Writing papers

I. Overall organization

The paper should contain a clearly stated thesis near the beginning. This is the argument which the body of the paper will develop through a grouping of sub-points and various kinds of supporting information. Thesis development must flow in a logical manner throughout the paper to convince the reader of the rightness and importance of the thesis. Each paragraph in the paper should clearly pertain to the thesis and advance the argument in a logical manner so that the reader knows at every point in the paper how the writing contributes to thesis development.

Common errors at this level: failure to provide a clear statement of thesis; failure to provide supporting arguments and evidence for the thesis; failure to adequately address counterarguments; failure to organize the paper so that thesis development flows logically.

II. Paragraph organization

Organize each paragraph around a central idea, expressed in a topic sentence that serves the paragraph much as the thesis statement serves the paper. Other sentences in the paragraph serve to develop the topic sentence. The reader should be able to skim the paper by reading the first couple sentences in each paragraph and get a good idea of the flow of the writer's argument.

Common errors at this level: Sentences in paragraph do not hold together but appear to be a random collection of statements. Paragraphs lack transitions indicating the connection between them.

III. Sentence structure

Sentences need to be properly constructed. Beyond that, they should serve effectively to convey the writer's message. Try to use variety in sentence structure and word choice. Dull, uninteresting writing often can be strengthened by paying more attention to verbs. Avoid the passive voice unless you have a reason to use it in a particular context. (Note the difference from "The passive voice is to be avoided.")

Common errors at this level: Mechanical errors in punctuation, spelling, or sentence structure, including fragments and run-on sentences.