



How to Thrive as a Reader and Writer at SLU

Tips from past students compiled by the Writing Center

How do you thrive as a reader at Murphy?

I knew from the start I'm a slow reader. I knew I had to stay on it, and make sure I got that reading in. I'm not a skimmer. I knew what was due, and I would take chunks of time out during the week, and if I had any other time, I'd have to use it, including some of my days off, and get that reading in.

Usually after work, I went to Starbucks – it got too quiet in the library – and did my reading. It was a daily habit.

-Urban Studies MA Graduate '16

Read the beginning of the paragraph or two of the chapter first so you know what it's about.

Try to get the smaller readings out of the way and then go for the readings with more pages. (If I start with the ones with more pages, I know it's going to take me forever.)

Once you immerse yourself in the readings, the writing comes naturally.

-Labor Relations Certificate Program Student

I tried to get feedback from professors on what the discussion will be on so that I knew what to focus on in my reading because I wanted to make sure I was able to take part in the discussion. Everything is useful, but you want to make sure that you're getting the meat and gravy from the readings.

-Urban Studies MA Graduate '16

How do you thrive as a reader at Murphy? (cont.)

Some people take notes on pages of readings and some people take notes on a separate page. I think taking notes on a separate page or in a notebook is better. I do a little of both. I read, highlight, and take notes on a separate page. That way you can paraphrase what you read. That way you're not reading and getting nothing out of it. You read it, and then you have that practice of writing to cement what you read.

When you read, you've got to connect with the reading. You have to ask yourself, how does what the author says connect with what you feel related to something that you do at work or what you believe. That way you are engaging with the reading, you're not just reading to read.

Do the readings. You gotta do them. Do the readings and take notes. It's going to make you more effective in class. Read, take notes, and give the readings their proper time.

-Public Administration Certificate Program Graduate '14; Current Urban Studies MA Student

How do you thrive as a writer at Murphy?

When I came in, it was totally opposite to what I thought about writing. It wasn't the length so much, but the content and the topic that mattered. The length was not important, it was the substance of what you had to write about that was important and that eased my fears a lot.

-Public Administration Certificate Program Graduate '15; Current Urban Studies MA Student

Before I would put down quotes and what I thought about them. Now I'm more conscious of taking notes on my readings and paraphrasing things and connecting things in my papers— writing so the reader could follow it and understand the direction of my paper – where I'm trying to take you from the introduction to the body paragraphs to the conclusion.

-Public Administration Certificate Program Graduate '14, Current Urban Studies MA Student

Brainstorm! Sit down and put pen to paper with all the possibilities, not ruling anything out and keeping it open. Once you have all the possibilities down, you can whittle them down.

You can only do a draft if you start early.

-Urban Studies MA Student

Drafting gets your idea out there. They may be all over the place and it is an important step to the writing process. Once you get it down there, that's your foundation, that's where you build it from.

-Public Administration Certificate Program Graduate '15; Current Urban Studies MA Student

In my class last semester, I was writing about a discussion that hits close to home – my neighborhood being gentrified. It wasn't spoken about until recently. It always helps to write about something you care about.

-Labor Relations Certificate Program Student

Any advice on balancing assignments with other responsibilities in your life?

Pay attention to the syllabus. Monitor what you're supposed to be reading on a week by week basis.

I carried my assignments around. It would remind me that I have a class and not to laze off. It would remind me that I had something to do. I carried them in my backpack to and from work.

-Urban Studies MA Student

I had to do a lot of planning in advance. If I started an assignment in advance, then I could hang out with my friends and do other activities on the side. If I knew that I wanted to hang out with my friends and I knew a paper was coming up, I knew I had to start working on the paper way before because I'm a very slow writer.

-Urban Studies MA Graduate '16

Sometimes you just have to go through it. You have to struggle. It's really about trial and error. You have to go through things.

-Public Administration Certificate Program Graduate '14, Current Urban Studies MA Student

I learned not to do school work at home. I'd rather do it at work or on my lunch break. If I'm home, I'm not going to be as focused.

Never wait until the last minute, so that pressure won't come down on you.

At the end it was much easier for me, once I figured out how to do everything.

-BA Urban and Community Studies Graduate '16

How can the Writing Center contribute to your academic success?

The Writing Center brings you back into focus. It helps you think about what you read and what should be in your paper, what is necessary and what is not necessary. It gives you a different perspective on how to write a paper more effectively and get a better grade.

-BA Urban and Community Studies Graduate '16

Collaboration can be helpful because just talking about a certain subject and planning what you're going to do next can be helpful in putting one foot in front of the other and getting something done. You're not just stuck, unable to do things, because you're talking about them: what's the next step, what's the next plan?

-MA Urban Studies Graduate '16

It's a good thing [for an adult student] to visit the Writing Center because you can get an update on how to do a better outline or do better research.

-Labor Relations Certificate Program Student

Four eyes is better than two because you can write and think your information is ok, but it's very helpful to get an expert opinion when writing. People who have experience can tell you what is important and what is not. When we focused on what we worked on together at the Writing Center, I felt like my paper was going to be stronger.

-Urban Studies MA Graduate '16

Knowing how to paraphrase and quote in the correct manner – that's an adjustment. Some people don't know how to do it in the right way. You learn in undergrad and high school. But sometimes you need a refresher on how to do it in the right way. You should seek help if you need it. It's good to have a second pair of eyes. You think your paper is good until you find a way to make it better.

-Public Administration Certificate Program Graduate '14, Urban Studies MA Student

I learned so much. I learned how to develop a paper from how to read the information that's given to you, what information to extract from it, how to paraphrase it, how to organize it, how to cite it, and how to develop writing skills that my professors, when they read my paper, will be happy enough with it that I can get a good grade, and that is what has happened.

In one of my classes, I had to write a 5-page paper every week, and the lowest I got on one of those papers was an A-. And that professor has high standards. So I felt very good knowing that I could actually present a paper to him and get an A- for his class. I've gotten good grades on all my writing assignment since I've been at Murphy. I think a lot of that came from the Writing Center.

-BA Urban and Community Studies student

