

Alex's Guidelines for Writing Essays

These are the guidelines I follow in writing essays. I see writing not only as putting ideas about a subject onto a page, but also as constructing a building; step by step and one stage at a time. I wrote this paper in a number of specific stages, each being critical in importance to the completion of the essay. In my thought process I see each stage as if in the format of a question; when answered those questions will provide me with all I need to compose a good essay.

The first question I asked myself was, **what are you writing about and why does it matter?** I have found that if I don't establish early why a subject matters or is **important and complex**, I will not receive a high mark on the essay. The first thing I always do when I receive a topic to write about is to think of how to **set it apart** from the dozens and dozens of other essays your teacher most likely doesn't want to mark. I do this by relating to the subject matter through a number of **perspectives** and in **question format**.

For example, my topic was prairie history. I wrote about the subject through both **political** and **economic** perspectives. For SS30, these two perspectives seem to be most appropriate. My subject was also very specific; what was Alberta and the west like economically and politically before and after the 1947 oil strike? I took the very broad subject of prairie history and made it very focused, relevant and specific. Doing this will make writing a thesis **much** easier. At this stage of my writing I write an outline. **The most important part of my writing for me** is writing an outline **before** I do any research. I make every line of the outline into a question. This forces me to make sure each body paragraph has depth and breadth.

This brings me to the second important question I ask myself in my writing. **How is each perspective true and related to the subject matter?** This is my research phase where I find answers to my questions and examples to support them, many from Google and wikipedia. I find it important to speak about both sides of the argument even if there is no argument. For example, I noted both the positive and negative effects oil had on the west and across Canada even though the subject was prairie history. Again, doing this will only help you in your efforts to show that your topic is **important and complex**. That said, make sure you determine the bias of the article you are obtaining information from in order to avoid over-generalizations about each side of the argument. Once the questions on my outline were answered and had sufficient support, I began writing.

The final question I asked myself was, **how should I write my paragraphs?** In my actual writing of the paper I follow a number of guidelines. I try to convince the reader of my argument, being focused & precise, using a variety of examples. If I need to pack in a ton of info in one paragraph, I avoid **superfluous** adjectives in order to achieve better flow. That said I still used enough adjectives to portray a definite tone and style. I always try to give my papers a bias, however slight. For example, it was fairly easy to tell that I am more than likely not a leftist liberal as evidenced in my comments about Trudeau. I didn't want to go over the top and sound immature but I didn't want my essay

to **read like an encyclopedia** or a financial report. Lastly, the conclusion should restate the thesis and have a summary of your ideas. The introduction and conclusion are **the** most important paragraphs in an essay. They should have the most attitude/flair of all your paragraphs and as well should be the most comprehensive of them. As far as editing goes, there are a number of things which, to me, are an **absolute** must.

1. Read aloud multiple times. Your words should not trip over themselves or be redundant. Make sure your ideas are expressed clearly and succinctly. Avoid bad clichés and run-on sentences.
2. Have a parent, teacher or both preferably, read over your writing for **punctuation and grammatical** errors as well as for their ideas.
3. Replace dull and boring adjectives with fresh and vivid ones. Using the synonyms in the MS Word right-click drop down menu is a good idea.