

## **Generic Paper Guidelines**

### **Dr. Paul Werth**

The following guidelines should govern all of the papers that you submit to me. Each infraction of these guidelines will result in point reductions on the paper grade.\*

1. All papers must have a title, preferably one that says something about the contents and argument of the paper.
2. All pages must be numbered consecutively.
3. Do not ever use contractions in your paper. The only exception to this rule is when you cite a passage that contains a contraction in the original. In such a case, the issue is beyond your control.
4. Do not use the second person (you, your, etc.) anywhere in the paper (unless, once again, you are citing another source).
5. Do not use passive constructions in your paper unless it is absolutely unavoidable (which is almost never the case).
6. Give reference (at least author + page number) immediately following any and all citations from source texts (either using parentheses or a footnote below).
7. Include references to any sources that you use in putting together specific portions of your paper, even if you do not actually cite any passages from those sources.
8. All book titles must be underlined or in *italics* (not "in quotations").
9. If you use any sources beyond those on course's reading list, you must cite those works in full, either in a bibliography or in footnotes.
10. Make absolutely certain, when you quote from another source, that you have cited the text *exactly* as it appears in the original and that you have not taken the quote out of context.
11. Good grammar is obviously essential to your papers across the board, but the following problems occur with truly remarkable frequency and thus aggravate me more than anyone can possibly imagine.

A. Students seem to think that apostrophes are optional, and unfortunately our grammatically illiterate culture does much to deepen this impression. In fact, this is not the case. I know the Apostrophes well, and they are absolutely convinced of their God-

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\* If you are unfamiliar with any of the terms and concepts below, you will have to consult the necessary resources (including me) in order to familiarize yourself with it. Ignorance of the law, as they say, is no excuse.

given right to grace possessive constructions. Thus it is hardly surprising that they get extremely upset when excluded, and they begin to put unbearable pressure on me to settle accounts with those who have excluded them. I usually cave in to this pressure.

B. This may sound like a radical proposition, but the subject and verb of a sentence must agree in numerical terms. That is, if the subject is in the plural, then the verb must be in the plural as well. Words like "one", "each", and "neither" are always singular. It is thus incorrect to write, for example, "Each state tried to protect their interests." (Correct: "Each state tried to protect its interests.") Please check for agreement meticulously, since I myself will be on vigilant look-out for it. Better that you catch it than I.

C. Another popular notion is that one can just splice two separate sentences together with a comma and come out grammatically unscathed. This is also not true. If you splice two separate sentences together with a comma, you are guilty of a "comma-splice." Nevada voters have just adopted the "three-strikes-and-you're-out" proposition on comma-splices, which forces me to impose the maximum penalty on the third transgression.

D. The relative pronoun that should be used with people is "who." It is therefore incorrect to write, "The people that support democracy..." Correct: "The people who support democracy..."

This list by no means exhausts the infractions for which you may be penalized, but these are in fact the problems that occur the most frequently. At this point you may be asking: Why is all of this important? Is it not "the ideas" that matter? In fact, the ideas are only as good as the clarity with which they are expressed. To the extent that these infractions compromise the clarity of your expression and thus minimize the access of the reader to your ideas, they need to be taken with the utmost seriousness. It is also worth emphasizing how ill-educated, incompetent, and careless you appear when mistakes like this occur consistently and frequently. Though I may seem like a cold, callous, and insensitive ogre for making all of this so central, consider--if only for a moment--that I might actually be doing you a favor.