

## WRITING GUIDELINES

*“The code is more what you'd call ‘guidelines’ than actual rules.”*

– Barbossa, Pirates of the Caribbean

**DIRECTIONS: Use these writing guidelines as a way to improve your writing.**

- ★ an asterisk (\*) denotes a easy fix
  - easy fix: grammar situations you can use Control + F to find and fix easily before submitting
- ★ you may deliberately break any of the following guidelines if you acknowledge doing so and provide a brief rationale in a footnote or postscript.

## STANDARD GRAMMAR

### Semicolon Usage

- Only use a semicolon if the words on both sides of the semicolon could stand alone as sentences.

INCORRECT: Thomas Jefferson argued for equality in the civic sphere; but in fact he owned many slaves.

CORRECT: Thomas Jefferson argued for equality in the civic sphere; ironically, he owned many slaves.

ALTERNATIVELY CORRECT: Thomas Jefferson argued for equality in the civic sphere, but he owned many slaves.

### Comma Usage

- Offset a removable clause with commas

EXAMPLE: Veronica decided to study abroad, despite her fear of travel, for two semesters.

- Do not put a comma before the word “because” unless the comma is preceded by a clause that is removable

INCORRECT: We can’t go to the beach, because our papers are due next week.

CORRECT: Tammy wanted to go to the beach, which is near her home, because she enjoys the sunshine.

- Use a comma before a conjunction (such as “but” and “and”) if a subject follows

WRONG: The Tigers have struggled to find a solid roster of hitters and their bullpen is sorely lacking talented pitchers.

RIGHT: The Tigers have struggled to find a solid roster of hitters, and their bullpen is sorely lacking talented pitchers.

WRONG: We should wash the car, and mow the lawn.

RIGHT: We should wash the car and mow the lawn.

- Caveat: in a list, the commas separate each item in the list

EX: We ordered wine, beer, and liquor.

## Run-On Sentence v. Sentence Fragment

- A run-on sentence is not necessarily a very long sentence. Rather, it's a sentence in which two independent clauses are joined without the necessary punctuation or conjunction. Therefore, a run-on sentence can be quite short.

EXAMPLE: Jack went to dinner, he went to bed.

- A sentence fragment is simply an incomplete sentence.

EXAMPLE: NAU offers many excellent humanities majors. Such as History, English, and Classics.

### **Hyphen v. En dash v. Em dash**

- hyphen -
- en dash –
- em dash —

Using hyphens

- Use a hyphen for compound words
- When two words collectively describe a given noun (aka compound modifier), use hyphens
- When the compound modifier is more than two words, you should use two or more hyphens

EXAMPLE: Hours are increasing among blue-collar workers.

EXAMPLE: Melinda took a matter-of-fact approach to the sales pitch.

En dash

- Use as a substitute for “to”

EXAMPLE: 2023 to 2025 □ 2022–2025

EXAMPLE: Phoenix to Denver flight □ Phoenix–Denver flight

Em dash

- Use an em dash as an alternative to a comma
- to elaborate on a prior clause
- to bookend a removable clause

EXAMPLE: Joey wanted an ice-cold beer from Blackbird, a favorite haunt for Norman locals.

EXAMPLE: Joey wanted an ice-cold beer from Blackbird—a favorite haunt for Norman locals.

### **\*No Apostrophe for a Decade\***

INCORRECT: 1950's

CORRECT: 1950s

### **Who vs. That**

- “who” refers to people, “that” refers to things

### **Lead vs. Led**

- The past tense of lead is led

### **Fewer vs. Less**

- Use “fewer” if the noun consists of countable units. Use “less” if it doesn’t.

EXAMPLE: He owns fewer sunglasses than she does.

EXAMPLE: She drinks less Pepsi than he does.

- Exceptions:

Money: We spent less than \$10 on Twizzlers.

Time: It takes less than twenty minutes to drive to campus.

Distance: ASU is less than four miles from Sky Harbor.

One: With the return of “The Bachelor” on Monday nights, I have one less problem.

### **Italicize Foreign Terms**

- Italicize foreign terms if they’re not yet effectively English-language words

EXAMPLE: He endorsed a *laissez-faire* approach to economics.

EXAMPLE: The voters must decide whether to uphold or upend the status quo.

### **“That” versus “Which”**

- you can either use a comma plus “which” or no comma plus “that” in such instances; either works.
- Warning: not all instances of “which” requires commas before them.

INCORRECT: Margo opened three envelopes, that contained cash.

CORRECT: Margo opened three envelopes that contained cash.

INCORRECT: Margo opened three envelopes which contained cash.

CORRECT: Margo opened three envelopes, which contained cash.

### **“Wherein” versus “Where”**

- Opt for “wherein” rather than “where” in instances when you are not referring to a place:

EXAMPLE: The Associated Press Top 25 is a poll wherein teams receive rankings based on performance.

### **“If” versus “Whether”**

- Use “whether” to indicate two alternatives:

EXAMPLE: Cecilia was unsure whether she should study Spanish or French.

- Use “if” to indicate a conditional state of affairs:

EXAMPLE: Cecilia was unsure if she should study Spanish or French.

### **Although v. Whether**

- When you mean “in spite of the fact that” opt for “Although” instead of “While” because “Although” has a more precise meaning.
- Caveat: if the word “Although” already appears close by, use “While” to vary your diction

INCORRECT: While I enjoy the warm weather, I am wary of exposing my skin to the sun.

CORRECT: Although I enjoy the warm weather, I am wary of exposing my skin to the sun.

## **Spell Out Numbers up to One Hundred**

### **Who v. Whom**

- Who is a subject; whom is the object
- trick: she/he/they=who; her/him/them=whom

EXAMPLE: To who/whom are you speaking?

EXAMPLE: We want to meet the woman who designed these sneakers.

### **\*Who's vs. Whose\***

- Who's = Who is
- Whose = possessive
- trick: see if the sentence works with "who is"

EXAMPLE: Whose dog is this?

EXAMPLE: Who's coming to the game?

### **If/Was vs. If/Were**

- When you're describing a conditional that is unreal, use "were":

EXAMPLE: If I were a millionaire, I would buy a ticket to the moon.

- When you're using a conditional because a real state of affairs is unknown, use "was":

EXAMPLE: If I was mistaken about your intentions, then I owe you an apology.

### **Hyphenating "Well"**

- Phrases such as "well known," "well established," and "well deserved" only sometimes use hyphens.
- Use a hyphen when "well" and the subsequent word precede the noun that they together describe:

EXAMPLE: Julie Payette, a well-known Canadian astronaut, will be giving the keynote speech.

- Lose the hyphen when those words appear after the noun:

EXAMPLE: Julie Payette, a Canadian astronaut who is well known, will be giving the keynote speech.

- A caveat to the above rule: if the word "well" changes the fundamental meaning of the compound word—and is not just an indicator of degree—than keep the hyphen:

EXAMPLE: Mike Weir won the golf tournament with a well-timed shot.

### **Possessive with Two People**

- If two people share the same thing, use one apostrophe:

INCORRECT: Mark's and Hillary's wedding is next week.

CORRECT: Mark and Hillary's wedding is next week.

- Caveat: use an apostrophe if you refer to one of them by a pronoun:

EXAMPLE: Mark's and her wedding is next week.

### **Doubles. Single Quote Marks**

- When you are on American soil, use double quote marks:

EXAMPLE: Sheila claimed to be home "with the flu," but actually she went to the movies.

- When a quote appears within another quote, the inner quote should have single marks and the outer quote should have double:

EXAMPLE: Max felt it important to rely on Wanda's exact language, explaining, "When I arrived at the crime scene, Wanda told me that 'it's still not safe' and urged me to leave."

- A quote within a quote that appears at the beginning or end of the outer quote will necessitate three quote marks in a row:

EXAMPLE: Max felt it important to rely on Wanda's exact language, explaining, "When I arrived at the crime scene, Wanda told me that 'it's still not safe.'"

## **ACADEMIC WRITING**

### **\*Contractions: Avoid in Formal Academic Writing\***

INCORRECT: don't, won't, couldn't

CORRECT: do not, will not, could not

### **\*Period Goes After the In-Text Citation\***

- When using a quotation, make sure your punctuation falls inside the quotation marks UNLESS the APA in-text citation immediately follows the quote mark; then the period goes after the parenthesis

INCORRECT: According to one biographer, George Washington was a "moral compass." (Klicker, 2020, 24)

CORRECT: According to one biographer, George Washington was a "moral compass" (Klicker, 2020, 24).

### **Write in the Past Tense for Historical Events**

- Use the past tense when writing about the past

INCORRECT: Alexander Hamilton writes in Federalist #79 that impeachment is a political rather than legal tool.

CORRECT: Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist #79 that impeachment is a political rather than legal tool.

### **Write in the Past Tense for Historical Interpretations**

- Use the past tense when referring to what evidence revealed to contemporaries

EXAMPLE: Many clergy were wary of Jefferson's views on church and state. His 1803 letter illustrated that he had little tolerance for state support of religion.

### **Write in the Present Tense for Literary Events**

INCORRECT: When Winston Smith saw Julia in the square, he told her that he betrayed her.

CORRECT: When Winston Smith sees Julia in the square, he tells her that he betrayed her.

### **Write in the Present Tense for Modern Interpretations**

- Use present tense when referring to what evidence reveals to us.

EXAMPLE: Jefferson wrote a letter in 1803 supporting the separation of church and state, which illustrates his views on the dangers of religious involvement in governance.

### **\*Avoid 1st Person Statements\***

- I already know it's your paper—it's your paper

UNNECESSARY: "I think," "In my opinion," "I refute."

### **Spacing and Font**

- The text of your paper should be double-spaced, the footnotes should be single-spaced.
- The text of your paper should be 12-point font, whereas the footnotes should be 10 point.

### **Italicize Larger, Stand-Alone Works**

- Italicize newspaper titles, magazine titles, journal titles, and book titles

EXAMPLE: *The Washington Post* features a new history section.

EXAMPLE: I subscribe to the *Journal of the American Revolution*.

### **Put in Quotes Smaller Works that are Not Stand-Alone**

- Put in quotes song titles, chapter titles, article titles, etc

EXAMPLE: I like Taylor Swift's song "You Belong With Me."

### **\*Avoid Date Abbreviations\***

- For dates, do not use "st" in 1<sup>st</sup>, "nd" in 2<sup>nd</sup>, "rd" in 3<sup>rd</sup>, "th" in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> etc

EXAMPLE: On March 23, 1904, nothing all that important happened.

### **Citing Sources**

- Have citations for all of your claims

Book:

Author, A. A. (Year). *Title of work: Capital letter also for subtitle*. Publisher Name.

Stoneman, R. (2008). *Alexander the Great: A life in legend*. Yale University Press.

Article:

Lastname, F. M. (Year). "Title of article." *Title of Periodical*, Volume(Issue), page number(s).  
DOI

Drollinger, T., Comer, L. B., & Warrington, P. T. (2006). "Development and validation of the active empathetic listening scale." *Psychology & Marketing*, 23(2), 161-180.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20105>

### **Make Your Thesis an Argument, Not a Method.**

METHOD-BASED THESIS: *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819) can be used to see how federalism developed.

ARGUMENT-BASED THESIS: *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819) helped establish the supremacy of the federal government over the states.

### **Write a Specific Thesis**

- Make your thesis specific rather than broad/vague.

BAD: The Supreme Court decided many important cases in the nineteenth century.

BETTER: Throughout the nineteenth century, the Supreme Court upheld federal power in commerce while limiting Washington's control over policing.

### **Topic Sentences**

- Topic sentences should be subarguments that directly support your thesis, not elements of a narrative
- Frame statements in the context of your argument.
- Topic sentences should *not* have quotations in them.

## **TO IMPROVE CLARITY**

### **\* "this," "these," and "those" Must be Followed by Nouns\***

INCORRECT: Abraham Lincoln issued a constitutionally dubious order regarding a suspected traitor. This raised difficult issues for the Supreme Court in a time of war.

CORRECT: Abraham Lincoln issued a constitutionally dubious order regarding suspected traitors. This exercise of executive power raised difficult issues for the Supreme Court in a time of war.

### **Introduce Individuals with Full Name**

- The first time you mention anyone in your main text, give the first name as well as the last name. For subsequent references, use just the last name.

EXAMPLE: Chief Justice John Roberts voted to uphold the Affordable Care Act.

Roberts argued that the wisdom of the legislation was beyond the purview of the Court.

### **Avoid Pronouns that Could Refer to More Than One Noun**

INCORRECT: Shirley and Lisa both play tennis. She taught her to play.

### **\*Avoid "If not"\***

- "if not" is a problematic phrase

- “if not” can mean “but not” or “perhaps even;” use those phrases instead

UNCLEAR: Mark’s cake tasted terrible. Sheila appreciated his attempt to bake a cake if not the cake itself.

UNCLEAR: Bethany cooked hundreds, if not thousands, of shrimp.

MORE CLEAR: if you use “if not” in the first sense, change “if not” to “but not”

MORE CLEAR: if you use “if not” in the second sense, change “if not” to “perhaps even”

### “Both” and “Neither” Clarify

- The proper placement of “both” or “neither” can clarify meaning of your sentence

INCORRECT: Peter is traveling to New Orleans both for the music and the food.

CORRECT: Peter is traveling to New Orleans for both the music and the food.

### Dangling Participles

- Make sure that if you start with a participle, that it connects with the subject of the sentence

INCORRECT: Stepping into the wardrobe, Narnia was a world that awaited the children.

CORRECT: Stepping into the wardrobe, the children found the world of Narnia awaiting them.

### Add “That” to Avoid Mistaken Interpretation

INCORRECT: The museum manager held the liberty bell must be preserved.

CORRECT: The museum manager held that the liberty bell must be preserved.

- mistaken interpretation: The museum manager held the liberty bell...with his hands?

## IMPROVING STYLE

### Vary Your Diction

- rule of thumb: the rarer the word, the greater the onus to vary your diction

INCORRECT: There are many great **teachers** at Arizona State University. **Teachers** such as Professor McGillicuddy have taken me from the valley of despair to the summit of hope. We need more **teachers** like her.

CORRECT: There are many great **teachers** at Arizona State University. **Professors** such as Dr. McGillicuddy have taken me from the valley of despair to the summit of hope. We need more **faculty members** like her.

### Judiciously use “It is,” “it was,” “there is,” and “there was”

- Avoiding these phrases makes your writing more concise

It is hard to take the LSAT. (7)

The LSAT is hard to take. (6)

There was a shed behind the house. (7)

A shed was behind the house. (6)



- Can be used for emphasis or *gravitas*; acknowledge you are using it for this purpose

*Gravitas*: It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Less gravitas: Times were good and bad.

### **When Possible, Use the Negative Version of a Word Instead of “not,” “never,” “without,”**

Dara did not have sufficient time to complete the task. (10)

Dara had insufficient time to complete the task. (8)

Without question, I’m taller than Jake Gyllenhaal. (10)

Unquestionably, I’m taller than Jake Gyllenhaal. (6)

### **Cut Unnecessary Verbiage**

The Supreme Court established the principle of judicial review so that the executive branch would not be able to become dominant. (21)

The Supreme Court established the principle of judicial review so that the executive branch would not become dominant. (18)

We decided to cook Thai food on the basis that we need to expand our culinary skills. (17)

We decided to cook Thai food because we need to expand our culinary skills. (14)

- caveat: you might use “on the basis” to vary your diction if “because” appears nearby

Colin sought neither the help of his manager nor the help of his supervisor. (14)

Colin sought the help of neither his manager nor supervisor. (10)

A shift from television ads to digital ones was responsible for changes in consumer tastes. (15)

A shift from television ads to digital ones changed consumer tastes. (11)

The quarterback proved lacking in offering moral support to the team. (11)

The quarterback failed to provide moral support to the team. (10)

Your plan for infrastructure is similar to what the Italians did when they constructed a new train system. (18)

Your plan for infrastructure is similar to the Italians’ construction of a new train system. (15)

### **\*“Use” versus “Utilize”\***

- Opt for “use” instead of “utilize” except when you mean “repurpose”

Less preferable: I utilized my laptop to write my paper.

More preferable: I utilized my laptop as a tray to eat my lunch.

### **Avoid Clichéd Metaphors**

examples:

The Battle of Concord was just the tip of the iceberg.

Paul Revere was ready to ride at the drop of a hat.

George Washington was at the end of his rope.

### **Avoid Colloquialisms**

examples:

Theodore Roosevelt was gonna figure out what was up.

Susan B. Anthony was a big shot in her era.

Thomas Jefferson totally flipped out during *Marbury v. Madison*. Like, literally.

### **Avoid Ending a Sentence with a Preposition**

INCORRECT: Durant is the player I must speak to.

CORRECT: Durant is the player to whom I must speak.

### **Avoid Two Consecutive Prepositions.**

- If you have two consecutive prepositions and can remove one without changing the meaning of the sentence, remove it.

NOT IDEAL: The basketball rolled off of the court.

BETTER: The basketball rolled off the court.

NOT IDEAL: We flew up above the clouds.

BETTER: We flew above the clouds.

- Leave both prepositions if removing one would alter the meaning of the sentence:

The cat jumped from beneath the couch.

vs.

The cat jumped beneath the couch.

or

The cat jumped from the couch.

### **Descriptive Verbs**

- Use descriptive rather than neutral words when appropriate.

JUST OKAY: Thomas said, "Follow the IKEA instructions."

BETTER: Thomas advised, "Follow the IKEA instructions."

JUST OKAY: Aurora ran through the finish line.

BETTER: Aurora bolted through the finish line.

- Collapse a neutral verb and descriptive adverb into a descriptive verb, thereby improving your concision.

OKAY: The student quickly read the book.

BETTER: The student devoured the book.

### **Avoid Long Sentences**

LONG SENTENCE EXAMPLE: Despite historians' praise for the *Marbury v. Madison* decision—with adulation coming from both liberal and conservative scholars, and from law schools as well as history departments—academics have failed to appreciate the subtle and important contribution that Marshall made in his crafting of the “political questions” doctrine, which endures as a valuable tool in the hands of the judiciary.

TWO SHORTER SENTENCES EXAMPLE: Historians have lavished praise on *Marbury v. Madison*, be they based in law schools or history departments, be their politics liberal or conservative. Yet academics have failed to appreciate the subtle and important contribution of Marshall's “political questions” doctrine, which endures as a valuable tool in the hands of the judiciary.

### **Avoid Sentences with Long Lists**

LONG LIST EXAMPLE: Historians have identified several causes of the Civil War, including enduring conflicts over the expansion of slavery, the constitutional legitimacy of popular sovereignty, the balance of power between state governments and the federal government, countervailing economic interests of Northern industrialists and Southern planters, and cultural differences between the North and South.

SHORT SENTENCE EXAMPLE: Historians have identified several causes of the Civil War. Some stress the most conspicuous origin of the conflict: slavery. Others emphasize political tensions such as the constitutional legitimacy of popular sovereignty and the balance of power between state and federal governments. Still others focus on regional antipathies between Northerners and Southerners, be they cultural or economic in character.

### **“Not only”**

- If a sentence has the phrase “not only” you should include “but also” as well.

EXAMPLE: I won not only the pie-eating contest but also the vomit competition.

### **Avoid Close Proximity of Words with Multiple Meanings**

YIKES: The head of state was concerned about finances, stating that the state of the treasury was poor.

YES: The president was concerned about finances, stating that the condition of the treasury was poor.

### **\*Avoid Using “Being” as a Verb\***

- Don't use “being” as a verb, only as a noun
- Try deleting “being” and see how the sentence reads

INCORRECT: With the train being able to carry people far distances, the Western frontier grew increasingly accessible.

CORRECT: With the train carrying people far distances, the Western frontier grew increasingly accessible.

CORRECT: Optimism is the essence of her being.

### **Avoid the Word “Occur”**

- Can you be more descriptive and concise? Probably
- Try deleting “occur” to see if the sentence still works.

POOR: The Civil War raged for four years. After the war occurred, the North admitted some Southern states back into the Union.

BETTER: The Civil War raged for four years. After the war, the North admitted some Southern states back into the Union.

POOR: Many state universities use affirmative action. These admissions programs occur in different forms depending on the institution.

BETTER: These admissions programs assume different forms depending on the institution.

### **Avoid More Than One “and” Per Sentence**

- If you have more than one and, consider revising

TWO ANDS: The document revealed secret banks and showed that they funded illicit drug deals and firearms.

ALTERNATIVE: The document revealed secret banks and showed that they funded illicit drugs deals as well as firearms.

ALTERNATIVE: The document revealed secret banks, showing that they funded illicit drug deals and firearms.

### **Find Proxies for Your Opinion**

INCORRECT: Abraham Lincoln was a leader with an astounding intellect.

CORRECT: Abraham Lincoln’s intellect astounded even his political rivals. As Stephen Douglas suggested, “Not since Jefferson has the White House seen such brilliance.”

INCORRECT: Unfortunately, Russia lost to Japan in their 1905 armed conflict.

CORRECT: Unfortunately for Russia, it lost to Japan in their 1905 armed conflict.

### **Keep Your Subject and Verb Close**

INCORRECT: Caleb Williams, despite his Trojans losing five games and falling out of the AP poll to the grave disappointment of fans, won the Heisman Trophy.

CORRECT: Caleb Williams won the Heisman Trophy despite his Trojans losing five games and falling out of the AP poll to the grave disappointment of fans.

### **\*Avoid “Clearly,” “Truly,” and “Obviously”\***

- Do not use words such as “clearly,” “truly,” and “obviously” to describe your own work
- You *can* use them to describe others

INCORRECT: Clearly, Madison overstated Hamilton's loyalty to a monarchical system of government.

CORRECT: Lincoln sought to convey clearly a conciliatory message in his 1865 Inaugural Address.

**\*Avoid the Word "Things"\***

- Replace the word "thing(s)" with a descriptive noun.

**Avoid "would+verb" and "had+verb" When Writing About the Past**

INCORRECT: In 1803, John Marshall voiced his support for judicial review, a principle that would define American constitutional law for the next two centuries.

CORRECT: In 1803, John Marshall voiced his support for judicial review, a principle that defined American constitutional law for the next two centuries.

INCORRECT: Abraham Lincoln grounded his political vision in the Declaration of Independence, which Thomas Jefferson had authored 87 years prior.

CORRECT: Abraham Lincoln grounded his political vision in the Declaration of Independence, which Thomas Jefferson authored 87 years prior.

**Avoid Double Gerunds/Double Infinitives/Double Past Tense Verbs**

Two Consecutive Gerunds:

INCORRECT: Sheila wrote a memo concerning swimming practice.

CORRECT: Sheila wrote a memo that concerned swimming practice.

Two Consecutive Infinitives:

INCORRECT: To learn to ski is a difficult challenge.

CORRECT: Learning to ski is a difficult challenge.

**Dependent Clauses**

- Avoid beginning more than one sentence in a row with dependent clauses.

EXAMPLE: With the Iowa caucuses less than a year away, the battle for the Republican primary is intensifying. Despite not having even announced, Ron DeSantis is attracting outsized attention. Given Donald Trump's recent indictments, many pundits expect the Republican faithful to rally around their former standard-bearer.

- Avoid never opening sentences with dependent clauses:

EXAMPLE: Democrats are starting, after some hesitation, to back Joe Biden's 2024 campaign. Donors are hosting fundraisers to keep the president's war chest full. His team is already filming ads that will soon hit the airwaves in critical swing states. Biden can only hope that the Fed gets inflation under control well before the campaign season begins in earnest. He would like to make the race a referendum on the Republican Party rather than on his tenure in office. Incumbency is certainly an advantage for most presidents who run for reelection. It remains to be seen whether his age will counterbalance the electorate's historic preference for giving second chances to sitting heads of state.

### **Avoid the Noun of the Noun**

- One way to tighten your prose is to change a noun-of-the-noun structure to noun's noun

WEAK: Hamilton illustrated the possibilities of the nation.

STRONG: Hamilton illustrated the nation's possibilities.

### **ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE**

#### **Avoid the Passive Voice.**

Passive: The window was broken.

Still Passive: The window was broken by the hammer.

Active: The hammer broke the window.

Passive: Legislation was passed that criminalized Hawaiian shirts.

Still Passive: Legislation was passed by Congress that criminalized Hawaiian shirts.

Active: Congress passed legislation that criminalized Hawaiian shirts.

Passive: For rules to be applied, we need willing citizens.

Still Passive: For rules to be applied by the state, we need willing citizens.

Active: For the state to apply rules, we need willing citizens.

Passive: The Court found that her constitutional rights were violated.

Still Passive: The Court found that her constitutional rights were violated by law enforcement.

Active: The Court found that law enforcement violated her constitutional rights.

#### **Rewording Passive: Make the Object the Subject**

PASSIVE: Roger insists that machine guns should not be protected under the First Amendment.

ACTIVE: Roger insists that machine guns should not enjoy protection under the First Amendment.

PASSIVE: The term "sync" is used to refer to online courses.

ACTIVE: The term "sync" refers to online courses.

#### **Rewording Passive: Avoid "you," "I," "we," and "the reader"**

- If identifying the subject means including a term such as "you" or "I" or "we" or "the reader" or some variation thereof, reword the sentence to give it a different subject

PASSIVE: To understand that the framers intended to protect religious liberty, the history of the First Amendment must be analyzed.

PASSIVE WITH "WE": To understand that the framers intended to protect religious liberty, we must analyze the history of the First Amendment.

ACTIVE WITHOUT "WE": The history of the First Amendment demonstrates the framers' intent to protect religious liberty.

PASSIVE: The significance of the court's decision is best seen in newspaper coverage.  
PASSIVE WITH "YOU": You can best see the significance of the court's decision in newspaper coverage.

ACTIVE WITHOUT "YOU": The newspaper coverage best illustrates the significance of the court's decision.

PASSIVE: The dissenting opinion must be considered.

PASSIVE WITH "I": I must consider the dissenting opinion.

ACTIVE WITHOUT "I": The dissenting opinion merits consideration.

### **Itself & Themselves**

- Don't let "itself" or "themselves" trick you; it may still be passive

PASSIVE: Religious discrimination was perpetuated in early state constitutions.

ACTIVE: Religious discrimination perpetuated itself in early state constitutions.

BETTER ACTIVE: Early state constitutions perpetuated religious discrimination.

PASSIVE: The origins of the Bill of Rights can be traced to the Magna Carta.

ACTIVE: The origins of the Bills of Rights trace themselves to the Magna Carta.

BETTER ACTIVE: The Bill of Rights originated in the Magna Carta.

### **Passive Voice Caveats**

- The passive voice is acceptable in the following scenarios:

(1)The subject is irrelevant for your purposes:

The criminal was arrested upon arriving in the country.

(2)The passive verb functions as an adjective:

Our house is painted blue.

(3)You deliberately want to obscure the subject:

The safe in the bank was robbed around midnight.

(4)The subject is unknowable:

The book was written anonymously.

- acknowledge that you are writing in the passive voice on purpose

## **VERB USAGE**

### **Simple Past Tense versus "was" + Gerund**

Emily ignored Jane last week. [a singular occurrence]

Emily was ignoring Jane last week. [a repeated occurrence]

### **Collective Nouns: Singular Verbs versus Plural Verbs**

- When dealing with a collective noun (i.e., "team," "jury," "group"), generally use singular verbs:

the team won  
the jury deliberated  
the group convened

- caveat: if you are referring to the individual components of the collective noun in question, then use a plural verb:

The police are scouring all the houses in the city.  
The faculty are conducting research in their respective fields.

## **GUIDELINES FOR QUOTES**

### **Integrating Quotations into a Sentence**

1. Complete Sentence and a Colon
  - a. EXAMPLE: Thorin speaks to Bilbo while on his deathbed about what should be truly valued: “If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world” (Tolkien, 1937, p. 263).
2. Incomplete Introductory Phrase and a Comma
  - a. EXAMPLE: Thorin tells Bilbo on his deathbed, “If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world” (Tolkien, 1937, p. 263).
3. Incomplete Introductory Phrase and “That”
  - a. EXAMPLE: Thorin tells Bilbo on his deathbed that “If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world” (Tolkien, 1937, p. 263).
4. Small Quotes as Part of Your Own Sentence
  - a. EXAMPLE: On his deathbed, Thorin warns Bilbo that valuing “food and cheer and song” more than “gold” would result in a “merrier world” (Tolkien, 1937, p. 263).

### **Attribution Phrases**

- If it is important who said the quote, identify the source of the quote with phrases like “according to [so-and-so],” “in the words of [so-and-so],” or “As [so-and-so] wrote,” etc.

INCORRECT: The American colonists felt that Parliament did not treat them on par with their English counterparts and thereby violated their natural rights. “All men are created equal.” This belief that only a new government could provide equality helped give birth to the Revolution.

CORRECT: The American colonists felt that Parliament did not treat them on par with their English counterparts and thereby violated their natural rights. As Thomas Jefferson stated in the Declaration of Independence, “All men are created equal.” This belief that only a new government could provide equality helped give birth to the Revolution.

### **Do Not Make Quotations Do Your Job For You.**

- You should summarize a quotation first and then offer the quotation to corroborate what you have already said in your own words



EXAMPLE: Thayer argued that in the exercise of judicial review, courts must extend to a given legislative act a presumption of constitutionality. The question, then, was not whether a judge personally believes that the act comports with the Constitution but whether anyone rationally could. If there exists any plausible argument in favor of the act's constitutionality, it must survive judicial scrutiny. In Thayer's own words, a court "can only disregard the act when those who have the right to make laws have not merely made a mistake, but have made a very clear one—so clear that it is not open to rational question."

### **Avoid Long Quotations**

- Use a shorter quotation or weave excerpts from a longer quotation into your own prose

INCORRECT: In a letter to a colleague, Porwancher described his experience at Chuckbox in vivid detail: "Upon entering this eatery, the zest of the beef produced an effect bordering on vertigo. No sooner had I recovered than the aroma of onion rings teased my nostrils with the promise of a life less ordinary. I dare say that the thrills of the ketchup have forever made my heart and mind a prisoner of a place the locals call Chuckbox."

CORRECT: A survey of Porwancher's correspondence reveals a professor deeply enamored of Chuckbox. In a letter to a colleague, he described himself as overwhelmed by the "zest of the beef," entranced by the "aroma of onion rings," and hopelessly captive to the "thrills of the ketchup."

### **Avoid Block Quotations**

- Readers tend to not read block quotes but skip right past them

#### **\*Ellipses Usage\***

- when using a piece of a quotation, do not use an ellipsis at the beginning or end of the quote
- use an ellipsis to indicate to the reader that you have elided the middle of a quote

INCORRECT: As Thomas Jefferson declared, "...they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights..."

CORRECT: As Thomas Jefferson declared, "They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." [note: I capitalized "T" even though it's lowercase in the original quote because the quote excerpt forms a complete sentence unto itself. However, that alteration is not required by CMS, and you can follow your preferences in crafting your prose in similar situations]

CORRECTAs Thomas Jefferson declared, "They are endowed by our Creator with . . . life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

### **Altering a Quote**

- If you wish to change text within or add text to a quotation, use brackets rather than parentheses. Parentheses indicate to the reader that the parenthetical text is from the *original source* that you quoted; brackets indicate that the language comes from *you*.

- In the following example, the entirety of the quotation—including the phrase “(indeed I must not)”—belongs to Washington.

EXAMPLE: In a letter, George Washington revealed, “I cannot (indeed I must not) wait any longer to chop down that cherry tree.”

- In the following example, you have changed the word “we” to “[they]” to make the pronouns consistent throughout the sentence, and you use brackets to indicate to the reader that “[they]” was *your* addition and not in the original source.

ORIGINAL QUOTE: “The more money we come across, the more problems we see.”

EXAMPLE: The more money they come across come, the “more problems [they] see.”

### Source Misspellings

- If your original source misspells a word, retain the misspelling and use [*sic*] to indicate to the reader that the source is at fault. *Sic* is short for a Latin phrase that means, “Thus it had been written.” Note that the brackets are not italicized, but *sic* is.

EX: The secret agent wrote in his diary, “I need a better soodoenim [*sic*].”

### Secondary Sources

- For *secondary* sources, use academic sources—i.e., books found in university libraries, articles in law reviews, and articles in academic journals that on their website describe themselves as either peer-reviewed or refereed. Rare exceptions can be made but you must check with me first.