

Professor Martínez's Rules by Which to Live

- **Follow the directions.** Answer the question. Do the minimum required if you want a C. A and B students use a range of sources and use them as evidence to support their claims.
- **HAVE A TITLE!** Your title should hint at the thesis of your paper, not just give the subject.

THESIS

- **HAVE A THESIS!** A thesis does not summarize what you are about to do. *The thesis should be arguable, not a simple fact or an unsubstantiated statement of personal opinion.* Your thesis is the purpose of the essay; it is what you are trying to convince your reader to believe. As you study your material, develop a position on it. This should be clearly presented in the introduction, or first paragraph. **Highlight or underline your thesis.**

Compare the beginning of the paper with the end. Make sure that you make the same argument all the way through. Your paper often will develop in an unexpected direction as you write, producing a more sophisticated idea than the one with which you began. Reread your paper to make sure all the paragraphs are in harmony with the new idea.

EVIDENCE

- **Have evidence for your argument.** Only use quotations that you can discuss. In a short paper, this means that you will have to select only the very best from a lot of great evidence. When rereading your paper, make sure it is *your* voice and *your* arguments that are clearest in each paragraph, and not the voices and arguments of the authors you are quoting. Your words, not quotes, should begin and end paragraphs. You always set the tone of the paragraph and get the last word.
- **Integrate sources.** Bring a variety of sources into conversation with each other. Do not summarize films or readings – we are quite familiar with them. Instead, use sources to support your claim. The more you *connect* varied sources, the more evident your analysis will be.
- **Cite your sources.** Any time you use sources, they must be cited in your paper and you must have footnotes. As historians, we use *Chicago-Style* footnotes. We will go over this in class. Pay attention. Take notes. (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)
- **Never use more than THREE quotations in a single paragraph.** Follow the quote with an explanation of how it relates to your argument, rather than assume its meaning is self-evident. Do not use big block quotes, and never end a paragraph with an un-analyzed quote.

- Quotes longer than 3 lines should be indented 1/2" on the left and single-spaced. Your words must contextualize and explain the relevance of any quote.
- Something quotable is stated in a unique way or captures an unusual perspective. Do not quote, but still cite, when it easily can be put in your own words. If you fail to acknowledge the source of your information or ideas, you are guilty of **PLAGIARISM**, a serious academic offense, **which will result in an F for the course and referral to Student Judicial Services.**

PARAGRAPHS

- **Your words, not quotes, should begin and end paragraphs.** You set the tone of the paragraph and get the last word. Yes, I realize this is stated above. It bears repeating.
- **Each paragraph should develop a single point.** Think of a paragraph as a mini-paper. In the first sentence or two of each paragraph, tell the reader what the point is, making sure it ties back to your larger argument. In the following sentences, examine that point and back it up with data from your sources. It is never enough to state a point without analyzing it. Explain why that point is important, and how it is linked to the rest of the paper.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR STRONG ACADEMIC WRITING

- **Write an introduction.** The introduction should present a map of what you will argue. Set the stage: time, place, and broad ideas you will consider. Ideally, it should be intriguing.
- **Write a conclusion.** Sometimes students get tired when they reach the suggested length of the paper, and they just stop. Keep going! Re-assert your thesis, summarize your points, and exit gracefully. **Then, revisit your introduction to confirm that it is in agreement with your conclusion.**
- **Do not express beliefs or opinions.** Use facts and evidence you can document. Personal experience is factual evidence, but use it carefully and judiciously. It must complement course material, not replace it.
- **Use strong, convincing language.** "I think," "I believe," and "I hope" *are not* convincing. I argue, I demonstrate, I show *are* definitive statements.
- **Avoid judgmental language or language that assumes your reader's position on the topic.** "Absurd," "outrageous," and "of course" violate this basic rule.
- **Use past tense.** This is history; it already happened. Write your paper with that in mind. When you refer to an author, you may use present tense: "Acuña suggests..."

- **Know your problems:** word choice, spelling, grammar, and style. Do not repeat them in subsequent papers.
- **Do not use slang, contractions or informal language in your writing.** Using such language in quotes, or using the terms authors use is appropriate.
- **Never, ever turn in something that has not been spell-checked and proofread.**
- **Use active verbs.** Avoid using the verb “to be” (was, were, is, etc.). Writing in the active voice makes your writing more dynamic, and makes clear who is responsible for what by making the agent the subject of the sentence. For example, change “India was colonized in the 18th century...” to “The British colonized India...” Change “High death rates were caused by...” to “War, poor diets, and inadequate medical care caused high death rates.”

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Go early and often! They will help you develop your argument, outline your paper, and polish your conclusion. They send me an e-mail each time you visit. I certainly keep those e-mails in mind when I determine final grades.