

WAC@CSM Comparative Guidelines for Writing in Different Disciplines

Aspects of Writing	Disciplines				
	Mathematics	Biology	Philosophy	Political Science	English
Thesis	Can be statement of purpose; may advance a theory; may use 1 st person.	Usually a statement of purpose; may advance a theory; May use 1 st person	If the paper is an essay, there should be a clear expression of the conclusion of the argument the paper is addressing. 1 st or 3 rd person is appropriate.	May be a carefully qualified argumentative stand; usually 3 rd person.	Usually NOT just a statement of purpose; often argumentative; usually 3 rd person
Introduction	May be a brief but coherent summary of background information, pertinent definitions, or a history of the problem. Usually general to specific. The hook is generally absent. When mathematics being used to support an argumentative paper, more latitude encouraged.	Places work in a theoretical context; interests the reader in the topic and its potential significance; may give a rationale for the approach taken; moves from general to specific; may cite prior works to support approach to thesis.	No cutesy biographical info, no epic info, brevity is a virtue.	Places work in a theoretical context; interests the reader in the topic and its potential significance; may make personal connection. Should inform the reader of the topic and/or the argument and the order for approaching it.	Can use a wide variety of strategies to be engaging; may be 1 st person anecdote
Organization and logic in body paragraphs/ sections	Proceeds through logical process or argument; may include history of idea or biography.	Usually moves specific to general; Sections may be specified or titled.	Body paragraphs correspond to premises of the argument.	Body paragraphs usually general to specific. In supporting of an argument, begin with a strong argument, followed by a not-so-strong argument and lastly, a strong argument.	Body paragraphs usually general to specific; Often least to most order.
Conclusion	May not be needed if task complete; If offered, is provisional and qualified; may look ahead to unanswered questions; may be a straightforward summary.	Draw conclusions as warranted; qualify carefully; support conclusions with own evidence or evidence from other sources; may make careful predictions	Bring shit together – synthetic <i>a posteriori</i> - rather than mere restatement of thesis.	Conclude by revisiting the thesis and the method to prove the argument or answer the question. May make connections to larger issues of significance.	Not just a summary in short papers. May have persuasive intent.
Subtitles	Acceptable	Often necessary	Avoid at all costs, use good transitions instead	Only in research papers.	Usually not needed

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Summary Voiced: “The author makes the point that . . .” Unvoiced: (like an abstract, as if the student is the source of the ideas)	Should be voiced; quotation may be ok	Should be voiced; should not sound like an abstract; quotation may be ok?? Summarize: Focus on main points, not supporting detail	It should be clear whose thought it is. (Voiced or unvoiced is acceptable.)	It should be clear whose thought it is; some quotation usually ok	Usually should be voiced; some quotation usually ok
Paraphrase	Ok but give credit to source	Needs fresh wording and syntax; source must be cited	Don’t confuse explanation with paraphrasing; we prefer explanation, not paraphrase. When using multiple sources, sources must be cited.	Needs fresh wording and syntax; source must be cited	Needs fresh wording and syntax; source must be cited
Quotation	Ok in small portions	Don’t use direct quotes. Primary sources preferred	Avoid quote quilts. Use quotes to support student’s interpretation of author’s work.	Using quotations is fine as long as they are appropriate for the topic. They also make interesting introductions that should be explained. Do not overuse quotes.	A desirable form of specific evidence
Passive Voice	Very common; 3 rd person objectivity required	Very common; 3 rd person objectivity required	Passive voice should never be used.	Undesirable in most instances.	Undesirable in most instances.
Documentation System	End notes often preferred; Turabian or APA ok.	Paraphrase with name-and-year parenthetical method preferred. APA ok.	MLA	APA or MLA is fine.	MLA
Pronoun Use	<u>Precise use required</u> ; Avoid vague reference. Repeated nouns preferred to repeated pronouns for clarity	Precise use required; Repeated nouns preferred to repeated pronouns For clarity	Precise use required; redundancy preferred over opacity.	Precise use required.	Precise use preferred.
Quantitative Information	Must be precise and accurate; often takes the form of graphs, charts, equations; integrate into text; all graphical inserts must be indexed and clearly referred to by number	Often needed; must be precise and accurate; integrate into text; graphs and figures should not stand alone and should support the text.	Use where appropriate.	Use where appropriate. Always CITE sources of data.	Usually not needed
Amount of detail	Concision is valued; provide all necessary information	Concision is valued; omit peripheral information: “Just the facts, ma’am.”	Dependent on particular assignment. Precision is of the utmost importance.	Dependent on particular assignment. Usually determined by professor.	Supportive detail is valued