

Writing

The writing in this course is intended to serve three functions. First and foremost, it is intended to help you develop a higher degree of mastery of the material in this course. Second, at the same time, it is intended to help improve your own writing. Finally, it is intended as an example of how you might go about teaching writing when teaching your own classes. To this end, you will be writing two short papers in this class. You will receive feedback on all these assignments and, on occasions, will be required to rewrite a weak paper.

Note: For the SLA papers you will be required to turn in one or more data sheets the week before the paper itself is due. Those who do not turn in the data on time receive a zero for the whole assignment, making a good grade in the course quite difficult to achieve.

It is assumed that you are familiar with what papers are and how they are written. However, for those who wish a few short reminders, let's talk about what a paper is.

The finished product will probably be around three pages long, double-spaced, and include one page or so of data. The first paragraph of the paper will include a thesis sentence which sets out what the paper intends to prove, and the remainder of the paper will set about developing the notions of the thesis sentence and providing supporting evidence. The final paragraph, if there is one, will probably come to a conclusion usually fairly similar to the one initially suggested by the thesis statement.

The process of writing the paper usually starts with making observations while working with your consultant. After noticing interesting things about your conversation partner's English and scribbling down some rough notes, you need to think about what the person you are working with is doing. Once you have a general idea what is happening, figure out how to organize support for your ideas and develop the various chunks of support into supporting paragraphs. Now summarize what you have found.

Note that there are roughly three activities involved in writing such a paper. Initially, you write out your ideas on paper, or, better, into the computer. Next, now that you have gathered your ideas together and written them down, reorganize and rewrite them so that they make sense to you. Finally, rewrite the paper so that it would make sense to someone else in the class. In addition, reread this final draft to edit the minor mistakes that occur in all papers.

General notes:

When writing, it is not necessary to begin at the beginning. I often begin in the middle with something that I understand quite well and get around to my introduction and my conclusion when I understand what I am doing a little better.

The whole process outlined above may take as little as two hours. It helps if you

already use a word processor. If you do not use a word processor, it is often useful to use a pair of scissors so that sections may be moved about. Do not necessarily wait until you know completely what you are going to write; as you write your ideas become clearer--- that is one of the reasons subsequent drafts read better.

What do I expect? I expect the papers to be well-written, well-organized, and well-argued. I do not necessarily expect you to be right nor do I expect everything you say will be linguistically sophisticated.

[thanks: Stacy Evans, for useful feedback on this]