

Tips for Writing College Papers

Before you ever start writing, **think about the topic**. Don't just repeat what you've read. New ideas and interpretations are usually more important than restating facts.

You may find it helpful to begin with an **outline**. While not everyone likes outlining, it typically keeps your writing more organized, which also helps you stay focused. As you continue to write—and research—the outline serves as a road map of where you're going in the paper and how you plan to get there.

Draft a thesis statement, which is your main idea stated in one sentence and is usually the last, or next-to-last, sentence in the introduction. This one sentence can make writing your paper easier.

One easy way to create a thesis statement is to start with a question. Ask yourself an open-ended question (a question that can't be answered with a yes or no) about the topic you're writing your paper on. If you're having trouble finding one, try adding "why" or "how" to the beginning of your question.

For example:

NOT OPEN ENDED: *Do textbooks cost too much?*

OPEN ENDED: *How are textbook prices reached, and is that process fair?*

Then, answer the question you've posed. One strategy is to repeat the question and add the word "because": *The cost of college tuition is (or is not) too high because (write your reasons here).*



Create a topic sentence (or mini-thesis statement) for each paragraph in your paper. These sentences can be written first or last, whichever helps you to best organize your thoughts.

To write your topic sentences, look at what's after the "because" in your thesis statement. For each of those ideas, follow the same steps you used for the thesis statement, asking and answering a question.

For example:

Although the increase in tuition exceeds the rate of inflation, tuition now also covers extra services for students including tutoring, technology access, and recreational events.

Usually, each topic sentence begins a paragraph or group of paragraphs that relate to it.

Many professors will want you to **write without using first person** (I, me, my, we, us), but that's not always true. Ask your professor if you're unsure. If you have trouble avoiding "I think" or "I believe," statements, start sentences that way, then cross the beginnings off:

For example:

I think textbooks cost too much for what they're used for, can be changed to *Textbooks cost too much for what they're used for.*

Nearly all professors will want you to **write without using second person** (you, your, yourself). If you find yourself using second person, figure out who you're really talking about. Are you talking about yourself?





If yes, use “I.” Are you talking about everyone? If so, use “everyone,” “anyone,” or “people.” However, if you can get more specific, that’s even better.

For example:

INSTEAD OF: You pay tuition hoping for a high paying job.

USE: Students pay tuition hoping for a high paying job.



Don't forget to **edit and proofread!** Always be sure you've read over your entire paper at least once before you submit the assignment. Be sure to check for misspellings (don't just rely on spell check!) and grammar, if the paper makes sense, and if it is in a logical order. You may want to have another person read it, too, to be sure you're not catching errors because you're too close to the assignment. This is where the Writing Center is a great idea! Make an appointment with a consultant, giving yourself enough time before your due date to make revisions if needed.

Most importantly, **ask questions if you're not certain of something.** Talking to a classmate, friend, or family member is a good starting point, but what may be true in your friend's class may be different in yours. Remember, your professor is the final authority in your class.