Sundy Watanabe’s Top Ten Tips for ECE
(Take a Deep Breath)

As you read prepare to write your reports or read through the drafts, use the following comments and suggestions to guide your thoughts. Think of them as your very own pre-submission evaluation guide to a better paper. Send any questions via email to: suwatanabe@comcast.net. Here we go:

(1) **Assess.** Before you begin writing, assess your writing situation and audience. Will your readers be professors, fellow students, managers, engineers, scientists, or technicians? What does your audience know about the subject? What background information will you have to provide? Why (for what purpose) will your audience read the document? Is the document supposed to inform or convince? Will your document be read straight through like a story or will your reader pick and choose by specific section?

(2) **Blueprint.** Builders find it helpful to have blueprints before they begin constructing a house. You might also find it helpful to design something similar before you start constructing your report. Collect and gather all pertinent data, research, pre-writing, and invention ideas. Begin “drafting” by making pictures, graphs, idea maps, or outlines to show the possible progression of those ideas.

(3) **Order and Transition.** You could also think of yourself as a brick layer, laying a path with orderly and smooth logic or instruction. Be thoughtful and careful. Don't let your readers stumble. Think how you might order the pieces of information. Then, decide how to “connect” one piece to the next. Sometimes you might have great individual sentences but readers can't tell why you've moved from one to the next. In this case, think about the transitions you might need to help your reader follow you down the path. As each sentence must transition to the next, each paragraph must build upon and further the one before it. Think about where the placement of your information will convey the greatest understanding and have the greatest impact. Remember that it might be necessary to re-design the path as you go along. That’s okay, good even, but you’ve got to give yourself enough time to make the changes.

(4) **Support.** As you are constructing your document, offer solid evidence and examples as well as specific numerical detail. Use what I call the statement rule. Every time you make a statement, support it with the following items as evidence:

- restatements or explanations (in other words . . . )
- definitions of jargon and abstract terms (words like “good/bad,” or “inaccurate,” or “useful,” are not specific enough and will just mystify your reader)
- enhancing quotes or statistics from expert sources
- examples

(5) **Research.** If you include research evidence from other sources or authors, introduce each new piece briefly. Name the author. Summarize just one or two pertinent points s/he/ gives. What do you think the author meant to convey? How did you actually “read” or interpreted the passage? Do you agree or disagree? Totally? In part? With
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clarification? Why? Tell readers how all this research relates to your main conclusion. Use in-text citation and use a reference page at the end of your report as well.

(6) **Consider Style.** Rework sentences that begin with or include: "there are," "there were," "this is," "there was" or "there were." Also watch for passive construction of sentences, words ending in "___ing," and “to be” phrases like “is working.” Sharper verbs make your writing stronger (i.e., change “working” to work, works, or worked). Check for unnecessary words or confusing "of" phrases and delete them. In addition, watch out for words like "obviously," "surely," and "undeniably," because somebody will "invariably" (Hah!) take exception to them. Decide when to use active or passive sentence construction. Decide when to accept or break with conventional use of third person voice.

(7) **Enhance Ethos.** Persuade your reader to keep reading by maintaining credibility: a knowledgeable, accurate, and thorough ethos. Acknowledge the complexity of the problem. Every problem has a variety of possible solutions. Address those that have direct impact on your conclusion or claim. Don't try to come to closure too quickly. Give a full discussion because a hurried conclusion leaves the reader unsatisfied; they may feel the information is incomplete. Consider what you expect your reader to think, know, or do after reading your argument.

(8) **Peer Review.** Take the initiative and create your own peer review groups with classmates to review drafts before submission. Think carefully during these review sessions. If you use the guidelines given here, you will get meaty feedback—the stuff of a real audience. To get it, though, you have to be willing to have material ready, and as early as possible. Feedback is one of the sharpest tools in a writer's toolbox; don't think you can do without it. Get your attitude right. If you think you'll learn something, you probably will.

(9) **Check.** Read the assignment in full and as many times as necessary for you to make sure you have addressed all the necessary points. Presentation matters. Hand in a clean, spell checked, proofed, double spaced copy with an identification cover sheet.

(10) **Time.** Yes, writing is hard work. It can also be deeply satisfying. The time it requires? Well, you can't get around it and "get" it. Thinking time. Questioning time. Drafting time. It just takes time. You probably didn't absorb all these tips in one reading, so take TIME to re-read these tips every so often for the rest of the semester and practice one tip each time you begin a writing task.