

FAQs for Assignment #1

Length

1. **What if my essay doesn't reach the 800 words mark? Can I still get an A?**

Sure, the word count is a guideline. To do a good job, you probably need about 800 to 1000 words for this paper, but as they say, "Your mileage will vary." Telling a good story matters more than the number of words. If your story is full of vivid details and fits the assignment, it won't matter if you have only 786 words. Content matters more than word counts.

2. **Can I go over the word limit?**

Certainly. As I explained above, the word count is a guideline. Telling a good story is what matters.

3. **Second, how important is it the word count be exact?**

Quite unimportant. Focus on telling a good story. Just let the word count give you a guideline.

4. **Generally, how many paragraphs, at least, should a excellent composition have?**

As many as it needs. I know that answer sounds like a cop-out, but I'm being quite honest. Naturally, everything depends upon what kind of a composition you are working on. You probably learned to write Five Paragraph Essays (SPE) in high school. For that particular genre, you needed exactly five paragraphs.

There are many other genres where no one even thinks about the number of paragraphs though. Who counts the number of paragraphs in a story though? No one. We look for different things when we are reading stories—like narrative structure, chronological order, and transitions that keep the events in order. Use as many paragraphs as you need to tell your story. If you want to learn a bit more about the topic, read [the Purdue OWL's information On Paragraphs](#).

Format

1. **How do you want us to head the paper?**

Please put your name near the top of the first page. I don't care if you set it off at the top above your title or you state your title and then on the next line you give a byline. Either is fine. You're turning your documents in online, so Scholar will tell me it's yours.

2. **Should there be a title page?**

No, you don't need a title page. Just put the title at the top of the first page of your essay. To make it stand out from the body of the text, you can use a slightly bigger font, make it boldface, or change its color if you like.

3. **What type of font would you prefer?**

Your work should be polished and professional. You can choose a font, but try to stick with something that is widely used like Times New Roman, Arial, Helvetica, Calibri, or Palatino. Avoid any special fonts like these:

Apple Chancery

Bauhaus 93

Braggadocio

Carlz MT

That kind of font is a little harder to read and distracts from your story. Stick with a basic font in most cases.

4. Are there times when it's okay to use another font?

Yes, of course. There are always exceptions. Say you are describing a post-it note that your teacher left on your essay, and you want the reader to know just what you saw. You could add an indented quotation with the message on the post-it and use a font that would remind readers it was a handwritten note, like this:

See me after class please.

In a situation like this, you're making a rhetorical choice to use a different font.

5. How strict are you on the format?

I want you to make rhetorical choices about the format for your essay. Every paper is different, and I want to see you make choices that make sense for what you're writing. I'm not going to dictate a single way that you must format all papers. I'm not strict in that sense. That said, if you make choices that distract from your message, your choices will affect your grade. I am strict in asking you to make smart formatting choices and asking you to accept the consequences of any poor decisions you make.

6. Do we have to use a particular format for our paper such as MLA or APA?

Either is fine. Just be consistent and use the same style throughout your paper. Remember that you can use online tools (see page 367 of WAVT) to help with the citations.

7. What should the basic format of the paper be?

I normally expect 1-inch margins on all sides, a title and your name at the top of the first page, and page numbers at the bottom. I think it can be a good habit to include your name in the footer if your papers are going to be printed out. You can use other formats if it makes sense for your project. If you were wanted your paper to look like a newsletter, for instance, you might have narrower margins. Just pay attention to your audience and your goals as a writer to help make rhetorically-appropriate decisions.

8. Single or double spaced?

Either is fine. Choose what looks best to you.

Submissions

9. What file format should we use for the assignment?

Either turn in a Word document or a PDF. You can use something other than Word to create your document. Just save the assignment as a PDF so that I can open it on my machine.

10. When we turn in the assignment, would you prefer that we submit it in attachment form, or if we just copy and paste it into the submission box at the bottom of the page in Scholar?

Attachments are the best choice because they give you better control over formatting. If you copy and paste your text into the submission box in Scholar, it may not keep your spacing, boldface, and any other formatting showing up the way you want it to. An attachment will.

11. What is the difference between the due date and the deadline? I am not sure what differentiates them and am confused about which date the paper must be submitted by.

The due date (September 20) is the day we will stop work on the assignment in class. It's the preferred date for you to submit your work. After the due date, you have a one-week grace period that you can use if you need more time. At the end of that one-week grace period, you reach the deadline (September 27). The deadline is the last possible day you can submit your assignment. If your assignment is not submitted by midnight on the deadline, you will earn a zero for that portion of your grade.

12. **When we as a class turn in our final draft of assignment 1, would you like us to turn in all our work leading up to the final draft as well, which would include the proposal, the rough draft, and then the final draft?**

You submit your proposal and rough draft in Scholar before the due date. You won't need to turn them in again. I can look back in Scholar if I need them for something. You just need to turn in the final draft on the due date.

13. **Do we submit our rough draft on Scholar? Or do we only submit our final paper online?**

You'll turn in your rough drafts when we do peer review in class (on September 13). You will turn in your final draft online on the due date (or at least by the deadline).

Rough Draft and Proposals

14. **Is the rough draft of the assignment supposed to be printed and brought to class? Or is it supposed to be submitted electronically?**

I only require that you bring it on your computer and submit it online. If you prefer to have a printed copy to share for peer review (rather than asking your classmates to read it online), you can bring a printed copy too.

15. **Will the rough draft be graded? Will the grade count a lot?**

Your rough draft will be part of your in-class writing for Friday, September 13. It counts just like all the other in-class writings.

16. **Can I use my proposal as some of the events to write my assignment?**

Absolutely. The point of writing the proposal (and of the other in-class writing) is to help you get started on your assignment.

17. **If we would like to review our paper could we come to your office ours and have your review it?**

As time allows, yes. I will provide general comments and answer your questions, but I won't grade the paper ahead of time. In other words, I won't go through it and mark every error for you. If you know that you need extra help on an assignment, be sure to sign up for an appointment at the Writing Center.

18. **Will my paper be shared with everyone in the class?**

You'll share your rough draft with one or two other people in class for peer review, and other students may see your paper in Scholar. I won't formally share your paper with the class however. I normally don't read students' papers to the class. If I did want to share your assignment, I'd ask you first and it would be as a positive example. I won't share your work as a bad example ever.

19. **Could you review the draft for another class?**

It's best to ask the teacher for the class to review your paper. I will answer a specific question for you however. If your teacher says you're having problems with comma splices, for instance, I'd be happy to talk about the rules with you and help you with the problem. If you want someone else to read papers for another class, I recommend that you try the Writing Center.

20. **When I complete the rough draft of assignment 1, will you critic it and give me feedback or would it just be better for me to go to the writing center in the library to get assistance?**

Going to the Writing Center is always a great idea. They're very helpful teachers who can give you advice on what you're writing. I can answer specific questions and give you some general feedback on your rough draft, but I won't go through it and mark every error for you.

Content: Creativity

21. Under the creativity section of the rubric what do you mean by "imagination"?

By *imagination*, I don't mean epic, make-believe worlds with magic and dragons and zombies. I'm looking for signs that you are using strong details that help the reader understand exactly what you experienced. I want to see ideas that get beyond predictable comments that any student might say. I want to see information that helps me visualize the unique and special experiences that you have had.

22. How does creativity play a role in this paper? And how can one be graded on how truly creative this paper is?

Creativity has to do with how you present your story. Try to get beyond basic information. Do more than just summarize the events. Use vivid details to help your reader understand what you experienced. You want your reader to be able to visualize the events. Show the reader exactly what happened, rather than just telling the reader that something happened. I'll be looking for creative details that make your story come to life.

23. Do we have to tell the entire truth about ourselves or can we make some stuff up to make a good story paper?

I expect you to tell a truthful story from your experiences. Don't make up experiences that never happened to try to impress your readers. Tell about something that really happened to you.

That said, you don't have to rely completely on the absolute facts of the event. For instance, I suspect few of us remember precisely what we said in a conversation with a teacher in middle school. It's okay to take some liberties with the conversation. The words may not be identical to what you said, but the basic details and their effect should match your personal experience truthfully.

Content: Rhetorical Strategies

24. What do you mean by rhetorical strategies?

At the most basic, rhetoric is about using the tools you have (e.g., words, images, sounds) to communicate your message effectively with an audience. Rhetorical strategies for this assignment would include things like using vibrant details to help your readers visualize the events that you are describing and the use of personal, friendly language to connect with your readers. If you want to learn more, check out Chapter 2 of WAVT, which explains rhetoric and how it works in more detail.

25. How would you recommend going about thinking of a good title that will hook the audience?

Your title should give your readers a key message about your text in just a few words. Think about the events that take place in the story and the message you want the reader to take away, and work from there. Use strong, vibrant words that connect directly to your story. (We'll talk more about titles in class).

26. How formal is the writing?

You are writing an academic essay. It is a formal piece of writing that should meet academic standards of correctness. That means there should be few, if any, errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics.

In this particular essay, you are telling a personal story, so I expect you to use first-person. Additionally, this assignment focuses on your experiences as a reader and writer, so it would be fine for you to use examples of things that you have read, said, or written that aren't perfect academic language. For instance, if your story were about overcoming spelling errors, it would be quite normal for you to talk about words that you spelled incorrectly and even to include misspelled words in your examples.

27. Should we have a thesis laying out what we're going to write about?

Most stories do not have an explicit thesis. You probably have a thesis in mind—the reason that you are telling your story and what you want readers to think after they read it. In most cases, however, you won't have a sentence in your story that spells all that out. It's unusual to have a thesis when you are telling stories. Think about other stories you know. Do you expect to find a thesis statement in a fairy tale, in Harry Potter books, or in murder mysteries? Probably not. The one exception would be fables, where the moral is a kind of thesis.

Content: Details

28. Can we also write about some things that deal with our process of becoming literate that is not included in the list of questions?

Absolutely. The list of questions is just a guide to help you start thinking. As long as you are focusing on a story about how you learned to read or write or about how you learned a language of some kind, you're on target for the assignment.

29. Do I need to answer one of the nine questions or just choose one for constructing and developing ideas for my assignment?

You can answer one of the questions, or choose another question altogether. The questions are just to help get your thinking started. See Question #28 above.

30. Is it bad if we just answer one question out of the assignment summary?

Not at all. You can answer just one of the questions or another question. See Question #28 above.

31. I am having a problem with expanding my content. Usually after I write my main point, the next main point or event comes just after 2-3 sentences. This will make it harder to make this essay at least 4 pages.

You probably need to concentrate on adding details that show your readers more about the events. Imagine that you are going to film a movie of the events. Describe what is going on with enough detail for someone to know what props you are using, what the setting is like, what the people involved are like, and so forth. The key to an effective story is vivid details!

32. I am having some problems with arranging the events. Since they were events from a long time ago, I am having problems remembering which one of them happened first.

Just do your best to arrange things. Go with what you remember and what makes sense. There are no Truthiness Police who are going to swoop in and arrest you if the events don't end up exactly in the order that they really happened. See Question #23 above.

33. Is the writing assignment on reading, writing, or just literacy in general? My topic is personal and mainly about writing so I wasn't sure if it would be okay to just write about writing.

Your assignment can be about how you learned to read, how you learned to write, how you learned to read and write, or how you learned to use some kind of language. You can focus on any particular area of your literacy experience.

34. Does the writing involve critical analysis, and, if so, why on this specific assignment?

The best writing always involves critical thinking. In this assignment, the critical thinking is less obvious in some ways because it's implied. You are telling a story about your literacy experiences, and by telling that story you are thinking critically about who you are as a reader and/or writer and about how you came to be literate. You probably won't write a sentence in your assignment that states it, but there is critical thinking in there.

35. **Is this paper just all about our own experiences or is there more to it rather than including how we changed as a writer?**

By showing your readers your experiences, your story should demonstrate how you have changed as a writer OR show something significant about who you are a reader and/or writer. You shouldn't have to tell your reader what the underlying message is. It should be obvious from the story that you tell. Think about other stories that you have read or stories that you have seen on TV, online, or at the movies. How many of them include someone coming in at the end to tell you what you are supposed to take away from the story? None of them. That's because the story shows you the underlying meaning.

36. **Should we try to avoid putting emotion/feelings into it?**

Not at all. This is your personal story, and unless you are a Vulcan, your experiences have included lots of emotions and feelings. It's perfectly appropriate for you to show your reader how you feel about the events that you are describing in your story.

37. **I'm concerned that my paper may be more about my reading than how my writing evolved. Is it alright for the paper to be majorly based on reading?**

Absolutely. Your papers can be about being a reader, a writer, a reader and writer, or about how you learned some language. It doesn't have to be all three.

38. **Would it be a good idea for me to look up a role model I have and see if they have any good quotes about literacy or reading and put that in my introductory paragraph? I know this is a narrative, but I would build off the quote and explain what it means to me as an individual.**

Your assignment is to tell a story. If you can work in a quotation that you encountered that is okay, but remember that the main goal is to write a narrative based on your experiences learning to read, to write, or to read and write – or your experiences learning a language. Applying a quotation now, after the fact, may not fit your story. On the other hand, it's quite appropriate to write about how a role model inspired you or changed who you are as a reader or writer.

39. **I am concerned that my paper will not be long enough. I don't really have any unique stories to write about.**

Come on. Everyone has stories. Try going through the questions in the assignment to find some starting points. Think about your favorite experiences with reading and writing, or think about a reading or writing task that you hated but endured. You can focus on a very specific story from your past. You don't have to come up with a long series of stories. Just tell a story that shows your readers something about who you are as a reader or writer. If all else fails, come talk to me.

Grading

40. **Is the largest part of the grade the material or the layout?**

Take a look at the [rubric for the assignment](#) to see the five main areas the grade is based on: Assignment Requirements, Creativity, Rhetorical Strategies, Organization, and Academic Correctness. Each of those areas is weighted equally (20% each), so the grade is based on a combination of those areas. The layout falls mainly into the Academic Correctness area, but is also a concern under Rhetorical Strategies. The content of your story falls in all the areas except Academic Correctness.

41. **How many points will you take off for incorrect spelling, punctuation, etc.?**

Check the Academic Correctness section of the [rubric for the assignment](#). It's not that I will take off 1 point for every error. I will look at whatever errors may be in a paper and decide where they fall on the scale. If there are a lot of major errors, the assignment will probably end up with a 1 for Academic Correctness. If all I find are a couple of typos and a little grammar problem, it will probably end up with a 3.

42. How does an A paper stand in comparison to a B paper?

The [rubric for the assignment](#) outlines the difference between an A and a B. If a paper were absolutely perfect, it would score a 4 for all areas on the rubric. An A paper exceeds expectations with highly original and creative storytelling and a strong connection to the audience. A B paper is above average, but has a few flaws. The rubric has all the details.

43. How many grammatical errors does it take to significantly affect your grade?

The specific scale (from no errors to several major errors) is included in the [rubric for the assignment](#). Academic Correctness is worth 1/5 of the grade on this assignment, so it has the ability to lower your grade by as much as 20 points overall. That will only happen, however, in cases where a paper is filled with major errors in Academic Correctness.

Grammar, Mechanics, and Style

44. I am concerned that my paper does not flow properly.

My best advice is to try reading the paper out loud. If it is hard to read, you probably need to try rewriting the sentence. You can also read through the sections on Style in Chapter 5 of WAVT. You could also take your paper to the Writing Center for some one-on-one help.

45. What is the proper use of commas that you expect us to use in our papers so that I can be sure to review my paper and put them where they belong?

I don't really have a comma policy (nor a policy for any other kind of punctuation). I expect writing to follow standard academic rules for correctness. You can review comma rules in Chapter 5 of WAVT (pp. 109–114). The Writing Center can also help you with comma rules.

46. What sorts of vocabularies, words, or sentences are regarded more advantageous? Can you share some examples?

I don't have a list of words and phrases that make a great paper. The choice depends upon your purpose and audience. You have to choose words and sentences that will help your readers understand your story, that will help readers visualize what you are talking about. You have to make rhetorical choices. You can look at the sections on Style in Chapter 5 of WAVT for more advice. There are specific details on Word Choice in that section.

47. What an average length of the sentences is most reasonable?

What a difficult question! Ultimately sentence length depends upon the audience and purpose. Statistically, the average sentence is about 10 to 15 words long—but statistics aren't the best way to write a paper. In a highly complex, academic paper (something like an article in a medical journal), you will find longer, complicated sentences. In your textbooks, you probably find shorter and a bit less complicated sentences. For your story, I would guess the average would be shorter sentences, but really it all depends upon your writing style. Don't get hung up on the number of words in your sentences. Instead, make sure that your story makes sense and flows nicely when you read it.