“So What?”
Establishing significance – because significant, pertinent writing is good writing

BEFORE YOU START WRITING:
• Understand the assignment
• Understand who your audience is – who will be reading what you write? What perspective do they have? What do they know/ not know?
• Examine your body of evidence to come up with the main idea (your thesis)
• Outline what you will be talking about. For outline structure, see essay structure handout

WHILE WRITING:
• Refer back to your outline to...
  • stay focused on the prompt
  • maintain an organized structure that provides clarity
  • use the best evidence in your arsenal
• Remember who your audience is
• Use the conclusion to clearly state significance

AFTER YOU FINISH YOUR FIRST DRAFT:
• Let it sit for a little while and then look it over again with a fresh perspective
• Make sure you have addressed the right topic in the most effective and meaningful way
• Re-examine your assumption that the reader will be able to figure out the significance; if you don’t see an answer to “so what?”, come up with one that is clear and coherent
• Put yourself in the reader’s shoes; try to anticipate questions that they may have as they are reading your paper. Answer those questions in a way that contributes to your topic.
• Ask yourself...
  • How does your writing influence the reader? In other words, why should they bother reading it?
  • Did you answer the “so what?” in an effective and meaningful way?
  • Is your writing interesting?
• A second opinion is always useful

SIGNIFICANCE IS IN THE JUXTAPOSITION
Jux•ta•po•si•tion: instance of placing two or more things side by side

Use juxtaposition to produce a contrast. Dark is only dark in contract with light. Darkness makes light meaningful, and vice versa. You can establish significance by contrasting different situations, people, ideas, etc.

For example:
The juxtaposition – Children of the Mofu tribe of northern Cameroon, Africa study diligently in classrooms with mud floors and hardly any educational resources. Most schools in developed/ westernized countries provide students with well- equipped classrooms, air-conditioning and advanced technology; many students in those countries tend to slack off during class and on their homework.

What significance do you think arises from the juxtaposition of these two situations?


Inspired in part by advice from Evan Luzar, English Department, Beachwood High School in Beachwood, Ohio.