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**ACADEMIC WRITING**  
**GUIDE**

**2010**

**A Step-by-Step Guide to  
Writing Academic Papers**

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# Why Academic Writing

Academic writing is, essentially, the writing you have to do for your university courses. Your instructors may have different names for academic writing assignments (essay, paper, research paper, term paper, argumentative paper/essay, analysis paper/essay, informative essay, position paper), but all of these assignments have the same goal and principles.

## **Goal of Academic Writing: Why do students have to write papers?**

The truth is that academic papers are a specially-designed torture instrument. They are preferred because instructors are not directly involved in the torture. Usually students torture themselves by waiting until the last minute to write their papers and by not knowing what they are doing.

That's why this guide was written. A paper is not supposed to be torture. Seriously. The thing about torture was a joke. An academic writing assignment is supposed to be your opportunity to explore something that interests you from your course. You have freedom to choose a topic, empty pages on which to express your own ideas, and an audience that is interested in reading what you think.

In an academic writing assignment, you will start by asking a good question, then find and analyze answers to it, and choose your own best answer(s) to discuss in your paper. Your paper will share your thoughts and findings and justify your answer with logic and evidence. So the goal of academic writing is not to show off everything that you know about your topic, but rather to show that you understand and can think critically about your topic (and this is what earns you a good grade).

Plus, you will develop skills in researching, evaluating information, organizing, arguing, responding to others' arguments, analyzing, and expressing yourself clearly in writing (in English too). These skills, by the way, are all valued by employers.

## **10 Principles of Academic Writing**

- **Clear Purpose.** The goal of your paper is to answer the question you posed as your topic. Your question gives you a purpose. The most common purposes in academic writing are to persuade, analyze/synthesize, and inform.
  - **Persuasive purpose** – In persuasive academic writing, the purpose is to get your readers to adopt your answer to the question. So you will choose one answer to your question, support your answer using reason and evidence, and try to change the readers' point of view about the topic. Persuasive writing assignments include argumentative and position papers.
  - **Analytical purpose** – In analytical academic writing, the purpose is to explain and evaluate possible answers to your question, choosing the best answer(s) based on your own criteria. Analytical assignments often investigate causes, examine effects, evaluate effectiveness, assess ways to solve problems, find the relationships between various ideas, or analyze other people's arguments. The "synthesis" part of the purpose comes in when you put together all the parts and come up with your own answer to the question. Examples of these assignments include analysis papers and critical analyses.
  - **Informative purpose** – In informative academic writing, the purpose is to explain possible answers to your question, giving the readers new information about your topic. This differs from an analytical topic in that you do not push your viewpoint on the readers, but rather try to enlarge the readers' view.

Some assignments will have a pre-determined purpose (see the examples above); for other assignments, you will have to choose a purpose when you choose a topic

(research paper, term paper). And some assignments may have two purposes. In all cases, the purpose will be clear at the beginning of your paper, and your paper must achieve its purpose in order to be successful.

- **Audience Engagement.** As with all writing, academic writing is directed to a specific audience in mind. Unless your instructor says otherwise, consider your audience to be fellow students with the same level of knowledge as yourself. As students in the field, they are interested in your topic, but perhaps not so interested in reading a paper. So you will have to engage them with your ideas and catch their interest with your writing style. Imagine that they are also skeptical, so that you must use the appropriate reasoning and evidence to convince them of your ideas.
- **Clear Point of View.** Academic writing, even that with an informative purpose, is not just a list of facts or summaries of sources. Although you will present other people's ideas and research, the goal of your paper is to show what you think about these things. Your paper will have and support your own original idea about the topic. This is called the thesis statement, and it is your answer to the question.
- **Single Focus.** Every paragraph (even every sentence) in your paper will support your thesis statement. There will be no unnecessary, irrelevant, unimportant, or contradictory information (Your paper will likely include contradictory or alternative points of view, but you will respond to and critique them to further strengthen your own point of view).
- **Logical Organization.** Academic writing follows a standard organizational pattern. For academic essays and papers, there is an introduction, body, and conclusion. Each paragraph logically leads to the next one.
  - The **introduction** catches the readers' attention, provides background information, and lets the reader know what to expect. It also has the thesis statement.
  - The **body paragraphs** support the thesis statement. Each body paragraph has one main point to support the thesis, which is named in a topic sentence. Each point is then supported in the paragraph with logical reasoning and evidence. Each sentence connects to the one before and after it. The readers do not have to work to find the connection between ideas.
  - The **conclusion** summarizes the paper's thesis and main points and shows the reader the significance of the paper's findings.
- **Strong Support.** Each body paragraph will have sufficient and relevant support for the topic sentence and thesis statement. This support will consist of facts, examples, description, personal experience, and expert opinions and quotations.
- **Clear and Complete Explanations.** This is very important! As the writer, you need to do all the work for the reader. The reader should not have to think hard to understand your ideas, logic, or organization. English readers expect everything to be done for them; your thoughts and thought processes should be clearly and completely explained.
- **Effective Use of Research.** Your paper should refer to a variety of current, high-quality, professional and academic sources. You will use your research to support your own ideas; therefore, it must be integrated into your writing and not presented separately. That means that source material will be introduced, analyzed, explained, and then cited. *Research and APA Style Guide 2010* covers this topic in depth.
- **Correct APA Style.** All academic papers should follow the guidelines of the American Psychological Association as found in *Research and APA Style Guide 2010*, regarding

in-text citations, the reference list, and format.

- **Writing Style.** Because this is your work, you should use your own words whenever possible. Do not try to write like a boring, overly formal scholarly article. Use the natural conversational style that you would use in the classroom. Your writing should be clear, concise, and easy to read. It is also very important that there are no grammar, spelling, punctuation, or vocabulary mistakes in academic writing. Errors convey to the reader that you do not care.

And finally, this rule will override all the principles:

- **ALWAYS FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS OF YOUR INSTRUCTOR.** Every instructor has a reason for giving you an assignment, and each instructor's requirements may differ. Follow your instructor's directions to get the most from an assignment.

## The Writing Process

You've just received your first academic writing assignment. What do you do? If you are a beginning writer, take it step by step. The following writing process has worked for millions of university students.

- **Choose a topic.**
- **Think (brainstorm).**
- **Research.**
- **Discover your thesis.**
- **Plan (outline).**
- **Write.**
- **Revise.**
- **Edit.**
- **Proofread.**

This guide will go through each of these steps with you. Beginning writers should follow this process. However, as you become more experienced, you may find that a different order works best for you. That is OK. You will also find that you have to do some steps more than once; for example, you may do research before you choose a topic, as you outline, and as you revise. You will certainly need to revise your paper several times before doing the final proofreading. And of course, you should never stop thinking.

## Choosing and Narrowing a Topic

Sometimes your instructor will give you a list of possible questions or themes, and other times you will have the freedom to choose your own topic. Sometimes the assignment will have a specific purpose (argumentative essay, analysis paper), and other times you will have the freedom to determine the purpose (research paper, term paper). This freedom can be both great and terrifying. If you have trouble choosing what to write about, start with a few ideas and choose the best one after several steps. You can also consult with your instructor about the best topic choice.

### How to Choose a Topic

Think about things related to the course that you are interested in. If there is nothing which interests you, look through the textbook, instructor-recommended resources, course slides, handouts, and current periodicals for possible ideas.

Then you need to narrow your ideas from subjects to topics. A subject is a broad concept: conflict management, abortion, the Cold War, capital budgeting, organizational culture, global warming, Toyota's management style, and EU agricultural subsidies are a few examples. These are not paper topics; these could all be the subjects of books.

Narrow a subject by looking at its smaller parts, or by choosing a specific problem, time period, or place to cover. You may need to do a little general research here if you do not know much about the subject. Also asking yourself "Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?" questions about the subject can help you limit the subject and determine your interests.

Doing this with abortion, for example, leads to topics like the reasons American women choose abortion rather than adoption, the psychological effects of previous abortions on women who become pregnant again, the consequences of Poland's ban on abortions on Polish women's lives, solutions to ending the practice of using abortion as a tool for gender selection in India, and whether or not the morning after pill should be sold to girls under 16. From here, choose a topic which fits the prescribed purpose of your paper (if there is one).

Specific topics like these are much more likely to fit the goal of academic writing and to fit the number of pages allowed in your paper.

### **Writing your Topic as a Question**

Once you have a specific topic for your paper, write your topic as the question which your paper will answer. Doing this is a great way to focus your paper and ensure that you meet the paper's purpose. In fact, your purpose will determine the type of question that you ask.

For example, an argumentative paper would probably have a yes/no question, such as "Should the U.S. have used the atomic bomb in World War II?" or "Should the morning after pill be sold to girls under 16?" or "Should animal organs be used for human transplants?" or "Which is a better strategy for the EU to follow to encourage change in Burma – engagement or isolation?" And then, of course, your paper would argue for your answer to the question.

An analytical paper most likely has a why/how question, such as "Why has childhood obesity been increasing in the United States?" or "How has Poland's ban on abortions affected women's lives?" or "How effective is the article in supporting the author's thesis?" or "How could the EU best reform its agricultural subsidies?" And then, of course, your paper will analyze the various answers, justifying your point of view to the audience.

An informative paper often has a what/why/how question, such as "What are the negative aspects of wind energy?" or "What are the causes of anorexia in teenage boys?" or "How can managers evaluate whether to invest money in a software upgrade project?" And then, of course, your paper will explain the various answers, giving the readers a new way of looking at the topic.

### **Characteristics of a Good Paper Topic**

- **Your question does not have a simple answer.** A good question has several alternative answers, or no accepted answer, or maybe an easy but unsatisfactory answer. In other words, there is no one "right" answer to your question. Your paper will give and justify your own best answer(s), and it will require research and critical thinking to do this.

- **Your question is worth answering.** The readers will care about the answer to your question. Your answer will have some significance.
- **Your paper will achieve its purpose.** Will your informative paper truly give your readers a new perspective? Will your readers accept your analysis in your analytical paper? Will your persuasive paper succeed in changing your readers' view? This is especially important to consider with persuasive paper topics. Avoid topics in which arguments are mostly based on (usually unchanging) personal beliefs, rather than reason and evidence. Whether abortion should be legalized is such a topic.
- **You are interested in the topic.** You will spend a lot of time with this topic, so choose something that will not bore or torture you.
- **The topic is the right size for the length of the paper.** Make sure you will not have too little or too much to say for the number of pages allowed.
- **There is enough (but not too much) information available in reliable sources.** If you find too much information, you will need to narrow your topic further; if you find too little information, you should widen your topic.
- **You have enough time to do what you need to do.** How much time do you have before the due date? You may have to limit the complexity of your topic if you have waited too long to start....

## Thinking (Brainstorming)

When you have a topic, start brainstorming. Write down all the possible answers to your question, and write down all the information, opinions, and questions you have about your topic. Brainstorming will help you see what you already know, what you think, what you think you know, and what else you need to find out about your topic. Writing things down also ensures that you will not forget your great ideas later. (Although this is a really short section, it is a very important step!)

## Doing Research

Doing research is covered on pp. 3-12 of the *Research and APA Style Guide*. Read them!

What you must remember is that "doing good research takes time." Do not expect to do research once and find everything that you need for your paper. Research is an on-going part of the writing process. You will start now, doing general research to learn more about your topic, but you will continue doing research throughout the writing process, as you discover a thesis, make a basic outline and then a detailed outline, write your paper, and revise your paper. Also, do not be afraid to change your topic a little (or a lot) if your research leads you in a different direction.

To make research more effective and less time-consuming, you can do three things:

- **Plan your research before your start,** using the research guide's tips (pp. 3-4).
- **Set up and follow a research schedule.** Give yourself a set amount of time to do your preliminary research. Start working on your paper, and go back to researching later when you know exactly what you need to find.
- **Immediately record source information.** Write down the address or bookmark the web page of every good source, even if you are not sure if you will use it...you may want to later.

## Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is the most important sentence in your paper. If someone asked you, "What does your paper say?" your answer would be your thesis statement. *Everything* you write will support this statement.

### **A good thesis statement usually includes**

- **Main idea of the paper.** ONE idea. The entire paper is based on this statement.
- **Your opinion or point of view.** The thesis statement is not a fact nor a question, but your view of the topic and what you want to say about it.
- **Purpose of the paper.** From the thesis, it should be clear what the paper will do.
- **Answer to the research question.** Ask yourself the question and then answer it with your thesis. Is it truly an answer? (if not, change the question or the answer!)
- **An element of surprise.** This means that the thesis is interesting, engaging, and perhaps not so expected.
- **Clarity.** It should be understandable after one reading and have no mistakes.

When should you write your thesis statement? It depends on when you know the answer to your research question. You may have an idea before you begin researching, you may discover it as you research, or you may not know it until you have almost finished writing your paper. It's useful to have a thesis idea at the beginning to help you focus, but it's also OK to change your thesis statement as you go through the writing process and learn and think more about your topic.

## Planning – Basic Outline

After you have a preliminary thesis statement (the answer to your research question), you can make a basic outline. You may be able to do this before doing any research, or you may need to read more about the topic first. You should, however, have a basic outline before you finish researching in order to ensure that your paper is focused on YOUR thoughts, not just your sources'.

A basic outline is your first attempt to organize the ideas of your paper. It will help you focus your research and consider the order of your ideas. To make one:

### **Choosing and ordering points**

1. Write your question and answer (preliminary thesis statement). Don't worry about writing a beautiful, memorable, strong thesis statement yet; just a simple answer to your question is enough to start the basic outline.
2. Write down all the reasons/arguments/effects/solutions (each type of paper is different) you have to answer your question and support your thesis. Do not look at your sources – use your own brain.
3. Look at your list and organize the ideas. Some may be combined as one larger idea; some may just repeat others in different words. You may decide to delete some too.
4. The remaining ideas will be the main points of your paper. These ideas are the sections of your paper.
5. Decide how to order these points. What order will you follow – chronological, cause

to effect, problem to solution, most important to least important, weakest to strongest? Which order will make your paper the strongest and most interesting?

6. Your paper should also cover alternative or opposing viewpoints to show that you have done complete research and considered all ideas. In this "con section," you will present and refute (argue against) other views of your topic.

**EXAMPLE BASIC OUTLINE before research (argumentative paper)**

Research Question: Are birth control pills safe for women?

**Thesis: Birth control pills are safe.**

**Sections:**

- I. Pills contain nothing harmful to health.**
- II. Pills bring health benefits to women.**
- III. Myths about birth control pills are wrong.**

**EXAMPLE BASIC OUTLINE before research (analysis paper)**

Research Question: Why has childhood obesity increased in the United States?

**Thesis: Childhood obesity has increased in the United States due to the unhealthy environment in which many American children are raised.**

**Sections:**

- I. Children eat more than in the past.**
- II. Children often do not eat healthy meals.**
- III. Children do not have as much physical activity as in the past.**
- IV. Parents model bad habits.**
- V. Others say that food companies, advertising are responsible.**

**Breaking sections into smaller parts**

7. Those are very basic outlines. It is possible to add more to them, especially after a little research. For each section, think of how much support you have. If you have a lot of supporting details (facts, examples, expert opinions) and explanations, then you will need more than one paragraph for that section. Some sections, especially your strongest, need more than one paragraph, while others may have only one.
8. Divide your sections into smaller points. Write the idea of each possible paragraph as a sentence so you can see how/whether it still answers the research question.

**EXAMPLE BASIC OUTLINE after more thinking and/or research (argumentative paper)**

Research Question: Are birth control pills safe for women?

**Thesis: Although there are some disadvantages, birth control pills are safe.**

**Sections:**

- I. Pills contain nothing harmful to health.**
- II. Pills bring some health benefits to women.**
- IV. Myths about birth control pills are wrong.**
  1. They do not cause ovarian cancer, but prevent it.
  2. They do not cause breast cancer.
  3. It is safe to use them when breastfeeding if done right.
- IV. There are some minor disadvantages, but not for healthy women.**

(4 sections, with a total of 6 paragraphs)

### **EXAMPLE BASIC OUTLINE after more thinking and/or research (analysis paper)**

Research Question: Why has childhood obesity increased in the United States?

**Thesis: Childhood obesity has increased in the United States due to the unhealthy environment in which many American children are raised.**

**Sections:**

**I. Children eat more than in the past (portion sizes have increased).**

**II. Children often do not eat healthy meals.**

1. Healthy food is hard to get (expensive + rare).
2. Schools provide unhealthy food

**III. Children do not have as much physical activity as in the past.**

1. Physical activity in schools has decreased.
2. Some children live in areas unsafe for outdoor activity.
3. Many children watch too much TV.

**IV. Parents model bad habits.**

1. Parents do not have time, money, or information to prepare healthy meals.

**V. Food companies and advertising may bear some responsibility, but parents should be able to help children resist them.**

(5 sections, with a total of 8 paragraphs)

## **Planning – Taking Notes**

An important part of the research and planning process is taking notes of the information and ideas that you find. As you read a source, marking and writing down the important things that you read will help you to remember them and understand them better. It may seem time-consuming, but writing the paper will go faster if you already have all your ideas marked and written down.

Start taking notes from or on your sources during or after your research period. It's easier to do this after you have a basic outline. Then you can organize the notes around the main points of your paper. Still, you will probably have more notes than you need for your paper because your original ideas and organization will change.

### **Where to take notes**

- **On photocopies or printed Internet documents**
  - Highlight or underline important information.
  - Take notes in the margin. Write down your comments/questions about the information. Note which main point from your paper the information supports (this will help you when you are organizing and writing your paper later).
- **On a computer file**
  - Create a separate Word document for each section of your paper.
  - Take notes of important information from paper sources. Don't forget to include the author's name.
  - Put text copied from web pages in quotation marks. Be very careful – this often leads to unintentional plagiarism. Don't forget to include the author's name and web address.
- **In a notebook**
  - Write the author's name at the top of the page.

- Take notes of important information. In the margin, note which main point from your paper the information supports.
- **On note cards**
  - Write one piece of information on each card.
  - Don't forget the author's name and other source information.
  - Put the main point from your paper at the top of the card so you can organize all the notes later.

### **What to take notes about**

- Background information about your topic which is necessary for your paper.
- Arguments and explanations which support or oppose your ideas.
- Facts, examples, expert opinions, and other supporting details.

### **How to take notes**

- **Summarize** – Write the main points of the source in your own words. Good for sources with ideas, but not many details, related to your topic.
- **Paraphrase** – retell important information in your own words; use quotation marks for directly copied words. Good for details which will support/oppose you.
- **Quote** – copy the exact words from the source. Good for strong, exciting passages.
- **Comment** – write any questions or ideas you think of when you are reading sources.

## **Planning – Detailed Outline**

After going through your sources and taking notes, you can create a detailed outline by adding details to your basic outline as well as adding any new points that you found. A detailed outline plans each body paragraph of your paper for you, from main point to supporting points to supporting details.

Many students would prefer to skip this part of the writing process and just start writing their papers, since it takes a lot of time, thinking, and re-thinking to develop a good outline. Well, if you are an advanced academic writer, go ahead. Writers with a lot of experience know what works best for them. However, if you are still learning how to write academic papers, you should make a detailed outline for several reasons:

- You will learn whether you have enough support for your thesis statement.
- You will have a map to follow when writing your paper.
- You will avoid major organizational problems in your paper if you organize your ideas before you write.
- You will have a chance to think more about your topic, refining your ideas.
- Some instructors will require draft outlines before your paper is due, or even final outlines with your paper, so you need to know how to write outlines.

After you have mastered the academic writing process, then you can decide whether or when to write a detailed outline. Here are the steps to follow when making your outline:

1. First, make changes to your basic outline's thesis and main points until you are satisfied with your ideas and the order of your sections.
2. Then go through your notes and find supporting points for each section of your outline.

3. Organize the supporting points in each section.
4. Go through your notes and add supporting details (facts, examples, expert opinion, descriptions, quotes, etc.) to each point. Be thorough so that the reader of your outline can understand how the detail supports the point.
  - o Always include the source of any research that you put in your outline (Author, year). If you use the source's exact words in your outline, use quotation marks.
5. Now, based on the amount of supporting points and details in each section, you can determine how many paragraphs you will need.
6. Divide your outline into paragraphs, each with a main point written in sentence form (preliminary topic sentence) and list of supporting points and details.

**EXAMPLE DETAILED OUTLINE - 3 paragraphs (argumentative paper)**

**Thesis: Although there are some disadvantages, birth control pills are safe.**

**Section/Paragraph #1 Pills contain nothing harmful to women's health.**

1. Pills contain hormones produced by women's bodies.
  - Combination (estrogen+progestin) and progestin only (Planned Parenthood, 2003)
  - Estrogen – activates uterus, thickens walls. Progesterone – helps uterus accept egg (National Cancer Institute, 2003)
2. Pills give women the right amount of hormones so they can't get pregnant
  - Estrogen pill stops egg production, progestin pill will "thicken cervical mucus" so no fertilization (Planned Parenthood, 2003, Basics section, para. 2)
  - Hormones "fool the body into acting as if it's pregnant" (Alice, 1998)

**Section/Paragraph #2 Taking birth control pills has benefits for women's health.**

1. Avoid unwanted pregnancy
2. Improve skin
  - less acne, less "excess" hair (Greenfield, 2004a)
3. Other benefits are fewer ovarian cysts, and less likelihood of anemia (Greenfield, 2004a)
4. Less painful menstruation
  - not so many cramps, lighter flow (Planned Parenthood, 2003)
5. Women can enjoy life

**Section III: Myths about birth control pills are wrong.**

**Paragraph #3 Birth control pills do not cause ovarian cancer.**

1. On the contrary, birth control pills help fight against cancer.
  - Progestin pill caused "increased cell turnover in the ovarian epithelium, indicating that progestin might lower ovarian cancer risk by activating cancer-preventative molecular pathways in the ovary – Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center ("Oral contraceptives," 2002). More cell turnover means pre-cancerous cells are destroyed earlier and faster.
  - Women who took pills with more progestin had lower risk of ovarian cancer than women on pills with more estrogen, but all women taking the pill had lower risk of ovarian cancer than other women ("Oral contraceptives," 2002)
2. Some doctors even advise women to take the pill for five years because of its benefits in preventing ovarian cancer (Greenfield, 2004b)
3. The longer women use pill, more protection they have against ovarian cancer.
  - Women who used pill for 1 year had 10-12% less chance of ovarian cancer.
  - Women who use it for 5 years decrease risk of ovarian cancer by 50%. – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Harvard Medical School (National Cancer Institute, 2003)
4. Pill can especially help women with ovarian cancer in family history.

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## **EXAMPLE DETAILED OUTLINE (informative paper)**

**Thesis:** Golden Retrievers are valuable as support animals.

### **Section I: Retrievers are intelligent and thus trainable.**

#### **Body Paragraph 1: Golden Retrievers are one of the most intelligent and trainable dog breeds.**

1. Hunting dogs in 19th century (Benji, 1992)
2. Very intelligent dogs
  - “In several current studies, Golden Retrievers have consistently placed in the top five breeds when tested for intelligence” (Maximillian, 2003, p. 1238).
  - First in a survey of 14 intelligence + training categories. Retrievers, German Shepherds, and Labrador Retrievers all usually at top (Huff, 2008).
3. Better behavior than other intelligent dogs
  - More trainable than G. shepherds and Labs (Huff, 2008)
  - Only breed with 100% passing rate at obedience schools (“The semi-annual study,” 2008).
4. Intelligence and trainability make them successful helping dogs in a variety of tasks.

### **Section II: Retrievers are successful in many different programs.**

#### **BP # 2: Retrievers are successful seeing-eye dogs.**

1. Retrievers can remember and follow commands.
  - “their ability to effectively assimilate large numbers of training cues and to effectively recall that information makes them ideal candidates for seeing-eye purposes” (Spot, 2006a, p. 14).
  - Dogs must remember all commands and locations, such as busy intersections, crowded stores, bus stops, etc.
  - only takes average of 3 trips for Retrievers to learn everything (Spot, 2006a)
2. Retrievers’ good behavior makes them less likely to react aggressively in stress (Tin, 2008), which is necessary for seeing-eye dogs who may encounter stressful situations.

#### **BP #3: Retrievers’ sense of smell makes them invaluable as drug-sniffing dogs.**

1. Retrievers have a great sense of smell.
  - Can distinguish more than 150 smells (Benji, 1992)
2. Disposition and trainability make them good sniffing dogs.
  - Used at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport to find drugs since 1978. Now used at more than 30 airports and secondary schools in Canada (Save the Pets, n.d.).
  - US, Japan, Peru , and others are starting to do this too (numerous articles).

#### **BP #4: Retrievers have success in criminal rehabilitation.**

1. Programs to raise seeing-eye puppies
  - Usually raised by a family for a year before training (Fido & Rover, 2008)
2. Dr. Dan Canine’s prison program (prisoners raise puppies) – a success
  - started in 1992, prisoners care for puppies from 8 weeks to 1 year.
  - released prisoners have a drop in re-offending rates compared to released prisoners convicted of similar crimes at same time
  - Prisoners gain maturity. Canine says, “the emotional commitment necessary to raise a puppy, love it, then give it away seems to help inmates cope more ably with post-prison life” (Shaggy, 2005, Effect on Prisoner section, para. 12).
3. So prisoners and Retrievers gain skills and maturity.

#### **BP #5: Retrievers are successful in therapy programs for the elderly and disabled.**

1. Companionship programs for elderly, physiotherapy for disabled with Golden Retrievers were started due to Canine’s program (Bauwau, 2009).
2. Pets benefit old or disabled – they gain hope.
  - Dr. Sandy: “The patients report feelings of greater optimism about their disability, and their hospital stays are shorter than estimated” (Zelda, 2007, para. 2).
3. Retrievers = best breed for this
  - Other dogs, smaller or mixed, have more discipline problems (Bauwau, 2009).
4. Retrievers’ intelligence and trainability fit these programs perfectly, and they give caregivers a sense of responsibility and hope.

## Writing the First Draft

There are many ways to write the first draft of your paper. The key is to be prepared before you start – have a purpose, a thesis, enough research, and a plan (some sort of outline). And then, just write.

You could start at the beginning and write until the end. Or you could write paragraphs separately, in any order you like. Many writers do the body paragraphs first and save the introduction and conclusion for the end.

### **Advice for the first draft**

- Read about the introduction, body, and conclusion in this guide before you start.
- Know how to use source material (see *Research and APA Style Guide*, pp. 13-26) before you start.
- Then just write! Do not worry about perfection yet. Do not worry about grammar.
- Keep going! If you are missing information, mark the spot and then do more research later to fill in the gap.
- Be aware of plagiarism. Write down the source whenever you use anything from a source.
- Do not wait until the last minute! You will need time to revise, edit, and proofread.

## The Introduction

The introduction of an academic paper is usually 1-2 paragraphs long – longer for longer papers with more background information. In general, your introduction should do the following things:

### **Gain the immediate attention of the audience**

- Here are some (but not all) of the ways to start an interesting and relevant introduction:
  - Short anecdote that leads to your topic
  - Surprising statement/fact that relates to your topic
  - Quotation from a famous person or expert that introduces your topic
  - Brief and INTERESTING historical review of your topic
  - Statement which stresses the importance of your topic
  - Contradiction – someone else’s opinion (opposite of yours) about your topic
- Do NOT be boring! Use the first sentence (often called the “hook sentence”) to hook the readers’ interest.
- Do NOT be too general! Immediately dive into your specific topic; don’t waste space with a general introduction of the entire subject area. Remember that your audience is familiar with the subject area. And never start with the origins of humankind: “~~Since the beginning of history~~”!
- Do NOT begin with your thesis idea! Use the introduction to build up to your thesis statement, so it comes with a little tension.

### **Provide any necessary background information or definition of any terms.**

- Give only the history, facts, or definitions that readers will need to understand your topic and thesis. Keep in mind what the audience already knows.

- Use facts/statistics to show the problem if necessary.
- Avoid dictionary and encyclopedia definitions if possible and explain in your own words what the important concepts in your paper mean.
- Use source information to provide background information, but not to answer the research question or give your opinion.
- Make sure that the readers now know enough to follow your paper, but not too much that they have lost the focus of your paper.

### **Briefly introduce the main points (sections) of the paper**

- In academic writing, the writer lets the reader know what to expect. Provide a brief overview of your paper's main points.
- Do NOT support or try to prove these points. Do not go into depth.
- Do NOT just write a one-sentence list of your points. You can't summarize a great idea in one word.

### **Have a thesis statement (often the last sentence)**

- This guide has covered the thesis statement already, but because it's the most important sentence of your paper, we'll go over it again. In the thesis,
  - Answer the research question in a clear, straightforward statement.
  - Make sure the purpose and point of view of your paper are clear.
  - Do NOT write a long, wordy, confusing thesis statement (especially do not try to include all of your main points).
  - Do NOT announce your intentions. Avoid "This paper will prove..." or "I'm going to write about..." Don't tell the audience what you are going to do; just do it.

## **Body Paragraphs**

Body paragraphs can be written in many ways, depending on your purpose. However, each paragraph should have ONE point which supports the thesis statement. Most body paragraphs will have:

### **Topic Sentence**

- Usually, but not always, the first sentence of the paragraph. If it's not the first sentence, it should be very clear which sentence is the topic sentence.
- It introduces the paragraph's main idea, makes your point about this idea, and relates to the thesis statement.
- The topic sentence connects to the previous paragraph.
- The topic sentence is NOT a fact. It has a point of view.
- The topic sentence is NOT something from a source. It is your idea.
- Every sentence in the paragraph will support this topic sentence.

### **Explanation of topic sentence**

- The sentence(s) after the topic sentence often further describe the main idea of the paragraph.

### **Support**

The topic sentence is supported by supporting points, details, and explanations, often presented in sandwiches (review pp. 23-25 in *Research and APA Style Guide* about

sandwiching). A body paragraph could have one to several sandwiches, depending on how long and in-depth the detail is.

- Supporting points are the ideas that support the main point of the paragraph. These can be written in your own words and then supported by details.
- Specific details are very important to show the readers that your ideas are valid.
  - When using facts, examples, studies, experts' opinions, etc. be as specific as possible. Use the expert's names and professions. Use names, places, dates and other specific information about examples. Include numbers and dates. For scientific studies, explain a little about how the study was done. Use vivid descriptions to make the details clear to the readers.
  - Make sure the details are relevant to your point. A common mistake is including misunderstood source information that does not actually support the student's point.
  - Remember that one example does not prove something. Use more than one example or source in a paragraph.
  - Check with your instructor if you can also include your own personal experience as a detail.
- Clear and complete explanations are very important because the readers are expecting you to explain everything to them. The readers do not expect to have to think too hard. So explain why/how the details support the topic sentence, and thus the thesis.
  - Your explanation should not just repeat the source material, but rather interpret and analyze it.
  - Your explanation should not simply repeat your thesis or topic sentence, but rather explain how the source material supports those ideas.
- Do NOT rely on sources too much. It's YOUR paragraph, so it should contain your ideas about the topic as well. Look at the example papers in this guide and the *Research and APA Style Guide* to see how the writers balance source material and their own ideas about it in each body paragraph.
- Make sure all your support has a logical order and good connections.

### **Concluding sentence**

- The last sentence should review the body paragraph, emphasize the point and/or thesis again, or prepare the reader for the next body paragraph.
- Do NOT end the paragraph with a source citation. End with your own idea.

A final, important guideline about body paragraphs:

### **No long body paragraphs!**

It is difficult for readers to stay focused on long blocks of text.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page is generally as long as a paragraph should be. If your paragraph is much longer, find a logical way to divide it into two body paragraphs.

## **The Conclusion**

The conclusion may be the shortest paragraph, but it's also the most important because this is what the reader will remember. A conclusion usually does these things:

### **Connect to the last sentence of the previous paragraph**

- Use an advanced style. *In conclusion, to summarize, at the end* are rather boring and

typical although they will work. Try to be more sophisticated by repeating or connecting ideas in another way.

### **Summarize the findings of your paper**

- Remind the readers of the paper's main ideas and wrap up your argument.
  - Restate the thesis in different words/phrases.
  - Briefly summarize the main points of your paper. Again, say these in a different way, so readers are not bored by repetition of the same sentences and phrases.
  - Use your own thoughts, not your sources'. The place for source support was in the body paragraphs, not the conclusion.
  - Do NOT write any new information, points, or support in the conclusion.

### **Show the significance of your findings**

- Explain why your paper is important – What does it mean? What does it solve? What does it say about your topic? What does it show about the future of your topic? What should the readers take away from your paper?

### **End with a strong, memorable concluding statement(s)**

- Also known as the "Wow statement," the last sentence(s) of your paper should make your readers say, "Wow! I'm glad I read this paper." There are several ways to do this:
  - End with the significance of your paper, as described above.
  - Relate your conclusion to the hook sentence(s) from your introduction. This can be a very effective way of wrapping up your paper.
  - End with an idea for the reader to think about – a prediction or recommendation perhaps.
- Do NOT ask a question that leaves the reader uncertain. The purpose of academic writing is not to confuse the reader, but to enlighten the reader.
- Do NOT be too general. Stay focused on your specific topic.
- DO NOT be too shocking, unbelievable, sweet, or obvious.

## **Connection between Ideas**

Because academic papers should have a clear organizational structure, throughout your paper, you need to show the readers how your ideas are connected between paragraphs and between sentences. Often this happens naturally as you write; however, sometimes you will need to make the connection clearer to the reader. Here are 3 ways to do this:

### **Pronouns (he/she/they/this/that/these/those)**

- Use a pronoun to refer to a noun from the previous sentence.  
*Teachers should **not put grades on essays**. **This** would eliminate students' tears.  
**Angela Rizzi** argues that grades do not motivate students. **She** thinks teachers should only write comments, but not grades.*

### **Repeated words/ideas**

- Use the same word or a synonym in the next sentence.  
***The policy** on **changing classes** is too strict. According to **the policy**, a student must get the signatures of 7 different people before **moving to another class**.*

### **Transition words**

- These words clearly state the relationship between two sentences. Here are some transitions; if you are not sure what a word means, look it up in a dictionary.
  - to start – **first, first of all, to begin with**
  - to add another idea – **in addition, furthermore, also, moreover, what's more**
  - to add a more important idea – **more importantly, what's worse, what's more**
  - to add your last idea – **finally, most of all, most importantly**
  - to contrast with the previous idea – **however, nevertheless, on the other hand**
  - to show the result of the previous idea – **therefore, thus, consequently, as a result**
  - to emphasize an idea – **in fact, in particular**
  - to give an example of the previous idea – **for instance, for example, to illustrate**
  - to show a time relationship between ideas – **first, second, then, next, finally**
- While they are very helpful, there are two big problems with using these words:
  - Students over-use them. Too many transition words at the beginning of sentences can be annoying. Do NOT use a lot of transition words. One or two in a paragraph is enough.
  - Students often use them incorrectly. Please see the box below about proper use of these words.

**USING TRANSITIONS**

**Sentence. Transition, sentence. OR Sentence; transition, sentence.**

**Transitions usually connect two sentences. Therefore, they will usually appear at the beginning of a complete sentence – after a period or semi-colon.**

<i>The law does not stop teenagers from drinking therefore it is ineffective.</i>	WRONG
<i>The law does not stop teenagers from drinking, therefore it is ineffective.</i>	WRONG
<i>The law does not stop teenagers from drinking; therefore, it is ineffective.</i>	RIGHT!
<i>The law does not stop teenagers from drinking. Therefore, it is ineffective.</i>	RIGHT!

**Transitions must also be followed by a comma and a complete sentence.**

<i>Many organizations use English, for example, the UN, the EU, and NATO.</i>	WRONG
<i>Many organizations use English. For example, the UN, the EU, and NATO.</i>	WRONG
<i>Many organizations use English. For example, it is one of the official languages of the UN, the EU, and NATO.</i>	RIGHT

## Revising

Your first draft is complete, but your paper is far from finished. The next step is to revise your paper – strengthen the content. Start this at least a week before your paper is due. In fact, you don't need to wait until you have a complete first draft to start revising. You can revise individual paragraphs as you finish them as well.

### **Know what to fix**

Before you can revise, you need to know what to fix. How can you find that out?

- **Get feedback.** In some courses, you and your classmates will be asked to exchange papers to read and comment on them in class or online. If not, ask a friend to read it. You can also ask your instructor to look at parts of your paper (most instructors are happy to help if you have started your paper early. They may not be willing if you ask for advice at the last-minute). Listen to the advice of your reviewers, but remember that in the end, your paper is your responsibility.

- **Refer to the paper requirements or grading criteria or look at the checklist in this guide.** Read your paper and look at the requirements or checklist at the same time. Check off what you have, and mark what you need to fix.
- **Outline.** Make an outline of your first draft by listing the main point of each topic sentence. This will show you whether your ideas are clearly organized and whether they focus on answering the research question (the thesis).
- **Read your paper for focus.** Read every sentence of your paper. After each, ask yourself, "Does this support the thesis statement?" If it doesn't, cross it out or change it. [Or consider changing your thesis.]
- **Read each body paragraph for support.** Read a body paragraph, and then read its topic sentence again. Did the paragraph support that sentence enough? Were there enough specific details – facts, examples, descriptions, expert opinions?
- **Re-read your paper as the audience.** Imagine that you are seeing your paper for the first time (this is often hard to do, which is why it's good to have another person read your paper). As you read, write down any comments or questions your audience might have. Make sure that the tone fits the audience – will the audience be offended or attracted by your writing?

### **Fix it**

Once you know what to fix, you must do it. Be daring. You will not have a good paper if you are afraid to change things. It may be easier to completely re-type your paper while just looking at your first draft. How should you change your paper?

- **Erase** words, sentences or paragraphs; eliminate all unnecessary or irrelevant ideas.
- **Add** words, sentences or paragraphs; add new points, details, or explanations.
- **Reorganize** words, sentences or paragraphs; put everything in a logical order.
- **Re-write** words, sentences or paragraphs; keep your ideas but present them better.

### **Revise it again**

If there is time (make time!), revise your second draft. And keep revising. Good writers actually tend to revise more rather than less as they gain more writing experience.

## **Editing**

When you are happy with your paper's content, it's time to edit. Try to do this in the week before your paper is due.

Editing will make your writing more precise and easier to understand (not necessarily shorter, but clearer). When editing, you examine every sentence and ask yourself if has a purpose and if it's complete, clear, and concise in English. A grammar resource and an English-English dictionary are both helpful editing tools.

Experiment with the following strategies until you find what works best for you.

### **Read your paper out loud slowly (or ask someone to read it to you).**

You will hear mistakes, wordiness, repetition, and lack of clarity, which you can correct. If you don't know how to correct something, start looking through those grammar books.

### **Use the spell check and grammar check functions in Microsoft Word.**

They will find some things, but not everything. This should not be your only strategy.

## **Editing strategies for specific problems**

- **Connection between ideas**
  - Read the beginning and end of every paragraph to make sure they flow together.
  - Go through the paper sentence by sentence and find connections between them.
  - If the ideas don't connect, add a transition, pronoun, repeated word, synonym, or another sentence.
- **Wordiness**
  - Find all the very long sentences (25 words or more). Can they be rewritten more clearly and concisely?
  - Read each sentence. After each one, ask, "Is it necessary to the paragraph? Does it add something new? Could it be eliminated completely or partly? Could it be combined?"
  - Read each sentence word by word. Is every word necessary? Could some be eliminated or re-written in a shorter, clearer way? Could passive verbs be rewritten as active ones?
- **Repetition, Lack of variety**
  - Read each sentence and ask, "What is the purpose of this sentence?" Does it introduce a new idea? Does it support or explain the previous idea? OR does it just repeat it?
  - Read the first 5 words of each sentence to find sentences starting in the same way (such as with a transition word). Change some so your sentences have variety.
  - Look at the length of every sentence. There should be a variety of short and long sentences. Make sentences shorter by dividing them or longer by combining.
  - Find words which are repeated a lot. Use a thesaurus to find other words to use.
- **Sentence structure**
  - Go through the essay sentence by sentence. Label the subject(s) and the verb(s) in every sentence. Make sure each sentence has a subject and verb. Make sure there are not too many subject-verb combinations in each sentence and that word order is Subject+Verb+Object. Fix fragments, run-ons, and word order.
- **Word choice**
  - Find all the long words. Could some be replaced with shorter, clearer words?
- **Clarity, Non-English structure**
  - Read your paper without using a lot of effort – you're just reading because you are interested in the topic. If you have to read something twice, it's not clear.
  - Read your paper and translate it into your native language in your head. If it's really easy to translate, then maybe the writing is not following English structure and style.
  - Say your ideas out loud in English. Write exactly what you said. You probably speak more clearly than you write.

## **Proofreading**

When you think your paper is ready to turn it, it's time to proofread (check for mistakes). If you don't proofread, your paper may be full of careless errors, which shows the audience that you were too lazy, rushed, or uncaring to fix your paper. To proofread:

- Do not look at your paper for 24 hours (this requires time management skills!)
- Print your paper – you'll see mistakes that you might not see on a computer screen.

- Start with the last sentence of your paper and read your paper sentence by sentence, going backwards. (This will help you focus on grammar, not content).
- Cover all the other lines with another piece of paper.
- Point your pen at each word.
- Think about the grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, meaning... of every word.
- If you are unsure about anything, use a dictionary or grammar book. If you are still unsure, mark the line and ask someone for help.
- Fix any mistakes that you found.
- Print your paper and proofread it again!

It is a long, slow, unpleasant experience at first. However, the more you proofread, the easier it gets, the better your English gets, and the higher your grades get too.

## Paper Checklist

### **Clear Objective, Thesis, and Focus**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis is clear<br><input type="checkbox"/> Thesis has point of view<br><input type="checkbox"/> Thesis answers research question<br><input type="checkbox"/> Thesis is surprising | <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis has no errors<br><input type="checkbox"/> Purpose of paper is clear<br><input type="checkbox"/> Every paragraph relates to thesis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Every paragraph supports thesis |
|---|---|

### **Organization/Cohesion**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear introduction, body, conclusion<br><input type="checkbox"/> Connections between paragraphs | <input type="checkbox"/> Clear, logical order of paragraphs<br><input type="checkbox"/> All sentences connect to each other |
|--|---|

### **Introduction**

- 
- Hook sentence catches attention
- 
- 
- No too general statements
- 
- 
- Enough background info about topic
- 
- 
- Section ideas explained in introduction
- 
- 
- Thesis statement is easy to find

### **Conclusion**

- 
- Connects to last body paragraph
- 
- 
- Summarizes thesis and main points
- 
- 
- No new or superfluous information
- 
- 
- Shows importance of topic
- 
- 
- Effective closing statement ("wow")

### **Body**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Each paragraph has only one point<br><input type="checkbox"/> Logical, convincing points support thesis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Topic sentences in every paragraph<br><input type="checkbox"/> Topic sentences relate to thesis<br><input type="checkbox"/> Topic sentences have point of view<br><input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient supp. points in each para.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Supporting points are in logical order<br><input type="checkbox"/> Source information is introduced<br><input type="checkbox"/> Use of specific details as support<br><input type="checkbox"/> Source information is integrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Support is explained/analyzed<br><input type="checkbox"/> Balanced source info and own ideas<br><input type="checkbox"/> Each paragraph explains "why/how"<br><input type="checkbox"/> Specific explanations<br><input type="checkbox"/> No repetition of ideas<br><input type="checkbox"/> No irrelevant ideas or information<br><input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate concluding sentences<br><input type="checkbox"/> Each para. proves its topic sentence<br><input type="checkbox"/> Alternative/opposing views included, minimized |
|---|--|

## Example Paper

Birth Control Pills:  
A Safe Choice for Women

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IEP 060 – Academic Writing Skills

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Research Paper

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Janka (24) bought a pregnancy test and now is waiting for the results, which makes her nervous. One second may change her whole life, and she could become the mother of an unwanted child. To avoid this stressful situation, it was only necessary to have used a 43-year-old method of birth control – the birth control pill – once a day. It has been taken by approximately 80% of American women today (Okie, 2002), and its effectiveness is over 99% if used correctly (Planned Parenthood, 2003). However, some women still fear that taking the birth control pill could harm their health. In fact, the pill's composition provides advantages to women, including prevention of ovarian cancer. There is also no connection between the pill and breast cancer, and its usage is possible while breastfeeding too. Although there are a few disadvantages to its use, the birth control pill is safe for women.

Birth control pills contain nothing harmful to women's health. This oral contraception is divided into two groups. First are combination pills including estrogen and progestin (synthetic progesterone), and second are progestin-only-pills. Women's ovaries produce both estrogen and progesterone (Planned Parenthood, 2003). The pill thus contains the same hormones that women's bodies already have. According to the National Cancer Institute (2003), estrogen is a hormone which makes the uterus more active when a women's body becomes sexually mature. It also makes the endometrium (the uterus walls) thicker at the beginning of the menstrual cycle. Then, the endometrium is ready to accept a fertilized egg with the help of progesterone, which is made in the second part of the menstrual cycle. The pill, however, gives women the right amount of these hormones so that they cannot get pregnant. Planned Parenthood (2003) explained that estrogen in combination pills stops the ovaries from producing eggs, while progestin-only pills "thicken cervical mucus" to stop the fertilization of eggs (Basics section, para. 2). These supplemental hormones "fool the body into acting as if it's pregnant" (Alice! Health Promotion Program, 1998). They do not damage the body; they just make it act in a different way. So, the contents of this oral contraceptive

may be seen as safe.

Another point is that taking the birth control pill has benefits for females' health. Not just young 18-year-old girls, but also 30-year-old women use the pill to avoid unwanted pregnancies. In addition, the pill can improve the condition of their skin. As Dr. Marjorie Greenfield (2004a), an Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, reported, compared with non-pill users, users of the birth control pill have fewer problems with acne and "excess" hair on the face and body. She even pointed out that pill users are less likely to have ovarian cysts and anemia. So the hormones in the pill provide a variety of benefits beyond contraception. Moreover, women often have painful menstruation at the beginning of their cycles, and the birth control pill can be a solution. Planned Parenthood (2003) noted that women have lighter menstruations and do not suffer from such terrible stomach cramps when they use the pill. That means that the pill helps girls and women enjoy their lives, go out with friends, or exercise instead of staying in bed because of pain. In summary, these examples show that the birth control pill can have a beneficial influence on women's health and lives.

Despite these advantages of using the contraceptive pill, there is a myth that its use causes ovarian cancer. However, research shows that the deaths of females from this cancer are not connected with the birth control pill at all; on the contrary, the pill is successful in fighting against it. The effect of the birth control pill on the ovary is interesting. Scientists from the Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center found that progestin from the pill led to "increased cell turnover in the ovarian epithelium, indicating that progestin might lower ovarian cancer risk by activating cancer-preventative molecular pathways in the ovary" (as cited in "Oral contraceptives," 2002). With higher cell turnover in the ovary, cells that may become cancerous are destroyed earlier and faster, due to the effects of progestin from the birth control pill. In fact, another study at Duke showed that women who took a pill with more progestin had a lower risk of ovarian cancer than women who took a pill with more

estrogen; however, all women who took any birth control pill had a lower risk of ovarian cancer than other women (as cited in “Oral contraceptives,” 2002). So the pill, especially the progestine-only one, has been effective in fighting against ovarian cancer. According to Dr. Greenfield (2004a), the effectiveness of the pill is so great that some doctors now advise women to take the pill for five years just because of its benefits in preventing ovarian cancer. From this, it seems that the birth control pill neither increases the danger of cancer of the ovaries nor damages their functioning, so the myth should be forgotten. In actuality, the longer women use this form of birth control, the bigger the protection against ovarian cancer they have. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Harvard Medical School studies found that women who used the pill for one year had a 10-12% less chance of getting ovarian cancer, while women decrease the risk of getting the cancer by 50% if they use the pill for no less than five years. This protection lasts even after women stop using the pill (as cited in National Cancer Institute, 2003). Thus, continued use of the pill is not a bad decision because it can help to prevent cancer for a long time in the future. So, especially women whose mothers or grandmothers had ovarian cancer are protecting themselves in the right way by taking the birth control pill.

Another claim is that the birth control pill may cause breast cancer, which is a blunder. The truth is that not only 20- to 30-year-old women, but also women in their 40s, 50s and 60s do not have a higher chance of getting breast cancer just because they used oral contraceptives. This was shown by a study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* called the Women's Contraceptive and Reproductive Experience study. Of 9,200 women between 35 and 64, half of whom had had a breast cancer diagnosis, women who had used the pill did not have increased breast cancer risk (as cited in National Cancer Institute, 2003). So, especially older women, who are at greater risk of getting breast cancer because of their age, do not have to be afraid that taking the pill could lead to breast cancer. There is also another

significant fact about women with a history of breast cancer in their families. The same Women's Contraceptive and Reproductive Experience study showed that women with breast cancer in their families did not have a higher risk of cancer if they took the pill (as cited in Okie, 2002). So, women who had breast cancer in the past are free to use the pill as well as healthy women. They could also use the pill for two, five, or ten years without worrying because, as Okie (2002) pointed out, the study indicated no higher risk of breast cancer due to time of usage, or even race or weight. Almost all women can safely use the pill for weeks, months or years. In conclusion, there is no clear connection between breast cancer and using the birth control pill.

It is also remarkable that it is possible to use the pill during lactation. Women breastfeeding their infants also need to use birth control to avoid pregnancies, and hormonal oral contraceptives, especially the progestin-only-pill, are one of the safe options. According to the web site of well-known pediatrician Dr. William Sears (n.d.), in comparison with the combination pill, the progestin-only pill is better to use because it does not contain estrogen, which could reduce the amount of mother's milk. But his most important point is that the pill does not affect the child's health at all. This means that women do not have to stop either taking the pill or breastfeeding their babies. Furthermore, the combination oral contraceptive is also approved for use by breastfeeding women. Dr. Greenfield (2004b) confirmed that the combination pill may be used when the milk is well produced, which is six months after birth. When the mother's body is accustomed to breastfeeding, therefore, it is possible and safe to use both kinds of oral contraceptive without worrying about the baby or mother's health. In short, the birth control pill could be used during lactation with no danger to the child.

Although the use of oral contraception has all these benefits, there are also a few disadvantages. For instance, Planned Parenthood (2003) reported that women taking the pill for the first time may have terrible headaches and feel sick. They may experience bleeding

during the month as well. These are typical side effects of oral contraceptives, but they usually disappear in three months. It seems that the additional progestin and estrogen cause those changes, but as women's bodies adjust, the bad effects soon vanish. Plus, if the effects do not disappear, a doctor can help women to choose another kind of birth control pill. However, Okie (2002) named one group in danger while taking birth control pills: smokers over 35. This combination is risky because these women have a higher risk of heart attacks. Here it is important to note that smoking is the bad habit which endangers women, not the pill. In general, oral contraceptives benefit women's health and well-being much more than they hurt.

Using the birth control pill is a safe solution to avoiding unwanted pregnancies. It contains hormones which do not confuse the systems of women's bodies and bring health benefits into their lives. The pill has been successful in the prevention of ovarian cancer; moreover, there is little danger connected with breast cancer. Taking the birth control pill is also safe for women breastfeeding their babies. On the other hand, there could be a few minor negative side effects and there are risk groups who should be careful. Oral contraceptives overall, though, should not be seen as a symbol of jeopardy, but a symbol of women's choice.

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