

How to Write an Essay 101

Candis & Robyn's 12-Step Program: One Essay at a Time

1. Read the assignment carefully. Make sure to follow the instructions.
2. Think about what you might want to write about (i.e. labor, sexuality, health, mothering, racism, etc.).
3. Narrow your focus. Think about possible paper topics (i.e. Issues facing single moms in contemporary Canada).
4. Engage in preliminary research.
 - a) Go to the reading room first. Talk to Isabelle.
 - b) Check out CLUES for books and periodicals.
 - c) Go to the library to retrieve sources.
5. Ask yourself the following questions: Do I have adequate research material to write my paper? If not, return to step 2.
6. Write an outline.
7. Write your preface (Optional).
8. Write your introduction and thesis statement.
9. Write the body of your paper using the research you have collected.
10. Write your conclusion (Optional: Write postscript).
11. Return to your introduction. Does your introduction reflect the main themes you have articulated in your paper? If not, rewrite it.
12. Edit, edit, and edit again.

HOW TO WRITE AN ESSAY 101

- 1) **You may start with a preface.**

This is optional. However, it can be a fun, creative and playful way to get started on your essay. ***Why did you choose this topic? What does it make you think about? This can be done in non-academic language.***
- 2) **Introduction**

This is a key element in your essay. What is the main theme of your essay?

 - State the main theme of 1.our essay.
 - Write your thesis statement.*
 - Gesture towards your conclusion.
- 3) **Paragraph Structure**
 - State the main point of your paragraph.
 - Elaborate.
 - Quote or cite an example.
 - Summarize the key point.

***THESIS STATEMENT:**

A thesis statement is a sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the subject of your paper, the main points you will discuss, and the order in which you will discuss them.

A thesis statement is:

- what you'll prove
- the argument
- the scope
- the main idea
- the purpose of the paper

- 4) **Conclusion**
 -- Repeat the main points that your paper has developed.
 -- Double-check your introduction. Is this really what you have done? If not, re-write your introduction.
- 5) **You may end with a postscript**
 --This is like your preface. What are your personal parting words on the ideas that you have just explored? Again, this can be fun, creative and playful.

Our Picks: Feminist Magazines

- 1 *BITCH: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*
- 2 *BUST*
- 3 *Ms. (available in the reading room)*
- 4 *Herizons (available in the reading room)*
- 5 *good grrl (available online at www.ggodgirl.ca)*
- 6 *Girlfriends: Lesbian Culture, Politics and Entertainment*

Top Ten Feminist Periodicals

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING (AND MANY, MANY MORE!) ARE AVAILABLE IN THE READING ROOM:

1. *Atlantis*
2. *Canadian Woman Studies/cahiers de la femmes*
3. *Feminist Ethics*
4. *Feminist Issues*
5. *Feminist Review*
6. *Fireweed*
7. *Hypatia*
8. *International Journal of Women's Studies*
9. *Sage*
10. *Signs*

Another Valuable Resource

Women's Studies Reference Librarian,
 Webster Library, Concordia University
 Susie Breier
Susie.Breier@concordia.ca

Referencing

A PAPER IS NOT WRITTEN FROM YOUR THOUGHTS ALONE. YOU ARE ENGAGING IN A CONVERSATION WITH MANY OTHER SCHOLARS. THEIR IDEAS MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED. TO DO SO, YOU MUST USE PROPER REFERENCING TECHNIQUES.

PARAPHRASING:

Writing another person's ideas - in your own words - to further elaborate/illustrate your argument.

QUOTING:

Quoting is using another's exact words either to add authority to the concept, theory, or information one is trying to convey or because that author has stated so clearly what one is wishing to say that one could not say it better oneself.

ALL QUOTATIONS AND PARAPHRASES MUST BE REFERENCED.

There are many ways to cite your sources. However, "parenthetical citations" are the easiest. If you write a sentence that contains ideas that have been paraphrased, you must include the author's name, the date of publication, and the page number in brackets at the end of the sentence. For example:

Gender is not necessarily a product of biology. Instead, gender is socially constructed. In other words, gender is something that one learns to do (de Beauvoir, 1952:267).

Parenthetical citations are also used for direct quotes. For example:

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1952:267).

If a quote is longer than 3 sentences, you should place it in a block quote in your text. Block quotes are indented and single-spaced. For example:

Female fat is the subject of public passion, and women feel guilty about female fat, because we implicitly recognize that under the myth, women's bodies are not our own, but society's, and that thinness is not a private aesthetic, but hunger as social concession, exacted by the community. A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty, but an obsession about female obedience. (Wolf, 1990: 187).

If you prefer to use another official citation style (i.e. APA, MLA, Turabian, Chicago, etc) that's totally up to you. However, make sure that your referencing is consistent.

What is plagiarism?

"The presentation of the work of another person as one's own or without proper acknowledgment" (Concordia Undergraduate Calendar 2001-2002, page 62).

While many people might think this means outright cheating by stealing or copying another student's work, it could just as easily refer to copying an author's ideas without saying where they came from. You are responsible to respect this rule.

What counts as other people's ideas"?

- 1) All words quoted directly from another source.
- 2) All ideas paraphrased from a source.
- 3) All ideas borrowed from another source: statistics, graphs, charts.
- 4) All ideas or materials taken from the Internet.

What doesn't count?

- 1) You do not have to cite sources for knowledge that is generally known, like the dates of famous events in history or the names of prominent feminist activists. Similarly, phrases like the "war on terrorism" or "the generation gap" indicate concepts generally understood.
- 2) Also, within your field, there may be terms which are "common knowledge" because they are part of the knowledge shared by people in that field, like the "dominant hegemonic ideology," or the term "compulsory heterosexuality."
- 3) Knowing what to cite/not to cite is also influenced by culture. In North America, readers expect to be told where ideas come from. In other cultures there may be more shared and collective understanding of certain ideas or even of memorized texts. For example, a student may have had to memorize a text as part of her learning in a particular subject. If she were to reproduce that text in her own country she may feel she need not give a source, since everyone who studied there (including the professor) would know who wrote it. In North America, however, this is not the case and a North American reader would expect to be told that author's name.

When you paraphrase, make sure to understand what the original text is saying, then close the book and write the passage in your own words. Once again, you need to cite a source for a paraphrase even though you did not quote from the source directly.

Adapted from Student Learning Services. Concordia University.

Bibliography

The bibliography is a list of sources used in writing your research paper. It appears at the end of the paper. It is single spaced. However, individual entries should be separated by a space, and arranged alphabetically by the author's last name. The first line of each entry is aligned with the left margin; second and succeeding lines are indented five spaces.

Different sources are cited differently. For example;

Books, single author:

hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000).

Books with two authors:

Heywood, Leslie, & Jennifer Drake. Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist. Doing Feminism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Chapters in Edited Texts:

Steenbergen, Candis. "Talkin' 'Bout Whose Generation?": in Allyson Mitchell, Lisa Bryn Rundle, and Lara Karaian, eds. Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001, 256-272.

Periodicals:

Diner, Robyn. "Things to do with the "F" Word: The Ironic and Unruly Adventures of Liz Phair and Courtney Love." *Canadian Women's Studies/cahiers de la femmes*. Volume 20/21, Number 4/1 (Winter/Spring 2001) 76-81.

Government Publications :

Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. *Women and Poverty*. Ottawa: The Council, 1992.

Electronic Sources:

Tallentire, Jenéa, Kim Snowden, Norma Oshynko. And Alisa Harrison. "New Scholars in the New Millennium." *Thirdspace* 1/1 (July 2001): 5 pars. 27 July 2001
[<http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/ed1-1.html>].

Entry from a dictionary, directory, or other alphabetically arranged reference book:

"Oppression." *The Houghton-Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language*. 10th ed. 1992.922.

Article from a weekly magazine:

Bellafante, Ginia. "Feminism: It's All About Mel" *TIME*. Volume 151, Number 25. 29 June 1998. 48-56

Article from a Daily Newspaper:

Carmichael, Amy. "Is the Feminist Fight Over?" **The Toronto Star**. 3 March 1998. F1,F3.

Information from CD-ROM:

Ramstad, Evan. "Technology & Health: U.S. Robotics Defends Sale to 3Com Corp." *Wall Street Journal*. 6 March 1997:B6. Wall Street Journal OnDisk. CDROM. UMI-ProQuest. Dec. 1998.

A Film

Zeffirelli, Franco, dir. *Romeo and Juliet*. By William Shakespeare. Paramount Pictures, 1968.

A film on videocassette or DVD:

Romeo and Juliet. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. 1968. Videocassette/DVD. Paramount Home Video, 1980.

Sample bibliography

Bellafante, Ginia. "Feminism: it's All About Me!" *TIME*. Volume 151, Number 25. 29 Jun., 1998 48-56

Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. *Women and Poverty*. Ottawa: The Council, 1992.

Carmichael, Amy . "Is the Feminist Fight Over?" The Toronto Star. 3 March 1998. F1,F3.

Diner, Robyn. "Things to do with the "F" Word: The Ironic and Unruly Adventures of Liz Phair and Courtney Love." *Canadian Women's Studies/cahiers de la femmes*. Volume 20/21, Number 4/1 (Winter/Spring 2001) 76-81.

Heywood, Leslie, & Jennifer Drake. Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist. Doing Feminism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody': Passionate Politics*. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000.

"Oppression." The Houghton-Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language. 10th ed, 1992.922.

Ramstad, Evan. "Technology & Health: U.S. Robotics Defends Sale to 3Com Corp." *Wall Street Journal*. 6 March 1997:B6. Wall Street Journal Ondisk. CDROM. UMI-ProQuest. Dec. 1998.

Romeo and Juliet. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. 1968. Videocassette/DVD. Paramount Home Video, 1980.

Steenbergen, Candis. "Talkin' 'Bout Whose Generation?: in Allyson Mitchell, Lisa Bryn Rundle, and Lara Karaian, eds. Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms. Toronto: Sumac Press, 2001, 256-272.

Tallentire, Jenéa, Kim Snowden, Norma Oshynko. And Alisa Harrison. "New Scholars in the New Millennium." *Thirdspace* 1/1 (July 2001): 5 pars. 27 July 2001
[<http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/ed1-1.html>].

Zeffirelli, Franco, dir. *Romeo and Juliet*. By William Shakespeare. Paramount Pictures, 1968.

These instructions were put together by:

Candis Steenbergen and Robyn Diner (both Ph.D. students at the time) for the Writing Workshops at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University.

Checklist for Essay Writing

- Have I carried out and included relevant research from a range of sources?
- Have I fully referenced all the sources in the text and at the end?
- Have I typed and double spaced my essay?
- Does the opening of my essay capture attention and outline my approach?
- Are the paragraphs and main points in a logical order?
- Are supporting details convincing and in a logical order?
- Is it possible to tell where one point ends and another begins?
- Have I removed irrelevant information and repetitive words or sentences?
- Is my conclusion strong?
- Have I double checked the spelling and meanings of words?
- Has my essay been proof-read?