

A word or two about your first graf assignment.

What's weird about these kinds of assignments is the fact that as I'm reviewing your work, I am only reading these graf's to look at writing. It's probably been a long time for many of you since someone focused solely on this particular skill. This is not to say that you haven't received feedback on your writing, I'm sure you have and probably received some excellent advice (which I hope you've taken). Rather I am trying to say that for most written assignments in most classes, your professor or high school teacher was reading your work looking for something else. Usually, to see how you answered a question or understood a concept or read an assignment.

Here, I'm reading every word just to see how the thing is put together. Once we've moved beyond this stage, we'll get to other, bigger, things. But for now, I'm reading your graf's with a few key ideas in mind: Does it make sense? Does it get to the point? Are the words in the logical order? Are there words that don't belong? Are you able to make yourself understood?

The first step though, doesn't start with the page, but in doing the work necessary so that you will know what you are talking about. It's tough to B.S. your way through a piece of writing when it is being judged only as a piece of writing because the writing will lack details and factual information and instead be vague, weak, and lack conviction.

So, between now and tomorrow hopefully, and definitely before you turn in your first graf on Thursday, you need to learn some basic things: what is "health food," what is its history? Do a little work on the history of Post and his products. Have a timeline and some facts/data at your disposal. What did he sell? How much of it? Who did he sell it to? When?

We've got a few weeks to go before reading Marchand's book on advertising, so spend ten minutes getting a sense of what advertising actually is and how it works and bit of its history.

Not that any of the research you do or the information you gather will appear in your graf. It won't. At least it shouldn't. Most of what we learn and read is to prepare our minds so that we can write from a place of authority. And trying to show off everything you just learned is boring. See below. If you must, just bore your friends with all this stuff.

Now that you know some things, spend a half an hour just clicking on the documents that I posted and see what catches your eye. Take some notes. Look at the images, read the words. How does what you see and read match up with what you learned about Post and advertising and health food. Some documents will speak to you. Others won't. There is no formula. No hack. No minimum number of things I expect you to include. No one thing I am looking for. What's there for you?

Which brings us to the writing.

Here's my number one piece of advice to becoming a better student writer:

Stop writing like a student. Students write for professors (or high school teachers) to impress the professor/teacher with their understanding or knowledge because they think that's the way to a good grade. They may be right, but it kills their writing. Honestly, I am not going to be impressed with everything you know about anything. Give me facts. Plainly stated. Let's start there.

Other things for this very first assignment.

- 1) In whatever word processing software you use, find the way to turn on the grammar function and set your maximum sentence length to ten words.
- 2) Before you write your paragraphs, decide exactly what information you wish to include. Reduce every one of those pieces of information to three or four words: the subject (human, probably Post), the action (wrote, designed, included), and a direct object if necessary (copy, image).
- 3) Expand #2 as necessary for context or color.
- 4) Put them in a logical order.
- 5) Write a topic sentence that tells the reader what all those sentences add up to. Use a human subject (probably Post) doing a thing (probably writing or designing a series of advertisements).

I know this sounds super basic. It is super basic. Grip. Stance. Alignment.