

Written Communication

Organization

1. <https://chipcast.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=d2d08b42-fd3e-473f-810a-a85e0142da65>

One of CMU's resources cited earlier for the **OABC** framework.

- Have a logical **opening** that grabs the reader's attention and provides context for the topic of the paper.
- Present the **agenda**, which gives a preview of what the paper will cover (when in doubt, present the coverage by sections of the paper).
- The **body** of the paper is where the topic is laid out in great detail, with data and research; if more than one issue is covered, the body should be logically organized to flow smoothly from one topic to the next.
- The **conclusion** should briefly reiterate what has been covered in the body of the paper. In the conclusion, the main goals and findings of the paper are summarized, and recommendations can be made based on the findings presented. It is also a place to discuss any obstacles that the writer ran into, or any issues found in the field to which the topic belongs.

2. <https://bacwritingfellows.commons.gc.cuny.edu/using-an-outline/>

The City University of New York School of Professional Studies Writing Fellows page provides tips on how to prepare an outline of an academic paper. Most students have probably written an outline for a paper in past courses. The good news is that the major points of the outline can serve as the points for your paper's agenda! However, while the outline consists of brief ideas, the agenda will be a bit more detailed, introducing the main points in full sentences with a little bit of detail so that the paper does not read like a first-grader's "How I Spent My Summer" essay. Students may benefit from writing an outline of the paper first to: a). organize their ideas, and b). present these ideas in the agenda.

3. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/transitions/>

Transitions may occur within a paragraph as much as between paragraphs or even sections (groups of paragraphs in longer works). The University of North Carolina's Writing Center webpage provides a table that classifies transition words by purpose (e.g., sequence, time, cause and effect). It also explains how one can recognize that one's paper suffers from a lack of transitions. Our thoughts come in a stream of consciousness, which can make their presentation choppy and not logical to an outsider. Therefore, students should be mindful of presenting their ideas to the reader in a way that is easier to follow.

4. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/engagement/2/2/60/>

According to Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL), a paper's **conclusion** section should achieve three things:

- a. Restate the main idea of the essay or thesis statement
- b. Summarize the major subtopics of the essay
- c. Leave the reader with an interesting final impression

Content

1. <https://classroom.synonym.com/stay-topic-writing-essay-30818.html>

This website gives advice on how to stay on topic in the body of the paper. It can be easy to stray off topic and to present emotional arguments, rather than support the main point with evidence. Here are some of the major tips from the site:

- Write out your main **topic sentences** (the main ideas you wish to cover).
- As you write the section for each major topic, keep the topic sentence somewhere at the top of the page or nearby so you can refer to it; this will help to keep the content of the section **relevant** to the main point.
- For the main idea in each paragraph, ask yourself, “**How do I know this is true?**” The answer to this question should help to organize your argument for the idea. If you answer this question with an opinion, this can help to identify any gaps in your arguments that need more factual information to support the main idea.

2. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/evidence/>

The UNC’s Writing Center discusses how to choose evidence to support one’s arguments. Types of evidence are described (e.g., surveys, interviews, print/electronic sources), as well as ways of incorporating it into the paper (e.g., quotes and paraphrasing).

A note of caution: in academic/professional writing, the writer’s personal opinion should be backed up by facts—or **avoided** if one cannot support it with evidence. Once supporting evidence is chosen, the student should make sure that this evidence is relevant, logical, and meaningful. Some questions to ask:

- Why is this evidence interesting? Why should anyone care?
- What does this information *imply* about the argument I’m making or about the state of affairs?
- How is this idea related to my main point? What is the connection?
- Can I give an example to illustrate this point?

3. <http://essayheaven.blogspot.com/2009/11/using-evidence-to-support-argument.html>

Psychologist Charles Fernyhough gives 9 tips for ensuring your evidence is strong, accurate, and well-presented. Example tips:

- *Learn to hate quotations:* even though quotes are one way to present information from outside sources, do not over-rely on them! Students should learn to summarize other people’s ideas with their own words (paraphrase) to show that they understand the information. Quotes should be reserved for thoughts that were put in a particularly elegant or powerful way by the author.
- *Consider evidence to the contrary:* you may have found great evidence, but there will always be someone to argue against it. Play “devil’s advocate” and try to counterargue your own evidence. This helps to strengthen your argument and to preemptively address the reader’s potential concerns.

Style

1. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/608/01/>
The landing page for *Appropriate Language* in Purdue OWL outlines five aspects to consider in a professional paper: level of formality, in-group jargon, slang and idioms, deceitful language or euphemisms, and biased language. Each of these is in turn addressed on a separate page (see the navigation bar on the left to access the pages). This page addresses the criteria of using an appropriate tone, appropriate language for the intended audience, and avoiding clichés or slang.
2. <https://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/jbednar/writingtips.html>
If you scroll down to the *Word-level issues* section, you will find specific tips regarding avoiding ambiguity, misuse of words that sound the same, but mean different things (AKA homonyms; for example, *principal/principle*, *affect/effect*), use of hyphenated words, avoiding contractions (*he's*, *it's*, *they're* should all be written out as *he is*, *it is*, *they are*), capitalization where appropriate, etc.
3. <https://writingcommons.org/open-text/genres/academic-writing/use-academic-language/617-using-first-person-in-an-academic-essay-when-is-it-okay>
Short article on the use of “I” and other self-referring pronouns in academic writing. Students have been taught since high school to avoid these pronouns. However, college writing calls for use of “I” and “we” in **appropriate situations**. The article gives examples of such situations (for instance, it is better to say “I did...” than to use passive voice).
4. <https://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/2e.html>
Another short list of language to avoid in academic writing, with examples of each (this slightly overlaps with the above sources). Examples are: do not use run-on expressions, where in a sentence to properly place adverbs, and avoiding contractions.

Proofreading

1. <https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/writing/grammar-style/improving-your-sentence-structure>

This page describes types of sentences (simple, compound, etc.) and provides examples, lists common problems with sentences (e.g., sentence fragments, run-ons, choppy sentences, and so on) with examples, and suggests for how to fix these problems. This resource is particularly useful for regulating the length and content of one's sentences.

2. <https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/get-assistance/writing/grammar-style/improving-your-punctuation>

Same resource as above, but a different page that focuses on punctuation; specifically, it covers use of commas, colons, and semicolons. Semicolons are often misused in academic writing because the writer is not aware of purposes they serve. For each punctuation mark, several purposes are listed with examples of correct usage (and for some, also examples of what **not** to do). The last section briefly covers dashes, use of parentheses, square brackets, and quotation marks.

3. Most commonly used word processing software (e.g., Microsoft Word, OpenOffice Writer) has a built-in grammar and spelling check. For the most part, this is an incredibly useful tool. Students should always **proofread** their papers before submitting them; a paper that contains many spelling and grammar errors will be deemed unprofessional and may result in lost points on the assignment.
 - a. **First**, use the built-in grammar and spelling check to detect typos, repeated words (e.g., "he went to the **the** store"), and other obvious mistakes.
 - b. **Second**, carefully re-read your paper (do not skim, but read every sentence) to locate less obvious mistakes. For example, in the process of shaping an idea, the student may write a sentence and leave it unfinished, move on to the next idea, and forget to return to the unfinished sentence. Built-in grammar checks do not detect all possible writing errors. Even the best writers and spelling bee champions can make careless mistakes that can be easily prevented by manual proofreading.

Format

1. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>
The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) provides succinct yet comprehensive coverage of the major academic writing formats: APA, MLA, AMA, and Chicago style. The link above is a landing page with links to each format. Once you click on any one format, the new page has a collapsed navigation bar to the left that, when expanded, lists all resources for that format. This includes proper formatting of in-text citations (quotes and paraphrasing) and references at the end of the paper, headings and subheadings, appearance of tables and figures, and examples of each. **It is essential to consistently use only one format throughout one's paper.** This resource is updated regularly to keep up with the latest versions of each format.
2. Unless specified otherwise, the standard font to use in academic writing is **12-pt Times New Roman, double-spaced**, with **1-inch margins** on all four sides of the page. Make sure to also check the option "**Remove space after paragraph**" (found under spacing options in the Home tab) so that the space between paragraphs is the same as between lines within a paragraph. New versions of Microsoft Word use 11-pt Calibri, single-spaced with a space after paragraphs by default, so make sure to change font and paragraph settings.
3. **Always use a cover page!** Any professional paper or technical report has a simple cover page that should have (at least) the following elements: title of paper, full name of author(s), and affiliated institution (for homework assignments, this will always be CMU). Additional information may include the course for which the assignment is submitted, instructor's name, and semester or exact date of submission.
 - The cover page should **not** be numbered. To ensure this, when you edit your header/footer, check the box "Different First Page" in the Design tab that appears when you double-click on the header or footer.
 - Numbering will start on the next page, but it may still be wrong (e.g., the page may not start at 1). To fix this, select the page number, right-click, and go to "Format Page Numbers." In the new window that opens, under Page Numbering, select "Start at" and type "0."
4. <http://digitalwriting101.net/content/how-to-format-papers-in-standard-academic-format-using-microsoft-word/>
Proper page and paragraph formatting is covered here for APA and MLA formats, with screenshots of settings in Microsoft Word. The last section also covers how to create blockquotes, which are used when a quote is longer than four lines.

Citations

1. <https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/scholarly-vs-popular-sources>

This website explains the difference between scholarly and popular sources. It describes several kinds of scholarly sources (books, articles in peer-reviewed journals, etc.). Even scholarly sources contain both fact and opinion. When citing a source to support an argument, students must be able to tell apart expert opinions (which, no matter how educated, are still biased) and objective facts.

2. <https://search.proquest.com/advanced?accountid=10181>

CMU students have access to 31 databases on ProQuest through the library. The link above is the landing page for searching sources by title, author name(s), keywords, etc., using Boolean terms AND, OR, and NOT. To exclude popular sources from search results, students can check the “Peer reviewed” box. Searches can be narrowed by selecting only relevant databases. Students are automatically logged in to ProQuest when using CMU wi-fi and can use ProQuest off campus by clicking the link above and using their global ID to log in.

Findings can be filtered by:

- **Source type** (e.g., scholarly journals, dissertations & theses, magazines, books, reports, conference papers, etc.).
- **Publication dates** a). before or after a specific date or year, within a date range, last X days/months/years, if specified before searching; b). by inclusive decades, if filtered after searching.
- **Publication title** (for scholarly articles, choose which journals to include/exclude in search results); this is especially useful when assignment instructions specify which journals should be used for quality references.
- Other criteria as needed (e.g., language, full text available).

Users can request articles by clicking “Find it @ CMU Libraries.”

- This will open a page on which students can click “Get this for me” and request a photocopy of the source through iLLiad, an interlibrary loan partner site. You will need to create a login.
- **Tip:** the ILLiad request page sets the “not wanted after” date a month from today’s date. If you want your photocopy faster, change this date. Turnaround for requests can be as fast as 2 days for short notice.

Other useful features:

- Students can create a ProQuest account in under 3 minutes, after which they can save documents they find and organize them into folders, as well as save their searches (with applied filters, databases, search terms, and add any notes about the search).

Plagiarism

Central Michigan University has a strict Academic Integrity policy. Plagiarism is considered a violation of appropriate student conduct and can invoke disciplinary action against students who are caught. It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with what constitutes plagiarism. Ignorance of the rules does not free students of punishment.

1. <https://www.cmich.edu/AcademicSenate/secure/Documents/Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20-%20Editorially%20revised%20--2-08-17.pdf>
CMU's Academic Integrity policy can be found in this document. Section B defines plagiarism and lists types of outside information that must be acknowledged by proper citations, footnotes, or other references as appropriate for the writing format used. Note that unintentional plagiarism is still considered academic dishonesty, so take care to cite sources for everything that is not common knowledge. For instance, even quotes by the most famous historical figures came from somewhere—a book, a speech, or an interview—and you should conduct due diligent research to locate the source where the original quote was published or spoken.
2. <http://en.writecheck.com/ways-to-avoid-plagiarism>
This website lists 6 easy ways of avoiding plagiarism by referencing sources. Note that tip #5 states that writers must cite their own previous works as well to avoid *self-plagiarism*. Although this usually applies to professional authors who may refer to their prior published works, on rare occasions this may apply to college students as well.
3. In the *Format* section, resource #1 from Purdue OWL covers ways to properly cite works in the paper and to organize the Works Cited/References section at the end of the paper. Students who plan to pursue a profession after graduation may benefit from purchasing a style manual for the format which their professional field uses most often. Purdue OWL uses information directly from the manuals, but the handbooks have more comprehensive information regarding the acceptable writing style and format, advice on how to deal with rare cases not usually encountered in citing sources, and more.