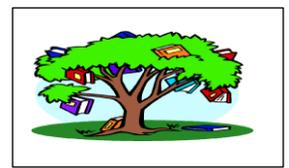


Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines



Writing for Clarity

Writing needs to be unambiguous. Diction (word choice) and syntax (sentence structure) must not leave the reader guessing about what is written.

Argumentation

- The best rule is comfort. If a writer is confident and comfortable with what is written, then there is less of a chance for ambiguity. "Take only ways that are firm." (Proverbs)
- A thesis, the position or focus of a paper, must be clear, or the writer will not have direction and the reader will be left wondering what the paper is about.
 - If a position is changed during writing, rework the thesis statement.
- Support must be germane (relevant) to advancing and supporting this thesis
 - Avoid "rabbit trails." A writer need not be in a reverie or stream of consciousness.
 - This is where the writer has no plan. He/she just writes where the mind goes.
- Arguments follow an organized pattern and logic principles.
 - When the essay is written, read it over and look for a feeling of "flow," like a dance.
 - If passionate or opinionated about the subject, you need to reflect on your logic.
- A good tool for clarity is to plan well before writing by using an outline and reading the paper aloud, especially if the writer learns best by hearing things.

Diction

- Use a dictionary to get the definition of words and a thesaurus to find nuanced words.
 - English is a difficult language, because one word can mean several things and one concept can have several expressions.
- Be concise. Endeavor to say as much as you can in as few words as possible. Don't repeat something, unless for effect or reinforcement.

Sentence Structure

- Check tense—keep a timeline in mind.
- Ensure agreement—keep subject and verb together.
- Parallel structure, using the same grammar pattern in a series.
- Transitions link sections of the paper together by using the same words or continuing a line of thought.

Voice and Style

- Active voice is clearer and stronger. Refer to this handout.
- Break up long and complex sentences. Journalists do this.