GETTING STARTED

Often, even experienced writers have difficulty getting started on an assignment. Before you begin, be sure that you understand the assignment's

PURPOSE—What is the writing supposed to be about? What will it explain or clarify?

AUDIENCE—Who are you writing for? Should the writing be understood by a general reader, or is it specific for a particular type of reader? How much does the reader already know about the topic?

FORMAT—How long does the piece need to be? What *style* should you follow? (MLA and APA style formats are typical for college-level essays.)

PROCESS EXPECTATIONS—When is the assignment due? Will you need to submit drafts for instructor or peer feedback? Create a timeline for yourself to complete the task.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION—Ask your instructor for information on how the assignment will be graded. Be sure you understand the criteria.

WHERE TO FIND HELP...

UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT

⇒ Review the assignment directions

⇒ Ask your instructor

RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

⇒ Visit with the research librarians at WWCC Hay Library or http://www.wwcc.wy.edu/library/.

RESEARCHING YOUR TOPIC

⇒ Read an article you find through one of the many extensive databases housed online through Hay Library

WRITING PROCESS, STYLE, AND FORMATTING

⇒ Visit the Purdue Online Writing Lab at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

⇒ WWCC Peer Tutor Center, open M-F from 8-3 in room 2006

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

⇒ Take this interactive tutorial at http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/

FEEDBACK ON YOUR WRITING

⇒ Submit your work to Smarthinking.com through the Smarthinking tab in your Mustang Cruiser account
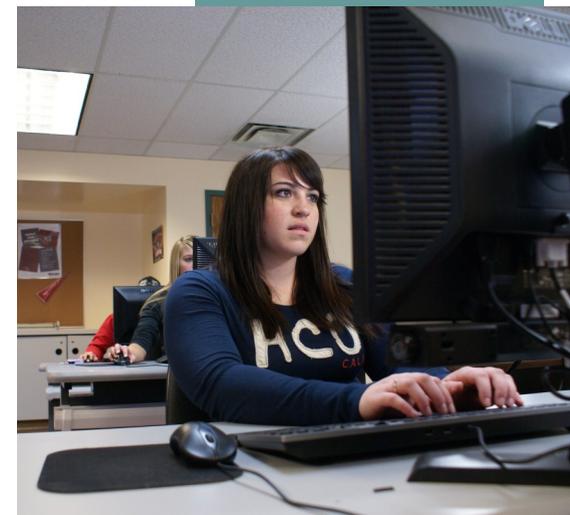
Western Wyoming Community College

Produced for you by the WWCC Assessment Coordinator on behalf of the Assessment of Student Learning Team

For more brochures or additional information, contact Dianna Renz
307-382-1871 or drenz@wwcc.wy.edu

Academic Writing

"Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you grow."

—E. L. Doctorow, American author and editor

"I write...to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means."

—Joan Didion, American journalist

"Every writer I know has trouble writing."

—Joseph Heller, American writer

Writing Assignments

During your time at Western, your instructors may ask you to perform a variety of writing tasks. Here are some key terms often used in writing assignments:

ANALYZE—Present a critical assessment of the text, concept, or behavior. Examine the subject in a scientific manner, seeking to uncover the way the object operates and acts.

APPLY—Relate the information to real-life examples.

ARGUE—Use logical reasons and researched evidence to make a point about your topic.

COMPARE/CONTRAST—Use comparisons to show how things are similar; use contrast to show differences.

DEFINE—Look to established explanations and give concrete examples to help define a concept, term, or expression.

DESCRIBE—Use vivid adjectives, adverbs, and comparisons to create a clear description.

DISCUSS—Present and consider various sides of an issue or controversy.

EVALUATE/CRITIQUE—Clarify your criteria and explain how the item meets a certain standard.

INTERPRET—Explain the meaning or significance of a text or event. Use evidence to explain why you think as you do.

REACT—Go beyond summarizing, interpreting, and evaluating. Create meaning by bringing your own experiences and prior knowledge to your understanding of the text.

SUMMARIZE—Condense a longer text into a short one by telling the most important points, clarifying your own understanding.

SYNTHESIZE—Blend information from many sources; determine which information "fits together" and use that as a basis to create connected meaning.

THE WRITING PROCESS

There are several stages in the writing process. Skipping any of these stages can be detrimental to your final product.

1. Pre-writing—includes brainstorming, gathering information, narrowing the topic, and organizing research

2. Drafting—includes developing the content by explaining ideas, connecting concepts, and discovering the central "argument".

3. Revising—includes strengthening the thesis, or main point; reconsidering the structure or organization; and refining phrasing & logical argument.

4. Editing—includes proofreading (see tips to the right) and seeking improved use of language and logic.

Style Formatting

Paper formatting is based on the rules of the particular style manual you are using. The most common styles are **MLA** (Modern Language Association) format, used in most humanities courses, and **APA** (American Psychological Association) format, used in most social science courses. Each style has its own rules for citing references in a References or Works Cited page and citing others' ideas within the paper. These styles also give specific guidelines for formatting the paper, including requirements for font size and style, margins and spacing, headers and headings, etc. Be sure to check with your instructor to know what format you should use, and then find a style guide online, at the library, or at the College Bookstore.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Although some people plagiarize intentionally, it is often the result of poor planning and lack of understanding how to give credit to the sources you used. Remember to give credit for others' WORDS and IDEAS! Writer Diana Hacker says there are three specific acts that are considered plagiarism.

1. Failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas

2. Failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks

3. Failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your own words

PROOFREAD YOUR WORK!

Proofreading your work carefully will ensure that you submit a piece of writing that is free of spelling and mechanical errors.

Sometimes it can be a challenge to catch your own errors because your brain already knows what you WANTED to say. To get a fresh perspective on your work, try the following tricks:

- Set aside uninterrupted time to FOCUS on this task
- PRINT a copy to look at on paper
- Ask a friend to READ it
- Read it ALOUD to yourself
- Read it BACKWARDS, one word at a time.