

Revising Academic Writing

Workshop for the Office of Graduate Professional
Development

Vallee; 10/26/22

The Writing Studio

Who are we?

Directed by [Dr. Eric Vallee](#), the *Writing Studio* is staffed by consultants with extensive writing backgrounds. Most have graduate degrees, and many teach in the University Writing Program or English Department. We are located in 2215 Turlington Hall, and our office phone is (352) 846-1138.

What do we do?

One-on-One Tutorials. The *Writing Studio* is a free service for current UF graduate and undergraduate students. Students have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a consultant on issues specific to their own particular development

Appointments are available both online and in-person

2 free meetings per week – any discipline/stage in the writing process

Today's Workshop:

Composing vs. Revising

Active vs. Passive Voice

Revising for Conciseness

PEA Structure

Composing vs. revising

Composing = writing as thinking; generate ideas *uncritically*

Almost everyone needs a “bad rough draft” first

Consider writing your introduction LAST

Revising = re-vision

There is no great writing, only great re-writing

Consider outlining at multiple stages (while brainstorming; after the rough draft)

Re-vision

Revising > Proofreading; Re-vision: Re-see your entire argument

NOT fixing weak spots; INSTEAD, Strengthen everywhere

Big to small (content/global first > formal/local last)

Content/global includes: clarity of thesis; paragraph structure; coherence and flow; pairing claims with evidence and analysis

Form/local includes: grammar, syntax, word choice, style, sentence length variety, etc.

Don't polish grammar or sentence-level issues first, because you might waste time on a section that eventually needs to be cut or significantly reworked

General Advice

Build in accountability for making progress in your writing

Use writing models to familiarize yourself with conventions in your field

Look to a peer reviewed source in your field and reverse-engineer

Use of passive voice? Are quotes allowed? Passive voice encouraged? How many sources are typically included? Are subheadings topical or functional?

Your intervention is perhaps THE MOST important element of your writing

Spend extra time to ensure this is clear

Feature in a prominent location (usually last paragraph of introduction)

Use signal phrasing: “Recent work has shown...” “What remains to be examined...” “This article examines...” “By [making intervention], this work seeks to [payoff/purpose]”

Use the topic sentence/concluding sentence test

Passive Voice

Perhaps the **most** common issue

Passive voice produces a sentence in which the subject *receives* an action
(as opposed to when a subject *performs* an action – active voice)

Question: who/what is performing the action here? To convert to active, place that subject in a primary position (as opposed to a secondary position)

The ball was kicked (missing subject)

The ball was kicked by her

(NOTE: including the subject or using first person pronouns doesn't simply fix passive voice)

She kicked the ball

Can also think how a prosecutor vs. a defense attorney might speak

Three Problems with Passives:

1. Lack of clarity – we can't tell who is doing what to whom

2. Wordiness -- A passive sentence with the same amount of content is usually wordier than an active alternative.

Ex: The account was opened by Mrs. Simms. vs. Mrs. Sims opened the account.

Ex: Your figures were checked by the research department. vs. The research department checked your figures.

3. Over-use of “to be” verbs, and nominalization – the process of turning verbs into nouns, often nouns that end in “-ion”: realization instead of realize, recognition instead of recognize, anticipation instead of anticipate.

4 Steps to revise from passive to active:

1. Advice : do a text search for forms of “to be” – is, was, were, (most common)
All 8: be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been
*Caveat: not all uses of “to be” are automatically passive (e.g. I am entering a new phase of life)
Sure-fire formula: form of “to be” + past participle = passive voice
Past participles express completed actions – thrown, been, -ed verbs
 2. Identify the main verb action in a sentence.
 3. Identify who is doing that verb action.
 4. Make that person the agent.
- Example: There is anticipation of higher profits next quarter.
We anticipate higher profits next quarter

When the passive voice is appropriate

When it doesn't introduce too much wordiness, and

The “story” of the sentence is about the object, not the subject

Bees pollinate flowers

Flowers are pollinated by bees

Which is correct?

It depends on the context – is the paper about bees, or is it about flowers?

Wordiness Exercise:

Read the following sentences and write alternative versions that eliminate as much wordiness as you can.

1. For all intents and purposes, American industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in kind than of any given technological aspect.

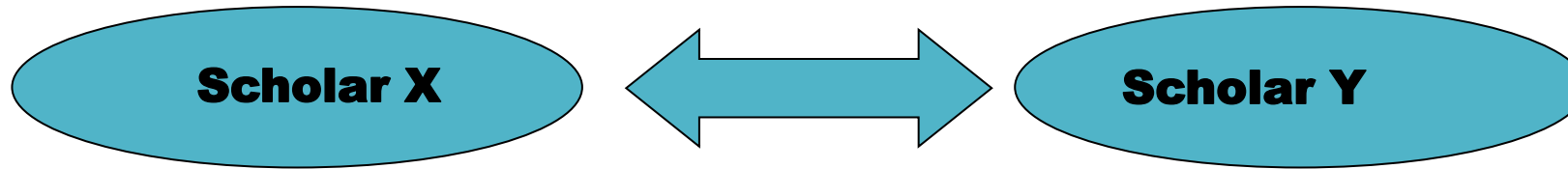
Better: American industrial productivity depends more on psychological than on technological factors. (26 words to 11)

Making Sources Speak to One Another

“Smith’s study from 2009 shows obesity among children is on the rise (1). One study from 2010 also shows that Type 2 diabetes is being diagnosed more prevalently (Allen 3). In fact, children are now at a higher risk for both of these diagnoses (James 5).

“Smith’s study from 2009 shows childhood obesity on the rise (1). More recent studies, like Allen 2010, establish a link between obesity and the increase in T2D diagnoses. Taken together, the literature makes a case for a possible link in these conditions’ growing prevalence. James corroborates this notion, showing that children are at a 15% greater likelihood to be diagnosed with both obesity and T2B than they were 10 years ago (5).

Make sources speak to one another



- **agrees with/affirms**
- **disagrees with/challenges**
- **builds on the conclusions of**
- **confirms the findings of**
- **indicates potential limitations of**

PEA Structure

Point: What are you saying?

Evidence: Why should I believe you?

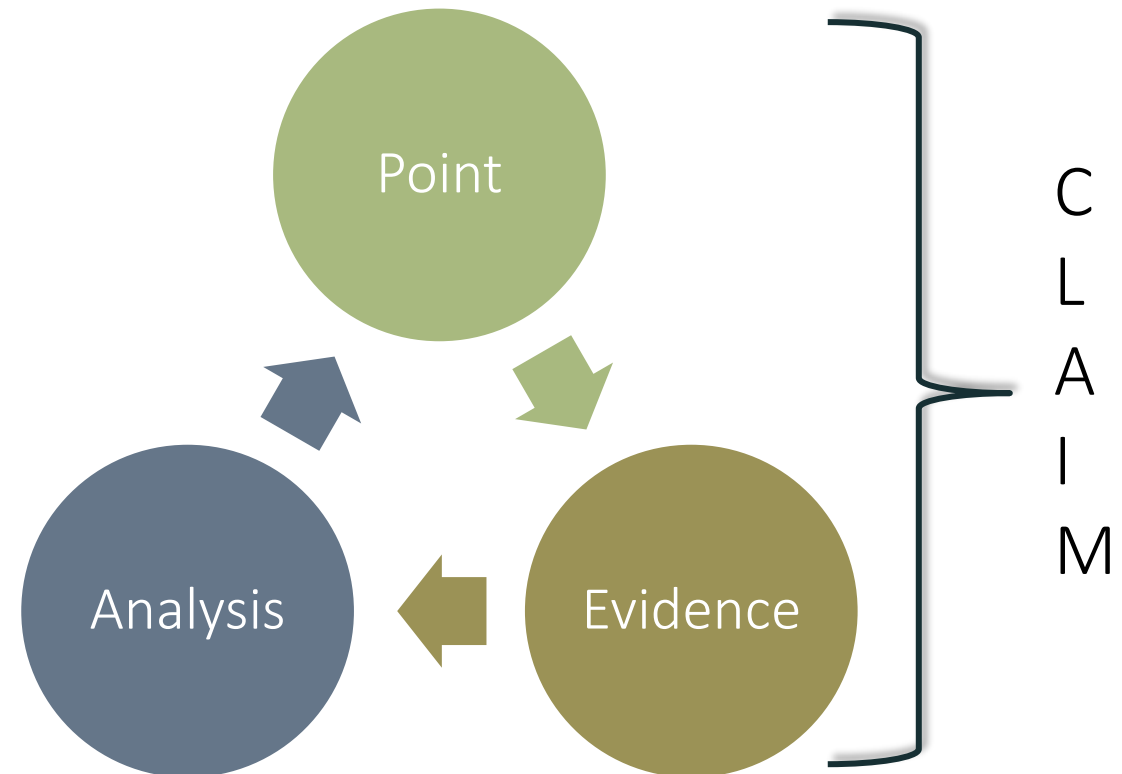
Analysis: Who cares? So what?

Larger Structure:

Point is true because **Evidence** and is important because *Analysis*

X is an important problem facing _____ as shown in _____, which raises concerns because _____

As shown in _____, X is an important problem facing _____ because _____



PEA Structure

Why is this important?

Two Reasons:

1) Need to include all elements for effective writing

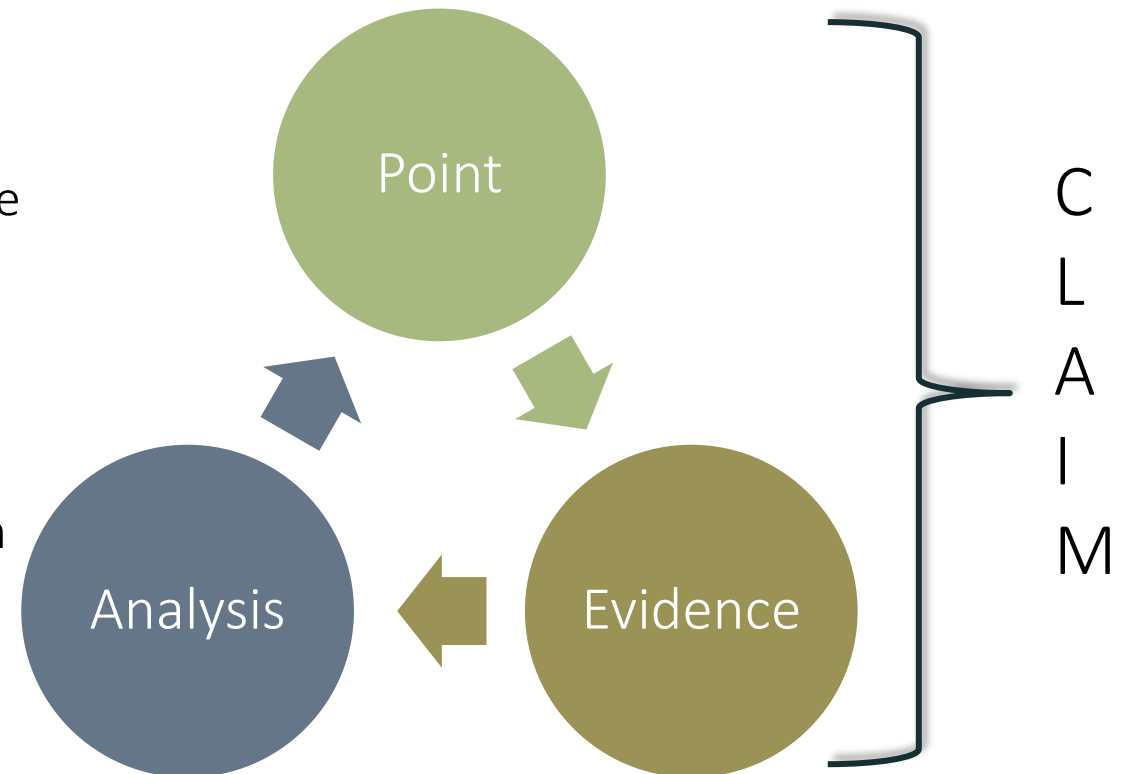
- Flexible (order and scope)

- Importance merits further explanation (more E and A)

- Statements can combine functions

2) Style of writing differs based on function

- Inform decisions on level of detail and functional phrasing



P = Point

Points should *lead with purpose*

Points should, in other words, be *pointy*

Purpose at the end

While there are many treatment options for managing ADHD, there remains important challenges, the most important of which is patient compliance

Leading with Purpose:

Patient compliance is a significant challenge in managing ADHD through medicinal treatment

P = Point

Points should *be concise and specific, strategically managing level of detail*

Too wordy

As this study demonstrates, the matter of patient compliance represents an enormously difficult issue with drastic impacts on quality of life, affecting behaviors (anti-social, poor school performance), psychology (depression, feeling distracted), as well as social factors, such as relating to peers

Cut overly dramatic phrasing (enormously difficult, drastic impacts)

Avoid lists within lists

Cut unnecessary phrasing (as this study demonstrates, the matter of)

Patient compliance represents an challenge with drastic impacts on quality of life, affecting behaviors, psychology and social factors, such as relating to peers

Some behavioral impacts include...

E = Evidence

Evidence refers to the details that justify your point by providing concrete, specific sources/examples/statistics

In relation to a point, evidence answers the question **how so? In what way?**

Evidence can take the form of:

- Trends

- Description

- Context

- Examples

E = Evidence

Evidence is best when it is concrete (scale; specificity)

Weaker:

...researchers found that there was a major difference in patient compliance based on age

More Concrete

...researchers found that age strongly correlated with patient compliance, with older adolescents (ages 14-17) being three times more likely to adhere to treatments than their younger counterparts (ages 10-13)

A = Analysis

Analysis reflects on both your point and your **evidence** to answer the questions:

Why? So What? Who Cares?

It comes in multiple forms:

Explaining how your **evidence** supports your point

Explaining why your point matters to the field/public

Effective Analysis Should...

Not only identify THAT something is important, but explain HOW and WHY

Not just be implied, but directly stated

Use transitional phrases to mark importance and draw connections among ideas

Establishing Order of Importance – Secondly, In addition, Also notable

First, Second, Third,

Consequently, As a result, For this reason

Ambiguous Pronouns

In 2016, the University of Florida Government made the decision to “deny extra funding for the Counseling and Wellness Center” on campus (WUFT, 2017). **This** matched with my own personal experience at UF’s CWC underlines that mental health organizations on campus are not receiving the support they so desperately deserve

Watch out for ambiguous pronouns at the start of sentences (“This,” “It,” “That,” “These”) – do a text search for these terms before turning in you final draft

How to fix? Add the noun to which you are referring

In 2016, the University of Florida Government made the decision to “deny extra funding for the Counseling and Wellness Center” on campus (WUFT, 2017). **This decision** matched with my own personal experience at UF’s CWC underlines that mental health organizations on campus are not receiving the support they so desperately deserve

Other common issues in graduate academic writing

Wordiness in phrasing (not the use of technical terms, which are often necessary, but overly formalized syntax)

“that,” “who,” “which” clauses The system that is most efficient vs. the most efficient system
Parenthetical statements
“Throat clearing” formalities; “Due to the fact that;”

Returning to one idea or related ideas, spread throughout a paper, creating repetition that could be easily culled if the information was put in once place.

(Exception: sometimes you have to talk about the same topic in several different contexts; that’s not wordiness.)

Prioritizing of evidence above all else:

Data dumping – particularly in the interest of providing “background”

Overly broad or absent topic sentences

Ending paragraphs by introducing new evidence rather than providing analysis