

# Student Reference Guide to the Academic Expectations of Willits Charter School

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide students with a quick reference to the basic requirements for written work at Willits Charter School. By becoming familiar with and adhering to the standards expressed in this handbook, students will strengthen their ability to communicate clearly and effectively.

These expectations should be thought of as the basic expectations for all assignments in all classes. Work that does not adhere to the standards outlined in this handbook will not receive full credit and may be returned to the student without a grade.

## **BASIC EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL CLASSES**

### **ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS *MUST*:**

- Be legible
- Use complete sentences that “stand alone”
- Use the proper format for paragraphs and essays

### **ALL ASSIGNMENTS INVOLVING RESEARCH *MUST*:**

- Not plagiarize
- Cite sources in proper format
- Include a “Works Cited” page

### **ALL ANSWERS TO MATH PROBLEMS *MUST*:**

- Be legible
- Show the calculations leading up to the answer
- Provide units when necessary

### **ALL GRAPHS *MUST*:**

- Be neat
- Have labeled axes
- Have a title

**I. EVERY SENTENCE YOU WRITE *MUST*:**

- a. be legible
- b. begin with a capital letter
- c. end with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation mark
- d. have a subject and a predicate

**IN ADDITION TO THE ABOVE STANDARDS, EVERY  
SENTENCE YOU WRITE IN RESPONSE TO A  
QUESTION *MUST*:**

- e. answer every aspect of the question
- f. be understandable without the question standing next to it
- g. not begin with “it” or “because”
- h. have antecedents for all pronouns

**FOR QUALITY WORK, EVERY SENTENCE YOU WRITE  
*SHOULD*:**

- i. have correct punctuation
- j. have no spelling errors
- k. have no comma splices or run-ons
- l. not ramble

## **II. EVERY PARAGRAPH YOU WRITE MUST:**

- a. be indented five spaces on the first line
- b. be double-spaced
- c. handle one idea

## **A QUALITY PARAGRAPH WILL:**

- d. be fully developed (*clarify, define, exemplify, illustrate*)
- e. show organization (*chronological, sequential, opinion/reason, comparison/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, etc.*)
- f. be coherent (*flow like a river: transitional devices, conjunctions, adverbs*)
- g. be concise (*unnecessary words obscure meaning*)
- h. be clear (*avoid verb tense shifts, misplaced and dangling modifiers; use parallel structure and active voice when possible*)

### **III. EVERY ESSAY YOU WRITE MUST:**

- a. have a thesis (*single controlling idea*)
- b. be written in paragraphs
- c. have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion

### **A QUALITY ESSAY WILL:**

- d. include general and background information in the introduction
- e. have a thesis that is clearly defined and arguable
- f. have body paragraphs that develop, exemplify, and support the thesis
- g. have a conclusion that originally restates the thesis and main ideas in an original, meaningful, and memorable way
- h. have all the same attributes that a quality paragraph has

## **IV. ASSIGNMENTS INVOLVING RESEARCH**

Any written work that is used to describe, explain, or inform is a form of expository writing. In a nutshell, expository writing is used to convey information from writer to reader. Expository writing includes book reports, literary analyses, position papers, research papers, and any essay that involves research. When you are incorporating the ideas of others into your own work, you must not plagiarize.

**PLAGIARISM** means taking someone else's words, ideas, or specialized information and passing them off as one's own. It is intellectual theft. The word plagiarism comes from the Latin words *plagiaries*, meaning plunderer, and *plagium*, meaning kidnapping (American Heritage Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed).

Anytime you summarize or paraphrase, you must restate the source's meaning in your own words and document your source. "You are guilty of the academic offense known as plagiarism if you half-copy the author's sentences – either by mixing the author's phrases with our own without using quotation marks or by plugging your synonyms into the author's sentence structure." (Hacker 398)

### **ACCEPTABLE versus UNACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASING**

**Original text** (from Watters, Thomas. Planets: Smithsonian Guides. New York: Ligature, Inc. 1995.)

"The Sun was worshipped as a god by early cultures. Structures were built in its honor and rituals performed to secure its favors. Such practices and beliefs faded over the centuries as astronomers gained knowledge about the sphere whose nuclear furnace cradled and continues to support life on Earth. Not until the twentieth century, however, were the Sun's complex nature and fascinating features revealed." (Watters 32)

#### **Example of unacceptable borrowing of words and structure:**

Early people worshipped the Sun as a god by erecting structures and performing rituals. These practices and beliefs decreased over time as scientists learned more about the sphere whose nuclear reactions shape life on Earth. Many of the complexities of the Sun remained a mystery until the twentieth century (Watters 32).

#### **Examples of acceptable paraphrasing:**

Although much of the detailed information we have about the Sun has been learned only recently, early human cultures recognized and celebrated the Sun's importance to life on Earth. Over time, human society moved away from the spiritual worship of the Sun as a more scientific understanding of the Sun was developed (Watters 32).

## **TIPS FOR AVOIDING PLAGIARISM**

When writing, you must make a clear distinction between what your own thinking is and what you have borrowed from others. Acknowledging the ideas and comments of others builds trust with your reader while it strengthens your own ideas by placing them in the context of other work.

The pointers that follow are designed to help you avoid plagiarism. They are based on an article written by SuEllen Shaw in *Writer's Corner*, Winter 1995-96 and adapted from:

Plagiarism: what it is and how to avoid it. March 22, 2002. MSU Moorehead. August 7, 2006. <<http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/expectations%20of%20students/plagiarism%20warning.htm>>

**Tip #1:** If you use more than three words in a row that can be found in exactly the same order in your source material, you must put the words in quotation marks and cite your source.

**Tip #2:** If you are using your own words, but the idea comes from your source, you do not need quotation marks but you must cite your source.

**Tip #3:** Use lead-ins to identify how much of a paragraph is someone else's idea.

Example: According to Diana Hacker, writing professor at Prince George's Community College, a good way to avoid plagiarism is to read a passage, comprehend the meaning of what you have read, and then close the book before writing your summary. After you have written the information in your own words, look back at the source and verify that what you have written is accurate.

**Tip #4:** Any information you use in your paper that is not general knowledge requires that you give credit to a source.

**Tip #5:** When in doubt, cite your source.

## **DOCUMENTING A SOURCE USING MLA FORMAT**

Within your text, cite the author's last name and the page number(s) in parentheses at the end of your sentence (Hacker 216-217). If you use the author's name (Diana Hacker) in your sentence, use only the page number (216-217). When you make a general reference to the work of an author whose name is mentioned in your sentence, you may omit any parenthetical reference and document the source in the list of *Works Cited*, which comes at the end of your paper.

Note: When the reference is a long, indented paragraph, the parenthetical reference comes *after the period* at the end of the paragraph.

The *Works Cited* list will be on the last sheet of your written work. Provided are examples of citations for 1) a book with one author, 2) an article from a periodical, and 3) an Internet site. The examples given are the sources used in preparing this handbook. You can find examples for documenting other kinds of sources by searching *MLA Documentation* on the Internet.

### **General format for a single author book:**

Author. Title of Book. Where published: Publisher. Date of copyright.

### **Example:**

Hacker, Diana. Rules for Writers 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2004.

### **General format for an article from a periodical:**

Author(s). "Title of Article." Title of Periodical Day Month Year: pages.

### **Example:**

Shaw, SuEllen. "Academic Plagiarism." Writer's Corner Winter 1995: 1-5.

### **General format for a website:**

Author (if available). Name of Site. Date of Posting/Revision. Name of institution/organization affiliated with the site (sometimes found in copyright statements). Date you accessed the site. <electronic address>.

### **Example:**

Plagiarism: what it is and how to avoid it. March 22, 2002. MSU Moorehead. August 7, 2006.

<<http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/expectations%20of%20students/plagiarism%20warning.htm>>.