
Manta Guide to Successful Writing

Essays that you write at home and research papers should not contain careless errors. Certain words and phrases are inappropriate for use in formal situations. While these words and phrases are commonly used for informal conversation; they are grammatically incorrect; they are empty expressions which add no meaning to a sentence; or they are redundant. Do your best to become familiar with this list of Please Don't and work to eliminate them.

Following are specific grammatical and usage errors that are unacceptable for take-home essays.

- Misspelled modifiers
- Sentence fragments
- Run-ons/ comma splices
- Parallel structure
- Tense shifts
- Contractions.

Check the rules for the following and be sure to use them correctly.

- Pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Pronoun reference
- Hyphenation at the end of a line
- Capitalization of titles
- Use of apostrophes
- Use of commas
- Punctuation of quotations
- Frequently misspelled words
- Problems with Usage
- Proper use of numbers/numerals
- Numbers/numerals
- Titles

Personal pronouns and abbreviations are too familiar and colloquial for informal or formal writing. Do not use any of the following:

- I, me, mine, myself (unless in a personal anecdote)
- You, Your (This an especially important rule. Do not use the second person you in academic writing.)**
- & (ampersand)
- Etc.
- b/c (when you mean because)
- Cause (when you mean because)
- w/o (when you mean without)

The following are examples of empty expressions. / Avoid using them.

This is	There is
That is	I think
Which is	I feel
Who is	I believe

Never use any of the following words or expressions in a formal essay:

Is when	This paper will explain
During the month	as will be shown
Due to the fact that	this quote shows
As a result of	this quote means
It seems as if	in this essay I will
At the present time	in this paper I will
Always there for me	the book I read was
Being as	in conclusion
Because of the fact that	As has been clearly shown
The reason is because	as anyone can see
Last but not least	for the reasons stated
First of all	as these examples show

The following are examples of empty modifiers. Avoid using the following words and expressions:

interesting	many	good or bad
really	awesome	things
A lot or lots	hopefully	stuff
very		

Redundancies are the needless repetition of words and ideas. Avoid using the following:

Continue further	visible to the eye
Necessary requirement	combine together
Rebound back	ten in number
Cooperate together	descend down
Each separate thing	revert back
Pretty in appearance	refer back
Exact same	center around
Sufficiently enough	

Judgment statements: Avoid using these or anything similar:

The best book	this great novel
A brilliant study	the best writer
A brilliant play	the most famous writer
A brilliant short story	

Attribution

Whenever including a quotation from a character in a work of literature, you must include attribution. In other words, you must tell who said the words and under what circumstances:

“I don’t think she ever loved [Tom],” Gatsby says to Nick, although he acknowledges that “She might have loved him just for a minute, when they were first married” (152).

Quotations must be embedded

Quotations should be used carefully, and integrated into your writing. Do not let the author of the work write your paper for you. Do not say “XYZ as the following quotation shows.” Do use quotations as evidence; do not use gigantic long passages. Any passage which takes up a quarter of the page is too long.

Documentation

When you quote a passage from a literary work, document the source of the quotation by giving page numbers for novels, short stories, etc. and by citing act, scene, and line numbers for plays, and line numbers for poetry. Make sure to use a handbook to find out how to document your sources.

EXAMPLE FROM A PLAY.

The audience recognizes the irony when Othello says to Iago, “This fellow’s of exceeding honesty, / and knows all qualities, with a learned spirit, / of human dealings” (3. 3. 274-276).

Unnecessary transitions

Points do not need to begin, “the next point is.” You do not need to say “Firstly,” “secondly,” and “lastly.” Do not start paragraphs with another reason is.” Do not close with “In conclusion.” Genuine transitions include ordinary words like the ones below. (Please see our transitions page for a complete list of appropriate transitions).

However	Because	Hence
Therefore	in addition to	Similarly

Spelling Names

Believe it or not, every year I receive papers which spell names wrong. I read about Arthur Miller and Heathcliff. **Double check the spelling of names.** Make sure to proofread your paper for accuracy. Careless errors like this will make it appear that your paper is rushed and was not drafted.

Literary Present tense

When writing about literature, **you must write in the present tense.** Characters in literature never lived, so they are not dead. They live forever and, like the figures on Keats’ Grecian Urn, ever act and suffer. When you shift tenses, it makes it difficult to read the paper.

Tense Shifts:

Do not shift tenses unnecessarily. Only shift tenses when you must. Shifting tenses in an essay creates confusion for the reader. If you begin your paper in past tense, you need to stay in the past tense. If you begin the paper in the present tense, you need to stay in the present tense. Avoid the future tense when you really mean the present tense. For example, look at the following sentence:

Martin Luther King Jr. would be an example of a nonviolent protester.
Martin Luther King Jr was an example of a nonviolent protester.

Would is an inappropriate verb for this sentence and creates confusion.

Do Not Narrate: Pursue an Investigation

You are investigating an idea in your paper. Think about what contributes to your investigation: Figurative language, characters, setting, specific lines/speeches, symbols, details, diction, and tone. Keep your idea unified but remember to investigate whether these aspects of the work support your idea. Do not use any narration of the story; this is not analytical. You do not have to prove you read the book by telling the story! Remember we all have read the work. We are not composing book reports but pursuing a connection or an idea.