



## **READINGS FOR CM220: COLLEGE COMPOSITION TWO**

### **UNIT 8**

**PART 1. INTRODUCTION TECHNIQUES (PODCAST 36)**

**PART 2. HOW TO WRITE A STRONG PARAGRAPH**

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## **INTRODUCTION TECHNIQUES (PODCAST 36 TRANSCRIPT)**

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Greetings everyone. This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to share with you techniques to use when writing an introduction.

Let's face it: Writing introductions can be tricky. Why? Well, for one, an introduction, for better or worse, is like a first impression. If the introduction is kind of wishy-washy and not that good, then the first impression readers have of the entire essay will likely not be too favorable. Second, writing an introduction can be tricky because many writers try to write the introduction first when the simple truth is it is often difficult—if not impossible—to write a good introduction if one hasn't even begun writing the paper. How can you properly introduce a subject if you are not sure exactly what you are going to say about the subject to begin with? For me—and I dare say for many writers—starting with some kind of introduction is necessary, but then later in the process the introduction gets revamped so that it properly and effectively introduces its subject to readers. Make sense?

Before I share some techniques, let me remind you that I discussed introductions in an earlier podcast—number 15 to be exact. In that podcast, I provided an overview of the role of an introduction in a composition, so you may want to listen to that podcast in conjunction with this podcast.

The first thing to keep in mind is that introductions set the stage for what is to follow in a piece of writing and are critical in preparing readers for the discussion. Without a proper introduction, readers may not be able to make sense of the content. An effective introduction does three things: It gets the reader interested with an enticing lead or hook, something that pulls the reader into the world of the essay; an introduction provides relevant background information readers need to understand the topic; and the introduction establishes the paper's focus and purpose, usually via a thesis statement.

Now let me share some strategies for writing introductions. Oftentimes an introduction will have characteristics of more than one approach, so you should treat this list as a compendium of possibilities, not as a prescription of how certain types of beginnings must look. A good approach to writing an introduction is to try out a number of options so that you get a sense of the possibilities. Don't feel locked into any one strategy and recognize that writing an introduction often requires a process just like the rest of your writing. To this end, don't feel you have to get the introduction right the first time. The more you work on your introduction and think about what you are trying to say in your paper as a whole, the better able you are going to be to write an effective introduction.

**First technique: Establish the issue.** With this type of introduction, your approach is direct and authoritative. You establish the topic, provide relevant background information so the context for your remarks is clear, and place the thesis.



Here's an example: In the last decade or so, American culture has become increasingly tolerant of teenage sexuality. Many parents, too busy in their lives, are not proactive in educating their teens on issues related to sexuality. Educators are often left with the role of providing basic information about the subject even as more and more sexual education classes are cut from the curriculum. Where does this leave curious teens? Statistics show that 75 percent of teens have had sex by the time they are nineteen years old. The teenage birth rate continues to climb as do reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases (Healy, 2008). Clearly, it is imperative to develop intervention programs that teach adolescents the effective skills in delaying early sexual behaviors. Early education on delaying sexual activity for teens can drastically decrease teenage pregnancies, prevent the spread of STDs, and help teens to make the right choices that can impact the rest of their lives.

**Technique two: Pose one or more questions.** This introduction is a tricky one to pull off, in large part because it is so common. The basic idea is to engage readers by using one or more thoughtful questions at the start. These questions need to move beyond the mundane and predictable so as to pique the audience's interest.

Here's an example: Did you ever think that your life would change dramatically in a matter of twenty-four hours? One day you have a certain kind of life – a home, nearby schools for your kids, a wonderful neighborhood, good job, friends – and the next day it was all gone, irreversibly changed. As a resident of New Orleans, Louisiana, I had always known that a major hurricane could strike, but even knowing this fact could not prepare me for what happened in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the need for residents to evacuate when mandated, for local and state authorities to work more efficiently together, and for the federal government to respond in a timely and responsible manner.

**You can tell a brief story or anecdote to begin an essay,** but the challenge for the writer with this kind of introduction is to make sure the narrative is clearly related to the focus of the essay—that is, the story has a purpose.

Example: It was a dark and stormy night. The wind whipped through the trees while lightening flashed and thunder boomed. Up ahead on a hill, a rickety old house stood. In an upstairs window, a single, solitary light shone, casting an eerie shadow across the yard. I was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on business, and was driving to the outskirts of the city to visit my aunt, an old woman I hadn't seen in nearly twenty years. According to my directions, that rickety old house was my aunt's house, but I didn't know if I had the nerve to knock on the door. In fact, I couldn't remember a time I had been more scared. Everyone experiences fear just as everyone experiences happiness or sadness. Fear is a natural human emotion to the unknown and is characterized by physical changes to the body, an innate need to escape, and acute awareness of one's surroundings.

**Next technique: Use an attention-grabbing statement.** This type of introduction presents an opening sentence that hooks readers immediately. The statement is provocative in some way and readers want to continue reading to understand better the initial sentence.

Some children cannot sit still. They fidget and do not listen. They appear distracted by every little thing and do not seem to learn from their mistakes. These children disregard rules, even when they



are punished repeatedly. Many people see such kids and conclude that their parents must not know how to control them. However, the truth is that attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is misunderstood. In fact, ADHD is a growing problem that requires more research to understand, better intervention programs to help afflicted children, and improved training and support programs to help parents and educators.

**An introduction can include an extended example or series of brief examples.** With this approach, you provide one or more examples that illustrate perfectly an important aspect of your topic. You will want to be careful not to use content that is too sensationalistic, yet at the same time, the examples should be vivid and memorable.

According to the Federal Highway and Transportation Agency, the majority of Americans, some 57%, do not regularly wear seat belts (2008). Teddy Biro didn't wear one when the car he was driving skidded on an icy road and hit a utility pole; Biro was catapulted through his front windshield and died of blood loss from a severed jugular vein. The coroner reported he had no other injuries besides minor abrasions. Bob Nettleblatt wasn't wearing a seatbelt when a car rear-ended him at a stop sign. Nettleblatt slammed his head into his front windshield and required 137 stitches to close up the laceration; investigators at the scene said if he had been wearing a seatbelt, he would have been virtually unhurt from the 2 mph rear end collision (Fischer, 2007). Despite what is known about the safety of wearing seatbelts, too many Americans still do not buckle up, resulting in enormous emergency medical costs and fatalities that could be avoided. Despite what some people think, wearing a seatbelt is not a choice nor does it violate one's personal rights. Wearing a seatbelt is the law and more needs to be done to enforce the law, punish those who break it, and educate young drivers to the dangers of not buckling up.

Here are some more good introductory approaches:

In some papers, the topic will be specialized enough that **one or more terms may need to be defined** so that readers can make sense of the discussion that follows. When defining a term, you should make sure the term is essential to the discussion and warrants a direct definition. In addition, you should define a term in your own words, not by consulting a dictionary. While referring to a dictionary may seem the logical approach, such definitions are predictable and usually boring. Offer a unique definition for any term that is important enough to require such attention. In the following example, note how the writer defines the term "criminal" in a way that is far more interesting than offering a dictionary definition.

Gun control legislation is ineffective because of the nature of criminals. A criminal is someone who disobeys the law and does not respect the rules of society. It is against the law to rob banks and murder people, but there are people in society who rob banks and murder people. Criminals do not obey the law regardless of the consequences. With this understanding of the basic nature of a criminal, it seems obvious that gun control would not work at reducing crime because a criminal will not follow the law. Consider the Virginia Tech shootings in April of 2007. Seung-Hui Cho's murderous rampage took place in a gun-free zone (Brady, 2007), but as a criminal, he did not follow the law. If he respected the laws of this country, then this crime would never have occurred. It wouldn't have



happened, not because of a gun-free zone, but because he understood murder was against the law. However, criminals do not obey laws—this is what makes them criminals.

**Beginning in the middle of a scene with action underway is a terrific way to hook readers.** The scene needs to be thoughtfully portrayed and compact so that it is appropriate for an academic essay, but this kind of opening can be very effective for some topics.

4 AM, March 28, 1979 and the floor of the control room at Three Mile Island nuclear power station jumps to life. The two control room operators are jolted from their mid-shift doldrums as alarms begin to sound and the pounding in the auxiliary room is deafening. What those at the station did not know was that the "worst crisis yet experienced by the nation's nuclear power industry" (Reuter, 2000, p. 31) had just begun, and its impact wouldn't be realized for years to come, if ever. Indeed, within seconds of the first alarm, a chain of events would commence to destroy the nuclear reactor and with it, the future of the nuclear power industry in this country.

As with the posing questions technique, **using a quote to start** can be effective, but it is also a familiar approach, so it does not come without risk. To this end, you will want to use a quote, whether direct or indirect, that is a zinger and worthy of the space and attention you give it.

An observer once said that New Orleanians are either having a party, recuperating from a party, or planning a party. The biggest and best party of all and the city's most famous celebration is Mardi Gras, the greatest free show on earth. Despite the image the popular media displays to outsiders, Mardi Gras is not the wild party shown on TV; in fact, Mardi Gras is a yearly celebration that is much tamer than most realize, brings family and friends together, and promotes unity among diverse groups of people.

**Use a shocking statement or shocking statistic(s).** This approach presents information that stops readers in their tracks. While the content is startling, it is also appropriate to the topic and provides an interesting context for the essay.

McDonald's has sold over 100 billion burgers. One hundred billion burgers with bun, stacked on top of one another would extend over 2.9 million miles into space—twelve times as far as the moon (Grimes, 2007). What is the secret of McDonald's incredible success? To use the words of Ray Kroc, McDonald's founder, the secret to McDonald's success is that the fast-food giant produces "consistently mediocre food" (Thomas, 2001, p. 67). The McDonald's corporation has become a model of success due to its understanding of its market niche, its ability to redefine its image over time, and its ability to remain stable and produce a profit even in difficult economic times.

Let these techniques serve as possible approaches to use when it comes time to write your own introductions. Don't feel locked into using any one strategy as you can combine techniques if that's what it takes to make the introduction work. The best advice I can offer is to experiment with these approaches—that is, try out multiple techniques until you find one that really seems to do the job. And don't be afraid to write your introduction later in the writing process or revise the one you started with to something new. Make your essay's first impression count!

Thanks everyone for listening. Good luck with your introductions! Happy writing!



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# HOW TO WRITE A STRONG PARAGRAPH

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## PARAGRAPH LENGTH

Because the definition of a paragraph is a group of sentences on one topic, in theory, paragraphs can be any length, from one sentence to one hundred. Paragraph length is dictated first by content and purpose. A new paragraph signals a pause in thought and a change in topic, directing readers to anticipate what is to follow or allowing them a moment to digest the material in the preceding paragraph. Reasons to begin a new paragraph include

- beginning a new idea,
- emphasizing a particular point,
- changing speakers in dialogue,
- allowing readers to pause, and
- breaking up lengthy text, usually moving to a subtopic.

Once you are satisfied with the content of your paragraphs, consider your readers.

Paragraphs of more than one typewritten page scare readers away: The paragraphs appear too dense and too long to be inviting. Short paragraphs make it appear as if ideas are not fully developed. Think of your reader and how your paragraphs appear on the page. Paragraph lengths should invite readers in, neither seeming too daunting to read through nor appearing incomplete.

Of course, if you have a complex concept that demands a lot of explanation, longer paragraphs are necessary. In a persuasive paper, for example, a complex, logical argument with supporting evidence might require a longer paragraph. Shorter paragraphs may be useful, for example, when relating the story of an exciting event. Dialogue could appear in separate, brief paragraphs or perhaps a series of short paragraphs could be used to create suspense as readers rush on to the next paragraph to see what happens next.

Extremely short paragraphs of one sentence are sometimes, though rarely, effective. Look at the following example:



My grandmother was a wonderful woman. I never went to visit her without getting the traditional plate of cookies and glass of milk. When I needed something for a Homecoming dance that my babysitting money couldn't accommodate, grandma would rummage in the attic and find gloves, a shawl, a brooch. When a date ended badly or a speech flopped or a friend betrayed me, grandma's wise counsel and ample lap soothed more effectively than even my mother's hug. Grandma taught me about friendship, honesty, comfort, and love.

She died suddenly right in front of my eyes.

That last sentence, because it is set apart visually from the other paragraph, dramatizes the narrator's emotions more effectively.

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## SENTENCE VARIETY

We have all probably experienced a lecture or presentation given by someone who talks in a monotone, never varying the tone of voice. It probably puts you to sleep, right? The equivalent of such monotony in writing occurs when sentences have the same structure and the same length. Once the content of your writing is solid, revise, paying attention to sentence variety.

### Sentence Structure

Remember the different types of sentence structure you learned years ago?

1. **Simple Sentence**= one independent clause with no subordinate clause

*Without music, life would be a mistake.*

2. **Compound Sentence**= two or more independent clauses with no subordinate clauses

*One arrow is easily broken, but a bundle of ten can't be broken.*

independent clause

independent clause

3. **Complex Sentence**= one independent clause with one or more subordinate clauses

*If you scatter thorns, don't go barefoot.*

subordinate clause independent clause

4. **Compound-Complex Sentence**= at least two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause

*Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you \_\_\_\_\_ what you are.*

independent clause

independent clause

subordinate clause

One of the methods you can use to gain sentence variety is to be sure you are using all of the above sentence structures in your paper. It is not necessary for you to identify the different clauses and name the sentences, but if you can scan your paragraphs and have a general sense that you are using them all, you are on the right track.





## Sentence Type

Here is another method for identifying sentence structure that should look familiar to you:

1. **Declarative**= make a statement  
*The echo always has the last word.*
2. **Imperative** = make a demand  
*Love your neighbor.*
3. **Interrogative**= ask a question  
*Are second thoughts always wisest?*
4. **Exclamatory**= make an exclamation  
*I want to wash the flag, not burn it!*

Declarative sentences will naturally be used the most in academic writing. But as you revise, look for places where imperative and interrogative sentences could be used effectively, both to make the content stronger and also to add sentence variety. Exclamatory sentences are used rarely in academic writing and professional writing, but can occasionally be effective, depending on context, audience, and purpose.

## Sentence Openings

Another easy way to add sentence variety is to look at sentence openings. Many writers fall into a pattern of starting sentences the same way, generally with the subject of the sentence. Here is a sample of what can be done with the very simple sentence “*John broke the window.*” Note all of the different openings that not only add sentence variety, but also create more interesting content.

- **Subject**
  - John broke the window.
- **Conjunction**
  - But John broke the window.
- **Adverb** (answers how, when, why)
  - Afterwards, John broke the window.
- **Adverb Clause**
  - While hitting a fly ball in the vacant field, John broke the window.
- **Expletive**\_(there, it)
  - There is the window John broke.
- **Correlative Conjunction**
  - Either John broke the window with the fly ball or he did not.



- **Prepositional Phrase**
  - During the game, John broke the window.
- **Infinitive Phrase**
  - To complete the destructiveness of the baseball game, John broke the window.
- **Passive Voice**
  - The window was broken by John.
- **Participle Phrase**
  - Testing his father's patience, John broke the window.
- **Subordinate Clause**
  - Although John hit a home run, the price was a broken window.
- **Inverted Word Order**
  - The window John broke.

Inverted word order, as in the last example, should not be overused. But occasional use at an important point where you want to really gain your readers' attention can add surprise and drama to your writing, as in the following example:

- **Normal Word Order**
  - The Christmas treats, the bright, beribboned presents, and the charitable love of the season are all gone.
- **Inverted Word Order**
  - Gone are the Christmas treats, the bright, beribboned presents, and the charitable love of the season.

### **Varied Length**

Finally, another easy method for adding sentence variety to your writing is to pay attention to length. Strive to write sentences that are short, medium, and long in length. The easiest way to check for sentence length is to begin each sentence of a paragraph on a separate line so that you can scan the sentences. Here is an example:

1. Kirilov's home is described as dark, in part because of his son's sickness and death, which occurred barely five minutes before Aboguin rings the doctor's doorbell.
2. The entry is dark and the lamp in his drawing room is unlighted, allowing the twilight and the dark September evening to fill the room, relieved only by a light in the adjoining study that lights his books and a big lamp in the dead boy's bedroom.
3. The darkness extends to Kirilov himself.
4. Chekhov describes him as having a prematurely gray beard and skin with a pale gray hue.



5. His hands are stained black with carbolic acid, marking him as a laborer.
6. His dark home and gray appearance exemplify the grayness and monotony of life that characterize his recent loss and years of poverty.

It is easy to see at a glance that this paragraph has sentences of varying length.

### Combining and Dividing Clauses

If you decide your paper's sentence length needs to be more varied, there is much that can be done.

**Clauses can be converted to phrases;** for example, sentence one in the paragraph above could be changed to

Kirilov's home is described as dark, in part because of his son's sickness and death, occurring barely five minutes before.

**Sentences can be combined.** Sentences three and four above could become

The darkness extends to Kirilov himself as Chekhov describes him as having a prematurely gray beard and skin with a pale gray hue.

**Long sentences can be divided.** Sentence two above could become

The entry is dark and the lamp in his drawing room is unlighted, allowing the twilight and the dark September evening to fill the room. The darkness is relieved only by a light in the adjoining study that lights his books and a big lamp in the dead boy's bedroom.

**Phrases can become one or two words.** Sentence four above could become

*Chekhov describes him as prematurely gray.*

These changes do not necessarily make the sentence better, but they serve as good examples of what can be done to change sentence length and add sentence variety.

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## SENTENCE CLARITY

Sentence clarity simply means that sentences are clearly written and grammatically correct. Most of the time, they are. As speakers of English, we naturally speak and write correct sentences. But sometimes hasty, careless writing and revising can result in garbled sentences.

### Mixed Construction

A mixed construction occurs when a sentence begins with one grammatical pattern and concludes with a different grammatical pattern, as if the writer started writing a sentence, was interrupted, and then finished it without referring back to the beginning.

- The fact that our room was hot we opened the window between our beds.
- By not prosecuting marijuana possession as vigorously as crack possession encourages marijuana users to think they can ignore the law.



- Because of the European discovery of America became a profitable colony for Britain.

It is perfectly fine to begin sentences with the expression “the fact that,” with adverb clauses like “because,” and with prepositional phrases, but pay attention to these openings because it is especially easy to write mixed constructions. Usually, if these sentences are pointed out, writers can quickly see they are a problem. An easy way to find them is to read a paper backwards, one sentence at a time so that each sentence is isolated.

### Faulty Predication

Faulty predication occurs when the predicate of a sentence does not logically complete its subject. Most often faulty predication involves the verb *to be*. We know that *to be* verbs act like equal signs between the subject and predicate:

- The piano player is skilled.

But if the predicate is logically inconsistent with the subject, the sentence will confuse readers.

- The power of a skilled piano player is keenly aware of being able to raise strong emotions in listeners. [Can the power of a piano player be keenly aware?]
- Listeners are keenly aware of the power a skilled piano player has to raise strong emotions in listeners. [Now it is the listeners who are keenly aware.]

### Inconsistent or Incomplete Comparisons

When making comparisons, be sure they are consistent and complete.

**Inconsistent:** *Brownlee’s business proposal is better than Summers.* [Brownlee’s business proposal is being compared to Summers, a person.]

**Consistent:** *Brownlee’s business proposal is better than the one by Summers.*

**Incomplete:** *I was ashamed because my background was so different.* [Different from what?]

**Complete:** *I was ashamed because my background was so different from that of my new co-workers.*

Inconsistent and incomplete comparisons are common in speech. Context, facial expression, and body language supply the missing information. But in more formal writing, care must be taken to be completely clear.

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## TRANSITIONS

Transitions are connectors or bridges between thoughts. For example, if you read the word *however*, you know that the next thought will be in contrast to the previous one. The word acts as a bridge explaining the relationship between the two thoughts. If you read the word *meanwhile*, you know that the next event is happening at the same time as the event discussed previously. The word explains the simultaneous relationship between the two events.



Transitions are one of the methods used to make paragraphs flow smoothly. When the reader knows the relationship between concepts or sentences, the thoughts flow smoothly and the paragraph is easier to read. The transitions used most often are the ones already described, words like *however* and *meanwhile*. Lists of transitional expressions can be easily found in most writing handbooks. Following is just a small sample:

TO INDICATE TIME ORDER	TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE	TO INDICATE RESULTS
in the past	for example	as a result
before	for instance	consequently
earlier	to illustrate	because of
preceding	specifically	for this reason
recently	in particular	since
presently	namely	therefore
currently	in other words	thus
now		accordingly
until		
during		
following that		
after a short time		

TO CONCEDE	TO COMPARE	TO CONTRAST	TO EMPHASIZE
although	in comparison	and yet	above all
even though	in like manner	but	undoubtedly
admittedly	in much the same way	despite	most importantly
granted	likewise	nevertheless	moreover
while it is true		nonetheless	furthermore
of course		notwithstanding	without question
			however
			contrary to
			on the other hand

Transitional expressions like these work well between sentences, *within* paragraphs, but should not be used too often. Use them only when a relationship between sentences is not already evident.

Transitional expressions can also be used *between* paragraphs when the paragraphs are already arranged so that the content of one paragraph leads logically into the next paragraph. In these cases, the transition simply highlights the relationship that is already clear.

### Echo Transition



For more sophisticated transitions between paragraphs, use whole sentences. One effective sentence transition is an *echo transition*. An echo transition echoes a word, phrase, or idea from the last sentence of one paragraph in the first sentence of the next paragraph. Here is an example:

- ... Throughout the story, the husband's word is considered law, and the wife barely dares to question it.
- *This unequal marriage* fits perfectly into the historical period of the setting....

The italicized phrase echoes the idea in the previous paragraph, providing a bridge to the next paragraph.

### Key Word Transition

Another sentence transition repeats *key words* from one paragraph to the next.

- ... Shirley Jackson shows the uselessness of the lottery and the *selfishness of human nature* through Mr. Warner's ignorance.
- This *selfishness of human nature* is shown very clearly through Tessie in the story....

The repetition of key words demonstrates the relationship between the ideas in the two paragraphs.

### Look Back and Forward

A third type of sentence transition *looks back and forward*. In one or two sentences, look back at the ideas of the preceding paragraph and then look forward to the ideas in the next paragraph.

- ... These first two stanzas set up the theme of triumph in life.
- *In contrast to this victory, stanza three moves to the issue of dying....*

In the italicized sentence, the first phrase (*in contrast to this victory*) looks back at the ideas of the preceding paragraph. The second clause (*stanza three moves to the issue of dying*) looks forward to the ideas in the next paragraph.

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## **WORKING WITH SOURCES: THE 80/20 PRINCIPLE (PODCAST 28 TRANSCRIPT)**

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<https://campus2.purdueglobal.edu/media/working-with-sources-the-80-20-principle-podcast>

Greetings everyone. This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to discuss working with sources: the 80/20 principal.

What on earth do I mean by “the 80/20 principal”? Good question! Well, to put it simply, when you are assigned to write a “research” paper, 80% of that paper needs to be your own thinking—that is, your ideas, your analysis, your commentary, indeed, your words—and 20% will be content borrowed from sources—summaries, paraphrases, and quotes. These percents are approximations, of course, but they can serve as a good general guide to follow as you integrate content from research into a paper of your own. Indeed, the operative words in that last sentence are “a paper of your own,” because you need to be the author of your own paper and it is your voice that needs to be heard loud and clear on the page.

Have you ever wondered why professors assign papers in the first place? They want to know what you think about an important topic in your field. They already know what the experts know and think, but they can only know what you think if you tell them. Every writing assignment should be an invitation to grow an idea and share it with your readers even when using content from outside sources.

The bottom line is that you need to be the author of your own essay. In fact, the word “essay” comes from the French verb that means “to try.” Back in the 16th century, a writer named Montaigne invented the essay form by composing 107 short words, in which he “attempted” to take the reader through his thoughts about a topic.

Today, the essay is the most commonly assigned form of writing for students everywhere. Professors hope that when you write, you will try to make sense of something you’re learning and make that sense clear to your readers. Imagine, for example, that you want to explore the topic of free speech and the media. You’ll need to find information to help you make your points and inform or convince your readers. You might begin by exploring the history of free speech in the United States. Perhaps you’ll read original sources and laws or legal cases. You might research challenges to free speech and laws as they apply to the media. Are there limits to free speech? May one, for example, race into a hospital and scream “Bomb” just to scare everyone?

As you research your topic, you begin to grow and shape your idea, creating a main idea or thesis that you want to explore with your reader. That thesis expresses your unique understanding of the topic you selected. You select the approach to your topic and choose a few pertinent facts, statistics, and expert testimony that support your ideas.

Some writers make a basic mistake: Instead of writing their own ideas, they report the ideas of others. This approach is not an attempt of the writer to express his or her views on a topic—there is no attempt to understand, as information is simply being reported. In addition, when the writer merely



reports, there is no attempt at growing one's thinking. When you grow your thinking you are, in part, building upon what you already know or believe by synthesizing information from a variety of sources and making connections. Some of what you learn will validate your thinking, some of what you will learn will enhance your understanding so that you are better informed, and some of what you learn will challenge your thinking. All of this is good and will help grow your thinking. Make sense?

Less experienced writers can learn from more experienced authors who know and practice the 80/20 principle. Eighty percent of a research based essay should represent the writer's own thoughts and words and no more than 20% should come from outside sources to support the writer's original ideas. If a writer includes more than 20% from outside sources in his or her essay, the writer becomes a reporter rather than an author. Reporters summarize what others think; authors focus on what they think.

What you need to be aware of is your use of content from outside sources. Information from source material alone does not help you make your case. You need to do something with that content, and in doing so you are presenting your thoughts, which should, after all, be front and center, not backstage. Right?

Listen to the following example and think about what you are hearing:

A 2009 study reported that, "for the first time in the nation's history, one out of every 99.1 adults is behind bars. With a sevenfold increase in prisoners since 1973, the U.S. has experienced prison crowding" (Boehm & Lampert, 2008, p. 54). California corrections officials estimated that by the end of 2012, prison facilities would run out of bed space for inmates and more than 15,000 inmates would have to be housed in areas not designed for living space. To compound the problem in California, voters in November did not approve a bond to fund prison expansion at the state's thirty-two correctional facilities (Selman, 2012). According to Warnecki (2012), the prison population is expected to increase as there is a "direct correlation between a poor economy and crime" (p. 39).

What you heard was a lot of information—one sentence after another of information. There was nothing from the writer to set up the paragraph and no commentary on the information presented. What is the exact point of the paragraph? Is there any sense that the paragraph is connected to a larger idea? A purpose? No. The writer has simply presented information like a reporter and even if the information is good, readers will wonder what it all adds up to.

Here are some suggestions for powerfully integrating sources. First always introduce a paragraph with a sentence that you believe is your own thought on the subject matter. This means framing a body paragraph with a focus statement or content that makes the focus clear. It's important not to jump in too quickly to the evidence. Set things up and then move to marshal in evidence.

Second, introduce and comment on every quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Use evidence to help support an assertion you make and to serve as the basis of analysis. Do not rely on the evidence alone to make your case. You have to set up and comment on that evidence. Remember, you need to be the author of your own paper and let your thoughts be heard the loudest.





Third, take your time and sustain the writing. Surround the content you use from sources with your own interpretation or opinion. To this end, you can explain where the material is from and why it is interesting (in other words, telling readers why the source is relevant to your paper).

A research writer wants to make his or her own ideas, argument, or interpretation of that research clear to the reader. For that reason, it is wise to avoid using too many quotations or references because then someone else's ideas dominate the discussion, not yours. When integrating source material, follow the pattern of introducing the content and then following it with commentary and/or interpretation. Don't rush. Sustain the writing and discuss the information presented as it relates to the point of the paragraph and to the larger point of the paper as articulated in the thesis. In this way, the reader will focus on your ideas and how the parts of the paper fit together and work to support a dominant idea.

In short, keep the 80/20 principle in mind whenever you are working with information from resources. 80% of your paper needs to be your own thinking and 20% will come from sources. With practice—and keeping the 80/20 principle in mind—you will develop useful critical writing skills that will help you in your academic career and beyond.

Thanks, everyone. Happy writing.

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## EDITING AND REVISING

### [Open Resource Webpage](#)

There is a common misconception, and not just among writing students, that only bad writers have to revise and edit their work. To the contrary, virtually all writing that ends up in print, as well as “A” papers, need both revision and editing—sometimes several rounds of each. Many of the best writers in the world are obsessive revisers. Revising is quite different than editing, however. This resource provide explanations and strategies for both.

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### REVISION

Revision is best thought of as **re-vision** or re-seeing: looking at a text from a new perspective, which means re-thinking even its most fundamental precepts. This might involve reconsidering your position on a controversial topic, re-evaluating the quality of the evidence used to support your claims, or re-defining your audience and or purpose.

### EDITING

Editing is a little bit like cleaning up the kitchen after cooking a big meal. Your essay’s “cleanliness” includes smooth transitions between paragraphs, logical organization of your thoughts and presentation of information, overall clarity and sense, proper citation format, and effective language usage (standard grammar, punctuation and spelling).

Revising and editing are inextricably connected. A text must be both revised and edited well in order to be successful. If an essay, for example, is revised extensively, but not edited, problems such as grammar errors will make the essay’s meaning difficult to comprehend and stand in the way of its success.



The reverse is also true. Consider the poor writer who tirelessly edits an essay whose ideas are not fully formed. The result is a very polished text—perfect grammar, logical organization, no spelling errors—that no one can comprehend, despite its orderliness, because its basic meaning is unclear, undeveloped, or unsubstantiated.

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## THE REVISION PROCESS



*Figure 1.* The revision process is recursive, which means that writers will go through several stages of the process at different times.

After you have written a complete draft having a beginning, middle, and end, it's time to re-see what you've written and think about what you've said, how you've said it, and why. Believe it or not, revising can be fun. You've already chosen your topic, defined its scope, conveyed your thesis, presented your information or position, supported your claims with evidence (which might have required a great deal of research), addressed potential counter-arguments, and arrived at a satisfying conclusion. Whew! That's a lot of work, starting from scratch, getting over the terror of the blank page, and committing your thoughts to paper. You've already done the hard work. Now sit back, kick up your feet, hard copy of your paper in hand, and breathe. It's time to **read, re-read, review, reflect, and revise.**

One tried and true method of revision is the **post-draft outline**. It helps you identify potential organizational problems within your draft. Its steps are quite simple:

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## POST-DRAFT OUTLINING

This revision strategy requires you to outline a draft that you have already completed. This strips down your essay and allows you to see if your organization is sound, if you have repeated your points, whether your introduction and/or conclusion need work, if there are points you need to make that you haven't yet, etc. A good way to set this up is to count the paragraphs in your draft and write that many numbers on a separate piece of paper like this:

- 1.
- 2.



- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Then in one sentence, as briefly as possible, state the point of each paragraph. You are not looking for the topic sentence. You are trying to boil down what the paragraph is about. If your topic sentence actually reflects what the paragraph is about, that's fine. It should, just don't trust that it will. If it doesn't, you will want to revise it.

A possible outlined draft (this one for a paper on homeschooling) might look something like this:

1. Parents want what's best for their children: Is homeschooling best?
2. (Introduction)
3. Homeschooling is growing for many reasons (religious, etc.).
4. Homeschooling gives parents the freedom to set the educational environment
5. (Activities, peers, etc.).
6. Not all children need to be homeschooled, but children should have that option
7. (Conclusion).

This is a clear outline, and so it indicates that the paper is strong in terms of organization. The reader can tell that distinct points are being made in the paper, that the paper is logically organized, and that there is a clear introduction and conclusion. This outline is for a very short paper (six paragraphs), but the same process can be applied to longer texts.

Now consider this outline, written for a different paper, also on homeschooling:

1. Two groups of homeschoolers: religious and other
  2. Can't get religion in school
  3. Parents want to pass on their faith to their kids
  4. Homeschools put kids at disadvantage—no state/federal guidelines
- What do you think about the paper this outline was written from?
  - What sense do you get from paragraphs two and three about the big point the author is trying to make?
  - Is the author against homeschooling? For it?
  - Can you identify a thesis here? What is the paper's main point?

If you are struggling, you should be: This outline shows that the paper has several problems.



First, as readers, we think we will be reading a paper about two types of homeschoolers, religious and other, as described in the first paragraph. However, in the remainder of the paragraphs the author only discusses religious homeschoolers. As readers, we have to shift gears: Now we think the paper is going to be about why religious parents might want to homeschool their kids.

And then, all of a sudden, we are hit with the idea that homeschooling harms kids (#4).

Quite likely, this author did not recognize the disorganization of the paper, or that she or he had changed the angle on the topic, the central focus, several times. When writers are too close to their own work (which is almost always), it is easy to overlook that information is missing or misplaced. We've all started writing and ended up wandering, digressing beyond the point of no return. We can be forgiven for that—but outlining totally strips down the essay, so we can see its bare bones, meaning that even though we are close to the work, we can readily identify its strengths and weaknesses.

**You can also apply outlining to a single paragraph, rather than a whole paper.**

Let's look at this one:

Many people are unaware of a growing trend in American society. This trend is parents taking the initiative and dedication towards ensuring that their children are given a quality education. Although it may seem somewhat unorthodox to many, these families prefer to educate their children in their homes. These "homeschooled" children are growing in numbers every year. It's clear that there are many advantages to having your children learn at home.

This paragraph has five sentences, so your outline will have five points. When you summarize sentences, do it in as few words as possible:

1. Growing trend in U.S.
2. Trend = parents want good education for kids
3. Solution = homeschool
4. Homeschooled kids increasing in number each year
5. Why? Many advantages...

This outline shows a clear logical progression from point 1 to point 2 and so on. This outline demonstrates that the above is a well-constructed paragraph.

Now it's your turn to practice. Below you will find a paragraph. Grab a piece of scrap paper and outline it sentence by sentence:

Homeschooling is often associated with two groups: religious and non-religious. Religious groups want their children to embrace their religion. To this end they take them to church on Sunday, involve them in church activities during the week, and teach them from the scripture. Religious homeschoolers want to be in charge of their children's education while emphasizing their belief in religion. Religion and education are mixed together to build the children's



character, morals, and values. Religion is the faith that they hold above anything else. Religion is a subject that they can't receive at public schools.

Here is one possible outline of this paragraph:

1. Homeschooling = religious and non-religious groups
  2. Want kids to have religion
  3. Have religious activities all week
  4. Parents in charge of education and religion
  5. Both mixed is good for child
  6. Religion very important
  7. Can't get it in school
- What do you think about this paragraph?
  - Is it structured like the last paragraph we looked at?
  - What are the similarities and differences between them?

It's repetitive (paragraphs two and six say roughly the same thing), and it uses the word religion/religious too many times (nine times). Also, the topic sentence suggests that the paragraph is going to talk about two groups (religious and not), but it only talks about one.

- How could this paragraph be revised?
- Would reordering the sentences help?
- What about changing the topic to just religious homeschooling?

There are countless ways to revise this paragraph; your choices will depend on the focus that you, the author, want to take.

Here's one attempt at revising this paragraph:

While parents choose to homeschool for several reasons, many do so to instill their religious beliefs in their children. By homeschooling, they are able to involve their children in church activities and teach them from the scripture throughout the week. This gives parents the opportunity to shape both their children's religious and academic education, thereby building in their children a strong moral character. Given that religion cannot be received in the public schools, homeschooling allows these parents the ability to pass on their faith.

Note how many of the "religion" words were removed, without changing the focus of the topic, which is a religious angle on homeschooling. This makes the paragraph less repetitive.

The focus has also been changed from two homeschooling groups to just religious homeschooling. In other words, now the topic sentence fits the paragraph.

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## PARAMEDIC METHOD OF REVISION

The Paramedic Method of Revision is a technique that targets wordiness and helps streamline your writing so it is clear and concise. To start, we will need to review prepositions. A good test that identifies most prepositions is whether they can fit into the following sentence:

The squirrel ran \_\_\_\_\_ the tree (up, over, with, under, around, at, below, from, to).

About	Besides	Inside	Plus	Unto
Above	Between	Into	Regarding	Up
Across	Beyond	Like	Respecting	Upon
After	But	Near	Since	With
Against	By	Next	Than	Within
Along	Concerning	Of	Through	Without
Among	Considering	Off	Throughout	
Around	Despite	On	Till	
As	Down	Onto	To	
At	During	Opposite	Toward	
Before	Except	Out	Under	
Behind	For	Outside	Underneath	
Below	From	Over	Unlike	
Beside	In	Past	Until	

Is "president" a preposition? What about "and" or "this"? Why not? "The squirrel ran this the tree" is not a possible sentence. Neither is "The squirrel ran president the tree" or "The squirrel ran and the tree." See how this test helps us to identify prepositions? "President," "this," and "and" do not fit into that blank, and so we know that they are not prepositions.

One note: There are a few prepositions that sound a bit odd in this sentence (for example, of), but they are prepositions just the same.

**The next thing we need to identify are forms of the verbs, "to be" and "to have."** These verbs are really common and have many forms. For instance, "being" and "is," "had" and "having"—can you think of other forms of these verbs?

Here are some more:

**BE:** was, were, wasn't, am, are, been, be

**HAVE:** has, hasn't, hadn't, have

With our memories jogged about prepositions and the verb forms of "to be" and "to have," we can now look at the Paramedic Method of Revision, which involves a series of steps:

### Step 1. Identify Overused Prepositions and Vague or Passive Be and Have Verbs

Highlight in blue all the forms of "to be" and "to have" (is, were, being, to be, had, having, hasn't, etc...):

- The little girl **was** found safe at the mall down the street after **having been** declared missing for ten days.



Now you try

- The dog was having too much fun when his owners were away from home.

Here's the answer

- The dog **was** having too much fun when his owners **were** away from home.

Next, highlight in yellow all the prepositions, like this:

- The dog **with** the black spots **on** his back lives **over** the tracks **from** my house.

Now you try one. Highlight all the prepositions:

- Go over the bridge, down Main Street, up Markham Blvd, and turn into the third driveway.

Here's the answer

- Go **over** the bridge, **down** Main Street, **up** Markham Blvd, and turn **into** the third driveway.

So at this point in the revision strategy, we've marked all the versions of "to be" (was, were, am, be,...), "to have" (have, had, having, has, ....) and the prepositions (from, to, over, under, around, below,...), like this:

The latest book **of** the month **is** a fascinating gem which will **be** cherished **for** years.

## Step 2: Revise Highlighted Words

Try to delete the highlighted words. How? First, insert verbs that actually do something:

- "I **am** a race-car driver" -> "I drive race cars."

Often, you will find the verb you need (in this case "drive") posing as an adjective or noun (in this case "driver") somewhere in the sentence. Find it and make it a verb.

How do you revise the overuse of prepositions? Well, often, prepositions are acting as adjectives, so make them into one. How would you change this: "The boy **with** the blue hair"?

- "The boy **with** the blue hair" -> "The blue-haired boy."

The result is junk-free writing, real words carrying real meaning. There's an added bonus here too. It has been proven in psychological tests that the clearer the writing, the more people understand it (i.e. the fewer unnecessary words). By using this technique, your point will be clearer.

There's nothing wrong with prepositions, or the verb form of BE and HAVE. The problem is that most writing is packed full of them, which can create unspecific meanings. Give some other words a chance, and express yourself with more accuracy and intent.

Let's go back to one of our earlier examples. Try to re-write this sentence, getting rid of as many of the marked words as possible:

- The little girl was found safe at the mall down the street after being declared missing for ten days.





What's the problem? For starters, there are lots of prepositional phrases. Did you notice a waltzing rhythm as you were reading? At the mall, down the street, ... It's also a passive sentence, meaning that there's no real subject for the verb "found." Who found her? We don't know from this sentence because it is passive, but when you're the author, you should make sure this information is known. For this example, let's say the police found the girl.

Here's one revision:

- Police discovered the little girl safe ten days later at the local mall.

Solution: active verb, no more distracting rhythm.

Let's look at another example. First identify the BE/HAVE forms and the prepositions:

- They had an argument at the house of their neighbor.

Here's the marked-up version:

- They **had** an argument **at** the house **of** their neighbor.

Is there a hidden verb lurking somewhere that could replace "had"?

How about "argument"?

Couldn't we change this to "argued"?

Here's our first revision:

- They argued at the house of their neighbor.

Now, can we do anything about those prepositions? We may not be able to get rid of both, but we can get rid of one:

- They argued at their neighbor's house.

We started with a ten-word sentence and revised it to a clean six words. How's that for eliminating wordiness?

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## READ YOUR PAPER ALOUD

Reading your essay aloud is perhaps the single-most effective way to revise it. It's an especially effective method for those writers who fear they don't have good command of basic writing principles because all you have to do is listen, hear what the sentence sounds like. This encourages you to revise the sentence as you would speak it, and since most of us speak well, even if we have writing problems, it's a way of addressing problems that we wouldn't otherwise likely identify or know how to correct.

Now the twist: Read your paper backwards, starting with the last sentence first, then the next-to-last, etc. This seemingly odd suggestion is a useful one because reading your essay backwards dissociates each sentence from the larger meaning of the text, enabling you to focus just on the sentence and whether or not it makes sense on its own. Because the basic unit of each paragraph is the sentence, you want to make sure that each sentence you write is capable of standing on its own in terms of



meaning and clarity. If you discover a sentence that doesn't make sense on its own, in isolation from its context, then chances are it won't make sense in the context of your paragraph (and, hence, your paper) either.

After you've made changes to sentences that need revision, read your paper aloud again, this time straight through from top to bottom. Listen to the sentences as if you were listening to music. Does anything sound clunky? Monotonous? Redundant? This will give you a chance not only to revise individual words, but also to revise for sound. This is a very good way to improve sentence variety. For example, if you have three sentences in a row that are roughly the same length (which sounds monotonous when you read them aloud), try combining two of them to make one longer sentence. The result is two sentences of different lengths, which will make for a more pleasant reading experience for your audience.

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## TAKE A BREAK FROM WRITING

This sounds like yet another easy assignment. It is, but only if you haven't procrastinated much and have left enough time between writing your draft and submitting your final essay to take a break from your paper.

Most writers are too close to what they have written to effectively revise it, and putting your work aside for several days give you a chance to create some distance from what you've written, allowing you to return to it, even a few short days later, with fresh eyes.

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## YOUR READERS AND YOUR THESIS

Have you kept your promise to your readers? A thesis is a lot like a promise, a promise you make to your readers about the journey your essay will take them on. You likely started thinking about your thesis long before you began drafting your essay, and at that point it was tentative. As you gathered information, researched your topic, and crafted a compelling angle, your thesis changed according to the direction your draft was taking at every stage.

Then came time to commit. In your rough draft, you had to stake your claim. The next step was to get comments from your instructor and peer reviewers in your class. Their critical commentary helped you think about ways to improve your essay. You've diligently applied the above revision methods to your paper. But did your thesis get the full attention it deserves?

The thesis is one of the most important parts of any text. It is a one- or two-sentences passage that describes your essay's main point, as well as its purpose. Your thesis answers the question that is implied by your desire to write the paper. Hence, the above analogy to a promise made to your readers. Your thesis lets readers know what your paper will discuss, and why—and if it's a persuasive essay, your thesis also lets your readers know by what means you've come to the conclusions you have, i.e., why you hold the position you do, the evidence that has led you there.

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## THE EDITING PROCESS

Now that you've revised your work, you have a collection of ideas you're proud of, in a form that seems logical. What could possibly be left to do? Oh, yes, the aforementioned "clean-up."

Don't let your best ideas become obscured by sloppy writing. Editing is the last act you will perform on your essay before you submit it for evaluation. Take your time, and don't underestimate the importance of this part of the process! Leave at least one whole work session (an hour or two at least, depending on the length of your essay).

Running spell-check and grammar-check does not constitute editing. You can do these things, but be aware that there are likely a number of spelling, punctuation and grammar errors that the automated programs will not catch.

Here are some ways to make sure you turn in your paper in the best shape possible:

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### READ YOUR ESSAY ALOUD: TAKE 2

Wait, wasn't this recommended in the Revision section as well? Yes! Reading your essay aloud, whether to a specific person or just to yourself, is useful for both revision and editing. The value this gesture potentially brings to editing is that it allows you to hear, literally, all kinds of problems with language. You might now know, for example, that the subject and verb of a sentence disagree, but you can hear if something sounds awry. Take this simple example:

- One of the doors are open.

Reading this sentence aloud, you can tell immediately that it doesn't sound right. Why? You probably thought, perhaps unconsciously that "doors" is the subject of the sentence, so you wrote "doors are open." But, in fact, "one" is the subject of the sentence, and it's singular, so the verb must follow:

- One of the doors is open.

Chances are you could correct this sentence without even naming the problem.

The other aspect of your essay that reading aloud can help with is identifying unnecessary and vague words and phrases. If your sentence sounds like a mouthful it probably is! Can you say what you're trying to say in fewer words? Try re-working an especially long sentence to see if you can communicate your intended meaning more succinctly.

If you notice that some of your sentences use "I" or "in my view," be especially careful to make sure that what you are offering is more than just your opinion. In an informative piece, this might be a fact; in a persuasive piece, this might be an argument that is supported with evidence gathered in your research.

Vague language is one of the most common problems with rough drafts. After all, you know what you mean. Read aloud for overly general, non-specific language. Here's an example, taken from a thesis statement:



- My essay will explain my views on capital punishment.

This is vague because it says nothing about what your views are, or why you hold them.

Consider this revised statement:

- Capital punishment is unjust because it fails to deter crime.

Your reader will know your position and know why you hold it. What follows is the (correct) assumption that your paper will be an argument against capital punishment.

Many writers also want to add that there are pros and cons to their arguments, advantages and disadvantages, and while this impulse is understandable (and may be helpful to you in the draft stage), it doesn't typically advance your thesis—and because you are taking a position on a controversial topic, readers will assume there are inherent pros and cons. The best strategy is to name, very specifically, the chief positions being debated. An example using the above topic, capital punishment, might look like this:

Some lawmakers have argued that capital punishment deters crime, while other stakeholders, including victims' families, hold that incarceration is just as effective at deterrence as the death penalty.

When you are editing your essay, make sure that your words are as precise as they can be. Don't say "people" when you mean "residents of Delaware County who pay taxes." Don't hesitate to use a thesaurus if you think your word choice could use improvement, but you can't think of the most precise word.

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## CHECK FOR REDUNDANT SENTENCE STRUCTURE

As you are reading aloud, be aware of any passages that sound monotonous or sing-songy. This is a sign that you are on your way to lulling your readers to sleep with repetitive sentence patterns. An easy way to correct this is to combine shorter sentences to make one longer sentence, as well as to break up long sentences into two shorter sentences. Sentence combining allows you to combine sentences that are closely related in order to enhance clarity, underscore connections among ideas, and reduce choppiness. Look through your draft for sentences that are explanation or connection.

Remember: Punctuation changes always change the rhythm of a sentence—just make sure that new punctuation doesn't get in the way of what you're trying to say.

*Here's an example of several sentences that could be improved by this method.*

- Olin loves to play tennis. He doesn't like wearing traditional "tennis whites." He prefers tournaments that allow players to wear bright colors on the court.

*Edited version:*

- Olin loves to play tennis, but he doesn't like wearing traditional "tennis whites"; he prefers tournaments that allow players to wear bright colors on the court.



[Check out the APA Style's tips on avoiding redundancy too.](#)

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## AVOID CLICHÉS

Writers often resort to clichés as a kind of short-cut to meaning, especially if they think the reader will “get” the intended meaning. For example, “It’s raining cats and dogs” is a popular cliché in American culture. It means that it is raining a lot, or has been raining for a long time. As delightful as this image is, it doesn’t belong in a scholarly essay. Try instead to communicate your meaning directly; don’t assume that your reader knows the cultural slang. Take a look at a short list of common clichés below:

Cold as ice	Let sleeping dogs lie
Come hell or high water	Life is like a bowl full of cherries
Crocodile tears	Little did I know
Curiosity killed the cat	Moment of truth
Cut to the chase	More than one way to skin a cat
Down and out	No spring chicken
Few and far between	On my last nerve
Fit as a fiddle	Over a barrel
Give 110 percent	Pearls of wisdom
Home is where the heart is	Push the envelope
Honesty is the best policy	Quiet as a mouse
I had the time of my life	Raise the bar
Scared to death	

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## AVOID SEXIST LANGUAGE

Few people any longer use “he” and “him” to mean “everyone, both males and females.” Most people recognize that “mankind” is not gender-neutral. But it’s complicated to write in such a way that sexist language is avoided, especially if you don’t want your essay filled with “s/he” and “his or her.” A popular answer seems to be “their” or “them,” which has been accepted by many as grammatical. Another option is to revise the sentence to avoid singular pronouns. For example, say instead, “Students sharpen their pencils.” This is both grammatically correct and gender-neutral.

Supplemental tutorials on using unbiased language from the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition:



### Chapter 3: Writing Clearly and Concisely

Guidelines for Unbiased Language (PDF table)

3.12 Gender (PDF)

3.13 Sexual Orientation (PDF)

3.15 Disabilities (PDF)

3.19 Agreement of Subject and Verb (PDF)

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## AVOID OVER-QUOTING

Quoting experts makes you look smart, right? So, the more quotes the better? Well, no, not exactly. You should think of direct quotes (and paraphrases) as support for your own original thoughts, not vice versa. If your essay is one long string of quotations, it appears that your work isn't very original, even if you've properly cited all your sources.

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