

Fr. D's Top Ten Ways of Writing an Atrocious Paper

- 1. Start working on the paper the night before it is due.** A good paper requires a lot of thought and often some research. It can't be done adequately when there is no time to collect sufficient source materials or to think about how these are best utilized in the formation of an argument. Start the paper the night before, and you will almost certainly end up with a paper that is superficial in its arguments and possibly inaccurate in its reporting of facts, data, or events. But if you want your paper to be atrocious, this is the place to start.
- 2. Turn in your first draft.** No muss, no fuss. After writing your last paragraph, print the paper out and just turn it in as is. Don't even look at it again. (See #6.) First drafts are almost always atrocious. Your teachers will be able to recognize them from the first paragraph.
- 3. Don't have a thesis.** A really good paper has to have a *thesis*—that is, it must state a hypothesis or argument. A paper with a thesis has purpose and direction. An atrocious paper tends to be aimless drivel that fills up the required number of pages.
- 4. Don't follow the teacher's instructions.** Generally, teachers give detailed instructions about how a paper is to be written: its length, format, structure, etc. If you want to write an atrocious paper, feel free to ignore or misplace the instructions. The only rule that an atrocious paper has to follow is not to pay attention to any rules that the instructor has set up. Pretend you're at Burger King: do it *your way*.
- 5. Don't spell check.** Never mind that spell checking takes only a few minutes. Never mind that most people (even good spellers) need to do it. One of the trademarks of atrocious papers is numerous spelling errors.
- 6. Don't proofread.** Since you are turning in the draft that you probably printed out five minutes before class, or at 4:00 A.M. after you've pulled a near "all nighter," you really don't have the time or the desire to look over the draft and check for obvious errors in writing or content. Heaven forbid! If you do this, you might find that you have to *revise!* Your atrocious paper might then turn into a reasonably good one. You might even catch mistakes that your spell catcher couldn't (like the difference between "there" and "their," "hear" and "here," etc.) But then, you probably didn't run the spell checker, did you?
- 7. Don't be attentive to consistency.** Don't worry about mixing singulars and plurals, second person and third person, present tense and past tense. Don't use parallel constructions that make a sentence easier for your teacher to read. An atrocious paper is meant to be virtually unreadable.
- 8. Don't reference sources properly.** Atrocious papers pride themselves on plagiarism: borrowing ideas or even direct quotes without proper referencing. If someone wants to look something up from an atrocious paper, he or she won't know where to begin, because often sources are listed without page references, if they are listed at all.
- 9. Assume that the teacher knows what you are talking about.** After all, the teacher knows the subject better than you do, right? An atrocious paper never goes out of its way to make itself clear.
- 10. Tell the teacher what you think he or she wants to hear.** Sadly, some teachers *want* to hear only what they espouse or agree with. Most don't. Most want students to think for themselves, to take a risk of stretching themselves intellectually. Atrocious papers are intellectually wimpy; they rarely deviate from the professor's perspective; or when they do, they don't give good arguments for their position.

P.S. To write a good paper, do the opposite of the above.