

Essay Expectations: General Instructions for Writing Papers

It is highly suggested that you visit the Oral & Writing Lab (OWL) <http://www.riosalado.edu/library/owl/Pages/default.aspx> before beginning to compose any writing assignment for this course. The OWL has some excellent resources and references about writing essays for all students. Even if you feel very comfortable with composing expository essays, you should take a look because you can never have too much instruction in this area. If you have never composed an essay for a course, you will find this immensely helpful. The link is on the right-hand side of your student page.

Following the steps provided for you below will help you get started.

1. Read the essay question very carefully and consider what the assignment is asking you to do. You can often use part of the question as a lead-in for your answer. Starting off by answering the question will often help you formulate your thesis statement or argument. All of the writing assignments for this course will not necessarily need a thesis, and, in that case, you will compose the sections as asked.
2. Compose an interesting, unique title for your essay that captures the essence of your argument and topic.
3. Essays should be a combination of concrete details (facts) and personal commentary (opinion), all of which work together to prove your thesis (if applicable). Try to outline the information you will include, such as sub-topics and specific examples you will use in your paper. You should include examples from the textbook, and they should appear at times in the form of quotations. If you use a direct quotation, you must place quotation marks around any directly borrowed terminology and refer to the citation format discussed in Step 8.
4. Do **not** rely on outside sources. Instructors are primarily interested in your own thoughts and observations; however, your paper should have a nice blend of your own interpretations and facts from the textbook. The use of specific examples to support major points or observations is mandatory for this assignment.
5. Drafting an outline will prove very helpful in seeing how your paper fits together. What do you want to say about your topic?
6. After you have composed your first draft, you should start the editing process. Proofread carefully, considering all grammar usage, punctuation, sentence construction, and spelling. Mechanics are a component of the essay grade, and, if the paper is difficult to read or the mechanical errors hinder the flow of the prose, points will be deducted. It helps tremendously to read your writing out loud

because you will hear errors you would not normally find when reading silently. Also, having someone else read your paper and help you proofread are certainly acceptable.

7. Type your essay in a non-bolded, readable font in a 12 point size. The paper should be double-spaced, so note that when considering the length of the paper. The requirement is a double-spaced format.

8. Be sure to include in-text citations for any borrowed material used for support. These citations should correspond with a “Works Cited” section at the end of your paper, and URLs (Uniform Resource Locators or Web addresses) for art sources should be included here. Any supporting material that you paraphrase, summarize, or directly quote should be cited. The citation should follow the material within the paper. For the textbook, the following formats are acceptable: (Text 53) or (Getlein 53). Cite the exact page number. See the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines from the Rio Salado Library for more instruction. Note: Wikipedia and similar sites are **not** reputable sources.

You should find this list helpful in composing your essays. Feel free to ask questions and contact your instructor if what you are looking for is not addressed here. Most importantly, your instructor is looking for how you respond to the question and demonstrate comprehension and application of the course material. You should first and foremost choose a topic you will enjoy writing about because that will certainly come through in your style.