

# Writing Tips for Graduate School

1. Be simple and direct.
  - a. You may have been reinforced for long sentences and big words in high school and even undergrad, but actually clear communication is much more important than demonstrating your vocabulary.
  - b. Consider your readers (other scholars): they are busy and they are not reading for fun – they want the information as fast as possible.
  - c. If you have to read a sentence more than once to understand it, it is too complex. Simplify.
2. Not all papers are the same.
  - a. Some papers will be quite formal – avoid passive voice, first person, contractions, slang.
  - b. Some papers will be reflections on how you are applying your new knowledge to your life or career – then you can be more casual.
  - c. When in doubt, ask your professor. (The Writing Center doesn't know what each professor wants from each assignment.)
    - i. Make appointments with your teachers during their office hours.
    - ii. Write down lists of questions for your professor and ask them before or after class.
    - iii. If you are a professional working on your big paper and not attending class, ask your professor for a weekly check-in call at a certain time.
3. Start papers well ahead of time.
  - a. Visit the Writing Center when you have at least a week before the paper is due.
  - b. Set yourself a fake due date that is before the actual due date. When you finish the paper on the fake due date, be happy that you have saved yourself feelings of anxiety and panic.
  - c. Then read your work out loud to catch your own mistakes.
4. Remember what you learned in high school.
  - a. Make an outline first.
  - b. Make sure your topic sentences encompass the paragraphs' content.
  - c. Make sure the paragraph's content is accurately summed up in the topic sentence.
5. Buy the most recent APA manual (or MLA, etc. depending on your field)
  - a. Mark it with tabs for frequently used pages. Use the index. Become good friends with this book.
  - b. Use <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> or <http://www.apastyle.org/> or the Writing Center.
  - c. When in doubt, cite! Plagiarism is a serious thing.
6. Use the librarians.
  - a. Save time by asking for help with research.
  - b. Librarians actually love to help you and will be happy you asked.
7. Research aids are not perfect – you are smarter than they are.
  - a. Database search engines will not bring up every source that has been published.
  - b. RefWorks will not place your sources into correct APA style – check them all.

