

WRITING SAMPLES

UCSD SPWP

Amy Berg

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you can find links to all the files we're using today at amyberg.com/spwp

ON THE AGENDA

- The process of coming up with a writing sample
- Advice from UCSD admissions committee members
- Additional writing resources
- Review a writing sample

THE PROCESS

1. Select a writing sample
2. Get help
3. Revise
4. Revise again

START EARLY. This will probably take more time than any other component of your application.

YOUR GOAL: A grad school-quality paper.

THE PROCESS: select a writing sample

Should you use...

- ~~A term paper or thesis chapter as is~~
- A writing sample you start from scratch...
 - Too broad
- A term paper...
 - Asks and answers a smaller question
 - May not be your best work
- A thesis....
 - Probably some of your best work
 - Broader engagement with the relevant literature
 - Closer faculty supervision
 - Is this faculty member a good supervisor?
 - Will it be done on time?
 - Can you extract a writing-sample length chunk?
- A paper you're confident in vs. a paper in an area you really like

THE PROCESS: get help

Your team might include...

- A main faculty member
 - Get his/her frank opinion *first*
 - An independent study
- Other philosophy faculty
- Grad students
- Other undergrads
- Your university's writing center
- SPWP

THE PROCESS: revise

Starting out

- You're aiming for 12-20 pages
- Reread all papers you reference, and then read related literature
- Think: how do you turn a response to an essay prompt into a real paper?
- Make an outline (even for a paper you've outlined before, even for a paper you've *written* already)

THE PROCESS: revise

Expanding

- Your main task: deepen the analysis
 - Decompress (what assumptions did you take for granted? What explanations can you expand?)
 - Connect more broadly and deeply to the literature
 - Anticipate and defuse more objections
 - Expand the examples you have and offer more of them
 - Add a new argument vs. redevelop an old one
- Don't try to do too much—what can you do *well* in 15 pages?

THE PROCESS: revise

Writing tips

- Don't begin with a very general bloviating first sentence (“Since the dawn of time...”)
- Minimize technical terms, but explain the ones you do use, especially since the meanings you learned in class for them may not be universally accepted
- Choose quotations carefully, and explain them

Voice

- Write for a reader who is lazy, stupid, mean, and unsophisticated
- Don't *try* to sound sophisticated—it may backfire

THE PROCESS: revise

Structure

- Make your thesis extremely clear early on, for the benefit of committee members who aren't reading carefully the first time around
- Make your structure obvious, using connective words (“before,” “however,” “it follows that,” “on one hand”)
- Add headings
- Be clear in your conclusion about what you have answered—and what you have not

Philosophical mistakes

- Category mistakes (“utilitarianism believes that...”)
- Flag your assumptions

THE PROCESS: revise again

- Expect to revise many, many times
- Send many drafts to many people (including SPWP!)
- Read it out loud. Does it sound conversational?
- Talk out your main claims with someone, especially with someone who isn't intimately familiar with your paper
- Try constructing an outline of your paper using only your thesis statement and topic sentences; see if it hangs together
- Go through your paper sentence-by-sentence. Which ideas/sentences/words don't you need?
- When should you expect to be done?

ADVICE FROM THE ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

What makes for a good writing sample?

- “it is very important that candidates work with their supervisor and perhaps teaching assistants or other friendly graduate students to get feedback”
- “If two good, up-to-date philosophy professors at your school think your sample is excellent, admissions committees will probably also think it's good”

ADVICE FROM THE ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

What should you write about?

- “should make a serious attempt at originality, being appropriately respectful of other work in the area”
- “it's better [usually] for applicants to choose topics that are related to what they are thinking about possibly studying”
- “were there references in the writing sample to the work of the people that the student in their statement of purpose were proposing to work with?”
- “is there a clear problem and solution?” “can they clearly formulate a problem?” “can they present and assess alternative solutions?”

ADVICE FROM THE ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

What should your writing be like?

- “focused, clear, precise, analytically rigorous, easy to read and follow, and well-organized”
- “it’s really the ability to write clearly and concisely, along with analytical sophistication and a serious commitment to the discipline, that I am looking for”
- “make sure that the essays aren’t too long”
- “I think it's okay to send it with a cover letter acknowledging that it's over the requested length, an abstract, and advice about what sections (totaling under the requested page length) can be read, in conjunction with the abstract, as a stand-alone sample”
- “it should not contain any grammatical errors, typos, etc.”
- “use precise language to express abstract thoughts”

ADVICE FROM THE ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

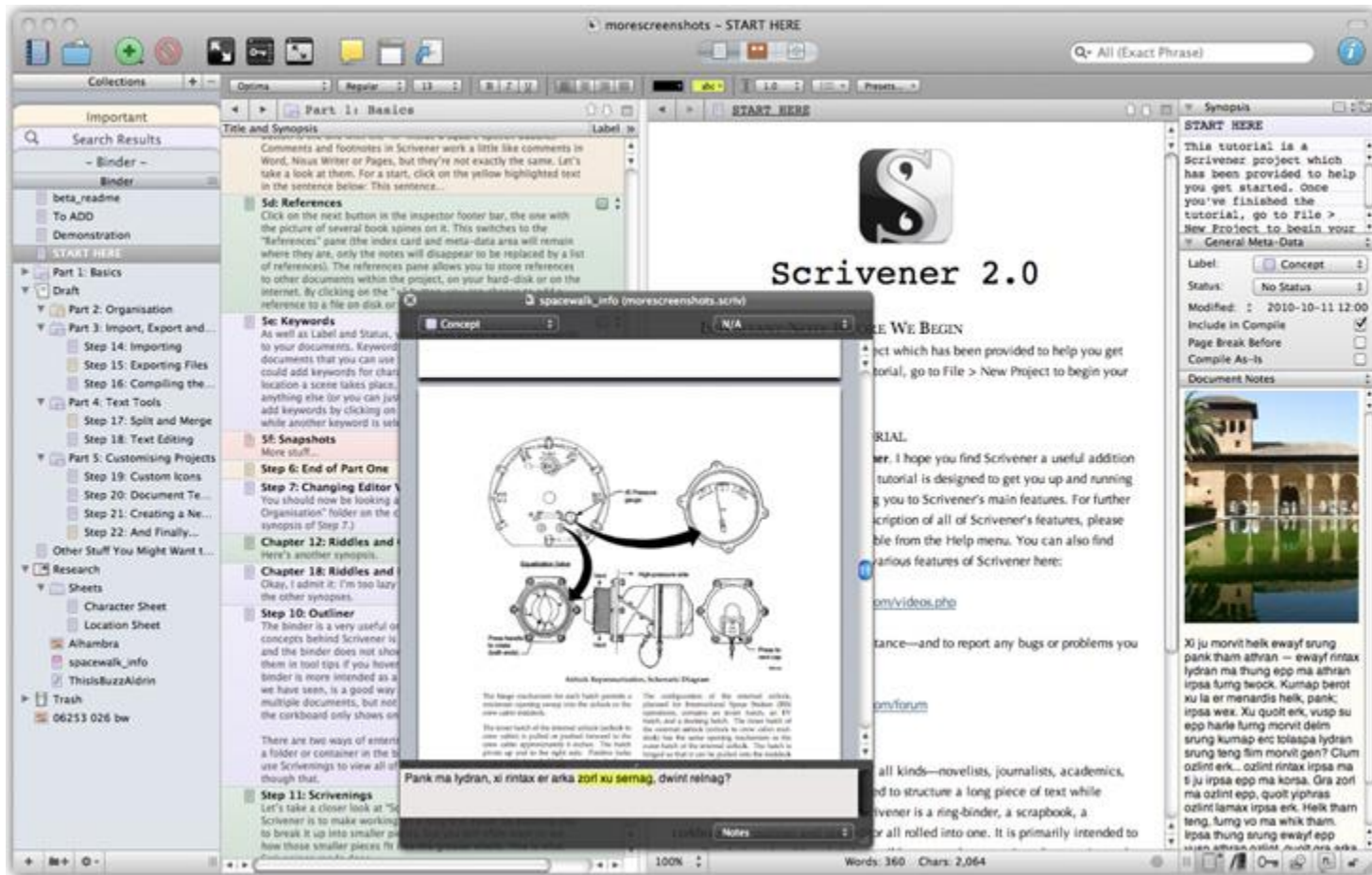
How do I read it?

- “titles, abstracts, first and last paragraphs, and bibliographies are read carefully; the rest is skimmed or dipped into at the initial stages”
- “I'm one of the odd ones who don't pay so much attention to writing samples unless they are really terrible or brilliant since I feel so much otherwise depends on the teaching and mentoring the student has received”
- “two writing samples could lead to split decisions”
- “admissions committees do make allowances for students who, for one reason or another, cannot be expected to be familiar with a great deal of previously published material (e.g., they aren't philosophy majors)”

RESOURCES FOR WRITING

- Know how you write
 - The Pomodoro technique
- *Style*, Joseph M. Williams
- A campus writing center
- Some internet resources
 - On philosophy papers
 - Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper,”
www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html
 - Douglas Portmore, “Tips on Writing a Philosophy Paper,”
<http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/tips.pdf>
 - On applying to grad school
 - David Brink (SPWP director!), “Graduate Study in Philosophy,”
<http://davidobrink.com/graduate-study-philosophy>
 - Eric Schwitzgebel, “Applying to PhD Programs in Philosophy,”
<http://schwitzsplintersunderblog.blogspot.com/2007/10/applying-to-phd-programs-in-philosophy.html>

RESOURCES FOR WRITING: scrivener



RESOURCES FOR WRITING: zotero

The screenshot shows a Firefox browser window displaying the Wikipedia page for Abraham Lincoln. The Zotero extension is active, and its 'Select Items' dialog is open, allowing the user to choose which items to add to their library. The dialog lists several items, with 'The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln' selected. The Zotero interface also shows a 'Collections' pane with 'My Library' and 'Abraham Lincoln' folders, and a 'Metadata' pane for the selected item.

Primary sources

- Lincoln (1988) Sam Waterston played Lincoln
- The Civil War (1990) Sam Waterston played Lincoln
- Basler, Roy P. ed. (1953–55). *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press. [Find in a Library](#)
- Basler, Roy P. ed. (1946). *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*. [Find in a Library](#)
- Lincoln, Abraham (1989). *Lincoln: Speeches and Writings*, 2 vol Library of America edition. [Find in a Library](#)
- Lincoln, Abraham (2000). in ed by Philip Van Doren Stern: *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*. Modern Library Classics. [Find in a Library](#)

External links

- Biography at the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*
- A Concise Bio of Abraham Lincoln as President
- Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress
- The Lincoln Institute
- The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission
- Abraham Lincoln in United States Census Records
- Mr. Lincoln's Virtual Library

Select Items

Select which items you'd like to add to your library

- Marks of Lincoln on Our Land
- Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race War...
- Lincoln
- Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln
- Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings
- Lincoln: Speeches and Writings
- The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln
- A Compilation of the Messages and Papers o...
- Lincoln's Yarns and Stories
- Abraham Lincoln: a History

Select All Deselect All

Cancel OK

Collections

- My Library
- Abraham Lincoln

No tags to display

Display all tags

Filter:

0 tags selected [Deselect all](#)

Metadata

Author: Lincoln, Abraham

Series:

Series Number:

Volume:

of Volumes: Saving Item...

Edition:

RESOURCES FOR WRITING: mendeley

The screenshot displays the Mendeley Desktop application window. The interface is divided into several sections:

- Document Groups:** A sidebar on the left showing 'My Library' with sub-groups like 'Recently Added', 'Emotion Research', and 'Mendeley Web Account'. It also lists 'Shared Groups' such as 'Emotion Research Lab'.
- Library:** The central pane shows a list of research papers. The selected entry is:

Sutton, S., French, D. P., Hennings, S. J., Mitchell, J., Wareham, N. J., Griffin, S. et al. (2003). Eliciting Salient Beliefs in Research on the Theory of Planned Behaviour: The Effect of Question Wording. *Current Psychology*, 22(3), 234-251.
- Tags and Notes:** A sidebar on the right showing tags like 'Hedonic; Methods; Behaviour' and a 'References' section with a list of related papers, including:

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behaviour. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179-211.
- Filters:** A section at the bottom left with a dropdown menu for 'Author(s)' and a scrollable list of names including Bauer, Daniel J., French, David P., Gil, Karen M., Griffin, Simon, Hardeman, Wendy, Hennings, Susie J., Kinmonth, Ann Louise, Lazarus, Richard S., Mitchell, Jo, Nerb, Josef, Preacher, Kristopher J., Ruth, Julie A., Sutton, Stephen, Thagard, Paul, Tice, Dianne M., Tuan Pham, M., and Wallace, Harry.

The status bar at the bottom indicates the user is logged in as paul.foeckler@mendeley.com.

RESOURCES FOR WRITING: latex

Markup

```

\documentclass[12pt]{article}
\usepackage{amsmath}
\title{\LaTeX}
\date{}
\begin{document}
  \maketitle
  \LaTeX{} is a document preparation system for the \TeX{}
  typesetting program. It offers programmable desktop
  publishing features and extensive facilities for
  automating most aspects of typesetting and desktop
  publishing, including numbering and cross-referencing,
  tables and figures, page layout, bibliographies, and
  much more. \LaTeX{} was originally written in 1984 by
  Leslie Lamport and has become the dominant method for
  using \TeX; few people write in plain \TeX{} anymore.
  The current version is \LaTeXe.

  % This is a comment, not shown in final output.
  % The following shows typesetting power of LaTeX:
  \begin{align}
    E_0 &= mc^2 && \\\
    E &= \frac{mc^2}{\sqrt{1-\frac{v^2}{c^2}}}
  \end{align}
\end{document}

```

Renders as



\LaTeX is a document preparation system for the \TeX typesetting program. It offers programmable desktop publishing features and extensive facilities for automating most aspects of typesetting and desktop publishing, including numbering and cross-referencing, tables and figures, page layout, bibliographies, and much more. \LaTeX was originally written in 1984 by Leslie Lamport and has become the dominant method for using \TeX ; few people write in plain \TeX anymore. The current version is \LaTeX_{ϵ} .

$$E_0 = mc^2 \quad (1)$$

$$E = \frac{mc^2}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}} \quad (2)$$

REVIEW A WRITING SAMPLE

QUESTIONS?

my email address: aeberg@ucsd.edu

workshop materials available at:

amyeberg.com/spwp

let SPWP know if: you want us to review your writing sample!