CS1800 Writing Workshop

Intro

- CS1800 is a WRIT course
- Significant amount of writing
- You will receive feedback on your papers

Short papers in CS1800

- Only 3-4 pages (around 1000 words), so get to the point quickly
  - No time for in-depth historical background
  - Depth > breadth
- Argumentative
- Include technical explanations, but only insofar as they strengthen policy arguments
  - Don't explain all of the Internet Protocol
  - Explain how one aspect of the IP's design requires a particular policy decision

Aspects of a Good Academic Essay

- Introduction
- Thesis Statement
- Paragraph Structure
- Paragraph Transitions
- Conclusion
- "Extras"

Introduction

- Provides a brief background directly related to the prompt
- Should not include superfluous overarching statements
  - Example: "Through all of history people have created new technologies"
- Recommended length: 4-5 sentences including thesis statement

Thesis Statement

- Directly answers the prompt, often using the prompt's language
- Takes a definitive stance on the prompt
- Highlights the points that will be introduced later in the argument
- Scope is limited (don't try to solve all of cybersecurity's problems!)

- Poor thesis:
  - "U.S. cybersecurity strategy is catastrophic, and inferior to France's strategy in every respect" - too broad, exaggerated
- Strong thesis:
  - "U.S. cybersecurity strategy should learn from France's prioritization of protection of critical infrastructure because x, y and z" - limited scope, falsifiable

Paragraph Structure

- For the length of short papers, we recommend 3-4 body paragraphs, but this is not a solid rule
- Each paragraph should focus on one point of argument made in the thesis statement
- Acknowledge and refute counterarguments
  - Don't strawman: refuting strong counterarguments makes you more persuasive
  - Is the counterargument wrong? Why?
  - Is the impact of the counterargument overstated?
  - Is it less important than other arguments raised?

Paragraph Transitions

- Each paragraph should relate to the previous one while also presenting a new topic or idea
    - *"Social media-based disinformation can not only influence public opinion immediately before important events like elections, but it can also degrade trust in institutions more broadly. For example, …"*

- Transitions between paragraphs can be like a "thesis statement" for the individual paragraph

Conclusion

- Should restate the main argument of your paper and each point of argument mentioned throughout
- This is the last piece of your paper that a grader will read-- your final argument should be direct and clear and will not introduce a new point in your argument

Extras

- Planning
  - Start thinking about potential arguments early
  - Create an outline before writing
- Quotations
  - Direct quotations from readings can be used to make an argument stronger
  - But, overreliance on others' work is often a sign of a weak paper
    - Especially block quotations in short papers
  - Quotations should be integrated into your own writing
    - E.g. 'While this approach has benefits, it also creates "serious vulnerabilities that lack appropriate solutions", according to *x* from *y* (*x* 2018)'
  - All direct quotations **must** include a proper citation
  - You can paraphrase authors as long as you include a citation afterwards

Extras (part 2)

Citations

- Pick a style (Chicago is good for social sciences) and stick with it
- You must include a Works Cited page at the end of your paper
- You do not have to repeatedly cite the same source after each sentence. If the general argument of a certain paragraph is coming from one source, you can put the citation after you have finished explaining that particular argument

Extras (part 3)

Writing Style

- **Be concise**: remove "fluff"
    - Ask yourself: "Could I phrase this more shortly?"
    - Replace "The conceptualization of this immensely powerful and globalized form of communication" with "This new form of communication"
- **Be formal**
- **Don't be pretentious:** Avoid using rare/high-level words when a simple word would have the same effect
- **Be precise:** don't say "technology" or "cyberspace" if you mean "the Internet"
- **Avoid absolutes:** Things are rarely "never" or "always" the case, so think twice when using these types of words (also "everyone", "no one", "everywhere" etc.)

Additional Resources on Website

- Rubric
- Writing center
- Comprehensive writing tips

Thanks!