Reaching Word Count

Often students fall short of a word count or page requirement and end up adding “fluff” to make their paper longer; however, this results in worse papers and lower grades. In order to lengthen your paper without compromising quality, you can ask yourselves this series of questions.

What is the instructor looking for?

Instructors assign a length requirement for a reason – it’s a clue. A ten-page paper on a five-line poem will require more than just summary. Look deeper at the key words in the prompt, and if you’re having problems refer to the CLAS assignment analysis handout or ask a tutor for help.

Is my thesis specific enough? Is it argumentative?

Look at these two theses: (1) Moving to a new country is difficult because of differences in language, culture, and ideology. (2) Although moving to a new country has many challenges, including differences in language, culture, and ideology, facing these challenges improves critical thinking skills, which can apply to all aspects of a person’s life.

The first thesis does not pose a specific argument; it merely states facts. There won’t be much you can argue or analyze there. In comparison, the second thesis is argumentative and specific. It requires more analysis to prove, and therefore will make a stronger and longer paper.

Do I have enough main points to support my thesis?

Having multiple points to prove your thesis will make your argument stronger, and, because each main point will be a separate paragraph with examples and analysis, it will also make your paper longer. However, avoid including points that are off-topic, weak, or repetitive – this is just fluff.

Do I have enough examples to support my main points?

Saying that something is true isn’t enough; you need to give evidence. With each piece of evidence you support your argument and will be able to follow up with analysis of that evidence that will make your paper stronger and longer.

Does my analysis sufficiently show my thinking?

Often students don’t show how their examples prove their points and thesis, but when asked they can explain it. Don’t make your reader ask questions you can answer through analysis. Pretend like you’re having a conversation or debate and need to explicitly explain all your reasoning.

Why? How?

When in doubt, ask Why? and How? Go through each part of your paper and think: “Why am I saying this?” “How does this relate to my thesis?” “Why is this important?” This will help you add analysis, make connections and transitions, and ensure your essay is coherent and thorough.