

English 102  
Prof. Carrillo  
Essay Writing Tips

For any essay to be written, you want to focus on organization and structure. Organize paragraphs according to main points or sequence of story's ideas. Structure accordingly, making sure to have a clear introduction with a dominant thesis. You may want to search your textbook for essay models to see how they begin. Let the reader know what will be discussed; thus, you may want to summarize your main points. Develop a clear, controlling thesis statement to guide and give argument to your paper. Avoid the first person in your introduction as well as throughout the whole essay.

In your paper, develop your ideas using the text (poem, story, play). Any general statement must be supported by ideas from text or use direct quotations. You may use select words or phrases or even whole sentences, but not passages or paragraphs. As noted, make sure to connect the ideas; do not separate. Do not quote information without a signal into idea or an explanation. For example:

On the next morning Goodman Brown is indeed a changed man. Following his "fearful dream," he changes from a relatively naïve, innocent young man recently married to Faith to a "distrustful if not a desperate man."

The first sentence points to a general idea while the second sentence serves to support it using carefully chosen words. Not every idea needs to be supported; only the most important points relevant to thesis, for it is your thesis that needs to be proved to your reader.

As in every essay, end it with a succinct conclusion. Do not begin with "In conclusion," "In summary," "To conclude," "To sum up" or any other phrase similar to these lead ins. Use a transition that points to closure indirectly like "Clearly, then," "Therefore," "Accordingly," or "Indeed."

Your essays **MUST** be typed, double-spaced, one inch margins. Please provide a title page. **PROOFREAD. NO FOLDERS.**

The following are helpful refresher notes on writing style. This compilation is taken from a former professor at UCLA. As she notes, the old trusted book for those whose writing skills may be rusty use Strunk and White, The Elements of Style. The point to these problems encountered is to aid in your need to proofread and correct your errors before the paper is turned in for a teacher's perceptions on your thoughts. Taking time to read will go a long way in the end. Do not allow your professors to correct grammar. A literature teacher (even a composition teacher) would appreciate reading your ideas not correcting them. Sometimes your keen perceptions get lost in faulty grammar and stylistic problems. Keep in mind, too, that this only lowers your grade.

---

### “Grammatical ‘Sins’ and Stylistic Abominations”

#### Passive Voice

Whenever possible, avoid the passive voice, that is, any combination of “to be” (is, were, was, has been, would be, might be, are) plus the past participle of another verb (participated, granted thought). Recast the entire sentence into active voice.

“From the time they were children, women were conditioned to think of themselves as the weaker sex. Women were also thought of as the great sufferers.” Who thinks? Who conditions? Recast: From childhood, society conditions women to think of themselves as the weaker sex and as patient sufferers. Ah! Notice the clarity, directness, even a single sentence as opposed to two.

#### Over-use of the verb TO BE:

Find more vibrant verbs to substitute for “to be.” Verbs make the most substantial difference in your prose. Choose them wisely. You might also watch out for over-use of “signifies,” “reveals,” “shows.” Be creative and use the dictionary or thesaurus.

“The scene that follows Rachel’s exposure is the most moving scene in the novel. It is an illustration of the hypocrisy of Christian ‘respectability,’ the power of friendship, and the unfair treatment a ‘fallen woman’ receives.” Redone: “The moving scene that follows Rachel’s exposure illustrates the hypocrisy of Christian ‘respectability,’ the power of friendship, and the unfair treatment of a ‘fallen woman.’”

#### Present tense and Narrative Style: Retelling the Story

In writing about novels, use the present tense, because a work of fiction is a living, not a dead object. The present tense invigorates your language; the past tense throws a dim, nostalgic light over your analysis. Often when you slip into the past tense, you also begin to “retell the story.” In providing evidence, you should select only the most salient points to support your ideas, rather than telling your reader the plot (events, happenings) all over again. Be wary of descriptive recountings. Instead, be affirmative - - live in the present.

“Christie’s lonely heart yearned to reach out to Rachel, for she could read in the girl’s eyes that she too suffered loneliness.” Recast: “Christie’s lonely heart yearns to reach out to Rachel, for she can read the loneliness in this girl’s eyes.” We even eliminated an unnecessary “that” clause from the end of this sentence.

“It is, there are,” and such like forms:

Avoid “it is,” “there are,” “there were,” “it was,” “there is,” “here is” because these forms invariably lead to “that” clauses and often to needless words. Frequently with such problems, you can easily eliminate the “it is” and the subsequent “that,” leaving yourself with a perfectly fine sentence.

“Higher education was a major step toward higher social status, and it was during this time that the problem of singleness took on new dimensions.” Recast: “During the nineteenth century, higher education became a stepping stone toward high social status and the problem of singleness took on new dimensions.” Or another sample: “Despite these efforts to ignore them, however, it is both her husband and her children who enter Edna’s thoughts clear to the end.” Redone: “Despite Edna’s efforts to ignore them, her husband and children intrude upon her thoughts even to the moment of death.”

“It is apparent, interesting, noteworthy, or whatever that”

Virtually the same problem as the previously defined “sin,” this form adds in an adjective, usually one with little meaning and usually a “cliché” or over-used and hackneyed phrase.

“It is apparent in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* that in the nineteenth century a woman’s only ambition in life was to be married comfortably and become a virtual slave to her husband. It is also apparent that the converse of this is true.” Recast: “In *Pride and Prejudice*, a woman’s only ambition is to marry comfortably and become a slave to her husband. The reverse may also be true that a man requires an accomplished wife of good social background to insure his happiness.” I also removed a passive voice construction and made that last nebulous sentence into a more concrete assertion.

Dangling “this”

After every dangling “this,” place a descriptive noun to identify the referent; otherwise, your reader must industriously sift back over the previous paragraph to find the “wandering” subject of your sentence. Better to repeat a word or to invent a succinct phrase than to frustrate your reader.

“After Christie renounces her acting career, she regains the admiration and faith of her colleagues. This camaraderie helps her to recognize her own susceptibility to an actress’s vanity and superiority.” Or: “Mr. Powers seemed truly concerned with Christie’s welfare when he spoke to her. This led her to attend his sermon where she made her final religious conversion.” Changed: “Because Mr. Powers seems truly concerned with Christie’s welfare, she heeds his sermon and undergoes a religious conversion.” Notice that I also transformed the past tense into present tense!!

### “That,” “what,” “how” Clauses:

Eliminate such clauses when noun phrases will function neatly and more concretely, with fewer words. “This (dangling again) also proved (past tense again) rewarding because the money that she earned enabled her to help Hepsey buy her family’s freedom.” Reconstructed: “This job as companion also proves rewarding, because Christie’s salary enables her to help Hepsey buy her family’s freedom.” I also eliminated a “dangling this,” the past tense, and a “that” clause with one simple revision.

### A few general notations: Do’s and Don’ts

Do not permit quotations to dangle at the end of paragraphs. Offer at least a sentence of commentary to bridge the gap to the next paragraph. You do not indent paragraphs after quotations, particularly if the paragraph comments immediately after the quote.

Do not end paragraphs (much less sentences) with prepositions (“for,” “to”).

Avoid “the fact that” and “being.”

Scorn clichéd words, such as “important,” “interesting,” “significant.”

Eliminate all forms of “realizes that,” “states that,” “says that” which invariably leads you into a quotation or into a recounting of what a character says. Often, you can put a “ and introduce the quotation or work the character’s observation more fluidly into your sentence. “Marmee says that plain cooking is ‘a useful accomplishment, which no woman should be without’ and that there came a time when she was truly grateful that she possessed not only ‘the will, but the power to cook wholesome food’ (pp. 136 & 273). Alcott also shows that all women cannot immediately and correctly perform their duties around the house, however.” Redone: Marmee lauds plain cooking as “a useful accomplishment, which no woman should be without” and recalls a time when she thankfully possessed not only “the will, but the power to cook wholesome food” (pp 136 & 273). But all women cannot immediately and correctly perform their household duties, as Meg’s experience illustrates.”

Finally, do not endlessly repeat “in the novel,” or “at this point in the novel” since the reader will know that we are discussing a fiction. Instead, if you must locate the reader, use a description of the action - - “When Mr. Bhaer proposes...”