

Top Fifteen Grammar Problems



Writing 2101

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Week 2

#1 - Topic and concluding sentences

task: read all first sentences => get the main content of the article.

- A topic sentence is (usually) the first sentence of a paragraph. *it can be 2nd, 3rd ... technically.*
- The topic sentence needs to say what the paragraph is about. *big overall take away of the para*
- It also needs to relate the paragraph to thesis or overall purpose of the paper.
- Often, topic sentences do not do one or both of these things.
- The concluding or final sentence of the paragraph should do the same thing.



Topic Sentence Examples

- TOPIC: Why has voter turnout in Canada declined since 1960?
- THESIS: Voter turnout in Canada has declined since 1960 because of voter apathy, increasing cynicism and lack of civic education. ↓
- TOPIC SENTENCE: The most important reason that voter turnout has declined in Canada since 1960 is voter apathy.

What would be a good concluding sentence?



#2 – Paragraph Length

- A paragraph focuses on one idea.
- It begins with a topic sentence.
- It ends with a concluding sentence.



Paragraph Length Information

- In an essay, a paragraph should not be longer than a page.
- In an essay, a paragraph should not be shorter than a page.
- When to begin a new paragraph:
 - Introduction of a new argument or concept
 - Next step in argument
 - Logical pause
 - 200 or so words

Why should we avoid paragraphs that are shorter than 150 words and longer than one page?



*150-200 words
- para*

#3 - Sentence Fragments

- Every sentence has a subject, verb and object.
- The verb is the action in the sentence.
- The subject is the thing that does the action.
- The object is thing that receives the action.
- Sometimes, a sentence is missing a subject, verb or object.

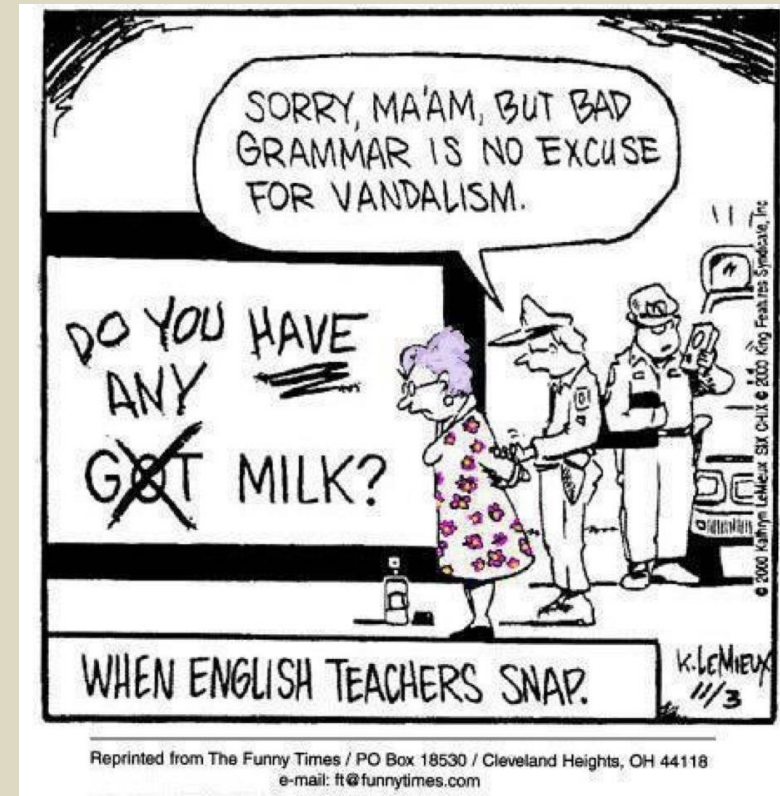
The professor	teaches	the students.
<u>subject</u>	verb	<u>object</u>
doing action		receiving action
John	washes	the dishes.
subject	verb	object
doing action		receiving action

Sentence Fragment Example

verb
↓
X A mock class to your parents
or friends on the exam
material?

✓ Give a mock class to your
parents or friends on the
exam material.

verb missing
↓
X The exam was unfair. Super
hard for no reason.



*a sentence does not need to follow the order
of subject verb object*

#4 - Awkward Sentence Structure

- The sentence is confusing due to problematic construction.
 - Sometimes, students “flip” the object and subject.
 - Sometimes, students misplace adverbs, adjectives, phrases or modifiers (a phrase that makes a change to a sentence), which can sometimes create a dangling modifier.



Awkward Sentence Example

- × Better than cramming everything you need to know the night before, studying a little bit each day will yield solid results.
- ✓ It is better to study a little bit each day than to cram everything you need to know the night before your exam.
- × For lunch, I had a hot plate of chicken. *which one is hot?*
- × Because they are often arrogant, students frequently do not like their professors.



#5 - Long Sentences

- A sentence is one complete idea.
- Sentences with multiple or repetitive ideas can be confusing.



Long Sentence Example

- X Study your notes in several different orders because the exam will not follow the order of the lectures, so you need to mix things up to make sure that your understanding is as good as you think it is.
- ✓ Study your notes in several different orders. The exam will not follow the order of the lectures. Mix things up to make sure that your understanding is as good as you think it is.



Long Sentence Example

I was late because my alarm did not go off, and then I could not find my textbook, and then I missed the bus, so I had to walk to campus, and then my roommate called me to tell me they had my textbook, so I had to go back to get it, and then I missed the bus again!

Statement
Command
Exclamation
Question

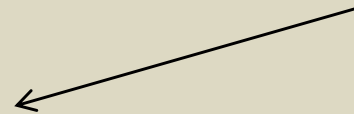
#6 - Introducing Quotes

- Sometimes, students drop quotes into their paper without providing an introduction, or context.

operation in the Arctic. The policy is not overly ambitious (as is the case with earlier Council agreements). [States pledge to give foreign scientists access to their territory for scientific purposes, as well as “platforms, material, samples, data and equipment.”⁵ David Bolton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, said in a briefing, “There have been times in the past when permissions that scientists seek to do scientific research in another country have not been granted or not been granted as readily as need be.”⁶ This agreement makes the Council stronger. Any institution that can be a

Introducing Quotes Example

Introduction : giving context.



- As the popular *Faculty Focus* newsletter says, “Teams don’t lounge around and then have one marathon practice the day before the game.”

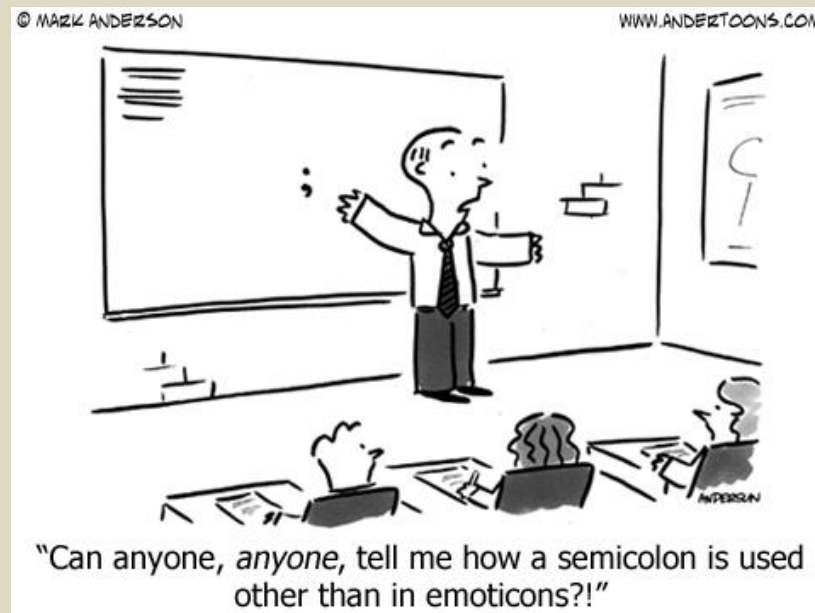


Why should you introduce quotes?

Quote

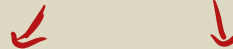
#7 - Colons

- Semi-colons link two complete independent clauses. •
- Semi-colons link together items in a list that are multiple words. ;
- Colons introduce lists.
- Colons also can link together two independent clauses if one idea follows from the other. •



Colon Example

independent (complete).



✓ You need to study every day; this class requires great dedication.

*introduce
a list*

✓ You need to do many things to do well in this class: study every day for several hours; stay on top of your readings; contribute to our online class discussions, and; ask the professor if you do not understand something.

✓ I did everything I could to get ready for the exam: study, read and pray.

*indicate
the reason.*

✓ This exam is going to be really hard: this professor has a reputation for giving unfair tests.

*the colon introduce
a list; but semi colon
cannot.*

X I did what I could, it wasn't enough to pass the test.

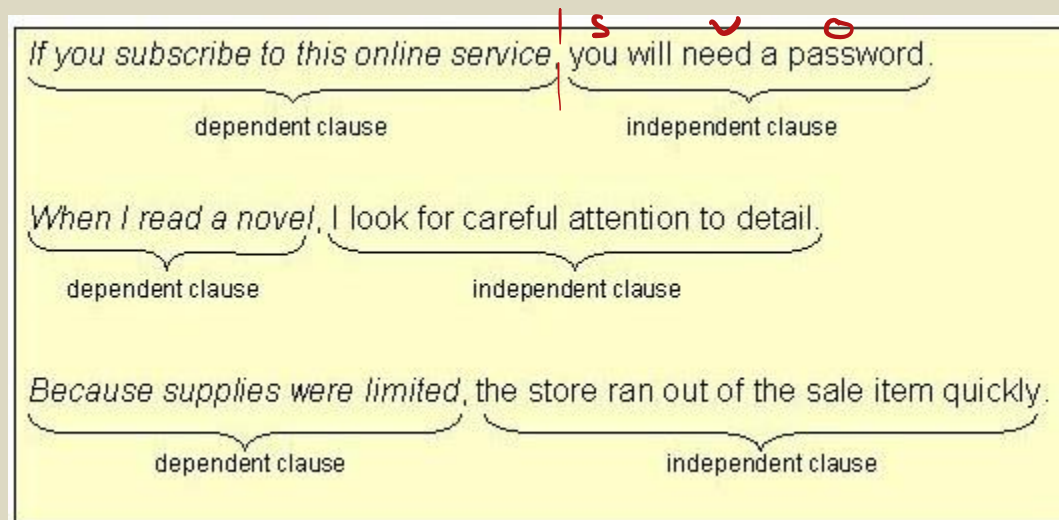
; : ← both works here



#8 – Comma Splice

- An independent clause is a group of words in a sentence that could stand on their own as a complete sentence.
- A dependent clause is a group of words that could not stand on their own as a complete sentence.
- A comma separates an independent clause and a dependent clause.

A common mistake is to use a comma to separate two independent clauses. This error is a comma splice.



Comma Splice Example



- Here is an example of a comma splice:
 - I always get up early on Sunday, I like to begin the day with a walk.
- We cannot separate these two independent clauses with a comma. We can use a period, conjunction, semi-colon or colon.
 - I always get up early on Sunday. I like to begin the day with a walk.
 - I always get up early on Sunday because I like to begin the day with a walk.
 - I always get up early on Sunday; I like to begin the day with a walk.
 - I always get up early on Sunday: I like to begin the day with a walk.

↑
; / . / linking words

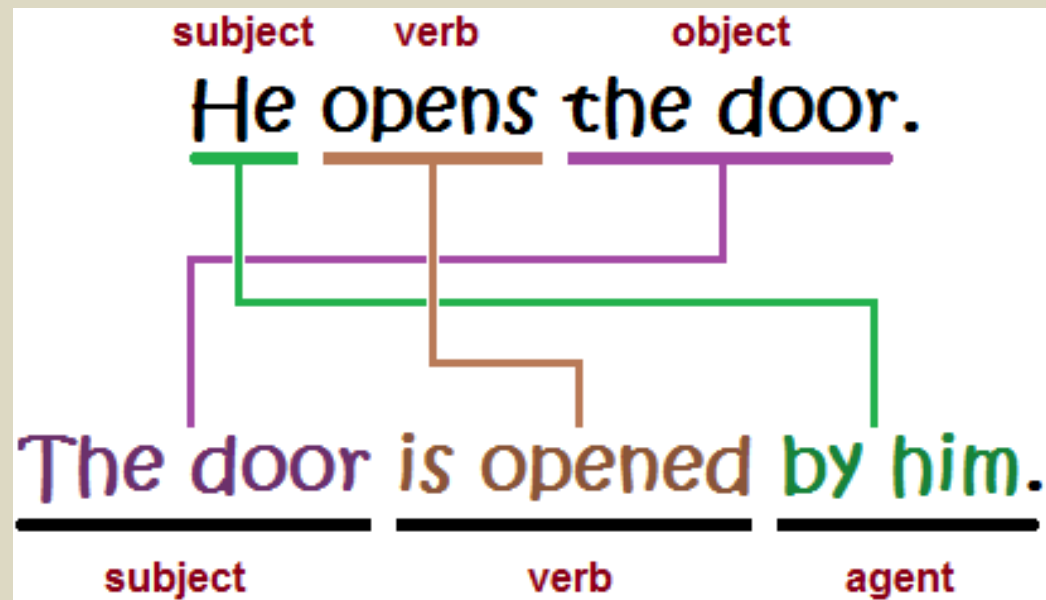
Comma Splice Example

- Does each sentence contain a comma splice, or not?
 - I worked really hard on Friday, I am too tired to go out.
 - ✓ – It was a fantastic movie, a true masterpiece of filmmaking.
 - I don't know why I do so badly on tests, I guess I'm just not a good test taker.



#9 – Passive Voice

- Passive voice occurs when the object of the sentence has become the subject.
- The object is performing the action, rather than the subject.
- The sentence lacks a proper subject.



Passive Voice Examples

- “The road was crossed by the chicken.”
- “The road” is the object, yet it is performing the action (being crossed).
- “The chicken” is the subject, in that the sentence is really about something done by the chicken.
- “The chicken crossed the road.”



Passive Voice Examples

- X Key concepts should be emphasized.
- ✓ You should emphasize key concepts.
- X The book was written by Charles Dickens.
- ✓ Charles Dickens wrote the book.
- X The students were bored by the professor's lecture.

be + past tense verbs.



Passive Voice Examples

- The passive voice can be okay when the subject of the sentence is unclear or abstract.
 - At the university, it was decided that classes should begin no earlier than 8:30 am. ← *who decided is unclear*
 - A new record temperature was set in London yesterday. ←
- However, use the passive voice sparingly!
it is not an error.

Why?

It is "less lively".



#10 – That vs. Which

- Use “that” when giving information essential to the sentence.
- Use “which” when giving extra information in the sentence.
 - “Which” follows a comma, except when part of a prepositional phrase (in which) or used as a question word.

GRAMMAR RULES

Which vs. That

If the sentence doesn't need the clause that the word in question is connecting, use *which*. If it does, use *that*.

That vs. Which Example

- ✓ He had a watch that made noise when it ticked.
- ✓ He had a nice watch, which made noise when it ticked.
- X He had a watch, which is made of gold.

or which => that

THAT VS. WHICH
THAT VS. WHICH
THAT VS. WHICH
THAT VS. WHICH
THAT VS. WHICH
THAT VS. WHICH

The class is three hours, the third of which will be our tutorial.

Which hour of class is going to be the tutorial?

The third hour of class is boring, which is our tutorial.

#11 – This + Noun

- When beginning a sentence with the word “this,” it is best to put a noun before the verb.
- Otherwise, a sentence beginning with “this” and a verb can be confusing.



THIS IS **US**

This + Noun Example

- X The movie started at 4:00. This was not good!
- X This is true because of the positive relationship.
- ✓ The movie started at 4:00. This time was not good!
- ✓ This fact is true because of the positive relationship.
- X This is the hardest test you will ever write.



#12 - Using Colloquial Language

- Colloquial terms are informal phrases, metaphors, slang or expressions we use in everyday language.
- Examples:
 - Penny-pincher
 - Pass the buck
 - Eat my dust
 - There's more than one way to skin a cat
 - I wasn't born yesterday

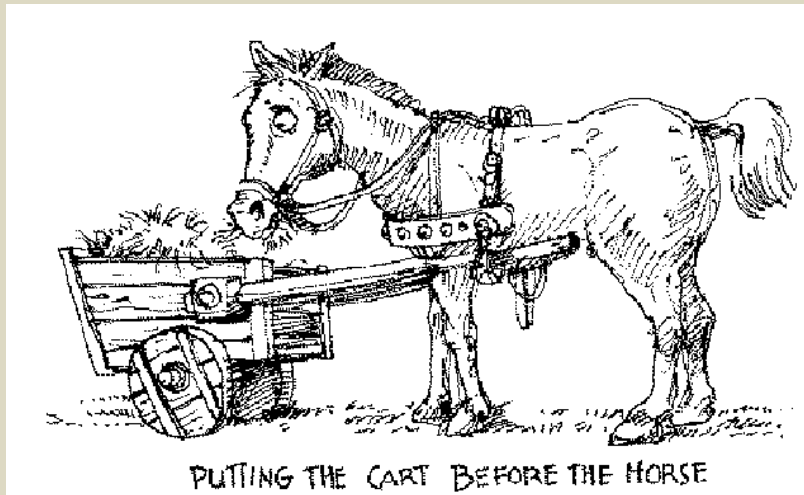


Can you think of others?

Colloquial Language Example

- X Study groups also allow you to fill in gaps and ensure you did not put the cart before the horse.
- ✓ Study groups also allow you to fill in gaps and ensure your understanding is as good as you think it is.

Why?



#13 - Unclear Sentence

- Sometimes, the sentence is missing a word that makes its meaning unclear.

Elizabeth told Amanda
that she had a problem.

Who had a problem?



Unclear Sentence Example

X However, a study from Concordia found that students do better when they are relaxed.

✓ However, a study from Concordia found that students do better on exams when they are relaxed.

X I need to do this exam badly!

**I like
cooking my family
and my pets.**

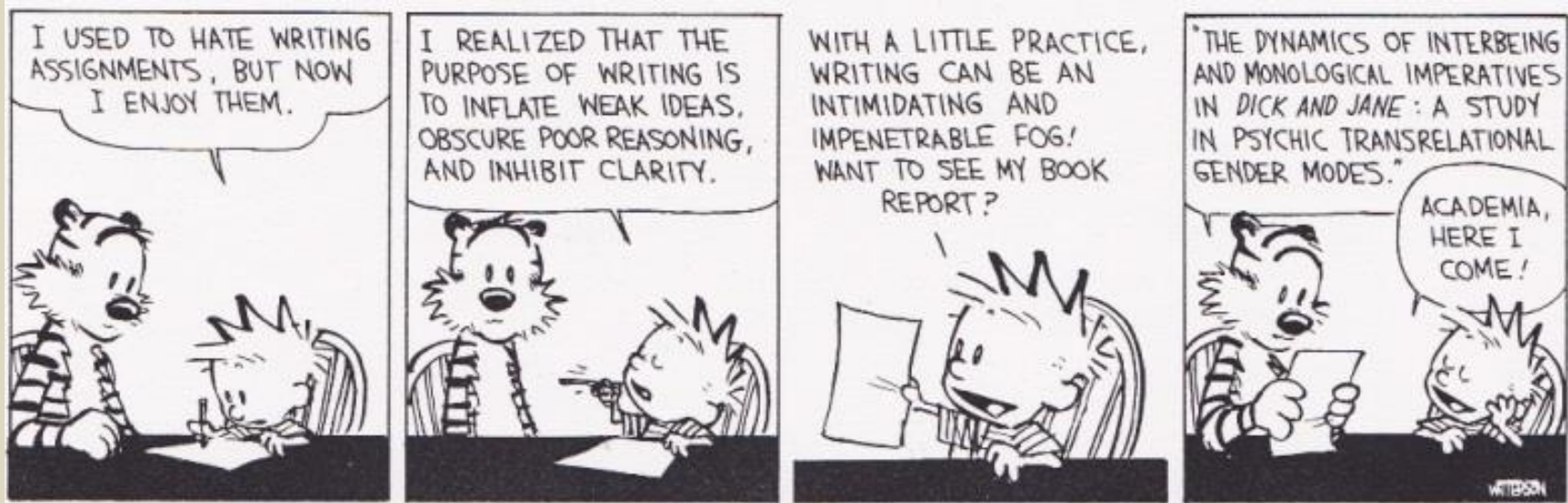
**Use commas.
Don't be a psycho.**



#14 - Paragraph is Hard to Follow

- Often in undergraduate papers, it is hard to follow the paragraph and understand all of the ideas.
- To fix, add “signal” words (i.e. First, Second, Third).

What are some advantages and disadvantages to this technique?



Signal Word Example

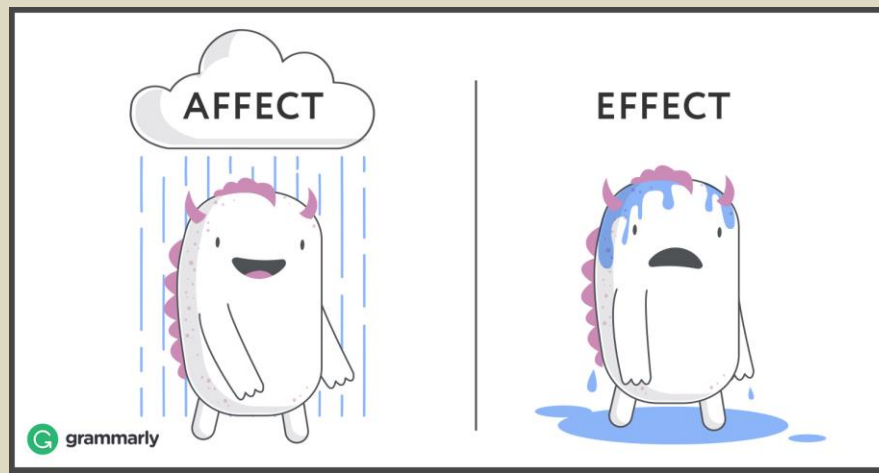
The main reason that voter turnout has declined in Canada since 1960 is voter apathy. There are three reasons for this apathy. First, the Watergate scandal in the United States during the early 1970s taught many people that politicians are untrustworthy. Second, people have more education on politics than the past, leading to more sophisticated understandings of civics. Third, the proliferation of media shines an ever-brighter spotlight on political corruption.

logical, easy to follow

feels more like a list rather than a para.



#15 – Affect vs. Effect

- “Affect” is a verb
 - “Effect” is usually a noun
-
- ✓ Tiredness affected the outcome of the game.
 - ✓ Tiredness had an effect on the outcome of the game.



Affect vs. Effect Example

- We know that compound A has an (affect/effect) on compound B, but we do not know if it will have any (affect/effect) on compound C. So, our new hypothesis is: compound B (affects/effects) the stability of compound C. What (affect/effect) it has on compound D is a matter for future research.

Affect	Effect
Verb. To change something or someone. <ul style="list-style-type: none">How does smoking <u>affect</u> your lungs?The flood <u>affected</u> the crops.The loud music <u>affected</u> her ability to concentrate. 	Noun. The result of the change.  <ul style="list-style-type: none">The <u>effects</u> of a healthy diets are good for the body.The medication had no side <u>effects</u>. Verb. To effect change. Sally hoped that the Prime Minister would <u>effect</u> change in her country.

Ten More Quick Ones

- Use dashes the same way as a semicolon or colon
 - The woman left quickly – she did not even remember her coat.

3 **Using Dashes**

instead of a colon, a semicolon, or an ellipsis

One fish eludes Lee – a decent bass. ✓

↑

replaces a colon (:)

Don't eat wild mushrooms – it's too risky. ✓

↑

replaces a semicolon (;)

It wasn't a boar. It was – a tiger! ✓

↑

replaces an ellipsis (...)

Ten More Quick Ones

- Use brackets the same way as commas
 - The Toyota Corolla (complete with heated seats) is a great car in the winter months.

Square Brackets with Quotations

1 to explain something in a quotation...

"You can't take it [your money] with you." ✓

explains "it"

2 to replace something in a quotation...

"You can't take [your money] with you." ✓

replaces "it"

3 with three dots (ellipsis) to show omitted text

He said: "Yes [...] it is achievable." ✓

The ellipsis shows the original quotation was longer.



4 with *sic* to show the text is as per the original

He wrote: "Those are my principals [sic]." ✓

should be "principles"

Ten More Quick Ones

- Hyphenate words that are compound adjectives or compound nouns (i.e., when two words form one adjective or noun).
 - I live in off-campus housing.
 - I live in housing off campus.

Hyphenate all self-compounds whether they are adjectives or nouns:

self-respect

self-esteem

self-paced

Ten More Quick Ones

- In a formal essay, you should write the word “per cent,” rather than the % symbol.
 - It is 65 per cent new content.

*canadian style.
percent => American*



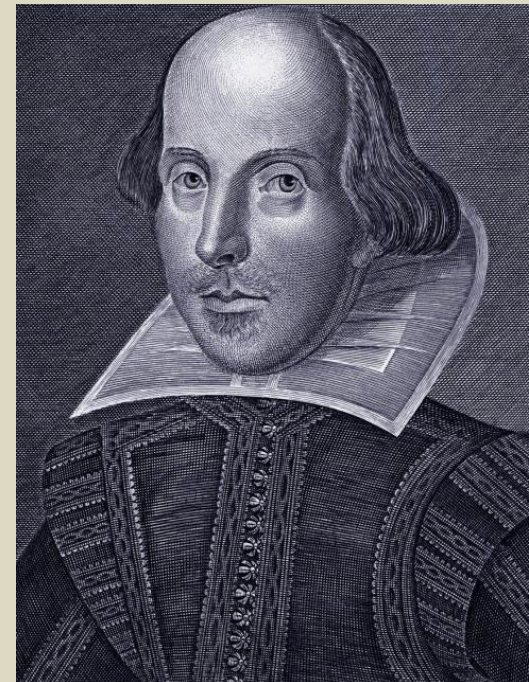
Ten More Quick Ones

- Write out numbers between one and nineteen.
 - Write the numeral for all numbers 20 and up.
 - This rule does not apply to figures (money or per cents).

ALEX J. CUSTOMER 1234 ANY STREET YOUR CITY, STATE, 12345-5678		Date <u>7/6/2017</u>	101
Pay to the Order of	<u>Electric Company</u>	\$	<u>130.45</u>
<u>One hundred thirty and 45/100</u>		Dollars	
Memo	<u>July electric bill</u> <u>Alex J. Customer</u>		

Ten More Quick Ones

- Refer to an author's last name in text.
 - X In "Hamlet," William's main theme is revenge.
 - ✓ In "Hamlet," Shakespeare's main theme is revenge.



Ten More Quick Ones

- When summarizing an article, refer to the author's name rather than the title of the article, publication or institution.
 - X “COVID-19 in Canada: Experience and Response” argues that part of Canada’s strong COVID-19 response owes to political leadership.
 - X A study from the University of Toronto argues that part of Canada’s strong COVID-19 response owes to political leadership.
 - X The Journal of the American Medical Association argues that part of Canada’s strong COVID-19 response owes to political leadership.
 - ✓ Detsky and Bogoch (2020) argue that part of Canada’s strong COVID-19 response owes to political leadership.

Ten More Quick Ones

- A journal refers to an ongoing publication of regular articles; a journal article is one article within a journal.

X Detsky and Bogoch's "COVID-19 in Canada: Experience and Response" is a journal that evaluates the government response to COVID-19 in Canada.

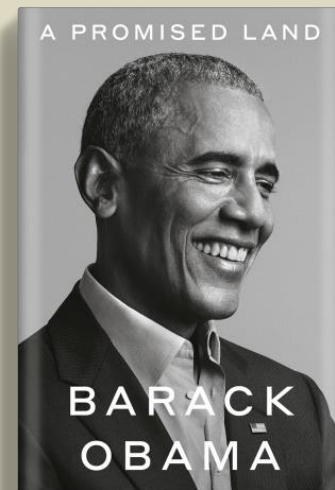
✓ Detsky and Bogoch's "COVID-19 in Canada: Experience and Response" is a journal article that evaluates the government response to COVID-19 in Canada.

Ten More Quick Ones

- A novel is a fictional work. A book that is not fictional is just called a book in text.

X *A Promised Land* is a novel by Barack Obama that gives an account of his life and time as president.

✓ *A Promised Land* is a book by Barack Obama that gives an account of his life and time as president.



Ten More Quick Ones

- Do not use contractions in a formal essay.

X In this paper, I'm going to argue that government of Canada's response to COVID-19 hasn't been adequate.

✓ In this paper, I am going to argue that government of Canada's response to COVID-19 has not been adequate.

Common Contractions in English

aren't - are not	I'm - I am	that's - that is
can't - cannot	I've - I have	there's - there is
didn't - did not	isn't - is not	we're - we are
don't - do not	let's - let us	what's - what is
he'll - he will	she'll - she will	you'll - you will

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