

The Writing Center @ KUMC

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What is Good Writing for Graduate School?

Anything you did well as an undergraduate writer, you must also do well as a graduate writer, or even better, if you want to succeed. But what exactly are the characteristics of good graduate-level writing, especially in the scientific fields? The characteristics vary from discipline to discipline, but some things remain constant:

- Synthesis of ideas
- Logic and organization
- Grammar and Punctuation
- Critical thinking
- Research writing
- Diction and vocabulary

Good scholarly writing has to have 1) a discipline/discourse/scholar context; 2) good organization (main ideas introduced early and defended, complicated, and/or refined); 3) coherence, unity, and a clear emphasis in each paragraph; 4) worthwhile content explored and explained; 5) conciseness; 6) audience awareness; and 7) good mechanical skills (including grammar, spelling, punctuation).

Here's more information about the difference between undergrad and grad writing:

Undergraduate	Graduate
Mechanically correct	Mechanically skillful
Concise	Concise and nuanced
Clear	Engaging, interesting, and clear
Maybe original	Original research question/topic
Summative/descriptive	Deep exploration
Citations	Extensive research
Transition words/phrases	Strong organizational frame
General audience	Discipline-specific audience
Presentable	Publishable

In sum, good graduate-level writing is discipline-specific, original, expert, clear, concise, and correct. It's not for the general public but for scholars in your field. Graduate-level writing doesn't just fulfill conventions of good writing, it exceeds them.

A writing illustration

Here's a quick show of differences. In the left column, a short explanation intended for a general audience (family, friends, or peers) on how the writer came to be interested in their field of study. In the right column, the same explanation for an audience of graduate students and professors. Compare the two versions and note the differences in the tone and word choice:

General/Undergraduate Writing:	Graduate/Professional Writing:
<p>Liberty University has always been a place I wanted to attend. I visited here while I was a student in high school, and I really liked the environment and the people. Plus, I wanted to study more about my faith, so this school seemed like a good fit for me. When I visited, I was blown away by the huge campus, the Division I sports teams, and the size of the student body. How great it is to study at a place with 10,000 Christians! I liked it so much that I stayed after I finished my undergrad degree. Now I'm a student in the Seminary. I can't wait to use all I've learned to minister to others.</p>	<p>Although I have long been aware of the existence of Liberty University, I did not seriously consider it until I was a high school student. With college decisions looming, I began investigating schools and found that Liberty University met many of my criteria: it was large, vibrant, and distinctively Christian. Thus, at the age of 17, I visited the Liberty campus and found that my expectations were met and exceeded. The campus was physically impressive; the athletic teams competed at a very high level; the student body was large and diverse. In short, Liberty University had all the advantages of a larger state school, along with the capacity to train me spiritually— something that other secular schools I visited unfortunately lacked. My decision to come to Liberty was effortless; indeed, my decision to remain at Liberty for an advanced degree in the Seminary was equally easy. I pray that I will be able to use all the blessings my time at Liberty has bestowed on me to, in turn, bless others as I minister to them.</p>

Audience indeed makes a big difference in terms of style, strategy and impact. It's not that one is simple and the other high-toned or wordy. The readers are different, with their own way of thinking and speaking. All writers need to consider seriously what makes for "good writing."