

Tutoring in the Writing Workshop

A Training Manual

By

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Preface

I have designed this manual to prepare you to work in the Writing Workshop. No manual, however, can teach you nearly as much as sheer practical experience can. Therefore, you should think of this manual only as a starting point in your development, a kind of rough outline or broad overview of what you'll need to know in order to begin your real education in tutoring, the education that will occur day after day as you do the actual work of the Writing Workshop. Every tutoring situation is unique, and good tutors soon learn that they must respond to the particular, fine-grained details and dynamics of each situation anew, rather than just repeat the same formulaic strategies by rote each time.

In the first part of the manual, you'll find a basic overview of the Writing Workshop: the broad philosophy that guides us, the concrete policies and procedures that structure our work together, a description of your job, and some fundamentals for effective tutoring. In the second part of the manual, you'll find a small refresher-course on the basic sorts of things you'll need to know in order to help students: essentials about grammar, style, and rhetorical invention. In the third part, you'll find copies of all of the handouts we have here in the Writing Workshop that you can use with students. In the fourth part, you'll find ideas for dealing with particularly challenging students, those for whom English is a second language, those who are angry or despairing about their experience with college, those whom you suspect of cheating. .

T. R. Johnson

PART ONE: WELCOME TO THE WRITING WORKSHOP

I. The Idea Behind the Writing Workshop

Writing is rarely easy, even for people who consider themselves successful writers. Sometimes, people have a hard time coming up with ideas, and, other times, they have so many ideas that they can't figure out how best to connect them, how best to structure an essay around them. And most writers, no matter how experienced, worry enough about grammar to ask a friend to look through their work with them. Moreover, all writers wish their style had more flare, more grace. When some writers sit down to work on their writing, these concerns can loom quite large, become overwhelming, and even undermine their attempts at writing.

Happily, the Writing Workshop, located in the Educational Resource Center, offers free help to all Tulane undergraduates who wish their writing could be better. We can't proofread student work, much less draft it for them. Our job, instead, is to show each student who visits us how to gain more power over his or her writing, more power through writing, so that, sooner or later, that student won't need our services at all. Toward that end, we talk with students about their work. We encourage students who visit us to bring along a copy of their assignment and any notes or drafts they've already developed, but, even if they don't have this stuff, we can still work with them: ultimately, they need only bring a strong will to improve their skills and a readiness to have an engaging, pointed, and important conversation. We also ask that they bring their professor's name and email address so that we can send a note about our work with that student.

When a student talks with a tutor, this ordinary, natural, spontaneous exchange can induce very subtle, very complex changes in the student's thinking. He or she can become increasingly sensitized to the ways readers experience prose – and more adept, therefore, at spotting potential problems and taking care of them. Also, the mere sound of the two voices going back and forth can often work to soften the barriers to successful communication that have undermined the student's composing process. Most importantly, the more a student talks to a tutor, the more he or she will eventually internalize this talk; that is, the student will be able to talk to himself or herself, so to speak, about his or her written work, and this inward reflection – call it, critical reflection – is what all successful writers prize as the key to their control over their writing.

We believe deeply in the power of conversation. Even if the student is only concerned about simple mechanical structures (how to avoid a comma splice, for example), we'll want to talk with the student about them to insure that his or her new understanding of them will last. In other words, we won't simply hand the student a vast body of grammatical law to memorize nor a large stack of worksheets to fill out, for we take the issue of grammar far too seriously to waste time with methods that, no matter how easy for the tutor, have been proven in dozens of careful experiments to do very little to eliminate error from student writing. We know that dialogue is the only way to insure that students are really gaining control over grammar, and therefore it remains the method we trust in the Writing Workshop. Part of what makes conversation such a powerful tool in this context is that it can build the student's confidence. As many have pointed out, when students are having significant trouble with grammar, these troubles are often a symptom of some larger alienation from the rhetorical situation, and, by simply discussing particular instances of grammatical error, we hope to put students at ease in a way that allows them to see for themselves – and correct by themselves – their errors.

After all, we believe that students must learn to write grammatically correct sentences, for this ability is a primary component of the persona that all educated professionals project and, in turn, expect from their peers. In fact, we feel that so many people rely on “grammar” (punctuation, usage, verb-endings, and so on) to distinguish those with real power from those with none, “insiders” from “outsiders,” that a

kind of perverse fury comes to infuse most discussion of writing in the popular sphere, and the only way for students to transcend these clouds of anxiety and confusion is to sit down with a well-trained tutor and talk about what makes sense in a given sentence and what doesn't and why. We believe that when a student talks with a tutor -- even if the student comes to English as a second language or grew up speaking a version of English that differs from the one used in the university and in the professions -- that student can begin to achieve the control over writing that he or she needs.

We take the same approach to the closely related issue of style. Many students worry that their prose sounds "choppy" or "wordy" or that it doesn't "flow" or "hang together." But most have considerable difficulty in pinning down exactly what the problem is. When faced with this situation, we like to read the paper out loud for the student and encourage them to listen carefully to how it sounds. We let our voices stumble when we come to those places where most readers' understanding might hit a momentary glitch. We then share certain principles about how readers generally process sentences and paragraphs, then guide the students in honing their prose to fit these patterns. We find, too, that this same conversational approach helps tremendously with students who are struggling with writer's block. We use conversation to stimulate the students' thinking, help them to see new angles of argument, come up with useful details to support their positions, and anticipate potential contradictions or shortcomings in their theses.

II. *The Ideal Tutor: A Job Description*

Tutors who work in the Writing Workshop are listeners and interlocutors, never proofreaders or arbiters in student-faculty conflicts.

When students come to the Writing Workshop, they are almost always in some degree of distress over their ability to produce acceptable prose, and, therefore, your first priority is to welcome the student and to put him or her at ease. The moment you make contact with the student, tell him or her your first name and say, "What's yours?" And then, in friendly and helpful tones, ask "So what sort of writing are you working on?" and then, "What in particular can I help you with?" Never let the friendly, conversational dynamic that you create in the opening moments fade. It is the heart and soul of our method.

Also, when you begin a tutoring session, try to discern fairly quickly what the goals of that tutoring session will be. That is, if the student doesn't have specific issues that he or she can identify but only wants you to look at a draft, push the student to specify what he or she thinks is needed from you. If the student can't, then start reading the draft -- *out loud* -- and ask the student to listen closely for any moments that don't sound "right." Once you find one, let your voice stumble. Ask the student what might be causing the stumble. Usually, they'll know immediately what needs to change. If you find two or more problems of the same kind, turn those moments into a generalized issue, explain it to the student, and lead him or her in correcting these errors. *Make sure the student, not you, pencils in the needed correction.* Then, read the next paragraph or two -- *again, out loud* -- and have the student see if he or she can spot another instance of that problem. Never try to deal with more than two issues in a single session, for to deal with three or more is to overwhelm the student and diminish the chances that the student will retain much, if any, of what he or she is learning. In short, identify one or two things, focus all your energy on those, and, if there are other items that need to be dealt with, tell the student to come back soon to work on these specific issues.

When a tutoring session ends, the tutor must send an email to the student's professor that follows this format:

Dear Professor [Name],

Your student [Name] visited the ERC's Writing Workshop for your course [Number or Title] on [Date]. During the session we discussed:

[Body]

[Tutor's Name]
Writing Workshop Tutors

Subject lines for reports should read: "Writing Workshop Report – [Student's Name]". The instructor's email address should be found on the signed in-take form, and if not there or improperly given, it can usually be found in the Tulane directory or by activating the "address book" function on Webmail. All of these reports is saved in a file for the Director to review before they are actually sent to the professor.

Remember, you are **not a proofreader**. No matter how much pressure a student puts on you to "just check over my paper," you must refuse, for to do otherwise is to engender any number of problems. First, a paper that has been proofread by you is no longer properly the student's, since knowledge vital to its construction came from you. In other words, proofreading leads to academic dishonesty. Second, when students get their papers proofread, they learn nothing. In other words, proofreading scuttles the fundamental mission of the university. Third, if a student gets a paper proofread, he or she will then leave the Writing Workshop with the erroneous notion that the paper has no flaws and therefore warrants a perfect grade. When the teacher finds problems in the paper, the student will naturally pass the blame onto us and thereby create a three-way circuit of ill-will between the Writing Workshop, the faculty, and the students.

This problem with proofreading involves a point so important that it bears separate discussion. **You must never, under any circumstances, discuss the overall quality of a paper with a student.** Time and time again, the student will say, "So, do you think this is an 'A'-paper?" You must tell him or her that he or she has just asked the one question that you cannot answer. You may say that the paper is considerably better than it was before, but you must never project a grade, for you can never know exactly what the teacher is looking for and therefore, if you predict a grade, you mislead the student. The student will be angry, the teacher will be angry, and, in turn, I will be angry. Also, if a student wants to talk to you about a recent grade, you must refuse. No matter how much a student might wish to complain about the fairness of grade or the value of an assignment, you must simply say, over and over, that we can't discuss such topics in the Writing Workshop. If the student persists with serious complaints about a teacher, you should refer the student to the Director of Composition, T. R. Johnson.

You must always rigorously observe the standards of professionalism outlined in the next chapter, as well as all of the basic policies and procedures. Before delineating these, however, the key points above bear repeating. In sum, **consider the following to be a kind of Ten Commandments for successful tutoring.** That is, the best tutors . . .

- I. Never forget to begin the tutoring session by asking the student his or her name, followed by a question about what sort of writing the student is working on and what his or her concerns are about the particular project.
- II. Never silently read a paper while the student silently waits.
- III. Never pick up a pen or a pencil during the session.
- IV. Never proofread or edit.
- V. Never "spoonfeed" ideas into the student.
- VI. Never seem impatient or frustrated.
- VII. Never make authoritative assertions, but rather lead the student via careful "guiding questions" to come to the needed perception on his or her own.
- VIII. Never stop listening – as carefully as possible – to everything the student says.

- IX. Never predict a grade, nor discuss the fairness of a grade, nor the quality of an assignment that a teacher has given.
- X. Never end sessions without trying to sign students up for another session (soon) or, failing that, without inviting them to come back (soon) to talk about writing some more.

III. General Policies and Procedures

Tutoring Sessions

A tutoring session should run no more than thirty minutes. Even if there are no students waiting for a tutor, do not let the session run much longer, for, in that length of time, you have almost surely taught the student as much as he or she can realistically hope to process and retain. Beyond thirty minutes, you are merely “hand-holding” and therefore creating the sort of dependence that does little to help the student gain control over his or her writing. Once a session has run thirty minutes, check to make sure you don’t have any immediate appointments. If you don’t and if there are no walk-in’s waiting, and, finally, if you feel it necessary, you can spend another ten minutes with the student – but only by way of reviewing and wrapping up.

Homework and Reading

During quiet hours, you may read or study or work on your own writing assignments. However, you must do this work at the tables in the tutoring area, and you must set this work aside the moment a student appears who needs your help. Again, *do not retreat behind a computer to work*, for you become difficult to find and introduce to a student.

Sick Days and Other Absences

For days when you know you won’t be able to come to work, please notify the Coordinator of the Writing Workshop in writing (email is best) and copy the note to Laverne Kappel. Also, you are responsible for finding one of the other tutors to substitute for you and for covering an equal number of hours for that tutor soon. Notify the Coordinator (again, via email) of the specific arrangements you have made. If you must miss work unexpectedly, call the Coordinator *and* also call the front desk immediately.

Cell Phones, Pagers, Walkmen, and Laptops

Your cell phones and pagers must be programmed to vibrate or turned off completely. If your cell phone or pager makes a noise while you are tutoring, you have interrupted your tutoring session. Don’t let this happen. You can only use your cell phones when you are not involved in a tutoring session, and you must take the phone out to the hallway. Calls must be limited to less than two minutes and made only when urgently necessary. You may not bring a walkman to work in order to listen to music between tutoring sessions, for such devices invariably “leak” into the surrounding area, distracting and annoying those nearby who are trying to work. Finally, encourage students to bring hard copies of their drafts to tutoring sessions rather than simply working with a laptop during the tutoring session, for laptops seem to cause a

variety of delays. If a student has only the laptop version, then work with him or her, but encourage the student to bring a hard copy next time.

IV. How to Tutor: Some Essential Strategies

Every tutoring session will be unique. However, there are a handful of basic strategies that you can use to anchor your sense of how to proceed. In fact, these four strategies – **Welcoming, Orally Interpreting, Reviewing, Knowing** – are easily remembered, because together they make a very appropriate acronym, **W-O-R-K**.

Welcoming

In some ways, the opening moments of a tutoring session are the most important, for it is here that you set the tone for the whole exchange, and this tone will either put the student at ease, open the student's mind, and inspire the student to learn – or it will do the reverse.

Always introduce yourself by first name, and ask the student for his or her name. Be cheerful, upbeat, and optimistic, even overbearingly so, for the student will often be in the opposite mindset and to a degree that necessitates a surplus of positive energy from you.

After the initial exchange of names, ask the student what sort of writing he or she is working on. Try to start a conversation. Again, be as friendly as you possibly can. As soon as the student tells you about the assignment, ask him or her questions like, "So, how's it coming along?" or "Well, how are you feeling about it?" Again, the goal is to get a conversation going. That is your first priority, for until a conversation is underway, nothing else can happen.

Next, try to get the student to specify as concretely as possible what particular struggles he or she is having. In many cases, the student won't be able to name the problem, but you should push him or her as far as you can to identify it as much as possible. Very often, the student will say, "I just need somebody to look over my paper." Make clear – again, in as friendly a way as possible – that you can't proofread for them, but that you will be more than happy to look through the work *with* them.

If they have no draft at all – that is, if they are having difficulty getting started – just engage them in conversation about the topic. Ask them what sorts of memories it stirs of related experiences or readings or ideas, and, as the conversation begins, encourage them to jot down a few notes, even make a list. *Never just talk – rather, make sure that the student has a pen in hand while the conversation proceeds and, every time he or she offers a thought, insist that he or she jot it down.* Once the student has a handful of items on the list, ask him or her to freewrite for ten minutes about that list of phrases. And then, after ten minutes or so, encourage the student to turn the freewriting into a draft. If he or she doesn't feel ready, just continue talking about the freewriting, encouraging the student to make more notes as the conversation proceeds, and then to do more freewriting, just repeating the same cycle again and again until the student is ready to draft. At that point, ask the student to come back soon to share the draft with you.

Orally Interpreting

Read the draft aloud – slowly, and with genuine interest, pausing wherever possible to offer encouraging and positive remarks, such as "Wow, this is really interesting!" or "You've chosen a really great topic" or "I like your opening line." Find something – anything – to occasion some positive words.

As soon as you find a problem, let your voice falter and read through the sentence again, faltering again at the same spot. Ask the student if he or she can see what might be causing you to stumble. Very often, the student will immediately say something like, “O, that should be . . .” or “No, no, I meant to say that . . .” or “Oops, that verb-tense is wrong, it should be . . .” Set the paper down and tell the student to pencil in the needed correction. Don’t ever pick up a pencil or pen yourself, for that wrests authority away from the student and encourages the student to see you as the one who will fix the paper. In fact, if you pick up a pen, you can sometimes literally feel the student’s attention disengage and float away. Making the student pencil in the correction keeps them tuned into the paper and the tutoring session.

If the student cannot see what is causing your voice to falter, read through it again, and ask him or her to consider other ways of wording that sentence. Again, in nine cases out of ten, students will offer a correct version orally that you only need to flag as such; then direct them to pencil it into the paper.

Once the student has made the correction, describe what the change means in general terms: that is, explain the rule he or she had violated in the original version and why the new one is better. Then, tell him or her to listen closely for other instances of that violation as you resume reading, and, when you find one, just look up at the student expectantly and say, “Remember how to take care of this?” Usually, the student will immediately know what to do, but if necessary, give a quick explanation again, and have the student fix it. If you spot a third instance, again let your voice falter, then ask the student to fix it.

This use of oral interpretation or speech to facilitate skill in writing works extremely well. The reasons for this are many, complex, and profound. They have to do with the phenomenology of sound and the structure of the individual self and, ultimately, exceed the space of what can be covered in this training manual. Nonetheless, pay close attention to the strange magic of this method as you use it and reflect upon it in your email journal. You may begin to refine the method in any number of ways as you become more adept at using it, and, as you do so, be sure to share your insights with me and your fellow tutors.

For students who come to English as a second language, this method won’t work as well, for they generally do not have the same verbal intuitions of how prose in English is supposed to sound. With ESL students, be patient. Choose one or two rules to engage at a time, explain them, and, on a piece of scrap paper, jot out a few examples of sentences that violate and fulfill the rule; and then help the student differentiate right from wrong. Then do the same thing with the student’s own paper. *Important:* try to find instances in the student’s paper where the issue is dealt with correctly. Point out those positive examples to them – “See, here’s a place where you did it exactly right” – and use that as a model to contrast with places where the paper has problems.

This method also has real limitations for students who are hearing-impaired. Nonetheless, try it as best you can but be ready to deviate if modified versions would seem more suitable.

Reviewing

This is the simplest strategy. As the tutoring session nears its ends – that is, after twenty-five minutes or so – begin to summarize the primary material that the session has covered. Restate the lesson in fresh terms, and try to find any fresh instances in the draft where the lesson applies.

Knowing

In the final phase of the tutoring session, try to know whether or not the student now knows the material that he or she needed to know upon arriving. Ask the student to restate this knowledge in his or her own terms, or demonstrate its use in a few sentences that he or she might jot down on some scrap paper. If the student isn’t yet confident with it, ask him or her to come again soon to work with the material some more, and, if you have time, go over it once more.

PART TWO: **WHAT STUDENTS WILL MOST OFTEN WANT** **YOU TO TEACH THEM**

V. *Grammar: Problems and Principles*

“To open your mouth in England,” James Baldwin once said, “is . . . *to put your business in the street.*” He continues: “You have confessed your parents, your youth, your school, your salary, your self-esteem, and, alas, your future.” Although Baldwin is describing a powerful feature of oral communication among the British – that is, the way one’s accent marks one’s social position – a version of the same truth holds among Americans where written discourse is concerned. In short, whether or not you can write grammatically correct sentences determines in large measure whether or not you can move around among the professional class. So much of the most significant interaction between members of this class occurs in writing that “grammar” has come to constitute a primary feature of that class; that is, the ability to write grammatically correct sentences characterizes the persona that all members of the professional class in this country project and, in turn, expect from their peers. It functions something like a password, a shibboleth, an access-code. It delineates those with real power from those with little or none. It distinguishes, as I said earlier in this manual, the insiders from the outsiders, and, for that reason, grammar is a source of enormous anxiety. Indeed, whenever I introduce myself as a professor of English, my interlocutor nearly always nervously retorts “Well! I better watch my grammar!” – as if those who work in Departments of English primarily serve as guards who operate a kind of checkpoint in our country’s system of economic class.

When students come to the Writing Workshop and ask for help with grammar, your first priority therefore must be to build confidence in the student: do everything you can to instill in the student the certain sense that these matters are not completely overwhelming, and that, if taken up one at a time and in the context of the student’s own sentences, they can be mastered rather quickly. In order to persuade the student to see things this way, you must, above all, *never merely proofread*. Instead, constantly direct the student’s attention to how a reader experiences his or her writing. In other words, turn the issue of grammar into a rhetorical issue. Also, rather than try to teach a student how to repair every error in the draft – which would quickly confuse the student -- try instead to address only one or two per tutoring session, then invite the student to schedule another appointment to work on the others. Start with the biggest problems first, the ones that will most disrupt the reader’s experience of the text. And don’t take up the second one until you’re confident that the student has a firm command of the first one. When working on a particular error, point out to the student other instances where he or she could have made the same error but didn’t. In other words, let the student know that he or she does know the correct form and thus only needs to know that he or she knows.

The only other approaches – worksheet drills on correcting error and flashcard memorization of rules – have been proven time and time again to accomplish very little. Every native speaker of English has internalized as tacit, unconscious knowledge nearly all of the rules for forming sentences long before they are old enough to attend college. They cannot, however, articulate these rules as abstract formulae, because they have no need to, just as they don’t need to calculate equations in fluid mechanics to drink a glass of water. If the reverse were true, people with doctorates in linguistics would be our greatest writers. And therefore, rather than hound the student into the rarefied heights of linguistic science, which, as Noam

Chomsky notes, have so little to do with learning to write well, we must base our tutoring on the assumption that students have already internalized nearly everything they need to know about how to communicate in writing. What remains for us to tutor them in – subtleties of punctuation, verb-endings of the dominant dialect, and so on – are, in comparison to what they’ve already mastered, quite minor. In order to motivate the student to this mastery, we must only anchor the issue of grammar in the practical, common-sense goal of connecting with a reader.

There is one important exception: students who speak English as a second language. These constitute a special case, and, for information on how to proceed in these tutoring situations, see Chapter IX.

Meanwhile, consider what follows as a mini-refresher on the basic sorts of errors you’ll see here in the Writing Workshop. These are the sorts of concepts and terms you’ll need to be able to explain to students, for they are the ones that most disrupt readers’ experience of their writing. I’ll offer, first, some remarks about “sentence boundaries” (fragments, run-ons, comma splices) and then some remarks about subject-verb agreement and articles.

SENTENCE BOUNDARIES

Fragments

A fragment occurs whenever a sequence of words is punctuated as a sentence but either fails to supply a principle component of the sentence (a subject or a verb) or begins with a subordinating conjunction (such as *after*, *although*, *because*, *before*, *until*, *when*, *whereas*, *while*) without actually conjoining itself to an independent clause.

1. *I drove to the store. Because I needed milk.*

“*Because*” renders what follows a dependent clause, and therefore it must attach to an independent clause.

Revision: *I drove to the store because I needed milk.*

2. *I sat in my favorite spot. The chair by the window.*

Because *chair* (the subject) lacks a verb, this sequence of words is a fragment.

Revision: *I sat in my favorite spot, the chair by the window.*

Comma Splices

Whenever two independent clauses occur in the same sentence with only a comma between them, we call this error a comma splice. There are four options for correcting this error: insert a semi-colon between them; insert a period between them; subordinate one of them to the other with a subordinating conjunction of the sort I listed in the section on “Fragments;” or link them with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

1. *There was a car-accident on I-10 this morning, it was not caused by the rain.*

These are both independent clauses. Use “*although*” to render the second subordinate to the first; or use the coordinating conjunction, “*but*;” You can also separate them with a semi-colon or a period.

Revision: *There was a car accident on I-10 this morning, although it was not caused by rain.*

Revision: *There was a car-accident on I-10 this morning, but it was not caused by the rain.*

Revision: *There was a car-accident on I-10 this morning; it was not caused by the rain.*

Revision: *There was a car-accident on I-0 this morning. It was not caused by the rain.*

Run-ons

A run-on occurs when two independent clauses are separated by nothing at all, not even a comma.

1. *There was a car-accident on I-10 this morning it was not caused by rain.*

To revise, follow the same guidelines as with comma splices.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

People who grew up speaking and hearing Standard English know “by ear” that *he talks, she has, and it doesn't* (as opposed to *he talk, she have, and it don't*) are correct, standard subject-verb combinations. For these people, trouble with subject-verb agreement usually only arises in certain tricky situations, which are detailed below. First, however, we should cover some fundamental aspects of subject-verb agreement since many of us came to English as a second language or grew up hearing and speaking the rich variety of nonstandard forms that persist in the English-speaking world.

Here is a quick, simple check-list for determining the ending a verb needs:

<i>Is the verb's subject <u>He</u> or <u>She</u> or <u>It</u>?</i>	<i>If so, then</i>	<i>use the –s form (<u>Loves</u>, <u>has</u>, <u>does</u>)</i>
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.
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If not, then ask:

*Is the subject a singular
noun (such as parent)?*

If so, then

use the –s form

.
.
.

If not, then ask:

*Is the subject a singular,
Indefinite pronoun –
Anybody, anyone, each,
Every, none, something*

If so, then

use the --s form

.
.
.

If not, then simply use the base form of the verb (such as love, have, do, don't). An exception: never use the –s form of a verb that follows a helping verb such as can, must, or should. Example: *He drives the car / He can drive the car.*

Here are some slightly trickier issues and some principles for dealing with them:

- Make the verb agree with the subject, not with a word that comes between.

The tulips in the pot on the balcony need watering.

- Treat most subjects joined with “and” as plural.
Jim and Jane often jog together
- With subjects joined with “or” or “nor” make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer the verb.
A passport or two credit cards are required.

ARTICLES

Students who come to English as a second language often find articles (*a, an, the*) to be among the most difficult features of the language to master. Here are some relatively simple guidelines for using articles.

- Use “a” or “an” with a singular count noun whose specific identity is not known to the reader. A “count noun” is a noun that can be counted. For example, “Mary arrived in a limousine.”
- Never use “a” or “an” with a non-count noun, such as “honesty” or “jewelry” or “poverty.” For example, never say “Mary no longer lived in a poverty.”
- Use “the” with most nouns whose specific identity is known to the reader. For example, “Mary arrived in the limousine that she borrowed from Beth.”
- Never use “the” with plural or noncount nouns meaning “all” or “in general;” also, do not use “the” with most proper nouns. For example, never say, “In some parts of the world, the rice is the most preferred of grains, except of course in the Italy, where other grains prevail.”

In general, omit “the” before:

streets, parks, cities, states, most countries, continents, bays or single bays, single lakes, and single islands.
(For example, we could say “the Hawaiian Islands” but not “the Hawaii”)

In general, use “the” before:

deserts, oceans, seas, gulfs, canals, rivers, mountain ranges.
(For example, “The Appalachian Mountains,” “The Ohio River”).

In general, omit “a” or “an” before noncount nouns, such as
foods and drinks (for example . . . bacon, beef, bread, butter)
abstract nouns (for example . . . advice, anger, beauty, confidence, courage)
areas of study (for example . . . biology, history, psychoanalysis)

As useful as some of this advice may be, please remember that a great many idiomatic expressions in English use articles in all sorts of irregular ways. For example, “I don’t like coffee” is as acceptable as “Please don’t pour me a coffee”. These uses can only be mastered by years and years of daily experience with the language. When working with ESL students, you’ll often have to tell them the correct form, as in “Most Americans today would say”

VI. *Style: Flow, Focus, and the Structure of “Polished” Prose*

Quite often, a student will come to the Writing Workshop with a draft that has little or no grammatical trouble. But the paper is still deeply flawed, and the student, somehow, can sense this. Typically, the student will say one of the following:

- “I need help arranging my ideas.”
- “My paper just doesn’t flow. Its choppy.”
- “I’m afraid I go off on tangents.”
- “It needs polish.”

Happily, these issues are fairly easy to resolve. Simply explain the principle behind “flow” (which I’ll set forth in a moment) and then read through the first few paragraphs out loud and ask the student to spot moments where “flow” is disrupted. Then explain how “focus” works, and do the same thing: read through the first few paragraphs and ask the student to stop you wherever the focus starts to blur.

Prose “flows” nicely when each sentence begins on a note that, within the immediate context of the paper, the reader will find familiar and when each sentence ends on a note that, within this context, the reader will find unfamiliar. For example, here is a passage borrowed from Joseph Williams’s *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* that doesn’t flow, followed by one that does, followed by a version of the same passage that Williams has revised:

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole. So much matter pressed into so little volume changes the fabric of space around it in puzzling ways. My favorite movie of all time actually deals with the issues surrounding black holes.

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists exploring black holes in space. A black hole is created when a dead star collapses into a point perhaps no larger than a marble. Because black holes compress so much matter into such small volume, the fabric of space around them changes in puzzling ways. The issues surrounding black holes are actually dealt with in one of my all-time favorite movies.

In the first version, each sentence begins on unfamiliar ground, so the reader must begin each sentence without a clear sense of where he or she is and what he or she will be reading about. This creates a halting, choppy effect that slows the prose down and inhibits the experience of “flow.” In the second version on the other hand, the reverse is true: each sentence begins on a familiar note and only delivers new material toward the end. This is what causes flow. The prose speeds along smoothly, and the reader is quickly absorbed in it.

The question of “focus” is only slightly different. A reader will feel that a paragraph is well focused only if each sentence begins with a topic that fits closely with the topics set forth in the openings of the other sentences in the paragraph. Wherever a sentence begins with a topic that doesn’t have a clear relationship with the other topics at the beginnings of the other sentences in the paragraph, at precisely that point the focus blurs. For example, here is another paragraph borrowed from Williams that, while wholly obedient to principle is wholly without focus:

Saner, Wisconsin, is the snowmobile capital of the world. The buzzing of snowmobile engines fills the air, and their tanklike tracks criss-cross the snow. The snow reminds me of Mom’s mashed potatoes, covered with furrows I would draw with my fork. Mom’s mashed potatoes usually made me sick, that’s why I was playing with them. I like to make a hole in the middle of the potatoes and fill it with gravy. This behavior often made my little brother laugh. But, really, making my little brother laugh isn’t very hard. He laughs at everything, because he’s crazy.

The topics of these sentences are “Saner” then “buzzing” then “snow” then “Mom’s mashed potatoes” then “I” then “behavior” then “he”. The reader inevitably feels that he or she has covered enormous territory – and expended enormous energy – in just a half-dozen sentences, and he or she will soon be completely exhausted and probably quit before going much further. To fix this sort of passage, one needs to isolate a central theme and make sure that each sentence begins with a topic that directly echoes that central theme, like this:

Saner, Wisconsin, is the snowmobile capital of the world. All winter, the woods around Saner buzz with the sound of snowmobile engines, and the Saner snow is always criss-crossed with their tank-like tracks. Saner-snowmobilers love to go home to a big meal after a day in the woods, and a great many of them have fallen in love with my mom's mashed potatoes and gravy. We would stuff ourselves with those potatoes, then plan an evening of night races in the woods, much to the delight of my easily-amused - indeed, crazy - younger brother.

Notice the consistency in the string of topics: "Saner" and then "woods around Saner" and then "Saner snow" and then and the "Saner snowmobilers" and finally "we".

This way of focusing paragraphs also applies to the paper as a whole: instead of looking at the opening of every sentence, though, just look at the opening of each paragraph. If the topics of all the paragraphs constitute a consistent set, the paper is well-focused. If one paragraph begins on a note that seems unrelated to the other paragraph-openers, at exactly that spot the focus has blurred.

Larger issues of style and arrangement involve devices for writing a good opening paragraph and a good closing paragraph. For advice about how to handle those matters, consult the hand-outs in the LRC and use them with your students.

VII. Invention One: How to Come Up with Ideas in the Tutoring Session

Many students who come to the Writing Workshop need help starting their papers. That is, they will sit down with you and say, "I have no idea what to write." In most cases, the students actually do have some good ideas, but they just don't know that they do. You must draw them into a conversation about the assignment, stimulate their thinking about it, and, as strong ideas emerge, flag them as such, get the student to jot down a note about them, and then use that note as the basis for more conversation. Repeat the cycle again: as a good idea emerges, have the student write it down. Soon enough, the student will have a short list of thoughts.

As soon as the student has this short list of ideas, ask him or her to try to freewrite from the list for five or ten minutes. That is, while you sit next to the student, ask him or her to start writing about the terms on the list without stopping and without any concern for grammar, spelling, style, neatness, and so on. Just move the pen across the page, documenting thoughts in a steady stream as they occur. Tell the student that polishing and arranging can happen later.

After five or ten minutes, ask the student to stop and read what he or she has written out loud. Ask the student if any moments seem particularly strong and valuable, and if so, tell the student to circle that stretch of prose, and use it to focus and launch one more run of freewriting. Again, have the student read the new freewriting aloud and have the student circle the stuff that seems the most promising.

At this point the student is probably ready to start drafting. Talk to the student about how he or she might arrange a draft. That is, look back at those original lists or make a new list of main topics from the freewriting, and then turn those lists into a formal outline, each section having a parallel section throughout the essay. Encourage the student to come back as soon as the draft is finished to discuss it and refine it further.

VIII. Invention Two: How To Tutor Students to Read Analytically

Many teachers of writing at the college level often lament the way their students read. In faculty lounges and departmental mailrooms, one can regularly hear them repeat versions of this complaint:

I tell my students to read something so we can discuss it in our next class meeting. But then the next time we meet, they can't seem to answer even the simplest questions about the reading. If even my easiest questions about the reading just draw blank stares, how can I even begin to teach my students to *analyze* a piece of writing, to dig out its deeper meanings and subtle implications, to examine its structure, its hidden assumptions and biases, its tricky ways of transmitting its meanings and affecting readers? How can I accomplish any of this, when, apparently, my students can't even read at all!?

Of course, most teachers don't literally believe that their students can't read. But their years of classroom experience have convinced them that their students enter their classrooms with a very different set of reading habits than the ones needed to succeed in college. In the following paragraphs, I'll outline some key strategies to share with students who want to become more analytical readers, the kind of reader who arrives in class well prepared to participate in a rigorous discussion about the previous evening's reading assignment and who finds the work of coming up with ideas for writing not to be work at all but rather a kind of playing.

If teachers are sometimes inclined to feel a little exasperated with the way their students read, students themselves can often feel a corresponding discouragement. When students chat in the halls or in the courtyards after class, they sometimes comment along these lines:

That class makes me feel so stupid. The teacher just breezes in and starts pointing out all these hidden meanings in what we've read. Once she points them out, I can see them, crystal-clear. And they're brilliant! But I could never find them on my own. How does she do it? Is she some kind of god? Or am I just stupid? I'm really worried about this, because she says we have to come up with original insights about the reading and develop them into a five-page essay by Monday. My question is *how?!?*

What is it that enables English teachers to find so many interesting things to say about something they've read? The simplest answer is this: all the other things they've read. More specifically, strong readers are those who have read a very great deal and who can thus carry with them into every act of reading something like a vast catalogue of memories of other texts. When they look at a new piece of prose, they do so "through the lens" of the many dozens of other things they've read, texts that are at once very similar and very different from the one at hand. When they look at a new text this way, all sorts of unique features in the piece they are reading become visible to them, all sorts of ways that this particular piece is saying something new or making an unfamiliar move—or, conversely, repeating ordinary messages in fairly standard ways. In the simplest sense, the experienced reader is able to supply the sort of context necessary to make a text seem more and more thickly dotted with meaningful moments and significant turns.

We've come then to a first, tentative piece of advice about how to help students read more productively, to read in a way that will give them ideas for writing: try to coax students to read *comparatively*. The more vast one's web of past reading experiences, the richer and more instantaneously one can develop an analysis of what one reads. Naturally, teachers who have spent years and even decades reading all sorts of books and articles and honing their sense of how to link and oppose groups of texts will do better than first year college students at coming up with original insights about a given reading. But, on a smaller scale, students can begin to imitate their teachers and adopt the fundamental principle that enables those teachers to develop such compelling insights. In short, students can acquire the habit of always reading one text in terms of another--or "through the lens" of another--in order to notice some of its significant features. In this sense, to read *analytically* means simply to read *comparatively*.

For example, let's say a student needs to read James Joyce's short story, "Araby." This story of young love and disappointment in the Dublin of roughly a hundred years ago will mean very little to the student if

taken in isolation. But, in so far as the student can read the story with certain other stories – related stories—in mind, he or she will find it easier and easier to say more and more interesting things about it. The “related” or contextualizing stories can come from anywhere: the student might begin by tracing places in the text that duplicate or starkly contrast anecdotes from his or her own life or the lives of friends; or perhaps stories enacted on television or in the movies might make a valuable reference point; or other stories written by James Joyce about the unhappiness of young Dubliners; or other stories about the anguish of young love that were developed in different cultures or at different times or by authors who differ sharply from Joyce. Wherever they come from, these secondary reference points constitute an invaluable tool for “opening” up a piece of writing and finding interesting things to say about it. And the more one gets in the habit of doing this and, too, the more one reads, the more one joins the ranks of the high-powered readers who find interesting things to say about any and all of the things they read.

An important implication follows from this principle. Given that the set of readings one person draws upon to formulate insights into “Araby” will differ at least a little from the set that his or her friend draws upon, no two people will understand a given reading in exactly the same way. In fact, two people might each develop their own analysis of a given reading and wind up disagreeing vehemently about what is important in the text. This sort of thing happens all the time. However, just because more than one analysis of a particular text is possible does not mean that all analyses are equally valid. Some responses to a given reading will be much stronger than others, and what makes them strong is how *convincing or persuasive* they are in the eyes of others. How do you help students make their analysis strong, persuasive, and convincing? By showing them how to support their assertions with concrete evidence taken from the text, by getting them to proceed with careful attention to the logic of what they’re saying, and by showing them how to muster meaningful support from outside the text.

In other words, tell your students that in order to be a strong reader they must understand that role as deeply *active*. They must read with a pencil in hand and with a notebook open alongside the book. They must assume that their goal in reading is to build, little by little, their own understanding of the text, and they do that by making notes, connecting the notes, and then using this partial sense of what the piece is about to steer themselves toward still more insights, toward a greater and greater sense of the piece. In doing this, they have, in a sense, left behind the role of reader in a simplistic, passive sense and begun to operate as a writer. More accurately, the best readers understand themselves to be already involved in a kind of writing the moment they open a book.

But *how*, in the most immediate, concrete, practical sense, does one go about reading closely and analytically? A handful of simple strategies are shared by all good readers, strategies for a paying a special kind of attention to special moments in the text. When you’re working with a student who is frustrated by a piece of reading, encourage the student to use some of the following rules of thumb.

- Think carefully about the beginnings and endings of sections of the text, and, too, about the opening and closing of the work as a whole. These privileged positions in the text usually carry important information.
- Think carefully about any assertions that the author seems inclined to repeat.
- Look closely at any oppositions or conflicts that would seem important in the writer’s treatment of the subject matter.
- Try to list any unstated assumptions that might guide the author to think the way he or she does. Can you think of anyone who might not share these assumptions and why?
- Why did the author choose to title the piece the way he or she did?
- Are there any compelling details that trigger for you any vivid memories or strong emotions? How do these color your sense of where the author is trying to take you as a reader?
- Always read everything more than once.
- Always try to have conversations about the things you read, whether with classmates, friends, or whomever, for all sorts of unexpected insights can emerge in the natural flow of dialogue.
- Try to read resistently, to find ways to disagree with or at least to complicate the author’s message.

The most important strategy at all for reading analytically is, however, the first one we've discussed above: the habit of constructing a context by situating the text alongside others that seem relevant. Strong analytic readers do this unconsciously and out of sheer habit all the time, drawing, as they do, on vast reserves of past reading experiences. Tell the students you tutor that until they can accumulate that range of reading experience, however, to proceed more deliberately: use related texts as the all-important "lens" through which important features of the one at hand become visible.

PART THREE: ADDITIONAL HANDOUTS TO USE WITH STUDENTS

In addition to the handouts on fragments, run-on's, subject-verb agreement, articles, focus, flow, invention, and critical reading that I've summarized on the preceding pages, you'll find several other handouts in the racks on the wall next to the breakroom. Each of these handouts addresses a single issue that many students ask us about. You should plan to explain the issue to students, and only after having a conversation with them about it, you can end the tutoring session by giving them a copy of the appropriate handout. Encourage them to keep the handout and to review it whenever they are revising a draft. As soon as possible, you should become familiar with all of these handouts, so you'll know exactly what sort of information to offer and when you should use them with students. Here are the additional handouts . . .

The Closing Paragraph

Many student-writers puzzle over how to end their papers. Everyone wants to end his or her piece in a way that seems snappy, sharp, perhaps even memorable, but how?

Unfortunately, there are no simple formulae that will guarantee a good ending, for every ending must grow directly out of the unique features of the composition that precedes it.

However, a few general ideas are worth remembering as you think about how to wrap up an essay.

Avoid a flat repetition of the introduction. While you want to remind the reader of your major points and drive home their significance one last time, a conclusion that simply restates the introduction is an unmistakable signal that the writer has very little to say. Instead, try to summarize, briefly and in fresh terms, the major issue of your paper.

Try to pay particular attention to the very final sentence and craft it in a way that will maximize its impact. Be especially sensitive to issues of concision here. Think too about parallelism. Also, consider the possibility of using these final words as the place to supply a powerful image, one that represents well the central concern of your essay.

A variety of other strategies are worth thinking about:

- Can you end with a bold call-to-action?
- Can you end with a prediction of what will happen if your message goes unheeded?
- Can you end with a provocative question?
- Can you end with a poignant or funny or particularly pithy quotation?
- Can you end with an anecdote that dramatizes your message?

Try to tinker and experiment with each of these strategies as you struggle to end your paper well. While many of them might not work, the struggle to find one that does can yield especially strong endings for your paper.

CONCISION

Concision is a crucial feature of successful writing. The opposite of concision is wordiness—that is, sentences and paragraphs that are full of “dead wood” and “hot air” and unnecessary words.

When writing is not concise—that is, when writers use words that are not essential to the meaning they intend to convey—readers are forced to process these words anyway. The energy that readers expend on these unnecessary words is thus wasted. If readers feel that a particular piece of writing is wasting too much of their energy, they’ll dismiss the paper as so much “hot air.”

Quite often, student writers feel a need to write with a level of abstraction and complexity that they feel is appropriate to a university context and, sometimes, they aim too high. They produce prose that is stuffy, pretentious, and full of unnecessary words. On other occasions, students feel that they have nothing to say about a particular topic and, worried that they’ll never produce the required number of pages, they fill their sentences with unnecessary words in order to make them longer. But students pay a terrible price for trying to produce the required number of pages this way: they write sentences that irritate the reader with their abundance of empty words.

No successful writers forget to weed out all the unnecessary words in their paper. Here are some simple principles to guide you through the process of making your sentences more concise.

- Watch out for words that we too often use meaninglessly and delete them
Virtually Kind of really certain practically basically
- Delete all doubled words, such as:
Full and complete hope and trust any and all
True and accurate each and every first and foremost
- Delete what readers can infer
Redundant modifiers: “completely finish” “past history” “various different” “future plans”
Redundant categories: “period of time” “blue in color” “shiny in appearance”
- Replace a phrase with a word, such as:
Carefully read what you have written = “edit”
The thing to do before you do anything else = “first”
The reason for = “because”
Despite the fact that = “although”

A Strategy for Generating Paragraphs

When some people sit down to write, they soon feel completely stuck. They have a few ideas or perceptions in their minds, but nothing very concrete, nor any real sense of how to put their thoughts together. When faced with this situation, some writers find that what helps most is a simple formula for creating paragraphs. As they fill in the blanks, so to speak, in this formulae, they create a paragraph, and then they can relatively easily generate another paragraph. In a short while, they’ve written several paragraphs and can then begin to imagine quite clearly how the draft of the entire essay might be set up.

Here is a simple formulae for creating a paragraph:

First, write down a sentence that makes an assertion. The more concrete and specific you can make this assertion, the better. For example, a paragraph that begins with a sentence like “Life is good” or “Knowledge is power” is awfully vague and doesn’t set forth a clear direction. On the other hand, a much better sentence to open a paragraph might be “A comfortable knowledge of Shakespeare’s comedies can give a person the power they need to resolve every conflict they face in the workplace.”

Second, write down a sentence or two that offers an example that illustrates the truth of this assertion. If the assertion is terribly vague or directionless, coming up with an example to illustrate it will be quite difficult. In fact, if you have a hard time coming up with an example, that might be a sign that your assertion is too vague.

Third, write down a sentence or two that explains the value or meaning of this example, how the example illuminates the assertion.

Fourth, write down a sentence or two that traces the implications of the point you’re making in this paragraph, some possible connections that arise that a reader might not realize right away.

This formula for generating paragraphs – assertion, example, explanation, implication – can be enormously useful as you struggle to get a paper started. If you follow this formula closely, you can quickly produce several strong paragraphs, and a few of these might even become the core around which you build your entire paper. This formula can enable you to create a great many paragraphs very quickly, so many in fact that you can throw away most of them and only keep the ones that are especially strong.

However, a word of caution: don’t rely on this formulae too much! If the final draft of your paper is filled only with paragraphs that follow this model with perfect exactitude, your reader might begin to feel that the structure of your paper is too predictable, too mechanical, and, in short, terribly boring. If you allow your reader to feel bored for even an instant, you might lose the reader – they’ll stop reading or form a very negative opinion of your essay. To avoid that possibility, only use this formulae when you are struggling to start a rough draft. Once you have several paragraphs written, pick the best ones and build your essay around them. Also, you might vary, from one paragraph to the next, the degree of exactitude with which you follow the formulae. For example, in one you might leave out the explanation or the implication, or you might develop the example at greater length, or vice versa. Remember, formulae are only really useful for starting your work; if you rely on them too much, you run the risk of boring your reader.

Forming the Possessive

When a noun refers to someone or something that holds or owns or otherwise possesses something else, you need to use the possessive form of that noun. In short, you use the possessive form to indicate ownership. To form the possessive, you simply add either one of these endings -’s or -s’ -- or you can use a possessive pronoun. Here is an example of the possessive form, followed by an example of the possessive pronoun.

That is Tyrone’s ball, not Marsha’s.

The ball is not mine.

Possessive Pronouns:

The possessive pronouns are *my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs.*

They are organized the same way other pronouns are. That is, the personal pronoun can replace a noun in the first, second, or third person and it can be either singular or plural in number.

Singular	Plural
First person: my, mine	our, ours
Second person: your, yours	your, yours
Third person: his, her, hers, its	their, theirs

Apostrophe and then “s”

Sometimes an apostrophe (') is used to indicate ownership or possession in a sentence. These are the various ways the apostrophe is used, depending on the particular noun that one intends to render in the possessive form. Here are the rules: If the noun is singular (Sally or house), then you show possession by adding the apostrophe, followed by the “s.” For example: “Sally’s house is on River Road. The house’s front door is painted orange.” Additional note: even if the noun already ends in “s,” you should still put the apostrophe after this final “s” and then add an additional “s” after the apostrophe. For example: “Charles Dickens’s novels are all incredibly long.”

Apostrophe without the “s”.

When a plural noun that ends in “s” must show possession over something else, even when it is a name, add only the apostrophe (') but don’t put an additional “s” after the apostrophe. For example: the boys’ house or the Jones’ house or the twins’ car.

Particular Situations

There are a handful of special rules to cover particular situations in which the possessive is used. When the possession of some particular thing is held jointly or by an entity identified by a compound noun, simply put the apostrophe, followed by the “s,” after the last word. For example: Jane and Mary’s apartment is next door to Frankie and Johnny’s restaurant.

How to Develop an Argument

What is an argument? Many people think of an argument as a verbal “fight” between two or more people. However, when your teacher requires you to “develop an argument” in your next paper, the teacher most often wants you to *persuade a reader to see a particular issue a particular way*. If the argument is fairly persuasive, the teacher will likely consider your argument a success; but, if your argument is less persuasive, the teacher will consider it weak or claim that you haven’t even created an argument at all.

You can better understand what an argument is if you think for a moment about what it is not. For example, while you might develop your argument by telling a story, an argument is never merely a story. Similarly, while you might summarize or report on a body of information in order to develop your argument, an argument is never simply a report. In other words, while many different types of communication (a story, a report, a description, a joke, a set of questions or emotions or ideas) can play a useful role in an argument, an argument finally has its own, distinct goal which makes it a different type of communication. In short, an argument is an attempt to persuade. A successful argument changes someone’s mind about something.

What are some good strategies for persuading your audience? There are countless strategies, and the strategies you choose to use depend entirely on the situation. More specifically, you should strive to understand as thoroughly as you can the expectations of your reader: what they consider the particular

characteristics of persuasive writing; what sorts of things they feel will automatically weaken your efforts at persuasion. If your reader is your teacher, plan to meet with your teacher to talk in detail about what he or she considers a good argument. At the very least, raise your hand to ask questions about these matters during class.

Below, you'll find a list of strategies that can help you develop your argument, strengthen your position, and increase your chances of changing your reader's mind. As you strive to generate ideas for your paper, you might experiment with this list – that is, try, for example, to come up with a paragraph for each item on the list and, as you do, keep track of the new ideas that emerge. Following this list of strategies, you'll find a list of what to avoid. Use this as a checklist that can guide you in revising your draft. Here are the strategies for generating ideas for your paper:

- Illustrate the urgency of your position by linking it to a dramatic, real-life situation that your reader will readily understand.
- Emphasize the profundity of your position by linking it to widely held moral values like honesty or courage or compassion that your reader will likely share.
- Define as concretely as you can any particularly abstract concepts connected to your position so that your reader won't feel that your argument is too vague to be persuasive.
- List the logical steps that led you to adopt your particular position so that the reader can follow them and draw the same conclusion you've drawn.
- Describe how the point-of-view that is the opposite of yours breaks the rules of logical thinking.
- Compare or contrast your point-of-view to the one associated with powerful figures currently in the media.
- Describe your position by drawing upon ideas that have arisen in other classes you've taken or in the readings your teacher has assigned.

And here is the checklist of things to avoid, because they can weaken your argument:

- Vague generalizations
- Racial, sexual, or cultural stereotypes
- Faulty logic or inconsistent point-of-view
- Controversial assumptions
- Unrealistic examples
- Insufficient evidence
- Poorly defined terms
- Inadequate discussion of the opposed point of view
- Frequent misspellings and / or grammatical errors
- Unimportant or uninteresting conclusions

MLA Style Citation of Internet Resources

As the Internet has become more accessible, more scholarly projects and databases have been made available online. In addition, many newspapers and magazines can be viewed and printed from websites. These rapid changes have made it necessary to find new ways to document net-based research.

The main concern in any works-cited page is the ability for a reader to find the referenced sources quickly and easily. Unlike books and printed articles, sites on the World Wide Web can change often and easily. Therefore, simply recording the web-address (or URL) is not enough.

In your citation, you must include the author's name, the title of the site, the name of the database or project, the editor or director of the database or project, the university or organization which sponsors the database, the URL, the date on which the website was posted, and the date on which the site was accessed. For example:

Dove, Rita. "Lady Freedom Among Us." The Electronic Text Center. Ed. David Seaman. 1998. Alderman Lib., U of Virginia. 19 June 1998 <<http://etext.lib.Virginia.edu/subjects/afam.html>>.

If any of this information is unavailable, then it must be omitted. Nonetheless, you should try to include as much as possible, so that even if the website has been restructured or removed altogether, a reader could still find the information from the website by using a search engine.

A magazine or newspaper article can either be cited as a website, or, if all of the information about the original print publication is known, it can be documented as a normal, print article. For example:

Markoff, John. "The Voice on the Phone Is Not Human, but It's Helpful." New York Times on the Web 21 June 1998 <<http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/98/06/Biztech/articles/21vioce.html>>.

Important note: because anyone can create a website, not every claim made on a website can be trusted as coming from a credible source. One way to test the credibility of a website is to look for the author's name. If the author is using his or her real name, then his or her credentials are likely to be easy to find, either on the website or through a search engine. If the author is using what appears to be only a nickname or offers no name whatsoever, then the website is probably not a reliable source of information. A very simple way to avoid the problems created by websites that do not observe professional standards is to stick to web sources that are obviously reliable – those directly associated with major newspapers, magazines, and universities. The Voice of the Shuttle (URL: <http://vos.ucsb.edu/>), sponsored by the University of California in Santa Barbara, is devoted to providing a database of credible websites, sorted by subject.

Overcoming Cliché

Many students feel intimidated by the prospect of genuinely communicating with their teachers, and this feeling can lead directly to very weak writing. Afraid of writing something that the teacher will find stupid or confused or disagreeable, the student will write an essay that is relatively devoid of real ideas, that, instead, offers only vague clichés. This sort of writing seems to cling to the overly familiar, the tried-and-true, as a kind of safety net.

Many teachers, however, find this sort of student work dissatisfying, even completely unacceptable. They feel that students at the college level, especially those taking English 1158, should feel comfortable expressing original ideas in lively and complex ways. In other words, teachers will often flunk essays that begin "In today's society, everyone should just try to be themselves."

What's wrong with that sort of essay? How can students avoid succumbing to the temptation to write such essays? Specifically, what sorts of strategies can they use to move their writing beyond the general vagueness that characterizes cliché? On one hand, these questions are tough to answer; what's more, any sort of quick, easy answers that require little thought would be no answer at all – for the question is precisely how to move beyond the thoughtless over-reliance on the quick, easy, ready-made answer. On the other hand, here are a few points of practical advice that help you overcome the temptation to cling to the relative safety and security that cliché would seem to offer. Think of these as ways of taking risks in your paper, ways that will engage your reader and show them that you're really thinking about the topic.

- First, think about your topic and ask yourself whether or not the point you want to make is a point that anybody could disagree with. If no one could disagree with what you're saying, then what you're saying is probably awfully vague, trivial, and, in fact, not worth saying at all. You might call this strategy the "So What Test," and you can apply it to every topic sentence of every paragraph in your paper. If a sentence can't stand up to the question of "So what," it has to be eliminated and replaced with one that can.
- Second, consider the details you've brought together to illustrate your points. Are they the sorts of details that could have come from anyone? Could they be used to illustrate many different points? If the answer to either of these questions is "yes," then you have probably written a fairly boring essay and, more specifically, the details you're using aren't illustrating much of anything. In other words, try to make your supporting details as concrete and specific and colorful as you possibly can, especially when these details are doing the important work of proving or supporting your main point. What's more, try to make the details original. That is, if the details you're using are the same ones that

anybody could have come up with, then you probably aren't engaging your own imagination and life experience as energetically as you could – you're probably hiding behind vague clichés.

- Third, try to imagine what sorts of ideas and examples might be important to readers who would disagree with your position, then develop at least a paragraph or two that engages that opposing position explicitly. Try, for at least a paragraph or so, to demonstrate that you really understand and even sympathize, at least partly, with that opposing point-of-view, and then of course explain why that position is ultimately different from your own.
- Fourth, try to find ways to make your paper funnier or more dramatic or more poignant. Try to play on your reader's feelings or stimulate their imagination or spur them to action. Try to offer a wisecrack or a scary statistic; or describe an intriguing or heartbreaking situation. And, perhaps above all, organize this material in a way that feels natural, not machine-like; lively, not predictable; complex, not simple.

The Opening Paragraph

Many student-writers struggle with the first paragraph of their paper. Often, they will spend far more time and energy on this paragraph than on any other in the paper—and then feel even more frustrated when they discover it to be the weakest, most problematic moment in their essay. In many cases, however, they struggle with this “introductory” phase only because they approach it in an unproductive way. Here are some strategies and general tips that can lead to a more successful and less arduous process of drafting the opening paragraph.

First, don't make the mistake of trying to write the introduction before you've written anything else. Although the first paragraph is the first thing your reader will read, it need not be the first paragraph you write. In fact, the introduction should probably be the very last paragraph you draft. During the process of drafting your paper, you'll discover in more detail exactly what you want to say; and, therefore, until this drafting is finished, you can't know all that you plan to say. To try to introduce material that you don't yet know well is, of course, an absurd task. And it is precisely this absurdity that dogs the writer who tries to write the introduction before drafting the body.

Because the first paragraph is such an important part of your essay, you should be careful to avoid overly broad generalization (“In today's society . . .”) as well as flat accounts of what the essay is about (“This essay will be about . . .”). Instead, try to open the paper with something that will grab the reader's attention: a provocative question or a short, vivid anecdote or a startling statistic or a wisecrack or a profound quote from an important authority.

Don't be afraid to discard your opening paragraph. Often, it's the second paragraph of the essay that constitutes a real beginning, a real engagement with the material, so look closely at your opener. If your first paragraph appears to be so much “throat-clearing” or “foot-shuffling” to prepare the way for the real message, then cut it and let the reader begin with the sentences that matter.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the opening paragraph is **the thesis sentence**. This single sentence should encapsulate the whole of the meaning that your paper will deliver and it will do so in a way that is intriguing to the reader. A thesis sentence can never be simply a flat statement of fact (“Daniel Boone explored Kentucky during the 1770s”), nor can it be a hazy generalization (“Early settlers in America endured many hardships”). For example, here is an improved thesis sentence that combines these previous two: “Daniel Boone endured numerous encounters with Indian war-parties as well as a string of unusually harsh winters while exploring Kentucky in the 1770s, and these experiences played a central role in the social structures he eventually proposed for the new settlements there”).

Overcoming the 5-Paragraph Theme

Many teachers feel that college students shouldn't rely on overly-simplistic structures to organize their essays. For example, when a student is first learning how to write, they might find that the "five-paragraph theme" is a very helpful model to imitate, and so, every time they sit down to write, they immediately try to construct an introduction, followed by the three paragraphs of support, and then a conclusion that simply restates the introduction. Teachers, especially those teaching 1158, find this sort of essay less than satisfying, and many of them will automatically flunk such an essay.

Like cliché, these simple structures offer a kind of safety net or security blanket. That is, they make the difficult, potentially endless task of working on an essay seem a little more manageable. On the other hand, however, they serve to limit one's thinking in ways that can, at times, make the essay seem almost devoid of thought. This is what bothers teachers the most.

In order to avoid these overly simplistic structures, there are a number of strategies you can employ.

- First, *brainstorm*. That is, devote energy to coming up with a wealth of ideas and details, enough material that you can't simply dispose of it in an overly simplistic essay. Talk to your friends and classmates and teachers and tutors in the Writing Workshop about your ideas, and take notes as these conversations cause your thoughts to develop. Try to freewrite or list your thoughts about the topic. Try to take notes on some readings that are relevant to the topic. Keep track of new ideas and think of real-life situations to illustrate them. When you have a wealth of material, you can't simply reduce it to five-paragraph theme – its simply too rich for that.
- Second, *try out a couple of different ways to organize your material*. Perhaps part of your essay could take the form of a story; and another part might proceed as a strict set of logical steps; yet another might offer concrete information or quotes from respected authorities; and yet another part might describe personal feelings. In other words, there are many different ways for you to communicate with your reader, and the more of them you can employ, the richer and more complex and more thoughtful your essay will be.
- Third, adopt the strategies described in the handouts called "Focus" and "Flow," which are available here in the Writing Workshop. These handouts describe simple strategies that will allow you to organize quite complicated material into an essay that your reader will enjoy reading.
- Fourth, check your paper for cliché. Often, if a paper is organized around clichés, the structure will also be overly simplistic and devoid of rigorous thought. If you can spot some clichés in your paper, chances are that your paper's structure could also use some more imaginative energy too.
- Fifth, share your paper with a friend. Ask your friend if it seems interesting or if it seems too simple. If the reader says your paper is too simple, try some of these preceding strategies to "jazz it up" a little.

Pronouns

- *Steve lent the pencil to Nancy because Nancy needed the pencil for the test. Nancy thanked Steve for the pencil.*
- *Steve lent the pencil to Nancy because she needed it for the test. Nancy thanked him for the pencil.*

Notice the difference between these two short passages: in the second one, pronouns take the place of nouns (“she” for Nancy, “it” for pencil, “him” for Steve). These pronouns allow the writer to avoid repeating the same nouns over and over again. There are several types of pronouns: personal, reflexive/intensive, and relative/interrogative.

Personal Pronouns

These pronouns take the place of nouns that name actual people. These are some of the most widely used pronouns, and they are divided into a few categories:

	Singular	Plural
First person:	I	we
Second person:	you	you
Third person:	he, she, it	they

In the following sentences, try to spot the pronoun and pinpoint whether it is first, second, or third person and whether it is singular or plural: “I have a pencil;” “All of you cannot use the phone at the same time;” “They always break when they hit the ground.”

Reflexive / Intensive Pronouns

When a personal pronoun takes on the “-self” ending, it can then either be used to refer back to the noun in the subject or simply add a certain intensification to the noun to which it refers. For example, here are some of the personal pronouns modified and combined with the “-self” ending to become reflexive or intensive pronouns: myself (I), ourselves (we), yourself or yourselves (you singular/plural), himself (he), herself (she), itself (it), and themselves (they). The reflexive pronoun “reflects” back on the noun in the subject. For example, “John was proud of himself.” Or: “The horse wedged itself into the small stable.” In both sentences the reflexive pronoun “reflects” or “points back to” the noun in the subject. Another pronoun, the intensive pronoun, is used primarily for emphasis. The intensive pronoun form is the same as the reflexive pronouns, but the function is different. For example: “Jen, herself, went to the store.” Notice how the intensive pronoun “herself” emphasizes the subject “Jen”. Another example: “The scared horse, itself, found the way back to the stable, though none of the other horses did.” Note: When both the reflexive and intensive pronouns refer to a noun or pronoun already mentioned in the sentence they always follow the person or thing to which they refer.

Relative / Interrogative Pronouns

Relative pronouns relate back to the noun in the subject to provide some extra information about the noun. Who, whom, whoever, whomever, which, whose, and that are all relative pronouns. An example: “Steve, who is in my class, lent Nancy a pencil.” Notice that “who” and the clause following it (“who is in my class”) relates back to the noun in the subject, “Steve”. Typically, who, whose, and whom refer to people; which to things; and that to either people or things.

Interrogative pronouns ask questions or “interrogate”. The interrogative pronouns are who, whom, which and that. Although these pronouns are also categorized as relative pronouns they also function as interrogative pronouns that ask a question. For example: “Who did Steve give the pencil to?” or “Guess who?” or “Which do you like better?”

Using Quotes

Writers can add credibility and authority to their work by quoting other writers who have powerful things to say. Student-writers, in particular, can use quotes from experts to demonstrate knowledge of the important facts and ideas that relate to their topic. When quoting others, the writer weaves his or her work into a broader discussion and weaves this broader discussion into his work: such weaving can only make that work stronger and more persuasive in the eyes of the reader.

Of course, too many quotes can sometimes distract the reader, and, if quotes aren't chosen wisely and placed carefully in the paper, they can weaken the paper's focus. How many quotes should a writer use? The answer to this question depends entirely on the particular situation the writer is in and what the writer's audience needs or expects. For example, if you're writing an essay about the various ways critics have understood Hamlet and your audience is a bunch of scholars, you will want to use a great many quotes, at least compared to when you're writing an essay that simply analyzes an event in your life.

When should you include quotes in your essay? Again, it all depends on the situation. If the point is especially controversial or complicated or crucial to the larger point you're making, then supporting this point with a quote is a good idea.

Sometimes, a writer wants to incorporate "outside material" in his or her essay, but feels that this material isn't quite important enough to need an actual quote. When this is the case, the writer can either paraphrase or summarize the material. In order to do this well, the writer needs to understand the difference between quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Here are some useful definitions:

QUOTATION: When you copy the exact words of someone else, you have a quotation. To indicate that the material is taken, word-for-word, from some one else, put quotation marks around the words.

PARAPHRASE: When you restate the information or ideas of another author in your own words, you have paraphrased that material. Although a paraphrase does not require quotation marks, you must indicate that material is coming from some other source and identify that source in the same passage where the borrowed material appears.

SUMMARY: When you briefly restate the main points of another author, you have a summary, and you need to identify the work you're summarizing.

Very, very important warning: any time you borrow material from some other source to include in your essay, you absolutely must indicate that this material is borrowed and indicate the source of the material. Otherwise, you can be accused of stealing that material from that other source. If you are found guilty of this most serious academic crime, you can be expelled from the university.

How to Punctuate the Material You Quote:

- Quotation marks are used to distinguish quoted material. The marks indicate both the beginning of the quotation and the end. For example: In Now and On Earth, the narrator describes how he wore a "brown Kuppenheimer suit."
- When deleting part of a quotation, use an ellipsis. Make sure the omission does not change the meaning of the quotation or disrupt sentence structure. For example: "Since 1913, Sax Rohmer's tales...have delighted readers and cinema-goers alike."
- If a quotation is more than four lines long, indent ten spaces from the left margin.
- Commas and periods generally go inside of quotation marks. For example, Mary said, "Your paper is great." Colons and semi-colons go outside, like this – Mary said, "Your paper is great": a remark I greeted with great relief.

- Usually, quoted material is cited according to MLA style.

PART FOUR: SPECIAL TYPES

IX. The ESL Student

By far, the greatest challenge you will face as a tutor will be tutoring students for whom English is a second language. They are at once the students who need us the most and who, most often, we have the greatest difficulty in helping. Noted authorities in the national discussion on Writing Workshops and on teaching English as a second language insist that we must approach these students with a different set of goals and expectations and a realistic sense of what we can hope to accomplish. In order to do the very best you can, bear in mind the following simple principles, which I've presented as answers to the questions that tutors, again and again, have asked me when dealing with this thorniest of tutoring challenges.

With ESL students, where do you even begin?

First, be positive. In this sense (and perhaps in no other), ESL students are the same as every student we tutor: they need encouragement. Therefore, focus as quickly as you can on something the student has done well. Also, pay attention at first to the content of the paper in the hopes of conversing with the student about the global message he or she hopes to convey. This move helps to create an authentic rhetorical context, which can only heighten the student's engagement with his or her text and audience. Finally, try to ascertain whether the student's problems stem from an ineffective composing process or from having inadequately learned the language. Obviously, you're far better prepared to deal with problems in the student's composing process than you are to teach him or her a new language. The former you do all the time; we simply don't have the resources to train you to do the latter.

When there are zillions of problems in an ESL student's text, as there usually are, which ones should I prioritize?

Since you can't begin to address everything that's wrong in most ESL texts, focus first on the errors that most drastically interfere with the writer's intended meaning, the stuff that will bungle the attempt to connect with a reader. Try to deal with one or two of those major issues, encourage the student to practice executing that rule correctly on his or her own, and then schedule them for another tutoring session soon to take up other matters of global significance to his or her text. After dealing with these crucial matters, turn your attention to smaller errors, the stuff that doesn't significantly obscure the writer's intended meaning. Finally, deal with problems that are simply a matter of cultural convention. Some cultures, for example, view lengthy digressions as an appropriate way to proceed and find the sort of directness associated with thesis-sentences, for example, the very summit of rudeness. Wherever you can discern these sorts of cultural differences, treat them for what they are – not as weaknesses or instances of sloppiness or stupidity, but rather as variations in the ways different cultures communicate. Explain that Americans do things differently, and show them how. And be sure to emphasize that these are arbitrary matters of cultural convention.

The most common errors that ESL-students commit have to do with verb-tenses, subject-verb agreement, the singular and plural forms of nouns, word forms (such as how to derive *quickness* from *quick*), prepositions, and articles. Again, concentrate on the ones that will cause readers the most serious difficulty at the level of comprehension. Also, differentiate lexical problems from grammatical problems: that is, only long exposure to the language can rectify the former difficulties; most readers will treat these problems as something like the written equivalent of a foreign accent, a charming imprecision that interferes relatively little with communication; grammatical problems on the other hand can and must be addressed, and of course, they present a special sort of challenge.

How do I deal with ESL students' special relationship with grammar?

Many foreign students first learned English in a classroom, and therefore they are accustomed to gaining control over the language by memorizing its rules. And, since they don't have the same sorts of verbal intuition that native speakers enjoy, they need these rules in order to write. This rule-based approach to the language creates enormous challenges for the tutor, for the sorts of errors that appear in ESL papers are often very difficult to categorize in terms of rules; besides, the endless variety of rules in the English language vary drastically in their usefulness, many don't apply fully in all cases, and some have as many exceptions as they do straightforward applications. One would need a Ph.D in linguistics to diagnose and explain much of what goes wrong in some sentences by ESL-writers. All of this, quite honestly, can seem like cause for despair. Confronted with this welter of difficulties, simply remember that as a tutor you are a kind of collaborator, not a grammarian, and your job is to help students communicate as clearly as they can, not recite laws. What you can expect to achieve with ESL-students is fundamentally different from what you can expect with native speakers. Adjust your aims, double your efforts, and remind the student regularly that only over time will their relationship with the new language become natural enough to sound like that of a native speaker.

X. The Angry Student

Many students who come to the Writing Workshop are in considerable distress about their ability to produce prose that will enable them to feel as though they are legitimate members of the academic community. These feelings will take different forms in different people, and, in some cases, they'll manifest themselves as real anger.

The object of the student's anger might be fellow classmates or the author of one of the essays he or she has been asked to read, but, most often, the student is angry with his or her teacher. No matter how much the student might want to "vent" about a teacher, simply say, over and over, "I can see that you're really unhappy about this teacher, but let's focus on what you need to do so that you can have as much success as possible in that class." In other words, constantly try to redirect the student's energy to becoming a better writer. Be sympathetic and supportive, but under no circumstances should you succumb to the student's attempts to win you over to his or her side in a battle with a teacher. If the student seems to have serious and well-founded complaints about a teacher, direct him or her to the Office of Freshman English, for that is the appropriate place for the student to discuss such concerns, not here.

Sometimes, a student might be angry with you. This scenario is, of course, the least pleasant one you'll ever have to face, but, given the difficulty some students have with writing and their desperation to pass the blame onto someone else, you may indeed find yourself the object of harsh, unfounded, even personal attack from a student. An extremely rare situation, but one that can happen.

When a student becomes angry with you (and the situation will likely be that you've spent a great deal of time trying to help the student, but his or her papers are still earning D's and F's), simply say, "I'm sorry that you're unhappy with our services. Please make an appointment with the Coordinator of the Writing Workshop to talk about this situation."

When dealing with angry students, you must never become angry yourself. Never fall into a shouting match; never even consider quarrelling. Simply send the student to me.

XI. The Dishonest Student

Once in a while, you'll discover that a student is cheating. Specifically, the student will have pulled a paper off the internet or copied something directly from a book without citing the source. When your suspicions are aroused, patiently explain to the student that any work that the student has falsely presented as his or her own can ultimately lead to his or her expulsion from the university. Show them how to document sources. There are a number of trusted handbooks in the Writing Workshop and in the Director's office, if you need to remind yourself of particular forms. If the student insists that the draft is legitimate, and yet you suspect that it is not, ask the student the name of his or her teacher, then contact me with the details of the situation. Most likely, I'll contact the student's teacher to share these suspicions.

XII. The Despairing Student

Many of our students are the first people in their family to enroll in college, and thus many of them must work against a feeling of considerable alienation right from the start. In some, this alienation will crystallize into despair. All too frequently, you will encounter students who are so overwhelmed by the challenges they face that their sheer despondence becomes the principle hurdle they need to overcome in improving their writing. In these situations, you must do everything in your power to build confidence in the student. Show a keen interest in everything they say, and, to get them to start saying things, earnestly ask them questions. Pull them into a conversation, and be as humane as you possibly can. Let them know that the university is not an alien monolith, but that it can have a human face – namely, yours. You need not plunge into psychotherapy; rather, simply be present to the student as an open ear and an energetic source of support. That alone can turn the tide of despair the other way and enable them to try yet again to meet the demands of the university. Encourage them to schedule another session with you tomorrow or the next day, and develop a friendly collegiality with them. You may well be making a profound difference in the general trajectory of their lives, so keep that fact in mind and let it energize you to do all that you can for those students who, without you, would drop out and embark on a very different path in life.

In special cases, you might want to recommend that the student visit a college counselor or advisor. Brochures for this service are in the Writing Workshop, on the same table as the handouts about grammatical and stylistic issues and computer workshops. Invite the student to take a copy of the brochure.