

## Finesse and Polish

As you make your final editing pass over your essay, please keep the following points in mind.

- Look for nominalizations (verbs or adjectives that have been turned into nouns). These often have these endings: -tion, -ence, -ation, -ion, -ment, -ure, -ility, -ness, -ty, (and others). Strong academic writing has few nominalizations. Try to restructure these sentences to have strong verbs and adjectives rather than these ramshackle nouns.
- Are any of your paragraphs longer than  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page? (Most should be near the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -page length). If you have a lot of these it is a sign your topic sentences aren't specific enough or you are giving too many examples. Find a way to break these up into separate paragraphs.
- Look for the phrases like "society," "our generation," "kids today," "today's generation," "nowadays," etc. These phrases almost always indicate over-generalization. Find ways to make this more specific.
- Look for absolutes: "never," "always," "everyone," "all can agree." First of all, only a Sith deals in absolutes, but even more importantly, if a person can think of 1 example that disagrees with your absolute then they won't believe the rest of your paper.
- Look for transitions and transitional phrases (these are the phrases or words at the beginning of the sentence that helps your reader move along). Words like "however," "also," "moreover," "in addition," (and many more) are transitions. What kind of transitions do you use? Do you use the same ones frequently? Can you change a few out for some new ones? Do your transitions vary in length from a single word ("however, candy is the most popular choice for children") to a clause ("**In addition to candy**, children also like dogs")?
- Make sure your paragraphs aren't "counting," by which I mean that each of your topic sentences isn't something like...first this thing...second that thing...third.... Counting is often (but not always) a sign that a writer didn't know how to use a transition. Use this device sparingly.
- Look for the verbs (in any of their tenses or number): "shows," "tells," "means" and try to replace them with more interesting, specific verbs.
- Look for passive voice. Passive voice is when you have a "to be" verb (am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been) next to a verb. *Books are written. People were bitten.* Passive voice means you do not have a clear subject.
- Upgrade your verbs. Comb through your essay and get rid of verbs you repeat.
- Remove your contractions like n't or 're words (where 2 words become one—do not remove possessive marks, such as *the cat's fish*).

- Look for clichés. Clichés are phrases that you hear all the time and worn out. Things like “soccer mom” “grass is always greener.”
- Remove language of uncertainty “can,” “could,” “think,” “it is arguable,” etc.
- Use “such as” to indicate inclusion in a set of objects: Beulah likes fruity desserts such as apple cobbler, peach pie, and strawberry shortcake. Use “like” to imply comparison: Wayne is attracted to strong women like his mother.
- Put a comma after each item in a list of three or more items except the last item: the Three Stooges in this episode were Larry, Curly, and Moe.
- Avoid the dread comma splice, in which two sentences are stitched together with a comma, that’s what a semicolon is for. [See what I did there?] Adverbs such as “however,” “nevertheless,” “moreover,” ... call for a semicolon when they are installed mid-sentence; however, you can also break the sentence into two sentences.
- Don’t use “this” as a noun: Rather than writing “This causes unfortunate...,” write “This *choice* causes unfortunate...”
- Short story and article titles should be quoted, not italicized. Book titles are italicized.
- Refer to people with *who* and *whom*; refer to things with *that* and *which*.
- Ironic point in *Strunk and White*: “The subject of a sentence and the principal verb should not, as a rule, be separated by a phrase or clause that can be transferred to the beginning.”
- Replace “in order to” with “to.” In most cases, the “in order” part contributes nothing but wordiness.
- Compound nouns that function as adjectives preceding the noun they modify should normally be hyphenated: *a five-minute exercise*, *a low-kinetic-energy cutoff*.
- Use an en-dash (option-hyphen [Mac], ctrl-minus on number pad [Windows]) to indicate a range: September 1–4. Use an em-dash (option-shift-hyphen [Mac], alt-ctrl-minus [Windows]) as a sentence dash: The reader can identify the writer’s attention to the primary elements of the course—thesis, evidence and analysis, and structure, as well as clarity—even if that attention does not always demonstrate mastery.
- Spell check, grammar check, and proofread!