

# The Role of Writing in Higher Education

*by Sophia*



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the role of writing papers in higher education and investigate the individual elements of the writing process, including preparation, outlining, thesis statements, first drafts, and revision. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. The Role of Writing Assignments or "Papers" in Higher Education

A lot of the most demanding, time-consuming, and important work you will do in higher education will involve writing papers. You may encounter all different kinds of lower-stakes writing assignments such as posting responses or discussion questions in an online forum, but more formal writing assignments—whether they are two pages or twenty—are commonly referred to as “papers,” even when they are submitted electronically and no actual paper is involved.

Therefore, the broader concept of “papers” encompasses lots of different kinds of writing assignments. It is crucial that you pay attention to the specific guidelines of your individual assignment, but generally, a paper is a focused essay with a central argument (or thesis) and evidence to support it.

Why are college students assigned papers to write? After all, most college students don’t plan on being writers or pursuing careers that require any academic writing. The primary reason that the paper has become such a conventional assignment in higher education is that papers require you to formulate and articulate your ideas on aspects of the content of your course.

Again, a distinguishing characteristic of higher education is that you are not simply charged with absorbing and reproducing information from your professors or your textbooks; instead, you are called upon to have something to say about the ideas you encounter. Papers are a way to formalize and organize your thoughts and to communicate them in a clear and convincing manner.

In addition, a significant portion of the discourse of higher education involves arguments—reading them, evaluating them, and making them. Often, assigned papers allow students to practice making persuasive arguments by offering an original thesis and supporting it with evidence.

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## 2. Types of Papers

There are a variety of types of papers you may be assigned by your instructor. The type of paper you're assigned depends on the class you are taking and the objective that your instructor wants you to achieve. Here are some of the most common types of papers you may encounter.

Type of Paper	Description
Analysis essays	Ask you to explore the meaning of something, not by summarizing it, but by writing about the author or creator's intent. An example of this would be a paper about the themes in Herman Melville's <i>Moby Dick</i> .
Persuasive papers	Ask you to form an argument and provide evidence for that argument. An example of this would be a paper about your stance on the death penalty.
Narrative papers	Ask you to tell a story, which can be personal. For example, a story about how your parents met is a narrative.
Cause and effect papers	Ask you to explain something that happened and why. An example of this would be a paper about the events that led up to World War II in Europe.
Compare and contrast papers	Ask you to select two things that have some similarities and some differences and write about them. For example, you could compare and contrast the Great Depression of the 1920s to the Great Recession of the 2000s.



## SUMMARY

You can expect to do a lot of **writing assignments in higher education**. The purpose of these writing assignments is for you to demonstrate that you not only have learned the subject matter, but you have also formulated your own unique perspective on it. There are many different **types of papers** that you may be assigned in your college career.