



A GUIDE TO
RESOURCES FOR WRITING
AT BARNARD COLLEGE



WRITING AND YOUR BARNARD EDUCATION

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WRITING AND YOUR BARNARD COLLEGE EDUCATION

Writing is an indispensable part of thinking and understanding, and the Barnard faculty will work with you to strengthen your writing. Whenever you verbalize what you are studying—in any subject—the act of expressing yourself in words makes you focus, clarify, sort, and arrange information and concepts, understand and acquire new vocabularies, take possession of your knowledge, and deepen that knowledge. Writing is a means of exploration (What do I know?) and communication (Let me tell you what I know!). Good writing skills will be as crucial to the career you choose after college as they are to your college career.

This guide will help you to get the most out of the broad range of writing resources that Barnard offers.

BARNARD'S WRITING RESOURCES

WRITING IN THE FIRST YEAR

All Barnard students take two writing-intensive courses during their first two semesters at the College, First-year English and a First-year Seminar.

SPECIALIZED WRITING COURSES IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Beyond the first-year level, the English department offers at least three sections of Essay Writing every semester. These are small, upper-level electives open to any student in any major. The department also offers courses in creative writing (fiction, poetry, playwriting, etc.).

WRITING IN MAJORS AND OTHER COURSES

In other departments across Barnard, many courses include an important writing component: students write several short essays or one long-term paper in the course of the semester. Some upper-level majors must take at least one writing course specific to their discipline —e.g., “Critical Writing” in English. During the senior year, most Barnard departments require a writing-intensive Senior Project.

BARNARD WRITING FELLOWS

Writing Fellows are Barnard undergraduates who read and write well and enjoy working with their peers. After a rigorous application process and an intensive semester-long training seminar, Writing Fellows are qualified to provide you with knowledgeable feedback at any stage of the writing process. You may work with them in The Writing Center or in writing-intensive courses across the curriculum.

Writing Fellows never grade nor do they correct the content of your papers; they are not teaching assistants. Rather, they will help you to structure your writing and your own writing process.

If you are interested in becoming a Writing Fellow yourself, and you are a Barnard student in your first or second year, we encourage you to apply to the program. Applications are available each year in the spring, shortly before Spring Break. They will be posted on our website, www.barnard.edu/writing.

WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

Students in these courses undertake two to three writing projects, each of which goes through at least two drafts. Writing Fellows read and confer with students on the first drafts of their papers, which students may then revise, handing in both first and second drafts to their instructors, who comment on and grade the revised drafts.

To find out the specific writing-intensive courses in any given semester, contact the Writing Program at extension 4-8941 or writing@barnard.edu.

The departments of Africana Studies, Anthropology, Architecture, Art History, Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures, Biology, Dance, Economics, Education, English, French, History, Music, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Religion, Slavic, Sociology, Spanish, and Women's Studies have offered writing-intensive courses. Both instructors and students report positive results. Students appreciate the help they get in revising drafts and experience significant gains in their writing skills. Instructors find that the revised papers they receive permit them to focus their comments on course content, rather than on the mechanics of writing.

THE ERICA MANN JONG '63 WRITING CENTER

In addition to their work in specific courses across the curriculum, Writing Fellows staff The Erica Mann Jong '63 Writing Center. Any Barnard student is welcome to confer on a particular writing project or to discuss some broader aspect of her writing (e.g., how to articulate, organize, and structure thoughts, how to use evidence effectively, how to work on English as a second language). Students bring chapters of their senior theses, drafts of papers for First-year English, outlines or ideas for papers in upper-level courses, lab reports, personal statements for admission to graduate school, etc. If you would like to work on your writing, we encourage you to use The Writing Center. Sign-up for Writing Center conferences takes place online through the Writing Program website, www.barnard.edu/writing.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF BARNARD'S WRITING RESOURCES

WRITING AND PROGRAM PLANNING

Despite the emphasis on writing in the Barnard curriculum, some Barnard students spend whole semesters enrolled in large lecture classes with few writing assignments.

Yet your ability to write effectively—like your ability to do math or speak French—grows only with practice. If you do not write repeatedly, over time, you risk losing the fluency you've begun to develop in your first year here. When faced with their senior project, some seniors find themselves struggling to regain control of the very writing skills they might have been strengthening for four years.

In planning your program each semester, look for at least one course that features writing and aim to work consistently on this skill throughout your eight semesters at the College. (N.B. Unless you are a tireless writer, you may find it strenuous to take more than two writing-intensive courses in the same semester.)

STRATEGIES TO USE IN INDIVIDUAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Reading the Assignment

Do you understand what you are being asked to do in a particular assignment, and why? If the assignment seems vague or confusing to you, ask your instructor to clarify it. If its aim (that is, what the assignment is supposed to teach you) isn't clear, ask.

Choosing a Topic

When an assignment offers you a choice of topics or asks you to come up with your own topic, we suggest you choose to write about something that is hard enough to challenge you but is not overwhelming. Talk over your ideas with your instructor. Students often decide to tackle topics that are too broad to fit within the scope of the assigned paper. You can bring a broad topic into manageable focus by choosing to explore one aspect of it that particularly interests you.

Writing the Assignment

Eggs

Writing is hard. Many college students further complicate the act of writing by envisioning it not as a process, but as one vast, daunting, undifferentiated lump: The Paper. In this conception, The Paper must be laid like an egg, complete, intact, at one sitting. The egg-paper demands of its author that she do everything at once. The predictable result is all too often writer's block, which leads in turn to rushed, blurry, last-minute prose and great frustration on the student's part and her instructor's because she isn't writing as effectively as she might be.

Writing as process

The writing process begins the moment the writer starts thinking about any given paper. It continues as she gathers material, organizes and writes a draft, asks for the comments and reactions of a reader, and revises her draft. This cycle – inventing, planning, writing, getting feedback, revising – is the writing process, and we urge you to take advantage of it to strengthen your prose.

The writing process, step by step

- To begin with, writers think. When they have a piece of writing to do, they mull over what they might write about, focus on a topic of interest, narrow it down, begin to read about it, take notes, discuss it, scrawl down scraps of thought, think some more, formulate opinions, gather evidence. All this occurs in the first stage in the writing process, long before a first draft takes shape on paper.
- Note-taking: Whether by hand or at your computer, take notes carefully! Before you write down anything else, record all relevant bibliographical information: author, title, publisher, place and date of publication, page numbers. Next, be sure to copy direct quotes accurately and to differentiate as clearly in your notes as you will later in your paper between the words and thoughts of the author you are reading and your own words and thoughts. Clear notes are an invaluable help in writing papers, and they are your surest protection against involuntary plagiarism.
- Once writers have done the preparatory work of

thinking, doing research, gathering evidence, etc., many find it useful to freewrite about their subject. Freewriting means writing continuously, without censoring yourself at all, for a defined period of time, usually twenty minutes or so. Set your alarm clock and start writing. The only rule when you freewrite is that once you begin you may not stop. No going back to correct yourself, to reread, to qualify in any way what you are writing. The resultant uncensored rush of language often contains interesting ideas or phrases that you can go on to develop. Freewriting also yields secondary benefits: it gets your prose going and shows you how many words you are capable of generating. It renders the forbidding white page less scary by filling it up.

- Outlining is next. In general, an outline reflects your line of reasoning and conclusions. But keep in mind that different writers outline in different ways. There is no one correct formula. Nor should you ever feel chained to your outline. If writing is exploratory, obviously you will make discoveries in the process of doing it. When this happens, you should feel free to discard your original outline and invent a new one, taking into consideration the new material you've unearthed.
 - Some writers outline after they have written a draft. One technique for doing this is to number the paragraphs you've written and summarize, very briefly, what each paragraph is about. This will give you an outline of your draft as it actually exists and you can go on from there.
- And so to the first draft. Each of your papers should go through an exploratory first draft whose sole purpose is to help you find out and define what it is you want to say. Most students have had the experience of suddenly realizing that what they have just written in their conclusion is what the whole paper is really about – except they didn't know that until this very minute and the paper is due right now, so how can they take their conclusion and make it their first paragraph and begin again!? The document they've just completed, which they now hand in to their professor, is in fact a first draft: extremely valuable to its writer, but not yet ready for the professor's eyes.

- ***Make sure you give yourself enough time to write an exploratory draft and subsequent revision of it. Don't start to write your paper the night before it's due.***
- No first draft is perfect, nor should it be. It should be an experimental dialogue with yourself. But once you have revised that dialogue and taken it as far as you can, all alone in your head and on your page, it is an excellent idea to go and get an objective reading from someone else, in order to find out if you have made yourself clear. Perhaps the most useful question your reader can ask you at this stage is: what do you mean here? Ask it of yourself, if no one else is available. It will lead you back into a revision of your draft.
- Revision can be the most exciting part of the writing process. Often at this stage you reorganize your paper, move whole pieces of text around in support of the argument you're developing, add new paragraphs, gather fresh evidence, and delete pages that have become irrelevant. Your best writing frequently occurs at this stage, for it is now that you focus, sharpen, shape, and understand what it is you want to say. Revision moves you deeper into your terrain, so that you make the paper your own.
- Only at this point need you edit your work at the level of language. Sharpen individual sentences; scrutinize individual words; hone your prose until it is as powerful, accurate, and vivid as you can make it. Finally, proofread for spelling and grammar. Use your spell check, by all means. But do not rely on it. Machines cannot substitute for the human eye and brain. Print out a hard copy of your paper and proofread it as though you were the instructor to whom you are about to submit it. You might find it helpful at this stage to read your paper aloud; many writers hear sentence-level errors that silent reading allows them to slide past. Another proofreading technique: read your paper backwards, last sentence first, second-to-last sentence next, etc. This forces you to pay attention to what's in front of your eyes.
- Only after you have proofread carefully should you submit your work to your professor.

- If, even after you have proofread, you find yourself still making numerous mistakes at the sentence level, we suggest that you focus on one or two repeat problems, such as verb-subject agreement or comma use, and work specifically on these in the paper you are currently writing. Then work on two or three different problems in your next paper. It might be a good idea to write a note to your instructor, spelling out that this is what you are doing. Consult a writing handbook (e.g., *The Elements of Style*, *Rules for Writers*, etc.). If the handbook seems unhelpful, consult your instructor, your roommate, or The Writing Center for assistance. Try keeping a separate notebook in which to write down each of your error, and, next to it, the correct version. Memorize the correct version. By the end of the semester you will not only have learned to write more correctly, but you will have created an ongoing dictionary-handbook of your own.
- In some courses, such as writing-intensive courses with Writing Fellows, you will find the writing process built into the structure of assignments. But in other courses you will need to take yourself through each stage of the process. This is especially important when the only assigned writing in a given course is one long term paper, due at the end of the semester.
- Make use of The Writing Center. Writing Fellows are available to discuss your papers with you at any stage.
- You may also want to become writing partners with your friends or classmates, reading and responding to each other's drafts. Ideally, you will learn after a while to act as your own Writing Fellow, sitting down with your own drafts, reading them as though they were someone else's, offering that someone else rigorous feedback.
- Whatever the situation, we urge you to make revision one of your central goals. Revision is the single most useful tool you can wield to improve specific papers and your writing as a whole.

WRITING AND GRADES

Do you understand your instructor's criteria for an A, B, or C paper? Ask.

If you are to write a specific assignment in a specific course in a specific discipline to a specific audience, you must know

the conventions that your instructor takes for granted, as well as her underlying assumptions about what constitutes good writing. If she can explicitly define the characteristics of an excellent paper, she will be teaching you about the nature of writing in her discipline. And you will be more likely to complete your assignment to her satisfaction. For this reason, it is also an excellent idea to ask your instructor to share with the class as a whole any particularly strong papers she receives and to discuss their strengths.

Most instructors at Barnard, whatever their discipline, would agree that a strong paper is clear and well-organized, provides evidence in support of its assertions, and is characterized by precision, detail, and exactitude of language. But beyond these general characteristics, the definition of good writing may differ depending on the discipline and, within a given discipline, depending on the reader. Many instructors and departments have their own specialized guides to writing (e.g., *How to Write a Lab Report in Psychology*). Be sure to ask.

DUE DATES FOR PAPERS

Meet them.

WHY AND HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words and thoughts without giving proper credit. The plagiarist makes it appear, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, that someone else's work is her own.

Why do we make such a fuss about this at the university?

One of the greatest privileges of belonging to this intellectual community, one of its deepest pleasures, one of our chief reasons for being here – all of us, teachers and students alike – is the passionate exchange of ideas. Plagiarism threatens that exchange. If you think that I am likely to steal your ideas without giving you credit for them, you'll stop talking to me, and our intellectual dialogue ends.

Some students plagiarize out of fear. They are afraid they can't do their work on their own. But the way to deal with insecurity is not to plagiarize. Rather, use the suggestions offered in this booklet and the support offered by the

Barnard community. Work on strengthening your thinking and writing to such a point that there will be no reason for panic.

In fact, much of the plagiarism we encounter at the College arises from an ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism. Its most frequent forms are unannounced direct quotation – that is, copying directly from another source without indicating to your reader, through quotation marks or indenting, that the passage is a quotation; and unannounced paraphrase – that is, closely rewording another source without telling your reader, through a phrase such as “Smith outlines this idea as follows...”

Footnoting in such instances is not enough. You must explicitly indicate to your reader, in the body of your text, that you are quoting or paraphrasing someone else. In addition, you must give a reference. There is nothing wrong with direct quotation or paraphrase, as long as you announce what you are doing and document it properly. Clarity is the chief rule here. Be sure that what is your thought, and what is the other writer's, is clear to yourself and your reader.

The rules governing scholarly attribution of sources are covered in First-year English, in *Rules for Writers* (by Diana Hacker), and on the Online Writing Lab (owl.english.purdue.edu). If, after consulting these sources, you still have questions about plagiarism, feel free to address them to any member of the Honor Board or to the Dean of Studies Office. They are eager to clarify this fuzzy subject.

CONCLUSION: YOUR PERSONAL WRITING GOALS

Your writing belongs to you. It is your domain, just as it is your responsibility.

Perhaps there are particular aspects of your writing, beyond the specific questions that may arise in individual papers, on which you would like to work. These might include, for example, how to develop a convincing argument or a distinctive voice, how to organize your thoughts better on paper, how to improve your syntax, or to gain greater fluency or clarity or vividness.

Barnard is a community of writers. All of us know that the struggle with writing is an honorable one and that it continues as long as we continue to write. We urge you to discuss any questions or concerns you might have with your adviser, your instructors, and the Writing Fellows you will meet in writing-intensive courses or in The Writing Center. We urge you to take advantage of the numerous resources for writing that Barnard offers you.

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(1992)

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(2011)

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