

STRUCTURE, *style*, & **Substance** Writing Guide

Know the Parts of Speech.

Her ancient cat quietly sleeps beside the door.
↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑
Possessive adjective noun adverb verb preposition article noun
(ownership) (modifies a noun) (thing or idea) (modifies a verb) (“action” word) (reveals location) (a, an, the)

Omit needless words. Create powerful sentences.

~~A lot of people~~ describe things, but saying *many* people is shorter and more effective.

He is famous ~~in that he~~ produces movies. He is famous *because* he produces movies.

~~In the account, it claims that . . .~~ → The account claims that . . .

Do not use the word “there”—ever.

~~There~~ was a fight. → A fight broke out / developed / erupted.

Avoid passive voice.

A sentence in passive voice indicates that the subject of the verb is being acted upon. It is usually boring and often confusing because it raises questions about *who or what* is doing the action.

~~It is widely believed. . .~~ → Many people believe . . .
~~The decision was delayed until. . .~~ → A panel of judges delayed the decision until . . .

Avoid 1st and 2nd person.

Some writing initiatives encourage you to include your opinion, but formal writing should avoid 1st person (I, me, we) and 2nd person (you, your). In research essays, the writer develops an opinion and defends it based on the *facts* s/he has uncovered.

Think about it. Which statement below is more powerful?

I think the policy should be changed . . . or . . . **The policy should be changed.**

Helping Verb + Have

He *should have* edited his paper. Then he *would have* noticed that “should of” makes no sense.

Titles

Books, films, and newspapers are underlined *or* italicized. (If it's loong, give it a line.)
101 Dalmatians *The Miracle Worker* The New York Times

Articles, short stories, chapter titles, song titles, and poems are in quotation marks.
The article "Who Has the Money?" in Sunday's Detroit Free Press was very interesting.

When you create a title for your essay, only other published works are marked.
The Crucible: An American Test of Faith Imagery and Allusion in "The Silent Ones"
Understanding Emma: An Exploration of Character Development

Possessives

Singular possessive:—————> Mr. Smith's car is here. Mrs. Jones' car is parked outside.
The community's laws are fair. Thomas' car is gray.

Plural possessive:—————> The Smiths' house is red. The Jones' house is gray.
The communities' parks are shared.

An exception is made if the plural form does not end in s: *the children's playroom, The People's Republic of China*

Mark the last item for a list possessive: *Mark and Maggie's dog sleeps most of the time.*

Numbers

Numbers from one to nine are usually written as words; numbers 10 and over are usually written as numerals.

Only three of the seven children are in elementary school now.

Over 150 people attended the party.

If one of the sets of numbers in a sentence is 10 or above, switch all numbers to numerals.

She had 7 birds last week, but she now takes care of 12.

Use numerals for money, decimals, percentages, chapters, pages, addresses, telephones, dates, time, and statistics.

Chapter 7 explains that less than 9 percent of the population invested over \$50,000.

Numbers begin a sentence.

Fourteen students "forgot" their assignments.

Do use the \$ symbol. *They received an estimate of \$4,500, but the final cost was \$5,700.*

Ellipsis . . .

An ellipsis (three periods) shows that one or more words have been omitted in a quotation. Leave one space before and one after each period when typing. It should look like this (. . .), not (...). *Dr. Wu believes, “We should eat less and . . . exercise more.”*

Our Friend, the Comma ,

Commas can connect two *independent* clauses joined by FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)

They enjoyed the play, and they decided to watch it again.

They enjoyed the play and decided to watch it again.

Commas separate phrases, adjectives, words, or clauses in a series.

I came into school early, made up a test, and edited an essay.

Her large, friendly, and loud puppy walked slowly down the street.

Commas enclose an explanatory word or *nonessential* phrase in a sentence:

Bentley Brothers, the new sports store in town, sells jackets and ski boots.

Julia, who plays golf well, is my sister. The girl who plays golf well is my sister.

Commas separate a long modifying phrase, a sentence *beginning* with a dependent clause, and some transitions:

Although Lydia pretended she disliked Tom, we all knew she had a crush on him.

However, few people noticed that Kate’s hair was orange.

During their winter break, they played in the snow.

Sentences with the dependent clause at the end **do not** need a comma:

They played in the snow during their winter break. (Contrast with the sentence above.)

Semicolon ;

A semicolon joins two or more *independent* clauses not connected with a conjunction.

Semicolons join two independent clauses in a compound sentence—when the clauses are connected by a conjunctive adverb. (Common conjunctive adverbs are *also, as a result, besides, for example, however, furthermore, instead, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, then, and therefore.*)

The new textbook is great; however, the publisher did not mention that it weighs 8 lbs.

Her car choice was unexpected; no one thought Mrs. West would buy an orange Porsche.

Colon :

Among other things, a colon can be used after the greeting in a business letter, to emphasize a word or sentence, or to introduce a list.

Colette enjoys several activities: dancing, jogging, reading, and cooking.

One popular theme pervades many American television programs: violence.

Word Snags

**Below are brief explanations of commonly misused words.
Your writing should be free of these snags.**

Accept or Except

To accept is to receive. To except is to reject or omit. (You're "X"ing something out.)
Greg will *accept* the trophy on behalf of his injured brother.
I invited everyone *except* Virgil, who is arrogant and rude.

Affect or effect

Affect (to alter) is almost always used as a verb. Effect is almost always a noun.
A good memory device: "To *affect* is to have an *effect* on something."
The ice storm had no *effect* on us, but it will *affect* when I plant my garden in the spring.

When occasionally used as a verb, effect means "to bring about."
The mayor *effected* many changes during her first term in office.

Among or Between

Between connects two people or ideas. Among connects three or more.
Between you and me, I think that car looks great. It is definitely *among* the finest I've seen.

Amount or Number

Amount is used for items that cannot be quantified (given a specific number).
Number is used for items that can be quantified.
I need a large *amount of flour* for this recipe. It requires a *number of cups*.
The *amount of traffic* is awful. I cannot believe the *number of cars*.

Can or May

Can describes ability, while may refers to permission.
The toddler said, "I *can* dress myself." The student asked, "*May* I go to my locker?"

Cause or Because

Cause is a noun. Because is a conjunction.
The play was cancelled *because* the stage lights went out. No one has determined the *cause*.

Desert/Dessert

Desert, as a noun, is the hot, sandy place. To desert (v) is to flee or abandon.

Dessert, on the other hand, is the after-meal treat.

I would never *desert* you before *dessert*. The *desert* stretched for miles.

Good or Well

Good is an adjective. Well is an adverb.

Beth is a *good student*. She *performed* quite *well* on her exam.

She's also a *good tennis player*. She *played well* in last week's tournament.

It's or Its

It's important to note the difference between it's and its.

It's = it is

Its = belonging to it.

Ex: *It's* an expensive building, but *its* design will save money in the long run.

Lay or Lie

Lay means to place. Lay is a transitive verb (is followed by an object).

Today I *lay* a book on the table. Yesterday I *laid* . . . I *have laid* many books . . .

Lie means to recline. Lie is an intransitive verb (an action complete in itself).

The cat *lies* down. It *lay* down yesterday. It *has lain* down before.

Lose or Loose

You will *lose* (v) those coins if your pants are too *loose* (adj).

Quote or Quotation

Quote is a verb. Quotation is a noun.

May I *quote* you on that? I like the *quotation* you chose for your personal profile.

Real or Really

Real, an adjective, means genuine. Really, an adverb, can mean truly or indeed.

Lydia's blouse is *really* attractive. Is it made of *real* silk?

Than or Then

Then tells when. —————> We will eat out *then* go to soccer practice.

Than is for comparison. —> I would rather eat here *than* at the other restaurant.

They're, There, or Their

Ex: Is the team in the locker room?

Yes, *They're* in *there* with *their* coach. *Their* parents are waiting over *there*.

They're=They are

There answers the question where.

Their is possessive.

Threw or Through

I accidentally *threw* (v., past tense) the baseball *through* (prep.) the window.

To, Too, Two

We have *too* many students *to* count. These *two* should go *to* the cafeteria. They are *too* hungry.

Who or Whom

Who is a pronoun used for a grammatical subject, where a nominative pronoun such as *I* or *he* would be appropriate. Whom is used elsewhere, such as when *him* would fit.

Who is at the door? The man *who* just left was friendly.

For *whom* is this note? The man *whom* the papers criticized declined to respond.

Woman or Women

Several women entered the store, but only *one woman* registered for the grand prize.

You're or Your

You're (*you are*) in Chicago, but you left *your* (*possessive*) backpack here.

Also know the difference between:

Allusion/illusion

council/counsel

Brake/break

hanged/hung

By/buy

weather/whether

Vary Your Sentence Structure

Repetitive transitions, bland adjectives, and choppy sentences are *BORING*. They also make Mr. Cox want to cry, so edit carefully.

Before editing: The house was very nice. It had several really big rooms. It had a remodeled kitchen. The kitchen had cabinets made of hickory.

After editing: The impressive home contained several large rooms, including a remodeled kitchen with hickory cabinets.

List of Connectives and Transitions:

ADDITIONAL FACTS (SERIES): again, also, and, another, besides, but, also, equally important, finally, first, further, furthermore, in addition, initially, in the first place, last, likewise, moreover, next, plus

COMPARISON (SIMILARITIES): as, as with, as though, also, by comparison, in the same way, likewise, or, similarly

CONTRAST OR CHANGE OR CONDITION: although, anyway, at the same time, by contrast, despite, either, even though, for all that, however, if, in any event, in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, neither, nonetheless, nor, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, or, otherwise, still, unless, yet, although this may be true

PLACE: above, across, among, adjacent, below, beneath, beside, between, beyond, farther, here, in, into, nearby, nearer, on, opposite to, over, there, under

CAUSE OR PURPOSE: all things considered, because, for, for this purpose, if, in order to, with this object in mind, since, toward this end

RESULT: accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this reason, hence, obviously, since, so, then, therefore, thus, accordingly

REPETITION: all of this means, as has been noted, as has been stated, finally, in brief, in essence, in other words, in short, on the whole, ultimately, chiefly

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES: a few of these are, especially, for example, for instance, in particular, the following will illustrate, to illustrate, specifically

EMPHASIS: basically, essentially, certainly, in fact, indeed, of course, truly

TIME: after, afterward, at last, at length, as soon as, at present, before, currently, finally, immediately, in the meantime, later, meanwhile, now, not long after, since, soon, then, until, when, whenever, while

AMOUNT: all, few, fewer than, greater, less than, more than, most, none, over, under, several, smaller, some



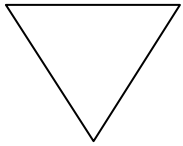
Mr. Cox's Edit-o-matic™

"It's super swell!"

Some students mistakenly believe that “editing” is something only their English teacher does. Not surprisingly, these students usually earn low marks because they do attempt to refine their own writing.

Creating a well-crafted essay requires time and effort. Before you turn in an assignment, check the following areas. Not every rule will apply in every situation, but most will help you compose a smooth, powerful response.

INTRODUCTION:

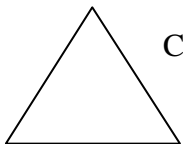


- ✓ Did I gain the reader’s attention through an interesting **hook**, such as a powerful quotation, statistic, scenario, observation, or anecdote?
- ✓ Did I provide **general background** on the topic and smoothly narrow the information to my thesis?
- ✓ Is my **thesis** clear and arguable? Does it respond to the assigned task?

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

- ✓ Are my body paragraphs effectively **organized**? (Arguments build on each other, strongest point is last)
- ✓ Does each body paragraph have a **logical argument/idea** and a clear **topic sentence**, a statement connecting my argument and/or other body paragraphs?
- ✓ Do I have enough **information/evidence/details/examples** to support my argument and make this a healthy paragraph?
- ✓ Is this paragraph becoming too long? If so, what information could/should be deleted or what argument(s) could actually be used to create a separate paragraph?
- ✓ Are my **quotations appropriately sandwiched and cited**? (Background on speaker/situation, quotation, connecting quotation to my larger argument/thesis)
- ✓ Have I used **transitions** and **paragraph conclusions** to smoothly connect my ideas and arguments?
- ✓ Have I evaluated how the information in my paragraph supports my thesis?

CONCLUSION:



- ✓ Did I briefly **review** my core arguments and **restate** my thesis in an interesting way?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PG.

- ✓ Did I include a summary statement, opinion, final emphasis, or “big picture” implication?
- ✓ Did I include a **bibliography/works cited** section to give credit to any outside sources?

THROUGHOUT MY ESSAY:

- ✓ Are my spelling, capitalization, and punctuation accurate?
- ✓ Is my writing free of run-on sentences and fragments?
- ✓ Are my sentences strong, graceful, and suitably varied in length and structure?
- ✓ Is my word choice vivid and precise but not pretentious?

Did I purge my essay of:

- ✓ **contractions?** (it’s, they’re, doesn’t, etc.)
- ✓ **“R.I.P. words?”** (there, nice, stuff, good, interesting, very, etc., that, thing/s, issues) Some of these are acceptable in moderation.
- ✓ excessive **“is”** and **“are”**? (ex: *It is* a great book. The author *is* known for his wit.)
- ✓ **1st person** (“I”, “my”) and **2nd person** (“you”/“your”)?
- ✓ transitions or words that are **repeated** from sentence to sentence? If so, have I changed the structure of the sentences to create variety? (Ex: *The* major concern is water damage. *The* contractor *said* it was not his fault. *The* homeowner *said* . . .)

Two additional recommendations:

The “Read-Aloud” Works: It may sound corny, but I strongly encourage you to read your essay aloud. Some people use a ruler or the edge of a paper to help them move methodically through each sentence. Your mind may catch grammar/style concerns your eyes may have overlooked. If you find yourself stumbling over a sentence, mark it, and return to it later so you can craft smooth, effective arguments.

The “Second-Set” Works: Offer to exchange papers with a classmate whose expertise you trust. *Do not* choose the friend who will merely mark your paper “Super Terrific!!!” with a border of smiley faces. Your second set of eyes can circle grammar/style concerns and highlight vague or confusing sections. You may not agree with everything your writing peer suggests, but their feedback can help you refine your response.

Fifty Rools for Writing Good

1. Each pronoun should agree with their antecedent.
2. Between you and I, pronoun case is important.
3. A writer must be sure to avoid using sexist pronouns in his writing.
4. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
5. Don't be a person whom people realize confuses who and whom.
6. Don't never use no double negatives.
7. Don't never use a proposition to end a sentence with. That is something up with which your readers will not put.
8. When writing, participles must not be dangled.
9. Be careful to never, under any circumstances, split infinitives.
10. Hopefully, you won't float your adverbs.
11. A writer must not shift your point of view.
12. Lay down and die before using a transitive verb without an object.
13. Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
14. The passive voice should be avoided.
15. About sentence fragments.
16. Don't verb nouns.
17. In letters themes reports and ad copy use commas to separate items in a series.
18. Don't use commas, that aren't necessary.
19. "Don't overuse 'quotations marks.'"
20. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (if the truth be told) superfluous.
21. Contractions won't, don't, and can't enhance your writing voice.
22. Don't write run-on sentences they are hard to read.
23. Don't forget to use end punctuation
24. Its important to use apostrophe's in the right places.
25. Don't abbrev.
26. Don't overuse exclamations!!!
27. Resist Unnecessary Capitalization AT ALL COSTS.
28. Avoide misspellings.
29. Check to see if you any words out.
30. One-word sentences? Never.
31. Avoid annoying, affected, and awkward alliteration, always.
32. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
33. The bottom line is to bag trendy locutions that sound flaky.
34. By observing the distinctions between adjectives and adverbs, you will treat your readers real good.
35. Parallel structure will help you in writing more effective sentences and to express yourself more gracefully.
36. In my own personal opinion at this point of time, I think that authors, when they are writing, should not get into the habit of making use of too many unnecessary words that they don't really need to use.
37. Foreign words and phrases are the reader's bete noire and are not apropos.
38. Who needs rhetorical questions?
39. Always go in search for the correct idiom.
40. Do not cast statements in the negative form.
41. And don't start sentences with conjunctions.
42. Avoid mixed metaphors. They will kindle a flood of confusion in your readers.
43. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
44. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
45. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
46. Be more or less specific.
47. If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement, which is always best.
48. Never use an enormous word when you can utilize a diminutive word.
49. Vulgarity sucks.
50. Last but not least, even if you have to bend over backward, avoid clichés like the plague.

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