

Proofread your work

Reread your work **multiple times** in order to avoid making any of the sentence level errors covered below – Remember, I am expecting error free work from all of you, because I'd much rather spend my time evaluating your **ideas** than your punctuation or spelling.

- **Use academic language**

- ✓ **point of view:** Keep your writing in the **3rd person** (he, she, it, they, the author, the text, etc.) – *Do not* use 1st person (I, me) or 2nd person (you) – Your task is always to write about the text, *not* about yourself, me, or some invisible and nameless “people” out there.
 - ✓ **verb tense:** Write in the **present tense** – The *only* time you should be using the past tense is when you refer to specific events or passages in a text where *the author him or herself* is writing in the past tense or recalling a specific event in the past.
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- **Cite sources correctly**

The first time you insert a quote, **include the author's last name only** with the page number in your citation – even if you have already introduced the author in the preceding sentence or paragraph. **Do not include any punctuation, or “pg” for page.** It should look like this:

...” (Dillard 209).

After the first citation of material from the same author, **do not include the author's name** – just give us the page number itself, that's it. It should look like this:

...” (223).

- **Reference titles properly**

Titles of **full length works** – things like **novels, collections of short stories, music albums, newspapers, magazines** – get **italicized**, like this:

Cathedral [the book, not the story]

Titles of **smaller individual works** that are contained within full length works – things like **stories, essays, poems, songs, newspaper or magazine articles** – are always placed in **“quotation marks,”** like this:

“A Small, Good Thing”

- **Use quoted material appropriately**

Each of your body paragraphs should include paraphrased or quoted textual support, but **quoted and paraphrased material should never overtake your own ideas:** no more than **25%** of any body paragraph should be comprised of textual support, while the other **75%** must be *your own* analysis and discussion.

Keep quotes **out of introductions and conclusions**, as these paragraphs are meant to be special places where you introduce and summarize *your own* ideas about the text.

Don't begin paragraphs with quotes: begin paragraphs with *your own* sentences first, sentences which introduce your main ideas as well as the textual support that you'll be discussing and analyzing in the body of the paragraph.

- **Use semicolons correctly**

Semicolons are like periods, not commas – Only use a semicolon when you’ve made sure that you have **grammatically complete sentences on both sides of the semicolon**; otherwise, you should be using a comma with a transition word instead.

In the example below, the semicolon is used correctly because it **joins together two closely related groups of words that are already complete sentences on their own**.

CORRECT: Raymond Carver relies heavily on irony as a literary feature in his stories; in fact, Carver’s skillful manipulation of surprise events and characters is probably one of the most defining features of his storytelling.

In the example below, the semicolon is used *incorrectly* because the second “sentence” after the semicolon is **not a sentence at all**: it begins with a subordinating conjunction (“that”) which in this case is just a linking word. The word “that” cannot just fill in where a subject would normally go. This second “sentence” is actually just a *partial thought*, unable to make sense on its own **if the full sentence before the semicolon were to be taken away**.

INCORRECT: Raymond Carver often builds his narratives around highly ironic twists in the storyline; that he usually ends up resolving by the end of the story.

- **Punctuate quotes the right way**

A block quote (**quoted text that comprises more than 4 lines** after you’ve typed it into your essay), gets **tabbed in twice** as one solid block of **double spaced text**, and you **do not use quotation marks** with them.

If you’re **still trying to figure out how to punctuate quotes**, here’s how:

Quoted material **without** a page citation (like a short story title) always **includes** the period or comma inside the quotation marks, like this:

Raymond Carver wrote the short story “Cathedral.”

Quoted material **with** a page citation after it (like a line of text from a story) **does not include** the period or comma inside the quotation marks – instead, those commas or periods go outside, *after* everything else, like this:

The first line of Carver’s story “Cathedral” from his book of collected stories begins, “This blind man, an old friend of my wife’s, he was on his way to spend the night” (209).

- **Make nouns and pronouns agree**

A pronoun (*he, she, it, they, their, one, someone*, etc.) must “agree” with its “antecedent” (the word it’s replacing). So, if a noun like **person** that’s singular and neutrally gendered is used in a sentence, *every* pronoun that refers back to **person** later on in the sentence must *also* be singular and neutrally gendered. Related words have to match so that your sentences don’t confuse or frustrate us.

So, do this: How can **someone** forget **his or her** childhood memories?

But not this: How can **someone** forget **their** childhood memories?

And this: **One** would question **his or her** own thoughts.

But not this: **One** would question **their** own thoughts.

And this: **The reader** doesn’t truly “get” the poem because **he/she** did not write it.

But not this: **The reader** doesn’t truly “get” the poem because **they** did not write it.