

# **“How to Write an ‘F’ Paper: Fresh Advice for Students of Freshman English”**

**Joseph C. Pattison**

Writing an “F” paper is admittedly not an easy task, but one can learn to do it by grasping the right principles. The thirteen below, if practiced diligently, should lead any student to that fortune in his writing.

## **Obscure the Ideas**

1. Select a topic that is big enough to let you wander around the main idea without ever being forced to state it precisely. If an assigned topic has been limited for you, take a detour that will allow you to amble away from it for a while.
2. Pad! Pad! Pad! Do not develop your ideas. Simply restate them in safe, spongy generalizations to avoid the need to find evidence to support what you say. Always point out the repetition with the phrase, “As previously noted...” Better yet, repeat word-for-word at least one or two of your statements.
3. Disorganize your discussion. For example, if you are using time order to present your material, keep the reader alert by making the jump from the past to the present only to spring back into the past preparatory to a leap into the future preceding a return hop into the present just before the finish of the point about the past. Devise comparable strategies to use with other principles for organizing a discussion such as space, contrast, cause-effect, and climax.
4. Begin a new paragraph every sentence or two. By generous use of white space, make the reader acutely aware that he is looking at a page blank of sustained thought.

Like this.

## **Mangle Sentences**

5. Fill all the areas of your sentences with deadwood. Incidentally, “the area of” will deaden almost any sentence, and it is especially ineffective when displayed prominently at the beginning of any sentence.
6. Using fragments and run-on sentences. Do not use a main subject and a main verb, for the reader will be able to understand your main idea much too easily. Just toss him parts of an idea at a time, as in “Using fragments...” (See beginning of #6) To gain sentence variety, throw in an occasional run-on sentence thus the reader will have to read slowly and carefully to get the idea.
7. Your sentence order invert for statements of the least important matters. That will force the reader to be attentive to understand even the simplest point you make.
8. You, in the introduction, body, and conclusion of your paper, to show that you can contrive ornate, graceful sentences, should use involution. Frequent separation of subjects from verbs by insertion of involved phrases and clauses will prove that you know it can be done to a sentence.

## **Slovenize the Diction**

9. Add the popular “-wise” and “ize” endings to words. Say, “Timewise, it is fastest to go by US 64.” Rather than simply, “It is faster to go by US 64.” Choose “circularize” in preference to “circulate.” Practice will smartenize your style.
10. Use vague words in place of precise ones. From the start, establish a vagueness of tone by saying, “The thing is...” instead of, “The issue is...” Force your reader to be imaginative throughout his reading of your paper.
11. Employ lengthy Latinate locutions whenever possible. Shun the simplicity of style that comes from the apt use of short, familiar words, especially those of Anglo Saxon origin. Show that you can get the

“maximum” (L.) not merely the “most” (A.S.) from every word choice you make.

12. Inject humor into your writing by using the wrong word occasionally. Write “then” when you mean “than” or “to” when you mean “too.” Every reader likes a laugh.
13. Find a “tried and true” phrase to use to clinch a point. It will sound comfortingly folksy to the reader. Best of all, since you want to end in a conversational and friendly way, sprinkle your conclusion with clichés. “Put a little frosting on the cake,” as the saying goes.

Well, to ensconce this whole business in a nutshell, you, above all, an erudite discourse on nothing in the field of your topic should pen. Thereby gaining the reader’s credence in what you say.

Suggestion-wise, one last thing: File-ize this list for handy reference the next time a paper you write.

Pattison, Joseph C. “How to Write an ‘F’ Paper: Fresh Advice for Students of Freshman English.” *Discovering Ideas: An Anthology for Writers*, edited by Jean Wyrick, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982, pp. 317-318.