

Top 10 Tips for Writing Your Final Project

By Dr. Sandra Glahn

1. **Figure out what you're saying and say it clearly.** Your subject relates to the best news in the world. So you of all people have something worth saying. Is your proposition clearly stated? Can you back it up? Strive for clarity. If you're having trouble coming up with a topic, "cluster" related ideas.
2. **Outline.** In academic work, your structure needs to show. Do you reveal your outline through your central propositions, your headings, your subheadings, and your overall organization?
3. **Craft strong transitions.** Between sections, you might write, "While X establishes the ABC view, Y suggests otherwise." Between paragraphs, you might need only a word such as "However," "Similarly," or "Nevertheless." Within paragraphs, short words or phrases also work: *Conversely*, K says.... *And* L agrees.... *But* some think otherwise.... An outstanding reference that offers good phrases for doing this is the thin but expensive book *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*.
4. **Know that most of writing is rewriting.** So go ahead and write a super-crummy first draft. Then go back and clean it up. And clean it up more. And then clean it more.
5. **Rely on active voice.** Most academic works use too much passive voice, because doing so has the advantage of eliminating the first-person subject. And usually you want to "write yourself out of the story" in academic writing. But avoid overuse, or your writing will, as they say, cure insomnia.
6. **Check your spelling.** Verify the names of scholars quoted, books cited, and organizations.
7. **Check your grammar.** The most common grammar error in the English language is mismatching singulars and plurals (i.e., agreement): "If someone smiles, they are probably happy" is wrong. Someone is not a "they."
8. **Check your punctuation.** Make sure to follow Turabian as well as the DTS style guide, because punctuation can vary from guide to guide.
9. **Follow every quote with a summary or explanation.** Never end a paragraph with someone else's quote. Before moving on, provide a summary or transition statement. This is *your* argument.
10. **"Do unto others...."** Loving others well means giving credit where credit is due, recognizing how offended you'd feel if someone tried to pass off your research as his or her own. It's dishonest to plagiarize, but it's also completely unloving. Additionally, if you must quote an opinion with which you disagree, represent the author fairly and keep the tone respectful. Ask yourself, "If I were to meet this person for lunch tomorrow, would he or she think I had been just?"

Part of following the Golden Rule and reaching the widest-possible audience can be using gender-inclusive language. The following statement comes from the syllabus of Dr. Barry Jones in DTS's Pastoral Ministries Department: "All written submissions should strive to use gender-inclusive language. While this has become standard academic practice, this request is not merely an attempt at 'political correctness.' As a gospel-shaped, gospel-centered community of learning, we have compelling reasons to think, write, and speak in such a way as to insure that none are either intentionally or inadvertently excluded by our use of language. Consider using 'humans,' 'persons,' 'humanity,' or 'humankind'" rather than 'man' or 'men' when referring to human beings in general. Consider alternating between the use of 'he' and 'she' as generic pronouns or substituting the use of the plural ('they,' 'them,' 'their') when appropriate.

You have something worth saying—words of life and healing. So strive to communicate your message well.