

Writing Guide by Paul J. Croce, History and American Studies, Stetson University
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This page offers a set of guides for achieving clear, fair, and persuasive writing. It is intentionally spare, designed to provide brief alerts to help you be your own editor. You can use it to refine your art of writing, and you can consult it in preparation for future work on your own work. I have culled these suggestions from reading many papers (and effectively serving as students' first reader and prime editor), and I have come to think that it is better to put my suggestions for better writing in black and white at the beginning of the semester rather than only in red during the course of the semester. Numbers toward the right refer to pages in The Brief Handbook, 4th edition, edited by Laurie Kirsznner and Stephen Mandell (Wadsworth, 2004), which elaborates on these suggestions and offers still more guidance for good writing beyond these brief tips.

A. Theme

1. thorough knowledge of topic ... 105-163, 449-451
2. focused thesis, with a title to suit your purpose ... 12-20
3. persuasive arguments ... 3-12
4. evaluation of facts: ... 91-101
 - a. how?
 - b. why?
 - c. what are the implications?

B. Organization, Structure

1. ample examples and documentation ... 93-94
2. one point for every paragraph ... 62-64
3. smooth flow of ideas, transitions: ... 64-68
 - a. sentence to sentence
 - b. paragraph to paragraph
4. clear relation of parts ... 68-69
5. thorough pursuit of ideas ... 70-75
 - a. explanations until whole idea is written, so the reader is not left guessing
 - b. facts, reasons, and interpretations to back up opinions
6. introduction ... 76-78
 - a. inform reader of theme
 - b. draw reader into your viewpoint
 - c. raise a question or questions
7. conclusion ... 78-80
 - a. summarize briefly
 - b. show upshot of your point
 - c. offer an answer (or at least a response) to your questions

C. Wording

1. explanations ... 351-373
 - a. words that show relations of ideas,
e.g., although, in addition, because, ...
 - b. persons and things (at least briefly) identified
2. clarity ... 415-420, 307-316, 377-412, 343-348, 281-284
 - a. showing, in addition to telling
 - b. awkward language alert: spelling, mixed tenses,
punctuation, faulty parallels, passive voice, sentence fragments ...
 - c. precise word choice, to express what you really mean
3. style ... 329-345
 - a. end choppy phrasing by combining, deleting, or elaborating
 - b. avoid repeated ideas or phrases
by removing the repetition, or
by extending the argument