

(1) Care. If you care, you'll think about the topic. If you think about the topic you'll have some ideas. If you have ideas, you'll write lively, definite prose. Select the topic you care most about. Failing that, select the topic you least care least about. Failing that, simulate passion; various errors of grammar, organization, and attribution can be overlooked if the paper has momentum or is unlike other papers in my stack. You can assume that I have the job of teaching you this subject-matter because I care about it and think it's important and fun. If you don't give a damn about it, I am personally offended; if you are preoccupied or absorbed by it I am flattered. (This is the key to the heart of all professors.)

(2) Picture me reading thirty papers on a narrow range of topics on which I've read hundreds of papers over the years. I'm bored. I have a headache. I'm popping Advils™ like they're Skittles™. Then I come across your paper. It takes a bold or counter-intuitive stance, or it directly opposes everything I ever said in class. The years of terrible disillusionment fall from me and I am again a young professor in his pedagogical springtime.

(3) By all means use 'I' and state your own opinion in your own voice. There is no reason to pretend that you don't exist, or that it's not you who's writing. Use of the first person is conventional in academic philosophy. This does not mean that sheer assertion is acceptable: you must give the reasons for which you believe what you believe. These can often be specified in careful reflection on the thought process that led to your conclusion.

(4) If a word can be dropped from a sentence, or a sentence from a paragraph, or a paragraph from a paper without changing the meaning, drop it. If you find yourself repeating or padding to reach a certain length, either think some more or write short. Otherwise you're wasting your time and mine, and I become homicidal.

(5) A reasonable form is summary and evaluation: give a clear statement of the argument or polemic of the text and a supported assessment of it. Valid or fallacious? Moving or senseless? A 'B' paper will show me that you have a pretty clear grasp on the terms and argument of the text you are considering. An 'A' will go on to evaluate the text in your own way in your own voice, giving reasons. The five-paragraph essay must be ruthlessly suppressed in a paroxysm of violence, a stylistic bloodbath.

(6) Sadly and happily, however, excellent essays have been written in innumerable forms or in no discernible form at all. Offhand, I will, for example, accept dialogues and fictionalizations. I like a good tear or rant that is too angry for organization, though not so angry as to lack documentation. I myself would call my writing, often enough, "riffing," or improvising.

(7) Destroy all cliches and empty, glittering generalities. If you find yourself beginning with "Since the beginning of time, great thinkers have pondered..." or any variation of it, stop and begin again in some other way.

(8) Say everything as clearly and simply as possible, in words you are certain you understand. Trying to sound sophisticated or academic often backfires.

(9) Don't contradict yourself or try to have it both ways. Be bold. Be clear. Often self-contradiction arises from being overly deferential to a famous philosopher: "Hobbes's argument is very convincing and logical, but..." If you're not actually convinced, you don't regard the argument as convincing; the term 'logical' ought not to be tossed around casually.

(10) Define key terms, or if you are discussing the use of some term ("justice," say, or "state of nature") by some thinker, say what that thinker means by it, with reference. If you do define a term, think about the definition as giving necessary and sufficient conditions; try to make sure your definition counts all and only the right items (perhaps you will receive a handout on this matter).

(11) Factual assertions that could be controversial must be supported by evidence and citation. Claims that a philosopher said, argued, or believed something should be supported by references to the text.

(12) My preference for citations is footnotes using the *Chicago Manual of Style*.¹ If you are referring to a course text, put the name of the author and page number in parentheses in the body of your paper. Second and subsequent references to the same outside source can be treated similarly.

(13) Any materials apart from our texts that you consult should be listed in a bibliography. If you use materials to which you do not refer in the notes for the paper, you can list them on a separate "Works Consulted" page in *Chicago Manual* style (again, see Hacker 428-435).

(14) That said, I'm not sure why professors are sticklers for citation form in undergraduate papers; it seems to me like pointless hoop jumping. If you are ever on the verge of being a publishing scholar in or after grad school, you can surely look up citation forms. Meanwhile, the real point is to allow me to find and consult your sources if I want to, and if you accomplish that then from my point of view the citation is adequate.

(15) If you cut and paste from the internet, and then replace a few words with synonyms, etc, that is plagiarism. If you closely paraphrase a text by someone else without attribution, that is plagiarism. If you get all your ideas from somewhere, that is spiritual plagiarism. For God's sake show some pride: think and write your own words.

(16) If you are not perfectly confident about grammar and punctuation, get help from the

¹ You can see models of this style in Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, 5th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 428-435.

writing center or from someone who knows. And go learn grammar and punctuation. I may not strike you as a person who'd be a stickler about such things, but I am.

(17) If you are taking a position, it is essential to consider the best possible arguments that could be made by your opponents. The most vigorous and effective attack on a position considers that position in its most plausible form. Perform the exercise of envisioning a reply to your point of view, made by a very smart person who passionately believes you are wrong. If you are attempting to support a position put forward by a philosopher, you need to consider the best counter-arguments to that position. I can often be of help with this.

(18) Make sure you have the basics right. If you give the wrong title for a key book, or misspell the name of the person you're writing about throughout ('Mills,' for example), I assume (perhaps unfairly) that you haven't actually been listening in class or reading anything.

(19) Read the damn thing over once before you turn it in, and after you spell-check it.

Style Sheet

Crispin Sartwell

This is a list of the sort of errors I see over and over again in student papers.

Conceptual

Conscience (con-shens) is the small still voice of morality. **Consciousness** is the faculty of awareness, and a person, animal, or machine that possesses consciousness at a given moment is said to be **conscious** (con-shus) (not conscience) at that moment.

To **argue** a position is to advocate it with reasons. If you're rejecting the position you are doing the opposite of arguing it; you are **arguing against it**. "Bobby says George is the greatest American president; I would argue that," means that I agree with Bobby's claim, not that I reject it.

Rationality refers to the human capacity to reason or is the faculty of a human being that allows her to reason. A **rationale** on the other hand is a justification. **Rationalizing** is not **reasoning**; it's justifying your actions in a false and self-serving way.

Words such as "**therefore**" and "**thus**" are not all-purpose transitional devices. They assert a conceptual connection of implication. "p; therefore q" means that q actually follows from p: given p, it would be irrational to reject q. If you use such terms, look at the two claims/sentences/events they purport to link and wonder for a moment whether they really do have the connection that the term asserts. Consider as you write the actual meaning of the transitional elements you are inserting, such as **so**, **because**, **however**, etc.

In general, for critical or argumentative papers, it is better to **think**, **assert**, or **believe** than to **feel**. "I feel that x" is not an all-around formulation for claiming, asserting, or arguing that x. If you do or could give reasons why you are saying x, then you are not merely feeling that it is so. Save "I feel" for real expressions of emotion, such as "Aristotle makes me feel warm and gooey." Don't feel that Aristotle is right; argue that he's right; show that he's right; believe, assert, or think that he's right.

Begging the question is the fallacy of assuming what you need to prove, not the idea that there is a question that needs answering or that demands to be addressed. **The question begs** is damnable piece of nonsense.

Use and mention: there is a difference between the word 'art' and art. The word 'art' has three letters, while art is a sphere or group of activities. You can define the word 'art,' but it's not clear what it means to define art. To refer to a word, enclose that word in single quotes. That is *mentioning* the word. *Using* it would be more like: I think Hirst's sculptures count as art.

A **novel** is a book-length work of fiction: that is, a piece of writing that makes some sort of explicit claim not to be factually accurate and that usually takes a narrative or story form. A book that primarily makes an argument or tries to describe some real course of events, that doesn't have constructed characters running about pretending to be human beings or mice, etc. (that is, the sort of thing you'd read in a philosophy class or a history class or a physics class or a math class), is not a novel. Anyway **figure out what sort of thing you're reading** (even if it's in an anthology) and call it by its right name. *The Critique of Judgment* is a book-length philosophical **treatise** or **essay** or, for short, a book. Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" is an essay, but not a book, because it's too short. Neither of these things, of course, are novels.

The titles of books, movies, and music cds/album-length works of music should be in italics, with no quotation marks. The titles of articles or essays should be in quotation marks, unitalicized.

For long quotes of more than about five lines, indent one or two tabs from the left, leaving the text even with the rest on the right. Do not use quotation marks around the quote as a whole where it is indented. Run other quotes into the paragraph, setting off with quotation marks.

Mass nouns and **count nouns** should be distinguished. A pile of sand consists of a certain *amount* of sand; a pile of puppies is a certain *number* of puppies. You cannot, for example, have an "amount" of people as you can have a cup of sugar, unless you actually grind them up first; you have a number of people, or several people. You can't make a large amount of mistakes, such as a pound and a half of mistakes, and you can't have six sugar, though you could have six lumps or teaspoons of sugar. Here's an actual example from the Washington Post: "The only time Giuliani has cracked the national news in any

real way over the past month was late last week when it was announced that much of his senior staff members are going without pay in order to save money for a final push in Florida." Dude. Not 'much.' 'Many.' Phil Sims during the AFC championship game: "They make less errors." No: they make fewer errors.

Different situations require different **prepositions** in a systematic way and one of the most frequent errors is the misuse of prepositions, reducing sentences to gobbledygook. Sadly, this is something that can only be learned by reading competent English prose all the time over a period of years. Let me just give some examples from student papers. "All of these paintings are important aspects to Hitler's political regime because they were metaphors to what Hitler had to do to gain power."

Rather: they are aspects *of* Hitler's political regimes, and metaphors *of* what Hitler had to do to create power.

"*The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* portrays the perspective from the director herself of what she thought about Hitler's concept."

Rather: it portrays the perspective *of* the director *on* what she thought about Hitler's views.

Everyday is an adjective, while **every day** is a noun phrase. "Everyday is better than the one before" is wrong. "I am everyday people," and "Every day I have the blues" are correct.

I.e. means "that is"; **e.g.** means "for example."

If you start a sentence using the pronoun **one**, continue in the same vein: "one never knows, does one?" not "one never knows, does he?" or "do they?"

When in doubt, punctuate inside quotation marks. Exceptions: semi-colons and colons.

The past tense of **lead** is **led**. **Lead**, pronounced 'led,' is a tasty heavy metal.

Do not use the **apostrophe** to form plurals, but rather for possessives and contractions. Plural possessives are usually formed by s followed by an apostrophe.

"It's" is a contraction meaning "it is." "Its" is the possessive the pronoun.