COMPOSITION & Essay Writing

Grades 7–12 · College | 8 pages

The writing process · the canons and appeals of classical rhetoric · thesis and outline · paragraphs · introductions and conclusions · transitions · eight kinds of essay · research and sources · quoting and plagiarism · style · common errors · revision checklists · rubric

1 Writing process | 2 Classical rhetoric | 3 Thesis statements | 4 Outlining | 5 Transitions | 6 Paragraphs | 7 Intros & conclusions | 8 Model essay | 9 Narrative, descriptive, expository | 10 Argument & fallacies | 11 Compare & cause | 12 Literary analysis | 13 Essay exams | 14 Style & concision | 15 Sentence variety | 16 Research paper | 17 Evaluating sources | 18 Quoting & plagiarism | 19 Common errors | 20 Revision checklists | 21 Self-check rubric

1 THE WRITING PROCESS

Invent *inventio* — find what to say → **Arrange** *dispositio* — thesis + outline → **Draft** *elocutio* — write it through → **Revise** *pass 1* — argument, order → **Edit** *pass 2* — sentences, words → **Proofread** *pass 3* — mechanics, format → **Publish** *memoria · actio* — final copy

go back to any step whenever the writing needs it

Purpose **teach** (inform, prove), **delight** (hold interest), **move** (change a mind or a deed)

Audience what the reader knows, believes and needs; write for a sensible reader who missed class

Occasion assignment, length, form, deadline; the prompt's verbs (section 13)

MEMORY TRICK

Four questions before the first word

Who will read it? **Why**: to teach, delight or move? **What** exactly is my claim? **How** long, in what form, by when?

Invention: finding material

- **Brainstorm** a list; **freewrite** 10 minutes without stopping; **cluster** ideas around a center word.
- **Ask** who, what, when, where, why, how.
- **Visit the topics** (the course's five rooms): definition, comparison, relationship, circumstance, testimony.
- **Read and take notes**; record every source as you go.

"Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." (Habakkuk 2:2, KJV)

Copy, imitate, invent

Classical schools taught writing by **imitation**. Benjamin Franklin, reading the *Spectator*, "took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days," then rewrote them and compared (Franklin, *Autobiography*). Try it with a paragraph you admire.

Drafting

- Write straight through; fix later. Leave **[brackets]** for a missing fact.
- Stuck on the opening? Draft the body first.
- Keep the thesis and outline in view.
- Save each version with a date.

2 CLASSICAL RHETORIC

The five canons

Canon	Latin	Question it answers	In an essay
1 Invention	*inventio*	What can I say?	research, the topics, the stasis, the thesis
2 Arrangement	*dispositio*	In what order?	outline; the parts of the oration; strongest point last
3 Style	*elocutio*	In what words?	correct, clear, fitting (**decorum**), well ornamented
4 Memory	*memoria*	How will I hold it?	know the material; notes and practice for a speech
5 Delivery	*pronuntiatio*, *actio*	How will I present it?	voice and gesture; for a paper, clean format and final copy

Rhetoric (Aristotle): the art of finding, in each case, **the available means of persuasion**. Logic tests whether an argument is sound; rhetoric makes sound arguments win a hearing.

The three appeals

Appeal	Rests on	Built by
Ethos	the writer's character: good sense, good character, goodwill	accuracy, fairness to opponents, careful citation
Pathos	fitting feelings in the reader	concrete examples, a story, vivid detail
Logos	reasons: the **enthymeme** and the **example**	evidence, sound inference, answered objections

Logos is the backbone; ethos and pathos carry it.

Six parts of the oration

Part of the oration	In an essay
Exordium	introduction: win attention and goodwill
Narratio	background: the facts the reader needs
Partitio	thesis and forecast
Confirmatio	body: the proofs
Refutatio	answer the objections
Peroratio	conclusion: sum up and move

Kind of oratory	Time	Asks
Deliberative (assembly)	future	expedient or inexpedient?
Judicial (court)	past	just or unjust?
Ceremonial (praise, blame)	present	honorable or shameful?

The four stases

Stasis	The question
Fact	Did it happen?
Definition	What is it?
Quality	What kind is it: good, bad, serious?
Procedure	Who should decide, and how?

3 THESIS STATEMENTS

Weak to strong

Weak	Why	Stronger
Pets are nice.	vague	*A family dog teaches children responsibility, patience and loyalty.*
In this essay I will talk about Rome.	announces	*Rome fell less to barbarians than to debased coins, crushing taxes and divided rule.*
Homework has pros and cons.	fence-sits	*Homework helps when it is short and practices one skill; long busywork harms.*
Washington was the first president.	a fact	*Washington's greatest act was giving up power, twice.*

Topic, fact or thesis?

	Example
Topic	*King Alfred and the Danes*
Fact	*Alfred defeated the Danes at Edington in 878.*
Thesis	*Alfred saved Wessex less by battle than by building: fortified towns, a new fleet and schools.*

A thesis for every kind of essay

Essay	Sample thesis
Expository	*Good bread needs only four things: flour, water, salt and time.*
Argument	*Every high school should require a year of formal logic.*
Literary analysis	*Dickens makes Scrooge's change believable by first letting him see his own past.*
Compare	*Athens and Sparta both trained sons for the city: Sparta for war alone, Athens for war and debate.*
Cause-effect	*The Erie Canal made New York the chief port by cutting freight costs from the Great Lakes.*
Narrative	the point of the story: *The night the barn burned taught me what neighbors are for.*

Classical thesis and final heads

A classical **thesis** is a general question (*Should a ruler build schools?*); a **hypothesis** is one case (*Should Alfred?*). Test a proposal by the **final heads**: **lawful**, **just**, **expedient**, **possible**, **honorable**?

Thesis statement one sentence that states the **claim** the whole essay will prove

Four marks (1) **one sentence**; (2) a **claim**, not a topic or a fact; (3) **arguable but defensible**: a reasonable reader could disagree, and you can prove it in the space; (4) a **forecast** of the reasons, in order

The "Prove it" test

- Could a sensible reader disagree? If not, it is a fact.
- Can I prove it in the pages I have? If not, narrow it.
- Does every body paragraph prove part of it?
- Revise the thesis last: the draft often discovers the real claim.

MEMORY TRICK

A pattern to start from

Although [the best objection], [claim] *because* [reason 1], [reason 2] *and* [reason 3].

4 OUTLINING

Sentence outline (model)

Thesis: *Alfred saved Wessex less by battle than by building: fortified towns, a new fleet and schools.*

I. *Fortified towns (burhs) gave every district a refuge.*

A. *No farm lay far from a walled town.*

B. *Each town owed a fixed number of men for its walls.*

II. *A new fleet met the raiders at sea.*

A. *Alfred's ships were longer than the Danish ships.*

B. *They fought before the raiders could land.*

III. *Schools and English books trained leaders.*

A. *A court school taught nobles' sons to read.*

B. *Alfred had key Latin books put into English.*

IV. *Objection: Edington won the war. Answer: only the building kept the victory.*

"to write unto thee in order" (Luke 1:3, KJV)

Ways to order the points

Order	Use it for
Chronological	narratives, processes, history
Spatial	description: near to far, top to bottom
Importance	arguments: strong, weaker, **strongest last** (the Homeric or Nestor order)
Problem–solution	proposals
Cause–effect	explaining why, or what follows
Comparison	block or point by point (section 11)

Titles

Name the subject and hint at the claim: *Fortress and Book: How Alfred Saved Wessex*. Use title case. Your own title takes no quotation marks, italics or bold in MLA; APA sets it in bold.

Outline form

- Levels: **I.** → **A.** → **1.** → **a.** Indent each level.
- Never a lone I or A: divide only into **two or more**.
- Keep headings **parallel** (all sentences, or all phrases).
- A **sentence outline** puts the topic sentence of each paragraph in place: the draft nearly writes itself.

The five-paragraph essay

A **scaffold**, not a cage: introduction, three body paragraphs, conclusion. Learn it in Grades 7–8; then let the number of body paragraphs follow the number of reasons the thesis needs. A research paper uses the same plan, each part grown into several paragraphs.

5 TRANSITIONS

Relation	Words and phrases
Addition	*also, moreover, besides*
Comparison	*likewise, similarly*
Contrast	*however, yet, in contrast*
Concession	*granted, admittedly, of course*
Cause, effect	*therefore, thus, as a result*

Relation	Words and phrases
Example	*for example, namely*
Emphasis	*indeed, in fact, above all*
Sequence	*first, next, then, finally*
Place	*above, beyond, nearby*
Conclusion	*in short, on the whole*

Using them well

- Fit the word to the **relation**: *however* turns; *therefore* concludes.
- Use them **at the turns**, not on every sentence.
- Link paragraphs by echoing the last idea.
- Punctuate: *The ford was closed;* ***therefore****, we waited.*

6 PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

The body paragraph

Part	Its job
1 Topic sentence	states the one point of the paragraph, tied to the thesis
2 Evidence	facts, examples, quotations, testimony
3 Explanation	shows **how** the evidence proves the point: usually the longest part
4 Link	ties the point back to the thesis or leads to the next

A body paragraph in a school essay usually runs **80–120 words**.

MEMORY TRICK

The quotation sandwich (Traditional)

Introduce the quotation, **quote** it, then **explain** it. Never let a quotation stand alone as a sentence.

Model paragraph

(1) *Alfred's first defense was a ring of fortified towns.* **(2)** *After the Danes nearly took his kingdom in 878, he built walled towns, called burhs, placed so that no farm in Wessex lay far from shelter, and he fixed how many men each town owed for its walls.* **(3)** *These towns changed the war: raiders who had once struck and vanished now met a garrison within a day's ride, and a burh could hold out until the army arrived.* **(4)** *Walls of earth and timber, more than any single battle, kept Wessex English.*

Start a new paragraph

- for a new point; a new time or place; a new speaker in dialogue.
- to give a long paragraph a breathing space, splitting it at a real turn.

Unity every sentence serves the topic sentence; cut or move the stranger

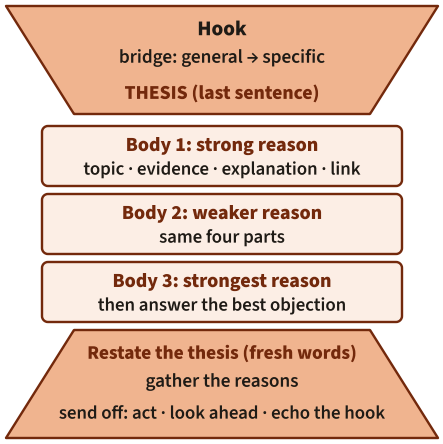
Coherence sentences connect: old information first, new last; repeated key terms; clear pronouns; transitions at the turns

Development enough proof to satisfy a doubtful reader

Kinds of evidence

Evidence	Weight
Facts, sound data	strong
Quotations from the text	strong in analysis
Expert testimony	strong if qualified
Examples	good; better in numbers
Analogy, story	illustrates; rarely proves

7 INTRODUCTIONS & CONCLUSIONS



The funnel: general to specific, then back out

Introduction: hook, bridge, thesis

Honest hook	Example
Scene	*In the winter of 878, a king hid in the marshes of Somerset with a few loyal men.*
Question	*What makes a beaten king worth remembering?*
Striking fact	*The scholar-king did not begin to read Latin until he was nearly forty.*
Quotation	"A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength." (Proverbs 24:5, KJV)

The **bridge** narrows from the hook to the thesis in 1–3 sentences; the **thesis** usually ends the paragraph.

⚠ Openers to avoid

- a dictionary definition (*Webster's defines…*)
- *Since the dawn of time…*; *In this essay I will…*
- a string of questions; an apology

Conclusion: restate, gather, send off

Conclusion move	What it does
Restate	the thesis in fresh words
Gather	the reasons into one view
Send off	a call to act, a look ahead, an echo of the hook

No new argument or evidence.

8 A MODEL ESSAY, ANNOTATED

Part	Fortress and Book (a short argument essay; original)	What it does
Introduction	*In the winter of 878, King Alfred of Wessex hid in the Somerset marshes with a few loyal men while Danish armies held most of England. That spring he won at Edington, but kings had won battles before and lost their lands the next year. Alfred saved Wessex less by battle than by building: fortified towns, a new fleet and schools.*	hook (a scene) · bridge · **thesis** with a forecast, last
Body 1	*Alfred's first defense was a ring of fortified towns. He placed walled burhs so that no farm lay far from shelter, and he fixed how many men each town owed for its walls. Raiders who had once struck and vanished now met a garrison within a day's ride.*	topic sentence · evidence · explanation; the strong reason first
Body 2	*Next, Alfred took the war to sea. He ordered ships longer than the Danish ships, so that raiders could be met before they landed. Though the new crews were not always skillful, a coast with a fleet behind it was no longer an open door.*	transition *Next* · concession *Though* · the weaker reason in the middle
Body 3	*Most important, Alfred built minds. He gathered scholars, opened a school at court and had the books he thought most needful put from Latin into English. Some say Edington alone saved Wessex; yet that victory lasted only because towns, ships and readers were ready when the Danes returned in the 890s.*	*Most important*: strongest last · the objection answered (**refutatio**)
Conclusion	*Alfred's sword won a spring; his walls, ships and books won a century. The towns kept the land, the fleet kept the coast and the schools kept the faith and the language. A people that means to last could do worse than build as he did: something to defend it, and something worth defending.*	restate in fresh words · gather · send off

The Grade 7 five-paragraph scaffold. A full essay adds evidence and citations; the facts are standard history (the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; Asser).

9 ESSAY TYPES: NARRATIVE, DESCRIPTIVE, EXPOSITORY

Type	Purpose	Usual order	Key moves
Narrative	tell a story that makes a point	chronological	scene, conflict, rising action, climax, resolution; dialogue; show, don't tell; past tense, first or third person
Descriptive (*ecphrasis*)	make the reader see	spatial or by impression	one dominant impression; all five senses; concrete nouns, exact verbs; figures of speech
Expository: process	explain how	steps in sequence	materials first; one step per sentence or paragraph; warn before the hard step
Expository: definition	explain what	class, then difference	*A canal* (term) *is a waterway* (class) *dug for boats or irrigation* (difference); examples and non-examples
Expository: classification	sort into kinds	one kind at a time	one principle of division; kinds that do not overlap and leave nothing out

Expository writing also explains by **illustration** (examples), **comparison** and **cause and effect** (section 11). Formal exposition is in third person, present tense.

Narrative: show, don't tell

Tell	Show
Ben was nervous.	*Ben read the first line of his speech four times and still could not say it.*
The room was old.	*Dust lay in the folds of the curtains, and the clock had stopped at ten past four.*

A model of description

Dickens stacks exact participles to fix one impression: "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!" (Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 1843).

Dialogue

- New paragraph for each new speaker.
- Comma or end mark inside the closing quotation mark: *"Wait," she said.*
- Use *said* most of the time; let the words carry the feeling.

10 PERSUASIVE & ARGUMENT ESSAYS

Parts of an argument

Part	What to do
Claim	the thesis: what should be believed or done
Reasons	why: usually two to four
Evidence	facts, examples, testimony for each reason
Counterargument	the best case against you, stated fairly
Concession	grant what is true in it
Rebuttal	show why your claim still stands

Persuasive writing uses all three appeals to move to action; an **academic argument** leans on logos and treats objections at length.

Enthymeme: find the hidden premise

Ben should lead the team, because he is the most experienced player. The unstated premise: *the most experienced player should lead.* If a reader would reject the hidden premise, state it and defend it.

Three kinds of claim

Claim of	Asks	Example
Fact	Is it so?	*Alfred's ships outran the Danes'.*
Value	Is it good?	*Alfred was the greatest English king.*
Policy	What should be done?	*Our school should teach logic.*

Fair dealing

- **Steelman**: state the other side so well that its holders would accept your wording.
- Quote opponents accurately and in context.
- Order the proofs strong, weaker, **strongest**; put the rebuttal before the strongest or just before the conclusion.
- "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." (Proverbs 18:17, KJV)

"be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15, KJV)

Fallacies to avoid (Logic course, Unit 3)

Fallacy	What goes wrong	Example
Ad hominem	attacks the person, not the argument	*Ignore his bridge design; he failed algebra once.*
Appeal to authority	cites someone not expert on the point	*A famous pitcher says this cereal sharpens memory.*
Appeal to the many	popular, so true (bandwagon)	*Everyone is buying it, so it must be best.*
Appeal to tradition, novelty	old, so good; new, so better	*We have always done it this way.*
Appeal to pity, fear, force	feeling or threat in place of reasons	*Pass this law or the town will be ruined.*
Red herring	changes the subject	*Why fuss about my essay when the roof leaks?*
Straw man	attacks a weaker version of the view	*You want less homework? So you want students to learn nothing.*
Begging the question	assumes what it should prove	*This paper never prints errors, because it says it is accurate.*
Complex question	a question that hides a claim	*Have you stopped wasting the budget?*
False dilemma	only two options offered when there are more	*Either we cancel the game or someone gets hurt.*
Hasty generalization	a broad rule from too few cases	*Two cousins disliked the book, so teenagers dislike it.*
Slippery slope	one step must lead to disaster, unshown	*Allow one late paper and soon no one will turn one in.*
Post hoc	after it, therefore because of it	*I wore my red socks and we won.*
Equivocation	a word shifts meaning midway	*A feather is light; light is not dark; so a feather is not dark.*
Composition, division	whole and parts confused	*Each brick is light, so the wall is light.*

11 COMPARE-CONTRAST & CAUSE-EFFECT

Block	Point by point
Intro + thesis	Intro + thesis
A: point 1	Point 1: A and B
A: point 2	Point 2: A and B
A: point 3	Point 3: A and B
B: point 1	Verdict
B: point 2	
B: point 3	
Verdict	

Two ways to arrange a comparison

Comparison essays

- Compare **like with like**, on the **same points**, in the same order.
- **Block** suits short essays; **point by point** keeps long ones clear.
- End with a **verdict**: what the comparison shows. The classical **syncrisis** sets two lives side by side, as Plutarch paired a Greek and a Roman.
- Plan with a two-column chart; *similarly, likewise, whereas, unlike, in contrast*.

Cause-and-effect essays

- Show the **chain**: each link must really cause the next.
- Separate **immediate** causes (the spark) from **underlying** ones (the dry wood).
- A **necessary** cause must be present; a **sufficient** cause is enough alone.
- Two things together are not proof one caused the other; *after* is not *because* (**post hoc**).
- *because, since, as a result, consequently, led to, therefore*.

12 LITERARY ANALYSIS

The moves

- **Read closely**, twice; mark repeated words, images and turns.
- Claim **how** and **why**, not *what happens*: summary is not analysis.
- Prove it with **short quotations**, each introduced and explained.
- Write in the **literary present**: *Scrooge refuses*, not *refused*.
- Name the author in full once, then by last name (*Shakespeare*, never *William* or *Will*).
- Titles: long works in *italics*; poems, stories and chapters in "quotation marks."

Quoting poetry

Mark line breaks with a slash and cite **line numbers**: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (lines 1–2). After the first citation, give numbers alone: "thy eternal summer shall not fade" (9). Quote four or more lines (MLA) as a block.

Close-reading questions

- What **repeats**? What **changes** (where is the turn)?
- What is odd, surprising or left out?
- Which words carry two meanings?
- How does the **form** (meter, rhyme, line and sentence length) fit the sense?
- Why does it end where it does?

Terms of analysis

Theme	the insight about life the work develops (a sentence, not a word)
Plot	exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution
Conflict	a struggle: with another person, nature, society, oneself, or God
Point of view	first person; third person limited; third person omniscient
Character	round or flat; dynamic (changes) or static
Setting	time, place and circumstances
Tone · mood	the author's attitude · the reader's feeling
Symbol	a concrete thing that stands for more than itself
Imagery	language that appeals to the senses
Irony	verbal (says the opposite), situational (the unexpected), dramatic (the audience knows more)
Foreshadowing	hints of what is coming
Allusion	a brief reference to a known work, person or event

Citing the text

Work	Cite (MLA)
Prose	(Dickens 23): author and page
Poem	(lines 1–2), then (9)
Verse play	(*Ham.* 3.1.56): act, scene, line
Bible	(*King James Bible Online*, Ps. 1.3)

Formats in full: the **MLA & APA Citation** sheet.

Summary (weak)	Analysis (strong)
In Sonnet 18 Shakespeare compares someone to summer.	*Sonnet 18 turns a compliment into a boast: by the last line, the poem, not the beloved, is what lasts.*

13 ESSAY EXAMS & TIMED WRITING

Prompt verb	Do this
Analyze	break it into parts; show how the parts work together
Compare	show likenesses (and usually differences)
Contrast	show differences
Define	give the class and the difference, with an example
Describe	give the features, in a clear order
Discuss	examine it from more than one side

Prompt verb	Do this
Evaluate	judge its worth by stated standards
Explain	make clear how or why
Illustrate	give examples
Justify	give reasons for a position
Summarize	give the main points briefly
Trace	follow a development in order

Timed essay (40 min)	Minutes
Read the prompt, plan, write a thesis	5
Draft introduction, body, conclusion	28
Reread, fix, proofread	7

Under the clock

- Underline the verbs and **every part** of the prompt; answer all of them.
- Answer the question in its own words in the **thesis**, in the first paragraph.
- Jot a short outline in the margin before drafting.
- Out of time? Outline the rest so the grader sees the plan.

14 STYLE & CONCISION

Wordy	Concise
due to the fact that	*because*
at this point in time	*now*
in order to	*to*
the question as to whether	*whether*
has the ability to	*can*
in the event that	*if*
a large number of	*many*
it is important to note that	(cut it)
each and every	*each*
end result	*result*
made a decision	*decided*
conducted an analysis of	*analyzed*

"Vigorous writing is concise." (William Strunk Jr., *The Elements of Style*, 1918)

"The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." (Ecclesiastes 12:10, KJV)

Clear and strong

- **Active voice** by default: *The council approved the bridge.* Passive when the doer is unknown or unimportant: *The bridge was built in 1820.*
- **Strong verbs**: *decided*, not *made a decision*.
- **Concrete** words: *oak, plow, 40 miles*, not *things, a lot, far*.
- **Formal register**: no slang; in academic prose avoid *you* and contractions; cut *I think*.

Classical style

Four virtues correctness, clarity, ornament, **decorum** (fit to subject, reader and occasion)

Three levels **plain** (to teach), **middle** (to delight), **grand** (to move)

Lincoln's three times

Lincoln's address at Gettysburg moves through time: "Four score and seven years ago" (past), "Now we are engaged in a great civil war" (present), to "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom" (future). Conclusions can make the same turn.

Cut the deadwood FIX IT

It is a fact that there were many soldiers who, due to the fact that they were tired, were not able to march in the morning.

26 words

Many tired soldiers could not march in the morning.

9 words

Schemes and tropes

Figure	What it is	Example
Antithesis	contrast in balanced form	"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," (Dickens, 1859)
Anaphora	repeated opening words	"we cannot dedicate… we cannot consecrate… we cannot hallow this ground" (Lincoln)
Tricolon	three parallel parts	"of the people… by the people… for the people" (Lincoln)
Chiasmus	reversed order, A B · B A	"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27, KJV)
Metaphor	calls one thing another	"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105, KJV)
Simile	a comparison with *like* or *as*	"he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water" (Psalm 1:3, KJV)
Rhetorical question	asked for effect, not answer	"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31, KJV)
Litotes	understatement by denying the opposite	"a citizen of no mean city" (Acts 21:39, KJV)
Personification	human action given to things	"Let the floods clap their hands" (Psalm 98:8, KJV)

15 SENTENCE VARIETY

Four sentence structures

Structure	Example
Simple: one independent clause	*The walls held.*
Compound: two or more independent clauses	*The walls held, and the raiders left.*
Complex: one independent + a dependent clause	*Because the walls held, the raiders left.*
Compound-complex	*Because the walls held, the raiders left, and the farmers came home.*

Copia: one thought, many ways

Renaissance schools, after Erasmus, had students rewrite one sentence dozens of ways. *The book delighted me.* → *I read the book with delight.* → *Few things have pleased me more than that book.* → *What a delight that book was!* → *The book was a feast.* Keep the best; learn from all.

Vary the openings

Open with	Example
an adverb	*Slowly, the fog lifted.*
a prepositional phrase	*At dawn, the bells rang.*
a participial phrase	*Seeing the sails, the watchman shouted.*
an adverb clause	*When the tide turned, we rowed.*
an infinitive phrase	*To reach the town, we crossed the ford.*
a transition	*Even so, the bridge stood.*

Keep it parallel

- Pairs and lists take the same form: *to read, to write and to speak*, not *to read, writing and to speak*.
- Balanced halves ring: *Alfred lost a battle but won a kingdom.*

Loose sentence main clause first, details after: *Alfred held on through cold, hunger and defeat.*

Periodic sentence main point saved for the end: *Through cold, hunger and defeat, Alfred held on.*

Rhythm follow a long sentence with a short one. It wakes the reader.

Combine choppy sentences FIX IT

The Danes came by sea. They came in spring. They burned the abbey.

choppy

Sailing in with the spring, the Danes burned the abbey.

combined

16 THE RESEARCH PAPER

	Step	What to do
1	**Question**	Narrow a topic to a **research question** (*How did Alfred defend Wessex?*); survey an encyclopedia, but do not cite it.
2	**Search**	Catalog and databases; **subject headings**; **Boolean** *AND, OR, NOT*; "exact phrases"; **citation chaining** (mine bibliographies).
3	**Evaluate, take notes**	Test each source; a **source card** per source (citation, number); a **note card** per idea (source, page; Q, P or S).
4	**Thesis & outline**	Turn your answer into a working thesis; sort note cards into the outline.
5	**Draft**	Cite as you write: every quotation, paraphrase, summary and uncommon fact.
6	**Revise & document**	Three passes (section 20); build the Works Cited or References list; check each in-text citation against it.

Kinds of sources

Primary evidence from the time or person: letters, diaries, speeches, laws, records, an original experiment

Secondary a later study of primary sources: histories, biographies, journal articles

Tertiary summaries of secondary work: encyclopedias, textbooks

Source card and note card (model)

Source 3: Whitlock, Clara A. *Burhs and Books: King Alfred's Wessex*. Ridgeline Press, 2019. (fictional)

Note card: heading *Burhs: placement* · source **3**, p. **42** · **P** (paraphrase): *Towns were sited so no farm lay more than a day's walk from one.*

Annotated bibliography each citation followed by 2–5 sentences: what the source says, how reliable it is, how you will use it

⚠ AI chat tools

- Never cite an AI chat tool as a source; its answers are not a fixed, accountable text.
- It can invent quotations, facts and whole books; verify everything in a real source.
- Submitting its writing as yours is plagiarism.

MEMORY TRICK

A good research question

is **open** (*how? why?*), **focused** and **answerable** from sources you can reach.

17 EVALUATING SOURCES

Five questions

Ask	Of a secondary source
Author	Who wrote it? What training, what record?
Publisher	Who stands behind it: university press, journal, agency, a stranger?
Evidence	Does it cite sources you could check?
Purpose	To inform, to sell, to campaign? Who gains?
Date	Is it current enough for the subject?

"at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." (Deuteronomy 19:15, KJV)

Weighing a witness

Ask	Of a primary source (a witness)
Nearness	Was the writer there, and how soon after?
Means of knowing	Could the writer actually know this?
Motive	Any reason to bend the truth?
Corroboration	Do independent witnesses agree?

A **statement against interest** (admitting what hurts one's own side) is unusually believable.

On the web

- **Read laterally**: leave the page and see what other reliable sources say about the site and its author.
- Check **provenance**: trace a quotation, statistic or image to where it first appeared.
- A domain (*.org, .edu, .com*) does not prove reliability.
- Red flags: no author, date or sources; outrage in capitals; mostly ads.
- The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11, KJV)

18 QUOTING, PARAPHRASING & PLAGIARISM

	What it is (always cited)
Quotation	exact words, in quotation marks
Paraphrase	your own words and sentence pattern, about as long
Summary	the main idea only, much shorter

One passage, four ways

Original: "From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books." (Franklin)

Paraphrase: *As a boy, Franklin spent nearly every coin he got on something to read* (Franklin).

Summary: *Franklin loved books from childhood* (Franklin).

Patchwriting (plagiarism, even if cited): *From a child Franklin was fond of reading, and his little money was laid out in books.*

Weaving in quotations

- **Signal phrase**, comma: *As Franklin recalls, "…"*
- **Woven**: *Franklin's money was "ever laid out in books."*
- **Colon** after a full sentence: *He names his first love: "…"*
- **[Brackets]** for a changed word; **ellipsis** (…) for omitted words; never change the meaning.
- Long quotations become **block quotations**: over four lines of prose or three of poetry (MLA); 40 words or more (APA).
- **Signal verbs**: *argues, observes, notes, reports, concedes, insists, warns*.

Plagiarism passing off another's words or ideas as your own: missing quotation marks or citation, patchwriting, a borrowed paper, AI-written text

Common knowledge undisputed facts found in many general sources (*Washington was the first president*) need no citation; when in doubt, cite

"Thou shalt not steal." (Exodus 20:15, KJV) A citation pays an honest debt. **Formats**: the companion **MLA & APA Citation** sheet.

19 COMMON ERRORS

Error	Wrong	Right
Fragment	*Because the river rose.*	*The town flooded because the river rose.*
Comma splice	*The walls held, the raiders left.*	*The walls held, so the raiders left.*
Run-on (fused)	*The walls held the raiders left.*	*The walls held; the raiders left.*
Subject–verb agreement	*The list of names are long.*	*The list of names is long.*
Pronoun agreement	*Each student brought their book.*	*Each student brought his book* (or *his or her*; or *The students brought their books*).

Error	Wrong	Right
Vague pronoun	*This shows he was wise.*	*This decision shows he was wise.*
Tense shift	*He climbs the hill and saw the fleet.*	*He climbs the hill and sees the fleet.*
Person shift	*When a student reads, you learn.*	*When students read, they learn.*
Dangling modifier	*Walking to town, the rain began.*	*Walking to town, we felt the rain begin.*
Faulty parallelism	*to read, writing and to speak*	*to read, to write and to speak*
its / it's	*The town lost it's wall.*	*The town lost its wall.*

Error	Wrong	Right
Apostrophe plural	*The Dane's came in ship's.*	*The Danes came in ships.*
Quotation punctuation	*He called it "a refuge".*	*He called it "a refuge."* (American style)
Dropped quotation	a quotation standing alone as a sentence	introduce it and explain it
Unsupported claim	*Everyone knows Alfred was great.*	give the evidence and cite it
Wordiness, clichés	*at the end of the day*	say it plainly: *finally*

Grammar and punctuation in full: see the **English Grammar & Punctuation** guide.

20 REVISION & EDITING CHECKLISTS

Pass 1 · Argument & structure

- Is the thesis one clear, arguable sentence?
- Does every body paragraph prove part of it?
- Are the points in the best order (strongest last)?
- Is the best objection answered fairly?
- Reverse outline: write each paragraph's point in the margin; does the list make sense?

Pass 2 · Paragraphs & sentences

- Does each paragraph have a topic sentence, evidence, explanation and link?
- Is every quotation introduced and explained?
- Are transitions at the turns, and right for the relation?
- Cut needless words; prefer active voice and strong verbs.
- Vary sentence length; check parallelism.

Pass 3 · Proofreading & format

- Spelling (read backward, word by word), capitals, punctuation.
- Every source cited in the text and listed at the end; the two match.
- Format: margins, spacing, font, heading, page numbers, title.
- Title: fresh, specific, in title case.
- Read the final copy aloud, from paper, slowly.

Ways to see again

- Set the draft aside a day; **read it aloud**.
- **Peer review**: one strength, one question, one suggestion. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." (Proverbs 27:17, KJV)

MEMORY TRICK **Large to small**

Argument, **P**aragraphs, **P**roof: revise in that order, so you never polish a sentence you are about to cut.

Revise from Latin *revidere*, **see again**: the large things first
Edit sentences and words
Proofread the last look for slips

21 SELF-CHECK RUBRIC

Criterion	4 · Excellent	3 · Good	2 · Developing	1 · Beginning
Invention: thesis & ideas	clear, arguable, insightful thesis; ideas fully developed	clear thesis; ideas mostly developed	thesis vague or obvious; thin ideas	no real thesis
Arrangement: order	every paragraph serves the thesis; strong order; smooth transitions	organized; a few weak links	some paragraphs wander	hard to follow
Evidence & citation	apt, explained evidence; every source cited correctly	good evidence; minor citation slips	thin or unexplained evidence; citation gaps	little evidence; uncited borrowing
Style	concise, varied, fitting; strong verbs	clear; some wordiness	wordy or flat; tone slips	unclear
Mechanics & format	nearly error-free; format exact	few errors	errors distract	errors block meaning

Score each row 1–4; the total is out of **20**. Multiply by **5** for a percent: 17 points = 85%. Score your own draft first and revise the lowest row.

Scale (course grading)

Points	Percent	Grade
18–20	90–100	A
16–17	80–89	B
14–15	70–79	C
13 or less	below 70	revise and resubmit

Before you hand it in

- Every part of the prompt is answered.
- Heading or title page in the style asked for.
- Source list on its own page, alphabetized, hanging indents.
- You can defend every sentence if asked: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV)