

Dr. Hilwig's Tips for Academic Writing

Ψ Use vigorous prose that employs an active voice:

Example: "Jack hit the ball!"

Ψ Avoid passive voice that includes helping verbs:

Example: "The ball was hit by Jack."

Helping verbs: am, are is, was, were, have, has, had, be, been, being

Ψ Take the reader by the hand and lead them to your conclusions.

Example: "Based upon Carlo Levi's memoir, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, the Fascist regime clearly neglected the peasants of rural southern Italy."

Ψ Avoid writing in the first person voice:

Example: "I really liked this book because it was nice."

Ψ Use third person voice for a more scholarly tone:

Example: "Levi's book included vivid descriptions of the rural south that painted a clear picture of the misery experienced in that region."

Ψ When using a quote that is more than three lines long, you must indent and single-space the citation.

Wrong:

"Freedom is not a thing you can receive as a gift. One can be free even under a dictatorship on one simple condition, that is, if one struggles against it. A man who thinks with his own mind and remains uncorrupted is a free man... Freedom is not a thing that must be begged from others. You must take it for yourself, whatever share you can."

(Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine* (1936): 33)

Correct:

"Freedom is not a thing you can receive as a gift. One can be free even under a dictatorship on one simple condition, that is, if one struggles against it. A man who thinks with his own mind and remains uncorrupted is a free man. A man who struggles for what he believes to be right is a free man... Freedom is not a thing that must be begged from others. You must take it for yourself, whatever share you can." (Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine* (1936): 33)

Ψ Begin with a strong introduction and end with a powerful, summative conclusion—remember that like a piece of music, the audience most recalls how it began and how it ended.

Ψ In organizing your essay, choose the structure that seems simplest and most comprehensible to you. If you are confused as the writer, most likely your reader will be confused, too.

Ψ As the old joke goes, do not “ASSUME” anything in your essay, take the time to fully explain ideas and evidence—always ask why this point or bit of data is significant.

Ψ Put part of yourself into the essay. Tell the reader what you think. **DO NOT SIMPLY CUT AND PASTE A PASTICHE OF OTHER PEOPLE’S IDEAS THAT YOU TOOK FROM VARIOUS SOURCES. USE IDEAS FROM OTHER WORKS EITHER TO ENHANCE YOUR ARGUMENT OR AS STRAW MEN TO TEAR DOWN!**

Ψ Always underline or *italicize* titles of books. Newspaper or journal articles should be put in quotes and the title of the journal/newspaper should be underlined or *italicized*.

Examples: Marysa Navarro’s engaging biography, *Evita: The Real Life of Eva Peron*, chronicles the life of Latin America’s most famous diva.

“Are you calling me a fascist? A Contribution to the Oral History of the Italian Student Rebellion in 1968,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36(4) (October 2001): 581-597.

Ψ Always *italicize* foreign words.

Example: For many French citizens, the joyful decade 1890-1900 came to be known as the *belle époque*.

Ψ When handing in your completed, typed essay, you must ALWAYS STAPLE IT! Paper clips, a folded corner, your last name on every page, and strange origami-like attempts to bind the paper together with folds and tears are all unacceptable!

Only a mediocre writer is always at his best. - W. Somerset Maugham

People have writer's block not because they can't write, but because they despair of writing eloquently. - Anna Quindlen

The mere habit of writing, of constantly keeping at it, of never giving up, ultimately teaches you how to write. - Gabriel Fielding