

As a graduate student, research and writing often differ from the academic work and expectations at the undergraduate level. This handout is designed to make those expectations more visible and provide strategies for making graduate work more manageable.

Strategies for Approaching Graduate Work

Developing research and writing strategies is important in becoming a confident graduate writer. Consider the following options:

- Build a support system, including a mentor (like a faculty member or advanced peer), to help guide your work and explain expectations and disciplinary conventions. Consider a peer writing or study group to encourage accountability, provide feedback, and explore ideas.
- Pay attention to the patterns of feedback you receive and work to improve in those areas.
- Understand that feeling a lack of confidence (*imposter syndrome*) is common. Remind yourself that academic work is centered on continual learning, and avoid negative internal dialogue.
- Set aside time regularly to review deadlines as well as assignment guidelines.
- Break larger projects up into smaller tasks to make your workload more manageable.
- Get and stay organized, including developing and maintaining a file-saving system early on.
- Manage your time effectively, including scheduling time to research and write.
- Meet with subject librarians to further develop your disciplinary research skills.
- Give yourself ample time to read research in order to understand concepts and academic conversations more fully before writing about them.
- Take advantage of campus and writing center handouts, resources, and peer groups to help you start, write, revise, or polish your work.

Strategies for Graduate Research & Source Use

As a graduate student, be prepared to develop advanced research strategies and offer unique, complex analyses within your work:

- Expect to choose and narrow a research subject rather than being assigned an exact topic.
- Remember to clarify research expectations with professors since many graduate-level assignments may not outline the number or types of sources you should use.
- Prioritize your own ideas instead of relying solely on sources. Synthesize sources and make connections to demonstrate your ability to think critically and contribute to the larger academic conversation.
- Anticipate conducting research using methods specific to your field of study.
- Determine and develop a consistent and reliable note-taking system and method of organization for research (e.g., annotation, color coding, folders, etc.) to streamline your writing process later.

Strategies for Graduate Writing

As a graduate student, you can successfully position yourself in academic and disciplinary conversations:

- Become familiar with the genres (types of writing) of your discipline, and study examples from your field to fulfill each assignment's purpose, audience, and organization.
- Work with professors, peers, and writing center consultants to better understand genres specific to graduate work (e.g., grant proposals, theses, conference presentations, etc.).
- Develop audience awareness, including learning what is considered common knowledge within your discipline and what terminology you will need to define for readers.
- Read scholarship from your field to gain a sense of stylistic conventions (e.g., point of view, use of active or passive voice, sentence structure and length, tone, etc.).
- Learn format and citation guidelines for your field. Individual faculty or publications may have additional or alternative guidelines (e.g., length, font use, table or figure format, etc.).
- Remember the writing process is cyclical. Seek feedback on your work as part of your process.
- Increase the clarity and credibility of your work by revising and editing thoroughly.