

Writing Advice

Effective Writing Center



UMUC

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your progress in writing this assignment for your Communications class. I don't know much about your subject matter, but your knowledge and confidence really impressed me.

My name is Aimee, and it's my pleasure to work with you again. 😊

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 [More Resources](#) section at the end. Before reading this advice, please review your assignment guidelines and the writing that you submitted, and make sure that you have copies of both nearby, so that you can refer to them easily. We will discuss the following:

- Your paper's **thesis statement**
- The structure of your **paragraphs**
- Grammar & mechanics**

As we work on your draft, I will frequently quote from and demonstrate revisions to your text. Your words will appear in **blue boldface**, while my revisions will be in **red**.

Although we will discuss certain revisions and review certain rules, your **professor's instructions will always take precedence** over any other advice that you receive from the EWC, so always refer to your assignment guidelines first if you have questions. If you refer to them frequently and get to know them well, you'll have a much better chance of meeting all of your assignment requirements.

Assignment Requirements

Your **assignment description** indicates that you're writing an analytical report that presents a problem, analyzes the problem, explores various solutions, and makes a recommendation about the best, or most feasible, one. Here's an overview of the major requirements for the report:

Required	What you have	What you need
4,000-4,500 words	3,645 words	At least another 355 words
Letter of transmittal	Letter of transmittal	
Table of contents	Table of contents	
Abstract	Abstract	
At least one graphic	Two graphics	
APA style in-text citations	APA style in-text citations	
APA style References page	APA style References page	

As you can see, you're in pretty good shape. You will want to make sure that you develop the paper so that it meets the length requirement, and I would also recommend reviewing the sample reports that your professor mentions.

Thesis & Organization

In this type of assignment, your **recommendation** functions as a kind of **thesis statement**: this is your "argument" about the best course of action, or the best solution, for this problem. Your draft thesis/recommendation reads as follows:

The recommendation is that the senior system administrator must take over management of the Jackal network, and work to document operations and put concrete procedures in place for the network to thrive and succeed. Once in place the other objectives will follow like; qualified technical backups, clear processes, and confidence in working with the system due to knowledge being readily available.

My only suggestion about this is a structural one. I'm not sure this is as clear as it could be, and I think you can make this a little stronger and more concise. It's a good idea to place the "pay off" or the benefit at the beginning of the sentence, since this will catch a reader's attention. Here's an example of how you might structure the beginning of this:

In order for the network to thrive and succeed, the senior system administrator....

It would also be helpful to address the structure of the second sentence. I think you can make the cause/effect relationship between your proposed recommendation and the objectives a bit clearer. Here's an example:

Once knowledge is readily available, qualified technical backups, clear processes, and confidence in the system will...

These are just examples, and they're just minor rearrangements, but you can see that by moving the information at the end of the sentences to the beginning, your ideas seem a lot clearer and more forceful. Feel free to use these as models. ☺

Development & Research

I'm definitely not an expert on your topic, but the information in the paper seems logically organized. Well done! I have a few ideas about your **paragraph structure**, and these should be fairly simple revisions. As a general rule, paragraphs in academic papers should be about **150-250 words**, and each one should focus on a specific point, or idea.

There are several short paragraphs in the draft, and it would be worthwhile to think about combining them to form longer, more developed paragraphs. For example, instead of having three very short paragraphs on **hardware**, you could combine these into one well-developed paragraph, like this:

The network is running using Gigabit fiber. All network drops have fiber, but must be converted using a media converter to CAT5 cable and then the speed drops to 100 megabits per second. If the thin clients were outfitted with fiber network cards then the response time of the client to the server could be much faster. Currently there is only one server that handles all the requests and connections of users on the Jackal network. There needs to be an additional server for load balancing. This way clients requests can be spread between the servers to allow for better response time. It also divides the processing power so not all resources are being used from one machine. An additional server is needed to be used as an imaging station for the thin clients. Right now there is no capability to image the thin clients remotely. There is software available to do this, but the hardware is not available at this time. If there is a patch or major change to be made on the thin clients, then each of the 160 machines must be collected and brought back to the operation manager's area for updating. This consumes manpower and time when there are other things that could be done on the Jackal network.

If you make similar revisions to the short paragraphs in the rest of the paper, it will improve the "flow" of your ideas. Try to pay special attention to the software, processes, and conclusion sections, since these will definitely benefit from this type of paragraph revision.

- If you have other questions about structure, UNC-Chapel Hill's handout on [Paragraphs](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/paragraphs.html) <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/paragraphs.html>> will also help to structure successful paragraphs.

Formatting & Citations

I only have a few suggestions about your **APA style** citations:

First, while you will include the author's first initial on the References page, the in-text citations will only include the author's last name. (See the example below.)

Second, when including direct quotations (exact words in quotation marks), you need to include the page number of the quotation. Here's an example:

Strategic management usually consists of the CEO or top executives. They have a wide scope and develop "organization goals, strategies, policies, and objectives as part of a strategic planning process" (O'Brien & Marakas, 2006, p. 427).

- Diana Hacker's page on [APA In-Text Citations](#) is very easy to follow, and covers most types of sources. Use the link in the left sidebar to access information on your [References](#) page.
- For general rules about APA style, including how to format the paper (page numbers, title, headings, etc.), check out Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL), which has a great page on the [Basics of APA Style](#).

Grammar & Mechanics

I have a few **grammar & style** suggestions, along with some examples and resources. These examples are *only* examples, not global corrections, so you'll need to review the paper carefully for other instances of these issues. There's a lot that you do really well (though we don't get to point those things out in as much detail), and I think you'll be happy with what you can accomplish!

- Spell out **numbers** that you can express in one or two words, as long as they do not refer to dates, times of day, addresses, percentages, or specific sums of money:

The Jackal network has been running and in place for approximately five years now and supports over five hundred users.

- The University of Richmond has a really useful guide to [Numbers and Numerals](#).
- Review the paper carefully for **subject-verb agreement**. Subjects and verbs "agree" when they are both in the singular form, or both in the plural form:

Figure 1 shows the three levels and the groups that make up those levels of the Decision Support System (DSS).

- For more on this, visit Purdue University's [Making Subjects and Verbs Agree](#).
- Finding a good **proofreading technique** is a very easy way to improve your writing. Since our eyes tend to skip over mistakes when reading silently, I find it useful to read my work aloud. This makes it possible to catch mistakes that I otherwise would miss.

Summary

Here's a reminder of what we covered:

- Try to make your thesis/recommendation as clear as possible.

- Combine short paragraphs into longer ones.
- Make minor revisions to APA in-text citations.
- Spell out one- and two-word numbers.
- Make sure subjects and verbs agree.
- Proofread!

Good luck with your assignment! I've enjoyed working with you! ☺

Writing Advisor:

Aimee Maxfield
The Effective Writing Center
www.umuc.edu/writingcenter
University of Maryland University College
3501 University Boulevard East, Adelphi, Maryland 20783

More Resources

[APA In-Text Citations](#)

[References](#)

[Basics of APA Style](#)

[Making Subjects and Verbs Agree](#)