Guidelines for Group Term Papers

Getting Ready to Write

Since this is a class on Drugs and the Brain, papers should be related to that topic and akin to the topics covered in class. That is, term papers should be about the pharmacokinetics, pharmacodynamics, cognitive, and socioeconomic factors involved in drug use and abuse.

Before sitting down to write you must have an idea and a plan in mind about what you want to write. That comes from reading everything you can get your hands on related to your subject and discussing it with your group.

How much? For this requirement, I suggest you use 5-8 articles as primary sources and some recent books on the subject.

Secondary sources are useful as leads to primary sources and as a way to gain an overview of your subject and initial familiarity with it. Encyclopedias, for example, are useful secondary sources. Review articles in journals, periodicals, and magazines are good secondary sources as well. But you must go beyond these, for a paper based only on secondary sources is considered weak. You need to get primary sources, such as journal articles.

After reading and digesting the source materials and discussing with your group, start organizing in your mind, or on paper, and create a clear and logical outline. Only then can you sit down at the computer terminal and begin to write whole sentences and paragraphs. Do this without your source references at hand. Do it from memory. Then, when the form and substance look good, consult your references for details, facts, and figures.

Specific Strategy for Doing a Term Paper

1. Consult with your group: pick a topic and assign work
2. Consult encyclopedias. These give you an overview. Some even provide a bibliography. This gives you clues to the names of people who write about this subject, and the titles of journals which publish papers related to it.
3. Follow up those references to find books and papers in journals and magazines. Each gives clues for further searches.
4. TAs (as well as librarians/instructor) can be a valuable resource to get primary sources. But before you consult them you should first have a general acquaintance with your specific subject (since they may not) so you can work with them most effectively.
5. By now you have enough solid understanding of your subject to refine, redefine, and focus the subject of your paper. Do not be surprised if you have accumulated more information than you will actually use.
6. You are also ready to do a search of internet resources. You have the keywords, and the names of the important players in this field.
7. If you get stuck, talk to the TA/Reader and/or Dr. Pineda for guidance.

Things to Keep in Mind While Writing:

- Don't write anything you don't understand. Don't fake it and don't force it. Understand first—then write.
- If you copy anything word-for-word from a source, set it in quotes (if short) or in an indented paragraph (if longer), and always cite the reference.
- Write as if you’re writing for other students in class.
- Make the focus and organization of your paper clear to the reader. Don't ramble from one thing to another aimlessly.
- Find your natural style—don't copy writing style of others. One way to avoid this is to sit down at typewriter or word processor without any books, and simply put down your own thoughts. Then use your notes to fill in specifics, references, quotes, etc.
- A paper should have your personal stylistic stamp on it: a point of view, a method of selection, a central theme.
- A good writer always tries to educate the reader.
- Give your piece to others in the group; put the pieces together and make sure they all flow well.

Mechanics and Style

Papers should be at least 8-10 pages. Use graph or visuals to illustrate points but don’t overdo it (length does not include reference list).

Have a title page (title, your name, name of class, etc), use sections and subsections to divide the text, number the pages, have a reference (or bibliography), and use figures, tables, and graphs to illustrate points. Title page and references/bibliography do not count towards the 8-10 page length.

Type and double-space the text. Use only one side of each sheet, with adequate margins on all sides.

Proof-read your paper carefully for correct spelling and grammar. As a group, read it critically for form and content.

One mark of good style is ease of reading. Read your paper out loud. If you can read it without stumbling or hesitating, that's a good sign. Fix any sentences that cause you to stumble. Each sentence, each word, must have a purpose in conveying a specific idea or a feeling. Remove any which don't.
Citations and References.

Citations and references guide the reader to where you obtained your information. Common knowledge need not be referenced. But if you reference something most people don't know you should document the source of that knowledge.

There are many acceptable styles for references, but these general principles apply:

- **Be complete.** Give sufficient information so that the reader can track down your references through standard search procedures. References to books must include author, publisher, publication date, and complete title. References to published papers must also include the journal title, volume and number, date, and page numbers of the particular referenced articles. Look at how papers in journals reference other papers.
- **Be consistent.** Adopt a style and stick to it.

References to WWW Sources.

Net citations will differ slightly, depending on where you found them online...