

# Academic and Professional Writing Practices

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Trailblazers Connections



# Academic and Professional Writing Expectations for DSU Students

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Dear Trailblazers Connections student:

You are now a college freshman, which means you already know how to communicate your ideas, write adequately, and persuade others with some degree of success. You have already submitted a wide range of assignments and composed countless messages. However, what has been sufficient thus far may not be effective moving forward. Clear, well-written, well-designed documents will enhance all your student work across the disciplines. Take the extra time to communicate professionally to position yourself with added credibility in everything you do. We designed this document and its accompanying assignment with you in mind. Together, these concepts will enable you to enhance your ethos (your credibility) as a student and a professional. You will have many opportunities in other classes to incorporate these concepts, but Trailblazers Connections is a great class for practicing these skills in a low-stakes environment. Let your instructor know if you have any questions as you study this packet and prepare your assignment. The faculty and staff are here to help you transition from novice to expert.

Sincerely,

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Director of Learning Services

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## Brief Primer on Writing Well

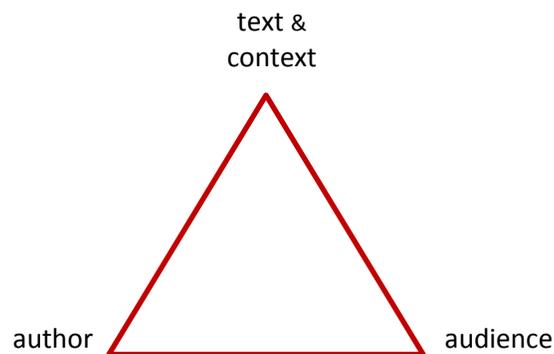
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The *effort* between writing well enough and writing well is relatively small; however, the *effect* of writing well enough and writing well can be enormous, especially in academic and professional environments. Almost anyone in a university or professional job can write *well enough* because it requires so little. Writing well takes some practice and attentiveness.

### Rhetorical effectiveness

First, good writers consider **audience** and **purpose**. To whom are you writing and with what goal? Sometimes, in professional writing, we use the term **users** because it helps us think about who will be using the texts we write and for what purpose. When we write with particular users in mind, our writing is often more effective.

Rhetoric is any effort to communicate, usually to persuade. In professional writing, we often talk about the **rhetorical triangle**, which refers to the relationship among the rhetor (writer, speaker, creator), the audience (reader, listener, user), and the text (essay, speech, artifact). Furthermore, every text has a purpose, and identifying the purpose will help you make decisions about what content to include and how to frame it. The rhetorical triangle acknowledges that the relationship among the rhetor, audience, and text is interdependent and that each element is essential in the rhetorical dynamic. The rhetorical triangle is worth considering when you compose emails and Canvas messages, design assignments, and otherwise communicate with students, faculty, and staff. Learning how to communicate effectively at school will serve you well in your profession as you will likely have occasions to communicate with colleagues, supervisors, and clients.



Consider the difference between an email message that focuses on the author's needs and motivations and one that also considers only the reader's. Author-centered messages are often less effective than audience-centered messages.

### **Author-centered, without attention to professional credibility**

“Mrs. Taylor, im in your class and need to know what textbook to order right away because im trying to order all my books before i leave for vacation later today. thx. Jane”

### **Reader-centered, with attention to professional credibility**

“Dear Professor Taylor, I am in your BIOL 1010-14 class Fall Semester. I was unable to find the name of the textbook I need for your class on the DSU Bookstore web page. Would you mind letting me know what textbooks I need? I would like to order my books as soon as possible so I am prepared on the first day of class. Thank you, Jane Smith D0012345.”

The two email examples above illustrate the difference between Jane thinking about her needs and her thinking about what information the professor might need, as well as what might motivate the professor, such as wanting Jane to be prepared for class. Furthermore, the reader-centered example will give the professor a good first impression of Jane, which will enhance Jane’s ethos (credibility) in class.

When you write, make decisions that will enhance your ethos by remembering that you (the author) are only one part of a rhetorical triangle.

## **Basic guidelines for academic writing**

Many college instructors use the five criteria below when grading academic writing. The questions for each relate to an academic paragraph.

### **unity**

Does the paragraph have a clearly defined topic sentence (1<sup>st</sup> sentence) that expresses the writer’s opinion?

Does the paragraph stay on topic with ideas or reasons that relate to the topic sentence?

### **development**

Is plenty of evidence given to support each idea or reason?

Are there examples, facts, quotations and/or details?

### **coherency**

Are transitional words or phrases used such as “first,” “next,” “finally,” or “on the other hand?”

Are other connecting words used such as synonyms or repeated words?

**grammar** Are correct capitalization, utilization, punctuation, and spelling applied?

Do all sentences have clear meaning?

**format** Should the paper follow a specific style guide such as MLA or APA?

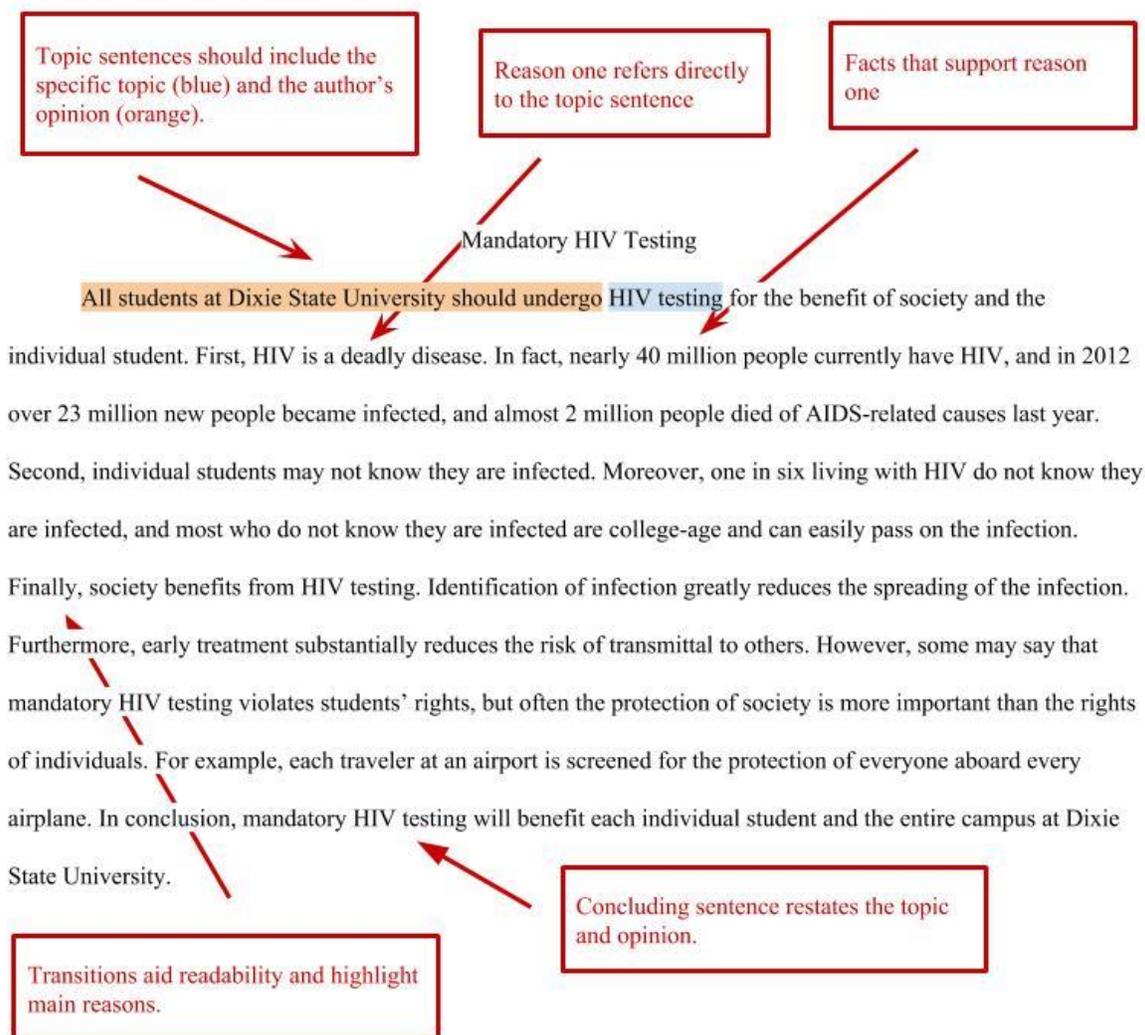
Is the paper free of unnecessary font changes, bold letters, underlining, or italics? Is the paper formatted to enhance clarity and readability?

## Guidelines for writing an academic paragraph

Writing academic paragraphs is easier and more effective if you understand patterns of development. These patterns guide writers in presenting their ideas in a manner readers can understand. While every written paragraph may not follow an exact recipe, most have the following ingredients:

- **topic sentence:** Usually the first sentence in a paragraph, a topic sentence should tell the specific topic the writer wants to address and his or her opinion about that topic.
  - Example: Dixie State University is the best college in Utah for several reasons.
- **reasons or aspects:** Reasons must reinforce the opinion in the topic sentence.
  - After reading the example topic sentence, you might ask, why is DSU the best? Your answer would be the reasons: small classes, low tuition, great weather.
- **support:** After each reason or aspect, you should develop each by providing adequate support such as details, facts, or examples.
  - When developing the idea that DSU has low tuition, you might mention that Dixie State's cost is the lowest for universities in Utah. You might also add that many students come to Dixie from California because DSU's out-of-state tuition is lower than in-state tuition there.
- **concluding sentence:** If writing a stand-alone paragraph, you will want to end by restating the idea in your topic sentence.
  - If your paragraph is part of an essay, replace the concluding sentence with a transitional one.

Take a look at the example on the next page to see how these items are used in a pattern that develops the writer's ideas into a unified, well-supported paragraph.



Paragraph adapted from Ricky Patel's student essay entitled, "Mandatory HIV Testing," found in *How to Write Anything*, First Edition.

## Six C's of professional communication

Academic writing and professional communication share a lot of characteristics, which you can think of as the six C's of effective communication.

<b>clear</b>	Aim to clarify any definitions, concepts, and context that your audience would need to understand the message. Avoid potential confusion.
<b>correct</b>	Be honest, accurate, and precise. Do the necessary homework or research to ensure that the information you use is well-supported and credible.
<b>concise</b>	Omit irrelevant information and wordy passages. Concise writing does not mean that you need to avoid descriptive language or details that clarify your ideas.
<b>complete</b>	Match the degree of specificity to the genre and purpose. Design your message to meet the needs and expectations of the audience.
<b>concrete</b>	Avoid generic or ambiguous terms when specific ones will enhance understanding. Favor plain language over inflated or pretentious language.
<b>courteous</b>	Respect your audience, even—or especially—when you have differences. Considerate, civil communication is often more effective than its alternatives.

## Trailblazer Connections Writing Assignment

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Read the section “Knowledge is Interconnected” (p. 35) in *Becoming a Learner* and create a paragraph answering one of the following questions:

- Why is writing a critical skill in order to succeed as a learner?
- How will becoming a better writer improve your overall experience in college?

## Campus and Online Resources

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Dixie State University Writing Center- [writingcenter.dixie.edu](http://writingcenter.dixie.edu)

Dixie State University library- [library.dixie.edu](http://library.dixie.edu)

Purdue OWL Writing Lab: Academic Writing- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/2/>