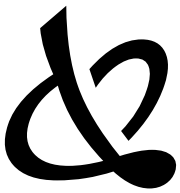
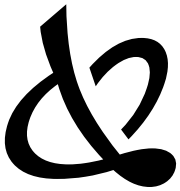


The Practical Companion

Collected Resources for Reading and Writing



El Camino Academy
Bogotá, Colombia
Written/Compiled/Edited
by Brandon Cooper

Keys to a Good Paper

Introduction

1. *Structure.* As a general practice, the introduction should be neither so short as to give the reader an incomplete preview of your paper, nor so long as to overwhelm the reader with information that more appropriately belongs in the interior proof paragraphs and/or conclusion. One simple and effective structure for introductions has four parts:

    a. *general statement(s)*, identifying the paper's topic in broad terms (e.g., ambition)

    b. *narrowing statement(s)*, marking the boundaries of the paper's content (e.g., ambition in Macbeth specifically)

    c. *thesis*, expressing the paper's central idea in one clearly focused sentence that can be argued in opposition

    d. *organizational sentence* and/or *bridge statement*, providing the reader a brief glimpse of the arguments you will use in the order you will use them, and/or setting up the structure of the interior proof paragraphs and perhaps forecasting the concluding idea which the thesis will expose by the paper's end.

2. Example. "Ambition has proved the downfall of many otherwise great men, supplanting contentment with the power one has with an insatiable thirst for what one does not [general statement]. Macbeth is no exception. Though esteemed by the king and holding significant titles, he craves the throne itself—and casts aside love and morality in pursuit of it [narrowing statements]. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* convincingly portrays the lure and ruin of ambition, depicting the downfall of the main character as a warning against social and political sedition [thesis]. Tracing Macbeth's ambition, ascension, and fall will demonstrate the widespread social ramifications of this deadly desire [organizational sentence]."

Interior Proof Paragraphs

1. *Organization and logic.* As you assemble information for and write the interior proof paragraphs of your paper, keep in mind that they must be logically ordered—that is, you should be able to demonstrate that one paragraph necessarily follows the previous paragraph and precedes yet another. A thread of argument should run through all of these paragraphs.

2. *Chronological order of events.* Whenever possible, argue your thesis statement by discussing the text work chronologically. Depending on the text, you may have a reason to stray from this chronological treatment; when you do so, make clear your reason for doing so early in the paper.

3. *Plot rehash.* Assume in your paper that you are writing to an informed reader, one who has also read (or viewed) the text. You need not, therefore, rehash the entire plot in detail. In a text-based paper you, the writer, are in control of the text's plot, characters, and setting. Establish as much context for your ideas as you need, but avoid summarizing material that is only marginally important to your topic.

Direct Quotations

1. *Selection.* If you quote directly from the text—and whenever possible, you should—select only those words, phrases, lines, and longer passages that are particularly important, interesting, or vivid. Keep quotations as brief as possible; over-quotation is no substitute for good ideas. A good rule of thumb is that direct quotations should make up no more than twenty percent of a paper's length.

2. *Context.* Always establish a structural and grammatical context for each direct quotation in your paper, adding some explanatory words of your own at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. Never let a direct quotation stand alone; always explain how it relates to the assertion, or idea, that immediately precedes it.

3. *Page citation.* At the end of each sentence containing a brief direct quotation, and at the end of each extended quotation, skip one space and then, in parentheses, cite the location in the text (page, act and scene, line, or other descriptor) where the quotation is found. *Note that page numbers, included within parentheses, come **before** the punctuation at the end of the clause or sentence*. That is, the quote will end *without* punctuation (unless it concludes with an exclamation point or question mark), then the page number will be given, and then a period or comma will follow. If the author's name is given in the introduction to the quote, do *not* include it in the citation.

Examples:

- ✓ Author not given in quote introduction:
  This explains the "great scandal of today's Church—Christians without Christian minds" (Hughes 71).

- ✓ Author given in quote introduction:
  As Moreland notes, "it doesn't take a rocket scientist to recognize that our entire culture is in trouble" (43).

- ✓ Quote ending with exclamation point/question mark:
  And yet, many do not: "23 percent—almost one in four professing Christians—say they never read the Word of God!" (Whitney 32).

4. *Brief direct quotations.* Prose quotations *up to four typed lines* should be placed in quotation marks and incorporated into the text of your paper.

Example:
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," wrote Charles Dickens of the eighteenth century (37).

You need not always reproduce complete sentences, however; sometimes you may quote just a word or phrase as part of your sentence.

Example:
For Charles Dickens the eighteenth century was both "the best of times" and "the worst of times" (37).

You may put a quotation at the beginning, middle, or end of your sentence or even divide it by your own words.

Examples:

- ✓ Joseph Conrad writes of the company manager in *Heart of Darkness*, "He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear" (121).
- ✓ "He was obeyed," writes Conrad of the company manager in *Heart of Darkness*, "yet he inspired neither love nor fear" (121).

5. *Extended direct quotations.* If you select a quotation of *more than four typed lines*, set it off from your text by beginning a new line, indenting from the left margin, diminishing the size of the font by two points, and typing it single-spaced without quotation marks at the beginning or end. A colon generally introduces an extended quotation, though sometimes the grammatical context may require a different punctuation mark or none at all. Do not indent the first line more than the rest, unless you are quoting dialogue.

Example:

Jesus often spoke of the importance of loving all people, regardless even of that person's attitude toward you:

> You have heard it said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:43-48)

In this way, Jesus sets a higher standard for Christians, that is, the standard of God himself.

Conclusion

1. *Beginning:* Never begin the conclusion with the transitional phrase "in conclusion"; it is redundant, since the reader assumes that your last paragraph is, indeed, the conclusion. Instead, refer to at least some of the major ideas you have discussed in the interior proof paragraphs without restating specific examples. In this way, you will make a natural transition from the interior of your paper to the end of it. If this technique does not suit your needs, examine the end of the text to see if it will yield an idea for the conclusion. Many times the resolution of a text's plot sheds unexpected but welcome light on a thesis in need of one last new angle.

2. *Ending:* Never weaken what may be an otherwise strong paper by concluding it with pale restatements of sentences from the introduction. Instead, save a first-class idea for your conclusion, a new angle that will yield a paragraph of intelligent discussion. This new angle must, of course, be related to your thesis; in fact, it should explain the importance of your thesis to the reader's overall understanding of the text. In thus justifying your topic, you must answer the question "So what?" In other words, "Why have I expended so much effort to prove my thesis?"

Manuscript Form
Typed Essays

N.B. *All essays should be typed unless done in class.*

1. **General requirements.** Select a clean and readable font with a 12-point type; never use a "fancy" font, unless an assignment specifically requires it. Make sure your printer cartridge is well-supplied with ink.

2. **Margins.** Except for page numbers, leave 1" margins at the top and bottom and on both sides of each page.

3. **Spacing.** Double-space your paper throughout, excluding the heading and quotes of more than four lines.

4. **Heading and title.** Do not include a title page unless the paper is more than five pages in length; this wastes paper for merely cosmetic purposes. Instead, on the first page of your paper, beginning one inch from the top and flush with the left margin, type your name, the name of the course, and the date due on separate lines, single-spaced. Double-space and type your title, centered on the line. Single-space between lines of the title if it has more than one line, and double-space again between the title and the first line of your text. Do not put quotation marks around your title, and do not underline it. If your title includes the name of a major literary work or film, however, italicize that.

   Devise a title for your paper that accurately describes its content. Avoid 1) one-word titles; 2) titles of more than a dozen words or so; and 3) cutesy titles including slang, jargon, or clichés. If you absolutely cannot devise what you consider to be an original, descriptive title, excerpt a pertinent phrase from either your introduction or your conclusion.

   Example:

   John Q. Student
   AP English—Mr. Cooper
   September 15, 2006

   Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby: A Friendship of Mere Illusion

   Early in *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, narrator Nick Carraway identifies himself as loyal to Jay Gatsby, irrevocably so, despite the fact that he abhors nearly everything that Gatsby's life represents.

5. **Page numbers.** Number all pages from two on in the upper right corner, one-half inch from the top. Type your last name before the page number as a precaution in case of misplaced pages. (Example: Jones 4.) Do not punctuate a page number by adding a period, a hyphen, or any other mark or symbol.

6. **Binding.** Staple your paper in the upper left corner with one staple. That's it. Do not use a plastic cover and binder unless specifically assigned to do so.

Manuscript Form

Handwritten Essays

1. **General requirements.** All essays should be written in *dark blue* or *black* **ink**, not in pencil or the latest fashionable color. Use college-ruled, letter-size paper (8 ½" by 11"). Paper should be clean and free of any fraying on the sides.

2. **Heading and title.** An in-class essay should still have a title. Simply write the title above the top line. Follow the guidelines for titling a paper given above.

3. **Page numbers.** As with typed papers, number all pages from two on in the upper right corner. Write your last name before the page number as a precaution in case of misplaced pages. (Example: Jones 4.) Do not punctuate a page number by adding a period, a hyphen, or any other mark or symbol.

4. **Binding.** If the teacher provides you with a stapler, staple the paper in the upper left-hand corner.

5. **Format.** Many in-class essay questions will be only one paragraph in length. If this is the case, do *not* provide a separate introductory or concluding paragraph. Instead, give a one- or two-sentence introduction and conclusion at the beginning and end of the paragraph respectively. In any case, every essay should have a *thesis statement*, clearly recognizable.

6. **Handwriting.** Write legibly or expect to lose points. Teachers will not give you the benefit of the doubt on spelling, grammar, and style if they cannot read what you wrote.

7. **Corrections.** Do not waste time correcting your paper with correction fluid or tape. Simply cross out whatever mistake you made and then continue writing. If you need to insert a sentence or paragraph, circle the part to be moved and insert the portion where it should go by means of an arrow. That's all. We'll know what you mean.

Transitions

Transitional words and phrases are absolutely indispensable to clear, precise, and intelligent writing. Use transitions to guide your reader: they help explain relationships among ideas, sentences, and paragraphs. The following list is selective rather than exhaustive.

Certain transitional expressions lend themselves to certain paragraph structures. For example, words like "moreover" and "further" will add to an idea already stated. "But" and "on the contrary" limit or contradict something already stated. "First" (etc.) or "next" shows an arrangement by time or place. "For example" and "in other words" exemplify or sum up something already said. **Advice:** Before you use a transition for the first time, make sure you know what it means and where it is correctly used.

above all
accordingly
actually
after
afterwards
again
all in all
also
although
and
anyway
apparently
as a matter of fact
as a result
as a rule
at any rate
at best
as has been noted
at last
at least
although this (noun) may be true

because
before
besides
best of all
better yet
both . . . and
but
by chance

certainly
consequently
conversely

either/or (neither/nor)
equally important

finally
for example
for the most part
for this purpose
for the time being
fortunately
frankly
further
furthermore

however

if any
if necessary
in addition (to)
in many ways
incidentally
indeed
in effect
in fact
in general
in order that
in other words
in reality
in the first place
in the meantime
in truth
in turn

later on
likewise

meanwhile
more or less
moreover
mainly

naturally
next
nevertheless
needless to say
nonetheless
now

obviously
occasionally
of course
of necessity
on the contrary
on the other hand
opposite to
on the opposite side
or (nor)

perhaps
previously
provided that

respectively

similarly
since
so far
so that
still
surely

that is
that is to say
then
therefore
though
thus
to be sure
too
to this end
to say the least

unfortunately
unless
until

when
whenever
while
without doubt

yet

Revising and Editing

Conscientious revising and editing are indispensable to the process of writing. In order to revise your content and edit your style and form, you must evaluate your writing continually—not just as the last ritual before turning in a paper.

Techniques to Consider

1. Run a blank sheet of paper slowly down the page so that you are forced to read one line at a time.
2. Read one sentence at a time from the bottom of each page up in order to take each sentence out of context and focus on content, style, and form.
3. Read the paper aloud to yourself, a parent, or a friend; or read it into a tape recorder and play it back.
4. List your three or four most common errors on the first page of your paper. As you reread your paper, focus on these errors either individually or collectively.

Twenty Questions: A Checklist on Content and Style
(adapted from *Write to Learn*, by Donald M. Murray)

1. Is the paper too long? Too short?
2. Can the reader argue with the thesis? What can be said in opposition to it?
3. Does each paragraph make one point?
4. Is there convincing evidence—including direct quotations, if appropriate—for each point?
5. Does any paragraph really need additional information for clarity?
6. Is each piece of information accurate, both in fact and in context?
7. Does the conclusion examine the thesis from a new angle? How does it do that?
8. Does the conclusion justify the topic by answering the reader's question, "So what?"
9. Does the reader leave each sentence with more information than when he entered it?
10. Does the paper go off in tangents that can be cut out?
11. Does the paper answer the reader's key questions about the topic?
12. Does the paper have an imbedded thread running through it that keeps the reader reading?
13. Does the paper deliver on the promise made in its title and introduction?
14. Are the sentence structures varied, with simpler sentences usually used for clarification or emphasis?
15. Are the verbs strong? Has the verb "to be" been cut out whenever possible? Have "-ings" been eliminated whenever possible? Are verb tenses consistent?
16. Are the nouns strong and as specific as possible?
17. Has the private language—jargon and clichés—been translated into public language?
18. Is every unnecessary word removed?
19. Is each word the right word and the simplest word?
20. Can this paper be read aloud so that the reader will have the illusion of the writer speaking?

Works Cited or Bibliographical Entries

from Kate L. Turabian,

A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (6th ed.)

Books

The reference should include the following information in the order shown:

Name of author(s)
Title and (if any) subtitle
Name of editor, compiler, or translator, if any
Number or name of edition, if other than the first
Name of series in which book appears, if any, with volume number or number in the series
Facts of publication, consisting of:
  Place of publication
  Name of publishing agency
  Date of publication

Helpful Notes

- In a bibliography or works cited page, the main elements are separated by periods (a period used at the end of each main part: author, title, facts of publication).
- If the work has multiple authors, separate the names of two authors with *and* and those of three authors with commas, the last comma followed by *and.*
- If the work has multiple authors, only the first author's name should be given with the last name first (for purpose of alphabetization); the subsequent names need not be inverted
- Enter the full title (and subtitle, if any) of a book as it appears on the title page. Often subtitles are distinguished on the title page by size or spacing rather than punctuation, so it may be necessary to add a colon to separate the title and subtitle.
- Capitalize all words in a title except prepositions and articles, but capitalize prepositions and articles if they are the first word of the title *or* subtitle.
- Italicize the title of a whole published work, such as a book or periodical; enclose in quotation marks the title of a work within a work, such as a chapter, short story, short poem, essay, or article within a periodical.
- If the work has an editor, translator, or compiler, that name follows the title, preceded by the appropriate abbreviation: *ed.* or *trans.* or *comp.* As this abbreviation stands for "edited by," "translated by," or "compiled by," it is never in the plural.
- If the work cited is not the first edition, include the information concerning what it is, making use of the following abbreviations: edition (ed.), new (new), revised (rev.), enlarged (enl.), second (2d), third (3d), fourth (4th), etc. If multiple information is given, include it all, as in Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged (3d ed., rev. and enl.). If the work was revised by another individual, include this information also, as in Revised by John Doe (rev. John Doe).
- For the place of publication, only the first city listed is necessary; if the city is not widely known, give the state as well, as in "Glenview, IL"
- If two publishers are given on the title page, include both publishers (and publishing places, if different)
- If the work is a multivolume work, the total number of volumes should be given.

Journals

The reference should include the following information, in the order shown:

Author(s)
Title of article
Title of periodical
Volume or issue number (or both)
Publication date
Page number(s)

Helpful Notes

- As with books, the main elements should be separated by periods.
- There is no period separating the title of periodical from the volume or issue number.
- The publication date should be given in parentheses; if a month is given, no comma separates the month from the year.
- A colon separates the publication date from the page numbers of the whole work.
- Magazines of general interest (such as *Time*)—even if they carry a volume number—are best identified by date alone. The date then takes the place of the volume number and is not enclosed in parentheses, though the periodical name should then be followed by a comma.
- For reference to a newspaper, the author (if given), name of the paper, and date are usually sufficient.

Special Forms

Helpful Notes

- Well-known reference books such as encyclopedias are not generally listed in bibliographies. When they are cited, the facts of publication are omitted.
- If included in a bibliography, list the title of the encyclopedia first, then the edition (separated by a comma), then "s.v." (Latin for *sub verbo*), then the title of the article, enclosed in quotes. If an author is given, list this last.
- The Bible is *never* listed in a bibliography.

Internet

For an internet source (to be used sparingly), include the following information:

Author(s)
Name of webpage (not website)
Name of website
Date accessed
URL

Helpful Notes

- If no author is given, simply begin with the name of the webpage.
- The webpage is to be distinguished from the website. The webpage is the *specific page* within the larger website (e.g., "Salvador Dali" would be the webpage within the larger website, *Wikipedia*.)

Radio, Film, Television

Include the following information:

Most relevant name (author, director, conductor, performer, etc.)
Title of performance
Venue (theater and city, television or radio station, etc.)
Date of performance (and time, if needed)

Model Bibliographical Entries

Note that all entries are single-spaced, with a double space between entries. Note also that the first line of each entry is flush left, whereas subsequent lines are indented.

Books

One Author

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Two Authors

Last, Martin and Baird Scarles. *A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction*. New York: Facts of File, 1979.

Three Authors

Carson, D.A., Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Subtitle Included

Hughes, G.R. *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation*. Cambridge: University Press, 1979.

Editor (Translator or Complier)

Mill, John Stuart. *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Subsequent Edition

Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Chapter within a Book

Moo, D.J. "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986: 175-211.

Work within an Anthology

Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Raven," in *Selected Stories and Poems*, ed. Joseph Wood Kruth. Danbury: Grolier Enterprises, 1978.

Journals and Special Forms

One Author (for two or three authors, see above)

Motyer, Stephen. "The Psalm Quotations of Hebrews 1: A Hermeneutic-Free Zone?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 50 (1999): 4-22.

Volume and Issue Number

Bellworthy, Cartright C. "Reform of Congressional Remuneration." *Political Review* 7, no. 6 (1990): 89-94.

Magazine of General Interest

Kanfer, Stefan. "Heard Any Good Books Lately?" *Time*, 21 July 1986: 71.

Unsigned Magazine Article

"America on Drugs." *Newsweek*, 28 July 1986: 48-50.

Newspaper

Marshall, Tyler. "200th Birthday of Grimms Celebrated." *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1985, sec. 1A, p. 3.

Encyclopedia

Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., s.v. "Blake, William," by J.W. Cosyns-Carr.

Unsigned Encyclopedia

Encyclopedia Americana, 1963 ed., s.v. "Sitting Bull."

Internet

Pelosi, Alexandra. "My Mother, My President." *Time*. Accessed 13 November 2006. Available *http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1558314,00.html.*

Internet without Author

"Salvador Dali." *Wikipedia*. Accessed 13 November 2006. Available *http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvador_Dal%C3%AD.*

Video (Filmstrip, Slides)

L.K. Wolff, prod. *Rock-a-Bye Baby.* New York: Time-Life Films, 1971.

Radio

Welles, Orson and the Mercury Theatre. "Invasion from Mars," radio performance. CBS, 30 October 1938, 8:00-9:00 p.m.

Television

Sesame Street, television performance. PBS, 22 November 1994.

Comma Usage

1. Use a comma **to separate the elements in a series** (three or more things), including the last two.

2. **Use a comma + a little conjunction** (and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so) **to connect two independent clauses,** as in "He hit the ball well, **but** he ran toward third base."

3. Use a comma **to set off introductory elements**, as in "*Running toward third base*, he suddenly realized how stupid he looked."

4. Use a comma **to set off parenthetical elements**, as in "The Founders Bridge, *which spans the Connecticut River,* is falling down." By parenthetical element, we mean a part of a sentence that can be removed without changing the essential meaning of that sentence.

5. Use a comma **to separate coordinate adjectives**. You could think of this as "That tall, distinguished, good-looking fellow" rule (as opposed to "the little old lady"). If you can put an *and* or a *but* between the adjectives, a comma will probably belong there. For instance, you could say, "He is a tall and distinguished fellow" or "I live in a very old and run-down house." So you would write, "He is a tall, distinguished man" and "I live in a very old, run-down house." But you would probably not say, "She is a little and old lady," or "I live in a little and purple house," so commas would not appear between *little* and *old* or between *little* and *purple*.

6. Use a comma **to set off quoted elements.**

7. Use commas **to set off phrases that express contrast**, as in "The puppies were cute, but very messy."

8. Use a comma **to avoid confusion,** as in "Outside, the lawn was cluttered with broken branches." Simply writing "Outside the lawn was cluttered with broken branches" could be confusing.

9. **Typographical Reasons:** Between a city and a state [Hartford, Connecticut], a date and the year [June 15, 1997], a name and a title when the title comes after the name [Bob Downey, Professor of English], in long numbers [5,456,783 and $14,682], etc.

10. **Never use only one comma between a subject and its verb.** "Believing completely and positively in oneself is essential for success." (Although readers might pause after the word "oneself," there is no reason to put a comma there.)

11. **Use commas with caution**. As you can see, there are many reasons for using commas, and we haven't listed them all. Yet the biggest problem that most students have with commas is their **overuse**. Some essays look as though the student loaded a shotgun with commas and blasted away. Remember, too, that a *pause* in reading is not always a reliable reason to use a comma. Try not to use a comma unless you can apply a specific rule from this page to do so.

Common Errors

These are among the most common errors made by English Language Learners. Teachers will pay especial attention to these mistakes, and you can expect to lose extra points if you make these.

1. We're/were/wear/where
    a. We're is short for *we are*, as in, *we are* going
    b. Were is the plural past tense form of "to be," as in, they *were* short
    c. Wear is the verb having to do with clothing, as in, what are you *wearing*?
    d. Where is the interrogative seeking information about location, as in, *where* are you?
2. They're/their/there
    a. There is short for *they are*, as in, *they are* going
    b. Their is the 3rd-person plural possessive pronoun, as in, *their* car wouldn't start
    c. There is a directional term, as in, it's over *there*
3. Whether/weather
    a. Whether suggests a conditional choice, as in, I don't know *whether* I want to do that or not
    b. Weather refers to how sunny it is outside, as in, nice *weather* today
4. Belief/believe, Proof/prove
    a. The noun form of these and like verbs ends in "f," as in, I have the *proof*
    b. The verb form of these and like verbs ends in "ve," as in, I *believe* what you *proved*
5. Lose/loose
    a. Lose is the verb form of "lost," as in, I hope we don't *lose* today
    b. Loose is an adjective describing something that is not tight, as in, your pants are too *loose*
6. Nowadays—not "now a day"
7. Prepositions—There are 57 in English, 26 in Spanish. This will make word-for-word translation difficult. The best way to check these is to have a native English speaker proof your paper.
8. Subject/verb agreement—Make sure you have the correct verb form with each subject. Teachers will not be impressed with sentences like "The girl walk to the store."
9. Would/will
    a. Would expresses a conditional thought, as in, I *would* like to go to the movies
    b. Will expresses a future action, as in, I *will* go to the movies
10. Make/do—Spanish uses "hacer" for both, so you will have to learn which verb is appropriate in any given context.
11. Ask/tell
    a. Ask represents interrogation, a questioning, as in, I *asked* my mom if I could go
    b. Tell represents speech or a command, as in, I *told* you "no"
12. Capitalize the names of days of the week, months, language (less common these days), and people groups

More Helpful Hints

1. Active versus passive voice. Use verbs in the active voice instead of the passive voice whenever possible. "Jay Gatsby *yearns* for Daisy Fay," in the active voice, is much stronger and more direct than "Daisy Fay *is yearned for* by Jay Gatsby."

2. Jargon. Avoid the following words or phrases, since in nearly all cases they either say nothing essential or can be replaced by one or two well-chosen words:

along the lines of	*concept*	*matter*
as for the fact	*essentially*	*relative to the matter*
as to whether	*factor*	*with reference to*
aspect	*in terms of*	*with respect to*
basically	*in the case of*	

3. Connotation. Select specific synonyms, using a dictionary and/or thesaurus to avoid improper word connotations. Note, for example, the difference between these two sentences because of italicized word connotations: 1) "In an *ecstatic outburst*, Mr. Smith today *lauded scholars* in English class for their *brilliance*." 2) "In an *animated moment*, Mr. Smith today *acknowledged students* in English class for their *achievements*."

4. Verb tense. Whenever possible, maintain a consistent verb tense in your writing. In addition, a literary paper should be written in the present tense, even though that tense may sound unnatural at first. (The past tense may, in this case, seem the logical choice. If you assume, however, that the characters and events in a literary work do not really exist in time—that they are eternal—then present tense is the truly logical choice.) If you mention two incidents that happen at different times in the literary work, the earlier incident normally takes the present perfect tense. Example: "Jay Gatsby *yearns* for Daisy Fay even as he *creates* for himself a life that he *hopes* will win her back to him. However, not until after the two former lovers *have met do* Gatsby's deepest feelings of romantic devotion *emerge*."

5. Sentence conciseness. As you revise and edit, eliminate superfluous words whenever possible. Example, with bold-faced words to be omitted: "**In my opinion**, *The Great Gatsby* is a masterpiece **in itself and quite a story**."

6. Sentence variety. Vary your sentence structures so that they are neither consistently simple nor consistently complex. Stray from the usual subject-verb-complement structure by beginning about one sentence in three with an appositive phrase, a single-word modifier (adjective or adverb), a modifying phrase, or a modifying clause. Combine shorter sentences to reveal relationships among ideas through coordinate and subordinate clauses.