writing assignments may differ, many have similar expectations to those listed below.

- **Understand what the assignment is asking.** Assignment guidelines can be confusing or lengthy, and reading carefully and slowly can help to make sense of them.
- **Refer to assignment guidelines,** rubrics, and class policies for questions about the assignment.
- Learn the **conventions of your discipline,** including genre, audience, citation style, and AI policies. Notice the writing style used in your field, then practice using it in your assignments.
- **Ask questions** of instructors, writing center tutors, and librarians.
- Present **clear, coherent ideas.** Consider if a reader would understand what you intend to say.
- Maintain a **professional tone** appropriate for your audience and their needs.
- Improve **writing mechanics,** such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Writing mechanics can be complicated, but your skills can improve with practice.
- **Read feedback** on your assignments, and incorporate those suggestions into your future work.

Refining Your Writing Skills

Using effective strategies when approaching writing assignments can help you mitigate worries, strengthen writing skills, increase confidence, and improve writing efficiency.

- **Start assignments early** to ensure you have ample time to pace your work.
- Break projects into **smaller, manageable tasks;** set reasonable and achievable goals.
- **Organize your work** by using consistent note-taking techniques, such as highlighting, color-coding, or annotating. Experiment with different ways to accomplish your writing assignments, and keep track of any requirements, deadlines, and rubrics.
- **Join a study group** to encourage accountability, collaborate with others, and receive support.
- Regulate your **time and energy** for writing. One part of an assignment may require more effort than another part. Allocate your energy mindfully to help make writing sessions more productive.
- Set aside time for both **writing and self-care.** Scheduling time to work and take breaks can improve your writing capacity and save you time in the long run.
- **Create an environment** for your writing needs. Consider different times, locations, and comforts that work for you (e.g., morning, evening; library, bedroom; snacks, lighting).
- Approach writing assignments with a **positive and confident attitude.** Remember that college work is centered on continual learning, and the writing process will have ups and downs.
- Use **campus resources and opportunities.** Consult with peers, talk with instructors or advisors, explore library services (in-person and online), and attend university workshops.

Developing Your Writing Process

College writing assignments can be complex, and assignments can build on each other within a course. It may also involve in-depth academic research. Create and maintain a personal writing process to organize your writing, research, and personal time.

- **Modify a basic writing process** to fit your needs. Consider the following **sample writing process**:
 - **Prewriting**: Understand the assignment requirements and identify your audience and tone. Brainstorm potential topics to expand on when writing later.
 - **Outlining**: Determine your main point for the writing assignment. Create sections with brief notes and develop your thoughts from prewriting.
 - **Drafting**: Elaborate on your outline and form sentences or paragraphs. Write about your thoughts and arguments in detail. If needed, add sources by using quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.
 - **Revising**: Read your draft and adjust it to clarify points and strengthen the argument.
 - **Editing**: Check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Change the format according to a style guide, example, or template.
- **Writing processes are cyclical and take time**. The first draft is not your final draft. Steps such as drafting and revising often occur more than once.
- **Read the assignment guidelines** carefully, and ask your professor about research requirements such as the number and type of sources required (e.g., primary, popular, peer-reviewed, etc.).
- Adjust your research topic to **fit the requirements** of the assignment. Narrow or broaden your topic by considering timeframes, locations, demographics, and contemporary issues.
- **Identify your audience** and adapt to their level of familiarity with your topic. Determine whether terms and concepts need to be explained. Your audience determine your tone or style.
- Identify **patterns of feedback** you receive from instructors, peers, or writing consultants. Use that feedback (both positive and negative) to inform your future writing.
- **Avoid plagiarism** by tracking and citing sources using your assigned citation style.
- Contribute to a larger **academic conversation** by connecting your ideas to sources through summary, analysis, and synthesis.
- Use **library resources** such as the physical library, online academic databases, and library research tutorials to become familiar with your field of study and help you identify relevant, credible sources to incorporate in your writing.
- Chat with a **research librarian** or meet with a **writing center consultant** for help finding, reading, and writing with sources.
- Learn how **AI can facilitate or frustrate your writing and learning processes**. Understand AI policies and expectations as outlined by your instructor, department, and university. AI policies and expectations may vary by instructor or program.
- Know that strengthening your **digital literacy, information literacy, and academic reading skills** will help you develop as a college-level writer.

As a college writer, you will continually grow and improve. College is a learning environment. Getting support from others can ease anxiety and build your confidence as a writer. If you feel overwhelmed, remember that you are in college to learn, and faculty, peers and the Writing Center are here to help.