

# Sound Writing

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## 5.15 Writing for Spanish

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Writing in Spanish (or any foreign language) is difficult because you are expected to think critically about the subject of the paper while also mastering grammatical concepts and developing fluency. Though daunting, critical thinking about a variety of different topics actually helps writers master grammar (tenses, moods) and sentence construction and learn new vocabulary, meeting two objectives with one task! Read this guide to learn more about the skills you will need to write well in Spanish.

### Note 5.15.1.

Unless otherwise stated, all italicized quotes throughout this section are excerpted from the interview with Spanish faculty members at the University of Puget Sound that informed this section.

**Genres.** The type of writing Spanish students are asked to do varies by level—100- and 200-level students typically write letters, summaries, and interpersonal communications, while upper-level students most often write literary and film analysis papers within Latin American and Spanish cultural contexts.

**Purpose.** *"We write in Spanish to practice the expression of ideas that leads to fluency."*

Though the ultimate goal of writing in Spanish is to achieve fluency, it cannot be achieved without both the mastery of grammatical concepts and critical, original thinking about relevant topics. In other words, grammatical correctness and original expression are equally important. By encouraging writers to think about different topics and ideas that arise through reading literature in Spanish and watching films, writing assignments in Spanish help students become "speakers of Spanish—who are prepared to speak their minds in any situation—rather than linguists."

**Valued Characteristics.** *"Persuasion is not synonymous with categorical assertiveness. Spanish writers demonstrate more politeness and openness to perspectives than English writers."*

Writers in Spanish are expected to dedicate an equal amount of time and space to a variety of viewpoints throughout a paper. In English, it is often accepted to have one paragraph or even one sentence that discusses and refutes opposing viewpoints, but this is not sufficient in Spanish. Nuance and close reading are key to achieving the kind of paper that devotes equal attention to a variety of viewpoints, but it is important to remember that everything must still relate back to the thesis. If an alternative viewpoint contradicts the thesis, the writer must also refute that viewpoint such that faithfulness to the thesis is maintained.

Don't summarize. While a paper must demonstrate that a writer has closely read a text, writers must also offer insight beyond summarization of the plot. Like all academic writing, literary and film analysis papers in Spanish must add to an ongoing conversation about the text and themes— a summary offers nothing to add.

**Evidence.** *"Writing in Spanish should be grounded in a close reading of the text [or film]. It should not use the text as a pre-text to talk about other things or what is happening in the world but should use the text as an object of analysis."*

Evidence should be exclusively textual. While it may be tempting to use the text as a springboard to talk about the sociopolitical context of the time the text was written or about something that's happening in the "real world"—and while this is not only acceptable but highly valued in other disciplines—papers in Spanish must remain grounded in the text. The text provides clues about themes that the author is thinking about, and the writer's goal is to uncover these themes and defend them using those very clues from the text.

### **Conventions and Tips.**

- Take cues from the conventions of the English department. Because English department papers usually also involve literary and film analysis, the expectations are often quite similar!
- Accept a lack of sophistication while you approach fluency. Writing in a foreign language is difficult, so it's ok to start simple! Papers can be written in short, simple sentences which can later be edited and combined to add nuance. Sentences in formal academic Spanish writing tend to be long with several subordinate clauses, but writers can always combine several short sentences to achieve this.
- Translation is not the answer! Though online translation software is becoming more and more sophisticated, it cannot provide the kind of nuance that is required of Spanish writers and will prevent learning in the long run!
- Write as if the reader has not read the text. While it is important to avoid summarizing, the more detail about the text you include, the better.

- Don't feel tied to the chronological order established by the text. Organize points thematically rather than chronologically if it makes more sense.
- Maintain continuity of tense. Make sure all of the verbs in the paper are conjugated in the same tense. When discussing actions that happen in the plot of the text, the convention is to use the present tense.
- For grammar concerns, identify patterns of consistent errors, and focus on correcting those. You might not catch every error you make, but by focusing on errors you make frequently, you'll learn to avoid them over time.