WRITING CHEAT SHEET

There is NO magic template for a perfect A+ paper in college, **BUT** there are THREE questions you can ask at the start of each project in order to DOMINATE the assignment.

Your answers to these questions will help you determine your

FORMAT & **STYLE** & **CONTENT**

1

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

Professor-Speak:

What are the demographics of your audience members?

What are the psychological traits of your audience members regarding this topic?

What past knowledge does your audience have about this topic?

Is there one primary audience, or are there secondary and tertiary audiences?

Student Translation:

Think about your audience's age; gender; ethnicity; race, sexual orientation; socio-economic status; cultural beliefs; primary language; profession; family life; religion; educational level; hobbies; political affiliations; personality types; values and systems of morals/ethics; previous knowledge of and attitude toward your topic, etc.

Is your audience all the same or will you need to cater to two, three different types of audience members?

FORMAT

Consider and adapt:

Organizational scheme (introduction, inductive or deductive logical progression, and final conclusion?)

Transitions (more or less context for transitioning between points?)

Topic sentences (more of less guiding signposts?)

Headers, lists, citations, notes (subtitles, bulleted lists, MLA/APA citations, footnotes, endnotes?)

STYLE

Consider and adapt:

Language choices (specialized language, high end vocabulary, simplified terms, slang?)

Tone (conversational, formal, casual, upbeat, serious,etc.?)

Sentence style and length (long, short, clear, verbose?)

Voice or persona (detached, personal, informative, sarcastic, evaluative, opinionated?)

CONTENT

Consider and adapt:

Introductory context & background info (more, less, length, level of detail, historical context?)

Thesis statement (length, position in text, level of detail?)

Examples (add, remove, alter length and detail, ?)

Supportive additions (external research, quotes, pictures, graphs, charts?)

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

Professor-Speak:

What is the rhetorical goal of this text?

Given your particular audience, what is your writerly purpose?

What is the rhetorical situation and historical context that surrounds this topic?

Student Translation:

What is the point of this text (beyond completing the assignment and getting a grade); what is it supposed to accomplish?

What do you want your audience members to do/think/behave like after reading it?

Is your purpose to to describe, inform, demonstrate knowledge, summarize, analyze, present research, construct an argument, persuade, theorize, reflect upon, advocate for, entertain, etc.?

What have other people said about this topic; how have others reacted to those previous texts, conversations, and debates?

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CONTENT

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(length, position in text, level of detail?)
Examples
(add, remove, alter length and detail, ?)
Supportive additions
(external research, quotes, pictures, graphs, charts?)

WHAT IS THE GENRE?

Professor-Speak:

What genre (or combination of genres) would be most appropriate and effective given your audience and purpose?

What are the traditional conventions of that genre?

What are the rhetorical benefits and drawbacks of following or breaking those generic conventions?

Student Translation:

How have writers working with similar purposes and audiences responded in the past? What kind of texts have they created?

What were the common features, elements, parts, components, and characteristic of those past texts?

Would mimicking those past writers and characteristics of their past texts be the most effective choice? What might be the benefit of breaking with those traditions?

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