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The 3 C's of Writing: Clarity, Concision, and Coherence

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This article aims to discuss three important qualities of excellent writing. All writers should practice the revision process by ensuring their writing communicates clearly through concise language that contributes coherently to the essay's message.

Keep it Simple

Many authors and self-help gurus have composed lists of traits and qualities seen in successful compositions. While they may not always agree from one list to another, they all seem to agree that excellent writing has three important characteristics. As a college student, you will be required to write many types of essays, from narrative essays to research papers. No matter the prompt, one of your main goals as a writer is to be heard. *How* you write enables readers to grasp *what* you write. To create meaningful and well-written essays, it is critical to be clear, concise, and coherent.

One Sentence at a Time

Clarity, concision, and coherence in your essay begin at the sentence level. *Clarity* refers to the understandability of your writing: the words you choose must be unambiguous for someone else to understand their meaning. *Concision* refers to the shortness and simplicity of your writing. A sentence that is overcrowded or over-complicated will confuse the reader. Instead, it is best to communicate your meaning with short and simple language. *Note:* Here, short and simple does not mean "casual" or "underdeveloped." Some sentences need to be longer to fully convey meaning. Remember to consider your audience's needs as you craft your sentences. Finally, *Coherence* refers to the logic and consistency of your writing. A sentence with an illogical structure is confusing. If you are inconsistent – switching your tone or verb tenses frequently, for instance – you will confuse and distract your reader.

The 3 C's extend to how you compose your essay as a whole. No matter your subject, the guiding principles of clarity, concision, and coherence allow you to effectively communicate with your readers in a way that is elegant in its simplicity.

Examples

Imagine you are writing an informative paper for an ENG113 class. You are trying to explain how social media is dangerous for college students because it negatively affects their mental health. In this essay, you are trying to write a sentence that tells your reader how constantly viewing other people's social media profiles can lower a student's self-esteem. To communicate this information effectively, aim for clarity, concision, and coherence. Consider these two sentences:

A student's view of oneself is lowered by social media profiles when they are viewed and they think they are better, therefore, losing self-esteem.

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This sentence is unclear. The wording of the sentence is unnecessarily long and complicated. Additionally, the sentence's structure and order are illogical and confusing. Lastly, the writer uses the word "they" inconsistently, so it is difficult to tell who they are referring to in the sentence.

Viewing social media profiles leads students to practice comparison, which can lower their self-esteem.

This sentence is clear. The wording is simple, short, and direct. The structure of the sentence is logical and consistent.

As a second example, imagine you are writing an argumentative paper for an ENG123 class. You are arguing that California's government should provide funding for college students to receive mental health treatment. In this essay, your goal is to write a thesis that states your argument and summarizes your main points. Consider the two sentences below:

Unclear: Due to college students needing better mental health, the government in California should help their treatment by giving funds, having easier access to therapy, and gain a healthy mindset.

Clear: California should provide government funding for college students to access therapy and other treatments that will improve their mental health and mindset.

Tips

1. Read your work aloud to yourself or others to hear how it sounds.
2. To make a sentence more concise, try looking up synonyms for words or phrases that you are using to find the word that is most direct.
3. To see whether a sentence is coherent, try reading the sentences before and after it. Is the sentence consistent with your other sentences? Does it logically fit within your paragraph?

Works Consulted

"7 Tips for Clear and Concise Writing." *MasterClass*, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/tips-for-clear-and-concise-writing>. Accessed June 6, 2024.

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