

CHC Writing Center

Tips on Writing the Senior Seminar Paper

1. Beginning Your Paper

- Be conscious of the topics that most interest you in your classes; you never know when you'll find an idea for your thesis. This strategy often is more helpful than trying to find a topic of interest in your last semester.
- The main stages of composing the paper are researching, note taking, writing, and editing. These stages take time, so pace yourself accordingly. It's a good idea to set weekly goals.
- Do your research early in the semester. You'll probably have to order books and articles, and they can take a while to arrive.

2. Researching

- **Begin with the CHC Logue Library.** You can arrange private meetings with the librarians, e-mail them, or have a consultation through IM ([Ask A Librarian](#)) on the library's website www.chc.edu/library. Begin reading background on your topic using some of the library's resources, including Web Resources, Find Journal Articles, Find Books, and Find News Articles. Don't shy away from books because of their length. You might discover a useful chapter or introduction just by skimming the index or table of contents. Be aware that many books are now available electronically and include a search feature that allows you to pinpoint key terms and information quickly.
- **Identify credible sources.** Really take the time to evaluate your sources. Pay attention to the currency of your sources and the reliability of their authors and sponsoring organizations, especially when using web sites.
 - Make sure to take notes while reading your sources. Taking notes is a critical step that will help you fine tune your ideas and get to a rough draft. (See the "Notes and Citations" section for more information.)
- **Use search engines and online journals.** These come in handy after the library is closed and you want to continue researching. Use credible sites and peer reviewed journals like EBSCOhost, Academic Search Premier, and JSTOR.
- **Inter-Library Loan** is a very effective way of obtaining current, credible research. You'll have access to more than just CHC's catalog and databases. Remember that ordering these articles may take time. Try to order them at least a month and a half before you need them.

3. Pre-Writing and Outlining

- Pre-writing: a strategy for jotting down ideas in an organized or unorganized fashion before drafting a paper. Types of pre-writing are freewriting, brainstorming, and/or mapping. See the Writing Center handout, “Pre-Writing Strategies: Getting Started on a Paragraph or Essay,” for an explanation of each strategy. Other pre-writing strategies include blogging, journal writing, and using Inspiration software (visual mapping program on CHC computers in the Writing Center and St. Joe’s lab).
- Outlining: a strategy for structuring ideas in an organized fashion before drafting a paper.
- Don’t bypass pre-writing or outlining before you begin writing your paper. A senior thesis (or any paper) requires thorough organization. Prewriting and outlining will help you begin to organize your paper so that it maintains structure and “flow.”
- Take the time to gather all of your thoughts on your topic, and write everything down. You do not want to run the risk of forgetting your ideas; capturing your ideas is what pre-writing is all about. Save everything you write.
- While researching, your thoughts may be scattered. Pre-writing helps you find a “center.” Writing everything down, or even asking yourself questions, helps you connect ideas and form new ones. If you have trouble forming ideas on your topic and/or organizing them, visit the Writing Center to discuss narrowing your topic and formulating an outline.

4. Notes and Citations

- Make sure to clearly mark the source of your notes as you take them. Write the source at the top of a page and highlight it. Then you’ll know what to cite when summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting in your paper.
- Actively read your sources. That is, take notes in the margins or use an entirely separate notebook. It’s best to have the original source (or copy) in your records. When taking notes, use your own words when possible, and place quotation marks around any language that you copy word for word to avoid possible (unintentional) plagiarism when writing your paper. Remember to cite any quotations and summaries/paraphrases. Even if you put an author’s ideas in your own words, you must still include the citation to acknowledge the source and give credit to the original author.
- Evenly distribute cited material. In other words, summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation should be integrated with your own voice. It is important that the majority of

your paper is written in your own voice. Be wary of quoting too much. Also, when paraphrasing and summarizing, use your own words, and include citations. The exception is technical language that is difficult to paraphrase/summarize in your own words. In this case, keep such technical language in quotation marks.

5. Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting

- Summaries, paraphrases, and quotations should be integrated with your own voice when writing your paper. Balancing summary, paraphrase, and quotations creates an organized and synthesized paper. Paraphrasing and summarizing are different ways of incorporating outside source material into your writing.
 - Summarize when you want to give a general idea of the source's points or main point in your own words.
 - Paraphrasing involves restating specific ideas from a source in your own words. Paraphrase when you need to maintain the logic and organization of the original source. Summarize when you wish to express a more general idea from a source.
- Quoting is restating what the source has said exactly (and enclosing it in quotation marks " "). Avoid saturating your paper with quotations. Reserve quotations for when the source's point (the actual quotation) is concise and directly supports your argument/thesis in powerful language.
 - The use of quotations must be justified. You should include a quotation in your paper if that quotation is indispensable and cannot be stated any more effectively in your own words. Remember to use a signal phrase before quotations (Smith claims, Jones explains, according to Bryant, etc.) and to offer some explanation of the quote (also known as sandwiching a quotation). Also, be mindful of including too many long (block) quotations; in many cases, such quotations can be summarized or paraphrased.
- Helpful resources on summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting:
 - *Practical Argument : A Text and Anthology* (Authors/Editors: Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell) (Available to review in the Writing Center)
 - Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)
 - *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker (6th or 7th editions available for review in the Writing Center)

6. Mechanics

- Refine **topic sentences**; they are essential to organizing a paper. A topic sentence establishes the content and organization of the paragraph. See the Writing Center handout, "Topic Sentences," for additional clarification.
- Write clearly and concisely.
- Edit thoroughly and frequently.
- It is a good idea to have another reader (even from another discipline) such as a CHC writing tutor read your paper for clarity.

7. Drafting and Saving Your Work

- Because a senior seminar paper requires a significant amount of editing, you will have multiple drafts. Keep all of your drafts so that it will be easy to add and revise ideas.
- Always save your drafts in multiple places – flash drives, digital drop boxes, e-mail, etc. You never want to be in the position of losing all of your hard work. Print an occasional copy as well.
- Save your sources to multiple places. If you lose the hard copy of a source, you'll still be able to access the PDF on your flash drive or in your e-mail.

8. Using the Writing Center

- Tutors are available to assist you in various stages of your writing process. Students with Senior Seminar papers should come to the Writing Center early in the semester and should schedule regular visits so as to work on the paper in increments. Once the paper reaches 7 or more pages, students will need to schedule more than one appointment (one hour slots available). The Center recommends that the student work with the same tutor. The Center cannot read and comment on entire papers of this length in one session, so students must plan and schedule ahead of time.

When the paper reaches beyond 7 pages, the Center *may* be able to schedule "read-ahead time." That is, the student may submit the paper in advance for the tutor to read before the appointment. In this case, students must make this request 5 days ahead of a preferred appointment time and should submit both a printed and electronic copy of the paper to Megan Ryan ryanm01@chc.edu (office, 3rd floor, St. Joseph Hall). The Center will then schedule a tutor for both reading time and a meeting time with the student. "Read-ahead" time is not guaranteed. Further, the student should be aware that lengthy papers often require multiple

appointments and should plan accordingly with paper due dates. Failure to attend the appointment will result in no tutoring for a week. If a student does not attend multiple appointments, read ahead time will no longer be granted.

The Center also offers a resource library of writing-related handouts on grammar, organization, and style. Handouts are free for students.