

The Comprehensive Essay Checklist

You can use this checklist as a guide to editing your own writing.

How to proceed:

1. Complete a rough draft.
2. Proofread for mechanical errors using the **Essential Proofreading Checklist**.
3. Put your essay aside for a few hours or days before starting the final revision process.
4. When you are ready, print out your text and work at a desk with a dictionary and grammar guide.

[Step 1] The Big Picture: Looking at the essay as a whole

1. Work through the questions in **Step 1**, highlighting any problem areas and making brief notes of what you would like to change or add on the hard copy of your essay.
2. At the end of **Step 1**, go back to the highlighted issues and notes you made and integrate the required changes.
3. Produce a clean printed copy and move on to **Step 2**.

Orient yourself with an Overview

Begin with an **overview** of the main elements of the essay. To get a sense of how the essay will come across to your audience, you may wish to:

- Read it aloud.
- Ask someone to read it aloud to you.
- Ask someone to read it to him/herself and give you feedback.

Does anything seem strange or out of place? Are there sections, paragraphs, or ideas that do not fit or make sense when read along with others?

Prioritize Purpose

i Writing with **purpose** is an important aspect of all good writing. When you make the purpose of your essay a priority throughout the planning, drafting, and editing processes, you will avoid many of the pitfalls that undermine student and professional writing. If the purpose of your academic essay is to persuade, you must be sure about what you are trying to persuade your audience to believe.

i The first step in making sure that your writing has purpose is to examine your **thesis statement**. The thesis should tell the reader of your essay what point you are trying to make. It should be expressed in a clear and precise statement, and it should not be left in the form of a question.

- Does the essay thesis answer the questions assigned by my teacher?
- Is the thesis presented as an arguable claim, and not as a question?
- Is the thesis too broad or too narrow?
- Have I carefully considered my audience and the reader's level of expertise?
- Is the thesis missing important or necessary information for the reader's understanding?
- Have I defined any unfamiliar or technical terms for a non-expert audience?



i In addition to having a clearly stated purpose, your essay should use an effective **tone** in order to persuade your audience.

Is the language formal or informal? (Circle one.)

- Is the language appropriate for my audience?
 Do I use this language choice consistently?

Examine the Essay's Structure

i An essay should include an **introduction**, three or more **body paragraphs**, and a **conclusion**.

Introduction

i The opening paragraph or **introduction** should create interest. It should include the essay's thesis and map out the main points you intend to cover as you develop the argument of your essay.

Does my introduction. . .

- Create interest or 'hook' the reader to want to read more?
 Clearly and prominently state the essay's thesis (thesis statement; statement of purpose) in one sentence?
 Indicate the types of arguments and examples that will be used to support the thesis?
 Briefly map out the subjects I intend to cover in the essay?

For literary essays, does my introduction. . .

- State the title and the author of the work?
 Is the title written in the correct font style, according to the type of work (novel, short story, poem etc.)?
 Indicate a principal theme or central meaning of the literary work the essay examines?
 Specifically mention important literary devices (imagery, symbolism, setting, etc.) that will be discussed or analysed in the essay?

Body Paragraphs

i The body of an essay should form a structured line of argument strongly and directly supporting your thesis. Each **body paragraph** should clearly support the thesis as it is stated in the introduction.

i The basic unit of organization for most kinds of writing is the **paragraph**. A paragraph is a collection of sentences that work together to establish one main idea. If a paragraph works correctly, it is unified and cohesive.

i A unified paragraph clearly establishes its main idea with a **topic sentence**, and every other sentence in the paragraph works explicitly to support that topic sentence. If a sentence is off topic and does not belong with the other sentences it is grouped with, it should be removed.

i Sometimes sentences fit together, but a lack of transition and connective words between sentences makes the relationship between them unclear to the reader at first. This problem means that the paragraph lacks cohesion. Typically, a **cohesive paragraph** guides the reader easily through the paragraph from topic sentence to supporting ideas and finally to a satisfactory conclusion. In order to edit your writing for overall organization, you must be clear about what each paragraph intends to achieve, and you should also be very confident about how each paragraph works together with the other paragraphs in a document.



First look at each body paragraph separately.

Does each body paragraph. . .

- Indicate the main point of the paragraph with a clear topic sentence?
- Focus on the main idea expressed in the topic sentence, and include only sentences that clearly relate to the topic sentence?
- Contribute to the development of my thesis?
- Use experiences, illustrations, facts, opinions, or examples to develop arguments that support my thesis?
- Use citations that directly support the topic of the paragraph and the essay thesis?
- Use appropriate and varied transition words to indicate movement to a new aspect of the topic?
- Provide sufficient information without adding irrelevant details?

Is any information missing that would illustrate the thesis more clearly?

Now look at how the body paragraphs fit together.

- Are the body paragraphs arranged in an effective sequence?
- Do ideas transition smoothly from one paragraph to the next because I have used effective linking sentences?
- Have I consistently used key words and phrases that appear throughout the body of the essay?

Finally, reread each body paragraph with the following questions in mind.

- Have I avoided wordiness and unnecessary repetition?
- Have I used a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary?
- Have I included relevant citations (quotations) and referenced them correctly?
- Did I vary words and phrases used to introduce a citation?

Conclusion

i The **conclusion** should sum up the main points of the essay and relate them to the thesis without repeating exactly what has been said before. The conclusion should leave the reader with a strong sense of the essay's message.

Does my conclusion. . .

- Adequately summarize my main ideas or points?
- Reformulate my thesis and arguments in new words?
- End with recommendations, advice, or thoughts to encourage further discussion?

[Step 2] The Details: Final touches & document formatting

1. Work at your computer with access to appropriate guidelines to format your essay.
2. Work through the questions in **Step 2**, highlighting any problem areas and making brief notes of what you would like to change or add on the hard copy of your essay.
3. At the end of **Step 2**, go back to the highlighted issues and notes you made and integrate the required changes.
4. When you have completed all the steps involved in thoroughly editing your essay, save and reread once more before printing and submitting your assignment.



i **Formatting** your essay correctly is an essential component of the editing process. Most importantly, it makes your work enjoyable to read. It also presents the essay according to familiar standards so that readers know where to find and how to interpret certain information. Finally, it shows your teacher that you are able to follow instructions, which is a valuable skill for both study and the workplace.

i Follow the guidelines provided by your teacher. If none are provided (be sure of this), always use commonly accepted standards and styles: Pick one style and stick to it throughout the essay. The most common formatting styles are **APA**, **MLA**, and **Chicago**.

Essential Information

i Every essay should include some basic information. Did I remember to include. . .

- Page numbers?
- A title page, correctly formatted?
- My name and the date?
- My teacher's name?
- The name of the assignment?
- The title of the essay?
- Any other information requested in the assignment?

Standards

i There are criteria for the way the document should look when it is handed in. Did I. . .

- Use appropriately-sized margins?
- Use consistent fonts throughout?
- Respect the alignment and spacing set out in the assignment?
- Include consistent paragraph breaks and indentation?
- Respect the assignment's total page requirements or word count?
- Include consistent headings, bullets, and numbering for lists where applicable?

References

i All ideas read or used in any way in preparing an essay should be carefully documented.

Did I follow conventions of academic honesty by. . .

- Avoiding plagiarism including paraphrasing and summarizing without proper references?
- Documenting my sources in the text completely, correctly and concisely using proper footnotes, endnotes or in-text citations?
- Following the referencing conventions of an appropriate formatting style (e.g. APA, MLA, or Chicago)?
- Including a bibliography of all sources I read and/or referenced?
- Ensuring the bibliography is in alphabetical order?

