

## THE WRITE STUFF

by

Thomas E. Cronin  
Princeton U. & Colorado College

From News for Teachers of Political Science  
(1986, 49. 1-4)

"In recent years I've supervised countless undergraduate research papers and numerous senior theses. Not surprisingly, I repeat myself about basic research and writing hints, suggestions, and outright warnings. This handout, "Write Tigers Write!" prepared for the "tigers" at Princeton and The Colorado College (the mascot is the same), attempts to help the novice researcher and is, as well, an act of self-protection."

What follows are suggestions and cautions for students writing a research paper. My suggestions are merely that. They are personal, general and speak more about writing than about research.

Make no mistake about it. Research and writing are demanding work, even for the professional. You won't hear professional scholars or writers boast about the easiness of their craft. No matter how much they love it, and they often love it more than anything else, they find it demanding, exacting, lonely and often painful--if they really work at it. "Writing, at its best," writes Ernest Hemingway, "is a lonely life....."

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning when he tries again for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed. How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

The joy of research and writing comes from the challenge of being out on your own, rethinking the explored and the whole unexplored realm of human relations and vision. Writing itself is one of the grand, free human activities. Working back and forth between experience and ideas, evidence and imagination, data and theory a writer has more than space and time can offer.

One more word about Hemingway. The intensity of his concentration was such that a few hours of writing literally exhausted him. A day's work seldom exceeded five or six hundred words.

As in the mastery of any ability, writing a research paper requires self-discipline. If you already know how to use time effectively and can ruthlessly stick to a schedule, you will find research paper writing relatively easy. You may even enjoy it. Most of us, however, are easily diverted and are accomplished procrastinators. A research paper assignment can overwhelm you if you let it. Yet it can, planned carefully strengthen your self-discipline and do more to sharpen your ability to manage time wisely than any other part of your college work. Be prepared to retreat and devote several hours a day and even two or three weeks to uninterrupted, focused concentration. For those of us who are extroverts, this is often like being sentenced to solitary confinement. If you are going to take pride in your research, however, you had better resign yourself

to devoting the time to the extensive reading, rigorous analysis and intense thought, not to mention the hours of writing and revising, a research project requires.

### Selecting a Topic

First you conduct a search for a worthy topic. What are your criteria? Perhaps something has been puzzling you, or a topic has been inadequately covered in an earlier course or short paper assignment. Topics arise out of discussions with friends, teachers parents or from your observations gained in job or intern experiences. Curiosity is the source of many topics--the urge to understand something better, to resolve or at least to better understand a puzzle, paradox, dilemma or set of previously unsolved, unanswered questions. Much of my own research arises from questions students ask me and from question-and-answer sessions on the lecture circuit. This is especially true when I find myself giving an answer I'm not wholly satisfied with and say to myself "That's a good question, and it deserves a better answer."

There are few things sadder than a solution in search of a problem or a solution that fits the wrong problem," writes Princeton professor Walter Murphy. He adds: "There are few people sadder than those who have chosen to attack a problem that is trivial or uninteresting in itself and is not closely related to another problem that is interesting and important."

You will, years later, regret the zero-risk or perfectionist inclination to tackle only those questions that are tidy, minor or readily answered. A junior paper or senior thesis is a chance of a lifetime. It's an opportunity to match your talents and abilities against a perplexing societal or political problem. Rise to the challenge and tackle an important problem. Woodrow Wilson's senior paper was published in a notable national review and became the basis for his first book. John F. Kennedy's senior thesis was turned into a successful book.

### Questions to Ask Yourself About a Research Topic

What is the problem? Who says it's a problem and why? What's the big idea? or confusion? What is it I want to discover, solve, learn more about? Why does X institution, or process, or theory work in its own peculiar way? Could it or should it be otherwise? For example, how much centralized political leadership do we really need--or do we really want? Or, how is powerful political leadership best held accountable? How much democracy do we really want? How much can we afford? How do we calculate the costs? How does our doctrine of separated powers really work? Are changes needed in our political system as we move into the Republic's third century? Are our economic deficiencies or inability to curb the arms race due to our structures, or to inadequate leadership or to deficiencies in vision and a crisis or ideas? You will have to narrow the topic in accord with your time and talent. Just don't narrow it to the trivial-pursuit level.

Be as clear as possible about what it is you want to discover, prove or disprove. What is the central issue? Define it. Explore its origins and historical development. Explain its consequences. If it is a policy, process or constitutional interpretation, you may want to explain its effects on current and future political behavior. Try to discern the underlying assumptions held by groups advocating change or the status quo. In what ways do different schools of thought define the problem differently--and why?

You will want to clarify the topic by gathering and comprehending as much material, qualitative and quantitative, as you can acquire. Be sure to conduct a thorough search of library literature and documents. Doubtless you will sometimes discover works that have already answered or at least addressed parts of your topics. Explore the availability of survey and polling data that may shed light on the problem. You may find, too, that interviewing knowledgeable professors, experts and present or former public officials will be necessary and productive. Never underestimate the talents of the school's librarians, especially those who are specialists with reference works and government documents. They can become your greatest allies.

### Research Strategy and Hypothesis Testing

I expect students not just to describe a problem and raise off-handedly some possible solutions. No. Prepare a list of likely solutions or likely answers to your research questions. Formulate competing explanatory propositions or hypotheses and subject them to the most rigorous testing you can undertake. Be as clear as you can about cause-and-effect relationships. Clarify your dependent and independent variables. Don't be constrained by conventional wisdom, or the dominant mindset or paradigms of the day. The way we look at problems and possible solutions is extraordinarily conditioned by how we have been socialized by the fashionable cultural norms of the day. Yet inventions, scientific breakthroughs and better answers often come only when we can step outside the prevailing paradigms, the prevailing way we have been taught to look at things. Disregard the received wisdom and ask bold questions and pose fresh possibilities. This is easier to suggest than to do. We are, more than we acknowledge, prisoners and creatures of habit and intense cultural conditioning. Undaunted, try to discern the paradigm shifts that are taking place or perhaps need to take place. For more on this topic, see an important study by Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. second edition (University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Logical reasoning is important at this point. You want to test, as systematically as you can, the plausible explanations you have raised. With a bit of ingenuity, you can test solutions to difficult problems without making each particular test a two-year enterprise. Please appreciate, however, that empirical tests and the most rigorous forms of logical reasoning are indispensable to building the body of reliable knowledge needed to arrive at your conclusions.

Remember, too, that information is merely a distant cousin of knowledge. Information and findings are important as intermediate phases of your research. You are asked in addition, however, to make sense of what you have found.

Political scientists ultimately seek to formulate theories about the why and the how and the "so what" of political life. Aristotle called the enterprise the "queen of sciences." He classified countries according to their political structures, making predictions about how varying structures would lead to different behavior. Machiavelli examined political systems and forecast how rulers could best govern and how people would react to different styles of leadership. St. Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and our own James Madison were also political theorists and political philosophers. Two hundred years ago, in the summer of 1787, the men in Philadelphia who drafted the Constitution acted as political researchers and political theoreticians as they merged experience and theory into practical political institutions.

Social scientists welcome you to join us as we continue to study and learn about the patterns of politics. Description yields understanding; understanding yields or can lead to explanation; the best explanation can lead to models and predictions; and predictions that work lead to theory. We continually search for the predictable--to discover, describe, and, if possible verify the basic laws of politics and governance. Although political science in some ways is an ancient discipline, it is also in several ways a youthful social science: Rigorous efforts to learn enough to allow us to explain and predict and develop models really began only in the last generation.

Most topics undergraduates tackle have already been written about by one or more scholars. Some of you will be put off by this. Your challenge is similar, however, to what Hemingway said in the quote I cited earlier. Your challenge is to examine the problem with a fresh eye. Come at it differently. Place it in a fresh context. Genius is the ability to recombine, rethink, revise, "recontextualize," to see new linkages, discover new paradigms, put forth audacious new and more relevant explanations. The job of research and writing is to push things beyond where they are, to raise new questions, to bring the freshness that clarifies and points in promising new directions.

#### Writing and Style Suggestions

Here are a number of questions you should ask yourself as you outline and prepare your paper. This advice is necessarily personal or subjective. What works for me may merely inhibit you. You can learn from these suggestions, yet you shouldn't be too much influenced by another person's tastes. Retain what's useful, disregard the rest. Most of what follows is common sense. Much of it comes from standard writing and style books. My emphasis on certain usage and abuse arises out of twenty years of my own writing and nearly twenty years of reading student paper.

Outline, Outline, Outline. It helps to have a map of where you are going. No wind is the right wind if you don't know where you are headed. If you don't know where you are going, you may just end up there. The moral is important. In the past you may have just sat down and typed out a first draft, throwing together by cutting and pasting odd descriptions and definitions and tagging on a rough conclusion. This is unacceptable for papers in your major.

Here are some additional questions to ask yourself. What is the problem? What is my main theme? How clear is my thesis? Have I presented it clearly and forcibly in the first few pages? Is there an apt, imaginative and fresh title? Have I stated clearly and early the questions that guided my research? Is there a unity that integrates the flow of problem development, argument, evidence presentation and logical reasoning? Is there a clear pattern of analysis? Have I provided adequate and balanced evidence? Have I provided adequate documentation and footnoted the major sources, documents and interviews used in the paper? Do I present a convincing case and is this well summarized in the conclusion? Does my conclusion flow smoothly from the body of analysis and earlier discussion? Have I leaped to any premises, jumped to any conclusions? Is this an objective and scholarly exploration, or is it merely an exercise, as in the case of the trial lawyer, who enters court and announces "these are the conclusions upon which I shall base my facts."

In short, will it persuade readers? Have complicated terms and concepts been explained in clear English? What have I learned? What is the significance of my findings? Is it highly readable? Have I brought a freshness to the analysis that both informs and enlightens? Do my findings help to develop

predictive and theoretical models?

Write with voice and power. Each of us writes with a flavor and voice that evolves with time and practice. I find students write at their best when they write as they talk. Be yourself. When style is forced through affecting someone else's technique, or fancy jargon is used, the likely result is stilted, artificial and phony writing. Write in a way that comes naturally.

Some stylists advise writers to place themselves in the background. This will work for most of you. You may prefer, however, to write as you speak in conversation.

In any event, read your early efforts out loud--to yourself, friends, dates, parents or whomever you can get to listen. I read the first draft of this to my wife and son and soon discard half of it, rewrote the other half and added additional sections. Why read out loud? When you read out loud, you invariably hear and see things in it you don't see or hear in any other way. Reading your words out loud gives you the experience of being someone else. The ear catches errors of substance and style the eye misses. Reading out loud also stresses what is important. An effective sentence is partly a matter of cadence and rhythm. In addition to using accurate words you will usually want to use familiar, simple, unadorned words.

Reading work out loud also permits us to see where we can reinject our own voice and personality. "When we were little we had no difficulty sounding the way we felt," writes Peter Elbow, "thus most little children speak and write with real voice.

People often lack any voice at all in their writing because they stop so often in the act of writing a sentence and worry and change their minds about which words to use. They have none of the natural breath in their writing that they have in speaking...

Be daring. Beware wishy-washiness. Take a position, back it up and argue it forcefully. Yet beware hyperbole. Overstatement usually weakens your case. When in doubt, understate.

#### Write, Write--Then Revise, Revise, Revise

Don't expect to get the words or flow exactly right on the first try. Concentrate on writing it down and getting your ideas on paper in any way you can. Writing publishable prose about irrelevant ideas is a waste of talent, time and energy. So focus first on the ideas and revise afterwards.

Once you have done extensive reading and research, sit down and start writing. Put your ideas on paper, writing freely. Be sloppy. Make a mess. Who cares at this stage? Allow your ideas to begin to take form. Sylvan Barnet of Tufts University writes, "If you are like most people, you can't do much precise thinking until you have committed to paper at least a rough sketch of your initial ideas. Later you can push and polish your ideas into shape, perhaps even deleting all of them and starting over, but it's a lot easier to improve your ideas once you see them in front of you, than it is to do the job in your head. On paper one word leads to another; in your head one word often blocks another." So get the thoughts on paper and worry later about getting them in the most concise and effective way.

Starting to write is the most difficult part of research paper writing for some people. For others, and for me, rewriting is the most difficult. If you

have not already learned to do so, learn to be ruthless in editing, erasing and throwing away unnecessary words. Editing means figuring out what you want to say and then saying it. After a draft or two, you'll want to get it clear in your head and then rewrite it in the most accurate way and throw the rest away.

The most common student-writing deficiency is an overly casual approach to the use of words. Ask yourself--why I am using this word? Is there a more appropriate word? Look for phrases that are awkward, unclear or wordy. Could one word suffice for two or three now used? "Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary part," advise Strunk and White. "This requires not that the writer makes all sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."

Prize-winning economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who is the author of more best sellers in his field than any of his peers, says clear writing--something his profession is not especially known for--comes from a commitment to rewriting and revision. His simple formula; at least five drafts.

To write adequately one must know, above all, how bad are one's first drafts. They are bad because the need to combine composition with thought, both in their own way taxing, leads initially to a questionable, even execrable result. With each revision the task eases, the product improves. Eventually there can be clarity and perhaps even grace.... My commitment is to not fewer than five revisions...

I have also been much helped in writing on economics by the conviction that there is no idea associated with the subject that cannot, with sufficient effort, be stated in clear English. The obscurity that characterizes professional economic prose does not derive from the difficulty of the subject. It is the result of incomplete thought; or it reflects a priestly desire to differentiate one's self from the plain world of the layman; or it stems from a fear of having one's inadequacies found out. Nothing so protects error as an absence of readers or understanding.

Letting nouns and verbs do your talking helps you to be clear and precise. Short words, short sentences and short paragraphs are preferable to their opposites. The challenge is to avoid oversimplification as well as mindless complexification. Carefully selected nouns and verbs seldom need a string of adjectives and adverbs to amplify their meaning. When in doubt consult stylist E.B. White, who advised: Write with nouns and verbs; do not overwrite; do not overstate; avoid the use of qualifiers; do not explain too much; avoid fancy words; do not take shortcuts at the cost of clarity; prefer the standard to the offbeat; make sure the reader knows who is speaking; do not use dialect and revise and rewrite.

Avoid qualifiers. Say it in positive form. Be definite. Be bold. It helps to avoid: it seems, it appears, very, quite, pretty, rather, usually, mostly, generally, some, often, various, frequently--really. Never use: somewhat unique, very unique. Unique is unique.

Curb your use of phrasing that makes repetition necessary to keep the sentence on track; strings of nouns depending on one another; prepositions, conjunctions and adverbial expressions made up of two or more words: with

reference to, in conjunction with, in the event that, in the nature of, as to whether. Also restrain the temptation to use indefinite, vague introductory phrases or constant hedging such as: furthermore, moreover, the fact that, it is believed that, many, on the one hand, however, that which, notwithstanding, and to the contrary notwithstanding.

I would appreciate it if you would omit the unnecessary use of which and that. Beware the "whichbogs," as one editor friend of mine put it "Which" is so often misused or used unnecessarily it can almost be banished. It ruins sentences. One of my friends has the habit of changing all whiches to thats even though, as noted below, it is not grammatically correct. The word that can be deleted in 30 percent of its appearances. If you find you are using sentences where that appears, try to rewrite the sentence, avoiding the need for it. It is easy and it's worth the effort. "He said that it's expensive," is crisper when written "He said it's expensive."

A note or two more on which and that. Which is used to introduce a clause adding further information about the noun; that introduces a clause restricting the meaning of the noun. For example, "The party, which had been defeated, pulled itself together and prepared to win next year." (This extra which clause tells us there was a Democratic Party, and that it had been defeated. We are being given additional information about the party. The clause could be deleted, and the sentence would still make sense.) "The party that had been defeated pulled itself together and prepared to win next year." (This clause distinguished the party from the winning party--it was the party that had been defeated that pulled itself together and planned for victory next time.)

Which can on occasion be used in place of that. "The party which had that cannot be used in place of which. A good rule is: if a comma can be inserted the correct word to use is which. Enough! Readability is enhanced by writing whichless and thatless sentences.

Omit unnecessary words. "First of all" (delete of all) "First and foremost" (delete and foremost) "Jack is a very strong hockey player" (delete very). The word very weakens the work strong. "He would claim that squash is easier than tennis" is better written "He claims squash is easier than tennis." My visit to Paris will always be remembered by me." Try instead-- "I will always remember my visit to Paris." Use now instead of presently. Use thus instead of thusly. "When the Constitution was first adopted" can be shortened to: "When the Constitution was adopted." "It would do nothing of the sort" is better than, "This writer feels, though, that it would do nothing of the sort." Here are a few I particularly dislike: Needless to say, to say the least, that is to say, in summation.

Use the active voice. "Tom passed the bill," not "The bill was passed by Tom." "The White House slashed taxes," not "The taxes were slashed by the incumbent administration." The passive voice makes for sluggish reading. It slows the pace. "The active voice strikes like a boxer moving forward in attack" writes Theodore Bernstein in his book The Careful Writer. "The passive voice parries while backpedaling."

Vary the length of sentences and paragraphs, and vary how you begin sentences. Sentences all with seven words and paragraphs all with seven words and paragraphs all with seven sentences bore your reader. Try an occasional one-or-two word sentence. Why? Absolutely not. Definitely. Try an occasional one-or-two sentence paragraph. Variety counterpoint and change-up pitches grab

the reader's attention. Always write directly to the reader. Keep your audience in mind awake. Nothing bores a reader more than a string of paragraphs of "Harry Truman said..." Harry Truman declared..." "Harry Truman noted..." "President Truman pointed out..." Or "There was..." "There is..." "There are..." There may be..." Innovate. Market your ideas.

Leads and conclusions are important. Your first two paragraphs are more important than you probably realize. Reporters often devote 60 percent of their energy to getting their leads right and jazzy. Why? Most readers never get beyond the first two paragraphs of most stories in newspapers and magazines. If journalists grab your attention up front, they are likely to hold your interest for the duration. Much depends on introducing vividly the theme, the major finding and the arresting angle or example that telegraphs the value or importance of the rest of the story.

Fortunately for you, dear student, your professor is being paid to read the rest of your paper. Don't count on a high interest level, however, unless you can make a case for its significance from the outset.

Use subtitles or subheadings to indicate transitions to new material or new sections. Subheadings can add to the paper's readability and, cleverly used, can help save words you might otherwise need to introduce a new section and explain transitions.

Conclusions are important. People carefully read the first and last paragraphs. Thus, treat your beginning and end as important opportunities. Properly crafted, they will invite a more serious reading of what lies between. Of course, if there is not much "beef" in between, you might as well go ahead and botch your lead and summary.

Please be correct. It's your language. For most of you it's the only language you'll ever have. Why not learn its rules of grammar and syntax and master them. Few people do. Learn to spell. I'm mildly dyslexic and I prize the saying that only creative types can spell a word three different ways. Still, when in doubt I look it up. I do this a lot. Bad grammar suggest a writer is lazy, careless, ignorant or indifferent to the reader. "The notion that a person can be a good writer and turn up his nose at rules of correct grammar is like a fingernail scratching across a blackboard." writes James J. Kilpatrick. "A reader won't stick with the writer very long." Volumes on usage are listed in the recommended readings at the end of this handout. Purchase one.

On quoting. Avoid using too many quotes. Few observations are truly original. As you begin to read widely on your research topic, you will develop a sense of what is considered common knowledge. Paraphrase--put common knowledge and agreed upon definitions in your own words. You can probably say it just as well or adapt it for your explicit purposes. Doubtless you can shorten it as well. You can still give proper credit to the author who inspired your thoughts. If you are using a quote that will run over six or seven lines in your manuscript it is best to indent it three or four spaces from the left margin of text. Don't use quotation marks if it is indented. Most of us skip over or let our eyes dance past long quotes, so omit them unless they are absolutely necessary or shorten them so that you can run them into the regular nonindented prose narrative. Try identifying the author in the middle of the quote rather than always at the beginning or ending. Instead of "as the late E.B. White aptly put it..." try: "I suppose I have written the fact that a thousand times in the heat of composition, revised it out maybe five hundred times in the cool aftermath," wrote E.B. White. "To be batting only 500 late in the season, to fail half the

time to connect with this fat pitch, saddens me, for it seems a betrayal of [my mentor] who showed me how to swing at it and made the swinging seem worthwhile."

Please avoid "twinkie" words and other awkward or hollow terms. A twinkie word takes its meaning from junk food, which has little or no substance or nutrition--as in, no "there" there. My nominations for twinkie words are: needless to say, interesting, exciting, fascinating, meaningful, hopefully, key, insightful, great, there are, there is, there was, and so forth, and the like, and so on, latter, former and parameter. Nominations are still open and suggestions welcome! Please avoid his/her, and/or, and similar slashing. Avoid the use of the word feel when you mean think, believe, consider. Adding wise or ize to the end of words is frequently done by television announcers and disc jockeys but is unacceptable in scholarly writing. Thus gradewise, politicswise, policywise, percentagewise, bureaucratize, and prioritize are wrong--at least as far as I am concerned.

The word but is commonly misused when yet is more appropriate. But cancels what you have just said. Yet can mean nevertheless, too. "The coach said they were going to win, but the season is now over and they came in third." Fine. "The coach is not sure he can use Jimmy Jones as a starting pitcher this year, yet he believes Jones has the potential in a year or two."

To avoid sexism, try putting examples in the plural. Instead of "A president will use his veto power..." try "Presidents will use their veto power..."

Use Contractions. We do it all the time in conversation and it makes for natural, readable writing. Write as you talk. It is okay nowadays to use words such as don't and can't? Boyoboy, is it ever. At least with me. You may, however, want to check this with other professors.

Avoid overuse of the exclamation point -- once in each paper is enough. Frequent use cheapens its value. Avoid, more than I have, underlining or italicizing words--for the same reason. Phrases or words put in parentheses disrupt the flow, just as do hyphenated words or foreign phrases.

Use tables only when necessary. Ask yourself first whether a table or graph is really necessary. Often, of course, it is. Again, readers have a tendency--I know I do--to skip past it, viewing it as an interruption or merely as evidence for a point the author makes in the prose narrative. Hence, try summarizing the content of a table in prose or showing it in an appealing visual (as in USA Today) so that it can be grasped at a glance.

Write out all numbers from one to a hundred, save when using percentages. Thus, it is 44 percent, sixty-two bills approved, ten court decisions, and 2490 laws vetoed. Spell out a number if it begins a sentence. Spell out percent except in tables, when the symbol % is proper.

Be careful not to overuse the words clearly, obviously or plainly. If it is clear, just say it. Cliches and tired, lame, colorless words made even the freshest ideas seems stale. The joy of writing is getting it right, making it come alive and communicating fresh ideas in as lively and clear a way as possible. Thus please avoid using scenario, input, interface, effectuate, nuts and bolts, end results, serious crisis, political actors, awesome, bottom line, maximize, bottom line, utilize, personalize, and finalize. Please also impeach wordy introductory phrases such as it is interesting to note that, also important is the fact that, therefore it seems that, I would like at this juncture of my

paper..., it is now time for this writer to admit her own..., and the thesis here is that. Princeton political scientist Stanley Kelley, Jr. wryly adds a related caution: "In closing, do not say that further research is needed. It always is."

#### Last Word

A faculty member can be of most help when a student submits written outlines or drafts. Begin to write early enough to read your paper over before and after typing it. If possible, finish it ahead of schedule, put it aside, and reread and revise it after it has receded a bit from the center of your memory. A later, detached reading will doubtless be as revealing as it is rewarding. Gaps between what you wrote and what you meant become apparent. If time permits, and you have thick skin, ask a roommate, date or parent to read it too. We all learn from feedback, and from the positive as much as from the critical.

Students will profit from learning to write, edit and revise on a word-processing machine. It's not for everyone, yet eighty-five percent who have mastered it prefer it to typing or writing longhand, and editing and revising on word processors is a relatively easy task. Word processor programs now come with spelling correction and thesaurus features that can prove of immense value. Word processors have also helped some students to overcome writer's block. A reverse problem is also occurring; papers are probably getting longer and wordier precisely because it is easier to pour out more ideas and thoughts in early drafts on a word processor. This may be due in part to the chemistry between machine and writer, and in part because of the attitude that verbosity can be easily pruned out at a later time. Whatever the reason, word processors may be contributing to rambling prolixity. Keep this in mind if you use one.

Set high expectations for your research, yet not so high that you paralyze your ability to get it done. Perfectionists seldom finish their work. "Analysis-paralysis" can undermine an otherwise healthy undertaking. Although too much of a good thing can be wonderful in other contexts, too much time devoted to the research phase often leaves too little for sophisticated writing. An executive friend of mine has a helpful 60 percent rule. He has found he never can obtain all the information he would like before having to make operation or personnel decisions. He knows from experience that if he can obtain 60 percent or two-thirds of the available information, he can usually make the appropriate decision. He's an executive, not a writer, yet the rule is a useful one. Few scholars can generate all the data, all the interviews, and all the evidence they'd like to have before coming to their judgments. Executives or writers, however, who keep on waiting for near 100 percent assurance will probably still be waiting long after it has been worth the effort. Impose on your work some realistic deadlines and schedule cutoff points. Give it your best, yet be prepared to move to the next stage of the enterprise.

In the longer run, learning to conduct research and to write well are highly correlated with extensive reading of the best writers and the most carefully executed research projects. If you want to become an effective writer, seek out the best. Adopt some of the best writers as remote mentors. Regularly read your favorite writers, columnists and social scientists. (If you have no favorites, try reading, for style, Churchill, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., James MacGregor Burns, George Will, Clinton Rossiter, Barbara Tuchman, William Manchester, David Broder, Anthony Lewis, Calvin Trillin, Russell Baker, Saul

Bellow, or William Safire.) Read their earlier works. Discover why they are so good. How do they outline? How do they marshal evidence? What do they do to simplify, clarify, convince and persuade? Able writers, not surprisingly, are constantly reading and learning from able writers.

Ernest Hemingway said the way for a young writer to learn the craft was simply to go away and write. Yet Hemingway grew up on a steady diet of Mark Twain and other notable essayists. And after the First World War he went away in his early adulthood to Paris for free tutorial sessions with Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson. "The most reclusive of apprentices," writes Johns Hopkins University professor John Barth, "usually flashes his or her scribblings at somebody and tremulously . . . hangs upon a response, for unlike a diary, a poem or story seen by no eyes but its author's can scarcely be said to exist."

I will gladly read and comment upon your drafts if you get them to me on or before schedule. (Even drafts should be proofread before turning them in, thank you.) As your teacher I want this to be a rich learning experience. Here are the questions I will ask about your completed papers: Does the paper have character and integrity? Is it well researched and well written? Does the paper have something new and fresh to say? Is it convincing? Did you learn and display this learning? Did I learn?

The Turabian volume is especially useful for guidance on footnotes and punctuation. Strunk and White is mandatory reading for anyone who hasn't read it in the past twelve months. Flesch, Baker and Zinsser are three of my favorites.

1. Sheridan Baker, *The Practical Stylist* (Crowell, 1969).
2. Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, second edition (Little, Brown and Co., 1985).
3. Theodore Bernstein, *The Careful Writer*, (Anthemum, 1965).
4. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 13th edition (University of Chicago, 1982).
5. Rudolf Flesch, *The Art of Readable Writing* (Collier, 1949).
6. \_\_\_\_\_, How to Write, Speak and Think More effectively, (New American Library, 1946).
7. Wilson Follett, *Modern American Usage; A Guide*, ed. and completed by Jacques Barzun, et. al. (Hill and Wang, 1966).
8. Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* (Oxford University Press, 1973).
9. \_\_\_\_\_, *Writing With Power* (Oxford, 1981).
10. John Hersey, *The Writer's Craft* (Knopf, 1974) edited collection.
11. James Kilpatrick, *The Writer's Art* (Andres, McMeel, Parker, 1984).
12. Margaret Nicholson. *A Dictionary on American-English Usage*, Based on Fowler's "Modern English Usage" (Oxford University Press, 1957).
13. Gabriele L. Rico, *Writing the Natural Way: Using Right-Brain Techniques to Release Your Expressive Powers* (Tarcher, Inc., 1983).
14. William Strunk, and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 3rd edition (Macmillan, 1979).
15. Kate L. Turnabian, *Student's Guide for Writing College Papers*, 3rd edition (University of Chicago Press, 1976).
16. *Webster's Standard American Style Manual* (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1985).
17. William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (Harper and Row, 1980).
18. \_\_\_\_\_, Writing With a Word Processor (Harper, 1983).