

# Writing at the Graduate Level

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Sam Houston State University  
The Graduate School

# What is Graduate Writing?

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- Graduate-level writing” is a deceptively simple term but the demands placed on students by the various disciplines, formats, and genres in which they write differ widely.
  - Most Social Sciences use *APA* style and format
  - Sociology uses *ASA* style and format
  - English and some Humanities use *MLA* style and format
  - History students use *Chicago* style and format
  - Some disciplines require *Turabian* style and format



# Comparison of Undergraduate and Graduate Level Writing 1

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## Undergraduate Writing:

- is mechanically correct.
- is concise.
- is clear though not necessarily interesting.
- may or may not demonstrate new ideas.
- contains citations when required.
- uses transition words and phrases.

## Graduate Writing:

- is mechanically skillful.
- is concise though also nuanced.
- is engaging, stylish, and interesting, and speaks with your own voice.
- explores a topic or research question in an original way.
- demonstrates extensive research.
- has a strong organizational frame.

# Comparison of Undergraduate and Graduate Level Writing 2

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## Undergraduate Writing:

- exactly conforms to outside models of argumentation, such as legal argument or classical rhetorical theory.
- is written for a general audience or for the teacher.
- will, with revision, be presentable at an undergraduate conference or in a general-interest publication.

## Graduate Writing:

- moves from point to point in the way you want your audience's thoughts to move; structure grows out of content.
- is written for a professional audience.
- should, with revision, be publishable in a professional journal or presentable at a conference

# Consistency in Writing

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- Critical Thinking
- Logic and Organization
- Diction and Vocabulary
- Conventions of Writing (i.e., grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure)
- Specific Style and Format

# What is Critical Thinking?

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- Critical thinking involves putting into practice what you have already learned in order to create new and original information, conclusions, and ideas.
- Critical thinking also involves your emotions and values:
  - there is an “affective” component to critical thinking.
  - there are two sides of thinking—the objective and subjective sides, the head and the heart.
  - you must be intentional in your writing.

# What Characterizes Critical Thinking?

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- Knowledge
- Intellectual Humility or Open-mindedness
- Intellectual Fairness
- Curiosity
- Actively Listening to Others



# Thinking Like A Writer

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- You can know all the grammar and punctuation in the world and still be an unsuccessful writer.
- Good writing grows directly out of good thinking:
  - knowing what others have said in relation to your topic
  - knowing what you want to say in response to them
  - knowing how to present your thoughts in a clear, graceful fashion

# Organization

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- You should follow these guidelines when you think about organizing your papers:
  - Get to your main point as quickly as possible.
  - All claims must have evidence.
  - All evidence should relate to a claim.
  - If evidence does *not* back up a claim, you need to explain why and/or otherwise account for it.
  - You must provide enough background information to set up your question, but do not provide so much that your reader loses *your* point.

# Discipline Specific Language

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- Each discipline has its own set of technical vocabulary and specialized language that writers use to discuss concepts with specificity and precision.
- During your time in graduate school, you will have to acquire the language that is specific to your profession.
- When writing, be mindful of rules that will help you understand how and when to use technical vocabulary and discipline-specific styles.
  - Think of your audience
  - Look at journals
  - Ask your professors
  - Know when to define your terms
  - Don't use jargon just because you can



# Punctuation

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- As a graduate student, you should be able to arrange your sentences in a manner that makes your meaning clear to a reader.
- Punctuation marks tell readers *how* to read your sentences—whether they should speed up, slow down, get excited, ask a question, or pause.
- Much like building a house, the little pieces reinforce the construction.

# Grammar

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- At the graduate level you should know the terminology and learn to recognize the way grammatical constructs contribute to the structure of the English language.
- Your goal here is to understand how all the pieces—parts of speech, grammatical constructs, etc.—fit together within a well-written sentence.

# Characteristics of Quality Scholarly Writing

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- It demonstrates your knowledge of the conventions of writing, including grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- It is well organized, with main ideas introduced early on and defended and refined through the paper.
- It is coherent and unified.
- It explores and explains worthwhile content.
- It is free from filler phrases, verbal tics, and space-wasters.
- It is aware of its audience.
- It situates itself within a discipline, discourse community, or scholarly field.

# Research

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- Any field of study has multiple sources of good information, and many of them are available through the Sam Houston State University-Newton Grisham Library. For example,
  - Books
  - Ebooks
  - Databases for your field
  - General databases
  - Web resources



# Final Thoughts

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- All of the strategies we discussed should help you to write with more confidence, knowledge, and correctness; however,
- You should:
  - Plan your writing assignment before you begin writing
  - Read your first draft aloud to someone who is a good writer
  - Rewrite your paper
  - Schedule a writing appointment at the Academic Success Center—in person or online
  - Rewrite final draft
  - Submit for evaluation

Questions, Comments, Concerns.

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# References

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*Note:* PPT slides were synthesized from:

Liberty University Graduate Writing Center. (2007). *Introduction to Graduate Writing*. Lynchburgh, VA: Liberty University. Retrieved from [https://www.liberty.edu/media/1136/Introduction%20to%20Graduate%20Writing%20\(full%20text\).pdf](https://www.liberty.edu/media/1136/Introduction%20to%20Graduate%20Writing%20(full%20text).pdf)