

## Academic Essay Skills Checklist

What do you feel skilled at in academic writing? What skills do you want to improve? Use this checklist to find one or two skills you want to work on this semester. Use A&L's other handouts and work with a tutor to clarify concepts and help you make progress.

### 1. Assignment Requirements

- Read through the assignment sheet. It will include requirements a general checklist can't anticipate, and may even ask you to do something different
- Highlight specific instructions and create a task-specific checklist.

### 2. Structure & Organization

- Make a reverse outline of your draft in order to get a better sense of its structure: what is each paragraph saying (content) and doing (how is it serving your purpose or argument)?

- Introduction
  - Grabs the reader's attention and creates interest
  - Briefly describes the topic and includes my thesis statement
  - Provides a guide for the ideas being covered—a map of support
- Thesis Statement
  - Is neither too broad nor too narrow
  - Could be argued against
  - Is specific to the content of the essay
  - Is an original argument
  - Is significant to my readers/the field/the world
- Body Paragraphs
  - Each focuses on a different point of my argument
  - Each has a topic sentence
  - Support points with examples
  - Introduce and explain new terms and ideas
  - Each links to the next with a transition
  - Move from general to specific, creating a logical progression
- Conclusion
  - Refers back to the thesis
  - Summarizes my important points
  - Offers a sense of closure
  - Hints at the larger implications of my argument

### 3. References

- Create your bibliography and citations as you collect sources, not as a last step.

- Quotes, Paraphrases, and Summaries of Sources
  - Are framed with context
  - Formatted correctly, including punctuation and a consistent style (Chicago, MLA, APA)
  - Explained, including their significance to my argument

#### 4. Formatting

– Check the assignment sheet and syllabus for professor’s guidelines first.

- If No Given Guidelines
  - Consistent and readable
  - Leaves space for notes and feedback
  - Includes my name and the name of the course/section

#### 5. Tone & Style

– Consider readers beyond your professor and classmates.  
– Look to writing you enjoy and admire as models.

- Vocabulary
  - Is clear and precise
  - Uses key words consistently
  - Is otherwise varied to avoid repetition
- Voice
  - Relates to my audience appropriately
  - Represents my voice (instead of the voice of my sources)
  - Creates rhythm and “flow” by varying sentence length

#### 6. Grammar

– Always run spell check on a final draft.  
– Read your paper out loud to gauge the flow of the paper and to catch errors.  
– Read your paper backwards, one sentence at a time, so you don’t get caught up in the ideas.

- Word Choice/Form
  - Chooses the correct homophones (ex. too, two, to)
  - Includes vocabulary you’re familiar with—both meaning and grammatical use
  - Gives singular and plural nouns the correct endings
- Sentence Structure
  - Is free of run-ons and fragments
  - Uses punctuation purposefully (commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, etc.)
- Agreement/Consistency
  - Includes subject-verb agreement
  - Keeps tense consistent and appropriate to the content
  - Puts the correct definite or indefinite articles before nouns