

A note on writing...

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to turn in some form of writing assignment as part of your final grade. This assignment may be a formal research paper, an essay addressing a specific question or set of questions, or a take home exam consisting of a series of short answers. Every semester, I am always surprised to see that students make the same mistakes in their writing. Some of these mistakes are simple errors due to poor editing or little effort. Other mistakes may be the result of previous instruction, bad writing habits, or language skills.

To address these writing issues, I have developed this guide to make you aware of the common writing mistakes that students make. Use this guide as a resource to help improve your writing in and out of this class – it will teach you what to look for when you are editing your work. However, with this guide comes responsibility. The common mistakes that are addressed in this guide will **NOT** be tolerated. If you have any questions related to what is in this guide, please do not hesitate to talk to Dr. Ruggiano.

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Section 1: Common Errors in College Writing

Errors in Grammar



- Spoken and written speech are not the same. Many times when we talk, we use idioms, contractions, or slang that are not appropriate for writing assignments. Do the following sentences appear appropriate for a college essay written for a course assignment?
 - It was a real bummer when Jurgis was wrongfully sent to jail in *The Jungle*.
 - I was really sad after reading about the effects of pesticides in *Silent Spring* because I'm a big fan of salads.
- Homophones: Did you use the correct version of:
 - There, their, or they're?
 - You're or your?
 - Here or hear?
 - Affect or effect? (This one is particularly difficult because each may be used either as a verb or a noun.)

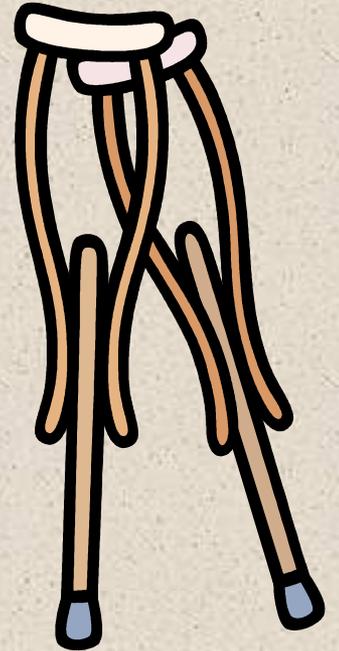
More on Grammar...

- Long paragraphs: If your paragraph is longer than a single page, chances are it is too long. I have seen numerous cases where paragraphs last several pages. Each paragraph should address a single topic. If you think that your paragraph may be too long, assess to see if more than one topic is being addressed. You may be able to take the same paragraph and separate it into a few smaller ones.
- In addition to proofreading for grammatical errors, also make sure that your paper is free from spelling errors. Sometimes we misspell the word we intended to use, but spell-check does not pick up on it (for example, accidentally typing “smart” instead of “start.” Smart is a real word, so Microsoft Word will not pick up on it as a spelling error).
- Dartmouth College provides examples of the 20 most common writing errors for college students at:
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/grammar.shtml

Section 2:
Using Evidence to Support
Arguments

Using Support for Your Own Ideas

- Many students demonstrate difficulty with striking the right balance of their own ideas and quotes/paraphrases used for support.
- Writing assignments are not designed for you to cut and paste another author's work. Your instructor wants to know what YOU think, not the person who wrote the text.
- So, how do we use evidence from texts, books, and articles to properly support our arguments in our writing?



Supportive Evidence: A General Guide

- First, make your original argument to the reader.
- Second, use the supportive evidence in the form of a quote or a paraphrase, citing the original author.
- Then, make it clear to the reader why that quote or paraphrase supports your argument.
- Online resources for using evidence to support your arguments:
 - <http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~english/evidence.htm>
 - <http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/pdfs/MicrosoftWord-ThreeWaystoSupport.pdf>
 - <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/argument.html>

Section 3:
**Writing Issues for Students Who
Have English as a Second Language**

English as a Second Language (ESL) Students¹



- Students who are not native English speakers may have particular trouble with writing assignments.
- Students may not realize that common mistakes are made by ESL students in their writing. By identifying these common problems, it may be possible to write clearer papers and be a better proofreader for your own work.
- One way to improve your writing is to read your paper out loud. When you read out loud, you make natural pauses and emphasis that may be lost when reading and rereading your own writing. By reading out loud, you are more likely to identify sentences and wording that may be unclear to your reader. While reading your writing out loud is good practice for all students, it is especially helpful for ESL students.

Common Writing Mistakes of ESL Students¹

<p>Grammar: Verbs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- tense (tense shift)- form- agreement- combinations	<p><i>He had loose clothes so nobody can see his body.</i> <i>He didn't talked so clearly. When he laid down his neck broken.</i> <i>Many people was afraid of him.</i> <i>But Dr Treves helped him having an easier life.</i></p>
<p>Grammar: Nouns and Pronouns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- singular/plural- articles/determiners- agreement	<p><i>He had 2 operation to take out the lumps of skin.</i> <i>His left hand was normal and right hand was size of elephant's trunk.</i> <i>He took off his glasses and put it on the table.</i></p>
<p>Grammar: Sentence Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- word order- reported speech- sentence fragments- run-on sentences	<p><i>The guy that took care of him gave him in the hospital his own room.</i> <i>I want to know how did Joseph Merrick make such a beautiful model.</i> <i>Because his right leg was like an elephant's.</i> <i>August 5 in Lee Street Joseph Merrick was born when he was born his body was terrible.</i></p>
<p>Usage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- word choice- collocation	<p><i>The driver flew the plane to Miami.</i> <i>He went to Belgium with the train.</i></p>
<p>Mechanics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- spelling- punctuation- capitalization	<p><i>He's name was Joseph Merrick. On his back their was a ball of skin.</i> <i>His left hand was like a 10 year old girls hand.</i> <i>He couldn't walk like a Human.</i></p>

Online Resources for ESL Student Writing

- Common Errors in English Usage:
<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html>
- Perdue University Website on Finding Common Writing Errors:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/02>

Section 4: Plagiarism

What exactly is it and
how do I avoid it?



Plagiarism: An Overview²

Plagiarism is defined as the presentation of words or ideas from an existing source as if they were your own work. In academic circumstances, plagiarism may be divided into three categories:

- Copying directly from another source without using quotation marks or a footnote that cited the original source;
- Changing a few words in a passage from another source without using quotation marks or a footnote;
- Putting ideas (judgments, opinions, inferences experiments, etc.) from another source in your own words without using a footnote.

Examples of Plagiarism

Here is the original wording from a sample of text:

A nuclear explosion can readily ignite fires in either an urban or rural setting. The flash of thermal radiation from the nuclear explosion, which has a spectrum similar to that of sunlight, accounts for about a third of the total energy yield of the explosion. The flash is so intense that a variety of combustible materials are ignited spontaneously at ranges of 10 kilometers or more from a one-megaton air burst detonated at a nominal altitude of a kilometer. The blast wave from the explosion would extinguish many of the initial fires, but it would also start numerous secondary fires by disrupting open flames, rupturing gas lines and fuel storage tanks and causing electrical and mechanical sparks.

The following slides represent ways that this text might be plagiarized:

Copying

If a writer merely copies this text, without using quotation marks and a footnote, he/she would be guilty of the most blatant type of plagiarism. A writer would not be stealing from the original if he/she used quotation marks and a footnote; but if a paper had many such quoted passages, the writer would be leaning too heavily on the thoughts and words of others. The purpose of writing is to express your own thoughts and feelings, not someone else's.

Patchwork Plagiarism

If a writer "borrows" phrases and clauses from the original source and weaves them into his own writing, he/she is plagiarizing.

The next slide compares the original text written by Richard P. Turco with a plagiarized version written by a student.

Original text by Richard P. Turco:

A nuclear explosion can readily ignite fires in either an urban or rural setting. The flash of thermal radiation from the nuclear explosion, which has a spectrum similar to that of sunlight, accounts for about a third of the total energy yield of the explosion. The flash is so intense that a variety of combustible materials are ignited spontaneously at ranges of 10 kilometers or more from a one-megaton air burst detonated at a nominal altitude of a kilometer. The blast wave from the explosion would extinguish many of the initial fires, but it would also start numerous secondary fires by disrupting open flames, rupturing gas lines and fuel storage tanks and causing electrical and mechanical sparks.

Plagiarized student version (The “borrowed” sections are in red):

An explosion from a nuclear bomb can start fires in either an urban or rural setting. The light from the explosion, which has a spectrum similar to that of sunlight, makes up about 1/3 of the energy produced. The light is so intense that a variety of combustible materials are ignited spontaneously at ranges of 10 KM or more from a one-megaton air burst detonated at a nominal altitude of a kilometer. Although the wave of air produced by the blast would put out many of the first fires, it would also start many other fires by disrupting open flames, rupturing gas lines and fuel storage tanks and causing electrical and mechanical sparks.

Why plagiarize?

The writer of the second version of Turco's prose could stay within the legal limit by putting quotation marks around all the original working, but the result would appear to be haphazard, ill-thought-out work. Avoid the patchwork, pasted-together job. Either quote directly, or paraphrase. In either case, use footnotes to cite the original author.

Resources for Referencing (and APA Formatting)

- FIU's Center for Excellence in Writing's resource page offering tips and guidelines for writing:
<http://w3.fiu.edu/writingcenter/resources/resources.htm>
- Purdue University's website offering a Power Point on how to cite referenced material using APA style:
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/17/>
- University of Delaware's writing center website offering handouts on various writing issues INCLUDING how to cite referenced material using APA style: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/student/handouts/index.html>

References

1. Shoebottom, P. (2007). Understanding writing mistakes. Frankfurt International School. Frankfurt, Germany.

<http://esl.fis.edu/learners/advice/mistakes.htm>

2. The information presented here on plagiarism was taken **directly** from the University of Delaware Writing Center's website on plagiarism. It is not being presented as my own original material.

