



HOLY FAMILY UNIVERSITY

**Center for Academic
Enhancement**

**Northeast
Philadelphia
Campus**

**Center for Academic
Enhancement
Library 2nd Floor**

**Phone: 215-637-7700
Ext. 3326
email: cae@holyfamily.edu**

Manual for Peer Tutors: Writing

Thank you for agreeing to work with us as a peer tutor in the Center for Academic Enhancement. You have been chosen from the applicant pool for many reasons. You have been recommended by your instructors, and, in some cases, also by your peers; you have exhibited outstanding scholarship; and, perhaps most importantly, you have shown that you understand the process of learning -- the challenges and the rewards. You will invest much, and, hopefully, will come away with much. In order for this process of learning and tutoring to be successful, you will need knowledge and imagination and patience. As Martina Horner, President of Radcliffe College, has said, "What is important is to keep learning, to enjoy challenge, and to tolerate ambiguity. In the end there are no certain answers." Remember: no manual can address all of the questions or predict each of the circumstances you will encounter; and so, we are there to help you. We are a team.

Angela Godshall, Director

P.S. Always, retain your humor. And read on, lest we take ourselves too seriously!

"They're the last words any writer wants to hear: 'May I make a suggestion?' But you'll hear them a lot if you want to write, because revision is part of the game, as Benjamin Franklin knew. 'Benjamin Franklin told the story of the hatmaker's sign...a true tale of writerly frustration....As the story-within-a-story begins, it's July 1776, and Thomas Jefferson is writhing in pain as the Continental Congress debates changes (he calls them "mutilations") in his draft of the Declaration of Independence, which he believes to be perfect as it is. The delegates noisily argue over every treasured syllable, striking out, adding, inserting, toning down, beefing up, rewording, rephrasing and reordering. On the sidelines, meanwhile, the distraught Jefferson is consoled by his friend Ben Franklin. "Tom," he says, 'this puts me in mind of a story.' The story he tells (one that Jefferson later recalled in his memoirs) is about a Boston hatmaker who's on his way to the sign shop with a plan for a new sign. On his parchment are the words 'John Thompson, Hatmaker. Fashionable Hats Sold Inside for Ready Money,' and below them a drawing of a hat. Along the way, he meets a few people who have suggestions to offer. Each one seems to have a good idea: The hatmaker's name is irrelevant, isn't it? And why say "inside"? Where else would the hats be sold? One by one and two by two, the carefully chosen words are struck out, and finally even the picture of the hat disappears (after all, there are hats in the shop window, aren't there?). By the time he arrives at the sign shop, his parchment is empty. But the sign maker has an idea too.' 'May I make a suggestion?' he says. 'How about: John Thompson, Hatmaker. Fashionable Hats Sold Inside for Ready Money.'" Under them, he'll draw a hat.' It's perfect!" says the hatmaker."

Welcome to the Center for Academic Enhancement (CAE) at Holy Family University. You are about to embark on an experience that promises not only to address the educational needs of the academic community, but one that enhances your personal growth as well. It is required that all tutors at the Center be exceptionally knowledgeable in their field[s] of expertise. However, what separates the great tutors from the good ones is not how much they know, but rather the way they communicate the subject matter to the students with whom they are working. Accordingly, tutoring sessions at the Center are designed to promote collaborative learning – you will give assistance and confidence to the tutee; in turn, your own skills of communication and ability to interact meaningfully will strengthen and mature.

We will work with you in an orientation program and training sessions. Also, we will make available to you a copy of The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, which served as the underpinning for this manual. Our design is to make your tutoring experience as productive and rewarding as possible!

Contributors

This manual was researched and written by:

Professional Tutors

William Broderick
Irene Klosko
Dennis Millan, compiler

Peer Tutors

Lisa Cruz
Wayne Hefner
Amanda Hipwell
Lauren Seay

Holy Family University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
April 2007

Introductory Information

The CAE's Mission Statement

The Center for Academic Enhancement at Holy Family University is committed to providing a broad complement of diverse academic support services, addressing student needs at all levels. By strengthening the skills necessary for intellectual growth and scholarly achievement, the Center seeks to enrich the academic experience of each student, to instill in each student enthusiasm for life long learning, and to uphold the University commitment to maintaining standards of academic excellence.

The CAE's philosophy for writing tutors

The Center for Academic Enhancement is a process-oriented Center which recognizes that writing and the writer are both works in process. More than improving a particular written work, we want to imbue the writer with ideals of clarity, accuracy and power of expression, structure, and appropriateness of form. We are neither a proof-reading nor an editing service. Our goal is to guide students to be monitors of their own work so that they can evaluate and revise completely. We work side-by-side with the faculty, complementing classroom instruction with individualized attention.

Tutor Training Program

The Center provides a training program for peer tutors. The intention of the program is to offer support and instruction to the tutor. We emphasize the Center's approach of working as a team; we coach the tutor, focusing on teaching technique and practices, communication skills; we strive to reinforce the University commitment to cultural diversity by providing insight into the needs of the ESL student and instilling an awareness of the dynamics of the intercultural community. In sum, it is our intent to reinforce the tutor's awareness of, understanding of, and respect for the learning needs of the University students.

Office procedures for the CAE

For non-referred students:

- Student logs into the computer dedicated to this task with the date, her/his name, the subject to be tutored, and the tutor's name.
- Student meets with her/his tutor.
- After tutoring session, the student fills out the Evaluation form on a periodic, but regular, basis.
- Student signs out on computer log with the time the tutoring session ended.
- Tutor fills out the Student Summary Sheet, noting the material that was covered and makes recommendations if applicable.
- Tutor files the Student Summary Sheet in the file cabinet in the student's folder. If the student is new and/or does not have a folder, the tutor makes a folder for the student and files it alphabetically. Exception: If a student comes to the Center to take the PRAXIS test only, a folder is not necessary; the Summary sheet should be filed in the PRAXIS folder.

- Tutor files the Evaluation form in her/his own folder for end-of-year summary and assessment. [NOTE: There should be a folder for evaluations in *each* tutor's section of the file cabinet.]

For referred students:

- Tutor takes the Faculty Referral Form from the student or locates it from the appropriate tray if the form has been sent via mail.
- Follow the procedure, steps 1-6, above.
- Complete the Faculty Confirmation Form and forward it to the referring faculty member via campus mail after first session.
- File the Faculty Referral Form in the student's folder along with the Student Summary Sheet.

In all instances:

- Please check your mailbox and the appointment book daily.
- When a student makes an appointment, either over the telephone or in person, please be sure to get telephone number [preferably cell] where s/he can be reached in case there is a scheduling conflict. Also record the student's subject and/or tutor in the appointment book. Place your initials next to each appointment you make.
- Keep all CAE resources, for example, dictionaries and handbooks, in order; return all resources to their place after each use.
- Keep the CAE neat and orderly.
- Have respect for all writers, without forming any preconceived notions based on any form of bias.
- Turn in your time sheet weekly.
- Suggest that the student be prepared, with textbook, notebook, pencil, and questions

Specifics for Math appointments:

- Remember, there is a separate math login sheet
- There can be no more than three people signed up at a single time, all of whom must be studying the same subject for tutoring.

Please complete ALL procedural steps daily, or as required: do not let the paperwork build up!

CHAPTER 1: THE CENTER AS CREATED LEARNING SPACE

A tutor becomes a part of a large but special group who has empowered others, enabling them to attain knowledge and hone their skills. Tutoring can be a joyful task, full of excitement and challenge, but there are some basic regulations that must be followed at all times --- these are intended to establish a procedure that works to the benefit of both tutor and tutee.

- Treat all students courteously and respectfully.
- Maintain a respectful and serious attitude toward the student's work, yet be somewhat casual, informal, and relaxed. Do not put on airs or act superior to those you tutor [you may have more education or have better skills, but this does not of itself make you a better human being.]
- Be constructive and specific when evaluating the student's work,. Don't leave the tutee hanging: give honest, but never nasty, feedback. Show the student exactly where s/he can improve her/his paper. Praise the areas you feel the writer did well.
- Make sure that you are **not editing** or "fixing the paper," when helping a writer. **For this reason, the tutor may NEVER place a correcting mark on the student's paper -- all corrections, additions, deletions are to be made by the student.** The job of a tutor is to help the *writer*, not correct the paper so the writer can get a passing grade. It is a common misconception that the Center is a "fix-it up shop," a place where tutors spend their time "dotting the i's and crossing the t's" to make papers presentable and readable. All of us at the Center must dispel this image whenever possible. Always remember: ownership of the written work belongs to the student!
- Give substantial help each session. The writer must feel that s/he has benefited in some clear way from the session or s/he is not likely to return. Sometimes, the tutor needs to tread a fine line between being too helpful, i.e. doing too much work on the actual paper and not giving enough direction or feedback [see the preceding item.]
- Help the writer interpret or better understand an assignment when applicable, but the tutor must always refrain from commenting negatively on the teacher, the assignment, or any comments the teacher has written on the student's work.
- To repeat: learn the procedures of the Center [listed above] and follow them. Fill out summary forms and other paperwork in a timely fashion. Don't let things slide, because you will forget later what you did with each writer.

You will not always be busy, tutoring students. There are times when you will not have appointments. Tutors must take advantage of these down times, to invest effort in assessing and honing their language and tutoring skills. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Learn as much as you can about the writing process—how different writers compose and write, how they revise and edit, etc.
- Review the rules of grammar and punctuation.

- Learn how to look up *quickly* fine points of grammar, punctuation, the different style sheets, etc. No one can remember everything, but all tutors should have handbooks and valuable websites within easy access.
- Between tutoring sessions, think about the things that seemed to go right, which seemed to work, and those that were less effective. Keep a journal so that you can remember and refer back to the most successful sessions.

Without a doubt, tutors are at different stages and levels of knowledge and ability. The common denominator among all writing tutors, regardless of their level of expertise and knowledge, is the love and enthusiasm for the English language, and the patience and willingness to transfer some of this knowledge and enthusiasm to the writers they tutor.

CHAPTER 2: WRITING AS PROCESS

Traditionally, educators largely viewed the teaching of writing as output-oriented. The focus was on the draft, seeing the text as an entity unto itself, without consideration of method or procedure. However, recent developments in the teaching of composition identified the advantages of shifting the focus to include not only the draft, but also the actual process of writing. Writing tutors, therefore, must be prepared to help a writer at any stage of the writing process. Also, the Center must remove the expectation that a writer needs to have a draft to go to the Center: we are here to help in every stage of the procedure.

STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

PREWRITING

There are several steps a writer must go through in the prewriting stage: A) identifying the topic, B) brainstorming/free writing, C) outlining, and D) identifying the target audience.

Identifying the topic

In many instances, topics are assigned by the professor of the course. However, on some occasions, writers may be given the total freedom to choose their own topic, subject to the professor's approval. In cases like this, when writers are given free rein, they may draw writing topics from:

- Personal experiences

Clearly, topics based on experiences will be ones that the writer will have some personal connection to, and will be more motivated in pursuing and writing about. The paper may not necessarily discuss the writer's actual experiences. For instance, someone who has recently been on a trip to Puerto Rico may choose to write on the culture of the island, the policy-making processes of its government, or the effects of tourism on its environment.

- Preferences

An individual's preferences, that is, areas which interest the writer, can also be a rich source of a topic, and one which would typically motivate the writer. It is also easier to make interesting to the reader what the writer herself/himself finds interesting.

Preferences may include interests like music, movies, sports, hobbies, contemporary issues, etc.

- Current events

The current events confronting society are always a good source of writing topics since research sources will be readily available. And since the subject matter is current, it is a part of the public discourse, and readers will readily see how such issues can affect them on a personal level, and, therefore, will find it interesting.

Brainstorming

There are several techniques that comprise the process known as brainstorming.

- Freewriting

This is an intense activity, since the writer needs to be writing constantly during the whole duration. For this reason, the free writing process, ideally, should only be between

2 to 5 minutes long. The key is to keep writing even if the writing is incoherent, ungrammatical, or even unrelated to the topic. Overall, the objective is to jump-start the mind; to coerce it into going into a writing mode. This tactic is quite useful if the writer is experiencing a writer's block, particularly in the early stages of the paper.

- **Listing**

This is a strategy wherein the writer comes up with a list of subtopics that s/he considers to be related, whether directly or indirectly, to the topic at hand. Bulleted lists are better than numbered lists since numbers can be considered hierarchical, and may give the writer the illusion of priorities. This approach identifies all concepts/subjects that can be related to the main topic. Lists should be as long as possible. Certain items can be deleted later on, during the planning stage. On the downside, listing is linear and may be too structured and anti-creative for the some writers.

- **Clustering**

This is a very visual form of brainstorming. It makes use of a concept map, which begins in the middle with the topic, radiating outwards as associated topics are identified. The cluster may roughly correspond to the outline, since subtopics can be easily connected to every topic that comes up. However, clustering has a tendency to digress the farther it moves from the original topic.

Outlining/planning

An outline is a useful tool in preparing to write a coherent and structured essay. In terms of format, the outline will have the following parts:

- **Title**

A title is important since it is the name the writer gives her/his work. And in this age when publication comes very easy (any work can be published by the simple act of uploading it to a website or a writer's own blogsite), each work should have a name we can use to refer to it. A title generally is an attempt to catch reader attention, and almost always is related to the topic. But there are really no rules to be followed nor enforced. The only thing to be avoided is the use of a sentence as a title.

- **Thesis**

The thesis contains the central idea of the paper, usually expressed as an assertion, a point of contention. It is what the writer is trying to prove as a writer. As a general guideline, it is explicitly stated in the text, usually in the introduction, but it can just be implied. Whether explicit or implied, a writer should always be conscious of it early on in the writing process.

- **Body**

The outline shows the hierarchy of ideas, not just the sequence. The body of the paper must follow the outline code.

- **Identifying target audience**

Students normally hold a misconception regarding target audience when they write academic papers: they erroneously think that the professor/instructor is the only target audience. In academic writing, students write for their academic peers, or the academic body as a whole, composed of individuals with the same academic bents and the same academic objectives as the writer. With this target audience in mind, the writer must then use diction and tone that are appropriate.

Gathering data

Some topics may be written with the writer simply relying on information s/he already has. However, there are topics which require research. Typically, data gathering can be accomplished by just logging on to the internet and reading credible websites that contain information relevant to your topic. It may also entail visiting the library to find books, periodicals, or other sources that will help you complete the paper. On a grander level, gathering information may mean conducting a survey, a focus group discussion, participatory observation, or an experiment.

Writing/drafting

The writing of the draft is, of course, the heart of writing. Traditionally, this is what is considered as writing itself. As there are many perspectives from which writing can be viewed, discussing it in terms of its basic structure can help college writers provide more structure to their work.. The basic structure of the essay consists of A) introduction, B) body, and C) conclusion.

Introduction.

This is used to make clear the thesis and, optimally, to catch reader attention, what is often referred to as using a hook! This latter may be done by:

- Quoting from a literary work, song, or any text
- Providing an interesting fact/statistic
- Retelling an anecdote/humorous story
- Stating a shocking statement
- Offering an ironic observation

Also, the introduction may be used to provide background information. This usually helps the reader by establishing context: the perspective from which the writer is viewing the topic or the bigger picture, of which the topic is just a part. Background information may also discuss events that occurred prior to the topic. Lastly, it may present causes of the topic.

As a general rule, in academic writing, the thesis has to be clearly stated early on in the essay--in the introduction. One positive way of preparing the readers for what they will read in the essay, and therefore help in the comprehension, is to preview the main points that you will use to support your thesis.

The introduction can also establish the essay's tone, which is the writer's attitude toward the subject and is generally recognized through diction, or word choice. Words typically have an innate flavor, apart from their denotative meaning; for example, some words are inherently negative, like *odor*, and some inherently positive, like *scent* or *aroma*. Some are more or less neutral, like *smell*. You establish your paper's tone by carefully selecting your words. To a large extent, any idea can be expressed in a negative or positive way:

1. “He is determined” / “He is hard-headed”
2. “The company is letting you go that you may pursue endeavors more appropriate to your skills” / “You are fired!”

Body

In writing the body of the essay, there are a few major points that need to be considered to ensure that the thesis is adequately developed: topic sentences, coherence, proof, length, and clarity.

- Topic sentences

A topic sentence expresses the central idea of a paragraph. It is a good idea to state it at the beginning of the paragraph so it functions as a guidepost for the writer, in that it makes it easy for the writer to determine if s/he is going off topic. In this position, it also serves as a guidepost for the reader, in that it provides a very clear idea what the paragraph will be about.

- Coherence

In the essay, coherence is achieved through the combination of two elements: unity and transition. All sentences in the paragraph must support the topic sentence. All topic sentences in all paragraphs must support the thesis. This is unity.

Achieving smooth transition can be done by the effective use of transition words. Transition words like *therefore*, *and*, *but*, *in addition*, *first*, *last*, and so on, help to make the logical connections between sentences more obvious, which, of course, aids the reader in comprehending the text more easily.

- Providing proof for claims

It is not enough to say something is good or bad; the writer must always provide proof for all claims s/he makes. S/he must convince the reader that the ideas are believable, sensible and logical. Some types of proof include:

1. Statistics or facts
2. Testimonies, preferably from an authority
3. Collective experiences, historical events
4. Personal experiences
5. Hypothetical examples
6. Paragraph/sentence length : What must be avoided is lack of variety.
Some sentences/paragraphs must be long, the others short.

- Clarity

Clarity can be achieved by following these guidelines:

1. Avoid ambiguity
2. Be specific
3. Be concise/direct and to the point

Conclusion

The conclusion is generally used to provide a short summary of the main points: thesis, supporting ideas. But more than this, it may recommend other avenues of inquiry so that readers may be inspired to look more deeply into the topic. Also, it may relate the topic to broader social realities to show the readers how the topic relates to their personal lives. Finally, an effective way of ending the essay is called *closing the circle* wherein the writer refers back to the device you used in starting the essay and show how the essay really stayed true to its topic.

POSTWRITING/REVISION

Some writers think that post-writing is a simple matter of running the spell-check and grammar check features of the word processing software and correcting the errors that are identified. However, there are numerous aspects of the paper that a writer may focus on in the post writing stage. Grammar and spelling, which are both considered as mechanical aspects of writing, are just part of it.

The following aspects of the essay should be reviewed, and for each aspect, the following questions may be asked:

- Subject matter and content
 1. Does the paper have comprehensive and accurate information?
 2. Does the writing reveal a keen understanding of relevant theory/concept?
 3. Are all claims backed by evidence?
 4. Is the topic appropriate to the requirements of the course?
- Assignment requirements
 1. Does the essay address the requirements of the assignment?
 2. Does it target the appropriate audience?
 3. Considering the content and target audience, does it establish an appropriate tone?
- Organization
 1. Is there sufficient background on the topic in the introduction?
 2. Is the thesis clearly stated/established?
 3. Is the structure logical and easy-to-follow?
 4. Do the different sections directly support the thesis?
 5. Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
 6. Does the conclusion flow logically from the body of the paper?
- Mechanics/format
 1. Does the paper observe grammar rules?
 2. Does it follow correct punctuation?
 3. Are there misspelled words?
 4. Does the manuscript consistently follow the prescribed documentation format?
- Style
 1. Are there ambiguous sentences?
 2. Is there varied sentence structure?
 3. Is there smooth sentence transition?

4. Is the diction appropriate?
5. Is there consistent point-of-view?

CHAPTER 3: THE TUTORING SESSION

A common misconception students have about coming to a tutoring or writing center is that only poor writers need the kind of help that a center provides. A student with this kind of thinking will come feeling inferior. The CAE must make it a priority to change such a view. One excellent way of doing this is by training tutors to manifest behavior that does not label the tutee as a poor writer. The ideas that the writer is always in control of her/his writing, and that practice and effort are rewarded, must always be reinforced.

The way in which the tutor interacts with the writer will either encourage or discourage her/him. The following guidelines will help evoke a positive response from the students.

As You Begin the Tutoring Session

- Help make the writer feel comfortable:
 1. Introduce yourself.
 2. Be friendly.
 3. Be interested.
- Sit next to the writer, not across from her/him.
- Be enthusiastic and upbeat, have a positive tone of voice .
- Smile.
- Always be friendly, respectful, and patient.
- Create a comfortable environment for yourself and for the writer.
- Most importantly, always remain calm and collected; as a tutor, you must always be a calming influence.

Pre-requisites for writers:

- Always have the writer bring something to work with—a book, a paper, a handout, etc.
- Check if the writer has a clear understanding of the assignments that s/he brings to you.
- Have her/him bring a syllabus for the particular class in which s/he is encountering difficulty.

During the Tutoring Session

- Try to limit sessions to one hour. Going over this time period can often be too much for writers to absorb at one time, and can decrease the productivity of the session.
- Ask to see the requirements of the assignment.
- Ask if there are any particular questions the writer has about the assignment.
- Two-way conversation—interaction between the tutor and writer—is ideal for tutoring sessions.
- Talk about experiences that the writer can relate to.
- Actively listen to and respond to the writer.
 1. Use appropriate posture and eye contact.

2. If something is confusing, ask the writer to clarify what s/he is trying to say. Example: “Can you tell me more about...?”
 3. Use “I” statements to place the burden of understanding upon you rather than on the writer. Example: “I’m a little confused about...”
- Let the writer make his or her own corrections. Guide the writer. Always have the writer hold the pen, and make all corrections.
 - Try to identify problems in the writer’s work and explain how to correct them—constructive criticism is a good thing!
 - Always keep reference books and handouts nearby.

Things to avoid when tutoring:

- Never discuss grades or criticize the writer’s professor(s).
- Try not to evaluate the writer’s work; this is the teacher’s job.
- **Don’t edit papers! The Center is NOT an editing service!**
- Don’t write or do work for the writer.

At the End of the Tutoring Session

If the tutoring time is almost over, or if another appointment is scheduled immediately following the session, let the writer know when there are only five or ten minutes left. This way, the remaining time can be used to end the session beneficially, and not hurriedly. Some possibilities include:

- Allow the writer to finish what s/he is currently working on.
- Discuss what the writer may do next or what may take place during the next session.
- Answer any last questions the writer may have.
- Have the writer fill out an evaluation form.

After the Tutoring Session

- Fill out the Student Summary Sheet.
- Make a folder for the writer if one is not already on file. Place the Student Summary Sheet in this folder.

You may find the links on the CAE website useful during your tutoring experience.

CHAPTER 4: THE DIFFERENT WRITERS

Writing tutors work with many different kinds of students, from traditional freshmen to returning older students, from very competent writers to those who need help at every stage of the process. A writing tutor will inevitably face some writers who will challenge her/his skills and abilities. The following are some of the most common:

- *Anxious students*
- *Academically under-prepared students*
- *ESL students*

Anxious Students

This group can be broken up into two main types: the procrastinator and the perfectionist.

- Procrastinators:

These students will leave their work until the last possible minute, and then somehow hope that by an act of God or some other miracle, the work will get done. They will show up at the Center two hours before an assignment is due, with nothing, not even a rough draft, in hand, and will nevertheless expect or hope to leave with a finished product to submit. BE PATIENT!

- Perfectionists:

Such students are in many ways the opposite of procrastinators: they usually get their work done well ahead of the due date—but then they agonize over every detail: “Are my margins the right width? Do you capitalize *Military Industrial Complex*? What is the proper way to quote sources from the Koran?”

These students are good to work with since their papers are usually competently written. However, sometimes their perfectionism can be taxing on the tutor since the constant questioning and second guessing may challenge every bit of knowledge and patience within the tutor’s reach. BE PATIENT!

Academically Under-prepared Students:

Another type of writer is the academically under-prepared writer. This student comes to the Center with an array of writing challenges, and often other related issues such as poor time management skills, weak study skills, family and work-related problems, etc.

Where does the tutor begin after s/he looks at a sample of writing that is not only poorly or not at all organized, but is full of grammar, punctuation, spelling and typo errors as well? Does one best begin at the macro level, by figuring out ways to help the student organize the contents in some discernible way? Or the micro level, by attacking sentence level problems? There is no one answer --- each student and situation needs individualized assessing.

This student’s writing will not be “fixed” in one or two sessions, and the tutor doing a cosmetic reading and adjustment will not help the student in the long run. Therefore, an honest appraisal is the best in this situation.

ESL Students

ESL students can be classified according to their fluency and knowledge of the English language into beginning, low intermediate, intermediate, and proficient. Many of the same problems that occur with the under-prepared native student can be seen in the ESL student.

- In addition to language usage issues, there can also be some cultural issues that can cause difficulties in communication and understanding. As usual, the tutor needs to provide assistance and be kind and helpful without doing the work for the student.
- With ESL students, it is important for the tutor to remember that some writing and language problems, although persistent, may not be all that serious. For example, Eastern European languages, such as Russian and Ukrainian do not use articles; therefore, students from that part of the world often are unable to use articles correctly, if at all. Yet many of these students are extremely intelligent and quite articulate in English in most other ways. Therefore, although the tutor should draw attention to omitted and misused articles, s/he needs to look at the student's writing as a complete text, and evaluate it on its strengths and weaknesses, aside from the problems in using articles.

CHAPTER 5: THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TUTORING

Technology has changed academia in so many different aspects. Computers have made writing easier with word processing software. Cable TV has allowed some universities to maintain their own TV stations. Online libraries and data-bases have allowed easier access to information. Written works can now be turned in and correspondences exchanged through email. Classes are given online. The way a tutoring center conducts its business has also been affected; computers and online tutoring are changing the way tutorials are being conducted.

Computers in tutoring

Most classes require that any paper submitted be typed and printed out. This sometimes results in a student bringing in a paper in electronic format. The tutor may opt to print out the paper first, if such equipment is available. Or s/he may choose to work with the writer directly on the computer. This latter method will be procedurally the same as traditional face-to-face tutoring, but can be more effective in some ways, since the writer may be able to manipulate the text more easily. Revision is made much easier on a computer.

Some pointers for computer-based tutoring:

- Keep the writer in control of the computer and the text. Sit behind the student as s/he sits in front of the keyboard and monitor. You may not enter any data.
- Use the bold, underline, and font color commands in highlighting problematic/weak sections.
- Point out weaknesses, errors, inconsistencies with an explanation of why they are better revised. But never make corrections for the writer.
- Emphasize the inadequacies of the spell check and grammar check functions of typical word processing software.

Using internet sources:

The internet has become the primary research tool for a number of students. And it is a very rich source of information because it is very easy to upload data. However, this ease has resulted in some problems since just about anyone can upload any information without the information being checked for integrity. It has become the responsibility of the internet user to evaluate the source s/he comes across, and see if it is a credible and accurate source. The following questions may serve as guides on how to evaluate internet sources.

- Website owners/sponsors
 1. Is the author's name provided?
 2. Is s/he an authority in the field?
 3. Do other sources say good things about her/him?
 4. Does s/he appear to be knowledgeable on the topic?
- Determine the organization which owns the website
 1. Does this group have the authority to talk on this topic?
 2. Is it respected in its field?
- URL (To a certain degree, the web address reveals some information on the site's credibility)

1. .edu – educational institution
 2. .gov – government agency
 3. .mil – military
 4. .org – non-profit organization
 5. .com & .net – commercial establishment
- Determine how often updates are implemented
 - Accuracy and Bias
 1. Does the source include its bibliography and does it offer links to the entries?
 2. Can you verify information through another source?
 3. Does the site offer factual information for opposing views?
 4. Is the author known to be a staunch supporter of a cause?
 5. Does s/he allow her/his emotions to become entangled with logic?
 6. Does the site include the date of publication, posting, or the last update?

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

“However great a man's natural talent may be, the art of writing cannot be learned all at once.”

Jean Jacques Rousseau

ADDENDA

THE DIFFERENT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

As a tutor, you will be asked to help students with a variety of writing assignments and writing styles. English essays, research papers, term papers, literature papers, lab reports, nursing papers, résumés and employment cover letters, scholarship application and thank you letters are some of the writing assignments you may be asked to help with. It is not likely that a beginning tutor will be familiar and comfortable with all these sometimes conflicting conventions. Even more experienced tutors do not always remember every picayune detail of every writing style. However, what the tutor needs to do is to become comfortable in looking up material as needed. Thus if you are asked to help a student with the Chicago Manual style or APA, you should know where to get reliable information. Your facility will increase with time particularly in the ones you use frequently, such as APA and MLA. Despite all the differences, there are some aspects of good writing such as a good sense of organization, clarity of expression, attention to detail, and the correct conventions of grammar and punctuation which stretch across all disciplines.

WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS

Many professors of different courses assign their students research papers. Furthermore, English 102 here in HFU is a basic research course. Due to this, many students constantly struggle with the different steps involved in conducting research and in preparing the research report. The following pointers will be helpful in guiding a student to be a better researcher.

Definition of research

According to the Cambridge Dictionaries Online, research is “a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding (Module 2).” Research is a process of inquiry, a way of enhancing knowledge and discovering something new. It involves narrowing a topic to a question, collecting sources, gathering notes, summarizing information, organizing observations, documenting sources, and publishing results.

Definition of research paper

A research paper is a written document that incorporates research findings and a student’s own ideas into one, often lengthy, composition. They are part of every college student’s education, no matter the major.

The first step in any process is always a daunting one. The same is true of course for research. For this reason, selecting a research topic may be difficult for many students.

- Looking at the author is always a good place to start an English paper; a topic could be based around the author’s style with the bulk of the paper focusing on two or three of the author’s work.
- For other classes, such as sociology, philosophy, history, etc., a topic such as violence would be too broad; a better choice would be child abuse’s affect on school performance or what role do violent video games play in school violence.
- A student may start by doing research on the topic keywords in professional journals, which can be found in the online databases of Holy Family’s library or by visiting the library’s journal collection.
- Research may also be done before the topic is chosen so that the student may have a better grasp of what topics are “researchable.”

Once a topic is chosen, the next step is to narrow it to a research question. It may be helpful to ask the student these questions about the **topic of study**:

- Can you determine three subtopics or examples to discuss from this topic?
- Is there enough information available on the topic to write a good paper?
- Will this topic cover all the professor’s requirements?

To determine a **thesis statement** from the selected topic, the student should ask two basic questions:

- What will the main idea of the paper be?
- What will the paper describe or prove?

As a guideline, a **thesis** should:

- Be one to two sentences.
- Include all the points being touched on in the paper.

Gathering Sources:

- It is important to gather a variety of sources unless otherwise instructed. Reliable sources should always be used such as: internet websites, online journals, books, interviews, and anything else that would be helpful.
- The library is an excellent place to start looking for sources. The librarians are knowledgeable in the area of research and can steer a student in the right direction.
- Websites can be unreliable, so it is important to look critically at every site:
 - Are there a lot of pop-ups that open when this site is opened? This may be a sign of an unreliable source.
 - Are there several advertisements on the site? This may be another sign of a source that is unreliable.
 - Does the web address end in .com or .edu? These are not always bad sites, but they are usually sites that need more critical analysis. A site with .edu may mean that the information is from a student's paper, which would make the information unreliable.
 - Is the student using Wikipedia or any other site that allows the information to be edited by its users? There are several websites that look legitimate because of the information given or the formatting of the site, but they have major flaws, such as Wikipedia, which grants its users to edit any of the information on the page.
- Before writing the paper it is important to:
 - Brainstorm for ideas-
 - Start thinking about the topic and write everything down; don't discard any ideas.
 - Organize ideas in an outline form, possibly by what will be said in each paragraph.
 - Write supporting details gathered from the sources so that the paper will be easier to write.

Gathering Notes:

- There are a few ways to use sources in the paper.
 - Summary
 - A summary, as a general rule, only includes the major/important points of a selected text. But depending on its purpose, it may include details.
 - This is not a word-for-word account of the information; nonetheless, the student must cite the source at the end of that summarized piece.
 - A summary is often shorter than the original text.

- Paraphrase
 - A paraphrase is a restatement of a selected text.
 - It must be cited and cannot be a verbatim rendition of the original text.
 - To paraphrase is to take a complicated text and reword it so that it is easier to read.
- Quote
 - A quote is the exact words of another author. The exact words, including misspellings or grammatical errors, if any, must be written or it is not a proper quote.
 - Quotation marks are always used in each quote, except for long quotes when using the MLA format.
 - Citing a quote is extremely important. Cite the exact page the information is retrieved from.

Writing stage:

- The next step of the research writing process is the actual writing of the document.
- This step requires that all gathered information be organized following the proper format.
- The paper should include:
 - Introduction- (1-2 paragraphs)
 - Have a hook. Whether it's a question or an interesting fact/comment/statement. Grab the audience's attention and make them want to read the paper
 - Write the thesis statement after the hook. This statement should sum up what the paper will be about.
 - Include some background information to introduce the topic. This should be brief
 - Include the main ideas that will be presented in the paper. These ideas should support the thesis.
 - Body- (3-4 pages)
 - It should include more than 3 paragraphs or as many as it takes to explain the thesis.
 - The first paragraph of the body should correlate with the first topic mentioned in the introduction. This format should be followed throughout the paper so that the ideas in the introduction are in order throughout the paper.
 - The paper must be formatted in the specific style that is required by the professor. The most popular styles are MLA, APA, and Chicago. These websites will be helpful:
 - For MLA and APA style visit <http://www.holyfamily.edu/cae/links.shtml> and follow the links to the style being used.

- For Chicago style visit
<http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.php>
- Conclusion- (1-2 paragraphs)
 - Should summarize the thesis
 - Can possibly include what was discovered about the thesis without using 1st person pronouns.
 - Finalize the point of the paper; tie up all the loose ends
 - End with a bam! Get the audience thinking about the paper even after they are done reading.
- Resources- (last page of the paper)
 - Resources should be reliable; databases and library catalogs are good places to conduct the search.
 - Books have good information; a researcher must not solely rely on the internet, unless instructed.

Offer your student the following guidelines as he/she is writing the research paper:

- Avoid the first and second person pronouns (we, I, you, us) unless directed to do so
- Use the thesaurus and dictionary to help with word choice and usage
- Avoid the passive voice and stay in the same tense
- Be aware of run-ons, comma splice, and fragments
- Be conscious of the stylistic effects of sentence length, sentence variation, and paragraph length
- Do not rely on spell check 100%.
- Usually good internet sources end in .gov, .edu, and some .html, but be wary of college sites that post student's papers
- Have transition sentences between paragraphs and thoughts. This makes the paper flow smoothly
- Follow one citation format consistently (MLA, APA, Chicago). Use the Little Brown Handbook or www.citationmachine.net
- **Above all else**, follow and review teacher requirements, which should be brought to the tutoring session

WRITING A LITERARY ANALYSIS

In HFU, composition courses are taught in the context of literature. Literary works are discussed side by side rhetorical devices and basic research. It is quite likely that a student will visit the Center needing guidance on writing a literary analysis.

A literary analysis is a methodical study of a piece of literature. This analysis may vary depending on the genre of the work being studied.

Some tips for writing a literary analysis:

- Write in the present tense.
 - Example: In Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily,” the townspeople **visit** Emily Grierson’s house because it smells bad.
- Write in the third person unless otherwise instructed.
 - Example: **The narrator** in “Sonny’s Blues” is a dynamic character **who** changes his attitude toward the relationship with Sonny as the story progresses.
- Make sure the paper analyzes rather than summarizes the literary work.
 - Analyzing entails forming a thesis and explaining the story in literary terms.
 - The thesis statement should address something meaningful regarding the literary piece, such as an underlying theme.
 - Some literary terms include character, theme, setting, rhyme, point of view, alliteration, symbols, imagery, figurative language, protagonist, etc.

(Tips extracted from the Sierra College website – <http://lrc.sierra.cc.ca.us/writingcenter/litanalysis.htm>)

- Tone
 - What is the speaker’s attitude toward the topic on which he or she is addressing?
 - How does the speaker’s word choice (diction) affect the meaning of the literary piece?
 - The following are possible tones of a literary work:

Anger	Jest	Romance
Threatening	Bantering	Intimate
Provocative	Amused	Dreams
Persuasive	Mock-heroic	Whimsical
Sarcasm	Sadness	Remembrance
Sarcastic	Elegiac	Reflective
Sardonic	Disappointed	Remorse
Satiric	Somber	Regretful
Contempt	Doom	Remorseful
Disdainful	Urgent	Objective Fact
Condescending	Ominous	Factual
Shock	Apprehensive	Detached
Horrific	Brashness	Scholarly Pretense
Happy	Audacious	Pedantic
Simpering	Respect	Sympathy
	Reverent	Sympathetic

- Perspective
 - How does the perspective add to the story?
 - The most common point of view is third person, usually an omniscient third person. In the third person, an anonymous narrator refers to characters as “he” or “she.” The narrator of the story may reveal characters’ thoughts and feelings of which other characters in the story may not be aware.
 - Occasionally, a story may be written in the first person. The narrator of the story refers to him or herself as “I” or “me.” In this case, the reader must rely on the details the character provides, even though they may be slightly biased.
 - If the narrator is an actual character in the story, on what details does the character choose to focus? What do these details reveal about the character?
- Characters
 - What part do the characters play in the story?
 - How are they described? What are their character traits?
- Imagery and Symbolism
 - Are any images or symbols present in the piece?
 - Imagery – A writer uses words or figures of speech to appeal to the reader’s senses. Imagery can add to the dominant mood of a literary work.
 - Examples include similes, metaphors, and personification.
 - Symbols – A character, action, or thing in the literary piece has a meaning beyond its literal significance.
 - Are any themes apparent?
- Historical and Cultural Background
 - Sometimes the symbols present in a piece of literature may be influenced by the story’s historical context.

WRITING LAB REPORTS

A large portion of many science courses such as Chemistry, Biology, and Physics, is devoted to laboratory work, where in the student is required either to follow a set of directions to an experiment or postulate a hypothesis and then perform an experiment, collect data, and then describe the findings.

The student should write notes, recording the data, both numerically, if applicable, and qualitatively, on the phenomenon observed throughout the experiment, and after the experiment is completed, it is required in most science classes to write a more formal lab report.

Unless directed otherwise, follow the following format when writing a lab report:

- Prepare a title page with the names of the participating lab partners, the title of the experiment, and the date. The title of the experiment should be less than ten words and should reflect the factual content of the paper. A good title is straightforward and uses keywords that researchers in a particular field will recognize.
- Include an *Abstract* which summarizes the purpose, the hypothesis, the findings, and the conclusions of the experiment. The purpose of the abstract is to concisely summarize the purpose of the experiment, the data presented, and the major conclusions of the experiment. If published, it should alert future readers whether it would serve their purpose to read the entire report. The *Abstract* should be approximately 100 to 200 words in length.
- Under *Introduction*, write a statement of the objectives of the experiment and provide any needed background information. A good *introduction* should include answers to questions such as (1) what was the specific purpose of this study, and (2) what knowledge already exists about this subject.
- Under *Materials and Methods* provide a list of all the materials and equipment which were used, and then concisely, clearly, and in chronological order describe the steps of the experiment. Provide enough detail for the reader to understand the experiment without overwhelming him or her. When procedures from a lab book or another report are followed exactly, simply cite the source. Be sure to describe any special equipment used.
- Under *Results* list the major findings of the study, including calculations and pertinent data. As well as explained in good, clear precise discourse, if applicable, the data should be organized into tables, figures, charts, graphs, and so on. All these should be clearly labeled.

- Under *Conclusion* relate the results of the experiment to the hypothesis. Did the hypothesis and the conclusion match each other, or were there some unexpected results? If the results were different, suggest possible explanations for the discrepancy, why the results differed from what was anticipated. Suggestions for the improvement of techniques or experimental design may also be included here. The experimenter should also suggest here why he/she now accepts or rejects the original hypothesis.
- Under *References* provide full publication information for all sources cited.

Points to Remember when Writing Lab Reports

- Lab reports are usually written in passive voice, e.g. the solution was mixed and frozen, or the solution was filtered and titrated.
- Generally, write about the procedure in the past tense, but use the present tense to describe the results and conclusions.
- The style of writing is precise, factual, and concise.
- Write in the third person, never first or second.

BUSINESS LETTERS:

Although it will happen very rarely, since business/professional communications is not a required course in many universities, there may be occasions when you will help a student, a member of the administrative staff, or even a faculty member write a business letter.

Business letters are formal letters used in a professional setting. They may range from positive letters, e.g. congratulating an employee for being promoted, to persuasive letters, e.g. convincing a client to buy a particular item, to negative letters, e.g. informing an employee that his services are no longer needed. But regardless of the content, a business letter is presented in any of the three set formats: semi-block, modified block, and block.

Format of the business Letter:

There are three common formats for business letters. All three types provided below assume that the letter is not typed on a company's letterhead. If this were the case, the "heading" will not be included.

Semi Block

	_____ Heading
	_____ Date
_____ Inside address	

Salutation _____	

Body	

	Complimentary close

	Signature block

Modified Block

	_____ Heading _____
	Date _____
_____ Inside address _____	
Salutation _____	
_____ _____ Body _____ _____ _____ _____	
	Complimentary close Signature block _____

Block


_____ Heading _____	
Date _____	
_____ Inside address _____	
Salutation _____	
_____ _____ Body _____ _____ _____ _____	
Complimentary close _____	
Signature block _____	

Structure of a Business Letter:

The structure of the business letter is largely dependent on the content of the message. Letters that transmit a positive or at least a neutral message should be using the direct approach. This approach starts with the good news as the beginning paragraph. The middle part of the message should present the reasons for the good news, all the time focusing on factual information. The ending of the message may be used to establish further goodwill.

1. The **direct approach** is used for good news.
 - a. Good news
 - b. Reasons for the good news
 - c. An ending establishing goodwill

Sample Positive Message: Promotion Letter¹



123 West Avenue Philadelphia PA 19114
Tel. No. 215-123-4567
www.abccycles.com

March 20, 2007

Roland Latmer
1234 East Street
Philadelphia PA 19154

Dear Mr. Latmer:

Congratulations! Your excellence, expertise, and dedication made it a very easy decision for me to promote you to the position of Director for Research and Development of ABC Cycles Inc. starting April 1, 2007.

The excellence you have shown in your work has helped this company overcome adversity the past few months. Your technical knowledge, as shown in your design of the Ti-carbon frame, pushed us to the front in the battle for the lightest frame in the market. Furthermore, your ability to rally a team, and motivate them to pursue a common goal helped us beat our competitors in releasing our new product in the best time possible.

The benefits of the new position include: a \$ 10,000 raise in your annual pay, a new office, and an additional one week vacation leave every year.

ABC Cycles is truly privileged to have an employee of your caliber.

Respectfully yours,


Anselm B. Crohn
President

¹ All sample letters use the block format.

Letters that announce negative news, previously known as the complaint letter, are now called **the claim letter**, to avoid the negative connotation of the term *complaint*. Such a letter employs the **indirect approach** and must never start with the negative news. The beginning must strive to start with a positive note, or at the very least a neutral note. The middle section should contain the reasons for the bad news. Only after these reasons are presented will the bad news be stated. Another important thing to remember is to never end the letter with the bad news. The ending is the most emphatic section of any document, since readers tend to remember most what they read last. End the message in a positive, or at least neutral note, by focusing on a positive way of looking at an otherwise negative situation.

2. The **indirect approach** is used for delivering negative news
 - a. Neutral or positive ending
 - b. Reasons for the bad news
 - c. The bad news
 - d. An ending establishing goodwill

Sample Negative Message: Termination letter



123 West Avenue Philadelphia PA 19114
Tel. No. 215-123-4567
www.abccycles.com

March 20, 2007

Roland Latmer
1234 East Street
Philadelphia PA 19154

Dear Mr. Latmer:

ABC Cycling has always stood for excellence, both in its products and its employees. Dedication, expertise, and efficiency are traits that have propelled us to the top of this very competitive industry.

Company records have shown that you have been late in coming to work more often than you have been on time the last 3 months. Furthermore, four of the five members of your R&D team have filed complaints regarding the ill treatment they have received from you since you assumed the position of R&D manager. And after the discussion we had regarding these matters 3 weeks ago, I clearly have not seen any indications that you have rectified these problems. For this reason, I have to inform you that ABC Cycles Inc. will no longer need your services starting the week of March 27, 2007.


Your innovation and expertise are the strongest traits that I still see in you; hence, a change in work environment may be mutually beneficial. I wish you luck in your future endeavors.

Respectfully yours,

Anselm B. Crohn
President

3. The **persuasive approach** is used for letters that try to convince the reader to do a particular action, agree to a position, or believe in a particular concept. It can be written following structure provided below:
- a. Positive beginning
 - b. Reasons why reader must do the request
 - i. Features of the product
 - ii. Innovations
 - iii. Advantages over the competition
 - iv. Price, if it is a selling point
 - v. Effects of the product on the user
 - c. End by making the request in a very specific manner

Sample Persuasive Message: Sales Letter



123 West Avenue Philadelphia PA 19114
 Tel. No. 215-123-4567
www.abccycles.com

March 20, 2007

Dear Mr. Dan Miller
 123 North Street
 Philadelphia PA 19104

Dear Mr. Miller,

ABC Cycles has again pushed the limits of innovation with the release of our most innovative bike frame: the TC, the perfect fusion of the two finest materials for a bike frame—titanium and carbon.

The TC weighs in at a scant 789 grams (55 cm model). It uses high modulus carbon for the top tube and seat stays, and True Temper double butted titanium for the head-, down-, and seat tubes, and the chain stays. This fusion accounts for the most comfortable bike ride yet. The slightly sloping geometry is perfect for the typical Sunday spin in the park, or the more grueling century ride, or even the highly competitive world of bike racing.

Visit any of our over 500 authorized dealers to test ride the TC, and to be amazed at the most comfortable bike frame ever made.

Respectfully yours,

Anselm B. Crohn
 President

PERSONAL STATEMENT

When students come to the center to write personal statements/essays, they are usually applying for scholarships and/or college applications. The tutor should make sure that the students know why they are writing it. The personal statement is primarily a persuasive essay, where the students are trying to sell a most precious “commodity”—themselves. There are two common types:

1. General

The general type provides a comprehensive picture of the students’ academic life. It provides students a lot of flexibility in terms of its content and style. Generally, this is required in law and medical application forms.

2. Specific

The specific personal essay is typically a set of responses to a series of questions that are related to the degree program the students are applying to. This is required in business and graduate school applications typically.

Possible content of a personal statement:

- A notable or uncommon aspect of the student’s life
- Situational concerns like personal/family details that may interest the admissions committee
- Interest in the field, its magnitude and the source/cause for such an interest
- Knowledge, preliminary or otherwise, about the field
- Work experience as it relates to the field
- Career goals, short-, medium-, and long-term.
- Explanation for a poor or mediocre academic performance
- Personal difficulties like physical, familial, behavioral, economic, etc.
- Strength in terms of personality traits, e.g. diligence, patience, resourcefulness, etc.
- Strength in terms of skills, e.g. leadership, computer, language, time-management, study skills
- Reasons why the admissions committee should approve the application
- Reasons why that school is the best choice for the applicant

Guidelines:

The writing guidelines discussed in the previous chapters apply to almost all academic writing requirements. But the guidelines provided below specifically address the writing situation that a student faces when writing a personal statement:

- First and foremost, the personal statement must show how the applicant is different from the hundreds or thousands other students who are applying. He/she must stand-out from the vast crowd.
- Questions should be answered directly but completely. Although it should be concise, it should not be a very short essay.
- If questions are similar, vary the manner and style of answering without content which may result in conflicting answers.
- A generic personal statement must be avoided. Since schools are different, programs have their differences; the personal statement should address such differences. Hence, if the applicant is sending a personal statement to several schools, he/she should not send the same one to all of them.
- Assertions should be backed with specific information. It is not enough to say that you have been a “strong leadership potential.” The applicant must cite specific instances in his/her academic or work experience that will prove this point.
- The structure of the essay may follow this:
 - The introduction must start with an interesting hook. It should catch reader attention by starting with an unusual statement or a creative angle regarding the applicant’s desire to be part of that degree program.
 - The body of the essay may contain any of the aforementioned content in “Possible content...” There should be a logical and smooth flow from one section to the next. It should not read as a set of disparate answers to unconnected questions.
 - A good possible ending is by providing a hopeful vision of the future anchored in the applicant’s acceptance to that school.
- It should be well-written and should have no grammatical/spelling errors. Proofreading is always a good way of ending the writing process.
- The essay must avoid common and trite responses to the questions.

Sample personal statement/essay

Although the title “Materials Engineer” sounds foreign to the average person, the impact of materials engineering on everyday living cannot be underestimated. Microchips, hybrid engines, artificial hips, coffeepots, tennis racquets—are just some of the products of materials engineering--products that shape an average person, a community’s life.

It is this glorious anonymity that attracted me to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Materials Engineering. Notwithstanding the grueling years of study, it is a source of contemplative satisfaction that products manufactured with the help of materials engineering are changing and shaping lives of individuals and communities. But my specific interest in Materials Engineering stems from the perfect fusion between my academic persuasions as my personal interest. As an avid cyclist for more than a decade now, I have seen how technology has shaped the sport. And with the recognition of carbon fiber as the holy grail of bike frame manufacturing, I saw how prominent materials engineering will be in this field that I am passionate about.

Thus far, I have been in the frame manufacturing industry the past 3 years as a design engineer for Trek, and now as the research and development director for ABC Cycles, one of the industry’s premium carbon fiber frame manufacturer. My direct involvement in design and production revealed the need to expand my technical knowledge particularly in the new materials that are being developed. This necessitated my decision to pursue a master’s degree. And there is no better place to do so than in my alma mater.

What attracted me most about our school is the “small school feel” where small class sizes and high teacher-student ratio make it easy for a student to feel that he/she “belongs.” On the more pragmatic side of it, it is very easy to seek and find help, not only in your academics, but in any aspect of campus life. I also see the tremendous value of the hand-on approach of the materials engineering program, especially now that I am working in an industry where design engineers need to be constantly in touch with the desires and needs of your baseline market.

But the factor that sealed the decision for me is my familiarity with the California Polytechnic State University. As an undergraduate, I am thoroughly familiar with the schools system, culture, and most importantly people. I know that the faculty is not only among the best in the field, but also deeply cognizant of their students needs.

The BS Materials Engineering in Cal Poly has fostered in me an understanding and appreciation of the necessity of technical expertise in this field. And this technical expertise is what I brought with me to the cycling industry, and what resulted in my rise as a director for research and development. But my foremost strength is my clarity of purpose. I have a very good vision of how the upgraded skills and knowledge, particularly in the subject of nano fibers, that the Master’s program will give me can be directly applied to the industry I am working in.

I hope that you will see my strength both as a student and as a professional, and that you will grant me the honor to be a part of the Materials Engineering Master’s Program.

JOB APPLICATION DOCUMENTS: THE RÉSUMÉ AND COVER LETTER

Nowadays, students pursue a college degree largely because it enhances their chances of landing a stable job in the future. In this regard, one of the most important documents they need to write in their entire academic career are the résumé and cover letter. The following guidelines may be helpful in working with a student who is preparing such documents.

The résumé and cover letter are the two main documents that students need in the job search. Depending on how these documents are prepared, they may be the difference between being relegated to the “do not call” list or being called for an interview.

A good way of preparing to write both documents is to have a personal skills inventory. It is a form of self-assessment where job applicants evaluate different aspects of their life that may play a role in the job search. These aspects include: education, work experience, professional skills, special skills, career goals, and desired position/company.

Personal Skills Assessment Tool:

A. Education

The assessment of the educational background should include a list of all the schools that the applicant has attended or is attending, and the certificates or degrees he/she has received. It must include the degree major and any awards, scholarships, or special recognition received. Special information such as on-the-job training or a list of 4 - 8 courses that highlight specific areas necessary to the targeted job may be included. Lastly it may provide the applicant’s grade point average if it is over 3.4 on a 4.0 scale.

B. Work experience

This section lists all job experiences starting from the present to the earliest. It must include specific tasks that are part of your every job’s description.

C. Professional skills:

These are the skills that are necessary in the completion of the job’s description. It may include traits like: leadership skills, communication skills, ability to work with deadlines, ability to work within a team, and so on.

D. Special skills:

These are skills that are not really necessary to fulfill the tasks included in the target position’s description but may prove useful in certain circumstances. It may include skills like: knowledge in computers, ability to speak a language, artistic skills, e.g. photography, calligraphy, dance, etc.

E. Career goal:

With the trend toward switching jobs and careers several times in today's job market, one's career goal is likely to change over time. To identify a job seeker's career goal, he/she may ask him/herself: "What kind of work do I want to be doing, 3, 5, or 10 years from now? What sort of positions should I seek in order to prepare for my career goal?"

F. The desired position:

Skills and experience must match the target position in the chosen career/field. A job seeker must never overestimate or underestimate. Being an under-qualified or over-qualified candidate is, in almost all cases, a waste of time, effort, and resources. Such candidates normally find their application packet thrown in the trash bin. To ensure that their qualifications and the requirements match, they may ask themselves the following questions:

- What training or experience is required in order to qualify for the position I want?
- Do I enjoy the challenges involved in the position being considered?
- What aspects of my experience, education, and skills will be most beneficial to a potential employer?

The Résumé

The résumé should summarize the jobseekers' background and provide enough details to give an employer the information needed to assess their qualifications. At the same time it should be concise since on average, only 10 to 20 seconds are spent reviewing a résumé. Furthermore, the better their résumé looks, the more likely a potential employer is to read it.

The résumé must present the best part of an applicant. Thus, he/she needs to select appropriate information from the self-appraisal inventory: "Which information about my training, skills, and experience are relevant to my job goal?" The résumé must then organize the information selected by listing the best traits early in the résumé.

In terms of format, the résumé doesn't have any requirements except for the information included in the header. Everything else is optional. But this lack of restrictions does not mean that the résumé can be crammed with all the information the jobseeker has generated in his/her self appraisal inventory. He/she must do his/her best to keep it to one page by just focusing, again, on the information that present his/her best picture.

A résumé is regarded as a visual document, and as such, must be aesthetic. The jobseeker must make creative use of white space to make it visually pleasant. On the other hand, it must avoid an overly ornate résumé since it can be distracting and may be regarded as unprofessional depending on the field one is in.

Lastly, references should not be included in a résumé. As courtesy to an applicant's references, he/she must provide this information only when asked.

Common Sections of a Résumé:

A. Header

The header should contain the name and contact information such as: home address, email address, telephone number(s). Applicants must use a more-or-less permanent home address and phone number. They should not give an address or number where they know they will be moving from in a matter of weeks or months. Also, they should avoid using an unprofessional email address such as: hotbabe77@yahoo.com. The email address can be seen as a reflection of one's personality. Neither should an applicants use their college email; the account will be suspended a few weeks/months after they graduate.

B. Career objective or summary

An **objective** is a concise statement indicating the type of position a person is seeking. It may also reflect his/her goals for the next few years. A **summary, on the other hand**, is a concise statement that sums up his/her experience and ability. It assists the interviewer in assessing the applicant's qualifications. A résumé may have a summary, an objective, or neither, but never both. If one or the other is used, it should come immediately after the header.

C. Education

If education is an applicant's strength, then it should immediately follow the heading, objective or summary. For the average recent college graduate, this may be the case. This section includes all degrees he/she has completed or is expecting to complete. Specific courses may be included if they have significant relevance to the position. GPA may also be stated if it is 3.4 or higher. If it is lower, an applicant may want to compute the average for the major courses, which may be higher than the GPA, and present that instead.

D. Work experience

This section tells the employer what the applicant is capable of doing on the job based on what he/she has already done. It begins with the present or most recent position, and works backwards. The job description of each position may be listed under each entry. The present tense should be used for current positions, and past tense for jobs in the past. Also, it may include volunteer work. It doesn't have to include all jobs the applicants has had, only those that are pertinent to the current position he/she is seeking

E. Professional skills

These are the skills directly related to the position/field and may be a requirement in fulfilling some of the tasks included in the job description. It may include such traits as:

- a. Leadership abilities
- b. Ability to work with deadlines
- c. Ability to work within a team
- d. Initiative
- e. Ability to work unsupervised

- f. Typing skills
- g. Knowledge in computer software that will be extensively used in that position or company
- h. Competence in a foreign language, if it is directly relevant to the position applied for.

F. Special skills

These are skills that are not related to the target position but may prove useful in a situation that may arise. The difference between professional skills and special skills is dependent on their relevance to the target position. What may be a professional skill for one position may be a special skill for another. It may include traits like:

- a. Manual skills, such as carpentry skills, ability to fix motorized vehicles, photography skills etc.
- b. Computer skills that are not related to work
- c. Competence in another language if it is not requisite to your work.
- d. Artistic talents such as singing, dancing, ability to play a musical instrument

G. Recognition

It may include awards, honors, grants that the applicant may have received in recognition for academic, artistic, social, or any professional endeavor.

Sample Résumé:

<p>John Smith 1234 First St. Philadelphia PA 19114 215-987-6543/ email: jsmith@yahoo.com</p> <hr/>
<p>Objective: To obtain a research-and-development managerial position with ABC Cycles Inc. that involves computer-aided design in frame construction and the use of state-of-the art materials</p>
<p>Education: BS Materials Engineering, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo CA, May 2005 (GPA 3.6)</p>
<p>Work experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&D Engineer (2005-present), Trek Bicycle Corp., Waterloo WI Designs road bike frames using high modulus carbon; tests frame performance in real world conditions; prepares annual report for the whole R&D Department • Sales manager (2004-2005), DDR Cycle Store, San Luis Obispo CA Prepared store inventory; dealt directly with customer in addressing their cycling needs; determined the proper bike fit for each customer; prepared weekly sales reports • Bike mechanic (2002-2004) DDR Cycle Store, San Luis Obispo CA Fixed customer bikes; assembled incoming bikes from manufacturers; stocked inventory; helped in maintaining store premises
<p>Interests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Category A competitive cyclist for the past 2 years; winner San Luis Obispo Century Race, June 2005

The Cover Letter:

The cover letter, as the name implies, is meant to “cover” the résumé. Thus, between the two, it is the résumé that is the more important document. However, the cover letter can bridge the gap between your skills, knowledge, and experience and the requirements of the position. In it, an applicant may be able to focus on his/her strengths relevant to the specific job for which he/she is applying and to stimulate interest in the résumé. Lastly, the cover letter may express his/her interest in filling that position in particular, and in working for that company in general.

- In preparing the cover letter, an applicant may ask the following questions:
- What does the organization do, make, or sell?
The more he/she knows about the organization, the more interesting and convincing the cover letter will be. And it will reveal that he/she is the type of person who prepares well for any endeavor he/she engages in.
 - What is my central selling point?
An applicant must identify his/her qualification which makes him/her the best candidate for the position. Also, it should focus on just one or two attributes, which then becomes the central selling point.
 - How should I address the letter?
The cover letter must avoid using “To whom it may concern.” The applicant must obtain the name, title, and address of the specific person. This reveals how he/she does his/her homework and considers details as very important to the over-all quality of the work.
 - What type of cover letter should I write?
There are two types of cover letters: A solicited letter is sent to a prospective employer for a position which you know is open and for which an applicant is qualified. An unsolicited letter is sent to an organization for whom an applicant is interested in working, regardless of an opening in their ranks.

Structure of the Cover Letter:

- A. The first section states the position being applying for and where it was found
- B. The second section explains why the applicant wants to join the company.
- C. The third section presents how the company would benefit from hiring the applicant?
- D. The last section requests an interview.

Sample Cover Letter:

November 12, 2007

Mr. Ronald Jones
Manager, Human Resources
ABC Cycles Inc.
123 West Avenue
Philadelphia PA 19114

Dear Mr. Jones:

I would want to express my interest in the Research and Development Managerial position that you have posted in the May 17 issue of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

ABC Cycles Inc. has been an industry pioneer particularly in the design and manufacture of carbon fiber frames. I have always marveled at the build and ride quality of your frames. The TC specifically has been the industry's benchmark for lightness, stiffness, and comfort. It is this demand for excellence that compels me to be a part of your organization.

I am a graduate of the California Polytechnic State University with a bachelor's degree in Materials Engineering. This technological background that I brought with me to Trek Bikes helped me in leading the development program that resulted in the highly successful Madone 6.2 and 6.9 frames. In spite of this technical expertise, I have never lost touch of what the average cyclist looks for in a bike. As a bike enthusiast and an occasional racer, I am familiar with the cyclist's need for comfort, durability, cost-effectiveness, and aesthetics. Thus, this combination of technical and pragmatic knowledge puts me in a good position to head your esteemed company's R&D Department.

The hope of being a part of ABC Cycles has been a source of motivation for me the past few weeks. I am immediately available for an interview so I can answer any questions you have about my application packet. I am also quite enthusiastic to show you a few frame designs I have. I can be reached through my cell phone: 215-987-6543. Thanks for your time,

Respectfully yours,

Jeff Nag

References:

- "Chicago Manual of Style Citation Guide." University Libraries. 2007. Ohio State University. 5 Jun 2007 <<http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagofd.php>>.
- "Module 2: Identifying a Topic." Information Literacy. 2007. University of Idaho. 5 Jun 2007 <http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/info_literacy/modules/module2/2_1.htm>.
- Liethen Kunka, Jennifer and Barbato, Joe. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." The Owl at Purdue. May 13, 2007. Purdue University. 5 Jun 2007 <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>>.
- Neyhart, David and Karper, Erin. "APA Formatting and Style Guide." The Owl at Purdue. May 17, 2007. Purdue University. 5 Jun 2007 <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>>.
- Stelzer, Richard. "Writing the Personal Statement." Owl Online Writing Lab. 2004. Purdue University. 5 Jun 2007 <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html>.