

## 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 repetitive papers and lower grades. If you find yourself short of the word count, ask yourself the following series of questions in order to lengthen your paper without compromising quality.

➤ 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. If you’re having trouble, 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. Be careful, though, to avoid including points that are off-topic, weak, or repetitive – these are just fluff.

➤ Do I have enough detailed examples to support my main points?

Saying that something is true isn’t enough; you need to give concrete evidence. Each piece of evidence supports your argument and gives you an opportunity to follow up with analysis that will make your paper stronger and longer.

➤ Does my analysis sufficiently show my thinking?

Often students don’t directly tell the reader how their examples prove their points and thesis, but when asked they can explain it. You don’t want your reader to be asking questions that aren’t answered in your analysis. Pretend like you’re having a conversation or debate and need to explicitly explain how each point you make directly supports your main argument.

➤ 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.