

Writing Guidelines

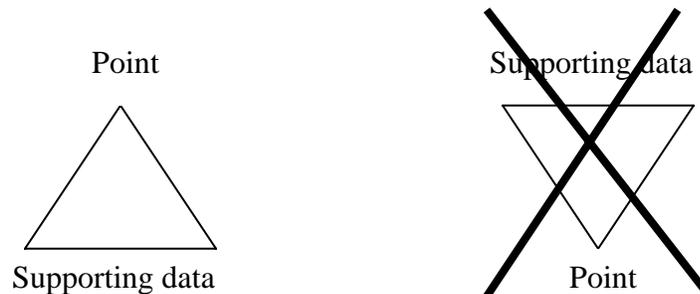
Overall Organization

Titles and first paragraphs are important, because they introduce readers to the content and allow them to decide whether to read further. In the title and first paragraph, you should establish a “contract” with the reader. This contract informs readers of what they will gain by reading the document. You tell them how you will address and approach the question or topic. You also inform them of the main points and often your conclusion.

Never allow your reader to ask the question “Why am I reading this sentence or paragraph right now?” You want your reader to have a good time. High quality analysis is a seamless chain of judgments and evidence.

Paragraph Structure

The first sentence should tell your reader about that paragraph. Then add data and evidence to support your claim. This type of organization suggests a pyramid shape with the point at the apex and data underneath. Do not do the opposite, which is an inverted pyramid, where you start with ample amounts of data and then surprise the reader with the point at the end of the paragraph.



No matter what the assignment is, you carry the burden of proof and you should try to make the reading compelling. Consider the scenario where the reader performs some triage on the document and reads only the first line of each paragraph. Those lines along with the first and last paragraphs should form a coherent development of thought.

Format

Double space the pages to make it easier to add comments.

Voice

Use the active voice instead of the passive voice. The active voice gives more information. For example, in a sentence beginning “A debate is being waged ...,” we neither know the parties in the debate nor the motivation or importance of the debate. At a minimum, avoid the passive voice, because it is not a substitute for now knowing what to say. In general, active voice promotes clear thinking.