

Writing Tips

1. Avoid unnecessary jargon. Do not create phrases or terminology to describe your arguments. You should be able to make your argument in plain English. If you have to use a lot of jargon or create your own terminology to get your point across, then you probably aren't expressing your ideas clearly.
2. Avoid passive voice. It causes your writing to be unnecessarily verbose and detracts from the overall clarity of your ideas.
 - **Example:** "David Lake integrates both rational and behavioral explanations for war in his analysis of the Iraq War." (*Active*) **VS.** "Both rational and behavioral explanations for war are used by David Lake in his analysis of the Iraq war." (*Passive*)
3. Watch out for repetitive sentence structure! In general, you will want to use a variety of sentence structures to enhance the flow of your ideas. Repeating the same structure causes your writing to come off as redundant, even if the ideas you are presenting are not.

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety. Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

-- Gary Provost, quoted in Roy Peter Clark's **Writing Tools**

4. Simplify your language. The quality of your ideas is **not** measured in how advanced the vocabulary you use is. In fact, using overly complicated vocabulary can detract from the presentation of your ideas. The more simply and concisely you express your ideas, the better.
5. Do **not** have page-long paragraphs (or close to page long paragraphs).
6. You should **not** have sentences that take up more than 3 lines. They are hard to follow!
7. When talking about the United States:
 - The United States is a noun.
 - "U.S." is an adjective
 - "US" is just "us" in capslock.
8. Do not use "said." It is bland and does **not** convey as much information as "argues, claims, explains, challenges, etc."
9. When using quotation marks be sure to put your punctuation inside the quotes, "like this."
10. Proof read! Proofread! Proofread! Typos can happen to anyone. While I will **not** be specifically grading you on your grammar, I am grading you on the quality and overall presentation of your ideas. Having a ton of grammatical errors and typos is distracting and detracts from the overall quality of your paper.
11. Avoid using "this" without a noun to qualify it. This is not clear. This sentence is clearer.