

Black Studies Writing Guidelines

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Before starting, you should ask yourself the following questions:

1. What, specifically, are you focusing on? Why?
2. How are you going to utilize the theoretical and historical references discussed in your course? Why?
3. What point(s) are you going to make about your topic, what stand(s) are you going to take?

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Getting Started

It is a good idea to start writing your paper by thinking about your introduction in such a way that:

1. your topic is narrowed to a single main idea;
2. your material is well organized;
3. your position is clearly asserted in a sentence that makes a claim about your topic;
4. you state not only facts and theories, but also your opinion;
5. you make generalizations that can be supported by details contained in the information you gathered;
6. you stimulate the reader's curiosity by writing in such a way that you and the reader think "why do you say that?" and read on.

An outline is always helpful: a rough list of points that you will cover in your essay will help you see how the ideas that you already have connect to each other. The outline will also help you think about what you can do to support and develop your ideas.

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Writing your paper: revisions and revisions

Multiple revisions will lead to a good paper; lesser-quality papers are usually those done at the eleventh hour. At least 50% of your academic and professional writing time should be dedicated to revisions. Therefore, working under the pressure of deadlines means that you need to set aside several days for revisions.

As you build your paper, be mindful of organization: how each sentence follows the one preceding it; how sentences form blocks of thought, or paragraphs; how each block, or paragraph, is linked to the previous and next ones. (see UT handout)

Below are the main building blocks your essay should have:

A) An introduction

In the introduction you define your problem, the source(s), question(s) and author(s) you are going to analyze, and how you are going to approach the topics you selected.

A good introduction provides the context and background information that sets up your main idea(s). The introduction leads your readers to expect a statement of your point of view. It defines key terms pertinent to the discussion.

The introduction also presents a hook for the reader. The hook can be a surprising statistic, an unusual fact, a relevant anecdote, a challenging question, an intriguing opinion, a counterintuitive proposition, et cetera.

As importantly, the introduction sets up the structure, or map, of your essay. In the introduction you should clearly draw the map of your argument by stating the order in which your thoughts are going to be expressed.

B) The main body of the essay:

The main body of your essay should include a detailed discussion of the author(s) and/or question(s) you specified in the introduction. Here you unfold your argument, carefully selecting passages from your reading(s), emphasizing the points you want to make, and substantiating them with evidence and/or further argumentation. If you are writing a research paper, this is where you present your data and analyze it according to your methods and theories. In your main body, it is important to keep in mind coherence, flow, and persuasion. Make sure you are constantly addressing the following questions: How do you make sense of the author(s)? Why? What are the compelling arguments you are making, how are you making them, and why are they important? What is the evidence (or argument) you are using to support your claims? Why is the evidence (or argument) compelling?

C) A conclusion:

In the final part of your essay, you should remind the reader of your initial concerns, emphasize and draw a final argument for your own perspective.

D) A bibliography with the references you used:

Throughout your essay, it is crucial that, when pertinent, you reference authors/books/texts as well as other sources you utilized. Please be as thorough and as precise as you can. You may utilize any citation standard as long as you are consistent.

Please refer to http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_what_is.php if you have questions about acceptable scholastic procedures, and plagiarism in particular.

WRITING CHECKLIST

Do *not* turn in your work until you have checked all of the following:

- ___ Does each sentence logically follow the one preceding it?
- ___ Are your sentences too short or too long?
- ___ Have you checked for irrelevant and/or out-of-place sentences?
- ___ Are your paragraphs well organized?
- ___ Does each sentence in your paragraph relate to the central idea stated in the topic sentence?
- ___ Is there continuity between your paragraphs? Do they transition well?
- ___ Are your paragraphs coherent? Do they address and respond specific questions?
- ___ Is the length of your paragraph consistent with what it is trying to say?
- ___ Have you checked for words repeated too often?
- ___ Have you checked for passive voice, and changed them to active voice? For example: “A case was made by...” to “Jazz musicians make the case for a practice of improvisation that is rooted in a black radical tradition.”
- ___ Double check for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Don’t be content with what software can do – they often misread more specialized and creative language.
- ___ Does your paper follow the instructor’s guidelines?
- ___ Does your paper accomplish what it sets out to do?
- ___ Do you understand your own ideas and arguments as they appear in the page?
- ___ Does your paper express your ideas in simple and direct ways?
- ___ Is your citation system appropriate and consistent?
- ___ Are your paper’s style and general appearance consistent and appealing?