

Academic Values and The Writer's Craft

The writing you do for class or for other scholars engages you in a particular type of conversation, that of the academy. This conversation has its own set of rules and expectations. Part of the university's job is to help all its students learn how to contribute to that conversation. Professors assign particular types of writing like literature reviews, arguments, and annotated bibliographies. They also expect your writing to look and sound certain ways. They might require that you eliminate contractions, for example, or avoid the first person, or use the MLA or APA style guides.

All these expectations can get pretty confusing. It's a lot like learning a new language, with its own grammar and vocabulary. The important thing to remember is that no one expects you to get it right the first time. Whether you are struggling with the best way to cite sources, or trying to figure out the difference between an argument and an abstract, you will never be alone. We have all struggled with similar questions. When you get stuck, ask your professor, or your librarian, or a writing center consultant for help. You can also look through the materials we've assembled here.

As you engage in academic writing, remember that learning and scholarship rest on a set of values: curiosity, humility, honesty, engagement, awareness of self and others, originality, rationality, and fairness. As responsible scholars, we attempt to live through these values and to demonstrate them in our work. Crafting texts that reflect these values isn't easy, but we can get better through increased awareness and deliberate practice.

Your Academic Writing Should Show...

- The curiosity to find out what others have said, done, and thought
- The humility and wisdom to learn from what others have said, done, and thought
- The honesty to give to others credit when you use what you have learned from them, such as when you quote, paraphrase, or summarize what others have said
- The experiential engagement you have with the topic
- The ability to understand self and others' as you engage in academic discourse
- The originality to come to a conclusion that is not merely a summary of what others have said, but rather is based – at least in part – on your thinking and your experience
- The rationality to support your conclusion with logic and evidence
- The fairness and objectivity (a) to acknowledge evidence that does not fit with your conclusion and (b) to acknowledge alternative explanations for the evidence that you present in support of your conclusion

Adapted from Mitchell, Jolley, & O'Shea, 2010, p.3

References

Mitchell, M.L., Jolley, J.M., & O'Shea, R.P (2010). Writing for Psychology (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.