

Five Principles of Good Writing

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The following list is taken verbatim from Hans P. Guth, *Words and Ideas: A Handbook for College Writing*, p. 9. There are many good writing manuals available for college students. Consult with your English teacher and make sure that you become familiar with one.

Each writing assignment presents its own problems and calls for somewhat different skills, but some basic principles apply equally to different kinds of writing. Whether your writing is descriptive or autobiographical, whether you are defining a term or developing an argument, remember the following requirements:

1. **Your writing should be your own.** It should reflect your own first-hand observation, your honest attempts to work out your own answers to questions and problems. Your first task is not to follow a prescribed formula or to please the reader but to write with conviction.
2. **Your writing should be concrete.** Keep in mind the reader who asks: What is there for me to see? What does it feel like to be there? What does this mean in practice? Back up generalizations with examples; anchor abstract terms to concrete references.
3. **Your writing should have focus.** Learn to do justice to one point at a time. Though you are fully entitled to your opinions on many different subjects, limit your writing to the kind of idea you can fully examine, explain and support. Concentrate on a limited area, but cover it well.
4. **Your writing should be coherent.** When you move from one point to another, your reader should be able to move with you. He/she should see the logical connection(s) between one paragraph and the next. He should see the direction in which you are headed or perceive the trend of your argument.
5. **Your writing should be responsible.** Learn to forego sweeping claims and drastic charges. Learn to respect evidence that goes counter to your assumptions--objections that might weaken your arguments or case. Respect the reader's right to think for himself/herself. Present your sources and your reasoning in such a way that he can examine and verify.

Source: <http://www.picard.tnstate.edu/~cmcginnis/writinghints.htm>