
20.380 written work: points to ponder

- Questions? Comments? Wanna meet to talk about the work? Write to me:

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- Revise one another's work. Be free of ego. It's always *obvious* when the work hasn't had enough eyes on it – just like when it's been done by committee. It's not enough to have just one person doing editorial work. Develop competence at this kind of collaboration.
- 40-year professional writers usually can't ace the first draft. You can't either. Nor the second.
- Know your reader. Check in regularly w/instructors to help gauge the proper level of tech detail for your paper. Seek out examples of good and bad work.
- Lines in an outline are easier to move around than paragraphs of prose, because prose is *connected*. Think about structure in advance.
- Think about the parts of the paper in terms of what's necessary for the reader to *believe* your central claim. Maybe that claim is 'You should give us money to do this work.' In that case, you're building an argument, attempting to *compel*. Think about the paper as having an argument's structure.
- The introduction is part of the argument – a key part – and it should be as pared-down and carefully constructed as the rest of the paper. It is *not* an infodump, and its purpose is not to show how much research you've done. It's there to provide all necessary context, but nothing more.

- To amplify the previous point: **no one cares how much reading you do, as such.** If an advisor/reviewer responds to your writing by telling you to do more research, it's not because she thinks sitting in the library is good for you. It's because an element of your *argument* is missing, and further reading will point you toward it.
- Page count is not a measure of value. You're not trying to impress teacher (or anyone), you're trying to make a *perfectly functional written object*. Think in terms of *necessary* and *sufficient* support for your argument. 'What to include?' is a logic problem, not a prose problem, so it's most easily solved at the planning stage. Moving blocks of prose around is harder than shuffling items in an outline.
- That said, the work takes as many pages as it takes. Try to keep the page count down, but always serve the content of your paper above all. That means including all the important stuff and cutting *absolutely* everything else.
- Figures are part of the flow of your paper. Instead of trying to squeeze someone else's visual presentation into your paper, figure out in advance *exactly* what kind of figure your paper needs, then put together visual materials with that requirement in mind. Don't include anything else. If that means creating original figures *to order*, do it. You'll save yourself time and save your readers headaches.