College Paper Structure Checklist

BEFORE YOU WRITE

- [ ] Read the prompt and rubric twice; underline every required element.
- [ ] Write the question your paper answers in one sentence.
- [ ] Gather credible sources and note page numbers as you read.
- [ ] Sketch an outline: thesis, 3–5 main points, and the evidence for each.
- [ ] Note the due date, required length, and citation style.

INTRODUCTION

- [ ] Opens with context that leads to your topic (no dictionary definitions).
- [ ] Narrows to the specific issue or question.
- [ ] Ends with a clear, arguable thesis that previews your main points.

BODY PARAGRAPHS

- [ ] Each starts with a topic sentence that supports the thesis.
- [ ] Evidence (quote, paraphrase, or data) is introduced and cited.
- [ ] Your analysis explains how the evidence proves the point.
- [ ] A transition links each paragraph to the next.
- [ ] At least one counterargument is addressed and answered.

CONCLUSION

- [ ] Restates the thesis in new words.
- [ ] Synthesizes the main points; it does not just list them.
- [ ] Answers “so what?” with an implication or next step. No new evidence.

CITATIONS AND SOURCES

- [ ] Every quote, paraphrase, and statistic has an in-text citation.
- [ ] Every in-text citation matches an entry in the reference list.
- [ ] The style (APA, MLA, or Chicago) matches the assignment.

FORMAT AND FINAL PROOFREAD

- [ ] Margins, font, spacing, page numbers, and title or heading follow the style guide.
- [ ] Read the paper aloud to catch missing words and awkward sentences.
- [ ] Check spelling of names, terms, and titles; run a spell check last.
- [ ] Confirm length, file type, and file name before you submit.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- [ ] A thesis that names a topic but makes no argument.
- [ ] Paragraphs that summarize sources instead of analyzing them.
- [ ] Quotes dropped in with no introduction or explanation.
- [ ] The same word or sentence opening repeated again and again.