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How to Write with Confidence

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seek LIGHT

Welcome to University!

- I'm Jillian Schedneck, Coordinator of the Writing Centre.
- Writing is going to become a big part of your life for next three years or so.
- You're going to be asked to research and write a lot of amazing assignments.
- As a university student, you should already be thinking of yourself as 'a writer'.



Why do we have to write at uni?



- To help you develop knowledge and **critical thinking skills**
 - To demonstrate your logical thinking and ability to articulate clear, ordered thoughts
 - To help you think more deeply and work out your reasoned opinion about important issues
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Writing at Uni

- You'll be asked to demonstrate and further extend your learning in the course
 - You won't be asked to do any assignment that you've not been prepared to do
 - You may not like all of your assignments, and that's ok
 - A lot of these assignments will be new to you, and that's ok too
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What do you think about the term 'writer'?

When you hear the word 'writer' what mental picture arrives in your head? Talk to the person next to you for a few minutes on this question.

Who thinks of a 'writer' as someone who has a lot of authority?
Who is an expert on a particular topic?

Who thinks of a 'writer' as some kind of genius who, when struck by inspiration, can easily express what's already in her head?

Who thinks of a 'writer' as someone who was born with the skills of writing, while others just weren't born with that 'writing gene'?

All of these ideas about who and what a 'writer' is are false.

Myth 1: Only those who know a great deal about a topic can write about it.

You will know enough to have a reasoned opinion.

Myth 2: You need to have all your ideas sorted *before* you write.

We write in order to know what we want to say.

Myth 3: Writing is a talent that you are or are not born with.

Your writing will improve with practice.

What's your writing process?



Think for a moment about how you write. What's your process?

Think about the last time you did a written assignment, in high school or wherever.

How do you go about completing it—from the moment you receive it to the moment you hand it in?

Talk to the person next to you about your writing process for a few minutes.

Who writes like this:

Write out lots of ideas, and then edit. ❤️

Edit as you write, re-reading and clarifying your meaning. ❤️

Wait until you have all your ideas in your head, and then write. 🚫

You're a perfectionist, and all your sentences need to be perfect before you can keep going. 🚫

Writing in order to find out what you want to say:

David:

First I begin to read through my notes to get the ideas clear in my head. But this doesn't last long. I get bored going over the same old ground. So, even though I haven't sorted out my ideas, I start writing anyway. It's only after I've written a few paragraphs that I know clearly what I want to write.

Sometimes it's more than that. Longer. It can take hours. **But gradually the argument comes clear as I write.** When I've got it straight, I go back ... Well, it depends. Sometimes I start again with it all clear, and sometimes I continue on to the end. Anyway I find I'm revising as I go because I know what I want to say.

An outline of main points:

Anna:

I write on coffee. I read over all my notes and then have a cup of coffee or take the dog for a walk. This lets the ideas bubble away at the back of my mind. **Then I try and block out on a piece of paper the main points I want to make.** I also put down the quotes and references I know for sure I want to use. I mean I put the ideas in the order I think I'll write them in. **This is my outline I write from, you know, developing the ideas as I go but still coming back to the outline to check where I'm heading.** Between coffee. I stop at each of the main sections and think again about where I'm going next.

Careful planning:

Ben:

Well, I'm not so keen on working it out as you go along. I spend a lot of time thinking out the argument before I wrote a word. I make an outline. **No, I make a series of outlines, building up the detail each time.** And making the structure clearer. Then when I write, I try and get the first paragraph just right before I go on. Sometimes I work away at it for hours. Not just the same paragraph, but three or four different tries at it, till I think I've got it perfect. Or as good as I can. I do the same with each paragraph. I don't like thinking that when I get to the end I'll have to do the whole thing again. So I revise as I go. That's not always true, though. Sometimes I have to go back to the first paragraph because the argument changed a bit along the way. Mostly I try to keep the argument in line on the way through.

Clanchy, J & Ballard, B 1997, *Essay Writing for Students: A Practical Guide*, Addison Wesley Longman, Melbourne.

Different writing processes for success

All three processes were different, and yet all three connected planning and writing in a fluid way.

Some suggested steps for approaching your writing:

1. Analyse the question
 2. Read through your notes (which means you must first take notes)
 3. Begin to identify key points
 4. Think about a potential order for your material
 5. Draw up a tentative plan
 6. Work on a draft, referring to your plan, and being flexible and open to changing your plan
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Improving your writing process

No matter how you write, it is important to know that:

- writing is a process
 - reflecting on your writing process is important to your growth as a writer
 - Your writing process can and will improve with practiced effort. Be open to changing what doesn't work.
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Tips for becoming a confident writer: How to think about your drafts

First draft: for you. It helps you understand what you want to say. It's 'thinking aloud', sorting through the material.

Take a break between drafts, if possible. Get some distance from your writing.

Second draft: this one is for your reader, to guide them through your ideas and meet their expectations.

Devise your own strategies to keep going—frequent breaks, no breaks, rewards, lots of coffee and chocolate. Try different methods and see what works.

Imagining Your Audience

The most successful writers:

imagine their audience and lead them through the purpose of their writing

have their own goals and how they wanted to affect the reader.



Who is your reader / audience?

- Is it your tutor? Your peers?
 - Think of your reader / audience as a student at this university who isn't in your class.
 - This person is clever enough to get into this university, but doesn't necessarily know much about your course and particular argument.
 - When you imagine your reader as a student at this university, you have a great shot at hitting that middle ground between explaining too much and explaining too little.
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Avoid the problem of explaining too much or too little

- Let's say you're writing a paper in answer to this question:

Should carbon trading be promoted as a solution for reducing emissions and combating atmospheric pollution?

How much do you need to explain about carbon trading, emissions and pollution so that your reader can understand your argument?

It's not an exact science. But you'll have to explain enough so that your reader can be convinced by your argument in answer to the question.

Confident writers assume they have authority to give their reasoned opinions

How many of you have ever wondered if you have the authority to give your opinion in your essays?

It may seem strange to give your opinion in a topic you're just starting to learn about.

You're not giving yourself enough credit.

Think of it this way:

- You've learned a lot about a topic (censorship, freedom in ancient Greece, the Anthropocene).
- You have, in fact, become somewhat of an expert, just by attending a lecture and reading many sources.
- Don't feel shy about giving your opinion in answer to the essay question you've chosen.
- You've not taken this position on whim. No, you are giving your reasoned opinion.
- We trust you.

Use confident language

Which sounds the **least** confident?

Which sounds the **most** confident?

It appears that the ancient Greeks did not value freedom as much as we claim to today.

I believe that the ancient Greeks did not value freedom as much as we claim to today.

The ancient Greeks did not value freedom as much as we claim to today.

Evidence supports the fact that the ancient Greeks did not value freedom as much as we claim to today.

Be confident: write a great thesis statement

Assignment question: Should carbon trading be promoted as a solution for reducing emissions and combating atmospheric pollution?

Which of these thesis statements is a reason and which is a fact?

Carbon trading has been proposed as a solution for reducing emissions.

Carbon trading is the best option as an overall solution to combat climate change.

More on thesis statements

- usually one sentence
- a statement, not a question
- identifies the subject of the paper
- takes a stand rather than simply announcing a subject
- typically appears as the last sentence of your introduction paragraph

It is a one-sentence description of the purpose of your assignment.

Which one is a thesis statement?

- In this essay, I will first describe the pros and cons of the Federal plan, analyse the consequences of this plan, and discuss the future of this policy.
- The Federal plan was designed to support politicians in making decisions at the Federal level.
- Although the Federal plan has its flaws, it is ultimately a worthy piece of legislature that is needed in the Australian government.

Be confident: write a great topic sentences

Which topic sentence is a reason and which is a fact?

There are two types of carbon tax schemes being implemented around the world.

While there are two types of carbon tax schemes in existence, only one of these schemes is part of the solution to combat climate change.

2 example outlines:

Identify an example of restriction or censorship of music or art, and use this example to discuss the concept of freedom of expression, either defending or disputing the particular restrictions.

Censorship of literature

- Definition of censorship
- Example of Catcher in the Rye
- Example of To Kill a Mockingbird
- Example of Lady Chatterley's Lover
- Conclusion

Why censoring literature is wrong

- Censorship and freedom of speech do not mix
- Censoring explicit language is unnecessary
- Censoring portrayals of confrontational race relations is wrong
- Censoring sexually explicit literature inhibits freedom of expression
- Summary re-stating reasons why the censorship of literature goes against freedom of speech

Revise with confidence

- reverse outline to see the structure of what you have written
 - provide a brief summary of each paragraph. If that summarizing is difficult, that means there are too many ideas in one section or that you need to make connections among ideas.
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More ways to be a confident writer

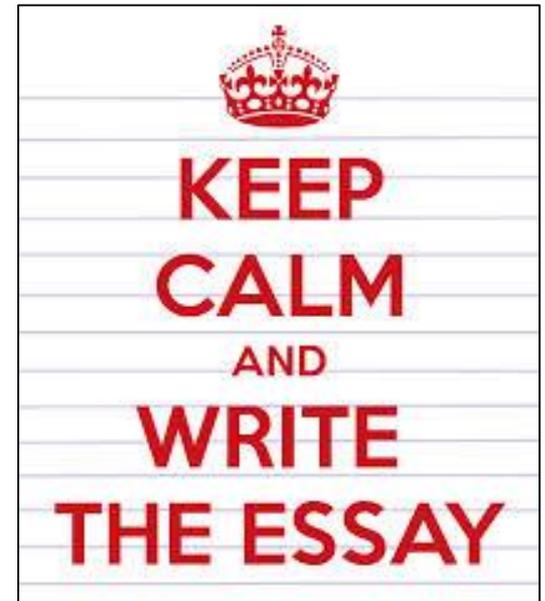
- Make a clear **argument**, and support it with evidence
 - Write a concise introduction introducing the reader to your topic, and include a thesis statement at the end
 - Stay on topic throughout your essay
 - Have a clear organisation
 - Include well-developed paragraphs that are at least 5 sentences long, but no longer than a full double spaced page
 - Explain the evidence you use within each body paragraph
 - Include topic sentences that introduce the point of the paragraph
 - Include conclusion sentences to paragraphs (summary sentences to end each paragraph)
 - Write a conclusion
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Final Tips for Writing with Confidence

- Think of each assignment as series of one paragraph units rather than 1500 to 2500 words in total (which can be overwhelming)

• Write → research → write

- If you're having trouble, ask for an extension. The worst that can happen is that your tutor says "no."
- Hand SOMETHING in. Your essay draft is probably better than you think.
- Your tutors and lecturers WANT YOU TO DO WELL.



There is help!

Writing Centre: Level 3 East, Hub Central

- We can help you start your assignment.
- We can let you know if you're on the right track, and if not, how to get on it.

