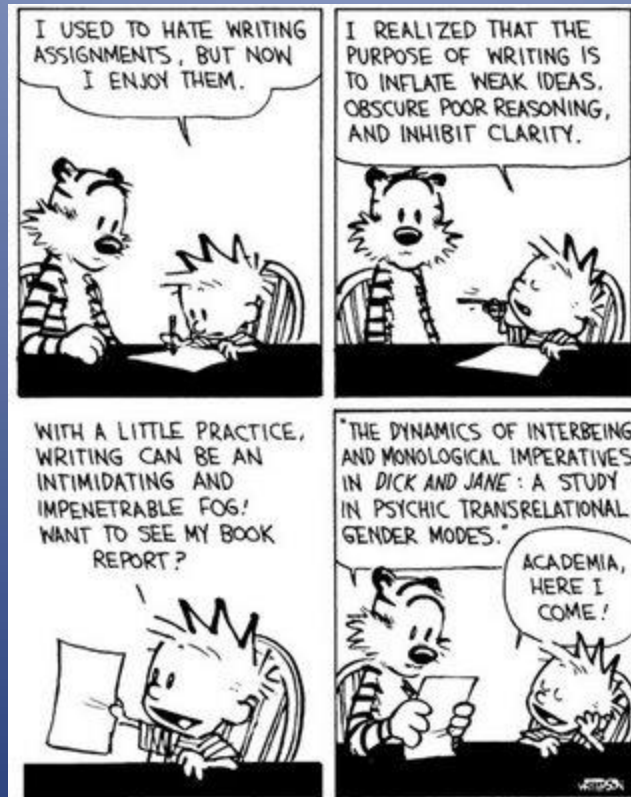


Scholarly Writing: Learning/Sharing Skills

UCSB McNair Scholars Program

Scholarly Writing

Communicating in a whole new way!



Scholarly Writing Overview

A. The Reader(s)

B. The Characteristics of Good Scholarly Writing:

1. Clarity
2. Logic
3. Precision
4. Persuasiveness

C. The Revision Process

The Reader(s)

- In scholarly writing, one always writes for a reader.
- As graduate students (and McNair Scholars) your primary readers are/will be _____

Some Cardinal Rules of Scholarly Writing:

- Keep the reader in mind at all times –
- Stay “in dialogue” with the reader (even if it’s only in your mind) –
- Use the reader as an “anchor” --

Scholarly Writing Tip #1:

Assume your reader is smart but knows little or nothing about your *specific* topic

- Define all technical terms
- “Unpack” all theoretical terms and concepts
- Attribute correctly and accurately all sources for definitions – even if it’s your own “take” on a word.

Scholarly Writing Tip #2: Assume your reader is skeptical but reasonable

- Anticipate objections he or she is likely to make to your claims and address them.
- Stay “in dialogue” with your reader.
- Argue your positions persuasively but try to avoid being defensive.

However...if you are unable to defend position...

- Re-evaluate
- Revise
- Remove
- Rethink

Review: Reader's Traits

- Smart
- Less informed about your specific topic
- Skeptical

Your Traits!

- Smart!
- Well-informed about your topic.
- Skeptical!

Scholarly writing needs to be...

➤ Clear

➤ Logical

➤ Precise

➤ Persuasive

Clarity:
Clear thinking
=
Clear writing

Scholarly Writing Tip #3

- When you read what you have written (whether it's a sentence, paragraph, section, or entire paper), try to read it through the lens of someone with little or no background in the field – even though your target audience may be VERY well-versed in the topic
- In other words, read as if you are intelligent, interested, but uninitiated.

Ask yourself:

- Do you understand the point that is being made? Even though you have made it, you might not fully understand it.
- Do you understand why you are making this point and how it fits into your argument?
- Can you defend the point?
- Are you clear about where in the paper you are making this point?

If the answer to any of these

• is no

(or even just maybe)

REVISE!

Some Characteristics of Good Scholarly Writing

1. Clarity

A. Structure

B. Organization

2. Grammar (and all its friends and relations)

Organizational Structure

- The structure of your paper will either:
 - a. Enhance its clarity
 - b. Create confusion
- The choice is yours; you're in the driver's (or writer's) seat.

Structure

- Paragraphs
- Sections
- Chapters (a future concern)

The paragraph is the basic building block of organizational structure.

Crafting Effective Paragraphs

- (As a general rule), every paragraph in your paper needs to convey one – and only one – main idea.
- Any sentence in a paragraph that is not directly relevant to the paragraph's one main idea needs to be eliminated or moved. Be ruthless!

Review

Aim to convey one main idea
in each paragraph.

Review

Eliminate (or move) any sentence unrelated to the main idea or that seems to contradict the main idea or introduces a whole new idea.

Topic Sentences

- ✓ In most cases, the paragraph's main idea should be stated in its first sentence (aka "topic" or "lead" sentence).
- ✓ But you can be creative – start a paragraph by "telling a story."
- ✓ General rule: Every remaining sentence in the paragraph needs to derive directly from the topic/lead sentence – or, what you want the paragraph to convey.

Words to Live By (for now)

- It's a good/reasonable idea to have most of the paragraphs in your paper start with a topic sentence.

A topic sentence serves two critical functions:

- ✓ It tells the reader what the paragraph's one main idea is.
- ✓ It tells the reader how the paragraph relates to the previous paragraph.

Playing Around with Topic Sentences:

Time to be Creative...

Linking Paragraphs

- Not only does the lead sentence convey the paragraph's main point, it also indicates how the current paragraph relates to the previous one.
- One strategy is to use a transitional word or phrase to link paragraphs.

Transitions & Topic Sentences



- Your topic sentences should contain a transition that links the current paragraph to the one before it.

Two Examples of How to Use Transitions in Lead Sentences to Link Paragraphs

- ✓ “A second characteristic of good scholarly writing is logic.”
- ✓ “Not only does the lead sentence convey the paragraph’s main point, it also indicates how the current paragraph relates to the previous one.”

Writing Effective Paragraphs: A Summary

- Start each paragraph with a topic sentence that does the following:
 - States the main point of the paragraph
 - Conveys the relationship of the paragraph to the previous paragraphs (by using a transitional word or phrase)
- Eliminate all sentences in the paragraph that do not derive from the topic sentence.
- Ensure that each sentence flows logically from the one before it and to the one after it.

Scholarly Writing Tip #4:

Create an outline
before and after
you write your paper.

Outlines

- Each line of your outline should relate directly to a topic sentence.
- By reading only the first sentence of each paragraph, the reader should be able to glean your paper's main points – as should you, the writer.

- After writing your paper, you should be able to create a coherent outline based on your lead sentences. If you cannot...

Road Signs

- At key places in your document, you need to draw a map of your paper for your reader.

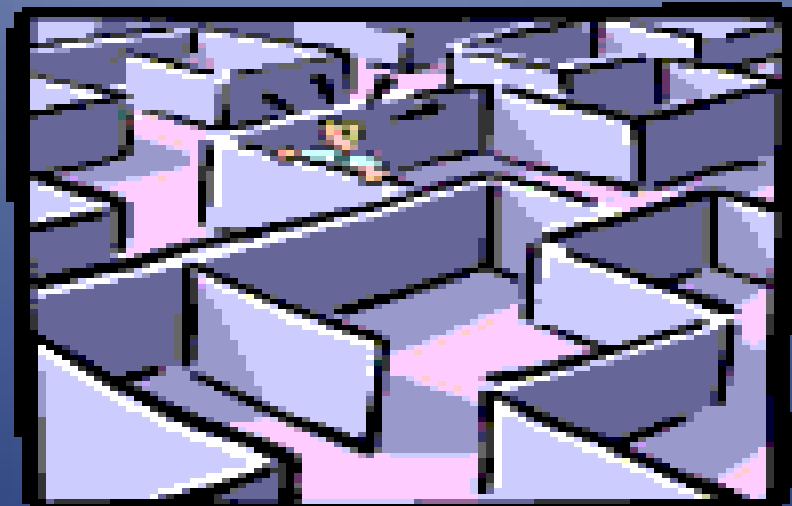


- In a dissertation, the road map should come at the end of the introductory chapter and the beginning of all subsequent chapters.
- In a proposal or concept paper or major undergrad research paper, you need only provide a road map at the start of a lit review because the other sections (methods, discussion, etc.) should follow a standard road map.

B. Grammar

Grammar: Stating the Obvious

- Good grammar creates clarity; bad grammar creates confusion.



Pronouns

- Be careful with pronouns!
- Make sure that every pronoun you use has a clear antecedent.

Common Culprits of Fuzzy Thinking

➤ That

➤ They

➤ This

➤ It

The best instrument you have for
using good grammar in your
writing is your ear.



“Grammar is a piano I play by ear.”

~ Joan Didion

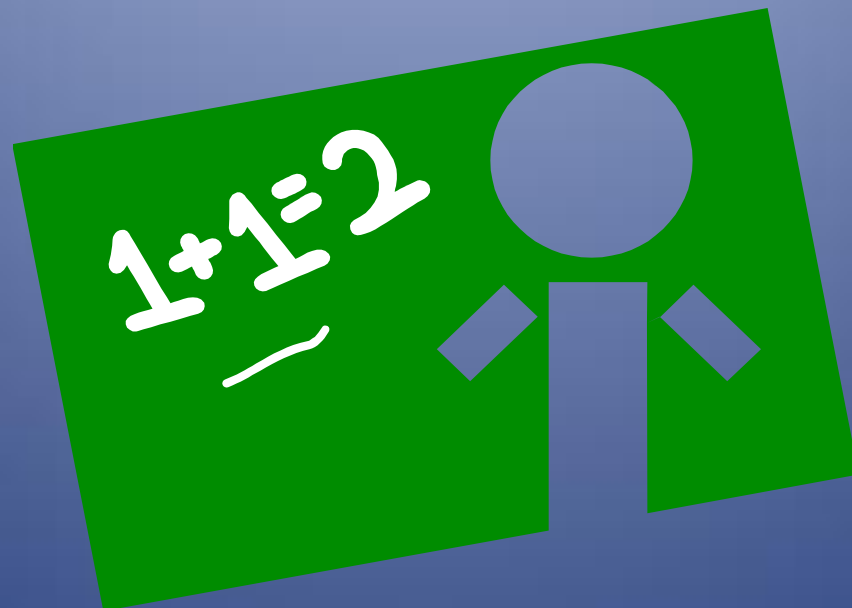
Scholarly Writing Tip #5:

- Read your paper out loud.
- (Perhaps even to a *good* friend)

Creating Clarity: Quick Review

- Draw road maps to your paper and insert sign posts.
- Create paragraphs with topic sentences that convey the main point and indicate the paragraph's relationship with the previous paragraph.
- Eliminate all sentences in a paragraph that do not pertain directly to the topic sentence.
- Read your paper out loud for grammar (and flow, and context, etc.).
- Outline your paper before/after you write it.

Logic



Structure = Logic

- Each sentence/paragraph/section needs to follow logically from the one before it.
- You, the author, need to make the logical connections between points crystal clear to the reader (if they are not self-evident).
- Scholarly/academic writing is not a whodunit!

Clarify precisely how your ideas
are logically connected
to each other by using...

Transitions

Transitions

- Transitions are bridges between ideas.
- Transitions help readers move from paragraph to paragraph (and sometimes from sentence to sentence)
 - They clarify where the reader is in the document (e.g., “First;” “In conclusion”).
 - They clarify the logical connection between the author’s ideas (e.g., “Therefore;” “In addition;” “In contrast;” “Nevertheless”).

Examples of Transitions

- Similarity

also, in the same manner, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly, in the same manner

- Exception/Contrast

but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ..

On the other hand, nevertheless,

notwithstanding, in contrast, although, even though

- Sequence/Order

first, second, third, next, then, finally, last

Examples of Transitions cont.

- Time

after, afterward, at last, before, currently,
during, earlier, immediately

- Example

for example, for instance, namely, to illustrate

- Emphasis

even, indeed, in fact

Examples of Transitions cont.

- Place/position

above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front of, in back, nearby, there, farther on, opposite, close

- Cause and Effect

accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus, if...then, as a result, for this reason, since

Be careful to choose
the right transition.

Logic Maps

- ✓ Summarize your argument in one or two sentences.
- ✓ Draw the logic of your argument.

Precision



Be Sure Your Claims Are Precise and Accurate

- Know what you're talking about. As tempting (and fun) as it may be, don't just make things up.
- Avoid broad brush strokes – universalizing, over generalizing, etc. – also fun but can lead to BIG trouble.

Word Choice

- Be sure to choose words that are precise and accurate. Do not shy away from providing definitions, even (or especially) for common words/terms that you may be using in a distinct way.

Persuasiveness



Support All Claims With Evidence

- All statements of fact need to be supported with evidence.



Sources of Evidence

- ✓ Citations
 - ✓ Research findings reported in the literature
 - ✓ A claim made by somebody in the literature (could be problematic ... why?)
- ✓ Data from your study

The less widely accepted a claim is apt to be, the stronger the evidence you need to support it...

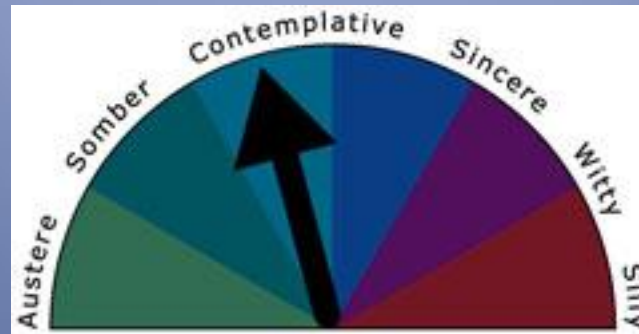
Or...

The more tentative you need to be in putting it forth.



Weigh your evidence with great care.

Tone



Set your tone early on and adhere to it . Let your true voice emerge – but within the “constraints” of scholarly writing.

Tone:

Be restrained in putting forth claims

Write

- ✓ “Evidence suggests that”
- ✓ “One may infer that”
- ✓ “Perhaps”
- ✓ “It is plausible that”

“Wrong”

- ✓ “It is a fact that”
- ✓ “This proves that”
- ✓ “We know that”
- ✓ “It is highly plausible that”

But be authoritative!

Write

- ✓ “I contend that”
- ✓ “I posit...”
- ✓ “I think...”

Wrong

- ✓ “I feel that...”

Tone (cont.)

When writing about yourself,
use the first person, not the third person (EJB
personal preference!).

Write

✓ “I”

Wrong

✓ “The researcher...”

Tone (cont.)

Use the active, not the passive, voice.

Write

“I conducted interviews”

Wrong

“Interviews were
conducted” (implied “by”)

Tone (cont.)

But don't be too casual

Avoid contractions.

Write

- ✓ Cannot
- ✓ Was not
- ✓ I would

Wrong

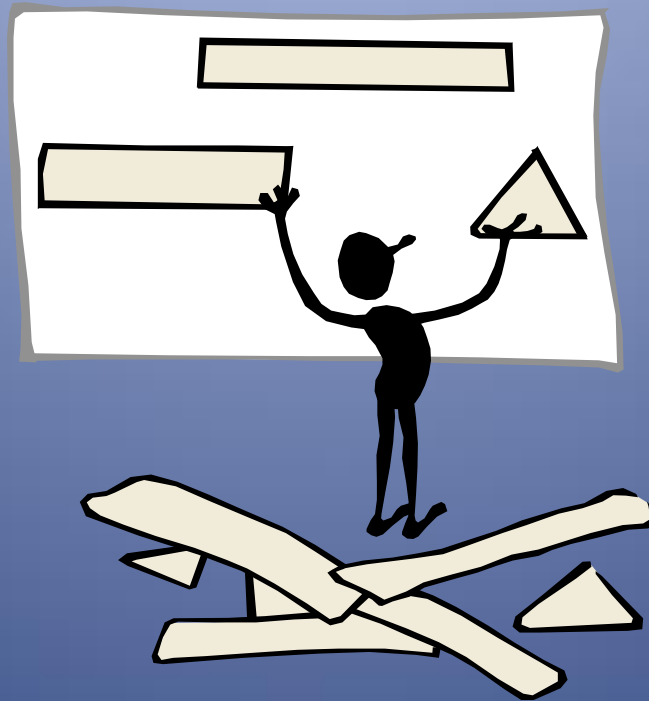
- ✓ Can't
- ✓ Wasn't
- ✓ I'd

Avoid slang – unless you are quoting




- ✓ Man

- ✓ Dude

The Revision Process



Hacker's Three-Stage Revision Process

-  Make global revisions: After outlining your paper once you've written a draft, make global revisions suggested by the outline by changing the structure of the document, rearranging the order of paragraphs, deleting paragraphs and sentences, etc.
-  Revise and edit sentences: Next, read your paper out loud. Revise and edit every sentence that is grammatically incorrect, unclear, or inaccurate.
-  Proofread your paper: Last, painstakingly proofread your paper. Go through the paper very slowly to check for misspellings, typos, punctuation errors, citation errors, etc. Proofread the paper backwards—that is, start with the last sentence in your paper and end with the first. Also, proofread your reference list (again, painstakingly).

In Conclusion

Revise, Revise, Revise!

(and congratulate yourself on a job well done!)

