

Tips for Writing Articles in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*

1. **Establish your exigence, and do it fast.** At the outset of your article, make sure your reader can easily tell what scholarly conversations you are speaking to and what your article proposes to add to them. Be concrete: don't suggest that your article will "reflect on" this or "interrogate" that. This isn't to say that rumination, reflection, or conjecture are unwelcome, but your audience should be able to quickly discern what your essay is offering. It's hard to overstate just how quickly this exigence should be established at your article's outset: it's probably not the case that seven paragraphs of literature review are necessary before you can even pose your research question.
2. **Signpost.** Pay as much attention to informing your audience of the structure of your arguments as you do the arguments themselves. Use metadiscourse to convey what you're doing from paragraph to paragraph and section to section (see Joseph M. Williams *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*). Pay particular attention to your abstract and introduction. Some level of redundancy is welcome here. For instance, one strategy is to have your earliest paragraphs provide the nearly same type of encompassing and distanced overview that your abstract does. Later paragraphs in the introduction can then echo that overview in a slightly more elaborated and detailed manner. Then, your signposts throughout the article should serve as a reminder to where your audience is in the argument sketched out in the abstract, early paragraphs, and introduction section.
3. **Get out of your own head.** Your audience is scholarly and knowledgeable and they know the broad contours of the field's literature. However, none of them are in the same headspace you are as a researcher. Provide summaries and reminders of cited works as appropriate. (Be judicious, however: summarizing well-known works can seem condescending; an introductory signal phrase such as "of course" can take the sting off, though.) In addition, do not rely on ellipsis and syllogism to carry your arguments: be overt with your claims and be demonstrative with your support for them. Your arguments should not be left as an exercise for the reader.
4. **Maintain organizational discipline.** For instance, your readers will have a better time of it if your introductory section sticks *solely* to the purpose of introducing the work and saves your elaboration of original arguments for later. Use headings to structure your essay but—more crucially—make sure that each section doesn't stray too far from its declared purpose.
5. **User test your work.** Show your work to one, two, or ten trusted colleagues with an invitation for them to provide serious, critical feedback. (Don't forget to send them a card or buy them a drink later.)
6. **Think twice about charts, tables, endnotes, and appendices.** In addition to posing production headaches to editors, it's often the case that these features provide little information value to readers. You don't have to avoid them entirely, but just have a good reason for using them when you do.
7. **Copyedit carefully.** After the important developmental work is done, make sure your piece is well copyedited. Pay particular attention to your quotes and citations, since these are especially time-consuming for *WPA's* volunteer copyeditors.
8. **Ignore this advice if the rhetorical situation demands it.** These are not edicts. We do not want cookie-cutter essays: the last thing we want is to homogenize and stultify the discourse of our field. These are merely reminders for you to think first about the needs of *WPA's* audience. Imagine your audience is a time-crunched *WPA*, an exhausted journal editor, a harried graduate student, etc. Even if your readers aren't among this impatient group, they will benefit from you assuming they were.

