

Darren Schreiber's Writing Checklist

Outline

- ___ Does my outline have a thesis?
- ___ Is the organization of my outline the most effective way to address the question?
- ___ Do the main points in my outline have a logical flow?
- ___ Do I structure my argument effectively?
- ___ Does my outline address alternative perspectives and anti-theses?
- ___ Does the placement of each argument give it the appropriate emphasis?
- ___ Does my outline have an introduction and conclusion?
- ___ Does my outline have three to five main points?
- ___ Do I have from three to five sub-points to support each main point?
- ___ Are the main points the best ones I can make to support my claim?
- ___ Have I placed the available textual support for my points in the outline?
- ___ Does my outline appropriately address criticisms of my argument?
- ___ Are the criticisms and counter-arguments placed appropriately?
- ___ Are my arguments logical and reasonable? (What would Socrates say?)
- ___ Do my arguments work intuitively? (What would my grandma say?)
- ___ Have I edited and revised my outline sufficiently?

Introductory Paragraph

- ___ Does my intro describe the problem I am addressing?
- ___ Does my intro state my thesis concisely and precisely?
- ___ Does my intro outline my paper clearly?
- ___ Does the intro draw my reader into my paper?
- ___ Would my reader know the question I am answering by reading my intro?
- ___ Did I rewrite my intro after I finished the paper to make sure it fits what I actually say in the paper?

Conclusion

- ___ Does my conclusion describe the problem I addressed?
- ___ Does my conclusion state my thesis concisely and precisely?
- ___ Does the conclusion summarize my argument effectively?
- ___ Does my conclusion outline my paper clearly?
- ___ Is my conclusion persuasive?

Paper Organization

- ___ Have I followed the outline I developed?
- ___ Do I use headings (and perhaps subheadings) that lead the reader through my train of thought and reinforce the outline in my intro?
- ___ Does the organization of the paper fit the tone and argument I want to make?
- ___ Is my paper concise?
- ___ Is each main point germane to the thesis of the paper?

Paragraph Style

- _____ Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
- _____ Are the paragraphs coherent?
- _____ Are the paragraphs too short or too long?
- _____ Do I have good transitions between paragraphs?
- _____ Can I cut any paragraph?
- _____ Is each paragraph germane to the thesis of the paper?

Sentence Style

- _____ Are sentences an appropriate length? (10 words average, 25 max)
- _____ Have I avoided philosophical jargon?
- _____ Have I omitted surplus words?
- _____ Are sentences in the active voice?
- _____ Am I using concrete words?
- _____ Do the sentences flow from one to another?
- _____ Do I avoid needlessly repetitious sentence structures? (e.g. beginning each sentence “I think that...”)
- _____ Do I use repetitive structures for appropriate emphasis?
- _____ Can I cut any sentences?
- _____ Is each sentence germane to the topic sentence of the paragraph?

Word Style

- _____ Can I cut any words?
- _____ Have I used the appropriate vocabulary?
- _____ Have I used the vocabulary appropriately? (this is not same question...)
- _____ Can I express my ideas more concisely?

Persuasive Writing Techniques

- _____ Have I arranged words for appropriate emphasis?
- _____ Am I using concrete and abstract words when appropriate?
- _____ Do I use parallelism to emphasize points and create literary flow?
- _____ Do I qualify thoughts only when necessary?
- _____ Have I avoided cliches?
- _____ Have I avoided unnecessary underlining?
- _____ Does my paper contain affirmative assertions?
- _____ Do I use figures of speech appropriately?
- _____ Have I defined important terms and explained important concepts?

Tone

- _____ Have I avoided stereotypes or other derogatory and inappropriate comments?
- _____ Does my paper have the appropriate tone?
- _____ Have I appropriately integrated my personal insights?
- _____ Have I given interesting examples of the points I am making?
- _____ Have I seriously entertained criticisms and alternative points of view?
- _____ Is my argument too one sided?

Citation

- ___ Have I appropriately cited the ideas of others?
- ___ Have I accurately represented the ideas of others?
- ___ Have I integrated quotations into the text? (i.e. Does my reader experience eavesdropping on a conversation among great thinkers?)
- ___ Have I avoided block quotes?
- ___ Is the citation form consistent?
- ___ Does the citation format follow the conventional requirements?

Spelling and Grammar

- ___ Have I checked spelling with the computer?
- ___ Have I manually checked the spelling?
- ___ Have I used a grammar checker and manually checked the grammar?
- ___ Have I read the paper out loud to test for flow and errors?
- ___ Do my nouns and verbs agree? (contrast - "He like the paper.")
- ___ Am I using commas, semi-colons, colons, periods, and dashes correctly?

Formatting Mechanics

- ___ Have I used a 12 point font and double spacing?
- ___ Are my margins one-inch?
- ___ Is the font easy to read? (e.g. Courier, Times, Palatino)
- ___ Is the paper the right length?
- ___ Have I used footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical comments in a strategic manner?
- ___ Have I included a bibliography if needed?
- ___ Do I need to include an appendix, maps, illustrations, glossaries or other material to help the reader?
- ___ Do I need a table of contents?
- ___ Do I need a table of other material helpful to the reader? (e.g. list of illustrations)

Final Thoughts

- ___ Does the paper work like a symphony? (i.e. each element of the paper fits together for a common purpose)
- ___ Is the paper readable? (Could a reasonably intelligent person outside the field follow it easily?)
- ___ Is the paper poetic? (i.e. Is it piece of literature or a VCR instruction manual translated literally from Japanese?)
- ___ Is the paper true? (i.e. Are the facts accurate and uncertainties clearly explained?)
- ___ Is the paper just? (i.e. Am I advocating positions that are morally untenable?)
- ___ Is the paper persuasive?
- ___ Have I edited and revised my paper?
- ___ Have I given my paper to an objective person to read?
- ___ Have I left my paper alone for a day (or at least an hour) before the final edit?
- ___ Am I satisfied that this paper represents the quality of my thinking, writing, and understanding?