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WRITING GUIDELINES:

In general, your paper should completely answer the question and thoroughly address the assignment requirements, especially by sustaining an engagement with the course readings. The thesis equals your assertion, backed up by supporting claims that make the overall argument compelling. Your paper should contain an informative introductory paragraph with a focused thesis statement. Your paper should be convincingly and persuasively argued, with relevant evidence and quotations. These chosen examples and quotes should be insightful, they should be set-up/introduced and incorporated smoothly, and their significance should be clear. You do not have to agree with the interpretations of required authors, but *you must engage in intellectual dialogue with their theoretical concepts and analytical conclusions*. In other words, even by disagreeing with the readings you can support your position and advance your argument. You may also counter or dispute the authors' claims to make a point that is not represented in the required readings.

Your paper should contain an introduction, a central development (the body), and a conclusion. Take a position. Construct a focused, specific thesis statement containing a single main idea that you substantiate and defend through the rest of the paper. State your position within the first paragraph. Let your reader know early what the central point or idea will be. This thesis statement will also help you maintain unity in your narrative, and help you decide which details to include. As you write, refer to your thesis statement from time to time to see if you have drifted away from your main idea. Do not hesitate to revise your thesis if you find yourself writing on something other than your original statement. Keep your topic focused and narrow. The broader your topic, the less manageable it will be, and the longer it will take you to unfold your argument.

Develop your argument logically. Start off paragraphs with a strong, clear topic sentence and try to end each paragraph with a concluding sentence. Let your reader know what will be covered in the body of the paragraph. Usually, each single paragraph explores one point. Think about how the paragraphs relate to one another, and write the topic and concluding sentences as transitions between related ideas. Support your assertions with evidence. Be as specific as possible. Avoid sweeping generalizations. Include more analysis than description and summary, so that the reader can easily follow the argument. Pay close attention to the readings you choose to back up your argument. Evaluate the author's interpretation. Do two authors discuss a topic or theme differently? Are the authors' conclusions convincing? Always cite an author when using his or her ideas, and when quoting or paraphrasing from their book or article.

For your paper to be logically organized, the paragraphs in the body should have topic sentences, the paragraphs should support the thesis, and there should be smooth transitions between paragraphs. Effective organization means that each part of the essay builds upon the next, guiding the reader through a thoughtful consideration of your themes and propelling the narrative forward. The conclusion should summarize and "clinch" the argument, but it may point to areas of future research or debate. A tight, powerful conclusion should be the logical consequence of everything that has gone before. The best essays develop a number of related strands that the conclusion ties together.

You will be graded less on grammar, style, or writing mechanics than on how you answer the question and develop your argument; however, there should be no typographical, spelling, or grammatical errors, or very few. In addition, the best papers avoid sloppy phrasing and fancy, flowery prose. Instead, convey your ideas plainly. Vigorous writing is fresh and concise. Strive for brevity, clarity, and precision. A little passive voice is all right, but too many “to be” verbs (is, was, has, does) and too much passive phrasing (were, was, have been, has been) slow down the pacing of your essay and detract from your analytical argument. Instead, employ more active voice by clearly making the subject of your sentences engage in action (use more action verbs). This ultimately, cumulatively renders your persuasive prose more compelling, allowing you to showcase your quotes as evidence to substantiate your thesis.

Always write *at least one* rough draft. Never turn in your first draft of a paper. And *always* spell-check and proofread your final draft before you turn it in. Do not over-rely on your computer to proofread your essay for you. You will be surprised how many typographical mistakes and other errors you catch just by scanning a printed, hard copy draft of your paper. Read your own paper aloud, or have a friend read it to you. Does it sound right? Are the sentences complete and clear? Do the sentences build upon each other to support your thesis? Do any sections sound awkward? These are usually rough spots in your narrative that require reworking for smoother transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Follow technical requirements and directions regarding length of paper, proper citation of sources, title and subtitle, font style and size, spacing, pagination, etc.

•**Final comments on paper organization:** Introduce your paper clearly, at or near the beginning of the paper. This **introduction** sets the course for the rest of the paper and tells the reader what the paper is about. Good introductions are like road maps: they tell the reader where to go and what to do to get to the destination. A good introduction provides you with a plan to organize the rest of the paper by laying out the subjects, concepts, or events you will discuss to support your thesis and develop your argument. This explication will comprise the **body** of your paper. It is not enough just to give your reactions or judgment about a question or issue—you always need to present evidence and examples to support your interpretations, defend your comparisons and contrasts, and persuade the reader to follow your perspective. Once you have written a clear introduction and presented strong evidence to substantiate your main points, then the **conclusion** should follow smoothly and logically. The best conclusions complete and wrap-up your paper, both clinching your argument and emphasizing its importance.

Remember: There is no trick or magic formula to being a good writer—it just takes hard work. The more thought, time, and energy you put into brainstorming, outlining, and revising your paper, the better it will be. This truism applies to *every* writer no matter the educational level, field of study, or genre of writing.



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