**Evaluating a Research Paper**

**Using the 5 Elements of *Writing at Fontbonne***

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he first element of writing is **Focus**, which means the concentration or emphasis on a subject or objective. **Focus** may be addressed in the following terms: objectives of assignment, thesis, argument, main point, central theme, conclusions, or recommendations.

What is the **focus** of a research paper and how is it evaluated?

The **focus** of a research paper depends on the type of research paper that has been assigned: argumentative or expository. As the majority of research papers assigned in college ask students to use resources to support an argument, this handout will examine an argumentative research paper.

In order to determine whether or not the assignment meets the **focus** or to what degree it meets the **focus**, first consider the thesis. If the thesis doesn’t make a claim—indicating an argument is being posited—then the thesis needs revision. Sometimes, however, even if the thesis does make a claim, the **focus** within the body paragraphs (as evidenced by the topic sentences or the content of the rest of the paragraph) does not connect to or support that claim, so the **focus** is problematic. If the thesis, the topic sentences, and the content of the body paragraphs present a connected line of argumentation, then the paper will be **well-focused**.

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he second element of writing is **Development**, in other words, support and/or elaboration of the **focus**. **Development** may include explanation, description, analysis, narration, exploration, source material or data use, or methodology discussion.

How is **development** assessed in a research paper?

An argumentative research paper is **developed** through both key subtopics and reasoning that support the thesis of the paper. Additionally, the argument is **developed** through relevant and timely research that connects to and supports those subtopics or reasons. If a student isn’t able to consider subtopics, can’t develop reasons, and/or doesn’t provide sufficient evidence to support claims, then the paper lacks **development**.

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he third element of writing, **Organization**, applies to the coherent order and grouping of material. **Organization** may be addressed in the following terms: overarching structure, paragraph structure, or use of transitions.

How is **organization** employed in a research paper and how is it evaluated?

In a research paper, there exists an **overarching structure** and a **paragraph structure**, both of which can be evaluated. Depending on the system of documentation required in the paper, the **overarching structure** may be composed of sections (APA format) or be a cohesive whole.

The **organization** of **each paragraph** should minimally consist of a topic sentence that indicates the focus (summary or analysis), supporting details/evidence taken from the article, transitions linking ideas together, and a concluding sentence.

If a student doesn’t provide a clear and focused topic sentence in each paragraph, then the **organization** suffers. If a student shifts from argumentation to extensive exposition, then both the focus and the **organization** are problematic. If the student fails to connect points through appropriate transitions, then the **organization** is not as strong as it could be. Keeping both the **overarching and paragraph structures** in mind will help you to evaluate **organization**.

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he fourth element of writing is **Style**, which is the tone conveyed toward material and/or audience. **Style** may be implemented or be evaluated through the following means: word choice, sentence structure, voice, or persona.

How is **style** evaluated in a research paper?

Regarding **style**, it would be appropriate to use academic diction and 3rd person point of view—not 1st person point of view—in a research paper. Sentence structure should be evaluated in order to ascertain if there are clear and varied sentences. Further, if the point of view shifts, or the diction is problematic due to slang or incorrect word choice, then the **style** suffers.

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he fifth element of writing—**Conventions**—is adherence both to standards of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and to discipline-specific rules of formatting and citation. For example: APA, MLA, AP Style, or other style guides.

Which **conventions** are utilized in a research paper and how are they assessed?

Regarding **conventions** as it relates to grammar & usage, a student should use appropriate **conventions** for both the assignment and the discipline. For instance, it would not be appropriate for a student to write in fragments (grammar) or to adopt nonstandard capitalization (usage) in the assignment.

Systems of documentation are also a part of **conventions**, so students should understand the rules related to citing in-text citations and other formatting rules for a system of documentation appropriate to the discipline, usually APA or MLA. As integrating research fairly and correctly are related to academic honesty, it is imperative that students understand and apply the **conventions** of discipline-specific systems of documentation.

***If you have questions or concerns***, please contact Teresa Sweeney, M.F.A., Writing Specialist, Kinkel Center for Academic Resources, via email at [tsweeney@fontbonne.edu](mailto:tsweeney@fontbonne.edu) or phone at 314.719.3608.