



Ten Suggestions from the Writing Center

1. Think of your writing as a process of self-definition--where do you stand in relation to your subject? Where's your authority? How do you make judgments?
2. Consider writing a process of exploration--finding out what you think and what you know. Then try to teach someone else the important things you've learned. Explain, as accurately as you can, where you are in this process--and as a bonus, where you might go.
3. Write what's important; discover the clearest way to say what you mean; write to another human being. For the most part, sound like yourself; if you have to use jargon, make sure it's necessary. Writing is the construction of a sound, thoughtful position. It is also the art of sounding thoughtful, generous, of good will.
4. Give yourself time to write what you want to write: time to get rid of the false starts, clarify your assumptions, define limits on what your essay can and can't do, and address an audience with ease and authority. It'll take a few drafts.
5. Write a little at a time. Let the drafts rest. Go on a walk to think it over. Get perspective, and a grip. Read some writers you admire to get their prose rhythms into your own. Speculate. Give yourself time to change your mind, to turn out more writing than you'll really need, to select what you need to say--and to save some big issues for another day.
6. Set your own high standards for clarity, honesty, self-representation, thoughtfulness, and function. What ideally should this essay say and do? (Almost as importantly, what do you *not* have to bother doing in this essay?)
7. Try to be generous both with what you know and with what you don't. Let your reader in on what evidence you are able to gather, and what you aren't; what your essay can do and what it can't. Let the reader into the conversation you have with the subject, and set a conversational tone.
8. A corollary: actually have conversations. Get some feedback on your drafts--from friends, from faculty, from the Writing Center. How do you sound? What's clear to you but not to a reader? Importantly, are you succeeding and doing better than you think you are? (Writing is a communal enterprise, and no professional writer *ever* publishes without trial runs. Not one.)

9. Recall that style too carries messages: diction is distancing or friendly, expressions of thought run clear or cloudy, prose is smooth or choppy. Writing registers choices, the writer's design; the best writers make effective and interesting choices. Your self-presentation includes what an audience might think of the choices you make, how much control you seem to have over your writing resources.

10. Aristotle put the whole business of public writing and speaking squarely into the arena of doubt and belief: rhetoric, for him, is the business of discovering what is plausible or possible, and why it seems so. As long as you have time to do so, doubt when you find yourself reflexively believing, and believe when you find yourself reflexively doubting. It keeps your system exercised and moving, and helps you earn doubts and beliefs that really matter. That's learning.

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