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ENC 1101/2

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ENC Essay Writing Guidelines

What separates a passing paper from a not passing paper in ENC courses is the existence of an argument. While citation, grammar, evidence, and organization are all important, argument is the most important part of an ENC paper.

To formulate an **argument**, a writer takes a position on an issue and provides reasons that support that position. An argument does not have to be original (something that has never been thought before) but it should be the product of your thoughts and ideas. Not all statements are arguable and thus not all statements are issues.

* A triangle is a shape consisting of three edges.

This is a general statement of knowledge, not an issue or thesis or argument (though it probably *was* an argument when the triangle was first formulated as a geometric shape). This statement cannot be disagreed with because it is a mathematical fact.

* The Chicago Cubs won the 2016 World Series.

This is an established fact and is not arguable, so it is neither an issue nor a thesis nor an

argument. There is no issue at stake because it is an established fact, not a matter up for debate. However, a writer could make an argument as to why and how they won that particular World Series.

* Should the city of Coral Gables ban grocery stores from handing out plastic bags?

This is an issue because one can take a side in answering the question. It is not an

argument or thesis. Arguments and theses never take the form of a question but posing questions and answering them can lead to an argument that is expressed in a thesis.

A position must take a side. A position that takes both sides on an issue is not a position.

* Life is both difficult and easy because you can connect with other people but you are often stressed out by your responsibilities to them.

This position is not clear because it is on both sides of the issue. So this is not an argument nor is it a thesis.

A **thesis statement** sums up the argument of your paper. The thesis consists of your position and reasons that support it. Think of your paper as a movie and your thesis as the trailer. The trailer of the movie highlights what will happen in the movie. It does not show everything but rather it touches on issues of theme, tone, plot, etc. Likewise, your thesis statement should briefly summarize what your paper will *do*.

* Study abroad should be required for American undergraduates.

This is a position on an issue. The issue is whether study abroad should be required for American undergraduates. The position here is affirmative.

* Study abroad should be required for American undergraduates because I studied abroad in my junior year and I learned a lot and partied hard.

This is a position but not a thesis because the reasons are tied to individual experience and *not* to facts, reasons, or topics related to the issue. This does not mean that individual experiences cannot be used as evidence in a paper. It does mean that individual experience should not be framed directly as a reason supporting a thesis.

* Study abroad should be required for American undergraduates because it promotes cultural understanding and helps students find jobs in an era of globalization. Study abroad also helps shy students to make friends because it forces introverted students to interact with their peers and people in the host country.

This is a thesis because the writer takes a position and then supports it with reasons that make sense. Notice that each of the reasons are arguable. This means that you can disagree with literally everything in this thesis statement. That is what shows that it is an argument. Notice also that this thesis statement is two sentences long. A thesis statement does not have to be a single sentence.

The argument based papers for this class should include a header, title, introduction, body paragraphs, a conclusion, and a works cited section. Reflection and response assignments should include a header, title, and body paragraphs. The title for reflection and response assignments do not need to be creative. Because reflection and response assignments are not argument based, an introduction and conclusion are not necessary, nor is a works cited page. In accordance with MLA format each page should be numbered in the top right corner, and your last name should go before the page number. All written assignments should follow MLA format in terms of headers, page numbers, and margins.

The **header** identifies the paper and makes it easy for the instructor (and for you) to organize and file it. The header should be in the top left side of the first page of your paper. It has four components:

Your Name

Your Instructor’s Name

Course title and section

Date you turned in the assignment

For the instructor’s name, just the last name is fine and there is no need to include Dr. or Professor because I am neither. The header should be singled spaced while the rest of the paper should be double spaced.

The **title** of your paper should be centered on the page. The title should not be *just* a replication of a term used by one of the authors you are citing. However, that does not mean that a title cannot use a term invented by the author(s) cited in your paper.

* Emerging Adulthood

This is a term from Henig’s essay “What Is It About 20-somethings?” and is by itself not

a proper title because it just replicates the term found in the essay. A title should give some indication of the writer’s position on the issue.

* Emerging Adulthood is Cultural and Synthetic, Not Biological and Real

This is a title because the writer expresses some opinion on emerging adulthood (which is

the subject of the prompt “is emerging adulthood a real life stage?”). There is not enough room in a title to express the writer’s full argument but there is enough room to express the writer’s position on the issue. Titles can be questions but it is usually easier to make them definitive statements because it is easier for a writer to show his or her position by declaring something as opposed to posing a question. Titles should *never* be questions that are merely the restatement of the writing prompt. The instructor enjoys reading creative and interesting titles because a good title can preface a writer’s style and opinions on the topic discussed in the prompt. Also, in future writing situations, a clever title can draw attention to the paper and encourage others to keep reading even if they are not obligated to (unlike your first-year composition instructor).

The **works cited** section does not need to be on a separate page. It should follow your conclusion and be separated from the end of your conclusion by at least one line. The purpose of a works cited section is to allow the reader to reference the sources cited in your work. Again, this is a conceit in first-year writing because the instructor will know the sources that you cite because the instructor assigned them (unless you use outside sources of your own). However, in ENC 1102, there is a requirement to use outside sources that the writer finds on his or her own, so the instructor may not be familiar with the sources cited. In any case, it is useful to get practice in knowing how to cite evidence even in ENC 1101 because you will be expected to know how to do it in ENC 1102 and in more advanced writing courses in your major. Also, your grade on a paper depends partially on correctness in citation.

The works cited section should begin with a centered line with “Works Cited” (obviously without the quotation marks). The entries should be listed alphabetically (by the author’s last name) on the left margin. If an entry extends beyond one space, the second line of that entry should be indented one space to the right (which can be done by pressing the tab key once).

The Purdue University Online Writing Lab website contains information on how to cite sources and format works cited pages for multiple style formats (MLA, APA, Chicago style, etc.) ENC courses use MLA format. The Purdue OWL website is <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>.

Further information about citation can also be found in the Hacker guide mentioned in your syllabus. Both the website and the Hacker guide also discuss how to cite sources intext, which is discussed below in the textual evidence section.

An **introduction** does two things: it frames the issue within a wider context and it tells the reader what the writer’s argument will be.

* Study abroad is not particularly common for undergraduate students. This has caused concern among university administrators and employers that work in global industries. Administrators want to spread the brand of their college abroad and use study abroad to show off the talents of their students. Employers that work in industries affected by globalization like banking, information technology, and translation (to name a few) are concerned by the lack of international experience of college graduates and see increasing study abroad as a means of resolving this issue. Study abroad should be required for American undergraduates because it promotes cultural understanding and helps students find jobs in an era of globalization. Requiring study abroad would also be a great way for colleges to promote themselves abroad and encourage international students to apply.

The first sentences frame the writing prompt (“should study abroad be required for

American undergraduates?”) as a problem. This is a useful strategy because it legitimizes your writing by drawing attention to an issue that needs to be dealt with. When you pose a problem and address it in your paper, it gives you the illusion of authority as someone who can solve that problem. This is a conceit. Obviously, you won’t solve that problem (not during this class at least). Nevertheless, it can be useful to ask the following questions when composing your introduction.

* Who cares about this issue?
* What are the various sides to this issue?
* If my view of this issue is right, so what? What happens? Who is affected?
* Why is this issue important? Why is it an issue?
* What happens if no one pays attention to resolving this issue?
* Who are the major players involved in this issue?
* What are the major texts involved in this issue and what do they argue? (for this class “major texts” means the ones assigned by the instructor for each paper prompt)

It is also useful to introduce the paper topic to the reader. Even though this is not necessary because your paper will most likely only be read by your instructor, this is still a useful practice that is worth doing. First-year composition is about preparing students for their writing lives in academic and professional contexts. In such contexts, your readers may not know the answers to the above questions. They also may not care. Your writing must make them care. This is particularly true when writing in a non-academic context.

It is fine if your *reason* for writing these papers is to get a good grade so that you can move on in college. However, your *justification* for writing must be stronger than that. This will prepare you for writing to an audience that is not forced to read your work and give you graded feedback; an audience, in other words, unlike your first-year composition instructor. You should use this class as an opportunity to *invent* an audience that will likely not need to be invented in your further academic and (especially) professional writing lives.

Your introduction should include your thesis, whether it is a single sentence or more than one sentence. Where you place your thesis within the introduction is up to you. However, sometimes it makes a stronger effect on the reader if they know the context of the issue (which you cover by answering the above questions) *before* they get to your argument. The most common way to write an introduction paragraph in first-year composition is to start with context and end with your thesis as the last sentence or sentences of the paragraph.

The **body paragraphs** of your paper contain the evidence for your claims. Evidence can be either textual or anecdotal.

**Textual evidence** is drawing from texts that should relate to the topic of your paper. Whether they were assigned as class readings or not, the texts you use should complicate, support, or even go against your position. The texts you choose should have something to say (figuratively speaking) about your argument and the writing prompt. Texts, in this context, does not only mean written texts but any sort of text or item of media that can be analyzed – movies, TV shows, music albums, paintings, buildings, websites, etc.

Remember to always cite your sources when you use textual evidence using MLA format to avoid plagiarism. You can cite your sources by either **paraphrasing** or **quoting**. When quoting, textual evidence must be introduced by referring to the author at either the beginning or the end of the sentence. This is not necessary for paraphrasing, but in both forms of textual evidence there should be a parenthetical after the quote and before the period ending the sentence. There should not be freestanding sentences that are pure quotation in your paper.

The benefit of paraphrasing is that it frees up more space in your paper to formulate your argument because you can summarize what a source says in your own words. Paraphrasing only makes sense if you can summarize the source in fewer words as compared to quoting. Therefore, if you want to use a short sentence from a source for textual evidence in a paper, it makes sense to quote, and if you want to use a longer sentence for textual evidence in a paper, it makes sense to paraphrase. No matter whether you paraphrase or quote a source, you should devote the following sentence or two to explaining the source’s idea(s) and showing how it fits into your argument. You should do this even if you disagree with the source and you are using the textual evidence as part of a counterargument.

* Aristotle addresses the potential to abuse rhetoric by stating “and even if someone who misuses this sort of verbal capacity might do the greatest possible damage, this is a problem common to all good things except virtue and applies particularly to the most advantageous, such as strength, health, wealth, and strategic expertise – if one used these well one might do the greatest possible good and if badly the greatest possible harm” (Aristotle 69).

This is a successful example of a quotation because the author is introduced and the

quotation ends with a parenthetical including the author’s name and page number from the book that the quote is taken from[[1]](#endnote-1). Here the introduction precedes the quote. But sometimes it is better, particularly with shorter quotes, to start with the quote and follow with the introduction or framing or acknowledgment of who you are quoting. The point is that you should not simply “drop in” quotes as separate sentences without giving indication that you are quoting *even if* you still include quotation marks and a parenthetical. If you quote first and introduce later you can place the parenthetical at the end of the quote or at the end of the sentence after your introduction of the quote.

* Aristotle addresses the potential to abuse rhetoric by arguing that anything good can be abused (except virtue) meaning that good things can cause great benefits when used well but can also cause great harm when used badly (Aristotle 69).

This is a paraphrase of the previous quote. Notice that it is shorter than the quote; the

paraphrase contains only 37 words, including the framing of the author, while the quotation contains 71 words, including the framing of the author. In this case, the paraphrase summarizes succinctly Aristotle’s point about how almost anything can be used for the wrong purposes. However, the paraphrase omits Aristotle’s comments on the sorts of people with qualities that are particularly prone to abusing seemingly good things (“the most advantageous, such as strength, health, wealth, and strategic expertise”). If these sorts of details are important for your paper, it is probably better to either include them in the paraphrase or to just quote all or part of Aristotle’s ideas on this subject.

* Aristotle addresses the potential to abuse rhetoric by arguing that anything good can be abused (except virtue) meaning that good things can cause great benefits when used well but can also cause great harm when used badly, particularly when dealing with people that are “the most advantageous” and or have “strength, health, wealth, and strategic expertise” (Aristotle 69).

This is a blending of both paraphrasing and quoting. It is longer than the paraphrasing at 56 words, but it is still shorter than the quotation, even though that word count includes the introduction of the author. The point is that there is flexibility in incorporating textual evidence into your paper, as most of the time either a quotation or paraphrase or a combination of both in the same sentence can be appropriate.

One other important part of textual evidence is always using the present tense when addressing the ideas of others, even in the case of authors who have been long dead like Aristotle. The point of using present tense is to acknowledge that the fixed meaning of a text is never settled, even for a text like Aristotle’s *The Art of Rhetoric* (from which the previous quote is taken) which has been debated by scholars for centuries. There is no fixed meaning of any text, meaning that you should consider these texts as part of a conversation, an ongoing conversation, that you are contributing to. To state that s/he argue*d* (instead of argue*s*) in whatever text is to hint that your formulation of their argument in the text is final and fixed.

**Anecdotal evidence** is personal examples that work best when the writer uses 1st person voice. The point of an anecdote, in a first-year composition paper, is to show how an argument makes sense in a realistic, everyday scenario. Personal observations, conversations, or even experiences count as examples that support your argument. In contrast to textual evidence, which should always use the present tense, anecdotal evidence works well regardless of the tense used, whether past or present or future.

For purposes of writing papers, it is not possible for the instructor to verify whether anecdotes actually happened to the writer, or whether they are products of the writer’s imagination. This is not an important issue. However, fictitious examples or anecdotes should make sense and should represent reality even if they are imaginary.

The number of body paragraphs is up to the writer. Generally it is advisable to only discuss one point or topic in a single body paragraph.

Another component of a successful paper that is found in a body paragraph is a counterargument. A **counterargument** is a concession made by the writer to an alternative view of the issue. Rhetoric suggests that truth is rarely evident, but that a persuasive text does not have to be truthful. Because we rarely know the truth about a given matter, it is not surprising that we have multiple, conflicting views of it.

A successful counterargument will incorporate an alternative view of the issue while showing why that view is misguided or wrong. It is a delicate balance. If a writer shows too much sympathy for the position of the opposition (as shown in the counterargument), it will compromise his or her faith in his or her argument. The trick is to be fair to the other side while not doubting for a second that you are right and that they are wrong. Your own word is not enough to persuade your audience that your view is the right one and their view is the wrong one. You must show how your view more faithfully adheres to the truth than theirs does (or at least is more persuasive than theirs is) by using both types of evidence. Using a counterargument increases your persuasiveness because it shows the audience that you understand the opposing view and that you are not taking your position for granted as true.

The **conclusion** of a paper first restates the argument and then at least attempts to answer the following questions:

* What should be done next about this issue?
* Who should take action about this issue and in what ways?
* What could happen if we ignore this issue?
* What could happen if we accept a different view of this issue?

As with the introduction, imagine that you are an expert on the topic you are writing

about. What sort of things would you recommend in order to deal with the problem you explored in your paper? Those suggestions belong in your conclusion, even if your paper will likely not lead to any action taken in resolving the issue.

What is the point of restating one’s argument in a conclusion? Much of composition

theory stems from the ancient tradition of rhetoric, which began (in the Western tradition at least) in the Ancient Greek world of the 5th century BC. Many ancient rhetoric texts dealt with speechmaking more so than writing. This was for two reasons: there were lower levels of written literacy in those days as compared to today, and participation in civics did not require written literacy as it does today. Composition theory has borrowed heavily from rhetoric and from speechmaking by extension.

One example of this is borrowing that the conclusion of a speech is the last thing that the audience hears. That realization has carried over from speechmaking into argumentative writing. Writers restate their argument in a conclusion partly out of tradition. Writers also do this out of politeness toward the reader. Particularly in longer papers, it is useful for the reader to have more than one place in the paper where they can find the writer’s argument. It may seem unnecessary to repeat the argument twice in short papers in a first-year composition course, but the idea is to learn this skill in organization now, so that it will be easier to implement when writing longer papers in the future.

Good writing is good manners.

1. The Aristotle quote comes from Aristotle. *The Art of Rhetoric*. Trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred. Penguin, 2004. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)