

GRAMMAR GUIDE BY ALFRED J. DRAKE

NOTE TO STUDENTS: This guide covers common grammar, style, and formatting problems. When you see a problem in your draft noted with a hyperlink, press *Control* and *left-click* on the link to jump to the explanation in the guide. I use a combination of MS Word's *Track Changes* feature, comments, and hyperlinks to bookmarked sections of this guide. To [view my comments](#) and [accept or reject changes](#) in Word, you may need to click on *Review*, then choose *Show Markup* and make sure all options are checked. The *Review* menu strip is also where you will find the icons that allow you to accept and/or reject changes, either individually or collectively.

NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS ON HOW TO ADAPT GUIDE (CHANGE FONT SIZE TO VIEW): -

intro argument structure frag verbt verba verbobj passive paral splice comma
modifier pronoun wordc wordf preposition article typocap rephrase citref mlaform

<< THESIS PARAGRAPH NEEDS WORK : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft)

Thesis paragraphs often begin with rather broad statements, but even those statements must be calibrated to the topic and subsequent analysis. When papers begin with empty praise (“Shakespeare is a famous author”) or truisms (“Throughout history, poets have written about love”), readers know it’s filler. Stay away from filler and avoid “this paper will do such-and-such” statements: get to the point, which is explaining the nature, scope and methodology of your study. To correct a vague or confusing thesis in a draft, examine the rest of your paper carefully to see what you have actually done. Next, go back to your introduction and ask, “does this provide an adequate look forward at the paper’s methodology and topic, and does it explain compellingly why the topic matters?” Then transform vague promises into specific, interrelated, forward-pointing claims. Think of your introduction as an isosceles triangle with the base at the top, and the apex (skinny point) at the bottom: the last sentence or two should be very sharply focused into a thesis, with every previous sentence leading up to it.

Let’s try an example. If you are writing about Sir Thomas Wyatt’s courtly love poetry, an *appropriately* general beginning might be, “Scholars have long noted that Thomas Wyatt’s poetry borrows many of its themes and figures from Petrarchan tradition.” You might go on to say something like, “Similarities aside, the Englishman’s sonnets differ from Petrarch and his imitators’ work in their persistently honest confusion and bitterness. Wyatt isn’t making bold declarations about passion’s power, but rather exploring the subtle, unwritten rules that govern erotic relations in the Court of Henry VIII.” Your final sentence in the first paragraph might run something like, “I will examine Wyatt’s ‘Whoso list to hunt...’ for the insight it offers into how the possessive, treacherous sexual rules of Henry’s Court shape the speaker’s understanding of his predicament and limit his hopes for transcending it.” If you proceed from the broad-but-relevant to the specific and incisive this way, your readers know from the outset that you’re going to write about what makes Wyatt’s poetry distinctive, and they will expect that you will soon offer an interesting angle on the topic. That “something interesting” is what the successive sentences need to deliver, with increasing focus and specificity, by the end of the first paragraph. It is not sufficient to conclude a thesis paragraph with a vague promise. A final sentence such as “I will analyze some of Wyatt’s poems and explore the poet’s attitudes about politics and

courtship” shows that the essayist still hasn’t achieved the argumentative edge that makes a final draft interesting.

If you want another example of what the last sentence or two in a literature paper’s first paragraph should look like, consider the following: “The exploratory style and deliberate contradictoriness of Wyatt’s ‘Whoso list to hunt’ and ‘They flee from me’ suggest that Wyatt’s poetry is often intended not so much as bitter advice but rather as an honest ‘transcription’ of his own experience—one that can, at best, serve others as a companion in time of suffering for love’s sake. If the poems provide any aesthetic distance from direct erotic experience, it’s the kind of distance that reinvokes the confusion and pain such experience can cause.” Perhaps these two full sentences could be still sharper in their references to style and content, but they indicate clearly the kind of analysis I will make in detail later on.

<< ARGUMENT NEEDS WORK : (use *alt + page-left arrow* to return to draft) Either the point you’re making isn’t clear, or it’s clear but doesn’t necessarily follow from the evidence you’ve cited thus far. Sometimes the issue is lack of sufficient support, or perhaps your statements aren’t closely enough connected and transition phrases/sentences are lacking. Sometimes one can present a great deal of evidence, but then get lost in it so that the point never emerges. Does each statement lead up to the main point so that it is clear and emphatic and the argument seems necessary, not contrived? See also the entry below on structure since structure and argument are interconnected.

<< STRUCTURE NEEDS WORK : (use *alt + page-left arrow* to return to draft) There’s a problem with your essay’s structure at the point indicated. Readers should never be left to guess how the elements of your argument fit together. Every statement (i.e., sentence) must flow clearly from the one that came before it, and the same holds true for every paragraph and every section of your essay. If the points you make seem to be tossed in randomly, readers will not follow your argument or find it convincing. See also the entry above on argument since structure and argument are interconnected.

<< SENTENCE FRAGMENT : (use *alt + page-left arrow* to return to draft) A sentence without both a subject and a verb is a fragment. Example: “Because of the snarling dog.” There’s no verb here -- “snarling” is a verbal adjective and does not function as a verb in a subject > predicate sentence such as “The dog snarled.”

<< VERB TENSE PROBLEM : (use *alt + page-left arrow* to return to draft) Use the present tense wherever you can. When you’re dealing with a literary work’s direct references to the actions of one or more characters, it’s usually best to keep things in the present tense: “At the beginning of Book 6 of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus, having survived a raft-wreck, washes ashore on the island of Phaeacia, where he wins the assistance of Princess Nausicaa.” We only needed the present-perfect reference “having survived” to remind readers about the previous book’s events—the present tense is appropriate and much livelier for the action in our current interest, Book 6.

Still, the past tense has a place in literary analysis. Sometimes, you may find yourself beginning an essay with brief past-tense references to historical events outside the text, and then shifting to

the present when referring to statements an author or narrator makes. In the example below, notice the handling of verb tenses: the past tense delivers some historical context, the present recounts what the mature Richard Wright says as narrator, and the past is used for the childhood memories he relates since that's the way he himself treats them:

Segregation or the rule of Jim Crow began around 1880 and continued right through the 1960's in the southern United States. To explain segregation's powerful effects, Richard Wright, in his autobiographical essay "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (1937), narrates a series of childhood experiences that reveal segregation's logic of perpetual fear.

In Section 1, Wright recounts the first experience that shaped his understanding of race relations. He describes the "skimpy yard . . . paved with black cinders" (1388) in which he and his childhood companions used to play. Young Richard had always considered his surroundings as fine as any other, but one day he and his friends got into a fight with some white kids and learned their first painful lesson about racial inequality. Wright recalls the fight's progress as follows: "We doubled our cinder barrage, but they hid behind trees, hedges, and the sloping embankments of their lawns. Having no such fortifications, we retreated to the brick pillars of our homes. During the retreat a broken milk bottle caught me behind the ear, opening a deep gash which bled profusely" (1388). The black kids, explains Wright, finally ran away, leaving him to tend to his bleeding face alone.

<< VERB AGREEMENT PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) A verb must agree with the number of the subject that governs it: "She sells seashells by the seashore," not "She sell seashells by the seashore." Agreement problems sometimes crop up when singular and plural words occur next to each other and the writer becomes confused about which noun governs the verb. Wrong: "His characterization of those events were inappropriate." Correct:

“His characterization of those events was inappropriate.” The word “characterization”—not “events”—governs the verb.

VERB TRANSITIVE/INTRANSITIVE PROBLEM : There’s a problem with the way you’re following a particular verb with an object, or possibly not providing an object when one is needed. Transitive verbs take a direct object: “I drink coffee.” Some verbs are intransitive by nature and can’t take direct objects, while some verbs that *could* take a direct object also have intransitive uses. Examples:

“I drink coffee.” Transitive. The noun “coffee” is the direct object of the verb “drink.” You could also use this verb intransitively, as in “Sam drinks early and often.” Here, no direct object is wanted; the usage is intransitive.

“Jerry arrived at the coffee shop late.” Intransitive by nature. You can’t use a verb like “to arrive” or “to go” or “to die” transitively -- it can’t take a direct object. “She arrived the package” and “He died me” make no sense, at least in modern English.

“You must allow the glue time to set.” Intransitive in this usage. “Set” used in this sense, as a process of settling or drying, doesn’t allow a direct object. Of course, “set” has transitive uses, too: “He set the book on the table.” The noun “book” is the direct object of “set” in this usage.

“The doctor wanted to check up on his patient in two weeks.” Transitive phrasal verb. The verb consists of multiple words, but “patient” is clearly the direct object here.

“We pored over the results with a fine-tooth comb.” Transitive inseparable phrasal verb. The phrasal verb “pored over” is one action, and the direct object is “results.”

“We approached the scene, but they told us to stay back.” Intransitive phrasal verb. There’s no direct object possible here -- you can’t “stay someone or something back.”

English language learners will sometimes use a fully transitive verb without any object, which confuses readers. Example: “They took and went to the movies.” What exactly did they take? The reader can’t help but ask.

<< PASSIVE VOICE PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Do not write, “Father, the cherry tree has been chopped down by me.” Write, “Father, I chopped down the cherry tree.” Use the passive only when you need to emphasize the object receiving action: “The plane was thrown off course.” Do not use the passive voice to achieve a tone of scientific objectivity unless you’re writing a science or sociology paper. In a humanities paper, instead of writing, “It will be shown that Shakespeare’s romance plays are vitally concerned with the healing powers of time,” stick to a simple declarative style: “The healing powers of time are a key concern in Shakespeare’s romance plays.” Incidentally, there’s nothing wrong with using the first person pronoun “I” in a humanities paper, except that overusing it amounts to padding. Instead of saying “I will show that such and such is the case,” just *show* it.

<< PARALLELISM PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Place similar sentence elements in the same grammatical form; keep constructions parallel. Incorrect: “Some Major League hitters fail to develop sufficient patience, adequate comprehension of the game’s fundamentals, and their attitude is self-centered.” Since the first two parts of the sentence initiate a series: fail to develop sufficient A, adequate B . . . the third part should go something like “or even the minimally necessary team spirit.” In all three elements of the sample series, we should have a verb + noun or noun phrase combination: develop patience, (develop) comprehension, (develop) team spirit.

<< COMMA SPLICE OR RUN-ON PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) A comma splice occurs when a writer fails to place a conjunction or semicolon between independent clauses (clauses that could stand as complete sentences): “Comma splices are my worst error, I cannot stop using them.” Correction: “Comma splices are my worst error because I cannot stop using them” or “They are my worst error; I cannot stop using them.” Run-ons are similar except that they have no punctuation at all between the clauses: “Run-ons are my worst problem I can’t stop writing them.” Caveat: don’t *overuse* semicolons. If you find yourself using lots of them, split up some of the clauses into two separate sentences.

<< COMMA USAGE PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Either you’ve left out a necessary comma or put one in where it isn’t required. Explanation of terms: An independent clause is a string of words that has its own subject and verb and that can stand as a sentence. A dependent clause also has its own subject and verb, but it cannot stand alone as a sentence—its meaning depends on its relation to another clause. (A phrase is to be distinguished from a clause in that it does not have both a subject and a verb.) Here is a partial list of structures that require a comma:

a) Independent clause + independent clause requires a comma before the coordinating conjunction: “I went to the movies, but Jane went to the library.”

b) Dependent clause + independent clause requires a comma: “Because I arrived fifteen minutes late, I had trouble following the movie’s plot.”

c) Independent clause + dependent clause does not require a comma: “I had trouble following the movie’s plot because I arrived fifteen minutes late.”

d) Prepositional phrases require a comma: “After the movie, Bob went home.” Some grammar guides suggest that it’s okay not to use a comma when the phrase is three words or less.

e) Conjunctive adverbs like “however” and “nevertheless” require a comma unless they join independent clauses, in which case a preceding semicolon would be appropriate:

“The star of the show, however, was ill.” Or “The star was ill; however, the show must go on.”

f) Commas are required around non-restrictive phrases or clauses (modifiers not vital to a sentence’s basic meaning). In the first of the following two sentences, the writer implies that he has but one son, so the name is hardly essential; in the second, the name “Charles” *is* essential to

the writer's statement—although he has more than one son, he is only complaining about one of them at the moment:

“My son, Charles, never mows the lawn.” Or “My son Charles never mows the lawn.”

g) A series of words, phrases, or clauses—if not internally punctuated—demands a comma:

“My car, radio, and computer broke down on the same day.” Or “Machiavelli wrote plays, advised the Florentines, and advanced political science.” Or again, “During the Lisbon earthquake, bells tolled, fires raged, and crumbling churches crushed the faithful.” Some writers prefer not to insert a comma after the last element in the series, but in legal writing particularly, this so-called “Oxford comma” or final comma in a series is preferred as less ambiguous. A longer series or one with internal punctuation may call for semicolons, not commas.

h) Coordinate adjectives (adjectives separately modifying the same noun) call for a comma:

“It's going to be a long, hot, depressing day.” Or “We have suffered an unmitigated, shameful defeat.”

But if the noun phrase contains an inseparable adjective, be careful: “Giovanni is a fine post-modernist painter.” Or “Sally is an average working woman.”

<< MISPLACED MODIFYING WORD/S OR DANGLING PARTICIPLE : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) This error consists in placing modifiers where they modify the wrong words or where they modify nothing, or in using an “-ing” verbal that doesn't govern a logical subject. Incorrect: “Like many modern caribou, I believe the dinosaurs migrated in winter.” Correct: “[I believe that] dinosaurs, like modern caribou, migrated in winter” or “Like modern caribou, dinosaurs may have migrated in winter.” Incorrect (dangling participle): “Rolling around in the drawers, I found my watch.” Correct: “I found my watch rolling around.” Incorrect: “I was told that a brick had been thrown in my window by my neighbor.” Correct: “My neighbor told me that a brick had been thrown through my window.” (Unless, of course, your neighbor *did* throw the brick through your window.)

<< PRONOUN OR ADJECTIVE PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft)

Vagueness: avoid using “it” and “this” to replace unspecified nouns or to modify them vaguely. Example: “Anoles escape frequently, bite, and squirm when handled. It makes them hard to take care of.” Better: “These three things make them hard to take care of.” Also avoid losing track of proper nouns. “Bob went home because he was tired” is clear, but if Bob hasn't been mentioned recently, “he” might be confusing. Additionally, the proper noun is usually best if you're referencing an author or character for the first time in a paragraph.

Number: The sentence “When someone is entrusted with a secret, they immediately feel the urge to blurt it out” mixes singular and plural. A singular antecedent calls for a singular pronoun. To avoid sexist language, you can use the plural for both antecedent and pronoun: “When people are entrusted with secrets, they...” You can also use “one” or “his or her,” but both quickly become

annoying. Some handbooks approve of mixing noun/pronoun numbers to avoid sexist language, but that seems unresourceful. You can also sometimes avoid sexist language by recasting the sentence without a pronoun, using an infinitive construction, and so forth: “Someone has lost a wallet” instead of “someone has lost his or her wallet.”

Redundancy: pronouns are sometimes used unnecessarily: “In Oscar Wilde’s essay, he says that...” Here the pronoun “he” refers to “Oscar Wilde’s essay,” which is not a “he.” And if you had written “In Oscar Wilde’s essay, it says...,” the pronoun “it” would refer to nothing. Correct: “In ‘Pen, Pencil, and Poison,’ Oscar Wilde says that a man’s being a poisoner is nothing against his prose.” Another form of redundancy is to repeat a noun or noun phrase in or near the same sentence when a pronoun would be smoother: “Browning is fascinated with Renaissance criminals, but his analysis of Renaissance criminals is at times convoluted.” The second mention should be replaced by “them.”

People vs. Things/Animals: “Who” is for references to humans; “that” is used for animals and things: “We tried to distract the dog that had been barking for two hours.”

<< WORD CHOICE PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Either the word you’ve chosen doesn’t suit the purpose, or there’s a better choice. Nouns, adjectives, and adverbs: problems here range from connotation (words inadequate to the meaning intended) to words that don’t make sense in their present context. Example of connotation problem: “In the first act of Shakespeare’s infamous play *King Lear*, Kent is banished.” The word “infamous” is inappropriate because it connotes criminality or outrageousness—the author no doubt means the play is widely known, not that *King Lear* is outrageous or that Shakespeare was wicked. A dictionary or thesaurus should provide alternatives. Verbs and Verbals: the problem may lie with unwanted connotations or a failure to make sense, but a common problem is over-reliance on “to be” and “to have.” Example: “He is manager at the Costa Mesa store” reads better with a *stronger* verb: “He manages the Costa Mesa store.”

<< WORD FORM PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Right word, wrong form. A few examples: “understandment” for “understanding” and “non-violence protest” for “non-violent protest.” Sometimes one forgets to use the past participle instead of the present: “he had pass the exam” for “he had passed the exam,” etc. Another error is to use the singular where you need a plural noun, or vice versa: “woman” is singular; “women” is plural. A third possibility is that you need the possessive form of a noun or that the possessive form you have written is the wrong number. Possessive nouns require an apostrophe: “Hilda’s house,” “the Johnsons’ apple pie.” Notice that the plural requires an apostrophe after the “s” instead of before it, as in the singular. The word “it’s” is not possessive; the apostrophe indicates a contraction of “it is.” The possessive form is “its.” A fourth common problem has to do with hyphenation of compound nouns and modifying phrases: a noun phrase like “Internet-based company” needs a hyphen between its compound adjectives when they precede the noun. Sometimes a writer may also be hyphenating a noun that really should be written as one word (in “closed form”), such as “hardball.” The rules for compound hyphenation, however, are inconsistent, so let a dictionary or other resource help you if there’s any doubt.

<< **DEF./INDEF. ARTICLE PROBLEM** : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Either you've included an article ("a, an," "the") where one isn't necessary, or you've left an article out. This is a common and minor problem for English language learners to have -- some languages use lots of articles, while others don't use them at all (Russian, for instance), so mistakes are inevitable. Basically, a/the are determining words; they function like adjectives. Here are some examples that should help:

To refer to a singular, countable noun that isn't precisely limited, we use the indefinite article a/an: "Stacy drives a convertible car, but Bill drives an Oldsmobile." We don't know *which* convertible car or which Oldsmobile, or we aren't emphasizing it at the moment. ("An" is the form of "a" we use before a word that starts with a vowel.)

To reference a noun in a more specific and limited way, we use the definite article, "the": "Stacy drives the convertible car parked over there at the back of the lot." "Bill drives the Oldsmobile you see right at the front." Here, we are dealing with *the particular convertible* that Stacy drives and *the particular Olds* that Bill drives -- the one and only in the whole universe. "The" often has this pointing-out or *deictic* function, like "this car right here" or "that car right over there." The definite article doesn't always refer to *one* unique object this way, of course -- if Bill has three cars, we could say, "the three cars that Bill owns are all parked in his driveway." Here, we are thinking of his three cars as a specific, unique set of three. There are many cars in the world, and many sets of three cars, but this set is *the* only one owned by Bill.

When doesn't English need an article? When we want to reference nouns in a general way: "Cars are easier to drive today than they used to be. Now they have automatic transmissions." Here, we're talking about "cars in general" and "automatic transmissions in general." Another example: "Big trees provide wonderful shade." I'm not talking about any particular big trees -- just "big trees in general." So the noun phrase here doesn't require an article.

Now for a bit of nuance. If I said, "the big trees in my backyard provide wonderful shade" or even "a stand of big trees in my backyard provide wonderful shade," you know I mean pretty specific ones. But how about this? You could ask me, "what do you have for shade on your property?" and I could respond with, "well, big trees provide shade." Here, my article-free expression may seem odd to an English language learner. Why didn't I say "*the* big trees on my property . . ."? Probably because I was making sort of a general class out of *the* specific trees on my property. But mostly because I'm taking it for granted that you know which specific ones I was talking about; I just felt like treating them in a general way. So while it may sound like I'm suggesting that "all of the big trees in the world provide shade for my property," of course I don't mean something so silly. Context -- which includes whim and the speaker's state of mind or attitude -- is the determining factor here.

There are always quirky little exceptions to such rules as the ones I list above, so here are a few resources that may provide more detail: [Purdue Online Writing Lab on Articles](#) and [Learn-English Today.com on Articles](#).

<< **TYPOGRAPHICAL ERROR** : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Please be sure to spell-check your paper to catch such mistakes.

<< REPHRASING NEEDED : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) Your aim should be clarity. Needlessly complex, repetitive or vague phrasing occurs when you don't know what you mean, how your phrases and clauses go together in a sentence, or how your sentences fit into a paragraph. Work on clarity in the semifinal editing stages, when you've become surer about your thesis and supporting presentation. Reading aloud helps. Simplify your sentences so that they read straightforwardly—there should be no extra words, but no necessary connecting or modifying words should be left out or put where they impede the logic of the sentence.

A sentence may be grammatically correct, but if it slows your reader down without cause, it isn't a good sentence. Ask yourself, "how might I simplify this sentence? Can I get rid of a comma or two by rearranging my word order? Is the sentence so long and complicated that I ought to split it in two, and then make any necessary adjustments? Combining ideas in sophisticated ways is an important skill; after all, you don't want a long string of "See Dick and Jane run" sentences. However, long strings of complicated sentences make reading a heavy experience. Variety is the key to good writing. Thomas S. Kane's *The New Oxford Guide to Writing* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994 repr., ISBN-13: 978-0195090598) nicely covers the different kinds of sentences and when it makes sense to use them. See also the entries for Fragments and Misplaced Modifiers/Participles.

Some clarity tips: phrases like "due to the fact that" should make way for "because," and "on a daily basis" should give way to "daily." Pointless adjectives such as "very unique" should go—if something is one of a kind, how can it be *more* or *less* so? Moreover, often you can give passive constructions like "it can be observed that" the axe. Use your words precisely and place them accurately. Don't overuse the verbs "be" and "have." Example: "He is manager at the store in Costa Mesa" reads better with a stronger verb: "He manages the store in Costa Mesa." Don't use the same word too many times, especially in or near the same sentence: use pronouns to replace recently mentioned nouns or noun phrases so long as it's clear what you're referring to. Avoid mechanical pointers such as, "This paper will show such-and-such." Instead, just *do* it. The only exception would be if you're dealing with extremely difficult concepts or structures and what you're doing might otherwise be unclear to readers.

<< QUOTATION HANDLING PROBLEM : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) The MLA formatting, grammatical construction, and/or contextualization of your quotation needs work. Do not insert a quotation into a sentence without introducing it and making sure the reader understands its context in the work. Introduce quotations smoothly and grammatically—usually, a colon or a comma will be the most appropriate punctuation before a short quotation, while longer quotations should be indented one inch from the left margin and are nearly always introduced by a colon. Taken together, your introduction and short quotation must work as a sentence. Quotations of four or more lines of poetry, or of what would be four or more typed lines of prose in your essay, must be indented one inch from the left. Below is further advice on various types of quotations.

Parenthetical Reference Formatting and Punctuation: The examples below will cover most of the necessary ground, but in general, don't clutter parenthetical references with verbiage: a typical page number citation from a book or article would be (123-25). A typical citation of an epic includes only the book number and line numbers: (5.456-60). A typical citation from a play

covers only the act, scene, and lines in simple Arabic numerals: (3.4.211-15). There's no need to include the author's name, as in (Jones 37), unless doing that is necessary to enhance clarity. Such a need may arise if you are incorporating multiple sources close together, or if you haven't already introduced the quoted material's author and title. But in a humanities paper, you will usually find it preferable to introduce and contextualize significant sources. Example: In *Return of Eden* (1965), Northrop Frye considers several important aspects of Milton's epic poems: "quoted material here" (134). Periods, commas, and semicolons go to the right of the (), except in block-style indented quotations, where the punctuation goes to the right of the final word. Non-indented example: Smith argues, "quotation here" (134), but others disagree. For indented examples, see below.

Punctuation involving quotations: Commas and periods should go inside quotation marks not followed by a parenthetical reference, but they should go outside the parenthetical reference if one is included (provided that it doesn't occur at the end of an indented, block-style quotation). Examples: In humanities essays, it's acceptable to use the pronoun "I." But as Dr. Duane Bogus points out in *Writing Science*, the first person is frowned upon in physical sciences writing (322). However, he says, "some scientists eschew that stricture," preferring instead to express their ideas more colloquially (323).

Short Prose Quotations (not indented; surrounded by punctuation marks; page numbers in parentheses):

Correct: In Chapter 24, Screwtape offers this concluding bit of advice to his neophyte subordinate: "Pray do not fill your letter with rubbish about this European War. Its final issue is, no doubt, important, but that is a matter for the High Command" (133).

Incorrect: In Chapter 24, Screwtape advises his neophyte subordinate. "Pray do not fill your letter with rubbish about this European War" (133). (The period after "subordinate" disconnects the introductory clause from the quotation it's supposed to introduce.)

Incorrect: In Chapter 24, Screwtape is full of advice for his subordinate, "Pray do not fill your letter with rubbish about this European War" (133). (The comma after "subordinate" creates a comma splice, which isn't a grammatical way to join two independent clauses.)

Long Prose Quotations (indented one inch from left; not surrounded with quotation marks, page numbers at end in parentheses):

The main reason to insert a long quotation is that it needs close examination, although to a limited extent quoting is also appropriate simply to convey an event or to provide context for another passage you are examining. Below is a sample paragraph in which the author introduces, contextualizes, and analyzes long quotations (i.e. more than four lines) as appropriate:

Soon the young Douglass, self-consciously "stealing" the knowledge that the Aulds have forbidden him, gets hold of Master Hugh's school book *The Colombian Orator*. One speech that

impresses him greatly is Sheridan's argument in favor of Catholic emancipation in England. As Douglass explains in Chapter 7, the great oration provides him with a language for expressing his own increasing discontentment:

The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery. (128)

But as with the other dialogues Douglass reads in *The Columbian Orator*, there is a price to be paid for this rhetorical ability. With the consciousness of his right to freedom comes still greater anger. Almost twenty years later, he describes the immediate effect of his learning: "It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. . . . In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity" (129). The depth of Frederick's agony indicates that he has learned a still deeper lesson: his experiences as a child have begun to teach him how different his own quest for freedom will be from that of slaves who gain their freedom by reason alone.

Direct quotations are not the only kind of reference a writer may make; paraphrases are occasionally appropriate. Here is how to refer indirectly to a work while maintaining MLA standards: Writing almost twenty years later, Douglass says that the immediate effect of his learning was to make him understand how miserable he was, and how far from obtaining any relief (129). After having introduced your quotations or paraphrases, provide their sources on your "Works Cited" page as shown elsewhere in this guide.

Short Non-Dramatic Verse Quotations: One, two, or three lines of verse can be incorporated into the paragraph, divided from one another by a forward slash (a " / ") and surrounded by quotation marks. Correct Example:

In “An Essay on Criticism,” Alexander Pope sums up his era’s usage of the term “wit” in the couplet, “True wit is Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed . . .” (297-98).

Taken together, the introduction and the verse lines function as a normal sentence. A semicolon followed “expressed” in the original, but here we need a period, which is placed outside the parenthetical reference. I have used ellipses to indicate that a change in punctuation has been made. Sometimes the verses may contain a question mark or exclamation point that’s integral to their meaning and therefore should be left to follow the last word as in the original. Example: Richard III’s question about Anne Neville, “Was ever woman in this humour wooed?” If the lines are from a long work such as an epic, you would include the book number along with the lines, as in (4.345-48).

Longer Non-Dramatic Verse Quotations (four or more lines): Four or more lines of non-dramatic verse should be indented one inch from the left. Example:

In “An Essay on Criticism,” Pope sums up his era’s usage of the term “wit” in the following couplets:

True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed;
Something whose truth convinced at sight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind. (297-300)

Notice that no quotation marks surround a block-style quotation, that it remains double-spaced like the rest of the paragraph, and that there’s no need for virgules (“/”) to divide the lines because the line break divides them. Since there are no quotation marks, the end punctuation follows the last word, not the parenthetical line reference. I introduce the longer quotation with a colon, altering my introductory phrasing slightly to allow for that punctuation. If the lines are from a long work such as an epic, you would include the book number along with the lines, as in (4.345-48).

Longer Non-Dramatic Verse Quotations (four or more lines) whose patterning must be reproduced faithfully: Here good sense must be the rule; in the following verse passage from Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” I’ve decided to single-space because I can’t capture the look of the poem’s paragraphed free-verse style any other way; double-spacing would look strange here:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, formed from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death. (1-9)

Below is another example of verse that needs to be reproduced carefully; it comes from the third stanza of Coleridge's "Ode: to Dejection" (the stanza should be mentioned in your introductory language—this poem is divided into stanzas, but it is numbered continuously, so there's no need to mention stanzas in the parenthetical references). I'll double-space to keep the quotation standard, but I have faithfully reproduced the ode's stanzaic indentations, with the flush-left lines indented one inch and the others further indented to match the original:

My genial spirits fail;

And what can these avail

To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?

It were a vain endeavour,

Though I should gaze forever

On that green light that lingers in the west:

I may not hope from outward forms to win

The passion and the life, whose fountains are within. (39-46)

Short Dramatic Verse Quotations: One, two, or three lines of dramatic verse can be incorporated into the paragraph, divided from one another by a virgule (a "/") and surrounded by quotation marks. Example:

Juliet instructs Romeo as follows in the language of the body: "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, / Which mannerly devotion shows in this: / For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch . . ." (1.5.97-99).

Notice that I ended the quotation with three ellipsis dots and placed the final period outside the parenthetical reference. That's because in the original, the line-ending word "touch" was followed by a comma, and Juliet concluded her thought with the line, "And palm to palm is holy

palmer's kiss." I did not include the abbreviation "JUL." as in the play because my introductory clause mentions her name, and in this short quotation, Juliet is the only speaker.

The parenthetical reference consists of Arabic numerals; the "classic" Roman numeral format—as in (III.ii.257-60)—is still encountered sometimes, but MLA doesn't encourage it since not everyone knows the Roman system. Do *not* include page numbers unless the play isn't numbered in the usual act.scene.line manner. Never use an edition that fails to do this if the play is usually so divided in standard editions. For example, some sub-standard editions of Shakespeare's plays fail to include line numbers; don't use such an edition for writing a paper.

Longer Dramatic Verse Quotations: Four or more lines of dramatic verse should be indented one inch from the left. Here is a typical quotation with two speakers, and a brief stage direction:

Romeo addresses Juliet tenderly—and a bit elaborately, since his words and hers together make a sonnet—after Tybalt exits the stage:

ROM. [*To Juliet.*] If I profane with my unworthiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JUL. Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this:

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmer's kiss. (1.5.93-100)

Notice that the characters' names are given in capitalized, abbreviated form, followed by a period. Each name begins one inch from the left margin, and subsequent lines by that character are indented an extra ¼ inch. If you need to begin with the end part of a line (i.e. when the "line" is really the second half of a split line), as in this excellent example (adapted from the MLA Handbook's 6th edition) of a dialogue between Goneril, Regan, and their father King Lear, reproduce the layout of the verse as accurately as possible:

GON. Hear me, my lord.

What need you five-and-twenty, ten or five,

To follow in a house where twice so many

Have a command to tend you?

REG. What need one?

LEAR. O, reason not the need! our basest beggars

Are in the poorest thing superfluous. (2.4.254-59)

Goneril's words "Hear me, my lord" are really the second half of the iambic pentameter line 254 (five two-syllable units, the basic pattern being unstressed/stressed, "U / U / U / U / U /") that Lear began by saying, "And thou art twice her love." Since dialogic exchange is common in Shakespeare, he often splits up lines between characters in this manner. And Goneril's "Have a command to tend you?" is only part of line 257, the end of which is Regan's "What need one?" That's why Regan's three words are indented so that they come a few spaces after Goneril's words end. Similarly, when you begin any quotation in the middle of a line (say because that's where the complete unit of thought you want to capture begins), reproduce it in the accurately indented manner used above, taking into account its position in the metrical line.

Notice that no quotation marks surround a block-style quotation, that it remains double-spaced like the rest of the paragraph, and that there's no need for virgules ("/") to divide the lines because the line break divides them. Since there are no quotation marks, the end punctuation follows the last word, not the parenthetical reference. Had I included introductory language, I would have introduced the longer quotation with a colon. The parenthetical reference consists of Arabic numerals, with no superfluous additions; simply (2.4.254-59), etc.

Prose in Drama: Sometimes plays don't consist entirely or at all of verse; rather, they are written in prose. One thinks of an Ibsen play, for example, or one by Samuel Beckett. In this case, you would preserve proper line numbering in your parenthetical reference (if included in the original) but not use a virgule ("/") to divide prose lines in short quotations, and not necessarily preserve exact line patterning in your indented longer quotations. To date, I haven't seen this issue addressed in the official guides I own; I am basing this advice on common sense and on a few good pages I've come across on the Internet. Here's an example from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, in which the Duke speaks to Isabella:

This forenam'd maid hath yet in her the continuance of her first affection; his unjust unkindness (that in all reason should have quench'd her love) hath (like an impediment in the current) made it more violent and unruly. Go you to Angelo, answer his requiring with a plausible obedience, agree with his demands to the point; only refer yourself to this advantage . . . (3.1.239-46).

This format treats the passage like prose, which of course it is, but preserves in parenthetical reference an accurate statement of the act, scene, and lines, just as one would do in quoting poetry.

[<< MLA FORMATTING PROBLEM](#) : (use *alt* + *page-left arrow* to return to draft) There's a problem with the formatting of your paper. Please refer to the Modern Languages Association (MLA) template page I will have handed out in class or made available online in the Wiki's Resources/Guides/Writing Guides section.

Basic Formatting: Your paper's margins should be one inch at top, bottom, left side, and right side. Your text should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, except—as mentioned in the quotations problem section—in special cases regarding some types of poetry), with no space-skipping at all. Manuscript-style requires left-aligned, i.e. “ragged” lines (not justified lines as you see in the current paragraph). The standard MS Word margins of 1.25” inches at left and right should be adjusted to 1 inch. The first line of each paragraph (unless you use block style and aside from indented quotations) should be indented half an inch (the “tab” key is usually set to half an inch). At the top right in your header should go your name and the essay's page number, as in “Jones 3.” To insert header material in MS Word, just use Insert/Page Numbers and add your name next to the page number once you've inserted that function. Don't insert such material manually. I list below some of the most common problems:

Page # Omission: You have omitted the page number at the top right of your essay. The top right header should contain your last name and the page number, as in “Jones 3.” Don't do this manually; use your word processor's “Insert/Page Number” feature.

Italicize Book Titles, Short Works in Quotations: Italicize (or underline) the titles of books, epics, and plays, not journal articles or short poems. Also italicize foreign terms: *reductio ad absurdum*; *coup*; *sprezzatura*.

Punctuation Not Immediately Followed by a Parenthetical Reference: Commas and periods should go inside quotation marks not immediately followed by a parenthetical reference. Examples: In humanities essays, it's acceptable to use the pronoun “I.” But as Dr. Duane Bogus points out in *Writing Science*, the first person is frowned upon in physical sciences writing (322). However, he says, “some scientists eschew that stricture,” preferring instead to express their ideas more colloquially (323).

Works Cited List: Modern Language Association (MLA) Format for Citations and Works Cited Lists. There's a problem with the way you're handling source documentation in your Works Cited List. General advice: the MLA says writers should list a book's source components in the following order: author's name; title of part of book; title of entire book; name of editor/translator/compiler; edition used; number/s of volume/s used; series name if any; publication place; publishing house's name; publication date; page numbers; supplementary information, if any. Consult the *MLA Handbook* for full information, but here are some common examples; note the formatting properties carefully:

a) Anthology Selections in a Works Cited List. This is the most common format in undergraduate papers, so here are several examples—first a short essay, then a short poem, and finally a long work (a play):

Short essay:

Wright, Richard. “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.” *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry L. Gates, Jr. and Nellie Mackay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1388-96.

If you wanted to include the year of the short essay’s original publication, which is optional, here’s how the same citation would go:

Wright, Richard. “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.” 1937. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry L. Gates, Jr. and Nellie Mackay. New York: Norton, 1997. 1388-96.

Poem:

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eds. M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt. 8th ed. Vol. D. New York: Norton, 2006. 430-46.

Drama:

Pirandello, Luigi. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Trans. John Linstrum. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Eds. Sarah Lawall and Maynard Mack. 2nd ed. Vol. F. New York: Norton, 2002. 1725-66.

b) Entire Books in a Works Cited List:

Dryasdust, Oliver. *Boring Trivia about Eighteenth-Century Historical Epics*. New York: Random House, 1989.

c) Articles in a Works Cited List:

Contrarée, Mary Q. “Incoherent Drivel in the Minor French Symbolists.” *Second-Rate Periodical* 44 (1977): 125-46.

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