

# General Writing Guidelines

## "The Do Nots"

- \* 1. Do not use second person--*you, your, yours*.
- 2. Do not use contractions--*isn't, aren't, there's*.
- 3. Do not use vague or overused words and phrases--*thing, nice, interesting, good, great, big*.
- 4. Do not always begin with a subject and verb. Vary beginnings. Also, avoid the *there is, there are, it is, it was* beginnings.
- 5. Do not abbreviate or use etc.
- 6. Do not write "I will write about" or "I believe."
- 7. Do not join sentences with a comma (comma splice).
- 8. Do not put a period or comma outside quotation marks. These marks always go inside.
- 9. Do not begin sentences with a verb because the subject is the understood you. (Violates rule #1)
- 10. Do not use linking verbs if possible. Strive for action verbs.
- 11. Do not use a plural noun when a possessive is needed. Five *days'* suspension. *Children's* parents.
- 12. Do not forget the comma after an introductory dependent clause. *Whenever* I think of my childhood, I remember my first friend.
- 13. Do not forget to have pronouns agree with their antecedents and subjects agree with verbs. One of the students taking the class forgot her notes. The colors of the new room look pale.
- 14. Do not confuse *their/there; to/too; then/than*.
- 15. Do not forget a title. Capitalize important words.
- 16. Do not hand in a paper without letting it rest a day and without proofreading it aloud.

**\* If your instructor gives you guidelines different from those listed above, follow your instructors' directions.**

# Possibilities for Achieving Sentence Variety

## 1. Vary the Kinds of Sentences

Although we use more declarative sentences, by far, than any other kind, use interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences occasionally for variety.

## 2. Vary the Structure

There are four types of sentences according to structure: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. Effective use of all four types of sentence structure contributes to clarity and fluency, as well as to interest.

## 3. Vary the Length

A passage in which all of the sentences are the same length is monotonous; this monotony is particularly apparent in a series of short sentences. Vary the length of sentences from long, to medium, to short. The short sentence is most effective for emphasis.

## 4. Vary the Beginnings

A succession of sentences that begins with the same word or the same kind of phrase can be monotonous. You can achieve sentence variety and avoid monotony by beginning a number of your sentences in each paragraph in different ways--with adverb modifiers, phrases, or clauses.

## 5. Vary the Elements Within the Sentence

Use compound elements occasionally. Use a series of words, phrases, or clauses now and then. Use appositives for concise explanations. Place the adjectives after the noun occasionally.

## 6. Vary the Normal Sentence Pattern

In English, the normal sentence pattern begins with the subject followed by the verb and the remainder of the sentence. Invert the word order occasionally. Begin with the last part of the sentence, next the verb, and last the subject.

## 7. Vary by Use of Direct Discourse

If applicable, adding some conversation and direct quotations can add variety and interest to your writing.

# Formatting a Paper

## Introductory Paragraphs

The introductory paragraph is the first paragraph of an essay. Its purpose is to be so inviting that the reader will not want to stop reading. In most college papers, this introductory paragraph contains a thesis statement.

The thesis of an paper is a statement of the main idea. It is a statement that the writer is going to explain, defend, or prove about the topic. In short papers, the thesis statement is usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph. The thesis statement is a complete sentence that presents a viewpoint, not just a statement of fact.

### Example of a thesis statement:

**Statement of fact (not a thesis):** Many college students have part-time jobs while they are attending school.

**Thesis:** Working part-time while attending college adds strain on a student for a variety of reasons.

### There are several common errors to avoid in the introduction:

1. Avoid telling the reader that you are beginning the essay. Following are some examples to avoid:

*In this essay, I will discuss . . .*

*I will talk about...*

*I am going to prove...*

2. Do not refer to later paragraphs of parts of the essay. Following are some examples to avoid.

*In the next paragraph . . .*

*By the end of my paper . . .*

3. Do not use second person (you).

## Body Paragraphs

Every body paragraph should have one main idea. This main idea is usually stated in a topic sentence. The other sentences in that paragraph should support or explain the idea stated in the topic sentence. These sentences should provide specific support: evidence, examples, or reasons. Some paragraphs may also have a concluding sentence, which sums up the main idea.

### There are several points to remember when writing body paragraphs:

1. Every sentence must relate to the topic sentence and offer specific supports.
2. Do not refer to other paragraphs of parts of the essay. Following are some examples to avoid:  
*In the next paragraph . . .*                      *As stated earlier . . .*
3. Use transitions for clarity (if necessary, ask ASC instructor for handouts).

## Concluding Paragraphs

Since it occupies an emphatic position in the essay, the concluding paragraph should impress the reader. The concluding paragraph should include the following two elements:

1. A statement of the thesis in different words and summation of the central idea.
2. An impression of finality by drawing a conclusion.

**Note:** Never introduce new material in a conclusion.

# Sample Essay

## Title:

Do not underline, italicize, or boldface your own title. An effective title should grab a reader's interest.

## Introduction:

First paragraph offers a general introduction that leads to a specific thesis statement. This is an example of a three-point thesis statement.

## Body paragraphs:

Note transitions (bold), topic sentences (italicized), and specific details about each of the restaurants.

Note how the three-point thesis provides a guide to the essay (body paragraphs).

## Conclusion:

A transition tells reader this is concluding paragraph. The thesis is re-stated in different words, summarizes the main ideas, and draws a conclusion.

## The Flavors of Relaxation

In Florida, as in many other states, people enjoy going out to dinner for relaxation. Sometimes, however, finding a good restaurant is difficult. With all of the restaurants available, choosing the best one is not always easy. Luckily, every now and then one hears about a restaurant that stands out among the others. **Three restaurants that offer outstanding meals are the Pier House, Joe's Steakhouse, and Desperado's.**

*To begin, many top-rated entrees are served at the Pier House.* **For example,** the Pier House has won three gold stars for its vegetable creations. One of these, Cauliflower Delight, is made from a special recipe that has been handed down from generation to generation, and it is delicious. **Also,** the restaurant has been voted number one in Palm County for its seafood combinations. The Surf and Turf Spectacular, which has been written about in Gourmet magazine, features freshly shipped Maine lobsters and prime cuts of Midwestern beef. **Furthermore,** the desserts are a dieter's nightmare, but the Devil's Temptation Cake has been featured on the Chef's Best television show.

*In addition to the Pier House, Joe's Steakhouse also offers outstanding meals.* For instance, Joe's steaks are thick and juicy, sixteen ounces of meat that is so tender that a steak knife is unnecessary. **What is more,** Joe's recipes have appeared in newspapers. Tim Snerd, a food critic for the Daily Sun newspaper, has featured many of Joe's recipes because readers have requested them. Joe's **also** offers daily specials that are delicately prepared and reasonably priced. Many families and retired couples go to Joe's just because of the specials, which offer quality food at reasonable prices.

*Desperado's is another restaurant that offers people an exceptional dining experience.* Desperado's chef is well known for his fish tacos, beef enchiladas, and chimachangas. He delights his customers with the variety of fillings and seasonings that he uses. **Additionally,** the restaurant is one of the few that offer an attractive menu for children. Desperado's serves children's plates featuring tasty tacos and burritos. Desperado's is so popular that diners often have to wait for a table.

**Thus,** with the fast-paced life that many people lead, relaxation is essential. One of the most popular ways to have fun and unwind is by going out to a nice restaurant for a fine meal. Three restaurants that offer pleasant dining experiences are the Pier House, Joe's Steakhouse, and Desperado's. Anyone who visits any of these restaurants will not be disappointed.

**Note to students:** This essay is a sample to illustrate format. Course instructors have copies. Duplication or near duplication would be regarded as plagiarism.