



Cultural Components of U.S. Academic Writing

Advice from UDM Writing Center Coordinator Karen Springsteen, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

If you are not coming from a traditional U.S. academic background, you may find the list below helpful. It comes from a book by Helen Fox called *Listening to the World* (p. 113) and outlines what is typically expected of writing in the U.S. academic setting.

When you look at this list, it is important to remember that this is not necessarily telling you *the best way* or *the right way* to write. The list is simply about what Americans tend to expect of academic writing.

1. Get to the point quickly
2. Make the point clear
3. Make explicit transitions between ideas
4. Be precise or literal in the use of words
5. Reference specific quotes or paraphrases
6. Avoid over-generalizations
7. Do explicit analysis
8. Tie analysis to narrative or example
9. Remove irrelevant material
10. Give an opinion or come up with an “original” or independent thesis

If those are the expectations, then ask yourself the following questions before you turn in a paper:

- Have I included transitions between paragraphs?
- Is there a thesis somewhere towards beginning of the paper, such as in the first or second paragraph?
- Do I give an opinion or take a stand when necessary?
- Have I analyzed the points I make?
- Do I use sources to support my points?
- Are all my quotes and paraphrases cited correctly?
- Do I use enough examples? Is it clear what they have to do with my thesis or argument?
- Are there places where I seem to go off on a tangent?
- Is there anything unnecessary or vague that I can remove from the paper?

UDM Writing Center

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