Essay Due Soon?
Guidelines to organize & revise

~ A Workshop for ISC~
Facilitator: Amanda Goldrick-Jones
What we’ll cover

- Developing a central argument: making valid claims and finding support
- Organizing your ideas: outlines, coherent paragraphs
- Revising your draft: clear style, common errors
Surviving your paper!

- Work backwards from the due date and schedule mini-deadlines. Try the SLC/Library Assignment Calculator Tool.
- Make a plan for the paper, even if the plan changes!
- Get peer support. Ask others to read the draft for “sense,” structure, flow, style.
- Print out your complete, revised draft and read it OUT LOUD with pen in hand.
Reading? what to highlight

**INTRODUCTION**: main problem or issue; central claim (thesis/hypothesis) or research question.

**CONCLUSION**: resolution of thesis, hypothesis, or research question; indication of why this is important or what happens next.

**MAIN POINTS** developing the central claim or question. **HINT**: paragraph beginnings and endings usually introduce and wrap up supporting arguments.
Find arguments in sources

**HINT:** Start with the title, abstract, introduction, conclusion, and headings or sub-headings.

Look for

- the writer’s **main position** (claim), statement of **purpose**, or research **question**.
- the main issue and its **significance** ("So what"?)

☞ See online [Structure of a Research Article](#)
Use sources to build your arguments

REVIEW YOUR SOURCES: What’s the gist? Overall purpose? Problem or issue? How does each source tie into your purpose for writing?

☞ TRY THIS. . .
In your own words, write the “gist” of source-material without looking at the source. These paraphrases solidify your understanding and help build your arguments.

FIND and RECORD key terms / themes / claims across sources that connect with your purpose.
Use sources to build your arguments

For each key idea ("slug"), **SELECT** and **RECORD** a quote, fact, argument that develops and supports the key idea.

☞ See online How To Organize a Research Paper Using Notecards
Check your thesis

A CLAIM is not the same as a THESIS.

“. . .you may need to convey [a] position or claim in a thesis statement near the beginning of your draft (Thesis Statements, UNC). You likely need a thesis if the paper asks you to analyze, interpret, compare and contrast, demonstrate cause and effect, or to take a stand on an issue.

A thesis must be debatable and significant: “So what”? 

☞ See the HANDOUT “Thesis Statements”
Plan your writing

True or false? An outline is

☐ a series of points capturing trends in your research notes

☐ a list showing relationships between points or arguments

☐ a thesis statement followed by an ordered list of headings related to each other and to the thesis

☐ a thesis statement followed by an ordered list of full-sentence claims that interrelate and support the thesis

☞ All of the above, depending on your stage of planning!
Shape your paragraphs

5 Tips for coherent paragraphs

◆ Start with a KEY IDEA → a sentence conveying a purpose

◆ Develop this purpose with specific details

◆ Show how sentences connect with each other and with the purpose. Here’s an example.

◆ Wrap up with a sentence that says something about the purpose

◆ Use a key word/phrase from the final sentence in the first sentence of the next paragraph
Shape your paragraphs

Common paragraph problems

◆ no overall governing topic ("everything but the kitchen sink")

◆ no clear topic sentence

◆ lack of structural cohesion or "flow" (information isn’t logically organized; there is a sudden switch in topic; sentences do not clearly connect to each other)

◆ overly frequent or mechanical transitions

◆ a final sentence that is abrupt, mechanical, or off-topic
Physical activity is good for people. It contributes greatly to a person’s physical and mental well-being. The schedules of varsity teams are very demanding. The swim team has eleven practices a week, of which eight are mandatory. The workouts, consisting of approximately four thousand meters each and also including running, weight training, and flexibility exercises, keeps a person in good physical shape and also increases mental awareness. You are active before classes begin, so you are alert and awake.
Revise your sentences

Are your sentences grammatically correct?

What’s the key message in the sentence? Are your SUBJECT and VERBS easy to spot?

Do your sentences tell a “story”? What’s happening to whom?

- SUBJECT → character
- VERB → action or change

Are your sentences clear and concise?

HINT: reduce clutter between subjects and verbs; omit jargon and “filler”
Integrate your sources

**Summarize**

*Why?* To condense the main ideas of a source.

*Cite?* Yes.

**Paraphrase**

*How much?* *Most* of your paper.

*Why?* To show your understanding; to contextualize and synthesize.

*Cite?* Yes.

**Quote**

*When?* Infrequently—15% of content or less.

*Why?* When the exact words matter more than the idea.

*Cite?* Yes.

☞ [Techniques for Paraphrasing — SLC Resource](#)
You’re not alone!

Use the SLC’s peer consultants / the SLC website / WriteAway / the Library

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Thanks, and good luck!