

DEBT-FREE SCHOLAR

Presents



HOW TO
WRITE IN COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

Writing at the college level is a difficult endeavor. Most high school students are not prepared for the college style of writing. Not only is the length more difficult, but the individual, unwritten requirements vary from professor to professor.

To help you become a better writer, I interviewed Andrew Pudewa, the director of the [Institute for Excellence in Writing](#). I have reviewed two of his video courses on Debt-free Scholar: the [Advanced Communication Series \(review\)](#) and the [High School Essay Intensive \(review\)](#). I consider him to be the best writing teacher in the US today.

It is my hope that this interview will help you improve your writing and succeed in college.

Respectfully,

Nate Desmond

Editor, DebtFreeScholar.com

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What are the primary differences between college level papers and high school level papers?

First, length.

This depends of course on the type of high school one went to, the standard of rigor and the luck of the draw when it comes to teachers.

However, the consensus among students I've polled is that while a few pages are common in high school, college paper requirements are often two to three times that length.

Second, formatting.

Teachers require strict adherence to style guidelines, which may include MLA, APA, Turabian, and even departmental specific requirements.

While this does not require a lot of critical thinking, it does mean that students must be able to meticulously follow formatting rules.

Quotations and citations are critical in the college or university environment, since the most common form of writing is the argumentative paper, which states a thesis or asks a question.

Anything that is not obviously general knowledge or a clearly stated personal opinion must be referenced.

High school students who have worked a bit with one or more documentation formats will certainly have an advantage over those who haven't.

Do you think most high school graduates are prepared for college level communications?

No, most are not.

However, determined and hardworking students will generally adapt very quickly.

Being able to “read” the instructors and figure out what kind of writing they prefer is a huge advantage. While some teachers try to claim that they don’t have particular preferences, very few are entirely objective that way.

Rather than try to write “well,” a sharp student will figure out ways to “spy” on their professors and imitate their writing style.

One way to practice this ahead of time is to read various authors, analyze what makes them sound unique, and practice rewriting fables, scenes from movies, or personal experiences in the style of different writers.

What is the most common communication mistake college students make and how can it be avoided?

One very common problem would be waiting until the last minute, and trying to produce a finished version on low sleep and not having time to let it “settle” or rewrite much.

Although that may seem inescapable, planning and time management can help greatly.

One of the things we constantly teach is that any project—short or long—can be broken into smaller tasks.

Connected with this, it seems that many students don't get enough help.

Recently, while reading some upper division college papers sent to me by a professor of business at a large East coast university, I was shocked to see the frequency of careless punctuation errors, homonym spelling mistakes and awkward constructions.

I thought again and again, "Did this student have anyone look at this before turning it in?"

Every writer needs an editor (or two!), and if you don't have a friend or relative with decent proofreading skills, then using one of the many online services would make sense.

Professionals—and professors—generally have little tolerance for blatant carelessness in student writing.

What is the best way for college students to improve their communication skills?

I polled several college graduates to get this answer, and it genuinely surprised me!

They all agreed that one of the most important things to do is to have the self-discipline to use correct grammar whenever writing anything—in other words, to avoid texting and emailing without punctuation, capitalization, etc.

Be careful of the “newspeak” style of text communication, which can carry over from informal to formal communication all too easily.

On a slightly different note, I find that it is very helpful for students of all ages to regularly listen to audio books, as the language patterns of excellent English will “soak into one’s mind” more easily through the ear than through the eye.

Sadly, many parents stop reading out loud to their children when they become able to read well on their own, but for most people, continued auditory input (as well as poetry memorization) will build one’s language database more effectively than fast and silent reading.

FURTHER READING

For more free college-help ebooks, visit DebtFreeScholar.com/ebooks today.

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