

Willow Creek Style

A Short
Writing Guide
for Middle School
and Beyond

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Formatting an Essay

Most of the formal papers you will be writing in school will be essays. It is very important to make a good first impression and know how a teacher wants your essay to look. For that reason, this style guide begins with how to format an essay. Every part is laid out here, from headings to footnotes.

Headings

The purpose of an essay's heading is to inform your teacher or another student—at a glance—who wrote the paper, which class it is for, and when it was written. Also, if you misplace your essay, someone who finds it can read your heading and know exactly whom to give it to. Write your heading in the upper left or upper right corner of the first page of your essay, just above the title. Write your first and last name at the top, then write the name of the class and the period below your name, and then write the date under that. Unlike the rest of your essay, keep your heading single-spaced. For example:

Craig Coss
Homeroom/Per. 1
Name of Teacher
January 22, 2006

Writing and Placing a Title

Give a title to every essay you write. Because your reader will most likely read your title before reading any other part of your paper, make it interesting and informative. Don't title your paper with the name of the assignment. Rather, aim to state what your writing piece is really about. Or, see if you can add something that invites your reader to read your paper.

How your title looks will set the tone for the rest of your paper, so capitalize it correctly, center it, and choose a large, clear font. Always capitalize the first letter of the first and last words of your title and the first letter of the main words in your title. Write all articles (*a, an, the*), coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or, for*) and prepositions (*in, on, at, to, with, over, from, under, before, after, etc.*) in lower case, unless they're the first or last word. Center your title using a 16 or 20-point font (see the discussion about fonts, below).

Use a *subtitle* to describe in more detail what your essay is about. Subtitles are especially helpful if your title is something clever or poetic, yet ambiguous. For

example, if you wrote an essay on whales and titled it *The Whales of the Pacific Northwest*, you would not need a subtitle. But if you titled it *Choir of the Deep*, it would help your reader to know that your essay is about whales. In that case, use a subtitle with your title, such as: *Choir of the Deep: The Whales of the Pacific Northwest*. If you do decide to write a subtitle, use a colon to separate it from your title. Here are some examples of essay titles:

Goddesses of Ancient Egypt
The Invention of Pottery
The Evolution of the Snowboard
Democracy's Demise: Voter Turn Outs at the Polls
Of Miracles and Magic: Shamans Around the World

The essay formatting template below shows two examples of how to format a conventional title for an essay. First is a title page, and second is an example of a title above an essay. If you are writing a longer essay—say over seven pages or so—a title page may be more appropriate. Certainly for most papers shorter than seven pages a title page is not needed, unless requested by your teacher.

Title Centered and Bold:
Subtitle Centered Below in Smaller Font,
Appropriate for Longer Papers

Name of Author
Name of Class/Period
Name of Teacher
Date

Name of Author, Aligned Right
Name of Class/Period
Name of Teacher
Date

Title Centered Above Text: Subtitle Below in Smaller Font, for Most Papers

Begin your introductory paragraph here by indenting and using a double-spaced, 12-point font. Never use bold or italicized text unless you are trying to emphasize certain words, such as foreign words, titles, or special terms that you define. You can't go wrong with either *Palatino* or *Times New Roman* fonts. No teacher will ever hassle you about using either of those fonts for an essay because they are not only easy to read, but they are publishing industry standards. Don't forget: before you finish writing your introductory essay, you should have clearly stated your *thesis statement*: one or two sentences that tell exactly what your essay is going to be about. Keep in mind that you don't have to write, "My essay is about..." Always make sure that your essay looks formal and clean to the eye even before your teacher reads it. That will make a positive first impression on your reader.

Use a *tab* to begin every paragraph, and remember to include a topic sentence in every paragraph that tells exactly what each paragraph is about in one sentence. All of the other sentences in that paragraph should give support, evidence, or details that fall under the topic of your paragraph's topic sentence. Since you don't want your reader to trip over your sentences, make them flow by using transition words between sentences. To help you with this process, see the style guide's page on transition words and phrases. You'll be glad you kept it. Now, if you've followed the guidelines of this page

accurately, your paper should look sharp. No teacher is going to grade you down for sloppy formatting or poor presentation.

Don't plagiarize. This means either that you must rewrite everything you research and want to write about in your own words, or that you must carefully quote your sources and add citations at the end of the passage when you do use someone else's words. Even if you do phrase ideas in your own words, you should give credit to any ideas that you found somewhere else by using footnotes, endnotes, or, at the very least, by citing the person, author, or work in your essay's bibliography.

When quoting a longer passage—three sentences or more—move your margins in on both the left and the right side of your paper to create an *excerpt*. By changing the margins, the excerpted text stands out from the body text of your paper. Be sure to keep the excerpted text as single spaced text. Don't forget to add your footnote or endnote at the end of your excerpt by typing INSERT > FOOTNOTE or INSERT > ENDNOTE.¹

If your quote is just a sentence or two, add quotation marks around the text quoted. As I've said before: "Be sure to use either a comma or a colon before using quotation marks. Don't forget to include a footnote at the end of the text."²

Footnotes differ from a bibliography citation in a couple of ways. First, when writing notes, don't indent the second line. Second, use parentheses around the publication information. Third, notes always mention the exact page or pages where the information came from. In the example below, the information came from pages five and six. If your paper looks like these pages, you'll impress teachers both in high school and college just by your paper's clear and conventional presentation.

¹ Use appropriate Chicago/Turabian style citation here. For example:

² Coss, Craig. *Willow Creek Style: A Short Writing Guide for Middle School*. (Sausalito: Letters and Words Publications, 2004), 5-6.

Indenting and Paragraphing

When writing an essay (or a story), indent all of your paragraphs five to ten spaces. The *tab* on your keyboard usually works well for indenting easily. Don't use a block formatting style—skipping a line space between paragraphs instead of indenting—which is commonly used in emails, business letters, fliers, or other instructional manuals (like this style guide).

Keep each paragraph tightly organized on one topic. Include a topic sentence that tells your reader exactly what the paragraph is about. The topic sentence doesn't have to appear in the beginning of the paragraph; you could put it in the middle or at the end. Also, make sure that all of the other sentences in that paragraph support the topic sentence. It might help to imagine that the topic sentence is like an arm or a hand, and the supporting sentences are like fingers that branch off from that hand.

Spacing

Double space everything you turn in to a teacher from now through college unless your teacher tells you otherwise. Teachers appreciate double-spaced writing for two reasons: it's easier to read, and it's easier to edit and give comments. The only part of your paper to single-space is your heading.

Double-spacing is easy to do on a word processor. First, select the body of your whole essay or story. On the menu bar, select **FORMAT**, and then select **PARAGRAPH**. Set the line spacing to double and you're set. You can do it even faster if you use the formatting toolbar on your word processor. *Note: Don't double-space by pressing the return key twice at the end of each line. If you do that, any future editing may become a real mess.*

Fonts

If you want to make your writing beautiful, *write* beautifully. Don't use fancy fonts in an essay or other prose writing piece. Teachers want something that they can read easily, so they can focus on the beauty of your word choice, not your font choice. You can't go wrong with either of these two fonts. Both of them are legible and will please middle school teachers and college professors:

Times New Roman	This font is a standard in the publishing business.
Palatino	Palatino adds an elegant touch to your essay.

Whichever font you choose, stick with the 12-point font size unless your teacher tells you otherwise.

Sentence Fluency

There are two big things to look for when writing fluid prose: sentence structure and transitions. Nothing will help your sentences' fluidity more than writing well structured sentences in the first place.

Sentences, Fragments, and Run-On Sentences

Every complete sentence in English conveys a complete idea with both a *subject* and a *predicate*. The subject tells the reader what is doing some action, and the predicate is the action the subject is doing. Without either subject or predicate, an incomplete sentence is called a *fragment*. Here are some examples of complete sentences and fragments.

Complete Simple Sentences:

The kettle sang.

Subject: *kettle*

Predicate: *sang*

La'Tacia and Justine found a doll.

Subjects: *La'Tacia* and *Justine*

Predicate: *found*

His mother wrote most of his essay.

Subject: *mother*

Predicate: *wrote*

Examples of Fragments:

La'Tacia and Janine a doll.

Problem: Missing a predicate

Found a magical doll.

Problem: Missing a subject

Wrote most of his essay.

Problem: Missing a subject

His mother.

Problem: Missing a predicate

To heal a fragment, simply add the subject, subjects, predicate or predicates as needed. Often, students have an easy time recognizing and repairing fragments. More challenging is the second type of incomplete sentence, known as a *run-on sentence*, or just *run-on*.

A segment of text which contains both a subject and a predicate is called an *independent clause*. Any independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence. However, when two or more independent clauses are used to create a sentence, they must be joined with either a semicolon, em dash, or a conjunction (e.g., *and*, *or*, *but*, *yet*, *so*, *because*). If they are joined only by a comma, or with no punctuation or conjunction at all, they are called run-on sentences.

Examples of Run-On Sentences:

The kettle sang, Elijah heard it from his room.

La'Tacia and Justine found a doll, she looked beautiful.

His mother wrote most of his essay, he didn't want her to she did anyway.

Even though many of these independent clauses are separated by periods, they are all run-on sentences and need periods, semicolons, and conjunctions to repair them. Here are some solutions to repair such run-on sentences.

Repaired Run-On Sentences:

The kettle sang; Elijah heard it from his room.

Or: The kettle sang and Elijah heard it from his room.

La'Tacia and Justine found a doll. She looked beautiful.

His mother wrote most of his essay. He didn't want her to, but she did it anyway.

When you develop the ear for when a sentence needs a comma and when a sentence needs a semicolon or a period, the fluency of your written sentences will increase significantly, simply because you will be writing in true sentences, and not fragments and run-on sentences.

A Word About Em Dashes

Note that many writers prefer to use the em dash to a semicolon. Please see pages 8 and 9 to read more about how semicolons and em dashes are used effectively.

Simple Rules for Using Commas

Rule #1: Use a comma to indicate a slight pause in the writing.

The ocean water rippled calmly, as if under a soft breeze.

Despite Odin's fear, he still gave his eye to the giant.

Under the roof, they felt protected from the storm.

Rule #2: Use commas to separate three or more things in a list.

She saw the three women holding spindle, thread, and shears.

The tree's roots terminated in Asgard, Midgard, and Niflheim.

Sati made her father promise to feed her, raise her, and always treat her as a goddess should be treated.

Rule #3: Use a comma just before the quotation marks when also using an introductory element such as "Jeff said," or "exclaimed Mia."

Vishnu said, "Both the gods and the demons must work together."

"Fenris Wolf," Thor ordered, "try to break free from this cord!"

"Don't ever open that door," Marya Morevna told Ivan.

Rule #4: Use a comma after a transition word or phrase.

However, her curious husband could not resist.

After many years of punishment, Heracles freed Prometheus.

Indeed, she had seen it all before in a dream.

Rule #5: Use a comma before a conjunction (i.e., *and*, *or*, *but*).

Nu Wa finished sculpting some people, but she wanted many more.

She found a rattan, and she dipped it into the mud.

Then Nu Wa twirled the rattan, or she swung it around herself.

Rule #6: Use a comma after *yes* or *no* at the beginning of a sentence.

No, that was not the end of Ananse's many achievements.

Yes, I felt the same thing when I heard that myth the first time.

Rules For Writing Dialogue

To Indicate Who Is Speaking

- **Begin a new paragraph (indent) whenever a different character speaks:**

“This is quite a profound tale,” Joanna said.

“Do you really think so?” asked Sean, who had studied many myths when visiting Sri Lanka.

“I do indeed.”

“Well,” he replied, “I suppose the symbols are pretty cool. What do you think the snake means in this story?”

Overhearing their conversation, Lydia interjected, “Wait until you read the conclusion—then decide!”

- **When needed, indicate who is speaking with an introductory element (such as: *she said*, *they asked*, *Kathryn told her*, or *Ben replied*):**

Moya said, “I don’t know that story.”

“That’s remarkable!” Dion exclaimed.

“Garett,” Quincy called, “Come here, quickly!”

Use of Commas with Quotation Marks

- **Use a comma instead of a period at the end of the spoken sentence if the introductory element follows:**

“That is a beautiful myth,” said Renee to herself.

“I predicted the conclusion correctly,” Mark commented.

- **Use a comma after the introductory element when speech follows:**

Vivien yelled, “That’s an incredible book!”

Juan replied, "I prefer the original version."

Ryan asked, "Have you read many?"

Transition Words and Phrases

Once you have mastered the complete sentence, the next step toward fluid writing requires that you link your sentences carefully by choosing appropriate transition words and phrases. Choosing the best transition is an art form, but by staying closely attuned to the meaning of your sentences and the relationship you want to create between each sentence, you will be able to add transitions that work well.

After you have arranged your paragraph's sentences in a logical order, the next step is to determine what the relationship between the sentences is. Once you've determined that, try out different transitions at the beginning of the next sentence until one fits so seamlessly that your reader won't even notice it. The best placed transitions are almost invisible: they carry the reader's thought from one idea to the next so smoothly that the reader focuses only on the ideas, and will not even be consciously aware of the transitions unless she is intentionally looking for them. On the other hand, if a transition stands out when you read it to yourself aloud, you know it's not the best choice. Keep in mind that between some sentences, no transition is needed because the ideas already flow well together.

Placing transitions well takes practice. Now that you know about them, try to be more conscious of how other writers use them, and try to notice them in your reading. The more you use them, the better you'll get.

Commonly Used Transitions

Indicating more information:

additionally, again, also, and, and then, besides, finally, first...second...third, furthermore, in addition, indeed, last, moreover, next, still, too

Comparison:

again, also, in the same way, likewise, once more, similarly

Contrast:

although, but, despite, even though, however, in contrast, in spite of, instead, keep in mind, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the one hand...on the other hand, regardless, still, though, whereas, yet

Examples:

after all, even, for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, in particular, of course, particularly, specifically, such as, the following example, to illustrate

Cause and Effect:

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, due to, for this purpose, hence, in the hope that, in order to, since, so, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end

Time:

after a bit, after a few days, after a while, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, initially, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, previously, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, then, thereafter, until, when

Place:

above, adjacent to, below, beyond, closer to, elsewhere, far, farther on, here, near, nearby, opposite to, there, to the left, to the right

Concession:

although it is true that, granted that, I admit that, it may appear that, naturally, of course

Summary, Repetition, or Conclusion:

all in all, as a result, as has been noted, as I have said, as we have seen, as mentioned earlier, given these facts, given the evidence, hence, in any event, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in summary, finally, lastly, on the whole, therefore, to put it briefly, to summarize

Word Choice

Writing with an attention to the choice of words you use can mean the difference between clear writing and awkward writing, writing that bores you to death, and writing that inspires you to action. The last thing you want is for your reader to fall asleep while reading your prose, and one thing you can do to avoid this from happening is to avoid stale, overused words or cliché phrases. Fresh word choices will invigorate your reader and keep him awake, alert, and more conscious of a new perspective: yours.

Overused Verbs

**to say
said**

When writing dialogue, you will probably use *said* more often than other verbs. For the most part, *said* is not usually read consciously by your reader, and should be fine, even repeated. However, you may wish to use a variety of verbs to describe the speaking so you don't tire your reader. Aim to engage your reader's imagination with verbs that show how the dialogue is delivered.

Alternatives (in past tense):

told	pronounced	commanded
spoke	suggested	laughed
asked	revealed	sang
stated	hinted	flirted
questioned	whispered	cajoled
commented	murmured	yapped
explained	exclaimed	conveyed
remarked	yelled	affirmed
voiced	screamed	reflected
expressed	thundered	barked
disclosed	reported	snarled
articulated	retorted	snapped
interrupted	demanded	spat

**to get
got**

Our word choices often suffer when we write like we talk. In spoken American English today, we use the words *get* and *got* often, but they aren't the most interesting words to read. Notice these examples and see what may be written instead of *get* or *got*. (See more examples under *Writing with Active Voice*.)

**I get the creeps from him.
I got my diploma in June.
She got graded on her writing.
She got sick.**

**He makes my skin crawl.
I received my diploma in June.
Her teacher graded her writing.
She fell ill.**

to go
went

How did they go? Describe it more accurately.

Alternatives (in past tense):

walked
skipped
strolled
ran
sped
hurried
danced

jaunted
sauntered
swaggered
limped
hopped
inched
visited

drove
biked/bicycled
skated
flew
sailed
shipped
traveled

to like
liked

Let's get more descriptive with this one. Since the verb *like* describes an inclination, preference, or desire, go further in one of those directions.

Alternatives (in past tense):

preferred
enjoyed
was partial to
felt affection toward
resonated with
trusted
cared about/for
loved
respected

valued
esteemed
honored
revered
venerated
worshiped
embraced
admired

looked up to
entertained
cherished
adored
coveted
obsessed over

Adjectives

Adjectives are like spices: use them sparingly. Nothing bogs down good writing like too many adjectives. Adjectives hamper your reader's ability to imagine because they aren't real: they're abstract qualities. *Slick*, for example, can't be imagined without *something* that *is* slick, such as a slug, a slide, or greased hair. Similarly, we can't imagine *powerful* without something that shows its power, like an empress, a hurricane, or a dancer. For that reason, use adjectives when you can't find a better way to describe something. A famous poet once said, "Remove all adjectives, then add back to taste."

Overused Adjectives

a lot
a lot of
lots

The words *a lot* have become so overused in today's urban speech that we hardly notice them anymore and even mistake them for one word. Originally, *a lot* referred to a measurement of one *lot*

lots of of land, such as a car lot or a parking lot. Thinking about the word this way, we might realize how inaccurately or inappropriately we use it.

a ton
a ton of
tons As with *a lot*, *ton* refers to a measurement: one ton (2,000 pounds). So *tons* literally means “4,000 or more pounds.”

Alternatives:

plenty	a batch
many	a heap
multiple	a mound
much	a pile
several	a mountain
scads	a load
quite a few	a crowd
a great quantity	a pack
a great deal	a group
a large portion	a mass
a considerable amount	an assembly
a massive amount	a collection
a vast quantity	an abundance
a prodigious amount	a multitude
a handful	a profusion
a cluster	myriad (10,000)
a bunch	a plethora (too many)
a bundle	

big
great
humongous Avoid habits such as placing *great* and *big* next to each other. They’re synonyms (they mean the same thing), so choose *one*, or chose a more precise word. The word *humongous* is an informal word that adults use only to add humor to a description of size. Perhaps it’s inspired by the words *huge*, *enormous*, *monstrous*, and *tremendous*.

Alternatives to indicate mass or volume:

sizable	bulky	massive
large	huge	voluminous
considerable	grand	prominent
heavy	mighty	giant

These refer to high frequency or extension:

broad	profuse	extensive
abundant	widespread	boundless
copious	spacious	ubiquitous

These adjectives evoke awe or wonder:

enormous	monumental	vast
prodigious	gargantuan	awesome
immense	titanic	immeasurable
mammoth	colossal	infinite
monstrous	tremendous	unending
gigantic	stupendous	cosmic

Moving Beyond *Good* and *Bad*

good This general adjective can mean beneficial to something or someone (“It’s *good* for you”), or refer to a system of values (“do *good*” or “a *good* girl”), or it can refer to a high standard (“a *good* job”). Here’s a list of alternative words that are more specific. *Before you use them in your writing, check the meanings of the words below that you aren’t familiar with.*

Alternatives:

great	helpful	able	reliable
super	beneficial	skilled	dependable
superb	profitable	talented	trustworthy
brilliant	advantageous	acclaimed	virtuous
beautiful	healthy	accomplished	noble
excellent	important		worthy
exceptional	desired	strong	admirable
wonderful	desirous	powerful	
fantastic	wanted	compassionate	fine
extraordinary	needed	appropriate	quality
amazing	required	pleasant	valuable
superlative	essential	enjoyable	precious

bad Similarly, *bad* may be used in different contexts. Again, check the meanings of any words you don't know and choose carefully!

Alternatives:

offensive	poor	unpleasant	rotten
despicable	flawed	distressing	
deplorable	shoddy	painful	
terrible	sloppy	troubled	
undesirable	decrepit	miserable	mean
disgusting	ruined	terrible	scary
horrible	wrecked	horrid	fearsome
nasty		awful	wicked
repugnant	harmful	appalling	dastardly
foul	injurious	dreadful	nefarious
vile	dangerous	woeful	terrifying
loathsome		abysmal	evil
abominable	serious		diabolic
detestable	severe	decaying	heinous
abhorrent	grave	spoiled	
execrable	dire	moldy	

Overused Adverbs

really *Really* describes something as real, actual, accurate, or truthful. Often it's used in dialogue today to emphasize an adjective, as in: "*Really* strong, *really* boring, or *really* good." Outside of dialogue, be careful not to overuse *really*. Instead, try to choose one adjective that means what you wish to achieve by adding *really*.

Alternatives:

quite	correctly
verily	genuinely
actually	positively
definitely	resolutely
surely	
certainly	
in fact	
in truth	
truly	
undoubtedly	
beyond a doubt	
without doubt	
indeed	
literally	

very Developing writers often use *very* in the same way they use *really*: to emphasize an adjective. Often, however, your writing will sound better—and your reader will visualize your ideas more—without an adjective, but an image. See the examples below for ideas, then work to create images for your reader in your writing.

WARNING: Don't repeat, underline, or emphasize the words *really* or *very*. Instead, think of an image that shows what you're trying to communicate. Or, if you wish to use passive voice, use a more specific adjective.

	Alternatives:
She was really really tired.	She felt exhausted.
	She crashed on the couch.
	She could not stand up.
	She couldn't wake herself.
passive voice:	She was thoroughly tired.
Nate was very fast.	Nate could outrun anyone.
	Nate's speed impressed us.
	Nate ran like the wind.
passive voice:	Nate was unbelievably fast.
The class was <u>VERY</u> boring.	The teacher bored everyone.
	The class drained me.
	The class bored me comatose.
passive voice:	The class was totally boring

Vocabulary Building

The best way to expand your working vocabulary is by reading. Try circling—or writing in the back of your book—words that you come across whose meaning is uncertain to you. When you have a moment, look up the meaning of those words in a dictionary. You'll be surprised how many new words you can learn that way.

By memorizing common word elements (roots, prefixes, and suffixes) from Greek and Latin words, you will be able to recognize and decode many words that you read that you would not be able to before. Use the provided list as a guide to help your study. If you learn to recognize all these word elements by sight and by sound, your vocabulary will increase tenfold.

Word Elements from Greek and Latin

<i>aer, aero</i>	air, atmosphere	<i>hyper</i>	over, above	<i>philo</i>	love
<i>able, ible</i>	ability	<i>hypo</i>	under, below	<i>phobia</i>	fear
<i>anthro</i>	human	<i>-ic</i>	like, pertaining to	<i>phono</i>	sound, voice
<i>anti</i>	opposite	<i>im- , in- , il-</i>	not	<i>photo</i>	light
<i>auto</i>	self	<i>inter</i>	between	<i>polis</i>	city, state
<i>bene</i>	good	<i>-ist, -er, -or, -ar</i>	one who	<i>poly</i>	many
<i>bi</i>	two	<i>is, iso</i>	same, equal	<i>port</i>	to carry, door
<i>biblio</i>	book	<i>-ize</i>	to cause to be	<i>post</i>	after
<i>bio</i>	life	<i>-less</i>	without	<i>pre</i>	before
<i>centri (tro)</i>	center	<i>kinesis, kinetic</i>	motion, movement	<i>psych (o)</i>	mind
<i>chrom</i>	color	<i>macro</i>	large	<i>pyro</i>	fire
<i>chrono</i>	time	<i>mal</i>	poor, inadequate	<i>quad</i>	four
<i>cogni</i>	know	<i>mania</i>	extreme enthusiasm for	<i>radi</i>	from the center
<i>com, con</i>	with, together	<i>mare, marine</i>	sea, of the sea	<i>re-</i>	again
<i>contra</i>	against	<i>mater (ern)</i>	mother	<i>semi</i>	partially
<i>cosm</i>	universe, order	<i>medi</i>	middle	<i>sol</i>	alone
 				<i>soph</i>	wise, wisdom
<i>cycle</i>	circle	<i>meter</i>	measure	<i>sphere (ro)</i>	ball shaped
<i>deci</i>	ten	<i>micro</i>	small	<i>sub</i>	under, below
<i>dent</i>	tooth	<i>mis</i>	bad, wrong	<i>super</i>	above, over
<i>derm</i>	skin	<i>mobile</i>	movement	<i>syn</i>	together, inited
<i>dict</i>	to say	<i>mono</i>	one	<i>tech</i>	art, skill, craft
<i>dogma</i>	opinion, teaching	<i>morph</i>	form, shape	<i>tele</i>	far away, distant
<i>e-, ex-</i>	out, without	<i>non</i>	not, without	<i>terra</i>	earth
<i>-ee</i>	one who gets or does	<i>octa</i>	eight	<i>theo</i>	god
<i>epi</i>	over, above	<i>ology</i>	study of	<i>therm</i>	heat
<i>fer</i>	to bear, to carry	<i>omni</i>	all	<i>trans</i>	across, through
<i>ge , geo</i>	earth	<i>onym</i>	name	<i>tri</i>	three
<i>gen</i>	birth, race, kind	<i>pan</i>	all	<i>un</i>	not, opposite of
<i>graph</i>	to write	<i>para</i>	near, beyond	<i>uni</i>	one
<i>hemi</i>	half, part	<i>path</i>	one who suffers, feels	<i>urb</i>	city
<i>hemo</i>	blood	<i>pedi</i>	foot	<i>ver</i>	true
<i>hydr (o)</i>	water	<i>penta</i>	five	<i>zoo</i>	animal

Voice

Voice is the quality of emotion: conviction, sensitivity, power, or feeling that a reader senses from your writing. Writing with a well-developed voice takes a combination of good ideas and passion. However, there's more to writing with vigor than only passion. Two writing strategies will charge your writing with vitality: writing with *active voice*, and the practice of *showing, not telling*.

Writing with Active Voice

Sentences written in *passive voice* tell how the subject is being acted upon or receives the action. Sentences like this will blunt the power of your writing, and convey a world without active characters, things, or places.

Examples of Passive Voice:

A blue stone *was found* by Reggie. (Reggie is the object.)

The soccer team *is congratulated* by Bridget. (Bridget is the object.)

The audience *was stunned* by the trumpet blast. (Trumpet blast is the object.)

Powerful writers engage their readers with *active voice*. Sentences written in active voice show the reader how the subject of the sentence *acts*.

Examples of Active Voice:

Reggie *found* a blue stone. (Reggie is the subject. He *found*.)

Bridget *congratulates* the soccer team. (Bridget is the subject. She *congratulates*.)

The trumpet blast *stunned* the audience. (Trumpet is the subject. It *stunned*.)

How to Change from Passive to Active Voice

Often, as in the cases above, you'll have to eliminate the passive verb and change the subject of your sentence so that the person or thing that *acts* appears before the predicate (main verb). Here are some more examples and other ways to change a sentence from passive to active voice.

Passive Voice:

His opinion *was* totally different.

My house *is* just down the street.

or:

Tests *were made* to find the temperature.

I *am* always overwhelmed by Houston.

You *are* fast to catch on!

Active Voice:

He *expressed* a different opinion.

I *live* just down the street.

You *will find* my house just down the street.

Scientists *tested* the temperature.

Houston always *overwhelms* me.

You *catch* on quickly!

Avoid Passive Verbs

Avoid using passive *to be* verbs (*am, are, is, be, being, was, were, will be*), *to have* verbs (*have, has, having, had, will have*), *to get* verbs (*get, getting, got, will get*), and *to make* verbs (*make, making, made, will make*). If you replace these verbs with active verbs, your reader will thank you!

Show, Don't Tell

Good readers seek out writing that actively engages the imagination. Excellent narrative writers show the reader what the character does and says, or describes a way that the character looks, leaving the reader to interpret how the character feels.

As you read the paired sentences below, ask yourself which sentences engage your imagination more. In the second set, can you tell how the characters feel by the descriptions of what they do? Notice carefully how the choices of words change between *telling* and *showing*.

Examples of *Telling*:

After hearing the news, the king grew somber.

She felt embarrassed.

Reading the letter, Maynard was pleased for the first time in a long while. His daughter was curious about what he'd read.

When he left the car, he never wanted to see his old friend again.

Zeyna found a lot of money under the sofa.

The violin was broken.

Examples of *Showing*:

After hearing the news, the king leaned on the arm of his throne and a tear rolled down his cheek.

She blushed and turned away.

With the letter still in his hand, Maynard danced around the room. “Dad?” asked his daughter, “What did she say? What’d she write?”

He slammed the car door and stomped off, turning his face from his old friend.

Zeyna reached her hand into the gap under the sofa and pulled out a curiously heavy leather purse. When she opened it, she found it filled with gold coins.

Pieces of the violin lay about the parlor. Each string pointed to a different corner.

Conventions

Conventions include spelling, formatting, and punctuation. They're conventional—agreed upon—so that everyone who reads your writing can understand what you are trying to convey.

The Semicolon (;)

Semicolons indicate a pause in the text that is greater than a comma can express, but less than a period. Always use a semicolon to connect two sides of a compound sentence that aren't connected with a conjunction (*and*, *or*, *but*) to prevent a run-on sentence. In a way, a semicolon works like the word "and" to glue two independent clauses (sentences) together. Below are some examples of how run-on sentences can be repaired with a semicolon.

Examples of Run-On Sentences:

I finally found the treasure it was a chest full of gemstones!

Alexes's skateboard flew through the air, it almost hit Enrique.

Carl waited in front of the shop, his friends were still inside.

The show pleased the audience, however, it disappointed me.

Run-On Sentences Repaired with a Semicolon:

I finally found the treasure; it was a chest full of gemstones!

Alexes's skateboard flew through the air; it almost hit Enrique.

Carl waited in front of the shop; his friends were still inside.

The show pleased the audience; however, it disappointed me.

Semicolons are also used to separate items in a list that have commas in their description or are long and complex.

Bring the following items: a sheet of cardboard, 4 X 4 feet; two eggs, for the experiment; and a letter from the fire department, to show your principal.

The backpack included: two energy bars, for emergency rations; a headlamp, to help set up the tent at night; a steel canister, to secure food in bear territory.

The Colon (:)

Colons have many uses, a few of which are explained here. First, a colon directs the reader's attention to something that explains, amplifies, highlights, or relates to something previously stated in the sentence.

Miles suddenly remembered: he could sign his name with his new pen.

Joanna thought twice: using colons correctly required study.

Miro knew the sentence looked wrong: it ran on with no breaks or a period.

Colons are also used to introduce a series of items in a list.

Joshua's lunch options were limited: pizza, hot pocket, or fish treasures.

Donovan found three things under his bed: a lamp, a wheel, and a wand.

Grace loathed sitting next to him: he smoked, burped, and smelled terrible.

Colons are also used to introduce a long quote or excerpt of text. For example:

On page 165, Mircea Eliade writes:

What we find as soon as we place ourselves in the perspective of religious man of the archaic societies is that *the world exists because it was created by the gods...it is not an inert thing without purpose and significance. For religious man, the cosmos "lives" and "speaks."*

The Em Dash (—)

An em dash is usually used to mark an abrupt change in the flow of the sentence, used instead of a colon or semicolon. Type an em dash with command + shift + dash or use two smaller dashes together (--).

Lisann thought hard about the choice—it was her last chance.

Oshun approached the austere god—surely her beauty would capture him.

Two em dashes can also be used to set off a parenthetical phrase from the text (instead of using parenthesis or commas) for a dramatic effect.

The idea of leaving—it had always frightened Kenny before—now felt right.

Tomorrow—and not a day later—Sam would turn in his homework.

The em dash is also used to indicate breaks or interruptions in dialogue.

“Grandmother, I was wondering what those three—”

“If you ask me that question,” interjected Baba Yaga, “I’ll eat you for sure.”

The Apostrophe (’)

The apostrophe has three uses in the English language. The first is to mark the place of letters that have been removed to create a contraction—two words put together and shortened to create one—or another shorter word. Here are some commonly used contractions. Notice what missing letters the apostrophe marks.

Contraction	Original Words	Missing letters
it’s	it is	i
here’s	here is	i
there’s	there is	i
let’s	let us	u
I’ve	I have	ha
I’ll	I will	wi
I’d	I would	woul
you’d	you would	woul
you’re	you are	a
they’re	they are	a
aren’t	are not	o
can’t	can not	o
couldn’t	could not	o
don’t	do not	o
hasn’t	has not	o
isn’t	is not	o
shouldn’t	should not	o
wouldn’t	would not	o
won’t	will not	ill (Note reversal of the <i>o</i> and <i>n</i> .)

Apostrophes are also used with an s to indicate possessive nouns. Use the apostrophe-s ('s) to indicate singular possessive case, and the s-apostrophe (s') to indicate the plural possessive case. Here are some examples of the singular possessive case, using 's:

Tylee's artwork
Alison's bag
Kat's game
James's guitar

Everyone's struggle
The people's opinion
The office's paperwork
The women's restroom

Here are some examples of the plural possessive case, using s':

The rabbits' holes
The families' doctors

The boys' bathroom
The horses' stable

The third use for the apostrophe is to form a plural letter or number:

Don't forget to dot your i's and cross your t's.
All of the 2's and 4's should work together at the two far tables.

Ellipses (...)

Use ellipses to indicate a place where text has been left out or removed from a quote. Use three in the middle, and four at the end of a sentence.

“Keep in mind...the present you are constructing. It should be the future you want.”
—Alice Walker

“Revolution is not something fixed....It is a perpetual process...in the human spirit”
—Abbie Hoffman

Spelling Out Numbers

In prose writing for a non-scientific essay or story, always spell out at least every number from one to ten. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the most respected writing style guide in the USA, recommends spelling out all numbers up to one hundred. Additionally, if you can spell out a number in one or two words, do so (i.e., one thousand, nine thousand, one million, four billion). Also, always spell out a number when it appears as the first word in a sentence, even if it's a large number. Here are some examples of what to spell out, and what not to:

Connie noticed that three students were absent.

The war cost the country over ten million dollars per day.

Hein had to grade 48,234 math papers each year.

Two thousand and sixteen tiny diamonds were set in the crown.

Eleven students agreed that \$1,200 would suffice to begin the project.

Dates, unless used as the first word of a sentence, should always be expressed as numerals and not spelled-out.

In 1770, news of the Boston Massacre was used as propaganda.

Harriet Tubman was born in either 1819 or 1820 as Harriet Ross.

The Klondike Gold Rush of 1879 brought many settlers to Seattle.

Virginia ratified the Fifteenth Amendment on October 8, 1869.

When to Use Numerals

When writing a science lab report or a mathematical paper, or when expressing exact quantities with decimals, use numerals for numbers instead of spelling them out. In other words, use numerals for expressing measurements. Here are some examples:

The planet Venus orbits the sun at 35 km/sec.

The length of the average human intestine measured 23 ft.

The atomic weight of mercury weighs 11.13 times the weight of water.

The ratios 8:5, 13:8, 21:13 approximate the golden mean of 1.6180339887...

Finally, when writing a series of numbers bunched closely together, numerals help clarify and separate the different numbers.

Eleven students felt that projects 19, 24, and 31 were worth repeating.

Spelling

Some of the most confusing words to spell correctly today—with spell-checking word-processing programs—are *homophones*. Homophones are words that sound exactly like another word that is spelled differently. Here are two lists of homophones. The first list gives you examples of how each is used differently, and means something different. The second list is more complete, but without meaningful examples. Use the second list if you already know the difference.

Commonly Misspelled Homophones

affect/effect	Late work will affect your grade and will not produce a good effect if you're trying to impress your teachers.
allowed/aloud	"Smoking is not allowed in the hospital," she read aloud .
ate/eight	Baba Yaga ate enough to feed over eight hungry soldiers.
bare/bear	To see the great bear bare her teeth was more than I could bear , so I dropped my pack, and with my back bare , fled.
blew/blue	We all felt blue when the musician in the blue dress blew a note of great emotion through her saxophone.
board/bored	I became quite bored after spelling the word fifty times correctly on the board .
brake/break	She slammed on the brake and said, "I need a break , or I might break something!"
capital/capitol	The vice-president's new business enterprise brought much capital into the nation's capitol .
cent/scent/sent	I sent my dog to follow the scent of the hare, but since I returned empty-handed, I didn't earn a cent .
close/clothes	After I close the shop, let's go shopping for clothes !
coarse/course	She did not enjoy the course because of the teacher's coarse manners and sarcastic sense of humor.
dear/deer	He saw the deer eating the flowers that were dear to him.
dew/do/due	"Do you recall that the morning dew damaged my

homework which was **due** yesterday?”

fair/fare If you wish to enter the **fair**, you’ll have to pay a \$15 **fare**.
Fair enough?

fir/fur If you look carefully at the bark of the tall **fir** tree, you’ll see where the bear left some of its winter **fur**.

flower/flour Use the **flour** to bake the bread, then place the bread under the vase with the bright red **flower**.

for/four **For four** days and **four** nights I’ve waited **for** this!

forth/fourth It was the **fourth** time she’d gone **forth** to claim an award.

heal/heel The wound on my **heel** looked like it might never **heal**.

hear/here **Here** is the place where you can **hear** the jazz well.

HINT: **hear** = listen (“You *hear* with your *ear*!”)
here = a nearby place (This *-ere* word is similar to two other words related to location: *there* and *where*. “Where do I place the *e*? Place the *e* both here and there—on both sides of the *r*!”)

hi/high I waved “**hi**” to her, but I was not **high** enough for her to see me.

hole/whole “Why, that’s the deepest **hole** in this **whole** county!”

hour/our **Our** corrupt leader seems to be elsewhere at this **hour**.

its/it’s **It’s** the ferret who did this! **Its** scent is unmistakable!

HINT: **its** = belongs to it
it’s = it + is

English words use an apostrophe for more than one reason. One reason is to indicate possession with an *'s*. However, *missing letters in a contraction are also indicated with an apostrophe*. The apostrophe in *it’s* represents the missing letter *i* in *it + is*. Just as the possessive word *his* (*belongs to him*) doesn’t use an *'s*, so the possessive case of *it* (*belongs to it*) uses an *s* without an apostrophe: *its*.

knew/new I **knew** that my **new** dog would love Barkie Bits!

know/no	No, I don't know of anything my goat won't try to eat.
lead/led	After the aliens placed a protective shield of lead around us, they led us all to the x-ray chamber.
made/maid	She made her maid do all sorts of unreasonable chores.
mail/male	The postal carrier who delivers my mail is not male , but female.
meat/meet	He thought he could meet his daily nutritional needs without meat , but he'd meet with a nutritionist and ask.
one/won	I was the only one who won only one game.
passed/past	As my brothers passed the cake, it flew right past me, and now that cake is only a thing of the past .
peace/piece	To secure years of peace , the leaders each gave a piece of their territory to their foe.
HINT:	piece = a portion, part, or slice (The <i>piece</i> contains a <i>pie</i> !) peace = serenity (The double entendre, <i>visualize whirled peas</i> , might remind you that peace contains the word pea in it. Or perhaps you know that in India, the peacock symbolizes peace .)
peak/peek	Only atop the highest peak could she peek at the sky.
plain/plane	Although I traveled by plane , the plain truth is that I could have reached you faster had I galloped over that wide plain .
poor/pore/pour	The poor old man had to pour ointment over the pores in his skin.
principal/principle	On principle , we'll have to speak with the principal .
read/red	Although she read the stop sign, she missed the red light.
right/write	With his right wrist injured, he decided to write his poem with his left hand, but his letters did not look quite right .
road/rode/rowed	She took the long road , and she rode all night; meanwhile, he rowed across the lake, to meet her if he might.

role/roll	The role Sisyphus played in the myth is that of the tortured soul, cursed to roll a stone uphill, only to have it roll down.
sail/sale	You could sail your yacht across the lake for that shoe sale .
scene/seen	Have you seen the first scene of that Scottish play?
sea/see	Over any sea I would swim, only to see my love again.
son/sun	The light of the sun blinded the eyes of her youngest son .
steal/steel	I will steal the key and open the steel gate before nightfall!
straight/strait	She sailed straight over the sound and through the strait , to the shimmering sea.
tail/tale	I will now tell you a tale of how Raven lost his long tail .
their/there/ they're	They're collecting their favorite words in that book, there .
HINT:	they're = they + are (The apostrophe replaces the missing a .) there = a distant place (There contains the word here in it!) their = belongs to them (Their contains the word heir in it!)
threw/through	He threw the baseball all the way through the barn.
to/too/two	I, too , agree that, even though we both yearn for peace, all too often our two nations have gone to war.
HINT:	too = also -or- much (Too also has another o , which is a bit <i>much</i> .) two = 2, the number (Two contains a <i>double</i> [2 X]-u [w]!)
vain/vane/vein	As his arm vein bulged, the archer struggled in vain , but he could not notch the arrow with the vane of gold.
vary/very	You must vary your word choices, or your writing will be very boring to read.
waist/waste	Around his waist he wore a sash that was a waste of cloth.

wait/weight	She had to wait years before she could lift the heavy weight .
way/weigh	The way looks clear at last! Our hearts will weigh less when we reach the other side.
weak/week	I feel rather weak , so I'll rest next week .
wear/where	Wear your finest shirt if you go where she might see you.
weather/whether	Whether we go or not depends on the weather .
weave/we've	She will weave the carpet after we've agreed on the price.
weed/we'd	Let's weed that garden fast, for we'd best do it quickly!
we'll/wheel	We'll need a new bike wheel if we want to go faster.
which/witch	Baba Yaga, the witch , knew which way to go.
who's/whose	Whose homework was left in my room? Who's responsible for turning it in on time?
wood/would	Would you build the house out of wood , or brick?
you're/your	You're going to write splendidly if you often consult—and never lose— your Willow Creek Style Guide.

Homophones (words that sound alike)

affect/effect
air/heir
aisle/I'll/isle
allowed/aloud
ant/aunt
ate/eight
bare/bear
be/bee
beat/beet
blew/blue
board/bored
brake/break
buy/by
capital/capitol
caught/cot
cent/scent/sent
cereal/serial
chews/choose
chord/cord
close/clothes
coarse/course
dear/deer
dew/do/due
die/dye
earn/urn
fair/fare
feat/feet
find/fined
fir/fur
flew/flu
flower/flour
for/four
forth/fourth
groan/grown
hair/hare
heal/heel
hear/here

heard/herd
hi/high
higher/hire
him/hymn
hoarse/horse
hole/whole
hour/our
in/inn
its/it's
knew/new
know/no
knows/nose
lead/led
leak/leek
load/lode
made/maid
mail/male
main/Maine/mane
meat/meet
might/mite
none/nun
oh/owe
one/won
pail/pale
pain/pane
pair/pare/pear
passed/past
peace/piece
peak/peek
plain/plane
poor/pore/pour
principal/principle
rain/reign/rein
read/reed
read/red
real/reel
right/write

road/rode/rowed
role/roll
rose/rows
sail/sale
scene/seen
sea/see
seam/seem
sew/so
side/sighed
sight/site
some/sum
son/sun
steal/steel
straight/strait
tail/tale
their/there/they're
threw/through
toe/tow
to/too/two
vain/vane/vein
vary/very
wail/whale
waist/waste
wait/weight
way/weigh
weak/week
wear/where
weather/whether
weave/we've
weed/we'd
we'll/wheel
which/witch
who's/whose
wood/would
you're/your

EDITORS' PROOFREADING MARKS

MARK	MEANING	EXAMPLES OF USE
↷	Delete; remove	Get rid off it, all .
⊂	Close the gap; make one word	Under⊂stand? It's one wo⊂rd.
⊂	Delete and close up	Repair the ga⊂p you leave.
#	Insert a space	I need some [#] room here.
⌊	Move text to left	⌊ This isn't aligned.
⌋	Move right; indent	<u>Indent</u> your essay's paragraphs.
∩	Transpose; change the order	Did I recieve <u>note</u> your?
∧	Insert a letter or word	What I leave ot? ^{did} ^u
⊙	Add a period	Ms. Parker winked at her.
↵	Add a comma	"Outside [,] Jeff [,] " Jay told him.
∨	Add an apostrophe	Let's boogie! Don't stop!
“ ”	Add quotation marks	“How wonderful,” said Priscilla.
≡	Capitalize	we're at the <u>ballard</u> <u>bowl</u> .
/	Make lower case	I love S nowboarding!
¶	Begin new paragraph	"For you!" "Thanks, Katie."
:	Add a colon	Mt. Rainier: 14,410ft.
;	Add a semicolon	I use them; do you?
<u> </u>	Add an em dash	He's great [—] a fabulous writer.
<i>stet</i>	Let it stand; leave as it was	Editors change <u>their</u> minds too. <i>stet</i>