

Five Things Iliff Professors Want You to Know About Writing

Use these insights in order to write more effective papers during your studies at Iliff and beyond.

- 1) **Make sure you understand the assignment.** Not all professors will be equally clear about what they expect from your writing assignments. Some will expect you to stay close to an assignment while others will encourage you to strike out on your own. Most will want you to use your understanding of the required reading and class discussions as a starting point for analysis and development of your argument. Either way, your first step in writing an assigned paper should start long before you begin writing: you must know what the professor expects. Begin by reading the syllabus and/or assignment details closely. If you are still uncertain of what is expected of you, ask your professor directly. You do not want to spend time doing something different than what is expected of you.
- 2) **An argumentative essay should contain an argument.** An argument is a set of statements that offer a *claim* (or thesis), *evidence* (or reasons for the claim) and demonstrates that you have thought about *objections* to your claim. This kind of argument is not wrangling; it is more like an amiable and lively conversation with someone you respect but who will not agree with your claims just because you state them. You should write not only to communicate what you think, but to show the professor why it matters and why others might agree. You are asked to do this not because Iliff professors expect you to become professional scholars, but because in just about any vocation you pursue you will do research, think about what you find, and communicate your decisions about complex matters in writing to others who have a stake in your decisions being sound ones.
- 3) **Drafting is not writing.** Drafting, the process of committing words to paper or screen, describes only one stage of the writing process. The second and most crucial stage of writing is revising. Ideally, you should draft early enough to have ample time for revisions. As you revise your draft(s) into something clearer, you will understand your own ideas better and thus you will be able to write more clearly. Drafting early allows you the time to revise and thus write (and think) more clearly.
- 4) **The very basics of English grammar are important.** Errors in basic English grammar are enormously distracting and put Iliff professors (like most people who dedicate a lot of time to reading and writing) in a grumpy mood. While grammar books and sites can sometimes offer conflicting advice, the basic rules of English grammar are firmly established. Verbs must agree with their subjects. Pronouns must match their referents. A sentence must express a complete thought. Learn and use the basic rules of English grammar: your professors will thank you for it.
- 5) **Sometimes simpler really is better.** Apply the K.I.S.S. (keep it simple, silly) principle. If you do not understand what you are saying, chances are no one else will. It is tempting to imitate the complex, convoluted prose often assigned as required reading in graduate school. However, complex sentences are seldom clear. Moreover, complicated sentences do not necessarily indicate deep thinking. Writing well means writing simply.