# Checklist for Using Visuals:

Use visuals that are appropriate for your audience, purpose, and the rest of your rhetorical situation. In your academic writing, especially, be careful that any visuals you use support your main point--and don't just serve to decorate the text. (Therefore, avoid clip art, which is primarily intended as decoration.) Images should support what you say elsewhere with written words and add information that words alone can't provide as clearly or easily.

- ❏ Position images as close as possible to the discussion to which they relate.
- ❏ In academic writing, number all images, using separate sequences of numbers for figures (photos, graphs, diagrams, video clips, and drawings) and tables: Fig. 1, Fig. 2; Table 1, Table 2.
- ❏ Explain in your written text whatever information you present in an image -- don't expect it to speak for itself. Refer to the image before it appears, identifying it and summarizing its point. For example: "As Table 1 shows, Italy's economic growth rate has been declining for thirty years."
- ❏ Provide a title or caption for each image to identify it and explain its significance for your text. For example: "Table 1: Italy's Economic Growth Rate, 1980-2010."
- ❏ Label the parts of visuals clearly to ensure that your audience will understand what they show. For example, label each section of a pie chart to show what it represents.
- ❏ Cite the source of any images you don't create yourself. You need not document visuals you create, based on data from your own experimental or field research, but if you use data from a source to create a graph or chart, cite the source of the data.
- ❏ In general, you may use visuals created by someone else in your academic writing as long as you include full documentation. If you post your writing online, however, you must first obtain permission from the copyright owner.
- ❏ When using graphs, charts, and tables, remember to follow basic design principles: be consistent, label all parts clearly, and keep the design simple, so readers can focus on the information and not be distracted by needlessly complex design. In particular, use color and contrast wisely to emphasize what's most significant. Choose colors that are easy to distinguish from one another--and that remain so if the graph or chart is printed in black and white.

# Checklist for Research Papers

The research paper is a common genre in academic writing, and you will undoubtedly tutor many writers with research papers in the writing center. To write an effective one, the writer will need to conduct research, interpret that research, and compose a paper that synthesizes both the writer's and the experts' views of the topic. Proper documentation of evidence is particularly important in research papers; writers may need help selecting appropriate resources to substantiate their claims, integrating information and quotations into their papers, and citing sources within their papers and in their bibliographies.

- ❏ If there is a title, is it informative and appropriate?
- ❏ Is the thesis clear? Is the organization logical? If headings and subheadings are used, do they consistently follow an accepted format?
- ❏ Are sentences varied in length and structure?
- ❏ Are tone, voice, and diction consistent and appropriate?
- ❏ Are transitions smooth from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, section to section?
- ❏ Are credible sources and evidence used? Is the supporting material suitable and persuasive? Does it adequately support the thesis?
- ❏ Are quotations as well as paraphrased and summarized passages properly introduced with a signal phrase?
- ❏ Are visual materials--tables, figures, charts, maps, and the like--introduced before they appear in the text?
- ❏ Are long quotations set off from the text?
- ❏ Is proper credit given to sources throughout?
- ❏ Does the paper consistently adhere to the style used (MLA, APA, CMS, CSE, and so on) in format and in documentation, both within the text and in the reference list or list of works cited?
- ❏ Were the instructions for the assignment--length, number and kinds of resources to be used, directions for title page or documentation--followed carefully?

# Checklist for Lab Reports and Scientific Papers

Lab reports and scientific papers document the results of scientific experimentation and communicate its significance. Typically, lab reports and scientific papers contain the following sections:

- **Title Page:** includes the name of the experiment, the participating lab partners, and date
- **Abstract:** summarizes the purpose, findings, and conclusions of the experiment
- **Introduction:** contains a statement of objectives and background information
- **Materials and Methods:** provide the list of materials and the procedure (in chronological, narrative format) used for the experiment
- **Results:** contain the major findings of the study, including calculations and data
- **Discussion** includes interpretation and analysis of the data
- **Reference:** lists full citations for all references cited.

Lab reports and scientific papers may also contain **acknowledgements** and **appendices**.

The major difference between lab reports and scientific papers is that lab reports are shorter documents whose audience is typically a teacher and classmates. A scientific paper contains the same sections as a lab report; however, beyond presenting and interpreting the experiment, it also puts the experiment in conversation with other research in the field and invites further study. Its audience, therefore, is the scientific community at large.

- ❏ Is the title concise, and does it adequately describe the contents? For example, with the title "Substance Y Alters Blonial Structure of Elephant Bone Marrow," researchers interested in substance Y, blonial structures, elephants, or bone marrow will recognize that the article may be of interest to them.
- ❏ Are the appropriate headings and subheadings included and in proper order?
- ❏ Are the tone and style appropriate? Scientific writing, for the most part, is intended to be more factual than entertaining and is not embellished with descriptive language, anecdotes, personal opinion, humor, or dialogue.
- ❏ Does the writer use passive voice, which is the generally accepted convention? The writer of a lab report, for example should use the passive past tense: "Solution A was centrifuged," not "I centrifuged Solution A."
- ❏ Is past tense used for describing the procedures and present tense for describing the results and conclusions?
- ❏ Are sentences short and to the point, expressing facts clearly and concisely? Does the writer answer all basic questions about the topic?
- ❏ Have disciplinary conventions related to symbols and abbreviations been observed?
- ❏ Are figures and tables numbered and accompanied by explanatory captions? Are they introduced before they appear in the text?

## Checklist for Book, Film, and Play Reviews

A review does not simply retell what happens. It commonly addresses the purpose, idea, or theme embodied in a work, often in relation to other similar works, and judges its quality by pointing out both strengths and weaknesses. Though reviews cannot deal with every aspect of a work, they should focus on several; for example, a play review might discuss actions, sets, costumes, lighting, and music in addition to the play itself. In reviewing a work, the writer typically describes the criteria of evaluation and offers evidence (quotations, examples, and specific references) to support her opinions. The writer assumes that readers are unfamiliar with the work and thus offers more summary than an analytical piece might, but only enough to create a context for the reader.

- ❏ Does the first paragraph include the title and other important information, such as the author's, playwright's, or director's name?
- ❏ Does the introduction give readers an idea of the nature and scope of the work? Does it establish criteria for evaluation?
- ❏ Are evaluative terms or phrases, such as "good action" or "like a soap opera," defined? (What are the characteristics of good action or soap operas? How does the work embody those characteristics?)
- ❏ Does an early paragraph orient the reader by briefly summarizing the plot or contents?
- ❏ Does the review make reasonable assertions and present convincing evidence (quotes, examples, and specific references) to support those assertions?
- ❏ Is the tone appropriate? Does it suggest that the reviewer is being fair? Does it indicate respect for readers?
- ❏ Does the reviewer avoid overuse of phrases like "I think" and "in my opinion"? (Such qualifiers may weaken her assertions.)

# Checklist for Cover Letters

Writers should know that, unless otherwise indicated, a résumé must always be accompanied by a cover letter. In these letters, applicants should clearly indicate the position being sought, mention how they learned about it (on an online job board, through another person, and so on), and explain how their qualifications suit each requirement listed in the job description. Finally, they should request an interview.

- ❏ Does the letter follow an acceptable format for a business letter? (See a website or handbook for a discussion of business-letter formats.)
- ❏ Is the letter addressed to a person rather than to a position? ("Dear Ms. Plotnic" is preferable to "Dear Personnel Manager.") Consider checking the company website or making a telephone call to get this information.
- ❏ Does the first paragraph specifically identify the position being sought?
- ❏ Does the letter indicate how the applicant learned about the position?
- ❏ Does the letter acknowledge all requirements mentioned in the ad or job description?
- ❏ Does the applicant talk in terms of what he can do for the employer rather than the other way around? (With the exception of those applying for internships, which are set up to help people learn and gain hands-on experience, applicants are assumed to bring knowledge or expertise to a position; therefore, statements like "I expect to increase my knowledge about the accounting field" are out of place.)
- ❏ Is the letter error free?

# Checklist for Application Essays and Personal Statements

Writers often ask for help with essays of application for undergraduate, graduate, or other programs. Writers sometimes have difficulty envisioning the audience for their essay, so asking them to describe their readers can be a good place to start. Writers may not realize that readers will likely be professional people, but their expertise may not lie in the applicant's area of interest. Someone with degrees and experience in electrical or aerospace engineering, for example, may weigh in on an application for graduate school in mechanical engineering. At the same time, these readers are people with personal, political, and cultural sensitivities. They also probably have many essays to read in a short amount of time. Articulating the readers' characteristics should help the writer make more thoughtful decisions as he composes his essay.

Though you will need to consider the usual aspects of an essay--like content, organization, tone, and grammar--you need to keep a number of other specific points in mind with essays of application.

- ❏ Does the writer establish the point of the essay early on? Instead of including many themes, does she focus on one or two that allow her to go deeper rather than be superficial? Is the relevance of the information clearly established? Avoid the mistake made by one applicant, who wrote a lengthy essay describing her harrowing escape from her homeland. Though her point was that if she could withstand those rigors she could manage medical school, she confused readers by waiting until the end to tell them her reason for relating her story.
- ❏ Does the introduction engage the reader? Does it avoid trite statements like "Ever since I was four and put bandages on my doll, I have wanted to be a doctor"? How will this essay fare against the many others that are being read? A note of caution: Readers want to see how an applicant differs from other applicants, but they can quickly spot outrageous or excessive statements.
- ❏ Does the essay sound sincere and honest, or has the writer exaggerated? (For example, becoming a teacher to "change the world" is clearly beyond one person's capabilities.)
- ❏ Has the writer completely answered the question being posed? Some applications simply ask why one has chosen a particular career or program. Others ask applicants to discuss their strengths and weaknesses, ethics, work experience, accomplishments, or extracurricular activities.
- ❏ Has the writer included sufficient evidence--often anecdotal--with details that show rather than tell? (For example, rather than write "I am a community-minded person," the applicant should describe what he has accomplished that demonstrates that attitude.)

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❏ Has the writer appropriately eliminated extraneous details that do not contribute anything to the essay? (For example, Aunt Mary's illness may have led the writer to consider becoming a doctor. Unless there is good reason, however, readers do not need to know what Aunt Mary prefers for breakfast or the kind of car she drives.)

❏ Does the writer use positive statements and subordination to downplay negative points? A student who received Bs while studying abroad deftly demonstrated this tactic on a law school application by explaining, "When I studied in Spain, I took all courses in Spanish, knowing that doing so would significantly improve my facility with the language, but also likely lower my grade-point average."

❏ Is the essay error free? Misspellings, grammatical errors, and other mechanical problems may cause readers to question an applicant's attention to detail.