

Notes on your essays:

CONTENT:

C1: CLARIFICATION: Your explanation is vague. Please clarify. Be specific.

C2: INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE: There is not enough “evidence” (logical reasoning, examples, statistics or whatever it is that you’re using) to support your main idea/thesis.

C3: THESIS: Where is your thesis? What one thing should I learn from this essay?

C4: SO WHAT? Answer the question: so what? What am I supposed to learn? Clarify please.

C5: LOGICAL FALLACY: There is a mistake in your reasoning process. There are oodles of these. Here are a few:

Slippery slope—one action will inevitably cause another (though not really in the real world)

Red Herring—getting off topic to distract the reader

Band-wagoning—lets all jump off the cliff like the lemmings. It’s not right just because everyone says so.

Ad-Hominem—attacking the author (irrelevantly) to distract from the argument

Poisoning the well—presenting a bias/emotional argument that causes the opposition to appear dishonest no matter what he/she says

There are many others: appeal to false authority, guilt by association, begging the question, false analogy, non-sequitur....the list goes on and on. See one of my many documents on Logical Fallacies. We went over this in class.

ORGANIZATION:

O1: TRANSITIONS: Transitions tell us the relationship between one idea and another. You need a transition between this word/phrase/idea and the next. Can be just a word/phrase but it might also need a bit more. Try for less if you can.

O2: ORDER: Why this order? It feels broken up. Or, perhaps you mentioned this idea earlier and are now coming back. Shouldn’t the two go together?

VOICE:

V1: BE YOURSELF: Many academic “voices” sound the same. I know mine tends to blend in with the rest, but try to be yourself---your formal self, that is. Don’t lose respect for the situation, but you don’t have to sound like everyone else. Put an interrupter in if you want. *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is a prime example. Look it up.

V2: PASSIVE VOICE: Passive voice is when you’ve taken the action from the subject and given it to the object.

Passive: The ball was kicked by Sally.

Active: Sally kicked the ball.

Mostly, you want to avoid the passive voice (which uses the “to be” verbs—is, am, are, was, were etc) because it’s wordy and weak. But there are times when, for style or rhetoric goals, you may want to use it. Be careful about it.

STYLE:

S1: WORD CHOICE (WC): Try rephrasing this/using a different word. Be concrete. Words like *beautiful* and *great* are meaningless because they’re different to everyone. The description might take longer and have a metaphor, but that’s a good thing usually.

S2: ADVERBS: The use of an adv. generally means you just need a better verb. Find a better verb. (There are some exceptions to this rule).

S3: CLICHÉ: Cliches are sayings that are overused to the point of ridiculousness. Be creative.

S4: VOCABULARY:

a: Make sure your tone is not too informal for academic writing. (I’m sorry, but very rarely are things “way cool” or even “way important” in school papers. Use more formal language. “Very interesting” etc...

b: However, keep in mind that sometimes the better word is smaller and/or simpler. I can tell when you’re using a thesaurus to sound smarter but you haven’t chosen the right synonym because you’re not using the word correctly.

S5: DEFINITIVE PHRASES:

a: better to be definitive (bold) than wimpy. Get rid of “might” and “seem” and such unless you’re saying that things must always happen a certain way and is uncertain in the circumstance you are speaking of. Avoid uncertainties where you can, instead of dancing around them. Try to take a stance.

b: So is a conjunction and a comparison word. “The bathroom was closed, so we had to find another.” And “I was so tired I fell asleep in my clothes—shoes and all.” If you say “I was so tired.” I sit there waiting for the rest of the thought. “So tired that what? You fell asleep mid-stride before getting to your bed?” Be careful with the word “so.”

FLUENCY:

F1: AWKWARD: Some phrases are just awkward. There are too many reasons to write down. I suggest playing with the wording/phrasing. Perhaps you used *that* or *to* too many times, or you repeated another word. Read it aloud. Does it sound harsh or smooth?

F2: WORDY: You can say this exact idea better with fewer words. Try it again.

F3: AGREEMENT:

a: You are using a singular word with a plural pronoun or visa-versa (the **student** may feel cheated if they don’t get a chance to prove their knowledge)

b: Your tense does not agree with the noun (She were the right girl).

c: The action or description in this sentence refers to the wrong pronoun. You may have too many “he”s or “she”s or “it”s in this sentence. Make sure the pronouns refer to the right noun.

d: Misplaced Modifier: words/phrases that modify (describe etc) something...you've misplaced yours. What's the difference?

"I almost failed every math class in high school"

"I failed almost every math class in high school."

They mean completely different things. The first says that you nearly failed, but passed, all math classes. The second says that you failed most. HINT: keep the modifiers close to the things they modify. Less likely to get lost that way.

e: DANGLING PARTICIPLES: a participle is often a noun that has been turned into an adjective by adding -ing (or -ed) and using them as a description rather than an action. "I stood there, holding my hand out in greeting."

e1: Dangling participles that describe the wrong thing because they're missing words. "*Flitting gaily from flower to flower, the football player watched the bee.*"¹

F4: NUMBERS:

a: **Write out the numbers one through one hundred.**

b: You may use numerals when decimals are involved.

c: Never start a sentence with a numeral. You must write it out.

F5: TENSE: Pick a tense and stick with it. Jumping all over the place gives me literary whiplash. Yes, you may move around in time as a story needs, but be careful to direct your reader properly.

GRAMMAR:

G1: COMMA SPLICE –improper use of a comma.

OPTION 1: You've tried to join two sentences with just a comma—not okay. Try using a conjunction, semi-colon or period.

OPTION 2: You need a comma here (likely, you've got a coordinating conjunction—and, but—but you did not include a comma).

G2: SEMI-COLON—improper use of semi-colon. You need two complete sentences here.

G3: QUOTATION—improper punctuation of a quote (if you've done a citation wrong, try the next page)

a: Use double quotes 99% of the time; single quotes are for when quoting within a quote.

b: Commas go to the left of quotes: he said, "blah blah blah," before returning....

c: Periods go to the left of quotes: "blah blah blah."

d: Questions marks are complicated.

1. If question is part of the quote/speech, it goes *inside* "blah?"

2. If the quote is part of a question but is not a questions itself, it goes *outside* "blah"?

e: Semicolons go out the outside when following (and not part of the quote) "blah";

f: Colons can introduce a quote and precede the opening quote mark : "blah"

g: the period goes AFTER OF THE CITATION "Blah, blah, blah" (Citation).

G4: HYPHENS are used to make a compound word, usually two adjectives that act as one idea: low-budget

G5: DASHES: there are two types based on size but really, you don't need to worry about that. To make a dash, press the hyphen key twice between the two words. If you use no spaces, the computer will format.

a: the dash (two hyphens, not one) can be used in place of commas, periods, parenthesis and colons for emphasis or abrupt

interruption. Use them sparingly.

G6: COLONS:

a: Use colons in lists *only when the part of the sentence preceding it is complete without the list* (I went to the store to get a few things I'm out of: cheese, yogurt and cereal).

a1: Do NOT use "the following" and a colon together. One takes the place of the other.

b: Use a colon instead of a period when the second sentence is a definition or further explanation/example of the first. The first must be a complete sentence. The second does not have to be.

c: Use a colon in time and ratios.

G7: EXCLAMATION POINTS:

a: Exclamation points do not belong in academic writing.

b: You may use three (3) in your creative writing career. Three total.

-They indicate shouting in dialogue. Not emphasis or excitement.

-The depiction of the character's actions/mood should show excitement. Don't rely on "!"

c: Feel free to use them in emails and texts or notes to your peers. Good job!

G8: PARENTHESIS: Parenthesis have mostly gone out of style. The period goes after the parenthesis.

G9: APOSTROPHES: Denote either contraction of words (do not= don't, etc.) or possession. They can show a shortening ('90s) But they almost never show plurality (1990's = **wrong**, CD's = **wrong**); **the exception is lower case letters and certain uppercase letters** (I got three A's this quarter).

ⁱ I just really liked this example.