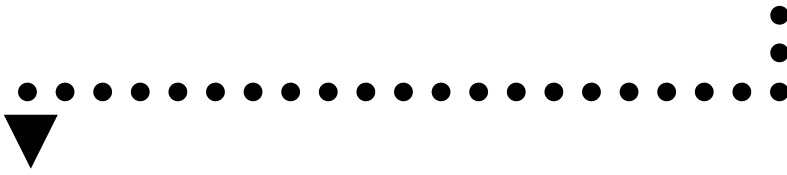


W R I T I N G T I P 5



Make a good first impression.

Anything that you write—an essay, a research paper, a resume, a letter, a postcard—begins to affect your readers even before their eyes hit the first word. Your handwriting or font, the type of paper you’ve chosen, the color of ink, and the visual organization of the page all have influence, either favorable or not.

As your readers move to the first line, the words they encounter there further confirm their attitude about your writing. Some readers see a boring title and think, “This paper is going to be a snooze-o-rama!” Other readers encounter a clunky, wordy opening phrase like “in this day and age in which we live today” and conclude that the writer either had nothing to say or counted the words in the paper and realized that he did not have the required number.

Do you want your readers happy or dissatisfied with the work you’ve done? Happy, of course! Happy readers give you good grades or offer to interview you. Happy readers say, “You guys have got to hear this” and then read aloud what you have written to an enthusiastic audience.

To make your readers happy, make a good first impression by including these three things: 1) professional format, 2) a correct and interesting title, and 3) a strong opening sentence.

Strategy 1 — Use a professional format.

A resume written in pencil on notebook paper will not impress a potential boss. A research paper turned in with pages out of order and fuzzy edges won’t impress the teacher who assigned it. Every piece of writing has an accepted format. Check a handbook, style guide, your syllabus, or class notes to determine the correct format for the piece of writing that you are composing. Then, by god, follow it!

Strategy 2 — Include a correct and interesting title.

Every essay and research paper should have a title. To make a good first impression, the title should be interesting and correctly formatted. To make the title interesting, **don’t** use the topic that you were given as the title of the essay. Instead, your title should be **original** and grab the reader’s attention. Here are two titles for the topic **a problem that must be solved**. Which one is the most interesting?

Inconsiderate Drivers

Move It or Lose It!

Your title should also have correct capitalization and punctuation. Remember these things:

- Capitalize the first letter of the first word.
- Capitalize the first letter of all major words that follow.
- Do not capitalize articles [**a, an, the**], short conjunctions [**and, but, or**, etc.], and short prepositions [**at, by, for, in, of, on, to**, etc.] **unless they are the first word of the title.**
- Do not use quotation marks around your title.
- Do not underline your title.

Here are some examples:

- "The Joy of Reading" [Boring with incorrect punctuation]
- Read Until Your Eyeballs Bleed
- A Problem In The House [Boring with incorrect capitalization]
- The Cockroaches under the Sink

Strategy 3 — Open with a Strong Sentence

Two things can weaken your opening sentence. First, don't begin with a clunky, wordy phrase. ***In the modern world, in society today, in these modern times in which we live***—all of these can be cut entirely or considerably shortened. Second, don't begin with an **expletive**, such as ***there is [are], there was [were], or it is [was]***. ***There*** and ***it*** say nothing, postponing the subject of your essay. Begin immediately with ***real*** words.

- In the society in which we live today, there are too many problems with credit cards.
- Today, credit cards frequently wreck lives.