



Center for Writing and Speaking

F NO. 1 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Biology Lab Reports

A lab report is a very structured type of writing, and it is important to put the right things in the right places. Here are some guidelines as to what goes where.

1. Abstract

- Is brief (fewer than 250 words).
- Includes 1-2 sentences each of summary for introduction, methods, results, and conclusion.
- Is easiest to write last, once you know what every other section discusses.

2. Introduction

- Provides all the context a reader needs to be able to understand and interpret the results.
- Discusses current understanding of topic with relevant studies in a “funnel shape,” beginning broadly and narrowing down to the exact inquiry.
- Describes what will be done in this study including objectives and hypothesis.

3. Methods and Materials

- Is written in past tense; many professors are moving away from passive voice, but the custom is still discipline-specific, so ask the instructor to be sure.
- Describes everything about how the experiment was performed (What? Where? When? How?).
- Includes relevant info, such as materials used, organism (with the Latin name listed in italics afterward), and methods of data analysis.

Note: If the procedure used is well-known or published, you may reference it rather than rewrite it.

4. Results

- Describes analyzed data, not raw data; for example, average length instead of individual length.
- Guides the reader through--and refers to--all tables or figures.
- Points out trends in data and comparisons between data, including the direction of difference (such as which variable was larger), not just that there was a difference between variables.

5. Discussion

- Conceptually links to the introduction with a brief recap at beginning of section, specifically through discussion of data in terms of objectives and hypothesis and comparison of this study's conclusions with those of others.
- Addresses any issues with experimental design or data collection that may have influenced results.
- Presents an interpretation of the larger meaning of this work.

6. Literature Cited

- Uses a different format with each journal. Check with your instructor for specific format.
- No matter the requested format, *must* be consistent.

(continued on reverse)



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Biology Lab Reports, Continued

7. Tables and Figures

- Need descriptive captions; figure legends go below figures and table legends go above tables.
- Are not be raw data.
- Are understandable without reading the entire report/manuscript.
- Should be referred to sequentially in the text, excluding none.

For more information on writing lab reports, see:

The St. Martin's Handbook (7th ed): 36, 854-72

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/sciences.html>

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Effective Quoting in the Humanities

Quotations are important components of any successful analysis paper in the humanities. As important as they are, quotations are not substitutes for your words or analysis, and they cannot stand alone. Note: This handout uses MLA style citation. Consult your assignment sheet for citation style requirements. Remember, other disciplines use quotations differently and require different citation styles.

Quotations are valuable.

Quotations provide convincing proof for your thesis. When they are accompanied by your commentary, they connect the text with your thesis and present the necessary evidence to understand your argument. Without your analysis, a wonderful quotation is an example of the author's talent, not yours.

Quotations capture the author's language.

Quotations are important for support but are also useful when the author's words could not possibly be improved.

Example: Eliot's "hollow men" grope blindly on their "last of meeting places" (101) and, avoiding speech and eye contact, wait for death.

Cite as you write.

Keep up with your quotations and make sure you cite them as you write in order to avoid plagiarism. Note page numbers, book titles, and authors. Also important is knowing what citation style you should use. In the humanities, most instructors require MLA style citation.

Avoid floating quotations.

Quotations should not be dropped into a sentence without introduction. Instead, they should be included with your commentary and should be introduced in your words.

Example: Ferdinand's love for Miranda enables him to overcome the difficulty of his work for Prospero. As he works, he states, "The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead/And makes my labors pleasures" (III, i, 6-7).

Be careful with long quotations.

Consider breaking passages into sentence-long quotations. Use only what is necessary and complements your commentary. If you do use a long quotation, make sure you still analyze it.

Example: Mina explains the encounter, "Dracula placed one hand on upon my shoulder and, holding tight, bared my throat with the other;" however, she explains that she was irrepressibly attracted to him so that "strangely enough I did not want to hinder him" (Stoker 251).

Try using keywords or phrases.

They can offer effective support for your thesis, while integrating the author's words into your sentences.

Example: Reminiscent of the novel's earlier scene of Durbyfield's domestic life, the "distracted hens in the coop" represent a possible fate for Tess (Hardy 258).

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A Guide to Creative Writing

Embarking on a creative writing project can be a little daunting because it is so different from academic writing. If you follow certain guidelines, however, your experience—and your product—will be much more rewarding.

Read.

You have to be a good reader to be a good writer. Read anything and everything, because whether you notice it or not, you are collecting information on what you think does or does not constitute good writing. Every word you've read and every technique you've appreciated becomes a tool you can use.

Write.

Like every other skill, you'll get better and faster at writing the more often you practice writing. Take some time every day, if possible, to write. Your writing doesn't have to be perfect—in fact, being too focused on perfection can prevent you from learning how to revise your language and grow as a writer. Also, keep in mind that crossing genres, such as writing poetry if you usually write stories, can develop your skills in new ways.

Keep a journal or notebook.

Your writer's journal is a place for you to practice your writing in any way that feels right to you. You could write interesting ideas or things you'd like to remember, your responses to those things, notes to yourself, or even works in progress. Just like constant reading, constant writing gives you an expanded toolbox.

Show, don't tell.

Don't spell out what can be evoked with dialogue, imagery, or action. Revealing your subject through “showing” is almost always more effective in helping your audience connect more deeply with your writing.

Be aware of language conventions.

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage remain important in any type of writing. Although it is common to bend these rules in creative writing, such usage should be intentional and serve a specific purpose. You have to be comfortable with the rules of language convention to know when and how to break them effectively.

Edit.

A work is very seldom finished the moment it's written. Always look at your writing as a work in progress, and continue to work at improving it; don't be afraid to make major revisions or even start over. Look at it from a different angle, or ask another person for advice—such as a Center for Writing and Speaking tutor. To be an effective (and publishable) creative writer, you must learn to be comfortable sharing your work with others. The purpose of creative writing, after all, is communication with others.

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Writing Reviews in the Visual and Performing Arts

Don't let reviews of art exhibits, concerts, plays, or dance performances stump you! Be the artist of a carefully crafted review with these guidelines.

Before you begin

- Review your syllabus. Are there any specific details that your instructor has asked you to notice or include? If so, be sure to make a note of them at the event.
- Take detailed notes at the event. Don't trust yourself to remember important parts of the event—write them down!
- Make use of your event program. It can be a handy resource for important information.

As you write

- Your review should give one clear, dominant impression of the work. What is your overall point of view regarding the experience? Communicate this idea up front in your introduction. The impression may draw from elements such as plot, character, theme, language, music, or sound.
- Summarize in moderation. It's important to let your readers know what happened, but they don't need a play-by-play account. The reader will be more interested in what you, the reviewer, thought about the event.
- Use specific, concrete details to describe the work. Include important details like the date, time, and location of the event. Go beyond superficial description and discuss how the exhibit made you feel, what it reminded you of, or how it could have been changed.
- Try to determine what the artists or performers intend for you to feel or think. Were they successful?
- Connect the work to the knowledge you are gaining in class and from your reading.

Consider answering these questions in your review:

- What is the significance of the title of the work?
- Who was the audience for this work? Did the work meet or exceed the audience's expectations?
- How did other elements (scenery, costumes, lighting, etc.) enhance or detract from the overall impression?
- What were your favorite and least favorite parts of the work?
- Did the work engage you from the beginning? If not, when did you start to become more directly involved?
- Were there any significant problems with your experience? How could the performance have been improved? Would you recommend this event? Why or why not?

Tying it all together

- Conclude your review with a conclusion about the experience as a whole. What needs to be said about the event that you have not already said?
- Read over your review. Make sure your comments throughout the paper match your overall impression of the work, as stated in your introduction and conclusion.

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Writing in Philosophy

Philosophy papers can be daunting in terms of subject matter, approach, and style. Although there is no standard, sure-fire method for writing philosophy papers, here are some tips to keep in mind as you're tackling an assessment of a dialogue or treatise.

There are two basic strategies that apply when approaching any philosophy paper:

- *Read:* One of the most important aspects of writing a philosophy paper is reading. Read the text multiple times and take notes while you read — note key points and things you don't understand.
- *Talk to your instructor:* Standards for philosophy papers vary, so your best bet is to make sure you understand what your instructor expects in an essay for that particular class and that particular assignment.

Philosophy papers come in several formats. Here are the main types of papers you will write.

Summary.

A summary is a restatement of a philosopher's ideas in your own words. This type of paper gives you the opportunity to prove that you have read and understood the material and as such it should only contain minimal quotes. The point is to prove that you have a solid grasp on the material, so aim to paraphrase!

Evaluation.

An evaluation is your chance to be a philosopher. It is your analysis of the philosopher's ideas and the expression of whether you agree or disagree with those ideas and why. Avoid explanations that merely summarize the text. You must develop an argument and defend it!

Position Paper.

Sometimes you will be asked to adopt a position and defend it from a philosophical or ethical standpoint. You are responsible for providing an argument that defends that position, regardless of whether or not you agree with it.

Other general tips:

- Philosophy papers differ from literature papers in that you are allowed to use the first person.
- Make sure your argument is clear. Think about what someone would say against your argument, and address those counterarguments in your essay. If you cannot defend your argument sufficiently, change it!
- Use examples to supplement your argument, not replace it. Beware of listing example after example after only a couple of sentences explaining your position.
- Define any key technical terms (for example, "justice" or "gender") as you use them in the particular paper.
- Organization is key. Try making an outline of your paper before you write so that you can better see the development of your argument.
- Be explicit. Assume nothing on the part of the reader. The reader should make no inferences; you should be going all that work in your paper.

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Writing in Math

Writing is as important in math as it is in any other discipline. Symbols are the tools mathematicians use to describe ideas, but words are necessary to explain the context and to interpret the results of a problem in real-world terms.

Stick with the general conventions of writing.

Use the same writing skills you would use in any other discipline. Write in complete sentences and paragraphs following grammar and language conventions. Avoid vagueness, and do not use more words than necessary. Most important of all, writing in mathematics requires use of the language of mathematics. Note how the author of your math text moves from explanation in words to development in mathematical symbols.

Introduce the problem.

Solving a mathematical problem requires that you first restate the problem, then state your objective. What are you trying to do? For example, “Our objective is to find the height of the building.” Restating the problem and stating the objective combine to form your opening paragraph. Clarify your assumptions and constraints, and specify units of the variables and numbers you are using.

Explain your approach.

No two people need approach a mathematical problem in the same way. Make sure that you explain adequately which approach you are taking, so there is no confusion. Introduce and describe each variable as precisely as possible. Use mathematical symbols clearly. For example, “ x equals height” is unnecessary and incomplete; “ $x =$ height of the building in meters” is better.

Label all visual aids.

Label diagrams, tables, graphs, etc. If you are using a graph, make sure that you have labeled your axes correctly, including units of measure.

Organize.

Your writing should have a logical flow, allowing your reader to follow you as you solve the problem. Write your solution to the problem in the same way you would answer it mathematically: step by step, goal in sight.

Solve the problem.

Do not just solve the problem mathematically. Restate your answer in words so that someone less familiar with the situation could understand your solution. This is your closing paragraph. Here, try to use broader, real-world terms if possible. For example, rather than just writing “ $x = 27$,” you should clarify your answer by writing, “The height of the building is 27 meters.”

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Writing About Film

The process of writing about film is very similar to writing about literature, but it also requires analyzing the elements of film, such as lighting, editing, and camera angles. Here are some pointers.

The importance of scenes

Films are made of scenes, which include not only dialogue, but also a myriad of technical elements. You should consider the entire experience. How does the lighting set the mood? How does a casting choice affect the way a character was portrayed? How does the music foreshadow the plot? How does the camera tell the story? When you begin writing your paper, think of how an entire scene contributes to your thesis, with reference to the technical and the more literary elements alike.

Before you watch the movie

- Why are you watching the movie? The purpose behind the assignment will affect how you watch the movie and how you structure your paper. Does the instructor want you to consider the social context of the movie? Are you asked to compare with another movie or a book?
- Do a little research on the film. Movie reviews written by professional critics are a good start because they give you an idea of what to look for. Once you know the reason why critics hated or loved it, you can look for that aspect of the movie when you watch it. The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) is one reliable source with information about the director, actors, crew, and a short synopsis. However, don't let a movie review overpower your interpretation of the film—what you write needs to be original.
- Get ready to take notes — the more you take, the more material you will have for later.

While watching the movie

- Remember that film is a unique form of expression, integrating visual and auditory media. Do not get so caught up in the plot that you forget to notice the technical elements. Pay close attention to music, lighting, camera movement, editing, and casting of characters. For example, how does music contribute to the shower scene in *Psycho*? How does the camera help portray relationships in *Sunset Boulevard*?
- Try to watch the movie more than once to notice certain scenes or quotations that you may have missed the first time around.

Writing the paper

- Just as in a literature analysis, you should introduce a concrete, arguable thesis in the beginning and prove it throughout your paper. Define major issues and analyze how, or whether, they are resolved. Sometimes the instructor will ask for a short synopsis of the film in your introduction, but in general, avoid plot summary. Only talk about the scenes that prove your thesis.
- Put the film in context. When was it made? In what time period does the action of the film take place?

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Describing Art: Writing a Formal Analysis

What is a formal analysis?

A formal analysis is more than just a description of a work of art. It is an argument based on your own visual evidence that takes a stance and creates an interesting discussion from the formal elements of the work.

How is a formal analysis different from other writing?

- A formal analysis presents the difficult challenge of translating the visual, what you observe in the art, into the verbal, what you actually write.
- Not only do you have to describe the work, but you also have to use your description to support your argument. You are therefore simultaneously analyzing and describing the work.
- All of your evidence and analysis will come from the formal elements of the work.

Prewriting

- Carefully choose the work you will analyze — choose a work that speaks both emotionally and intellectually.
- Take a pad and pencil to record your thoughts while observing the piece you chose to analyze. It is good to set aside at least 20 minutes for pure observation.
- Focus above all on the formal elements of the work, including line, medium, color, light, space, composition, and style. What feeling do they give to the viewer and what are their relationships to the rest of the work as a whole?
- Consider the context of the work: artist, time, historical background, location. These facts cannot be used in your visual analysis, but they can give shape to your conclusion.
- Review all of your notes to develop an argument. Try to make connections between the formal issues and the broader concepts of context and personal response to develop this argument.

Writing.

- The conventions for a formal analysis for a work of art is similar to other writing in the humanities. You should have a thesis statement and structured paragraphs, and you should adhere to general rules of grammar and style.
- Remember that you are not simply describing the work; rather, you are using your descriptions of the work to reinforce your thesis.
- Avoid using the first person since your arguments should develop from the formal elements, not your personal response.

Avoid: I was disturbed by the painting.

Better: The sharp, heavy lines outlining the figures and the dark blues which dominate the sky in the background give the painting an ominous and disturbing feeling.

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Writing for Sociology and Anthropology

Sociology and Anthropology are social sciences. They seek to examine and interpret 1) human behavior and culture, 2) the structure of and relationships among social institutions, and 3) the nature and consequences of inequality. Writing about these complex issues requires clearly expressing the purpose and conclusions of the analysis. It also requires a logical organization. In reference to a sample assignment, here are some tips on the mechanics and formulation of a social science paper.

Sample Assignment : Using our course readings, analyze the different forms of inequality that exist in the U.S. higher education system. Explain how these forms of inequality persist, and who benefits from them.

Sample Thesis Statement : “Building on studies of the organization of higher education in the U.S., this essay argues that inequality is a pervasive feature, developing from both personal insecurities and professional territorialism.”

Organization & Structure

- A good paper starts with a focused introduction containing a thesis statement and a description of the organization of the rest of the paper.
- The thesis is a clear statement of the major findings/conclusions/arguments of the paper.

Try to avoid these common errors:

- Don't just restate the paper assignment for the **thesis** (e.g. DON'T just write, “This paper will analyze forms of inequality in higher education and identify the mechanisms by which inequality is maintained”). Although the introduction may include some of this, a good thesis goes farther, by making a claim about the information.
- The **introduction** should also outline the rest of the paper, using a statement like the following: “This paper opens its examination of hierarchy through a review of literature on educational administrators, followed by a discussion of student-student relationships. In the final section, I will address hierarchical relationships between students and teachers.”
- The **body** of the paper develops and elaborates the thesis. Try to divide your argument into several main points/topics/themes. Unlike some disciplines, social sciences commonly use section headings (perhaps 3-5) for these themes. Section headings allow a reader to quickly flip through a paper and understand the main issues discussed. Section headings should be in a larger font and are often bold-faced. This sample assignment could have 3 or more sections including: 1) Hierarchy among Administrators, 2) Hierarchy among Students, and 3) Student-Teacher Hierarchy.
- Good papers contain a **conclusion** that mirrors the introduction by reviewing the thesis and the supporting information. The conclusion wraps up the paper and explains the significance of the inferences drawn.

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Writing for Sociology and Anthropology, Continued

Disciplinary Conventions

Here are a few more tips to clarify expectations for social science writing:

- Social scientists do divulge their conclusions in the introduction. This is how we formulate the thesis.
- Social scientists may use the first person (*“In this paper, I demonstrate how educational hierarchy is a function of personal and professional fears.”*)
- Social science citations within the text should have author’s name, date and page number in parentheses. For example, (Johnson 2003:25). Full references will be placed in a bibliography. Alternatively, footnotes with full citations are acceptable. Although you may choose from among several styles, you might try Chicago Manual of Style or the American Psychological Association style. These styles are explained in the St. Martin’s Handbook. The key is to be consistent.
- Using direct quotations from a source is acceptable but should be done sparingly. Generally, you should paraphrase other people’s words unless it is a phrase or a sentence which is so perfect or memorable that you wouldn’t want to change it.
- Most analytical social science papers call for an objective position regarding the material. You should refrain from inserting your own opinions or moral views unless the assignment asks for that approach.
- Although an engaging writing style is always welcome, your priority should be to write clearly and convincingly **in your own words**. Typical social science assignments aren’t a forum for creative writing.

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Writing in Economics

As in all disciplines, writing an economics paper is a skill that takes lots of practice. You should strive for clarity in economics papers: most ideas in economics are actually quite simple! Do some basic reading and research in order to narrow your topic to a question that can be asked in one or two sentences and can be answered within your page limit.

General tips

- It is acceptable to use “I” in economics papers, but “we” is usually acceptable for group papers.
- Visit the CWS for help. Don’t wait until the night before your paper is due!
- Start writing early in the process of doing a research paper. You’ll probably end up substantially revising your words, but writing early in the research process can help clarify ideas, improve flow, and generate additional areas for research.
- Draft an outline first before you start writing. New ideas always come up while you are writing, but with a fundamental outline, you will be less confused about where to add the new arguments or examples.
- Save often and make backup copies.
- Use titles, labels, and notes to make tables and graphs self-explanatory. Anyone should be able to understand the gist of your tables and graphs without having to read your paper. Do not include tables or graphs that are not referenced in the paper. Look at a few published articles to get ideas on how to present tables and graphs.

References

- If you used any sources, include a references section that provides the citation information for all works cited for your paper. Note that this is not a bibliography that lists all the materials you read or consulted; it only lists the materials you cite in your paper.
- Most economics papers use in-text citation (parenthetical citation) instead of footnotes or endnotes. Footnotes are only for material that is somewhat tangential to the main text and should be used sparingly.
- Works that are paraphrased can either be included directly in the sentence:
“Keynes (1922) argued that animal spirits. . .”
or cited at the end of a sentence:
“Animal spirits affect the business cycle (Keynes 1922).”
- For direct quotations, include the page number in the in-text citation.
- If a work has two authors, the authors are both listed upon each mention. Three authors are listed in full on first mention (and in the references section) and as “et al.” thereafter. Four or more are always listed as “et al.”
- Unless otherwise specified, use MLA format. Make sure you do this according to the most recent conventions of MLA formatting—check the latest edition of the *St. Martin’s Handbook* for help!

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F NO. 11 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Writing a Literature Review

What is a literature review?

Literature reviews situate your research within a context of previous research. Literature reviews are used to clarify

- What information is already known,
- What theoretical frameworks have already been developed, and
- What research has already been done.

Literature reviews can identify gaps in the current research or present areas of disagreement within your field of study. Therefore, your job is both to **describe** and to **evaluate** previous research studies. This requires you to determine the credibility and relevance of the research as well as identify conflicts or gaps in the body of literature on your topic.

How is a literature review different from a research report?

- Literature reviews discuss the previous work done in a particular area of research. They do so intentionally and critically, in ways that both inform your work and demonstrate its significance. Think of literature reviews as finding, mapping out, and joining of the scholarly conversation relevant to your study.
- While literature reviews outline other researchers' work and look at how different people have studied your area of interest, research reports present the study you have done. The literature review becomes a part of your report that is usually included in the introductory section. In the sciences, a typical report is structured as follows: introduction, methods, results, conclusion.

What are the basic steps for reviewing the literature?

1. Choose an area of research and develop your research question. This may be the most difficult stage of your research, so allow time to narrow your topic. Start with a provisional question, and expect that it will be modified as your work through the project.
2. Identify sources of information. Talk with professors in your discipline, review work cited lists, see who other researchers reference in their literature reviews, and search the major professional journals in your field.
3. Read studies and research relevant to your topic. Keep records of what you have read, making notes and documenting important quotes. Look for patterns and disagreements among authors.
4. Develop a meaningful, coherent way to organize the studies. Group the literature into categories, and lay out arguments in an ordered sequence.
5. Write about the literature, explaining what different authors say about your topic. Pay attention to their central argument, the methods they use and the assumptions that underpin their approach. Relate the literature review to your research question, show its relevance for your study, and make the case for the importance of your contribution to the scholarly conversation.

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How to Write a Literature Review, Continued

Seven questions to guide your reading of each source (these questions can also help revise your literature review):

1. Does the researcher begin by identifying a specific problem area?
2. Does the researcher establish the importance of the problem area?
3. Is the introduction an essay that logically moves from topic to topic?
4. Has the research provided conceptual definitions of key terms?
5. Has the researcher indicated the basis for factual statements?
6. Do the specific research purposes, questions, or hypotheses logically flow from the introductory material?
7. Overall, is the introduction effective and appropriate?

Four questions to help you examine the sources as a body of literature (these questions will be useful in organizing and writing your review):

1. What have authors already said about my topic?
2. Are there contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies in the literature?
3. How do we reconcile different findings in the studies?
4. How would my study contribute to the research on this subject?



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Historiographical Essays

Historiography is the study of how history is written. No single scholar's approach is "correct" or unimpeachable, because no matter how much he or she tries to treat the subject at hand in a fair and unbiased manner, the final product is invariably shaped by political agendas and pressures, contemporary trends in academia, limitations of resources, and the inherent subjectivity of critical analysis. This is why two historians can look at the same sources and come up with radically different conclusions regarding their significance and what they tell us about a subject. Because the way in which history is remembered and taught can legitimate, debunk, or otherwise influence current ideological agendas, it's our job to evaluate how well professional historians conceptualize their research, analyze their sources, and present the information to the scholarly community or the "popular" audience. A historiographical essay is one which summarizes and analyzes historians' changing arguments and interpretations of a historical topic.

Example:

Perspective 1 (Carol F. Karlsen): The Salem witch trials were primarily an attack on the community's most economically powerful women.

Perspective 2 (Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum): Gender was inconsequential in the genesis of the witch trials; rather, they were a result of an eruption of long-bubbling tensions between the leading families of Salem Town (who were merchants) and those of Salem Village (who were farmers).

Some questions to ask:

- What kind of history does each historian embrace? Social? Cultural? Economic? Political? Revisionist? Postmodern? Marxist? Materialist? Metahistorical? The answer is usually a combination of categories like these.
- How has the study or interpretation of this particular topic been influenced by recent developments in historical study or thinking? Is the approach teleological - that is, does it unfairly use the benefit of hindsight?
- What is each historian's main argument? Which historian's view is more convincing, and why?
- What are the two historians' most significant areas of agreement and disagreement? What are the bigger questions that they collectively address? What are the primary strengths and weaknesses of each historian's approach and analysis?
- What sources does each historian use to prove his or her argument? Are they adequate? Creatively used?
- Are there gaps in logic or curious omissions?
- What, if any, agendas seem to be influencing the study? Look in the acknowledgements and see who funded it!

Other guidelines:

- Don't just summarize the historians' analyses – delve beneath the surface!
- Support your critiques of the readings with specific evidence
- Consider the strengths and weakness of each piece, but also make an argument about what you think of the topic under consideration given these strengths and weaknesses.

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Writing About Poetry

Writing about poetry is not very different from writing about other topics. Some techniques exist, however, that can help you analyze and write about poetry. Remember that all standard rules of writing apply for essays on poetry, even though the poets might not have adhered to those rules. There are three basic ways to write about poetry.

- **Explication** unfolds the meaning of a poem; it involves analyzing the formal techniques the poet uses to present an interpretation of the poem.
- **Analysis** deals with a certain part of a poem and relates it to the work as a whole. For example, you can analyze the death imagery of a poem.
- **Comparison & Contrast** involves looking at two different poems that are usually connected in some way—they may share a common theme or technical device.

Pay attention to language.

Look up any words you may not understand. Be sure you grasp the meaning of the words and how they are being used, especially if there are words that may have a meaning specific to the cultural context or time period of the poem.

Relate style and meaning.

Be aware of style, or poetic techniques. Don't ignore the technical aspects of a poem when you focus on the meaning of the poem. At the same time, don't block *out* your interpretation of the poem when discussing the elements of style. Look for connections between the meaning (*what* the poem is saying) to the poetic techniques (*how* the poem says it).

Example: Eliot's replacement of the formal poetic restrictions of rhyme scheme and meter express the fragmentation of values and the breakdown of society that he observed in the aftermath of WWII.

Move from literal to interpretive.

A poem often works on two levels: the literal (what it is saying) and the thematic (what it suggests). Begin with the literal level of the poem, and then move into your thematic interpretation by providing evidence from the poem. Make sure you demonstrate *how* you reached a particular conclusion; take your reader with you whenever you make an interpretation. Show evidence that proves your interpretation *and* also relates it to the literal meaning of the poem. Don't assume what you're out to prove.

Example: The theme of "To His Coy Mistress" is deeper than mere sentimentality and romanticism; Marvell's wit and his use of strong, sometimes astonishing images poignantly illustrate man's mortality and the inexorable press of time.

Quote correctly.

You must quote the text directly as evidence for your argument. When quoting multiple lines of poetry, separate the line breaks with a slash (/). If you're quoting more than four lines, start the quotation on a new line and indent it.

AGNES SCOTT



F NO. 14 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

Chemistry Lab Reports

While lab reports are more technical than lyrical, the basic grammar rules of an English essay still apply. Remember that the details of the write-up will vary among lab proctors.

Part I: The Abstract

The abstract is a short, succinct statement of your purpose. It answers the question, "Why are you performing the experiment?" Your purpose should reflect an academic or research-based mentality, rather than your personal feelings on the experiment: *The amount of Fe in an iron-supplement tablet was determined through the use of a Beer's Law plot and spectrophotometry in order to compare this value with the manufacturer's claim.*

Part II: The Procedure

The procedure is a list of the steps you took in performing the experiment. The procedure should be written in the left column of your manual, with the corresponding data in the right column. As in the abstract, you will use passive voice (as opposed to active voice) in describing your procedure: *A 1.0 molar solution of NaOH was prepared*, not *Prepare a 1.0 molar solution* or *I prepared a 1.0 molar solution*. This section should take the least mental energy, since the steps are generally listed in your lab text, but take note in your lab manual of any deviations you make from the text.

Part III: The Data

The data are the exact temperatures, weights, colors, times, volumes, etc. that you can directly observe: *The p-aminobenzoic acid weighed 1.20 grams*, or *Bubbles formed upon the surface of the metal when it was placed in the solution*. If you must add, subtract, multiply or divide your numbers, such as with determining density, then save these operations for the calculations part of your arguments/results section.

Part IV: The Arguments/Results

The results section presents all logical or mathematical arguments upon which you will base your conclusions. Harness those creative abilities too - charts and tables are integral to this section. Arrange your data in tables or graphs with descriptive titles, clear labels, and explanatory legends. Units are essential and can make a tremendous difference in the meaning of your results. Also helpful is including the structures of your starting materials and products, as well as to illustrate the reactions that have taken place. For an organic lab write-up, you'll also want to include a brief statement presenting the purpose for performing the experiment and to describe the methods you used to reach your results in a few sentences. When describing your methods, you should try to incorporate the scientific language of the lab manual and textbook (e.g. pipette v. transferred with a pipette).

(continued on reverse)

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Chemistry Lab Reports

Part V: The Conclusion

The conclusion is essentially the analysis of the data. The most important function of the conclusion is to relate your results to the purpose stated in the results section. In describing the significance of the data values, you should explain what methods were used; however, since the procedure already describes what was done in detail, it is not necessary to repeat the specifics of every step. First person pronouns (*I, we*) are permissible here, but don't overuse them. Make sure to include an explanation for any changes you needed to make in your procedure, or changes that could have been made to improve the outcome. Since most experiments are not faultless, you should include a discussion of error. Again, these should be scientific speculations (e.g. *The percent yield was low because the reaction is reversible, and so not all of the reactants went to product*), so resist the temptation to cite human error.

Part VI: Significance

The significance should try to relate the lab experiment to issues not directly related to the experiment. In other words, of what use is your information to the world? When writing up an organic lab, this section should be covered in the conclusion. After being analytical throughout the other parts of the lab, this is your time to think outside the formula - be creative!

AGNES SCOTT