

Analytical Writing

Annette N. Brown

BearingPoint, Inc.

Adapted from *How to Write Better Essays* by Bryan Greetham

Writing is a reflection of thought. If you don't write clearly and effectively, no one will know whether your thoughts, ideas, arguments, and conclusions are any good.

At the same time, if you are not thinking clearly, you will not be able to write effectively.

Writing well is hard.

No one can take it for granted—
everyone must work at it.

Everyone needs an editor.

Writing is about language, so it is necessarily difficult to teach about writing through a translator.

At the same time, because you are in an environment where translation is so important, it is that much more important that you write well in your own language, so that it can be translated effectively.

Five stages of writing

- Interpretation of the question, determination of the thesis
- Research
- Planning
- Writing
- Revision

Stage 1: Interpret the question

- This first stage is really the *thinking* that you need to do before you even begin outlining.
- What you need to accomplish in this stage depends on what kind of article you are writing.
- The outcome in all cases should be a clear concise idea of what the main message of the article will be.

Article objectives

- Analyze
- Evaluate, criticize
- Compare and contrast
- Review, summarize
- Present, describe

Analyze

- Weak

This article discusses the impact that donor funding has had on the Armenian economy.

- Strong

Donor funding has had an overall positive impact on the Armenian economy, but continued benefits will require better targeting in the future.

Evaluate, criticize

- Weak

The PRSP has many faults.

- Strong

The PRSP covers too many topics resulting in weak analysis and unsupported recommendations in many areas.

Compare and contrast

- Weak

Armenia should understand the differences between the EU and US approaches to competition regulation.

- Strong

Given the features of the Armenian economy, the EU anti-trust regulations serve as a better model than the US anti-trust regulations.

Review, summarize

- Weak

This article reviews the common models used for macroeconomic forecasting in transition economies.

- Strong

A review of the common models used for macroeconomic forecasting in transition economies reveals that several key factors of growth in these countries are often not included.

Present, describe

- Weak

Here are the main features of the draft Armenian Labor Code.

- Strong

The draft Armenian Labor Code emphasizes job security issues over hours and wages issues for employees and includes special provisions for the self employed.

Your thesis may change over the course of researching, planning, and writing your article. The important point is to begin your work by determining what the main message or conclusion of the article will be. That message will then help you to focus your efforts and make choices about what are necessary and sufficient arguments and evidence to support your conclusion.

Beginning your work by determining your main message does NOT mean to start with your opinions.

Professional writing is not presenting your opinions. It is presenting your understanding, your reasoning, and your analysis.

Stage 1 continued: Interpret the question

Another important part of interpreting the question is defining what the key concepts in your main message mean.

For example,

“Pro-competition policy is a vital element of government efforts to support economic freedom.”

Stage 2: Research

- Read (model, analyze data) purposefully. Don't lose site of your main message.
- Take notes
 - Use both pattern note-taking and linear note-taking where appropriate.
 - Use notes to start writing in your own words.
 - However, be careful to distinguish in your notes your ideas and interpretations from others'.

Stage 3: Planning

- Planning is the organization of your ideas, arguments, and evidence into a linear progression from beginning to end.
- Planning helps you to identify holes in the analysis or evidence.
- Planning helps you to identify points that are unnecessary and can be cut.
- Planning also helps strengthen weak arguments by linking them to the overall progression.
- The outcome of planning is a written outline.

Many people skip writing an outline because they think it will take up extra time. However, if the article is well thought out, the outline will not take long to write.

On the other hand, if the outline is difficult to write, it means that the writer has not fully planned the article and will not be able to write it effectively.

Outline format

- Main argument 1
 - Supporting claim 1
 - Evidence
 - Evidence
 - Evidence
 - Supporting claim 2
 - Evidence
 - Evidence
- Main argument 2
 - Etc.

Example of irrelevant information

Thesis: The draft Armenian Labor Code emphasizes job security issues over hours and wages issues for employees and includes special provisions for the self employed.

“The Parliament debated three days over the proposed Labor Code, which one Parliamentarian called ‘a return to Soviet Communism’. She suggested that the Code be re-written with inputs from business associations. Another Parliamentarian argued that the business associations are all controlled by Russian oligarchs and should not be involved in Armenian politics.”

Stage 4: Writing

- Structure
- Style

Structure

- I. Introduction
- II. Main argument 1
- III. Main argument 2
- IV. Main argument 3
- V. Conclusion

Introduction

The introduction is where you:

- Get the reader interested
- Tell the reader your main message
- Describe for the reader the outline of the article—give the reader a map

Introduction example

The National Statistical Service of Armenia has worked hard, especially in recent years, to develop official statistics and institutionalize the publication of and improve the quality of its statistical publications. Currently the NSS and its Household Survey play a central role in the PRSP monitoring system. Since 1996, the household surveys and poverty assessments have become a unique tool to measure the efficiency of social and economic policy. In this regard, the independence, reliability and compatibility of data are crucial factors. Even a single survey that gives a distorted picture of reality may erode the efforts not only of the NSS, but also of other participants in PRSP development. The 1998/99 and 2001 Household Survey results, despite some methodological differences, were in line with the overall development trends, but one cannot state the same for the results of the 2002 survey.

Introductions

- You do want to tell the reader the “punchline” at the beginning. Professional writing is not about surprises.
- Sometimes your conclusion is the best introduction.
- Almost always need to rewrite the introduction once you complete the article.
- Boring sign-posting is better than no sign-posting at all.

Paragraphs

- Paragraphs need to have a topic sentence. Again, like with introductions, you begin with the end.
- The topic sentence tells the reader what the point of the paragraph is (what it will do) and how it relates to the full article.
- Paragraphs also need transitions to keep the reader on the path from beginning to end.

Paragraphs example

Davies and Harrison explore the traditional values of clinicians, such as professional autonomy, the focus on individual patients, the desire for self regulation, and the role for evidence-based practice...In those days, the paradox could be ignored, but we no longer have that luxury, according to Davies and Harrison.

There are many solutions to this paradox....

Transitions

- Transition words and phrases
 - Contrast: “On the other hand” “However,” “To the contrary”
 - Extend an argument: “Moreover,” “Therefore,” “As a result,”
 - Strengthen the argument: “Similarly,” “Further,” “Likewise”
- Repeating words

Transitions

- Weak or difficult transitions reveal weak or incomplete analysis or relevance.
- For example, “it should be mentioned that”
- Other examples: “Also,” “In addition,”

Evidence

- Opinions are not evidence.
- Claims are not evidence.
- Evidence can include citations from others or your own data or observations (must cite properly).
- Only present the evidence necessary to make the case.

Evidence example

Tables 5 and 6 present production growth beside employment, geographic and sectoral, respectively. As can be seen from those tables, there are no clear patterns associating production growth with employment growth. Aragatsotn Marz was the only marz to show a greater increase in employment than in production. Ararat, Kotayk and Syunik Marzes showed greater gains in production than employment. Four marzes – Yerevan, Gegharkunik, Lori and Vayots Dzor – showed production gains but employment losses. Armavir, Shirak and Tavush Marzes lost both production and employment.

Evidence example

Unfortunately, recent efforts to support housing association formation have encountered similar problems. In reaction to the new ABM and Condominium Law, local governments have initiated another wave of top-down organization. In several cities², the local government has facilitated the creation of huge condominium associations that include many buildings. This process allows them to show their commitment to central government efforts and to easily organize the city into a few associations so they have to work with only a few representatives their constituency.

Conclusions

- Link to introduction, restate thesis
- Summarize the main points
- Discuss wider implications or future trends
- Mention your opinions as opinions
- Do not introduce new arguments or evidence in support of the thesis

Conclusion example

The financial position of the banking sector reflects the economy in which banks operate. At present, the lending volumes in Armenian banks are significantly below the lending capacity as defined by the capital adequacy and liquidity norms. In order to enhance the intermediation role of banks and harmonize their relationship with the economy, it is imperative that bank and enterprise reform go hand in hand. The development of the banking system will largely depend on structural reforms in the economy and improvements in the legislative and regulatory environment in order to strengthen creditors' rights and enforcement mechanisms.

Stage 4: Writing

- Structure
- Style

The main point regarding writing style is that you are writing to inform NOT to impress. If you write a long sentence with big words and think to yourself, “wow, that is an impressive sentence!” it should probably be deleted.

Style – Simplicity

- Three principles
 - Logic
 - Interest
 - Brevity

Style – Simplicity

- Aim to write “talk in print”
- Use short sentences with clear structures
- Pay attention to punctuation
- Remember your logical indicators
- Read it aloud
- Avoid long, obscure words

Style – Active Voice

- More precise
- More interesting
- Shorter

Passive vs. active voice

Undertaking such analysis in the near future will still be very much needed in order to inform the PRSP update and to inform the MTEF and budget processes.

The Government and civil society both will need to conduct rigorous analysis of policy impacts in order to inform the PRSP update and to inform the MTEF and budget processes.

Plagiarism

- Distinctive ideas
- Distinctive structure or organizing strategy
- Information or data from a particular source
- Verbatim phrase or passage
- Not common knowledge
- Whenever in doubt, cite it!

Stage 5: Revision

- First revision – revise for reassurance
- Second revision – the larger questions
- Third revision – checking the details
- Fourth revision – style
- Fifth revision – revise by ear

What can you do to be a better writer?

- Read
- Write
- Revise
- Have someone edit your work
- Revise

Questions for Revision

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1st revision – revising for reassurance

1. How does it sound?
2. Does this essay still reflect my ideas and conclusions, or have those changed since I started writing?
3. Are my main points clear?

2nd revision – the larger questions

1. Have I interpreted the implications of the question (the thesis) thoroughly? Have I missed anything?
2. Does the introduction analyze the implications clearly and give the reader a clear indication of the structure of my answer?
3. Have I arranged the material logically?
4. Does the essay move fluently from one section to the next, from paragraph to paragraph?
5. Does each topic sentence introduce the subject of each paragraph clearly? (Does each paragraph begin with a topic sentence?)
6. Have I developed each argument sufficiently?
7. Have I made my arguments clear, or are there difficult passages that would benefit from being rewritten?
8. Do I provide support for each argument using sufficient evidence and examples?
9. Do all my examples and evidence do real work? That is, do my examples and evidence contribute significantly to my overall argument?
10. Have I *shown*, rather than *told*, the reader what I want to say wherever possible?
11. Have I dealt with all the implications of the question or thesis of the essay?
12. Have I covered these in enough depth?
13. Have I spent too much time on less significant issues?
14. Have I presented a convincing case?
15. In the conclusion, have I avoided presenting new ideas that haven't been dealt with in the body of the essay?
16. Have I tied my conclusion in with my introduction?

3rd revision – checking the details

1. Is the content accurate?
2. Are the grammar, punctuation and spelling correct?
3. Have I distinguished clearly between my own ideas and those of others?
4. Have I acknowledged all sources and references?
5. Have I omitted any text from my bibliography?

4th revision – style

1. Have I removed all unnecessary words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs?
2. Have I cut up all the long complex sentences that can be cut up?
3. Have I replaced all long, obscure words with short and simple ones?

4. Have I removed all unnecessary modifiers in favor of good strong nouns and verbs?
5. Have I written in the active voice?

5th revision – revise by ear

1. Does it read well for someone reading it for the first time?
2. Is the pace and rhythm right for the arguments I want to make?