English @ SCSU

Blue Book

Writing Guide for
English Majors and Minors

English Department
Southern Connecticut State University

How to Use this Guide

This Blue Book is for *you*—in several senses. First, it is a writing guide for English Majors and Minors at Southern. Its purpose is to help you write college-level papers and other assignments in your literature, advanced composition, and professional writing classes. It covers the *basics* of formatting, use of quoted evidence, voice, and sentence mechanics and grammar needed to draft an English essay. It adheres to the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines—the rulebook for English literature specialists—and may not always be applicable to other disciplines or majors. It also does not take the place of any specific writing instruction or handouts your instructor provides.

Second, it is for you, personally. Keep the Blue Book with you—on campus, on your home desk, in your bag—throughout your time at Southern. We have designed this guide as a quick reference tool for those routine writing issues you may have known but forgotten, or may have never known but didn't know how to find the answers easily. Many of these concepts are fundamentals that will *not* be covered in your English courses, **so use this book to take charge of your own writing.** For further writing help, visit the SCSU Writing Center, the Purdue Online Writing Lab (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/), or your professor during office hours.

Why a "Blue Book"? Simple: so you'll remember it. To that end, we have designed the pages below for ease of reference. When things are in **bold**, pay attention - those are the main skills and principles to follow. When things are in Times New Roman, those are examples. Look at them carefully for models of what to do (and what not to do). Skim, dog-ear, circle, re-read as needed. Fresh copies can be downloaded (PDF) from the English Department website.

Dr. Joel Dodson
Dr. Charles Baraw
Dr. Cindy Stretch

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Table of Contents

I. The Basics of an English Essay

MLA Style Sheet | English @ SCSU

The following is a style sheet for your English classes at SCSU, based on the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines for how to cite sources in a Works Cited page and parenthetically in a paper.

A full explanation of the MLA guidelines for In-Text Documentation and Works Cited can be found online at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/1/) and in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 8th edition (2016). Remember that other majors and disciplines at SCSU may require different style guidelines (APA, Chicago, etc.).

Works Cited

Below are examples of some of the most common bibliographic citations used in Works Cited pages. Use this for papers and for any other assignment for which you need to cite a work (an annotated bibliography, a paper proposal, etc.) following MLA guidelines.

Remember that these are examples. You need to be able to locate the author, title, editor(s), publication information, page numbers, and any other relevant information on your own. Be sure also to follow the correct format *exactly*, including punctuation, order of information, italics, etc.

How to cite …

- **A book**
  When citing an entire book by one or more authors, include author(s), book title, publisher, date:

  Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, 2011.

  Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2nd ed., Yale UP, 2000.

- **A critical edition or translation**
  When citing an entire book by an author that has also been edited or translated by someone else, add the editor or translator after the title:

  Donne, John. *The Complete English Poems*. Edited by A. J. Smith, Penguin, 1996.

  Sloterdijk, Peter. *You Must Change Your Life*. Translated by Wieland Hoban, Polity Press, 2013.

- **An essay or chapter in an edited volume**
  When citing an essay or chapter contained *within* a book that has essays or chapters by other writers as well, include the author of the essay or chapter itself, the title of the essay or chapter in quotations, the book title, editor(s), publication information, and the page range of the essay or chapter:

  Arnold, Miah. "You Owe Me." *The Best American Essays 2012*, edited by David Brooks, Houghton Mifflin, 2012, pp. 1-5.

  Hauerwas, Stanley. "Why Gays (as a Group) Are Morally Superior to Christians (as a Group)." *The Hauerwas Reader*, edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, Duke UP, 2001, pp. 519-21.

- **A literary work (poem, short story, play, etc.) in an anthology or textbook**
  When citing an individual literary work in an anthology or textbook containing multiple works, follow the same format as a work in an edited volume above, including the number of the edition after the title, if necessary.

  Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Immortal." *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley, Penguin, 1998, pp. 185-93.

  Marlowe, Christopher. *Hero and Leander. The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et al., Norton, 2012, pp. 510-30.

- **A literary work online**
  When citing a short work (poem, short story, etc.) found on a web page, include author, title of the work, title and date of book from which it was derived (if provided), title of website, a URL or Permalink, and the date you accessed it:

  Wyatt, Sir Thomas. "They Flee From Me." *Luminarium.org*, http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/theyflee.htm. Accessed 10 Nov. 2013.

  Lee, Li Young. "Arise, Go Down." *The City in Which I Love You*, 1990, *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43327. Accessed 13 Dec. 2013.

- **A scholarly article in an academic journal (in print or PDF)**
  When citing a scholarly article in an academic journal that you have in print or a PDF copy of the printed pages, include the author of the article, article title, title of journal, volume and issue number, year, and page range of the article:

  Randel, Fred V. "The Political Geography of Horror in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." *ELH*, vol. 70, no. 2, 2003, pp. 465-91.

  Nydam, Arlen. "Philip Sidney's Extended Family and the Catholic Petition of 1585." *Sidney Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 53-79.

- **A scholarly article in an academic journal (in an online database)**
  When citing a scholarly article in an academic journal that you are viewing as a web page in a library database (i.e., not in PDF), use the same format as above but include a URL and the date you accessed it. If no page numbers to a print edition are listed, omit them or provide paragraph (par.) numbers:

  Heyen, William. "Sunlight." *American Poetry Review*, vo. 36, no. 2, 2007, 7 paras., *ebscohost.com.www.consuls.org/login. aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24224660&site=ehost-live*. Accessed 24 Sept. 2008.

- **A non-scholarly article in an online newspaper or magazine**
  When citing a popular newspaper or magazine article online (not found in a library database), include author, title of the article, name of the online publication, the date of the article, a URL or Permalink, and the date you accessed it:

  Korb, Scott. "Anywhere, Nowhere, Elsewhere, Everywhere." *Slate*, 10 Jan. 2014, www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2014/01/richard _powers_novel_orfeo_reviewed.single.html. Accessed 15 Jan. 2014.

  Cavett, Dick. "Booze, Revisited." *New York Times*, 10 Jan. 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/11/opinion/booze-revisited.html. Accessed 13 Jan. 2014.

- **Other cases not covered above**
  If you have a source not covered in the examples above – e.g., a print newspaper article, an e-book, a blog, a YouTube clip, etc. – consult the MLA Guidelines at:
  https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Things to remember …

- Always compile your Works Cited in alphabetical order, author's last name first
- Book titles take *italics*; articles, essays, short stories, and short poems take quotation marks ("   ")
- If the citation is longer than one line, indent each line *after* the first
- Page numbers are required for any essay, journal article, or work within a larger work
- If there are more than two editors, use "et al." (Latin for "and others") after the first editor's name
- Don't mistake authors with editors – the author is the person who wrote the work you're using, the editor is the one who put it where it is

In-Text Citation

Following MLA guidelines, cite your sources in the body of your paper parenthetically. Cite *all* quotations and any important information, ideas, or words not your own.

Parenthetical citations typically occur at the ends of sentences or after quotations. With the exception of block quotations, the parenthetical citation always comes *after* quotation marks but *before* the period or semi-colon.

Basic format

To cite a source in your paper, include the author's last name and page number in the parentheses; do *not* use "p." or "page":

E.g., (Ruhl 25)

As one critic has argued, "*Measure for Measure* raises the issue of embodied experience in the opening scenes" (Knapp 262).

If you have already named the author in the preceding clause or sentence(s), simply cite the page number:

As Jeffrey Knapp has argued, "*Measure for Measure* raises the issue of embodied experience in the opening scenes" (262).

Source quoted in another source

To cite an author quoted in another article, essay, or book, include the author's name in your prose and credit the work in which you found it, using "quoted in":

Empson claimed that "A word may become a sort of solid entity" (quoted in Frenkel 190).

Literary works

To cite poetry, give line numbers, using "line" for the first citation and the number for every subsequent citation. Use stanza numbers for larger works:

E.g., (line 13), (17-19), (16.78-9), etc.

Donne begins *Satire 1* pleading, "Away thou changling motley humorist" (line 1). By the middle of the poem, however, he calls his companion "a contrite penitent / Charitably warn'd of thy sins" (49-50).

To cite plays in dramatic verse, give act, scene, and line numbers:

E.g., (3.3.54-7)

To cite works of literary prose – such as novels or short stories – use the basic format above, citing author and page number. When needed for clarity, include chapters for novels: e.g., (105; ch. 12).

Special Cases

• If there is more than one work by the same author in your Works Cited, include an abbreviated title in the parenthetical citation: e.g., (Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr* 50).
• If the author is unknown, include only the abbreviated title and page number in the parenthetical citation.
• If you are citing a block quotation – a longer indented quotation, to be used when you quote more than four lines of poetry – the parenthetical citation comes *after* the final punctuation.

Working with Quotations

Remember that the correct use of quotations in your papers is important.

Punctuation and capitalization must be exact. In American prose, commas and periods at the end of a quotation go inside the quotation marks, outside if the quotation is followed by a parenthetical citation.

When quoting verse, mark line breaks using a back-slash (/).

Everyone has heard the saying, "He came, he saw, he conquered."

"That thou hast her, it is not all my grief, / And yet it may be said I loved her dearly" (lines 1-2).

Integrate all quotations properly, with a signal clause and proper punctuation; there should be no "dangling" quotations. To introduce a quotation, you need a signal clause containing either a speaking verb with a comma (,) or no speaking verb and a colon (:).

You may also use the quotation to continue your own sentence grammatically, using a "that" clause or a subordinate clause.

Regardless, the quotation *must* make semantic and grammatical sense in the sentence as a whole, meaning it needs to form a complete thought together with the surrounding clause.

Correct

Shakespeare's gender confusion in Sonnet 120 can be seen in the next quatrain, where the poet complains, "Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!" (9).

Shakespeare's gender confusion in Sonnet 120 is clear in the final quatrain: "Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!" (9).

The poet speaks of a boy "Who hast by waning grown" (3) but turns eventually to remark that "Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack" (5) has defeated him.

According to the speaker, "Lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds" (14).

Incorrect

Shakespeare is confused about his gender, "Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!" (9).

After this, the poet says, "though delayed, answered must be" (11).

The next quote begins; "And her quietus is to render thee." (12)

According to the speaker, "minion of her pleasure!" (9).

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English 666

December 7, 2016

<div align="center">All (or Nearly All) About MLA Formatting</div>

This page both explains and demonstrates the primary page set-up parameters for an MLA-formatted essay, according to the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook* (8th edition, 2016). That is to say, this document gives instructions for how to create an MLA-formatted paper, and it shows you what an essay following those instructions should look like. All instructions assume that you're using Microsoft Word, but the commands in most other word-processing programs are similar.

First, "select" the entire document (from the "Editing" tab in the upper right corner of the toolbars above) so that your formatting changes will be applied to the entire document. Next, select the "Paragraph" menu and set to double spacing. While you're there, make sure "Alignment" is set to "Left": the entire essay must be left-justified (not full-justified). This means that the left-hand edge of your type is perfectly straight but the right-hand edge is uneven. While you're in this menu, too, be sure the box labeled "Don't add space between paragraphs of the same style" is checked. This command will prevent MSWord from automatically adding extra spaces between paragraphs. Save your changes.

Still in the "Home" tab, in the "Font" menu this time, choose a normal font (like Times New Roman or Courier or Arial), "Regular" font style, and font size 10, 11, or 12.

Next, go to the "Page Layout" tab choose "Margins," and set to one (1) inch, all the way around (left & right, top and bottom). That does it for basic page set-up.

Page numbering is a little trickier. Choose the "Insert" tab and then click on "Header." Choose "Edit Header" from the menu. This will place your cursor in the header box at the top of your document. Click "Insert Alignment Tab" and select "Right" alignment to make the cursor

move to the far right of the header. Returning to the "Header and Footer Tools" tab, set "Header from Top" and "Footer from Bottom" are both set to .5 inches; this command will center your header information vertically inside the 1-inch top margin. Now type your last name plus one space, and click on the "Insert Page Number" menu at the left of the toolbar, followed by "Current Position" and "Plain Number." Make sure the font you're using in the header matches the size and type of the font in the main text of your essay. If the header is set correctly, your typing should appear ½ inch from the top of the page—midway down the one-inch top margin— and flush with the right margin. Click "Close Header and Footer" when you're done, or simply double click in the body of your document.

Note the four-line heading at the top left of the first page. Unless your instructor gives you alternative instructions, follow the example exactly. No title page is necessary.

Note also the title, centered and double-spaced, with major words capitalized, but otherwise in normal typeface—no all-caps; no boldface; no italics, no quotation marks.

The entire essay must be double-spaced—even the parts that you don't think should be double-spaced. Notice the headings and title at the top of the page: they're double-spaced. Block quotations? Double-spaced. Works Cited entries? Double-spaced. *Everything* is double-spaced—no exceptions.

A new paragraph is indented one standard tab-space: five spaces or, more precisely, one-half inch. No extra spaces between paragraphs because—you guessed it—*everything* is double-spaced. (As I wrote earlier, check the box labeled "Don't add space between paragraphs of the same style" in the "Paragraph" menu to prevent MSWord from adding extra spaces between paragraphs.)

So much for formatting. Yes, it's a pain. But correct formatting sends a clear message to your readers that you know what you're doing and therefore that the content of your writing should be taken seriously. The more formatting mistakes you make, the more likely it becomes that readers will assume the opposite: that you *don't* know what you're doing and therefore that

they should *not* take your writing seriously. Fairly or not, that's a cue to readers that they really don't need to pay much attention to whatever your essay is trying to communicate, because its content is likely to show the same sloppiness and lack of seriousness that the formatting does. In other words, your handling of the technicalities of formatting directly effects your audience's perception of your authority as a writer.

One essential element of any essay in literary analysis or interpretation is quotation and citation of outside sources, whether they are primary sources (a novel, story, poem, play or other work about which you are writing) or secondary sources (an essay, historical document, book, website, or other work whose words and/or ideas you're citing in support of your argument).

A short prose quotation, one that is four or fewer typewritten lines long, should be handled as an embedded quotation, indicated by quotation marks but run in with the typography of your sentence as though all the words in the sentence are your own. This sentence is an example: noted grammarian Joe Blow notes that "embedded quotations must function grammatically and mechanically in a sentence as though they are not quotations at all, but simply a part of the sentence in which they appear" (47).

Longer prose quotations, ones that are more than four typewritten lines long, should be formatted as block quotations instead of embedded quotations. MLA scholar Anita Lotta Trivia says this about the use of block quotations:

> Quoted material that amounts to more than four lines of typewritten text in your document should appear as a block quote—like this one— instead of an embedded quote. Block quotes appear without quotation marks, because the block itself indicates that the material is a quotation. Block quotes retain a normal (one-inch) right margin, but their left margin is an extra half inch from the margin. This is a change from previous editions of the *MLA Handbook*, which instructed writers to indent block quotations one full inch from the left margin. (872)

Your decision about whether to use a block quotation or an embedded quotation should be based on the number of typewritten lines in the quotation *as it appears in your essay,* not as it appears in the source.

Never leave a quotation "dangling" at the end of your paragraph; don't give "the other guy" the last word in your paragraph. Instead, use your sentences after a quotation to explain to your readers exactly how you want them to understand the quoted material so that it supports whatever point you're trying to make. If it doesn't do so, then you shouldn't be quoting it.

Now look back at the preceding paragraphs about quotations. Notice the source citations: the parenthetical information giving author and page information about the sources I have quoted. The first citation (three paragraphs back from here) includes only the page number of the source material, because the sentence itself identified the author. If the sentence had not identified Joe Blow as the quotation's source (as in the following clause), "then the end-of-sentence source citation and punctuation would look like this instead" (Blow 47). Note, too, that punctuation at the end of the block quote (two paragraphs back from here) differs from that of an embedded quotation: for embedded quotations, punctuation occurs after the citation, but in embedded quotations, punctuation occurs before the citation. Just as in the embedded quotation, had the author not been named in the "signal" sentence before the block quote, the author's last name would need to be included in the in-text citation.

Formatting and citation of poetry and drama work a little differently from prose. First, the rule for deciding between an embedded or a block quotation differs for poetry from prose, in two different ways. When quoting poetry, use a block quotation when you quote *more than three lines* of poetry (as opposed to more than four lines of prose). Count lines of poetry *as they appear in the source* (as opposed to their appearance in your document, for prose quotations). Lines of poetry must be capitalized and punctuated exactly as they appear in the source poem, just as the following three lines of poetry do: "Poetic quotes appear / With line breaks indicated by a slash / Just like those shown here for these three lines" (Opus, "Poetic," lines 14-17).

Note the extra information in that last citation. It's there for two reasons: because one should cite poetry by line number rather than page, and because this essay also includes "another quotation / By the same poet writ / But taken from a second poem" (Opus, *Rhyming,* 7-10). Because the essay cites two different works by a single author, the parenthetical citations must indicate which of the two works the quotation comes from. If your essay included only one work by the author Magnum Q. Opus, then the work's title would be omitted from the parenthetical reference. Note also that the second instance of poetic quotation omits the word "lines" from the citation; once is enough to establish the pattern for readers. Notice, too, that the title information in each of these two citations is formatted differently from the other. That's because the first quotation comes from a short work (a lyric poem, in this case) and therefore appears in quotation marks, while the latter quotation is taken from a long work (a book-length poem) and therefore appears in italics. The rules for formatting quotations from plays are similar in their logic, but would take too much space to demonstrate here, so see the *MLA Handbook* for further instructions.

This document outlines most of the greatest hits of MLA: rules for the formatting and citation feats that you'll need to perform most regularly. The most glaring omission from this document is the lack of a Works Cited page at the end of the paper to give full information about the sources cited in the body of the text. See the MLA Handbook, pages 20 and following, for further information. See also the instructions and samples in the "English@SCSU MLA Style Guide," available on the English Department website on the "Resources for Students" page. Further resources are available on the MLA's website and in Buley Library's "MLA Style Guide," which is linked from the library's "Research Guides" menu. If you are an English major or minor, you should invest in your own copy of the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook* (the 8th, at the time of this writing) and get in the habit of consulting it routinely.

Paper Grades

An "A" paper is *outstanding*.
It goes considerably beyond a merely adequate response, and delves beneath the surface of its subject to address the topic intelligently, perceptively, and thoughtfully. The argument is supported by well-chosen evidence that is gracefully introduced and thoroughly analyzed; it skillfully explores more than one side of the issue. It contains only minor mechanical errors, if any, and no significant lapses in diction or organization. The "A" paper demonstrates originality and creativity in language, language use, structure, and form.

A "B" paper is *good*.
It does more than merely fulfill the assignment, showing careful thought and a serious exploration of its topic. It has a clearly stated argument, which expresses the author's original opinions. However, that argument may be imperfectly supported or somewhat awkwardly expressed. The "B" paper is clear and free of jargon, with few distracting errors in usage and mechanics. Its use of language is creative as well as competent.

A "C" paper is *acceptable*.
It represents the *adequate* fulfillment of the assignment, clearly stating its topic and sticking to it. Often it is descriptive rather than analytical, and it may tend to repeat stock responses instead of presenting fresh insights. It may also have a good, original argument but exhibit serious problems in the execution of that argument. The "C" paper fails to make the best possible use of evidence: examples may be absent, ill-chosen, awkwardly introduced, or insufficiently analyzed. The paper is often marred by distracting errors in usage or organization.

A "D" paper is *seriously flawed*.
The ideas it expresses may be incomplete or vague. It is often so poorly constructed (stylistically, organizationally, and/or logically) that it is difficult to follow the sequence of ideas. It may wander from point to point without showing how all of its ideas cohere. It may also be marred by so many errors in mechanics and usage that the message is hard to decipher.

An "F" paper is *unacceptable*.
It shows either little thought or incomplete thinking. It is so poorly constructed (stylistically, organizationally, and/or logically) that it may be almost impossible to follow the sequence of ideas. It may also contain so many errors in mechanics and usage that it is almost impossible to understand. This category can also include a stylistically adequate paper that is not on the assigned or determined topic.

II. Working with Quoted Evidence

Punctuating Quotations

Quotations need to be correctly punctuated in order to avoid creating run-on sentences, comma splices, or other sentence errors.

Enclose all quotations in **double quotations marks** ("…"). Do not bolden, italicize, or or use other inventive formatting to mark off quoted text. Single quotation marks should be preserved for quotations within quotations.

1. Before a quotation

There are two basic ways to punctuate the beginning of a quotation:

• A comma after a signal verb

Quotations beginning with an introductory clause that ends in a signal verb (e.g., *says, claims, suggests, observes, implies, argues, believes,* etc.) take a comma:

> Shakespeare's sexual ambiguity in Sonnet 120 can be seen in the next quatrain, where the poet warns, "Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!" (9).

• A colon and *no* signal verb

When the introductory clause before the quotation is a complete thought that does *not* end in a signal verb, use a colon:

> Shakespeare's sexual ambiguity in Sonnet 120 can be seen in the warning that begins the next quatrain: "Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!" (9).

2. Continuing the sentence grammatically (no additional punctuation)

When the quoted text logically and grammatically *continues* your own sentence, *no additional punctuation* is needed preceding the quotation:

> The poet in Sonnet 120 speaks of a boy "Who hast by waning grown" (3).

A very common instance of a quotation completing one's own sentence is the use of *that* clauses; if the quotation logically follows an introductory clause ending in "that," no punctuation is needed:

> Shortly thereafter, the poet remarks that "Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack" has defeated him (5).

Finally, a quotation may also complete your sentence grammatically if it follows a subordinate or introductory clause (e.g., *As a result, According to the narrator,* etc.). In this case, a comma follows the subordinate clause, just as it would a typical sentence:

> According to the next quatrain, "Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack" has nevertheless defeated the speaker (5).

3. At the end of a quotation

In American prose, the punctuation at the end of the quotation *as it appears in the original text* goes *inside* the quotation marks:

> Barack Obama said, "We must honor the memory of those lost in Arizona."

However, when the quotation is followed by a parenthetical page or line citation, the closing punctuation goes *outside* the quotation marks.

> The narrator then captures the protagonist's unacknowledged feelings: "Her husband did not make her feel like this" (Bowen 83).

When the original passage ends in either a question mark (?) or an exclamation point (!), preserve *both* the original punctuation and the period after the citation.

> Faustus's famous speech to Helen begins, "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" (5.1.120).

Finally, when eliding - or omitting - part of the end of a quotation, omit any ending commas or colons, and add *three* full stops (…) *plus* the final period. (Note: ellipses should always be used *sparingly* in your prose, and only when they accurately preserve the basic sense of the original.)

> As Wharton's story opens, "It was three o'clock in the morning, and the cotillion was at its height…" (1).

4. Punctuating Lines of Poetic or Dramatic Verse

When quoting two or more lines of poetic or dramatic verse, *mark all line division*s using a forward slash (/):

> Jonson's poem is evenly divided into halves when the speaker wonders, "For why / Will man lament the state he should envy?" (5-6).

> Scene 4 begins with Angelo painting a vivid image of his sin and its bodily effects: "When I would pray and think, I think and pray / To several subjects. Heav'n in my mouth / As if I did but chew his name" (2.4.1-3).

Integrating Quotations

Correct punctuation is not enough. Quoted material in your writing needs to make *grammatical* and *semantic sense* with your surrounding sentence(s). Here are four rules of thumb for integrating quotations clearly into your prose:

1. Your surrounding sentence and the quotation need to *combine to form a complete thought.*

Incorrect
According to Jonson, "As what he loves" (line 12).

The quotation itself is only a partial phrase, rendering the surrounding sentence an incomplete thought.

Correct
In the last line, Jonson forswears all long-term commitments on behalf of his son, saying, "For whose sake henceforth all his vows be such / As what he loves may never like too much" (lines 11-12).

The sentence now has a quotation and an introductory clause that, combined together, form a complete thought.

2. Never leave a quotation "dangling"; introduce *all* quotations.

Incorrect
Simmel discusses modern city life. "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* that results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (25).

The quotation is "dangling"; it's a separate sentence, without context or introductory clause, and has only a vague relationship to the previous sentence.

Correct
Simmel wanted to explore the mental effects of modern city life, which he describes early in his essay as an experience of almost constant overstimulation: "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* that results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli" (25).

The quotation now follows logically from the previous sentence, which announces the main idea of the quotation with an introductory clause (correctly punctuated).

3. Use textual cues in introductory clauses to guide the reader.

• Prose
When writing about fiction or non-fiction prose, use descriptive textual clues - mini-summary, references to key events, chapters or other section breaks, or even a simple "beginning," "middle," or "end" where appropriate - to guide your reader to the context of the quotation. Do *not* use page numbers, as pages may vary between editions (and this information is in your parenthetical citation anyway).

Incorrect

On page 83 of *Fun Home*, the narrator reflects, "Dad's death was not a new catastrophe but an old one that had been unfolding very slowly for a long time" (83).

Correct

When Alison's mother presents her girlfriend with her father's copy of Wallace Stevens' poetry, the narrator reflects, "Dad's death was not a new catastrophe but an old one that had been unfolding very slowly for a long time" (83).

Coates opens the first chapter of *Between the World and Me* with a seemingly counter-intuitive claim: "But race is the child of racism, not the father" (7).

On his first glimpse of the African coast, Marlow sees "The edge of a colossal jungle so dark green as to be almost black…" (13).

• Poetry
When writing about poetry, use formal cues - line numbers, stanzas, and other structural devices - to guide your reader around the text of the poem:

In line 3 of *The Good Morrow*, the speaker muses whether he and his lover "sucked on country pleasures childishly" in a previous life.

By the time we've reached the final stanza, however, the imagery has changed: "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears" (15)

Donne's closing couplet creates a paradox: "If our two loves be one, or, thou and I / Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die" (20-21).

• Drama
Plays, particular those written in dramatic verse like Shakespeare's, often require a combination of the above textual cues. Where appropriate, use a combination of mini-description of staged action as well as formal references to act or scene number, to guide your reader:

Lear utters his fateful words in the first scene of the play: "Nothing will come of nothing, speak again" (1.1.88).

Act Three begins with Kent wondering, "Who's there, besides foul weather?" (3.1.1).

Lear's words to Cordelia as they are lead away to prison imagines them together as "birds i'th'cage" and "God's spies" (5.3.9, 17).

Analyzing Quoted Evidence

Working with quoted evidence in a literary essay requires analyzing and using that evidence effectively in your prose. Simply "inserting" or "adding more quotes" does not produce lucid (or particularly meaningful) writing. It's what you do with the quoted evidence that matters.

As an English Major or Minor, quoted evidence is the means to something larger: treating the **literary text as the subject of your analysis**. Practically speaking, this means:

- "sandwiching" every quotation with appropriate summary, context, and explanation

- providing a judicious mix of full and partial quotations, including quoting key terms and phrases where helpful

- keeping your own words and ideas in the driver's seat, while nevertheless …

- rooting everything you say in the language of the text

1. Sample Paragraph

Donne uses the word "sense" only once in the middle of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" in a parenthesis that nevertheless carries great weight: "Dull sublunary lovers' love / (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit / Absence …" (lines 13-15). The speaker contrasts his "refined" (17) love with the love of those who are "dull" because they are "sublunary," or live on earth, below the moon. He suggests that he and his beloved are defined by their minds, not physical things, and therefore do not care about being absent from each other. Dull or superficial love, by contrast, relies on the "Those things which elemented it" (16), or sense, to keep it alive. On one hand, by putting "soul is sense" in parentheses, Donne might be taken to mean that his thoughts are free from such superficial things. The word "sense" in line 14 serves as a metaphor to imply that other lovers' souls are like mere blocks of wood or stone. On the other

The writer correctly integrates and punctuates full quotations throughout the paragraph using introductory colons and commas, parenthetical citations, and line breaks.

Notice how the writer pulls out key words and phrases *from* the previous quotation and its surrounding lines for further analysis.

The writer continues to treat the text as the subject of his or her analysis by considering two contrasting interpretations of the original quotation.

hand, the same word can be read literally to mean that some lovers' souls are preoccupied with the bodily or emotional senses. This latter connotation of "sense" is ironic because Donne's poem seems preoccupied itself with physical imagery for emotional connection. The poem closes, "Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end where I begun" (44-45). If Donne needs to sense his lover's "firmness" in order to feel justified, or complete, one wonders if their love is really that different from the rest of the "dull" world.

Using helpful textual cues (e.g., "closes"), the writer advances the paragraph's analysis by linking the original passage discussed to a quotation at the end of the poem, "sandwiching" the quotation with context and follow-up.

2. Working with Block Quotations

Block quotations are long quotations that are more than four lines of prose or more than three lines of verse, indented and offset from the main body of your text. They should be used sparingly in any essay or writing assignment under ten pages. In very short papers (under three pages), you should avoid them, unless it is absolutely necessary or you have been instructed to use them otherwise.

Here are two general rules of thumb for the use of block quotations:

> • *never* end a paragraph with a block quotation
> • *always* devote at least *twice* as many lines of explanation to a block quotation as the quotation itself

III. Voice and Clarity

Beyond "I": Varying Subject Nouns

Often, students think that they can't express an opinion or an original interpretation in their writing without using the word "I." Not so. There are many other possibilities.

At times, "I" is indeed the best option. Turns of phrase like "In this paper, I will argue that…" or "What I have tried to show, …" can announce explicitly to your reader what you're trying to prove. When "I" serves as a statement of *mere* opinion, however ("I can see links between…," "I like when Wordsworth…," etc.), it takes the place of argumentation and evidence.

To avoid this, strong writers *vary* their subject nouns, experimenting with different ways of referring to author, speaker, text, reader, and the language of a work itself in order to express complex ideas using strong subjects and action verbs.

Here is a list of guidelines and suggestions. Think about what fits best with what you're trying to do and say in a given sentence, paragraph, or essay.

1. Author

When first referring to the author of a text in an essay, use his or her **full name**. Afterward, use his or her **last name**.

> **Virginia Woolf** wrote the character Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* based on cases of shell-shock from World War I. **Woolf** later portrays Septimus as a psychological parallel to the disaffected Clarissa.

2. Speaker

The author is not always the one doing the talking in a poem, story, or novel. Even when the speaker is not an actual character or persona, it is an effect of the text - an effect you can more formally denote with words like: **speaker, narrator, etc.**

> In the beginning of the poem, **the speaker** conveys a tone of assurance and confidence.

> In the closing couplet, however, **the poet** uses enjambment to call that confidence into question.

> When Mangin's sister appears on the balcony, Joyce's **first-person narrator** focalizes the story so that we see her from the perspective of a young ten- or twelve-year-old boy.

3. Text

Overall, the text itself is the main speaker in any literary essay. More than author or speaker, there are many ways to make the text as a whole or a portion of it the agent of your sentences. Here are just a few:

poem	**scene**	**narrative**
line	**act**	**discourse**
sonnet	**passage**	**structure**
stanza	**dialogue**	**metaphor**
refrain	**chorus**	**imagery**
couplet (octave, sestet,	**prologue**	**ending**
etc.)	**chapter**	**beginning**

Scene Two suggests an entirely different picture of Shakespeare's Prospero, as seen in his dialogue with Miranda.

The **structure of line 2,** which relates the "approach" with "taste," implies Herbert's reluctance toward Christian worship in "Superluminarium."

With an entire page devoted to fog, **the imagery** of *Bleak House* sends an early signal about its allegorical intentions.

4. Reader

At the same time, the reader - real or imagined - is just as much an active subject in the construction of a text. Beyond "I," your words can indicate that effect formally or informally with subject nouns like **one, the reader,** or simply **we.**

In Auden's imagery of jack-boots marching, **one** detects a direct response to 1930s fascism.

We first meet Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* counting his "Infinite riches in a little room" (1.2.1), and **our impression** is of a character paradoxically both large and small.

5. Language

What ties all these options together, of course, is words - the language of the poem, play, or narrative you're analyzing. Keep it simple: sometimes the clearest subject noun for making your point in a paper is a word or phrase itself.

 "Quintessence of dust" relates two seemingly opposing ideas, essence and ephemera.

Taken together, **these words** capture the tension Shakespeare wants us to feel in Hamlet.

Literary Present Tense

When we write about literature we are always, in a sense, writing about the present. Though the text under consideration was written in the past (even if it was written 15 seconds ago), the act of *interpreting* it is happening in the present. The text is communicating to its readers in the present moment. Perhaps more to the point, the present of the narrative also, by definition, has its own past and its own future.

These ways of conceptualizing the act of reading have been handed down to readers of English as conventions. In order to comply with those conventions, we use the present tense to discuss both what is happening in the "now" of the text and what is happening during the acts of interpretation and analysis. When we are discussing the "past" or "future" within or relative to the world of the text, we make our choices about verb tense accordingly.

> Babo is careful to appear subservient, a ruse that will be discovered by Captain Delano.

> Sought after by powerful men for years, Lily has refused to accept an offer of marriage. Now, unmarried at 29, she takes on the distasteful task of convincing Percy Gryce, the stodgy heir to a large fortune, to fall in love with her.

Here's a longer example from Paul Petrie's Introduction to William Dean Howells's *An Imperative Duty*:

> …This scientifically authorized deterioration of African Americans' legal status culminated in the US Supreme Court's infamous acceptance of the "separate but equal" doctrine of racial segregation in public life in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that would stand until the middle of the twentieth century….

Here Petrie uses the past tense to discuss the novella's historical context.

> Howells's novel of interracial marriage participates unmistakably in this ongoing national pseudoscientific dialogue. The novel's opening chapters appropriate the language and concerns of the contemporary sciences of race primarily through their center of consciousness, Dr. Edward Olney, a trained physician recently returned to the United States after long absence in Europe.

Here Petrie is discussing what the text is "doing" *in the moment when it is being read*, so he uses the present tense.

Titles

It's easy to ignore the titles of your papers until the last minute, leaving you time to produce only a vague or general heading to your paper. But titles are an important part of a polished paper. Rather than seeing them as announcing the topic of your paper, see your titles as the *beginning of your argument*. They should not only draw your reader in but help your reader see what original contribution your thesis will be making to the topic at hand. Here are some strategies:

1. Keep it specific
A specific title is better than a general title because it clues your reader into the original idea you are bringing to the "conversation" around your topic. Rather than,

> "Immigration Debate in the U.S."

Try:

> "Anti-Immigrant Stigma in Arizona Politics"

2. Cluster Key Terms
Think about the key terms of your essay, and group or cluster them into a persuasive idea in your title. Rather than,

> "Problems in Donne's *Satyre III*"

Try:

> "Fraternity, Fatherhood, and True Religion in Donne's *Satyre III*"

3. Use the Colon to Show the Conversation
Authors of papers often use a colon in their titles to show a relationship between ideas and the larger conversation at stake:

> "Between the World and Them: The Black Lives Matter Movement in Baldwin and Coates"

> "Joking Our Way to Adulthood: The Everyday Rhetoric of David Foster Wallace's Kenyon Commencement Speech"

IV. Sentence Mechanics and Grammar

The Basics of Complete Sentences (1): Sentence Fragments, Run-ons, and Comma Splices

Many people feel that writing grammatically correct sentences is a kind of mystery. They feel unsure how to recognize a complete sentence and how to avoid writing sentence fragments. They may feel confused about commas or about punctuation in general. The temptation, as a result, is to treat good writing as a set of arcane, punitive rules – an unknowable set of principles that are just around the corner, out to get you.

Rather than focusing on how to avoid *bad* sentences, it is more helpful to focus on how to write *good* sentences. Better yet, it makes sense to think about *strong* sentences – sentences that *do* something, make strong claims, and have a command over the grammatical building blocks necessary to make those claims persuasively.

These building blocks can be learned. The trick is to remember some basic principles of sentence writing, to practice them, and then to build toward more sophisticated sentences. Avoid seeing these principles as mysteries. See them as a basic framework for expressing your most interesting thoughts and ideas.

1. Complete Sentences

A complete sentence must have a subject and a verb:

> Jane   laughed.
> **[subject]   [verb]**

> I   thought long and hard about the matter.
> **[subject]   [verb]**

It can have other things too, but it needs an identifiable subject doing a complete action:

> Jane   laughed at the clown in the circus while eating a hot dog.
> **[subject]   [verb]**

> When I got home from the appointment, I   thought long and hard about the matter of my health.
>   **[subject]   [verb]**

2. Fixing Sentence Fragments

A sentence without an identifiable subject and verb is an incomplete sentence, or **sentence fragment.**

> Will do.
>   *This has an action but no subject. Who will do? "That"? "He"?*

The one with the brown coat.
> *This has a subject but no verb. What about the "one"? What is "the one with the brown coat" doing?*

This idea at the heart of the article.
> *This also has a subject but no verb. What about "this idea"?*

There are some common reasons that people write sentence fragments. Again, it's not a mystery! The usual reason is that they have separated out as a fragment part of a larger, complete sentence.

Incorrect
Although he came home.

This is a dependent clause without a main, or independent, clause. A "dependent clause" relies on an independent clause to make sense. Here's a complete sentence using the above fragment.

Correct
Although he came home, he went back out.
                     [subject]   [verb]

"He went back out" is a complete sentence. It can stand on its own. "Although he came home" is an unfinished thought without it. Sentences that begin with words like *Although*, *While*, *Because*, *Unless, Since, After, When, If,* and *Even though* will produce sentence fragments unless they are attached to a complete action. Examples:

Incorrect
While I was outside.

Correct
While I was outside, I mowed the lawn.

Incorrect
Even though the sign said "Stop."

Correct
He went anyway, even though the sign said "Stop."

Another common source of incomplete sentences is "garbled sentences," or sentences that have missing or jumbled words. These you should be able to avoid with proof-reading.

Incorrect
I the article is wrong.
> *The sentence is missing a verb ("I think," "I believe," etc.).*

Berry's claims that would not work.
> *The writer confuses the possessive "Berry's claims" with a sentence about what "Berry claims…."*

3. Compound Sentences

Once you know how to write complete sentences, you can start building longer sentences, such as **compound sentences**.

A compound sentence joins two complete sentences together with a comma plus the words *and*, *but, yet, so, for,* or *nor*. The latter are called "coordinating concjunctions," or connecting words.

> Jane   laughed,   and I   cried.
> **[subject] [verb] [subject] [verb]**

> Jane   laughed at the movie while we waited, but I   cried from hunger.
> **[subject] [verb]**   **[subject]**   **[verb]**

A compound sentence *must* have a complete clause – with subject and verb - on both sides of the comma.

> **Incorrect**
> Jane   laughed, and cried.
> **[subject]**   **[verb]**   **[verb]**

Here, Jane is doing both the laughing and crying. Either add a subject to the second clause (e.g., "she cried") or drop the comma (e.g., "Jane laughed and cried.")

Why write compound sentences at all? Compound sentences are a step toward stronger sentences because they convey a *relationship* between two ideas or statements. Note how "but" conveys a very different relationship than "and."

> Jane laughed, *and* I cried.
>   *The two events happened together.*

> Jane laughed, *but* I cried.
>   *The writer means to draw attention to the disconnect between these two events.*

> Berry argues that we need to think about the role of education in our sense of "place," *and* he gives a minimal defintion of what he means by education.
>   *The writer is listing what Berry says in his article.*

> Berry argues that we need to think about the role of education in our sense of "place," *but* he gives only a minimal definition of what he means by education.
>   *The writer is turning the screws on Berry. The "but" conveys that Berry's minimal definition is a problem.*

4. Fixing Comma Splices

One of the most common errors of student writing is comma splices – two parts of a compound sentence "spliced" together with a comma and no coordinating conjunction (*and, yet, but, so, for…).*

Incorrect
Jane laughed, I cried.

I went to the store, I bought a watermelon.

Derrick Rose is the best basketball player, he plays to win.

These comma splices are run-on sentences. They have multiple complete thoughts, or clauses, tacked together without appropriate stops or connecting words.

To fix a comma splice, you can (a) add a connecting word, or (b) add a period or harder punctuation, like a semi-colon.

Correct
Jane laughed, but I cried.
    or
Jane laughed. I cried.
    or
Jane laughed; I cried.

I went to the store, where I bought a watermelon.
    or
I went to the store. I bought a watermelon.

The Basics of Complete Sentences (2): From Compound to Complex

In academic writing, sentences rarely, if ever, occur on their own. They are always a part of a conversation—a conversation between the ideas that your own writing advances, the evidence of other written work you discuss, and the line of thought tying them together into a whole. Strong sentences *show* that line of thought running through each paragraph of an essay by conveying a *relationship* between ideas. There are several ways to build sentences that demonstrate such relationships:

1. From Simple to Compound Sentences

Simple, declarative sentences can be clear and grammatically correct while leaving the reader unclear about what a writer is trying to convey.

> Smith's book argues that we need to explore new approaches to education. Teachers are an important asset in the future of America. Students are falling more and more behind today. We need a technological innovation in the classroom.

These sentences are intelligible but hard to follow. Why? First, the reader cannot tell which sentences refer to information in Smith's book, and which do not. Second, the reader cannot tell the relationship between the ideas provided: if teachers, for example, are an important asset, why are students failing?

One way to convey a relationship between ideas is to tie separate sentences into compound sentences – sentences that tie two independent clauses together with **and, but, yet, for,** or **so**.

> Teachers are an important asset in the future of America, yet students are falling more and more behind today.

> Students are falling more and more behind today, so we need a technological innovation in the classroom.

Note how the addition of "yet" or "so" radically changes the implied meaning. The ideas are no longer simply adjacent, sitting beside each other like people on a bench. They are now *doing* things to each other. "But" and "yet" push *against* each other, showing contrasts or antitheses. "So" pushes something *forward*, showing an idea that results from another one.

Note: Be careful to avoid the common error of treating transition words as conjunctions: ***however, nevertheless, on the contrary,*** **etc.,** are **not** connecting words in a compound sentence.

2. From Compound to Complex Sentences

Compound sentences can only do so much. Separate sentences can only line up or push against each other for so long before the reader feels like he or she is reading a series of back and forth

statements. We often need more complex ways to convey the relationship between ideas and sentences. For example:

> Smith's book argues that we need to explore new approaches to education. **Even though teachers are an important asset in the future of America**, students are also falling more and more behind today. **Because of this decline**, improving the quality of our teachers is not enough. **According to Smith,** we need a technological innovation in the classroom.

The sentences highlighted in bold are what we call "complex" sentences. A "complex" sentence does not mean a *confusing* sentence. Rather, it means a sentence that shows a more complex relationship between ideas than simply sticking independent thoughts together in a compound sentence. A complex sentence shows *how one or more ideas depend on another idea*. Thus, a complex sentence contains what we call *dependent*, or subordinate, clauses.

You can usually spot complex sentences because they contain clauses that begin with words or phrases like the following – what we call "subordinating" words or phrases:

While	**Whereas**	**During**
Although	**According to**	**As a result of**
Even though	**After**	**By**
Because	**Before**	**If … then …**

Left on their own, sentences that begin with words like these can produce sentence fragments:

> **Incorrect**
> While I agree with Johnson.
> Even though she has no idea what she is talking about.

Once these dependent clauses are hitched to independent clauses, however, they can combine to form stronger, more interesting thoughts:

> **Correct**
> While I agree with Johnson, his theory of childhood education is only partly accurate.
> Even though she has no idea what she is talking about, Beatrice makes a valid point
>   about healthcare.
> Because of the Bears' inadequate offensive line, Jay Cutler looks like a weak
>   quarterback.
> As a result of our long struggle to improve its research, the program is now thriving.
> After careful consideration of all the evidence above, Johnson's article concludes with a
>   call to arms.

These sentences are interesting because they imply ideas that do not merely sit next to or push against one another. They show complex relationships between ideas: ideas that draw distinctions ("While," "Even though," "Although"), ideas that result from other ones ("As a result of," "Because," "If…then…"), ideas that are chronological ("After," "Before," "During,"), and ideas that attribute resoponsibility ("According to").

Commas, Colons, and Semicolons

Many of us were taught to put commas where a reader would naturally pause or take a breath. According to that logic, semicolons would indicate places where a reader would stop breathing for a moment, and colons would signal that it's time to call 911.

In fact, commas (and colons and semicolons) are not about breathing; they are tools that communicate the logical relationships among words, phrases, and clauses within your sentences. These three punctuation marks are meant to clarify, not resuscitate. Below are a few of their most common uses.

1. Commas and Semicolons in Compound Sentences

Use a comma <u>before</u> a coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses. A "coordinating conjunction" is a word that connects two things of equal importance in the sentence. The coordinating conjunctions are *and, but, or, for, nor, so,* and *yet.*

> Readers are likely to find *The Underground Railroad* narratively dense, so the book club materials on Oprah's website will be very useful.
>
> Frederick Douglass eloquently details his desire for freedom, but he does not narrate his actual escape.

In each case, the conjunction links the two statements and signals a particular logical relationship between them; they are doing things to one another. In the first case, the relationship is cause/effect: the materials will be useful *because* the narrative is so dense. In the second, the relationship is one of contrast: if Douglass has told us about his desire for freedom, we might expect that he would describe how he escaped from slavery; *however*, our expectations are not fulfilled.

When the two independent clauses are so closely related that they seem to want to be the same sentence, you can use a semicolon (without a coordinating conjunction) to connect them.

> The narrator interjects almost nothing beyond a brief description of the train station; what we learn of setting comes almost entirely from the girl.
>
> Frederick Douglass eloquently details his desire for freedom; however, he does not narrate his actual escape.

Note that *however*—like *therefore*, *indeed*, *in fact*, *for example*, etc.—is not a <u>coordinating</u> conjunction, so it takes a semicolon in this case.

2. Commas after Introductory Elements

Use a comma after most introductory words, phrases, or clauses. These introductory elements provide some context for the main clause of the sentence. Generally, these elements tell when,

where, why, or how the action of the sentence occurs or within what context it is to be understood:

> Since he had established himself as an accomplished slave breaker, Covey was respected by his white neighbors despite his relative poverty.
>
> To gain financial stability, Lily Bart must either marry or go to work. Unfortunately, she has no marketable skills.
>
> While swimming with Robert, Edna felt free.
>
> Abandoned, Maggie turns to prostitution.

In each case the comma separates the information that provides context from the actual sentence. "Covey was respected by his neighbors" is the main point the writer is trying to convey, but the *context* within which that matters or makes sense *for this writer* is Covey's reputation as a slave breaker. Lily must marry or go to work, but why? She has no marketable skills, but how does the writer want us to feel about that? When did Edna feel free? Why did Maggie turn to prostitution?

The commas, therefore, are not where they are because those are the places where readers take a breath. Instead, the commas help signal the logical relationships between the ideas. They say, "here's where the context stops and the main action begins."

When the contextual information comes at the end of the sentence, it is not usually set off by a comma. The connecting words signal the shift from main idea to context.

> Covey was respected by his white neighbors since he had established himself as an accomplished slave breaker.
>
> Edna felt free while swimming with Robert.

3. Commas with Interrupting Elements

Use commas to set off words or phrases that "interrupt" the main clause. Usually, those interruptions will provide "extra" information about some aspect of the main clause. Sometimes they rename the subject of the sentence; sometimes they will seem almost parenthetical. We say that information is extra because you could literally remove it and the sentence would still make sense.

> Tom Joad, home from a stint in prison, finds the family farm deserted.
>
> Noah, the Joads' eldest son, leaves the family just before they reach California.
>
> Tom, who had been convicted of manslaughter, risks his own life to fight for migrant workers' rights.
>
> Rose of Sharon, however, will figure significantly in the novel's conclusion.

4. Commas and Semicolons in Lists

Use commas in lists of more than two items. Be sure to use a comma before the conjunction if doing so is necessary for clarity!

> *Correct*
> Edna left her husband, children, and respectable life in order to live in the pigeon house.
>
> *Incorrect*
> It would have been easy for Tom to blame his parents, God and the boss.
>
> > *The lack of a comma before and makes it sound like Tom is the love-child of God and the boss.*

Here's a famous example of how the punctuation of the list affects the logic of the sentence:

> The panda eats shoots and leaves. *(Good panda.)*
> The panda eats, shoots, and leaves. *(Bad panda.)*

Use semicolons in lists when one or more of the items in the list contains a comma or other punctuation. The semicolons will help readers keep track of the items themselves.

> Along with literary history per se, contemporary literary critics often draw on several fields: cultural, political, and economic history; philosophy; cultural theory; and psychology.

5. Colons

Unlike a semicolon, a colon signals that what comes next follows directly from what came before it. The colon says to a reader, "Here it comes!" When used to introduce an explanation, example, quotation, or appositive (words that rename), a colon should be used only after an independent clause. That means that you do <u>not</u> need a colon after *such as, including,* or *consists of*.

> With no marriage options left, Lily's options are stark: trim hats or become Gus's concubine.
>
> Finally, Lily must face the same struggles as the working-class women she has shunned, such as long hours, meager wages, and soul-deadening poverty. But her resolve is complicated by a her suspicion that she is incapable of becoming a "worker among workers":
> > Inherited tendencies had combined with early training to make her the highly specialized product she was: an organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the sea-anemone torn from the rock. She had been fashioned to adorn and delight; to what other end does nature round the rose-leaf and paint the humming-bird's breast? And was it her fault that the purely decorative mission is less easily and harmoniously fulfilled among social beings than in the world of nature? (281)

You may notice exceptions to the "complete sentence" rule like the following:

> Woman, without her man, is nothing.
> Woman: without her, man is nothing.
>
> Cows: Please close gate!
> Cows, please close gate! *(…because everybody knows horses can't read)*

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject and verbs, like actors and actions, should agree. By *agree* we mean the number of the subject should match or correspond with the number of the verb. Here is the basic rule:

a singular **subject** (*she, phone, dog*) **takes** a singular verb (*writes, rings, sleeps*) and plural **subjects** (*we, machines, animals*) **take** a plural verb (*write, rule, sleep*).

Note the example in the sentence above: "***subject… takes***" and "***subjects… take***."
Be sure not to confuse the *s* on the verb *takes* (present-tense, singular) with the *s* on the plural noun *subjects*. Remember, it's the *number* that must agree: singular subject/singular verb; plural subject/plural verb.

She writes all day long. The *phone rings* most of the time. The *dog sleeps* through it all. *(singular s/v)*

We write less often. The *machines rule* anyway. *Animals sleep* through it all. *(plural s/v)*

Paying attention to the number of the subject and verb will help prevent most errors of agreement, but a few more complicated subject-verb relations require special attention.

1. Compound Subjects

When two nouns or pronouns form a "compound subject" (*Dick and Jane*, *a car or a bike*, *neither fish nor frogs*), they still must agree with the verb, but sometimes, it gets a bit tricky.

- **Two or more subjects joined by *and* take a plural verb**

    Incorrect
    Dick and Jane and baby Tim swims in the pond. *(*Swim*s is singular.)*

    Correct
    Dick and Jane and baby Tim swim in the pond.

- **Singular subjects joined by *or*, *nor*, *either…or*, *neither…nor* take a singular verb**

    Incorrect
    A car or a bike need care to function properly. *(*Need *is plural.)*

    Correct
    A car or a bike needs care to function properly.

    Neither the main character nor the narrator knows the secret of the man's mysterious origin.

2. Collective Nouns: singular for a unit, plural for the individual members

When nouns such as *team*, *family*, *audience,* or *group* refer to the whole as single unit, use a singular verb. In the example below, the *audience* is regarded as one entity.

The audience must know the conventions of ancient Greek theater to understand the violence at the end of the play.

If the collective noun refers to the individual members of a group, use the plural form of the verb. In this example, *audience* refers to an action of the individual members of the group.

The audience gasps at the bloodthirsty behavior of the protagonist as the final curtain falls.

3. *Anyone, Everyone* **and Other Indefinite Pronouns take a singular verb**

Everything agrees with everything else. Nobody knows why or how.

Indefinite pronouns such as *somebody*, *nobody*, *no one*, *someone*, *everything*, *anything* take a singular verb, but there are a few exceptions to the general rule.

Both, *few*, *others*, *many*, and *several* always take a plural.

Others understood what he could not grasp. Several told him, but he could not comprehend.

Just to keep us on our toes, some indefinite pronouns, including *most*, *more*, *some*, *none*, *any*, *enough*, and *all* follow the normal rules: they take a singular verb when referring to a singular noun and a plural verb when they refer to a plural noun.

4. *Who*, *That*, *Which*… **Relative Pronouns follow the number of the noun.**

If the relative pronouns *who*, *that*, or *which* refer to a singular noun, they take a singular verb. If they refer to a plural noun, they take a plural verb (makes sense, huh!).

Students in English classes, who ~~is~~ are always the smartest in the university, learn the art of writing well.

5. Subjects Separated from the Verb: TRICKY SITUATIONS!

A verb must agree with its subject even if separated by other words or a parenthetical phrase. In the first example below, the singular noun *poem* is the subject not the plural word *metaphors*.

A poem full of metaphors provides a rich field for literary interpretation.

An effective literary *interpretation* (one of the primary products in most English classes) *presents* one compelling way of understanding a poem, but there is always room for another.

Even if the verb comes before the subject, the subject and verb must agree.

In this poem there are several examples of inventive metaphors and figures of speech.

Agreed.

Restrictive and Non-Restrictive Elements

One of the most challenging parts of writing interesting sentences is knowing where to add commas around things which aren't essential to the sentence but matter to its overall meaning.

The technical term for these parts of a sentence are restrictive and non-restrictive elements:

> • **Restrictive elements** *restrict* the grammar and meaning of the sentence. They *have* to be there for *both* the sentence's grammar *and* meaning to make sense.

> • **Non-restrictive elements** are the *extra* stuff we add to a sentence to make it more meaningful. They do *not* have to be there for the sentence to form a complete grammatical thought, but they matter to the writer's meaning.

Here is a brief example of the same sentence with a restrictive and a non-restrictive element:

> The boy **wearing a black hat** walked the dog.

In this sentence, "wearing a black hat" is a *restrictive element* because it restricts, or is essential to, both the grammar and sense of the sentence. The sentence is pointing out which boy walked the dog - i.e., the one and only the one with the black hat. Compare with the following version:

> The boy**, wearing a black hat,** walked the dog.

Now, "wearing a black hat" is a *non-restrictive element*. It is added detail, extra information for describing how the boy looked when he walked the dog. It is not essential, or does not restrict, the grammatical sense of the sentence, but it does matter to the larger meaning writer wants to convey. In general, the rule is this: *non-restrictive elements are enclosed with commas, restrictive elements are not.*

The following are some common examples of non-restrictive elements with correct punctuation.

1. Introductory Phrases or Clauses

Introductory phrases or clauses in a sentence are usually enclosed with a comma as they are *non-restrictive* elements that add a transition or help set up the rest of the sentence:

> **As a result**, the book fails to give us closure.

> **In fact**, 'Frakenstein' is not the name of the monster but rather his creator, Victor Frankenstein.

> **Specifically**, Tolkien's Middle Earth is divided into three regions.

2. Parenthetical Ideas

Things that are *really* extra to a sentence might be put in parentheses, but we often add *non-restrictive* remarks, words, phrases, or ideas to our sentences even without parentheses.

It's easiest to imagine these kinds of non-restrictive elements as asides - as the additional information you're nudging your reader or whispering in her ear to notice, in order to move your point along.

> He walked into the drawing room, **embarrassed and ashamed**, to a chorus of murmurs.

> W. H. Auden, **often identified as both an American and British poet**, had a trans-atlantic reputation by the age of thirty.

> His poetic forebear in this regard might be T. S. Eliot, **a native of St. Louis who spent much of his twentieth-century career in London**.

3. That vs. Which

The answer to the pesky question of when to use "that" or "which" in a sentence has to do with restrictive and non-restrictive elements.

If the clause is a *restrictive element*, essential to the sentence, use "that":

> This is the famous 1649 sword **that chopped off Charles I's head**.

> "Was this the face **that launched a thousand ships**?"

In both of these examples, the element following "that" restricts the grammatical sense of the sentence: only the sword that killed Charles I is being discussed; only Helen of Troy, who "launched" the legion of Greek ships in Homer's *Iliad*, is being adored.

If the clause is a *non-restrictive element*, offering additional information, use "which":

> This is the famous 1649 sword that Chopped off Charles I's head, **which can now be found in the British Museum**."

> Marlowe's play ends with Faustus's tortured vision of Helen, **which can be read as an enchanting or disenchanting moment**.

Modifiers

When we "modify" something, we change it, usually to enhance or make it more to our taste. For instance, we might know people who modify their cars by adding sound systems or by installing hydraulics that allow the car to "hop" or ride very low. We could even say that the old Burger King motto "Have it your way" was an invitation to modify your burger.

The same is true with sentences. We add words or phrases in order to clarify and elaborate on an idea. By providing detail and description, we aim to make the sentence serve our purpose as precisely as possible.

The general rule of thumb for modifiers is to *keep related words together*. When we don't, it's difficult for readers to know for sure what the modifier is describing. Sometimes, the results are hilarious, but most of the time modifier errors are just annoying.

1. Misplaced Modifiers

When there's too much space between modifiers and the words they modify or when the modifiers are in the wrong spot, readers can get confused.

> **Incorrect**
> Henry threw a pinecone at a squirrel desperate to assert his agency and justify his desertion.
>
> > *Hmm…that's one desperate squirrel.*
>
> **Correct**
> Desperate to assert his agency and justify his desertion, Henry threw a pinecone at a squirrel.
>
> **Incorrect**
> As Vyry soon realized, sharecroppers whose crops failed often found themselves at the mercy of their unscrupulous landlords.
>
> > *Do the crops often fail or are the sharecroppers frequently at the mercy of the landlords?*
>
> **Correct**
> As Vyry soon realized, sharecroppers whose crops failed found themselves at the mercy of their unscrupulous landlords.

2. Disruptive Modifiers

Think of these as a subset of misplaced modifiers. These phrases or clauses cause confusion because they take up too much space between closely related elements of a sentence and thus make it difficult to keep track of the main point.

> Gatsby, because he had grown up in small-town Minnesota and had followed a Franklinesque program of self-improvement that ultimately encouraged social climbing over morality, was obsessed with Daisy's poise.
> > *I'm exhausted by the time I get to the verb.*

3. Dangling Modifiers

Unconnected to a noun, these modifiers hang off the front or rear of a sentence. The referent for the modifier is, at best, implied.

> **Incorrect**
> After fighting heroically, the sun shone "bright and gay in the blue, enameled sky."
>
> > *Did the sun do the fighting?*
>
> **Correct**
> After the men fought heroically, the sun shone "bright and gay in the blue, enameled sky."
>
> **Incorrect**
> Wasting away in jail for vagrancy, the Employer visited Bartleby.
>
> > *So, even if it were the Employer who was jailed, it would be strange for him to be able to visit someone, unless, of course, the person he was visiting were also in jail…*
>
> **Correct**
> The Employer visited Bartleby, who wasting away in jail for vagrancy.
>
> **Incorrect**
> Waiting for the train, the hills looked "like white elephants."
>
> > *Technically, this says that the hills were waiting for the train.*
>
> **Correct**
> Waiting for the train, the girl remarked that the hills looked "like white elephants."

4. Word choices and sentence constructions that often lead to modifier glitches

- Limiting words like *only, almost, hardly, just, scarcely, merely, simply, even*. If these are in the wrong place, the meaning of the sentence can change significantly.

- Modifying phrases that begin with *who, whose, which, that, when, although, because,* and *while*. Put these phrases as close as possible to the words they modify.

- -ing words. Misplaced modifiers are often caused by –ing words that are too far from the "doer" of the action.

    Much of this chapter is borrowed from the Temple University Writing Center: www.temple.edu/wc

Apostrophes and Possessives

Apostrophes are primarily used to indicate ownership by a "possessive" noun or pronoun. They are also used in contractions in place of missing or omitted letters. In general these two rules are pretty logical but not always.

For example, the possessive of "it" is "its" rather than "it's" (which is the contraction for "it is"). Don't ask why. If you dared to in the olden days, here's how it would go: "Why?" "'Cuz!" "'Cuz, why?" "'Cuz, I said so!" Fortunately, most occasions requiring the use of an apostrophe are more logical.

1. Possessives
The most common use of the apostrophe is to show ownership or possession. How we do this, though, varies depending on the situation.

• Singular Nouns
Most often, we add an apostrophe and an "*s*" to make a possessive singular noun.

> *Hawthorne's* story "The Birth-mark" suggests that human imperfection may be impossible to avoid without potentially fatal costs.

> Once her *husband's* chemical concoction erases *Georgiana's* "visible mark of earthly imperfection," she can no longer remain in this life.

• Plural Nouns
If a plural noun does not end in "*s*," simply add the apostrophe and an "s." Add only the apostrophe if a plural noun ends in "s."

> In Hawthorne's conception, *humanity's* imperfections are a gift as well as a limitation. They are signs of our mortality without which we would not experience earthly love and affection.

> Last semester, the **classes'** response to this story was surprising. **Students'** opinions were divided about the merits of aspiring toward physical perfection, even if it required surgery.

• Indefinite Pronouns
Indefinite pronouns are words like "someone," "everyone," etc. Add an apostrophe and "s" for indefinite pronouns.

> It's everybody's problem when the world ends, and nobody's going to do anything about it if you don't own it.

> *Note the slippery apostrophe here: "nobody's" uses an apostrophe for a contraction not a possessive.*

• Joint Possession

Sometimes two or more individuals share joint possession. In this case, use the possessive for the last noun only.

> Gilbert and Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic* helped recuperate the contributions of women to literary history and changed the way we teach and read the literature of the past. Its influence continues to this day.

> *Note the absence of an apostrophe in the possessive "Its." Just learn this one!*

To indicate individual possession by two or more persons, use an apostrophe and "s" for each.

> Gilbert's and Gubar's other books have also been well received by many critics and scholars.

• Compound Nouns

As with "joint possession" make only the second noun of a compound noun possessive.

> The United Nations' report described a startling array of bodily modifications in countries around the world.

2. Contractions

Apostrophes in contractions mark omitted or missing letters. Contractions are usually used to indicate the informal pronunciations of spoken language. They also appear in literature to suggest local dialects or the use of non-standard English. Contractions are an informal mode of writing and should be used with caution. But used strategically, contractions can be an effective tool for adding emphasis and inflecting the tone of your prose.

> This isn't your problem 'cuz you're going nowhere fast in your little world.

> Today's the day to discuss this problem because we're ready for the challenge.

Note "isn't" is a common contraction for "is not," but the apostrophe in "*'cuz*" indicates both missing letters and a written imitation of verbal slang. Also be careful not to confuse the contraction "you're" with the possessive pronoun "your." They sound the same but mean different things.