

Math 309: Style and content guide

Theme. In *one or two sentences*, you should be able to describe what the point of the essay is. What justifies the existence of any sentence in your essay is that it contributes to the development of the theme.

Concision. This is a goal of the *final* draft. In early drafts, write effusively—get ideas out as text. After you have a sense of how the writing is developing, you can eliminate inessential words/phrases/sentences in later drafts.

Flow. In some way (whether obvious or subtle), each subsequent sentence and paragraph should stem from as well as extend beyond the preceding text. An outline can capture the large-scale development.

Argument. In scientific writing, you're usually trying to develop a case that supports a specific and precisely stated claim. There are several crucial features to such an undertaking.

Coherence. How well do the text and illustrations fit together? Is it clear that a statement provides support for another? What entitles you to make that statement? What are you assuming? Have you made it clear that you're making those assumptions?

Hypothetical reasoning. Some of the most important words in scientific writing are 'suppose,' 'imagine,' and 'consider.' Describe the course of a thought experiment: Suppose X occurs. What consequences would or might follow?

Use examples. Describing or developing a topic that's somewhat or highly abstract in terms of a specific example or case study can be an effective technique. When you formulate an idea in concrete terms you provide a way of understanding the idea not only to the reader but to yourself as well.