Some Final Issues to Check before Essay Submission

The following items are common mistakes I see in student essays, and they're pretty easy to attend to as you fine-tune your work and prepare to hand it in for a grade.

☐ Is your paper formatted correctly? (1-inch margins all around, pages numbered, correct header, correct font size and type, etc.) Ignoring these says to the prof: "I don't care that much about my work" and/or "I ignored your requirements."

☐ Is your paper at least as long as the minimum required number of pages? If you've been asked to submit a paper that's at least 4 pages, remember that 3½ pages do not equal 4 pages—they're 3½ pages. Time to go back and develop your arguments more.

☐ Is your subject named in the introduction paragraph? Except in rare instances where you're trying to build suspense on the reader's part, do not delay specifying your subject until the body of the essay. Name your subject in the introduction.

☐ Is your subject renamed in the conclusion? One way a reader knows he or she is reading a conclusion—as opposed to a body paragraph—is he or she sees the subject named again, near the start of the conclusion. This implicitly signals the paper is coming to a close.

☐ Avoid clichés 100% of the time. There are <u>no</u> exceptions ("flat as a pancake," "cool as cucumber," etc.).

☐ Do not use the empty, over-used claim "_____ is always there for me" (or any variation thereof). I will write in the margins "Where? Where is _____?" I will also hold your argument in lower esteem. Use a more specific, better claim (*e.g.*, "_____ supports me in my times of need" or "_____ is always available for help when I need . . . ")

☐ Do not use "&" in any paper in this class. You are writing a college-level essay, not a text message.

☐ Do you know the difference between a hyphen (-) and a dash (— or --)? Check this sheet and you'll see correct examples of both.

☐ Contractions (*e.g.*, "don't" for "do not") do not bother me. Will all due respect, ignore the high school teacher who told you never to use contractions.

☐ Do not use "you" unless you, the writer, are referring directly to me, the reader. If you are using "you" to refer to someone else or a group of people, use a more specific, more accurate word (*e.g.*, someone, people, etc.).

☐ Do not use slang when a more specific, appropriate word or phrase is a better choice: "~~pissed me off~~" vs. "angered me" for instance.

☐ Do you know the difference between "*e.g.*" and "*i.e.*"? When one wishes to indicate that examples are forthcoming, *e.g.* is used, because *e.g.* stands for *exempli gratia* (Latin for "for example"). When one wishes to clarify meaning, one uses *i.e.*, which stands for *id est* (Latin for "that is").

☐ Do not use phrases like "my friend" or "my friends" without naming the people, too. What is your friend's name? Name your hometown, name your teacher, name your dog. Be specific!

☐ Do take 5 to 10 minutes to proofread your printed paper. I suggest holding a blank piece of paper just under the line you're reading. This will help you focus on the line you're checking.

- Do simply write in corrections by hand (pen or pencil is fine). It's not worth reprinting a whole page or even a whole essay for a few simple corrections. I actually like it when I see a few corrections written in by hand: It shows me the student cared enough to proofread the essay in the final stages of the process. Most of us proofread more effectively, too, on paper than we do on screen.

- Do read your work out loud to yourself while you proofread. It's amazing how effective this can be. Sure, you may feel a little self-conscious, and I wouldn't suggest doing this at Mass, for instance, but hearing your words as your eyes move across the page is a great way to catch mistakes.