



## COM 1: Transitioning to College Level Writing

Transitioning to college level writing can be intimidating, but writing in college is an opportunity to flex your writing muscles, learn new ways of expression, and experience a new freedom in your writing projects!

### Preparing for a Successful College Writing Experience

When students find themselves at a loss in approaching their first college writing assignment, it is often because they have not experienced the autonomy required in the college learning environment. The time you spend in the classroom can be extremely beneficial as you write if you practice diligent note-taking and participate in meaningful classroom discussion.

- **Read before class!** You will understand the material on a much deeper level if you can experience classroom discussion in context. Once you sit down to write, if you have already completed all the reading assignments, you will not be forced to speed read to inform your writing. (This means you will have more time to think through your ideas, and ultimately your paper *will* be better!)
- **Participate in class discussion.** You may not be the most outspoken in the class, but engaging with your peers and professors about the material opens new ways of thinking about what you are writing. Participation can manifest in different ways, so remember that dedicated listening and note-taking are forms of participation.
- **Take notes.** Taking notes in class is crucial to writing successfully about course material. If you are processing ideas and writing them down in your own words, you are already reframing the material in your own voice for your writing project. This will make writing much easier.

### Moving Beyond the Five Paragraph Essay

High school writing experiences can be dominated by strict structure requirements such as the “**five-paragraph essay**,” consisting of an **introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion**. This is not a *bad* way of approaching writing, and it can be helpful to remember the necessary components of a complete essay. However, in college writing, this simple structure might not be enough to fulfill the needs of the assignment. You may find that college writing requires far more depth and detail than what this structure allows. Do not be afraid to break away from the five paragraph essay and experiment with your writing! Remember, the five paragraph structure is simply acknowledging the need for a smooth movement from **beginning, to middle, to end**, and that can be accomplished in a number of ways.



## College Writing Experience Tips

- **The assignment sheet is your friend.** If you have questions about the writing assignment at hand, go to the assignment sheet **first**. Most assignment sheets contain all of the key information about what your professor expects from you on the project, and the majority of questions you have will be answered by this document. Remember, if it's on the assignment sheet, you can expect to be evaluated on it — even if your professor has not explicitly stated it in class. If your professor provides a grading rubric, you can use this document to ensure you meet the requirements. Finally, if your question is not answered on one of these documents, you can reach out to your professor for guidance.
- **The stages of the writing process might look different in college**, or you may find that they are different for you as an individual. While your high school courses might have given writing assignments in clearly laid-out stages, your college courses might not be so prescriptive. This can be overwhelming at first, but the freedom offered in college writing allows you to figure out what works best for *you*. Maybe you hate outlines! Maybe you prefer mapping for brainstorming. The best part is that it doesn't matter as long as you find the method of preparation that works for you!
- **Give yourself time to write.** Since the writing process in college may be different and assignments might require more than a five paragraph essay, you may find that you need more time to think about the material and write. After you are given a writing assignment, plan time to brainstorm, draft, revise, and edit a longer document.
- **Embrace writing freedom.** In high school, perhaps you had specific styles of writing that were imposed upon you or specific topics assigned to you. College writing allows you the freedom to let your own writer's voice permeate your writing projects. With a few exceptions, your writing assignments are going to be open-ended enough to find something to write about that truly interests you — and nothing makes writing easier than that!
- **Composition is collaborative.** Writing does not happen in a vacuum, and college allows many opportunities for you to acquire meaningful feedback and guidance on your writing. You are surrounded by peers with similar interests and varying viewpoints, and feedback from them can be instrumental to your writing. Furthermore, making time for consultations at the Writing Center can benefit your writing. Finally, ask your instructors for help in clarifying ideas, approaching the material in new ways, and obtaining feedback on your writing strengths and weaknesses.

**Visit the Writing Center for more help on your writing project! Stop by LIB 362 or visit us online at [mtsu.mywconline.com](https://mtsu.mywconline.com) to schedule an appointment.**