

# Writing Advice

Effective Writing Center



# UMUC

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your progress in writing this assignment for your biology course. Your paper was very interesting to read. I have not read anything about West Nile virus in a long time. It seemed like there was a lot of media about for while and then things died down. I learned a lot from reading this information.

My name is Michelle, and it is my pleasure to work with you today. I have been a Writing Advisor for over a year and love working with so many diverse students on a daily basis. You might find this surprising, but I learn a lot from you too! I work with students from every major, therefore; I have acquired a lot of knowledge about every discipline! ☺ While I learn about your particular assignment topic, my main goal is to present you with writing skills that you can carry with you throughout your entire college career.

You are welcome to come to the Effective Writing Center for help at any stage in the writing process, whether you are having trouble understanding an assignment or want feedback on a rough draft. At the EWC we are attentive readers who help you improve as a writer by explaining and modeling effective writing skills. For a more detailed discussion of our services, please consult the [EWC Web site](#).

## PLEASE NOTE

- *Advisors may not be experts in the topic your paper covers.*
- *Advisors will not make any judgment about the grade your paper may receive.*
- *Advisors do not copyedit papers. The advisor will use sections of your paper to model editing you should do.*
- *Advisors know only as much about the assignment as you have shared. Please provide an assignment description in the submission form.*

## Advice Overview

Resources to help you revise your writing assignment are hyperlinked within this letter and in the [Resources](#) section at the end. If you have time, I would like you to read your paper again before reading this advice. Since sending your paper in to the Writing Center, you have had a break from it and reading it again will allow you to connect with what you have written. My suggestions and advice will make more sense if the material is fresh in your mind. Thank you!

## Assignment Requirements

According to your assignment guidelines, you are to write a 5-7 page paper with at least 4 outside sources that captures a scientific topic in the news. You are to state the topic, summarize an article, relate the topic to class, relate the topic to everyday life, and explain the importance of this topic. You did a great job doing all of these things. We will still go over all areas and discuss a few small details in each section.

## Thesis & Organization

### ***Thesis Development:***

The thesis statement is the most important area of your paper. It should express your point or argument clearly, in the last sentence of your introduction paragraph. Thesis statements always have an academic tone, so they should not include wording such as: “In this paper I will,” or “The point of this paper.” Here is an example of a well written thesis statement: “Although many might disagree, the death penalty is a just method of repaying criminals that have murdered or committed horrendous crimes.” This thesis has a clear argument. If you are not arguing a point, but writing more of a research paper, your thesis would look something like this: “When making steps to improve children’s lives, adults must examine their health and wellbeing, family dynamics, and quality of education.” If this thesis statement was used, the body of the paper would discuss health and wellbeing, family dynamics, and quality of education.

Your thesis statement reads: “The known facts about the virus have been slowly uncovered since its first appearance in Northeastern United States.” Your thesis statement should be the last sentence in your introduction and it should showcase the main point you will make throughout your essay. After reading your paper, the main points I received were that this virus spreads easily and can affect human beings. You need to find the detailed focus in your thesis statement and present it right away. The sentence above is a bit too vague and needs some more detail to really reach your audience. Your outline is impressive and the information you present is well researched and impressive. You just need to show it in your thesis! ☺ If you have any questions on thesis statements, please visit:

The Writing Center UNC

<http://www.unc.edu/depts./wcweb/handouts/thesis/html>

### ***Introduction Development:***

Your introduction has three jobs: 1) grab attention on your topic 2) present general information on your topic (citation or quote free) and 3) ease into a focused thesis statement. The first sentence should be an attention grabber. Whether you use a statistic, quote, or shocking rhetorical question, the point is to gain some interest from your audience.

You begin your introduction with the following sentence: “Usually cool calm spring mornings bring about the sounds of birds chirping away in a cheerful serenade, but in recent years the sounds of joy have vanished.” This is a good beginning, but I wondering how much it fits into a scientific research paper. I think that perhaps a statistic would fit better to start out. Perhaps you could provide a statistic on how many cases of this virus has hit the human population. This would grab attention and get your audience

thinking, while at the same time presenting information in a more formal/academic tone. The sentence you have now reminds me of a paper you might write for English. You have to remember that this is a research paper and the tone should stay academic. I also notice your introduction is a bit long. Remember that you should present an attention grabber and general information that leads smoothly into your focused thesis statement. You do not want to get too much into detail in your introduction until you hit your thesis, where you present detailed information on the main areas you will cover. If you have any questions about your introduction, please visit:

[UMUC Audio Tutorial: Introductions](http://polaris.umuc.edu/ewc/tutorials/introductions/)  
<http://polaris.umuc.edu/ewc/tutorials/introductions/>



## Development & Research

### ***Paragraph Development:***

Paragraphs are many sentences dealing with a single topic that should possess clarity, unity, and a clear topic sentence to begin every new paragraph. Each of your paragraphs should stick to one topic and ease smoothly into the next paragraph.

You have done a lot of research and it shows. Your paragraphs and writing are very clear and you stay on topic in each of your paragraphs. Nice job on this. I do see some areas where you could use more transition to make your sentences flow smoother from one to another. We will talk about this now. If you have any questions on writing paragraphs, please visit:

[UMUC Audio Tutorials: Paragraphs](#)

### ***Transitions:***

Transitions hold our ideas together, connecting sentences and paragraphs. Transitions are needed to help your reader understand and connect to your ideas in a logical way. We also use transitions to help explain a relationship, whether it is compare and contrast or cause and effect. One of the most common places to include transition is in topic sentences. Here is an example of a smooth topic sentence: "Consequently, the character in the movie did end up moving away." This is a vague example, but shows the tone you want to achieve at the beginning of your new paragraphs.



Here is an example of one of your topic sentences: "Scientists have feverously researched the history of the virus to help shed light on the history and expected impacts of the virus."

When you read this aloud, do you think it might be a bit abrupt to start out your new paragraph? Simply switching your words around will help with this sentence. For example, "To help shed the light on the history and impact of the virus, scientists have feverously researched the history for quite some time." Something like this might sound a bit smoother. You will want to rearrange or add transition words to all topic sentences that seem abrupt when reading them aloud. You want your ideas to flow nicely in your paragraphs and part of this is creating smooth topic sentences. If you have any questions about transitions, please visit:

## UMUC Audio Tutorial: Transitions



### ***Conclusion Development:***

Some important points to remember when writing your conclusion include:

- A brief summary of main points.
- Restatement of thesis in different chosen words.
- Result or consequence of what you have written about.

Your conclusion looks great and really stresses the importance and impact this virus has on our lives. I would like for you to really examine the tone of your conclusion vs. your introductory paragraph and possibly revise your introductory to have the same impact your conclusion has. You really do a nice job of stressing the significance of this topic. If you have any questions on conclusions, please visit:

## UMUC Audio Tutorial: Conclusions



## Formatting & Citations

I was surprised to see that you used MLA citation style. Usually in science courses, APA is the most used. I did notice one mistake you made throughout your paper concerning citations. When you present Alters & Alters and you do not switch sources for quite sometime, you do not need to keep typing out Alters & Alters. You can simply include the page number after you have presented the last name once. If you switch to a different source and then turn back to Alters & Alters, then you need to retype their names. I hope this makes sense.

## Grammar & Mechanics

### ***Clarity/Unity:***

There are some small mistakes throughout your paper regarding grammar and mechanics. Here is one example of a sentence that needs a comma: "Since the arrival in 1999 the West Nile Virus has plagued the entire order of birds in the United States, and it shows no signs of giving up." You need a comma after 1999. Since this isn't the only sentence where a comma is missing, I am going to present some comma review for you, here.

### **Comma Review**

**Here is a summary of the 12 main comma rules.**

1. Use commas to separate **items in a series**.
  - a. He likes going to the game, drinking beer with his buddies, and dating fast women. (3 phrases)
  - b. She likes spaghetti, lasagna, and manicotti. ( 3 nouns)

2. Use a comma *before* a **coordinating conjunction** when you join two complete sentences.
  - a. The coordinating conjunctions are: FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)
  - b. We would like to come to the party, **but** we have to study for final exams.
  - c. Nobody said they could come to the party, **so** we decided to cancel it.
  - d. We can go to the party, **or** we can stay home and study.
  - e. We will have to stay home and study, **for** we want to pass the exam.
  - f. We would like to come to the party, **yet** we also want to pass our exams.
  - g. Henry can go to the party, **and** I can stay home and study for both of us.
  - h. We can neither come to the game, **nor** can we go to the party.
  
3. **Date, Addresses, Titles**
  - a. He moved to 23 Elm St., Chicago, Illinois, and he doesn't come visit anymore. (Notice the comma after the state.)
  - b. On June 25, 2006, Tom and Sara will get married. (Note the comma after the year.)
  - c. Mrs. Shirley Jones, director of the after-school program, recommends that kids be supervised while doing their homework. (Title is set off on both sides with a comma.)
  
4. **Direct Address**
  - a. Sally, please take out the trash.
  - b. Take out the trash, Sally.
  - c. You aren't going to win, Sally, with that attitude.
  
5. Use a comma to separate two **coordinate adjectives** (of equal value)
  - a. To determine if the adjectives are coordinate, try putting the word "and" between them or reverse the order.
  - b. We bought ten red balloons. (We cannot say: 'We bought red ten balloons.)
  - c. We gave the kids shiny, new quarters. (We gave the kids new, shiny quarters.)
  
6. Use a comma after **Introductory Transition words** (words that can stand alone.)
  - a. However, therefore, consequently, moreover, furthermore, nevertheless, in fact, of course, finally – etc.
  - b. **Therefore**, we should plan to stay home and study for the exam.
  - c. **Nevertheless**, we decided to go to the party anyways.
  
7. Use a comma after **Introductory phrases** (prepositional, verbal, and infinitive)
  - a. After the game behind the bleachers, a group of kids gathered to have a tailgate party and listen to music. (prepositional phrases)
  - b. Running to the store, Jack almost got hit by a car. (verbal – begins with an incomplete verb form)
  - c. To pass this exam, I must study every night next week. (Infinitive phrase -- "to" + the verb)

## [Proofreading for Commas](#)

I also notice some areas where word puts a green line underneath something to tell you it needs to be corrected. If you right click onto that squiggly line, it will usually show you the correct way. Here is an example: **Those lacking immunity have a limited choices, relocate away from highly concentrated areas of mosquitoes or hope for a mutation of their genes to evolve some means of resistance (Alters & Alters 256).** If you right click onto the green line, it will show you some correct choices to correct your wording. Pay special attention when word does this. You have many areas with green squiggly lines.

### ***Importance of Proofreading:***

Please also remember to use your spell check and proofread your paper aloud. Reading your paper aloud helps find any errors that you might not have noticed when writing it. Sometimes we can repeatedly read our own words silently and not notice an error and then read it aloud and find many.

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## Summary

Good luck! As you continue your work on this project, be sure to:

- Focus your thesis.
- Keep an academic tone.
- Begin with an attention grabber.
- Use transition in your writing.
- Proofread for missing commas and green squiggly lines from word! ☺

### **Writing Advisor:**

*Michelle Bowman*

The Effective Writing Center

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## More Resources

The Effective Writing Center

<http://www.umuc.edu/writingcenter>