

SPA 189: Intro to CLEG: Checklist for successful writing

Contents and structure:

- 1) Paper fulfills all requirements of the assignment (example—answers question presented; incorporates references to course texts or, as assigned, outside readings or research; if assigned - proposes a solution rather than simply identifying a problem);
- 2) Includes an explicit, thesis statement presented at the beginning of the paper and supported by sub-points (example: Modern baseball fans look to baseball as a means of fulfilling nostalgic visions of American life. They prefer “retro” ball parks with architecture reminiscent of early 20th-century structures; they purchase and wear merchandise with old-time ballplayers’ names and in old-fashioned uniform styles; and they publicly complain about modern developments such as the designated-hitter rule, Sabermetrics, and video replay);
- 3) Presents a provable thesis statement. Subjective assessments such as “Americans have an abysmal knowledge of our Constitution” are not provable. Here is a provable thesis: “Because the majority of Americans hold inaccurate views of the Second Amendment’s scope, Congress and state legislatures are often unable to enact constitutional gun safety regulations.”
- 4) Supports thesis and sub-points with textual evidence drawn from sources defined in the assignment (specific course readings, news articles, empirical research as assigned);
- 5) Organizes points into distinct paragraphs including an assertion, evidence, and transition sentences;
- 6) Paper as a whole and every paragraph within it answer the question “so what?”

Prose:

- 1) Adverbs are the enemy. They add nothing to a point and sometimes reflect a gap in evidence. “Clearly” and “essentially” are the worst. If it is clear you don’t need to write it; if it isn’t, you need to support it with evidence. Something either is or isn’t true. “Essentially” is filler;
- 2) Write as if every prepositional phrase costs one dollar. “The truth of Seidman’s point is illustrated by his focus on the shameful values of the founders. AAAAAAARRRGGGHHH NO! Try this: “Seidman states that because the founders accepted legalized slavery and excluded women from the franchise we should not utilize their Constitution to solve modern problems.”
- 3) Passive voice is a thing that should not be used by you. Did that sentence repulse you? Good.
- 4) Backwards like Yoda write you should not.

Schwartz writing checklist

- 5) Your reader should not get the impression that you wrote only one draft and did not check your work. Proofread and eliminate grammatical errors, misspellings, and prose or structure issues listed above.