

Discipline-Specific Writing Guide: Geography

Emphasized Writing Skills and Typical Assignments

Geography courses emphasize **clear writing, description, analysis, and interpretation**. Assignments range from short writing assignments requiring concision to longer papers requiring in-depth analysis of a topic. Geography assignments may involve:

- field observations
- writing about a place, population, or culture
- summarizing and interpreting historical processes and cultural changes

Some Key Questions to Guide Writing

While historians ask the question *when?*, geographers ask *where?* and *why there?* Geographers might focus more on physical and environmental geography, cultural geography, or other branches of geography, the following questions may be useful in writing a geography paper:

- Where are certain features or peoples located? Why there? (*Where do certain people live, and why do they live there? Where does rain fall the most, and why do those areas have greater rainfall?*)
- What factors influence the geography of an area?
- How do humans impact the landscape, climate, and other aspects of their environment?
- Where is geographical change occurring/where is it occurring quickest? Why there and not another place?
- What does the geography of an area influence?
- What characteristics do different places share? Which differ? Why?

Preferred Patterns of Organization, Headings, Style and Tone

Specific requirements of geography papers vary, but all assignments should be clear, well-organized, contain correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and meet the required word-count. The basic **introduction, body, conclusion** format is appropriate for many geography papers.

Favored Research Methodologies

In the field of geography, a wide variety of research methodologies are employed, ranging from **personal reflections and interpretation** to **advanced mathematical analysis**.

Authoritative Sources/Evidence

Many sources are considered authoritative in the field of geography, especially when they are **peer-reviewed**. These include:

- academic journals
- books
- scholarly websites
- major highly regarded newspapers (e.g., New York Times)
- major highly regarded broadcast media (NPR, PBS)

Documentation Style

Students may employ **any standard style**, but should closely follow the guidelines for whichever style they choose.

Samples of geography assignments are available for review in the Writing Center.