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 readers can easily determine what scholarly conversations you are speaking to and what your article is proposing to add to them. Don't just suggest that your article will "reflect on" this or "interrogate" that, but state overtly what you will offer to the *WPA* audience. Rumination and introspection are not unwelcome, of course, but the significance of your work will be readily appreciated if you are upfront about your goals. It's hard to overstate just how quickly your exigence should be established at your article's outset—you probably don't need seven paragraphs of literature review before you can pose your research question or define the scope of your inquiry, for instance.

2. **Signpost.** Pay as much attention to informing your audience about the structure of your ideas as you do to the ideas 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 same kind of encompassing, distanced overview that your abstract does. Later paragraphs in the introduction can echo that overview in a slightly more elaborated and detailed manner. Then, signposts should consistently orient your audience to where they are in the argument as it has been sketched in the earliest 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 nutshell summaries and reminders of cited works as appropriate. In addition, don't 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, the thrust of your work will be more clear if the introductory section sticks *solely* to the purpose of introducing the work and saves the elaboration of original arguments for later. Use headings as more than just a visual break on the page: use them to describe what each section does and try to make sure that each section doesn't stray too far from that description.

5. **User test your work.** Show your work to one, two, or ten trusted colleagues with an invitation 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.** It's often the case that these features offer little information value for readers, and it's always the case that they create production headaches for editors. You don't have to avoid them entirely, but use them in moderation and with good reason.

7. **Copyedit carefully.** After the important developmental work is done on your piece, make sure it is well copyedited. Pay particular attention to your quotes and citations, since these are especially time-consuming for *WPA*'s team of very talented—but volunteer—copyeditors. Double-check every quotation for accuracy and make sure there is a one-to-one match between your parenthetical citations and your bibliography. Don't leave certain aspects of your work unfinished on the assumption that "the copyeditors will take care of this for me later."

8. **Ignore this advice if the rhetorical situation demands it.** These are not edicts. We don't want cookie-cutter essays: the last thing we want is to homogenize and stultify the discourse of our field. These are merely reminders to consider *WPA*'s audience of readerly humans. 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 bunch, they will appreciate you assuming they were nonetheless.