

The Westminster School

Writing Manual

7th-8th Grade

PHILOSOPHY

Princeton University, a premier Ivy League academic institution, emphasizes writing as the core of a student's education. Though slightly paraphrased, this is their belief: Writing can be said to define a Princeton education. It is the central component of all academic work...and the ability to write cogently and coherently is the hallmark of the educated soul.

Westminster shares this philosophy and wants each student to develop into the best communicator possible.

LOGISTICS

If an electronic copy is required or needed, turn in papers to Mr. Lewis at mlewis@westminsterknights.org

In the event of technical difficulties that would prevent you from turning in your paper in class on its due date, you must notify the teacher at least one day prior to the final due date.

All formal papers, whether critical or creative, should adhere to the follow specifications:

- proper heading (student name, teacher name, class, date) in the upper left hand corner
- typed in size 12, Times New Roman font and double-spaced (no large gaps between paragraphs)
- one inch margins on all sides
- indentation for paragraphs is one-half inch
- print only on the front of the paper (if a hard copy is required)

ESSAY OUTLINE

Here is a general outline to be followed for persuasive/academic essays:

Introduction: three main parts

Captivation- something interesting (outside quote, anecdote/story, current event) to capture the reader's attention

Thesis- the argument of the essay (for the latter part of 8th grade and for 9th grade, the thesis should be fairly ambitious if a top grade is desired)

Direction- where is the essay going? (three-five main points to cover)

Support: three to five supporting, well-written paragraphs. Each paragraph should contain the following:

Evidence- specific examples, details, quotations, etc. that help to prove your argument (never begin or end paragraphs with evidence)

Analysis- explanation of the evidence- What does it mean? How does it help your argument?

A good ratio to remember is that for every line of evidence you should include at least two lines of analysis (1:2).

Refutation: considering the “other side” of the argument...and explaining why those thoughts are not valid. This can be done throughout the supporting paragraphs (point by point) or in a separate paragraph. This section will become increasingly important as you go through the upper school.

Conclusion: last chance to convince your reader. Redevelop your best point or two of support, bring back your thesis and captivation from the introduction...but this is **not** merely a restatement of the introduction and is **not** a general wrap up of the paper!

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

All sentences should be complete sentences (no run-ons) but should vary in length and structure. Paragraphs should be well developed and include clear topic sentences, three or more supporting sentences with explanation, and a proper concluding sentence. Paragraphs that are too short should be reworked as they are more than likely underdeveloped. Paragraphs that are much longer than all the others might be split into more than one distinct idea. There should be a balance to the look and development of the paper.

WRITING PROCESS

Once your first rough draft is finished and you have checked it over yourself for necessary modifications, you want to have someone proofread it and give you feedback. You will want to pick someone who will give you substantive comments on your thesis, evidence, analysis, and grammar and mechanics. If you choose someone who is unable to do this, you are wasting his time...and more importantly, your own.

Upon the return of your draft, check over the comments, discuss the issues with your reader, and set about revising your paper. *Revision* is not simply correcting minor mechanical errors but rather **changing** your paper in order to make it better! Then the process starts again. You should go through this process two or three times if you expect to earn a top grade on your paper.

STYLISTIC ISSUES

1. Do not be conversational unless quoting dialogue or a source. Writing is not speaking.
2. Do not make reference to yourself or your own writing. Do not use phrases such as "I am going to..." or "As I stated earlier..."
3. No short/underdeveloped paragraphs in formal/academic writing. Only well-developed paragraphs will help make a sound argument.

4. If you include a title, make it thoughtful and clever.
5. Do not be repetitive. Do not use the same words or sentence structure over and over again. Variety is beneficial.
6. Remember that action verbs are much better than linking or passive verbs.
7. Do not begin sentences with conjunctions such as *And, But, So, Or, Well, or Nor*.
8. Be sure to use transitions as you move from point to point- both within and between paragraphs.
9. Avoid any and all qualifiers (maybe, probably, could, might, usually, etc.) as these only weaken the point you are trying to make.
10. Do not use a pronoun unless you have first established the antecedent, and make sure you use the correct pronoun if you choose to use one.
11. Proofread your work!
12. If you are using outside sources, make sure they are published and reliable sources. Be wary of sources from the internet!

RHETORICAL DEVICES

This is a list of some of the important rhetorical devices that can help to improve your argument and your paper. They can improve organization, effectiveness, and clarity. They can also be used to add emphasis or reinforce a point.

1. **Metaphor**- an implied comparison between two objects/elements of unlike nature
I am the door. (John 10:9)
How many roads must a man walk down before he's considered a man?
2. **Simile**- a comparison using *like* or *as*
My love is like a red, red rose.
This job is as easy as taking candy from a baby.
3. **Analogy**- a partial similarity of features on which a comparison may be based; an extended metaphor
A famous book compares the religious nature of Zen Buddhism to the art of keeping and repairing a motorcycle.
4. **Irony**- a figure of speech in which the literal meaning of a word or statement is the opposite of that intended, or "the saying of one thing and meaning another"
Sarcasm is an example of irony. (Oh, that's just wonderful!)
A satire is also a use of irony to expose a fault of mankind.
5. **Hyperbole**- an extravagant statement or figure of speech not intended to be taken literally
This paper is going to take forever to write.
I am so hungry I could eat a horse.
You always say that.

GRAMMAR USAGE

It should go without saying (though I am stating it anyway) that your grammar should be impeccable. Here are a number of common issues to consider:

- Agreement...Subject/Verb Agreement is based on agreement in number ; Pronoun/ Antecedent must agree in both number and gender
- As a rule, use words to represent any number from zero to ninety-nine, and use numbers to represent anything larger than one hundred (100). If you have both, the default is to be consistent and use numbers for all. If a number begins a sentence, spell it out (use words).
- Contractions (don't) are never a part of formal academic writing unless they exist within an outside quote used for evidence. In creative writing, they are allowed within dialogue.
- Be sure to use the correct modifier in the correct place. Does the context demand an adjective or an adverb? Is it located in the proper place within the sentence?
- A preposition is not something to end a sentence with. (irony!)
- Do not use double negatives or double comparisons.
- *That* is used for things. *Who* is used for people.
- Be active in your writing. Action verbs, as a rule, are superior to linking verbs or passive verbs- though context is of utmost importance. Active writing makes the writing "come alive" and is more exciting for the reader.

MECHANICS/PUNCTUATION

There should be no punctuation errors in your paper. Remember that a single error on a resume can cost a person a job! The following rules account for the vast majority of errors in academic writing.

Comma

1. Separate items in a series
2. Use before coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for) when joining independent clauses
3. Set off introductory words such as well, yes, no, why, etc.
4. Set off prepositional phrases of more than four words at the beginning of a sentence
5. Set off two or more prepositional phrases at the beginning of a sentence

6. Set off adverb clauses at the beginning of a sentence
7. Set off nouns of direct address
8. Set off elements that interrupt the sentence (in fact, by the way, on the other hand, however, etc.)
9. Set off an appositive unless the appositive is the name
10. Set off appositive phrases

Apostrophe

1. Add an apostrophe and an *s* to form the possessive of all singular nouns
2. Add an apostrophe and an *s* to form the possessive of a plural noun that does not end in *s*
3. Add only an apostrophe to form the possessive of a plural noun that does end in *s*

Semicolon

1. Use only a semicolon to join two independent clauses that are closely related
2. Use a semicolon and coordinating conjunction to join two independent clauses if commas are present within the clauses
3. Use a semicolon to separate items in a series if the items contain commas

Italics or Underlining

Use italics or underlining for the titles of books, plays, films, magazines, newspapers, works of art, long musical compositions, television programs, and epic poems

Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks to enclose titles of articles, short stories, essays, poems, songs, and chapters of books

* If you do not know the rules for using single quotation marks, consult a teacher.

BANNED WORDS

The following words should be avoided in academic writing:

- got
- like (when used as a filler/qualifier)
- very
- really
- hot/cold
- big/small... any generic modifiers
- stuff
- things
- the transitions "first, second, third"
- any qualifier (probably, maybe, might, could, etc.)
- alot / a lot
- stupid
- dumb

- would of
- any abbreviation or symbol (including *etc.*)

ARISTOTLE'S COMMON TOPICS

Analyzing the Argument: Part 1

Rhetoric, simply defined, is the ability to use language effectively and persuasively. Aristotle, the Ancient Greek philosopher, developed the Common Topics as one of the foundations of the classical tradition of rhetoric. Each topic suggests a logical way to organize an argument, so this strategy is very useful in helping the reader conceive and understand subject matter and a conventional U.S. academic thesis statement. In the Critical Reading stages, isolating which of the following strategies are at work in the text allows the reader to effectively begin charting the source's argument. While reading, note the rhetorical modes at work in the writer's argument. Most sources will incorporate many of these modes in an academic text.

1. **Definition:** Definition asks the writer to describe the nature of the topic. (What is X? What was X?) Take a fact or an idea and identify that fact or idea for the reader by providing a definition. Begin by using a dictionary or other sources of etymological meanings to define the subject or topic. For example: Rhetoric is the art of influencing the thought or action of an audience. The writer would then continue to define the subject or topic of rhetoric. Remember: there are many ways to define a topic. The writer may use a reference source definition, or the writer may choose to define a topic by what that topic is not. For example, a writer might define the color 'white' by saying that the color is the opposite of 'black.'
2. **Analogy:** Also called Comparison and Contrast, Analogy asks the writer to reveal more about the topic by determining how the topic is similar or different from something else. (What is X like or unlike?) This method also helps to reveal what is known and unknown to the writer about the topic. Crafting an analogy also helps the writer to demonstrate the topics and arguments to be presented to the intended audience. For example: The brain is like a computer
3. **Consequence:** Also called Cause and Effect, Consequence asks the writer to consider how the topic came to be, to isolate what consequences the topic had or might have in the future, and to predict an outcome or behavior based on patterns that have already occurred. (What caused or causes or will cause X? What did X cause or is X causing or will X cause?) For example: If the new safety measures are not in place, the future of aviation will be in danger. Consequence requires the writer to elaborate upon the origins, development, and eventual outcome of a consequence from beginning to end. For example: If the new policy is not approved, the company will lose 50% of their customers to competitors.
4. **Testimony:** Also called Support from Evidence, Testimony asks the writer to use external sources of argumentation (expert opinions, factual data, statistics, and laws) to

support arguments and claims. (What does an authority say about X?) For example: The Surgeon General's report on the health risks of cigarette smoking. While the reliability and authority of external sources may be called into question, questioning the credibility of testimonials can be a good place for the writer's own line of argument to begin.

Adapted from
Corbett, E. P.J., & Connors, R.J. (1999). *Classical rhetoric for the modern student* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford.

For more depth and application, please see [Analyzing the Argument, Part 2](#) for Elizabeth Cowan Neeld's (1986) very useful expansion of Aristotle's Common Topics.

Analyzing the Argument: Part 2

Rhetoric, simply defined, is the ability to use language effectively and persuasively. Aristotle, the Ancient Greek philosopher, developed the Common Topics as one of the foundations of the classical tradition of rhetoric (see [Analyzing the Argument, Part 1](#)). Each topic suggests a logical way to organize an argument, so this strategy is very useful in helping readers to conceive exactly what the writer is working to develop as subject matter in conventional U.S. academic writing. What follows here is an expansion of Aristotle's Common Topics as adapted from Elizabeth Cowan Neeld's book, *Writing* (1986). Please note that Neeld's list includes an additional category (Circumstance) by Aristotle. When critically examining an academic reading, locating which of these strategies are at work in the writer's text will make charting the writer's intended meaning easier and more focused.

1. Definition

- How does the dictionary define ____?
- What do I mean by ____?
- What group of things does ____ seem to belong to?
- How is ____ different from other things?
- What parts can ____ be divided into?
- Does ____ mean something now that it didn't years ago? If so, what?
- What other words mean about the same as ____?
- What are some concrete examples of ____?

2. Comparison/Contrast

- What is ____ similar to? In what ways?
- What is ____ different from? In what ways?
- ____ is superior (inferior) to what? How?
- ____ is most unlike (like) what? How?

3. Relationship

- What causes ____?
- What are the effects of ____?
- What is the purpose of ____?
- Why does ____ happen?
- What is the consequence of ____?
- What comes before (after) ____?

4. Testimony

- What have I heard people say about ____?
- What are some facts of statistics about ____?
- Can I quote any proverbs, poems, or sayings about ____?

5. Circumstance

- Is ____ possible or impossible?
- What qualities, conditions, or circumstance make ____ possible or impossible?
- Supposing that ____ is possible, is it also desirable? Why?
- When did ____ happen previously?
- Who has done or experienced ____?
- If ____ starts, what makes it end?
- What would it take for ____ to happen now?
- What would prevent ____ from happening?

Neeld, E. C. (1986). *Writing* (2nd ed). Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.

CORRECTION SYMBOLS

agr	faulty agreement (s/v, pro/antc)	redun	redundant usage
amb	ambiguous wording	R/O	run-on sentence
awk	awkward wording	sl	slang word/phrase
cit	citation error	SP	spelling error
dev	lacks development	ss	faulty sentence structure
s/f	fragment	vt	wrong verb tense
LV	linking verb (prefer action verb)	wc	poor word choice (diction)
pass	passive verb (prefer action verb)	wdy	unnecessarily wordy
pro	unclear pronoun reference	ww	wrong word
^	add punctuation	#	add a space
EW	empty word or expression	S/V/A	subject verb agreement
VTS	verb tense shift	pp	incorrect personal pronoun
DNMS	does not make sense		