Writing: words to write by

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History

I. **Words**

Avoid the first person: “I”, “me”, “we”, “us”.

Especially avoid “I feel that” or “I believe that”.

Avoid second person.

Avoid contractions – “don’t”, “can’t”.

A void slang: “a lot”, “out in left field”, “a.k.a.”

Watch **usage** (also called **diction**) – what are the diction problems with these two examples?

“Europe was mostly rural at the time and much larger than it is now.”

“After the enemy dies, he searches him, in hopes to find something to help him to sort of take over where the dead man left off, as a sort of resurrection, to make up for the unnecessary killings in this war.”

Avoid the **passive voice**:

“Luther was thought by the authors to be a great leader of reform.”

How could you make this an active voice statement?

Always check spelling with your own eyes – do not rely solely on your computer’s spellchecker.

II. **Sentences**

Avoid **fragments:**

“One of the three classes during this time.”

“To keep his nation unified.”

Watch out for the **run-on** sentence:

“I think that I have made a wise choice in picking these two books, because they go together for the reason of Smith, who devotes his time to how the people lived, involving physical items of value, and Jones, concerning the kings themselves, thus the two societies together have a great effect on Europe’s changes, advances, and how time proves itself.”

Make sure the **antecedents for pronouns** are clear:

“By this, the author made Luther quite interesting, because he was extremely different, which helped the author write his book.”

Remember to vary sentence structure within your paragraphs.

III. **Paragraphs**

A good paragraph begins with a good topic sentence - a sentence which clearly tells the reader what the paragraph is about. The rest of the paragraph should be clearly tied to this one topic and should marshal evidence to support an argument about it.

Note the problems with the following paragraph:

The church during this time was in bad shape. One of the three classes during the times. The nobility, peasants, and the clergy. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote of a humble monk that was true to the Lord. That wasn't the case always. Some supposed clergy led lives of sin and drunkenness. Because of this the church started to put regulations on these dutiful men of the cloth. I'm sure this caused much uprest in society.

IV: **Quotations**

Quotations are useful, especially to support an argument based on primary sources. However, they should be used properly and in moderation. As a rule, keep them short and integrate them cleanly into your own writing. Do not begin a paragraph with a quotation; instead, save them for the body of the paragraph:

Like all Oxford students, Bentham had to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. But unlike many of his fellow students he was unable to simply sign off on them and forget about it. "In some of them," he related later, "no meaning at all could I find; in others no meaning but one which, in my eyes, was but plainly irreconcilable to reason or to scripture." (Bentham, Works, p. 37).

Try not to use quotations without introducing them into a sentence of your own.

You must use quotation marks if you use another author's words. If you borrow someone's ideas, but reword them, then you should not use quotation marks. You must, however, cite the source:

Like all Oxford students, Bentham had to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. But unlike many of his fellow students he was unable to simply sign off on them and forget it. He considered some of the Articles meaningless and others without basis in scripture. (Bentham, Works, p. 37)

Remember that **plagiarism**, the act of taking someone's words or ideas and passing them off as your own, is subject to severe penalties. Please read and understand our university's policies on this issue as presented in your student handbook

V. **Overview**

All papers should have a **thesis** - a clear statement of the argument which your paper is presenting. Everything in your paper should work to support this thesis. A very good way to help with organization is to **outline** before you write.

Aim for clarity and use vocabulary which you have truly mastered. If you do not really know what a word means, do not use it. Dictionaries are not entirely reliable here and thesauruses are notoriously tricky. Use good, solid, direct prose, free of jargon and buzz words.

Above all: good writing is re-writing! It often pays to take the paper through that extra draft, a process made immeasurably easier then it was a few decades ago due to the advent of computers. Lastly, please remember to proofread your final draft before handing it in.