

How to Enhance Your Writing

Things to Consider

“Things” to avoid when writing your essay:

- Repetition
- One-sidedness
- Too much emotion--i.e. no whining and no rambling
- Looking uninformed--i.e. not doing your research
- Excessive description or irrelevant information
- Vague words, confusing ideas.
- A final paragraph that summarizes.

“Things” to consider in constructing your argument that I will be looking for:

- Organization (see info under “course documents” for help!)
- Establishing an appropriate tone for your readers.
- Using an appropriate writing style for your readers.
- Building your ethos and logos by using the online documents.
- Using pathos only when and where appropriate.
- Consideration of at least one other point of view on the situation.
- Clarity and specificity in terms of ideas, sentence structure, word choice, etc.
- A catchy, appropriate opening paragraph.
- A final paragraph that calls your readers to action rather than restating everything you’ve already written.
- A clear stand on the situation that you express in either the first or second paragraph of your essay.
- An appropriate title.

Helpful Hints for getting started:

Read over all the documents and take notes where necessary. I’d advise printing out the documents because we read better and retain more information when we’re not looking at a computer screen. Also, you’re more likely to underline and make notations on a printed document. I’d suggest that you plan on writing at least two drafts--if not three or four. Your first draft should be a mess--get all your ideas down and don’t worry about any of the formalities of the assignment (i.e. organization, tone, style, etc). Your ideas are the back-bone of this assignment--if you censor yourself when drafting, you may end up with a weaker argument in the long run. On your subsequent drafts, you can work on organization, tone, style, ethos, pathos, and logos--information is easy to shape once you see it on the page. Incidentally, this idea was summed up quite nicely by author E.M Forester (Howards End, A Room with a View, Passage to India, etc) when he said “How do I know what to think until I see what I say?” You are more than welcome to talk to me about drafts, drafting, etc. via e-mail. You must include specific questions about your draft if you send it via e-mail and you must be prepared to ask specific questions about your draft if you show up in my office.

7 Ways to make your writing as clear and explicit as possible:

1. “Vague words.” Words such as things, something, everything, stuff, perfect, average, normal, better, good, bad, different, interesting, “well-written,” positive, negative, etc. **are so subjective** that they lose their meaning in writing. What’s perfect to one person will not be perfect to another. Likewise, when writers use the word “things” they typically are referring to “something” more specific than “things.” In essay writing in this class, you’ll want to **eliminate** these vague words by replacing them w/ more specific words. If you choose to use them, you’ll want to explain what these terms mean to you. What made the experience “good” or “interesting” for you?

2. Pronoun agreement: What's wrong with the following sentence: "She has a clear purpose in her essay, but later they begin to wander." In this example, the writer switches from a singular "she" to a plural "they." Shifting pronouns will confuse your reader and possibly alienate his/her from your essay. You want your reader to keep reading--just remember that it's your job as the writer to keep your ideas as clear as possible. In short, lead your reader through your essay.

3. Eliminate wordy phrases: In speaking, we frequently use empty phrases that give us time to think but don't add to our message--expressions such as "Okay?" and "You know what I mean?" In writing, though, we have the chance to eliminate such phrases. Here are some common expressions that are needlessly awkward and wordy. I've included their one-word alternatives below too.

<u>Wordy Expressions</u>	<u>Alternatives</u>
Due to the fact that	because
In light of the fact that	since
Regardless of the fact that	although
In the event that	if
In many cases	often
In that period	then
At the present time	now
At this point in time	now
In the not-too-distant future	soon
For the purpose of	to
Has the ability to	can
Be aware of the fact that	know
Is necessary that	must

A quick note on "it is a fact that": Don't call something a fact that isn't one, even if it may be true. "The fact that Shakespeare is a great writer ..." That's not a fact, even though most people agree that he's pretty good. "The fact that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit ..." That's a fact.

4. The author or writer of a piece never "goes on to say" or "talks about ____." Think about this situation for a moment—if you're encountering a piece of writing, the writer, isn't talking or going on to say. Great substitutes here that you might want to consider are the following: discuss, examine, analyze, state, assert, argue, etc. Remember, that each of these six words names a very specific action—think about what the writer is doing in the piece you're reading before you choose an appropriate word for that action.

5. Delete Unnecessary Adverbs. (An adverb modifies a verb (*walked briskly*), an adjective (*pretty tall*), another adverb (*very badly*), or a sentence (*Truthfully*, I do not know the answer). Oftentimes, adverbs are unnecessary and only serve to bog down our writing. For instance, why write "The crime was extremely difficult for the police to solve" when you can simply write "The crime mystified the police"?

Adverbs such as *extremely*, *really*, and *very* can weaken writing. Although they are called "intensifiers," they make writing less, not more, intense. Notice that the following sentence reads more emphatically without the intensifier:

Example 1: Although the professor's lectures are controversial, no one denies that they are really brilliant.

Revised: Although the professor's lectures are controversial, no one denies that they are brilliant.

"Qualifiers" such as *quite*, *rather*, and *somewhat* also tend to weaken writing. When you spot one, try to delete it:

Example 2: When planning a summer trip to the mountains, remember to pack warm clothes; it turns quite cool at night.

Revised: When planning a summer trip to the mountains, remember to pack warm clothes; it turns cool at night.

6. Verb Tense Shifting: Readers usually expect a piece of writing to maintain a consistent use of tense from beginning to end. Once writers commit themselves to a tense (either past or present), they must stick with it **unless there is a reason to shift tenses**. Readers find inappropriate tense shifting distracting at best and often misleading. Sometimes, though, there is a good reason to shift from one tense to another. The trick, of course, is knowing what these reasons are. The differences between the past tense and the present tense go beyond just their differences in time. The two tenses have different functions, and we shift between them as we have need of those functions.

Quick tips for past and present tense:

- Use the past tense when describing or discussing events that were **completed** in the past.
- Use the present tense to make statements of fact or generalizations that **are true now** and **will continue to be true indefinitely** unless something happens to change the situation. You can also use present tense to describe **habitual or repeated actions**.

Example 1: Whenever we went to a restaurant, my father always makes a fuss about ordering exactly the right wine.

In the above example, the writer mistakenly switches from past tense to present tense. Both actions, going to the restaurant and making a fuss about ordering, happened in the past. The entire sentence, then, must be written in the past tense.

Corrected: Whenever we went to a restaurant, my father always made a fuss about ordering exactly the right wine.

Example 2: She went to Trident Technical College, which was in South Carolina.

In the above example, a shift is necessary. She has finished attending Trident Technical College, so the past tense part of this sentence is correct. However, the college is still, and probably will always be, in South Carolina. In the second part of the sentence, the writer must shift to present tense.

Corrected: She went to Trident Technical College, which is in South Carolina.

(From A Commonsense Guide to Grammar & Usage, pp. 103-106)

7. Strong essay writing is always explicit. Never assume that the reader can read your mind—it's your job to read in between the lines for your reader. For example, when you provide an example and simply say that it's a "good example" you're expecting your reader to do all the work. Even if you just provide one sentence explaining why it's a good example, that's not enough. The more explicit, nuanced, and lengthy your explanation is, the easier it will be to get your points across to your reader.