

# The task of academic writing

For some students, the extended essay may be the first encounter with the requirements of writing an academic paper. Some of the tasks associated with writing an academic paper are the same as those required for a traditional research paper. For example, the following rules apply to both types of papers. You must:

- Cite every source used as a reference in your paper and provide full bibliographic references so readers can quickly locate your sources.
- Write in a clear formal style.
- Use a standard form of documentation.

While both types of papers adhere to these guidelines, an academic paper also requires the construction of an informed argument based on scholarly research and readings. Your argument will develop from reading scholarly resources and will only be as good as the evidence that you gather. If your paper fails to present an informed argument, it will not meet the requirements for an extended essay.

To formulate and develop an argument, you must:

- Find a topic that is interesting and relevant, complex and appropriate to your chosen subject. Topics that are simplistic or largely factual in nature typically do not merit further investigation.
- Determine what you know about your topic. Can you answer the questions of who, what, when, where, why and how?
- Read a sufficient number of scholarly resources so you can begin to formulate what you *think* about your topic.
- Determine whether you should use primary sources as evidence.
  - Primary sources are original materials from the time period or event under investigation. They may be written materials or artifacts.
  - Secondary sources are typically scholarly books and articles that analyze and evaluate primary sources in terms of their importance to the academic community.
- Determine what more you need to know about your topic and continue researching and reading. Decide whether your topic is too broad in scope and narrow it if necessary.
- Think about and formulate a claim that you can make about your topic. Can you shape the claim into an arguable question that requires complex, thoughtful analysis?
- Use the evidence gathered through your research to support your position.
- Provide thoughtful analysis of your evidence and state how, why, and in what way it supports the argument you are making.
- Consider and evaluate evidence that is contrary to your position. Why should your audience accept your argument?
- Examine and synthesize your entire body of evidence so that you can present your audience with conclusions that are based on analysis.