

Introduction to University-Level Writing I: Typical Challenges and Ways to Succeed

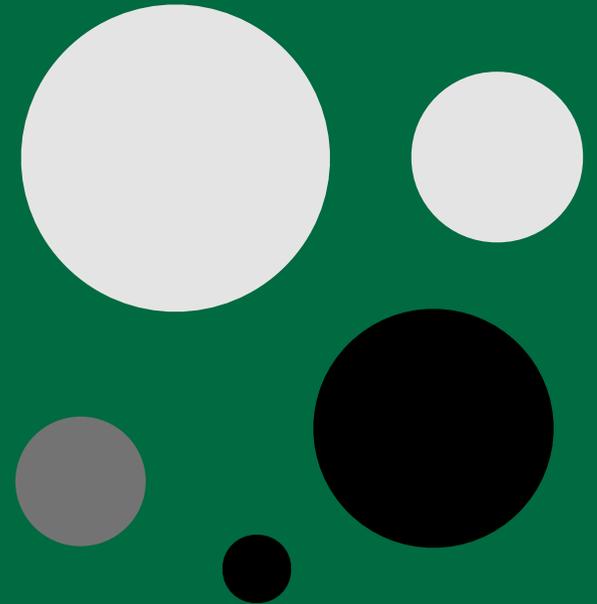
with Liv Marken & Brette Kristoff



Welcome!

Type into the Chat:

- where are you Zooming in from today?
- what college you are enrolled in?



The Writing Centre

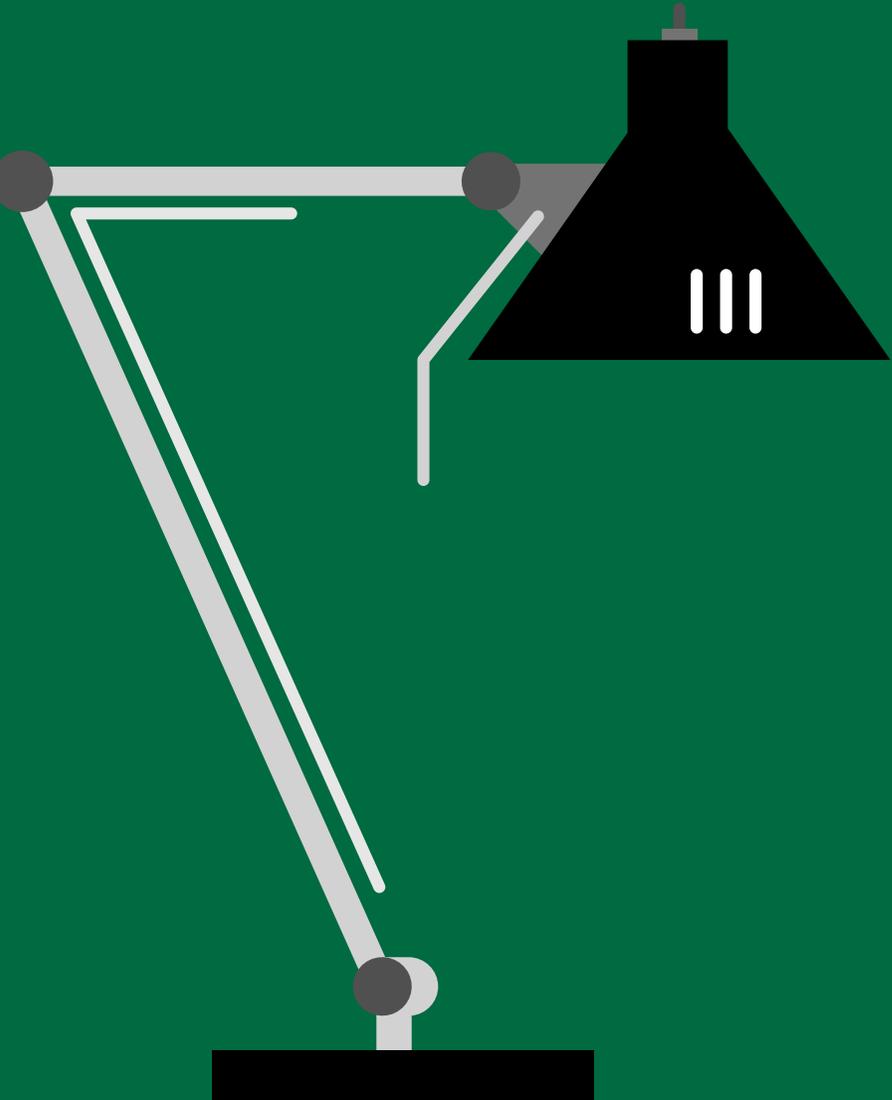
- Workshops, Tutoring, & Resources
- Online and in-person services
- Free, friendly, confidential. Drop-in & appointments.
- Tutors come from a range of disciplines.
- We help everyone from first year students to PhD students.

Location: Murray 142

[Library.usask.ca/writing-help](https://library.usask.ca/writing-help)



Roadmap

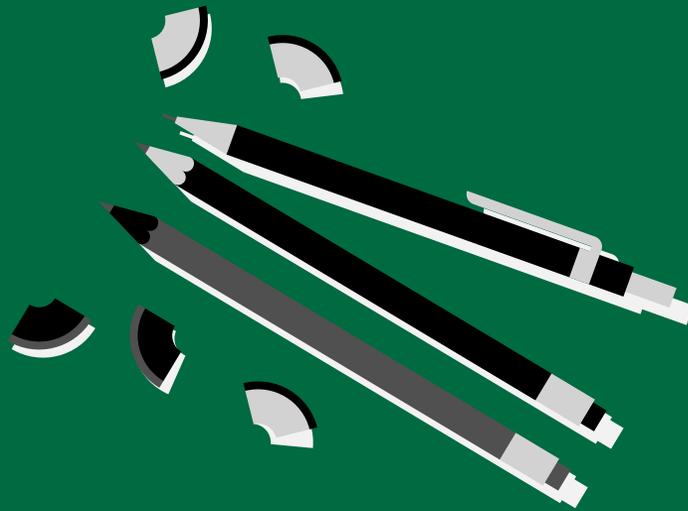
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1. Introductions
 2. Fear!
 3. General expectations for post-secondary academic writing
 4. Strategies for humanities, social sciences, and science writing
 5. Takeaways & Discussion

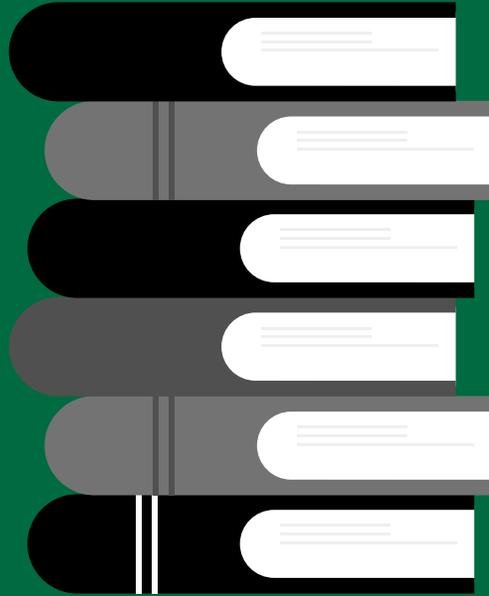
Type into the chat

- What was your biggest challenge when writing a paper in high school?
- What stressed you out the most?
- What did you enjoy about it?



Let's Talk about Fear!



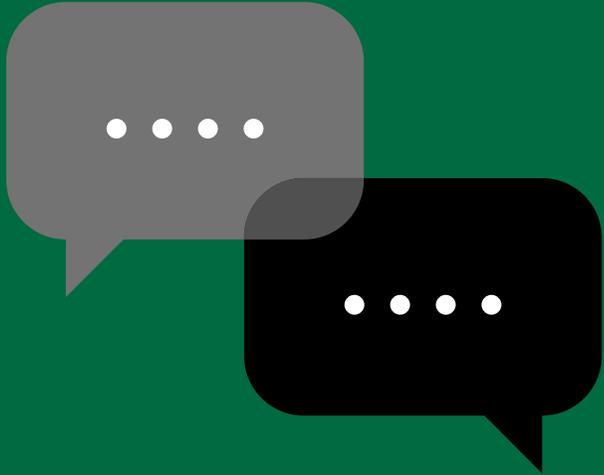


University Writing and the "Scholarly Conversation"



General Differences Between Secondary and Post-Secondary Writing





What do USask students say?



- “The main difference I noticed was that in high school, there was the expectation of a five-paragraph essay (intro, 3 body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph), whereas at university, there is a lot more flexibility depending on the assignment. While the expectations for university-level writing are much higher, I noticed that there was a lot more support in university writing (approaching professors, TAs, contacting the writing centre) compared to high school.”
– Rebecca (Psychology)

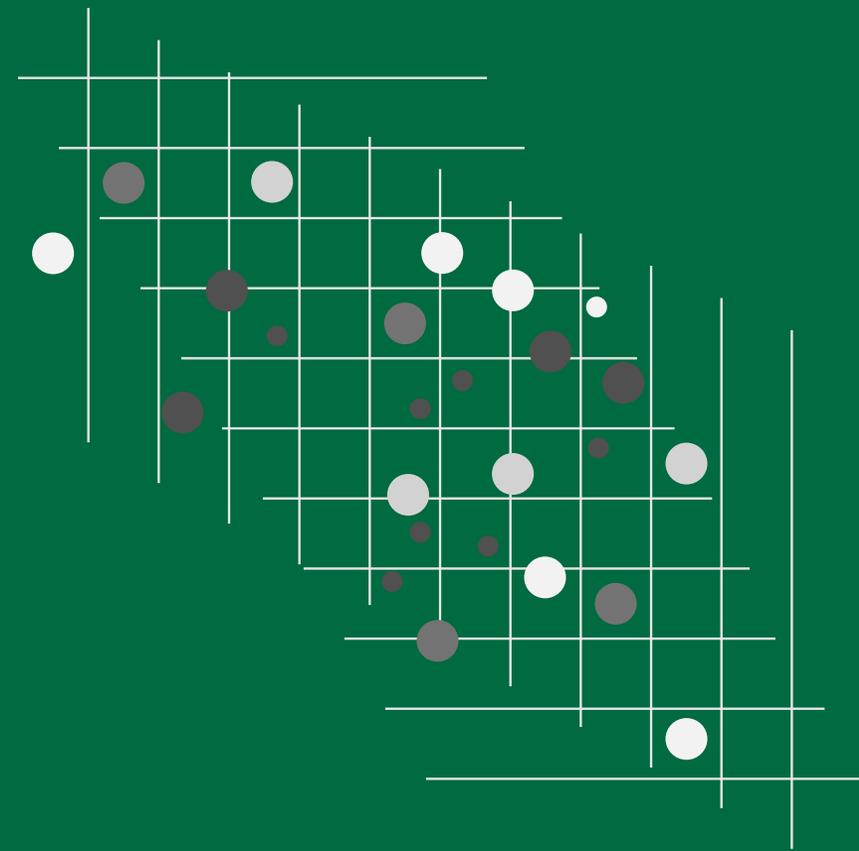
“You need to spend way more time on your work...spread out over time.... and that you should go through multiple drafts. Likewise, getting feedback from someone other than yourself is a must!” – Brittany (Psychology)

“Don’t freak out when your marks drop. You’ll get better and better.” –
Heather (English and Phys/Pharm)

“In lots of high school courses formatting is super relaxed and essentially if you have some amount of citing going on and maybe three sources in your bibliography you’re good, so it’s kind of like a new aspect to writing that you have to learn and that was never taught to you.” – Hannah (Health Sciences)

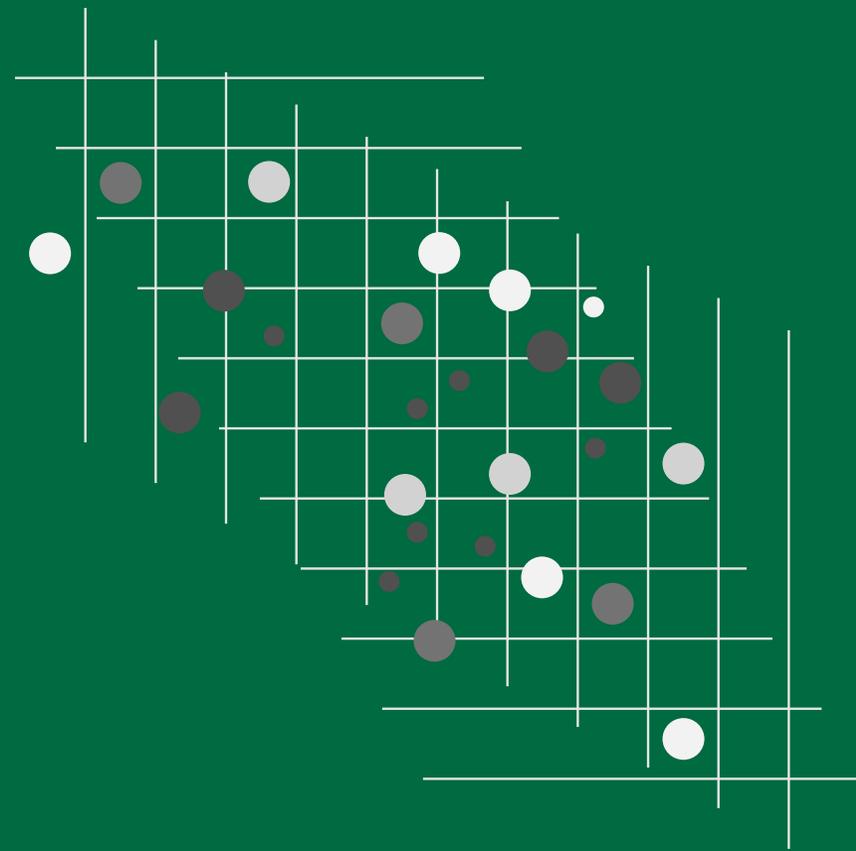
Differences in Post-Secondary Writing

More freedom: time management, topic



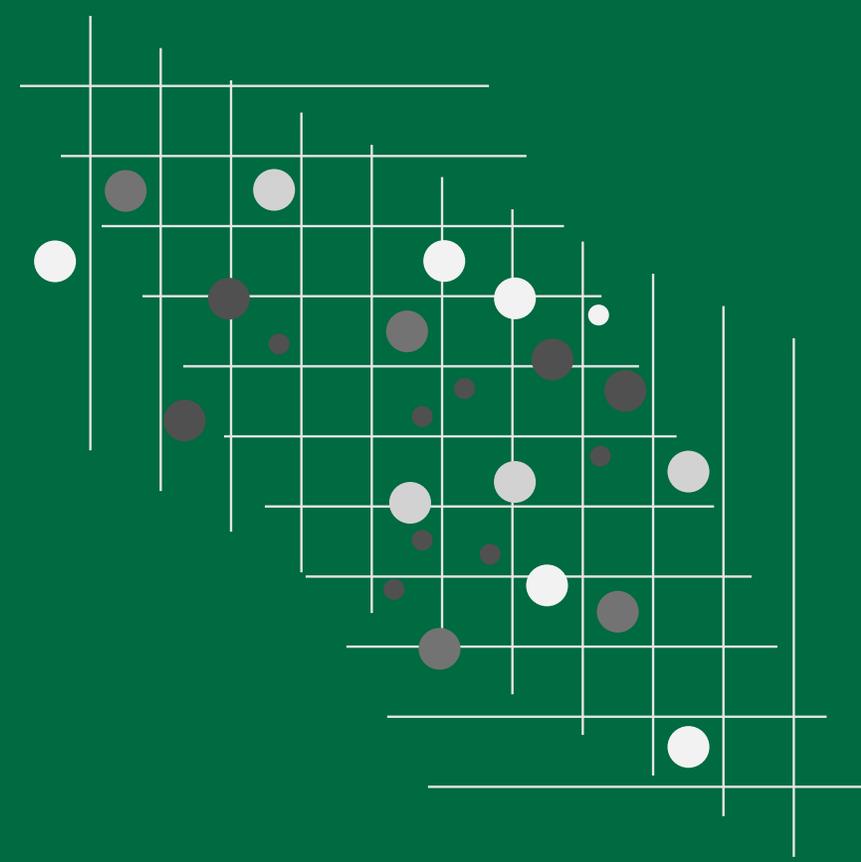
Differences in Post-Secondary Writing

- Degree of direction from instructor can vary.
- Work on papers typically doesn't happen in class



Differences in Post-Secondary Writing

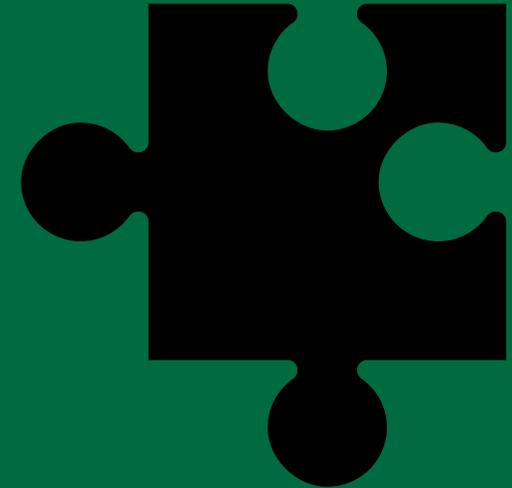
- Higher expectations: research, citation, grammar, punctuation, depth and originality.
- Academic honesty: citation, proper paraphrasing and quoting.



Why Do The Differences Exist?

There are “real-world” implications:

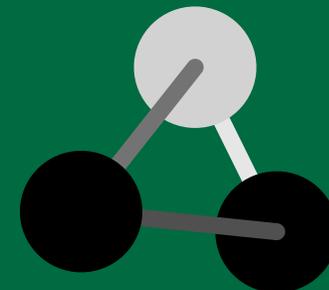
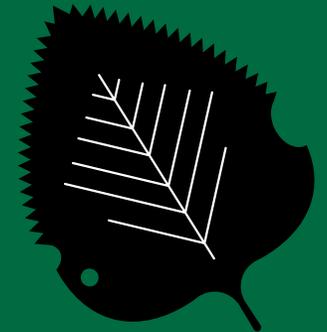
- Connected by sharing and citing the information
- Questioning information
- Scholarly work based on original analysis, research, and experimentation
- Your scholarship as a student builds on previous ideas or discoveries
- Students write papers and cite researchers, becoming the next generation building on knowledge
- We can solve problems, wrestle with important moral and ethical questions, contribute to the progression of justice.



Three general disciplinary categories in university:



Humanities & Fine Arts
Social Sciences
Sciences



Writing in the Disciplines: Humanities & Fine Arts

- Diversity of forms
- Similarities between disciplines
- Differences



Writing in the Humanities & Fine Arts: Genres

Annotated bibliographies

Book review

Critiques

Artist's statement

Essay exams

Annotations

Posters

Essays (expository, creative,
descriptive, narrative)

Research Essays

Précis

Reflections

Discussion posts

Personal essays

Poetry, Fiction, Plays,

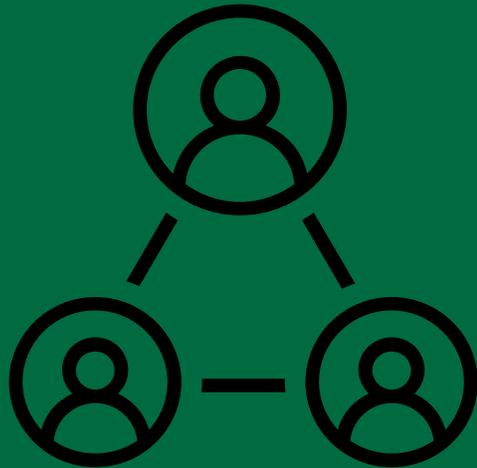
Writing in the Humanities: Student Perspective

- First Year: close analysis, very narrow topics.
- Reliance on evidence to prove arguments (arguing something with proof, presented systematically) rather than a summary of your thoughts, feelings, reflections, and plot or events.
- Concise, precise language
- Use of “I” depends on the professor and the assignment, but it’s usually unnecessary.

Writing in the Humanities: My Perspective as an Instructor

- Reading directions, lack of close reading, not tracking patterns or situating points in larger context
- No theoretical basis
- Issues with evidence, generalizations, logic
- Observations but no argument
- Issues with precision, care
- Rushed conclusions
- "Higher Order Concerns" attended to over "Lower Order Concerns"
- Not noting and acting on feedback

Writing in the Disciplines: Social Sciences



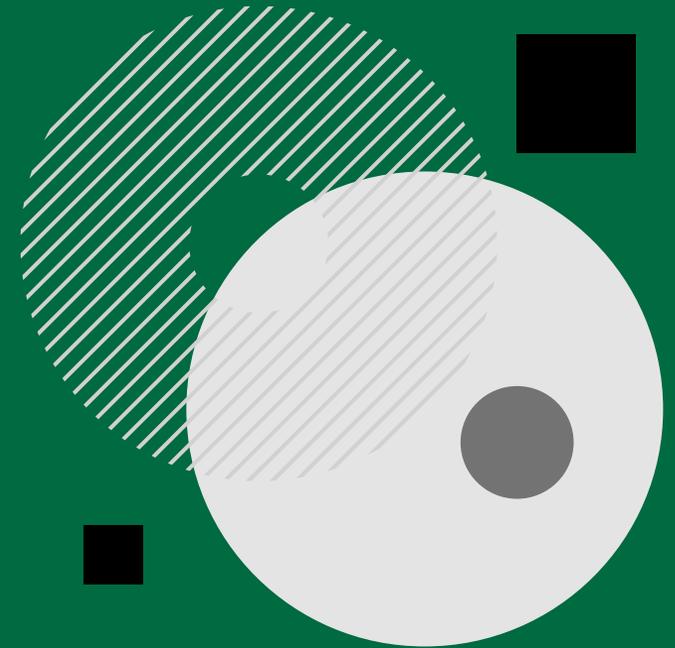
Examples: psychology,
sociology, political
studies, economics,
and archaeology.

Types of Writing in the Social Sciences

- Lab reports
- Term papers
- Review papers
- Presentations
- Theses
- Poster presentations
- Journal articles
- Grant proposals
- Briefing notes
- Annotated bibliographies
- Book review
- Critical Reviews
- Essays (expository, descriptive, narrative)
- Research Essays
- Précis
- Reflections
- Discussion posts
- Personal essays

Writing in Social Sciences

- Personal Experience: “Knowing, Doing, and Writing”¹
 - Writing as a learning tool
 - The importance of the reader
- First year writing advice
 - Social sciences: Essay-level structure and organization



1. Michael Carter, “Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines,” *College Composition and Communication* 58, no. 3 (February 2007): 385-418.

Writing in Social Sciences

“It doesn’t matter if it makes sense to you. It must make sense to the **reader**.”²

- Who is your reader?
 - Knowing: Studying and understanding concepts (static knowledge)
 - Doing: Participating in disciplinary ways of knowing (active knowledge)
 - Writing: The essay and the lab report as measurements of the “knowing” and “doing” – and ultimately, sharing!²

2. Graduate Connections, “The Basics of Scientific Writing,” Office of Graduate Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, September 20, 2016, <https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/connections/scientific-writing>.

Social Sciences

Using formal writing structures

- Read like a writer
 - Engaging with the formal structure of academic essays
 - Introduction + thesis statement
 - Body sections + paragraphs
 - Conclusion

Social Sciences

Using formal writing structures in a term paper

- The introduction (not always one paragraph!)
 - Introduces the reader to a topic (often one paragraph in short, early-year term essays) by starting with the broadest scope of the topic and narrowing into the main idea/argument of the essay
- The thesis statement
 - The main idea/argument!
 - Depends on the assignment: often professors provide a lot of guidance in early-year courses, and they often welcome questions

Social Sciences

Using formal writing structures in a term paper

- **Body paragraphs**
 - Each paragraph develops a distinct idea in support of the thesis statement
 - Important to ensure that they proceed in a logical way
 - Think about how one idea relates to the next
- **The conclusion**
 - Revisits “what happened” in the paper, starting narrow and ending broadly
 - This is a great opportunity to compare your final thoughts to the rest of the contents of the paper

Social Sciences

Brainstorming and using outlines

- Long answer essay questions
 - The social sciences often ask students to write an essay on midterm and final exams
 - How do you ensure, when you've only got one shot at a draft, that you cover everything you want to say and in a logical order?

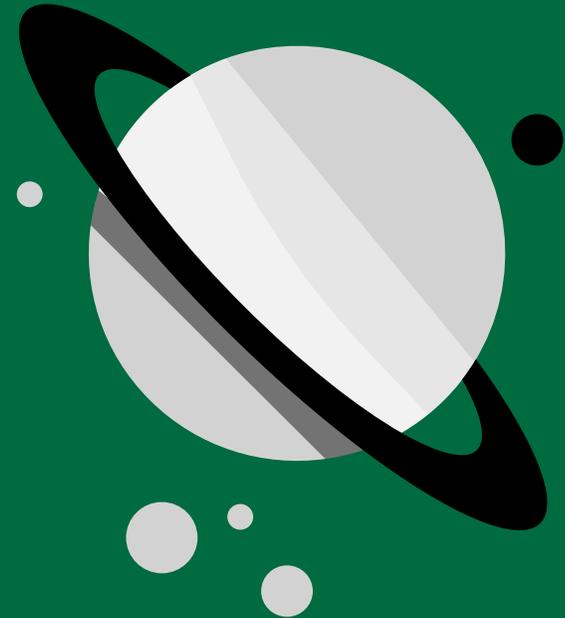
Social Sciences

Mapping an Argument

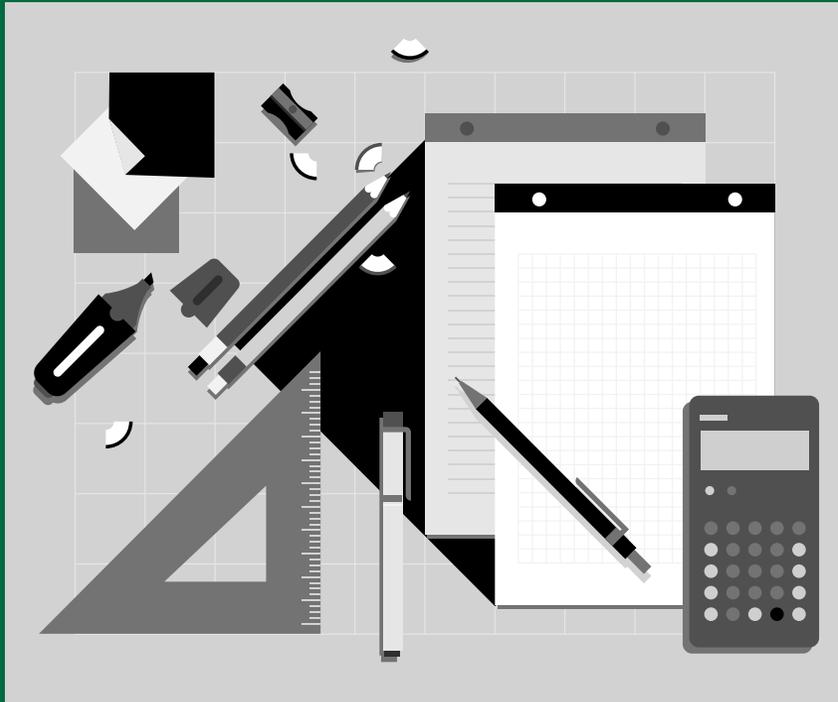
- Using a mind map, flowchart, or any other visual aid to see the arguments and subarguments and understand how they relate to each other

Science Writing

“The fundamental purpose of scientific discourse is not the mere presentation of information and thought, but rather it’s actual communication” -Copen & Swan,
American Scientist



Science Writing: Typical Genres



1. Lab reports
2. Term papers
3. Review papers
4. Presentations
5. Theses
6. Poster presentations
7. Journal articles
8. Grant proposals

Science Writing Format

You may see the acronym IMRaD



Abstract	Summarize purpose, experimental method, findings, and conclusions.
Introduction	What is the problem? Why did you do the study? Hypothesis.
Methods	How did I solve the problem? When, where, & how was it done?
Results	What did I find out? Was the hypothesis true?
Discussion	What does it mean? Why does it matter? How does it fit? Future?
Conclusion	What can I summarize?
References	Whose works did I cite?

Science Writing: Style

Conventions in language, organization: Manchester Phrasebank is helpful <https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

"Plain style" is used:

- Limit each sentence to one thought.
- Use present tense and active voice (some profs want passive voice)
- Be concise
- Pay attention to each word: would a more direct, precise, or less connotative word do?

Resource Guides for the Disciplines



Writing in Engineering, Health, and Natural Sciences Writing Resources:

<https://libguides.usask.ca/writing-help/disciplines/sciences>

Writing in Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts:

<https://libguides.usask.ca/writing-help/disciplines/humanities-social-sciences>

Writing in Business:

<https://libguides.usask.ca/writing-help/disciplines/business>

Writing in Education:

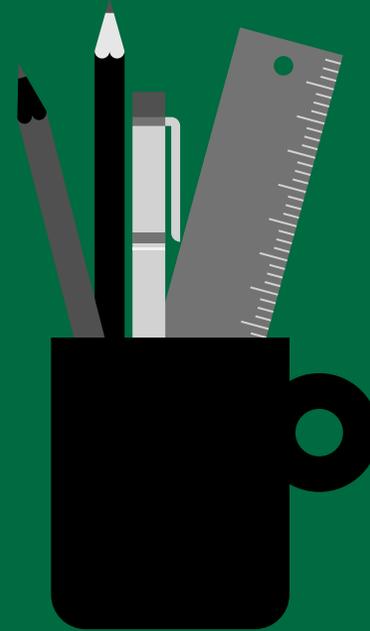
<https://libguides.usask.ca/writing-help/disciplines/education>

Full Guide (essay-writing, lit reviews, English language, citation, and writing support)

<https://libguides.usask.ca/writing-help/home>

Final Notes

- Talk to your TAs and Instructors
- Start early, use a calendar
- You will improve! Keep your papers, read and list your feedback, improve in stages.
- Get help along the way.



The Library Learning Hub



First year



Math and
Stats



Writing



Study skills



Research



Grad students