

Writing Guide

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Overview

During the S&P trimester, you will write essays on important strategic issues raised by the historical case studies. While the data you will be using is historical, the strategic issues are contemporary. Do not bother trying to anticipate what your moderators think is the right answer. There are no “school solutions.” The questions have been deliberately crafted so that there is no one “right” answer. Each question addresses issues of sufficient complexity to allow for a variety of well-reasoned responses. This is in keeping with real life where major policy issues tend to be controversial and where war is too unpredictable to provide a definitive answer in advance.

Before you start writing, make sure, with the help of your moderators, that you fully understand what the question means. You should not leave the tutorial without feeling comfortable with the question. It is often helpful to compose a very brief outline – one that fits on a single page.

Your opening paragraph should contain a clear thesis statement that directly answers the essay question. (See **The Art of the Thesis**.) Everything that you say thereafter should help prove your thesis. Eliminate all unnecessary details. We are looking for strategic analysis, not historical narrative. The proof of your thesis should be subdivided into various points, each supported by the relevant evidence. The points should be organized in a logical sequence so that, by the end of your paper, your reader should be convinced that you are right. (See **Organization**.)

As in the case of real life problems, in your paper you are making a judgment call outlining how and why you weighed the available and incomplete data as you did. Others will weigh the data differently and make different assumptions. That is the counterargument. You should present these counterarguments followed by the data that demonstrates the superiority of your thesis. (See **Counter-Argument**.) The ability to think flexibly, to understand issues from a variety of perspectives, and to understand the logical weaknesses of your own argument are essential skills to be developed in this course. A good counterargument demonstrates these skills.

Finally, your essay should end with a strong concluding paragraph driving home the validity of your line of reasoning.

Attention to detail is a necessity, not merely a virtue. Get your facts right. Make sure that your spelling is correct and your grammar is proper. (See **Grammar**.) Factual lapses damage your credibility in the reader’s eyes, while spelling and grammatical errors impede the flow of your argument. Leave enough time to edit your essay carefully.

Strive for brevity and clarity. You should take very seriously the prescribed page and word limits (laid out without “font fraud”). Do not waste space with historical

background at the beginning or with a summary at the end. It is unnecessary to repeat the readings since all members of the seminar have also read them. Do not use “bullets,” jargon, or slang as shortcuts. Minimize direct quotations. Concentrate on presenting what you have to say in simple, straightforward prose. (See **Style**.)

Give credit to others but avoid excessive reliance on them. The purpose of the course is to develop your independent ability to think strategically. Accordingly, in your essays use quotations sparingly if at all. Internalize and improve upon the ideas of others where possible. When you do borrow someone’s words or thoughts, be scrupulous in acknowledging them. A note in the text is sufficient: “Athenian power and the fear it caused in Sparta made war inevitable.” (Thucydides, 49). The use of sources other than the required readings is neither required nor desired. References to sources beyond the assigned readings require a full footnote. Such sources should be used only after consulting with your moderators.

The Art of the Thesis

David Kaiser

To illustrate three kinds of theses we are using a question that is not in the current syllabus but serves well as an example:

"Napoleon was simultaneously the political and the military leader of France. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement."

1. "C grade thesis: "Napoleon was the military and political leader of France from 1799 through 1815. Looking at the wars he fought during those years, we will see both advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement."

Comments: **This thesis is inadequate** and will likely result in a paper with a grade of B- or lower. It simply restates the question without giving any indication of what position the writer intends to take. Indeed, the writer may intend to take no position. **Avoid this kind of thesis.**

2. "B grade thesis: "At times, Napoleon's dual position as military and head-of-state enabled him to transform military success into political victory with unusual rapidity, but he eventually came to grief because he allowed his faith in his military skill to dictate his policy choices."

Comments: **This thesis is adequate**, because it takes a specific position with respect to the question. It will very likely result in at least an adequate paper if properly addressed in the body of the paper. It might result in a very good paper, but the reader can't tell as yet.

3. "A grade thesis: "From 1803 until 1807, Napoleon's dual roles as political and military leader enabled him to win spectacular battlefield successes and turn them into remarkable political achievements. From 1812 through 1815, however, he became overconfident in his military prowess, failed to pursue rational policies, and brought about the downfall of himself and his empire, proving that operational genius must be placed in the service of rational political goals."

Comments: **This is an excellent thesis statement.** This thesis not only takes a position, but announces specifically **how** the position will be supported. Having read such a thesis we would immediately expect an A or A- paper. Strive for a thesis like this example.

Organization

Opening paragraph: Opening paragraphs are the most important part of most types of writing because they set the tone for the entire work. You win or lose readers in this paragraph. Long e-mails with wandering opening paragraphs meet the delete button sooner rather than later.

Ideally your opening paragraph should capture the reader's attention, make clear the topic under discussion (in the case of S&P papers this translates to answering the question), and outline the rest of the paper. It is important to provide the general framework of your paper because this orients your reader. Such clarity will in turn make your argument more compelling.

Make sure that your introduction introduces your points in the order in which you intend to address them in your paper. Logical consistency helps your reader to absorb your argument.

Thematic Framework: In S&P papers, we are looking for the most direct and compelling answer to the question. Organize your paper thematically, that is, around a list of the specific points that you want to make. Those three or four key points may, or may not, form a chronological sequence. Your supporting evidence within those points may also be in chronological order. But you must not allow your paper to become a purely historical narrative of one fact after another that leaves it up to the reader to evaluate the significance of various facts. Any data you provide must be directly connected to answering the question. A thematic organization forces the writer to make the necessary logical linkages. It also forces the writer to justify the choice of themes, which requires marshalling evidence to prove points. These points then underpin the argument and prove the thesis. A direct approach to answering the question usually entails a point-evidence, point-evidence framework. .

A clear organization provided by a simple framework will help make your argument compelling. Readers tend to find arguments consisting of three to five points easy to remember. Therefore, a framework consisting of three to five general points should make your argument clear to your reader. If you have more than five points, try to group them into general categories (less than five) and present your argument in terms of these categories. Papers without frameworks tend to be hard to understand. The reader sees a mass of data but may not understand its purpose.

Organize your data around the points that constitute your framework and present your argument point by point, and within each point, sub-point by sub-point. Introduce each main point with a topic sentence - a sub-thesis indicating what the data in that section will prove. Without a topic sentence, the purpose of the evidence can become lost to the reader so that it appears to be unnecessary narrative detail rather than proof of the thesis.

Then use the data to make your proof. At the end of the proof of each point, make sure that you clinch the point. This entails your stating the obvious – meaning obvious to you,

but not necessarily to your reader. Your reader will perceive this as analysis. The analysis will highlight the significance to the information. This in turn, will make the paper even more interesting to read and the argument more compelling.

Below is a generic outline format:

Thesis

Point I

Evidence for Point I

Point 2

Evidence for Point 2

Point 3

Evidence for Point 3

etc.

Counter-argument (See page 10, "Placement of the Counter-argument" for alternatives.)

Evidence for counter-argument

Rebuttal

Evidence for rebuttal

Conclusion

Pitfalls:

Most common pitfalls in S&P papers:

1. The essay fails to answer the question.
2. The essay is largely an historical narrative.
3. The essay is disjointed because it lacks a logical sequence.

Overstating your case: It is important not to overstate your case. Often a less comprehensive version of an argument or less sweeping statement is sufficient to prove or support your thesis without triggering a counter-argument in your reader's mind. Once you trigger the counterargument, the reader is no longer on your side but questions your version of events. Therefore, if the comprehensive version of events is not necessary for your thesis, side-step this problem by moderating the prose.

For example: "Naval power alone has never been decisive in war."

Actually, Athens fell because of the loss of its fleet at Aegospotami. This one exception makes the above statement false.

Solution: "Naval power alone generally is not decisive in war."

The above statement is true. It is simply a toned down version of the original.

This problem sometimes appears in an overly broad thesis statement.

General solution: When making a generalization, ask yourself: “Under what circumstances is this generalization true?” Then either qualify your generalization or specify the circumstances.

Extraneous Information: Try to eliminate all information not directly related to your thesis. It is important to streamline your argument. Tangents dilute the force of your main argument. Conversely, explicitly link all information to your argument, either through topic sentences at the beginning of sections or through transition sentences at the end of sections. A transition sentence explains the logical link between sections.

Conclusion: Conclusions should not simply restate the argument. Sometimes you can discuss the greater implications of your thesis/argument in order to make a conclusion that supplements and strengthens your paper.

Counter-Argument

We live in a world of incomplete data, divergent opinion, and great uncertainty. Yet we must form our opinions and make our decisions in this environment. A good counter-argument takes the position of an intelligent person who weighs the incomplete data differently from the way you do, who makes different assumptions, and/or who sees different lines of causality. A counter-argument is an argument against your thesis or against some part of your analysis.

The ability to anticipate strong counter-arguments is a useful skill. (1) When giving briefs recommending a particular course of action, it is wise to anticipate the primary counter-arguments so that you have a well-prepared rebuttal to disarm your critics. (2) An essay that incorporates a strong counter-argument can preempt criticism and demonstrate a broad and fair-minded consideration of the available evidence. This will strengthen the thesis by proving that the best alternatives have been considered and proven inferior. (3) In a world of incomplete data, as more information becomes available, it may turn out that the counter-argument, not your original thesis, is correct. It is important to develop the flexibility of thinking required for counter-arguments to enable you to make timely reassessments.

S & P papers do not necessarily need a formal counterargument and refutation. The syllabus requires that you consider weaknesses in or counterarguments to your thesis “explicitly or implicitly.” A paper that compares the responsibility of President Truman and General MacArthur for civil-military problems during the Korean War, for example, will normally have its counterargument embedded within the flow of the text, since the student must explicitly evaluate the actions of both men and illustrate why he thinks one of them was more at fault than the other. Many papers, however, do include a section devoted to stating and refuting a counterargument.

For many students, the counter-argument is the most difficult part of an S&P paper. To think of one, imagine someone who disagrees with you entirely. Perhaps their assumptions differ from yours. Imagine someone who draws a different conclusion from the same evidence or someone who would use different evidence. Partisan politics provides an excellent example of intelligent people taking opposite sides on any number of issues. The disagreements usually turn on assumptions, evidence, and priorities.

The counter-argument has two parts: (1) a statement of the counter-argument and (2) the rebuttal of the counter-argument. It is essential to include the rebuttal. Otherwise you have shot yourself in the foot by undermining your thesis.

I. Statement of the counter-argument

(1) When you start your counter-argument, alert your readers that you are presenting a counter-argument; otherwise you will confuse them by appearing to contradict yourself. Alert them by using any one of such transition phrases as: *Some might*

argue that..., *Admittedly*,..., *Of course*,..., etc. Alternatively, introduce your counter-argument in the form of a question, for example, *But what about...? If so, then why...? Yet how... ?*

(2) Then make a forceful case for the counter-argument. Provide the most important relevant evidence. This generally requires at least a paragraph and sometimes a page. Do not make the counter-argument seem trivial or simplistic. It is not worth including unless an intelligent person would believe it. On the other hand, do not let the counter-argument dominate your paper, whose focus should be the proof of the thesis.

(3) Types of counter-arguments:

a. A direct argument against the thesis: You say that X is true/should have been done. The counter-argument says X is untrue/should not have been done. Such a counter-argument might offer an alternate explanation or recommendation. It might emphasize drawbacks or disadvantages associated with the thesis.

b. An argument against the evidence supporting the thesis. You say the data X proves your thesis; the counter-argument says the data Y proves your thesis. Such counter-arguments might agree with your thesis but offer different reasoning to support it.

c. A different prioritization. You say there are three reasons in ascending importance to explain X. The counter-argument says your least important reason is actually the most important one, or there is a fourth reason, or some other variation in priorities. In this case, the counter-argument does not take on all of the evidence, just a part of it. In cases where you have several reasons supporting your thesis, you can sometimes save one of them, perhaps the least important one, in order to make it your counter-argument.

(4) If after developing your counter-argument, you find it to be more convincing than your thesis, reverse them. Make the counter-argument your thesis and the thesis, your counter-argument. Do not reverse-engineer the data to fit the thesis. Make the thesis accurately reflect the evidence.

II. Rebuttal of the counter-argument

(1) Again, alert your reader when you shift gears to rebut the counter-argument. Use such conjunctions indicating a contradiction as: *even so*, *however*, *nonetheless*, *still*, *yet*, *nevertheless*, *notwithstanding*, etc.

(2) Do not make your rebuttal a repetition of your main argument. This not only adds nothing, but the reader may find the repetition annoying. (Reader: You told me once, why are you telling me again??? I am not stupid.) A strong rebuttal approaches the

counterargument from a different direction and, in doing so, strengthens the thesis.

(3) Types of rebuttals:

- a. Refutation: Explain the error within the counter-argument. Explain the flaws in its evidence and/or logic.
- b. Prioritization: Explain why the factors in your explanation are more important than those emphasized in the counter-argument.
- c. Qualification: Concede the validity of the counter-argument and add the necessary qualifications to your thesis to make it accurate. This is only possible if the counter-argument concerns a part of your main argument. If, however, you have successfully demolished your own thesis, then reverse the thesis and the counter-argument. Make the counter-argument the thesis and the thesis, the counter-argument.

III. Placement of the counter-argument

Placement of the counter-argument can depend on the type of counter-argument. Those that directly counter the thesis or that offer a different prioritization of factors (see I (3) a and I (3) c above), usually appear in the section immediately preceding the conclusion. Those that directly counter the thesis can also occasionally appear immediately after the introduction. Perhaps the counter-argument is generally perceived as common wisdom, so you present it at the very beginning and then spend the bulk of your essay tearing it apart. Counter-arguments applying only to a portion of the evidence (see I (3) b above), generally appear in the body of the essay immediately following that evidence.

In research papers, the introduction may begin with the counter-argument if your goal is to present an alternative explanation or course of action. The purpose of such essays is to refute a common position. The common position then becomes the counter-argument. Alternatively, when the purpose is not so much to demolish an accepted wisdom as to present one's own original thinking, then the counter-argument may appear in the section following the introduction in order to lay out the current state of research before launching into one's own findings.

Note, this section on the counter-argument draws on Gordon Harvey's "The Academic Essay: A Brief Anatomy," from the Writing Center, Harvard University, 1999.

Grammar

For students who believe that they are genetically unable to write, the primary impediment is often grammar. Repeated grammatical errors make for extremely difficult reading. Good writing, like grammar, is a learned skill. Grammatical errors are easy to eliminate. There are certain rules. Just memorize and follow them.

The following grammar points have been culled from student papers and are listed in alphabetical order. In addition, the ten most important errors have been assigned a number in order of descending priority. Pay special attention to No. 1, **pronoun agreement** and No. 2 **verb tenses**, which are both extremely common. The elimination of just these two will make a huge difference to your reader.

Affect/effect: Generally "affect" is a verb while "effect" is a noun. Exception: the idiom "to effect a change."

Among/Between: Between two items. Among three or more items.

Block quotations: Do not use quotation marks; rather, indent on both margins, single space, and footnote at the end of the sentence preceding the quotation. Block quotations should be used only for quotations exceeding eight typewritten lines.

7 Capitalization: The rules on capitalization are long and tedious. I am going to give you a list of pairs that have been correctly capitalized. *The Chicago Manual of Style* provides an exhaustive (and exhausting) list. (See Appendix 2, Supplemental Sources.)

In standard English usage, government, people, navy, empire, etc. are not capitalized. However as part of proper names they are. Below are some examples:

the navy	U.S. Navy
the British navy	Royal Navy
the army	the Army of the Potomac
the empire	Russian Empire (proper name for Russia under the tsars)
the battle	Battle of Yorktown
the president	President Bush
	BUT: George Bush, the president, (when used parenthetically)
the admiral	Admiral Nelson
the war	Peloponnesian War
revolution	American Revolution
command of the sea	(concepts do not get capitalized)
the west (direction)	the West (civilization)
the plan	the Schlieffen Plan
communism	the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

Colons (:) vs. **Semicolons (;)**: (1) Colons are generally used to precede lists. (2) Sometimes they are used to separate two clauses or a clause and a phrase when the

second item contains an explanation of the first. (3) Sometimes they precede quotations. (4) Semicolons are used to separate two closely related clauses. (5) Sometimes they are used in lists where the elements of that list contain commas. Below I have given examples for each of the above cases.

- (1) The relevant factors include: A, B, and C.
- (2) I.D. numbers are generally not included on our forms: it is illegal to include them.
- (3) According to Lenin: "...endless quotation...."
- (4) It is not that A is true; rather, B is the actual case.
- (5) Before Joe died, he wanted to go to the moon, where he expected to find green cheese; he intended to watch all James Bond movies in a single sitting, which proved difficult in practice; and he wanted to spend all of his free time writing S&P papers, which suggested to others that he required immediate medical attention. (This is a run-on sentence, but that is another issue.)

Commas and Semi-colons: Commas are usually used to separate phrases, while semi-colons are usually used to separate clauses. (Clauses contain a subject and a predicate; phrases do not.)

9 Commas: Generally speaking, do not put commas between two items separated by "and." If you have three items, put commas after the first and second items in the list. If the items have very few words, then it is possible to omit the comma after the item immediately preceding the word, "and." For long complicated lists, do not omit the comma.

In other words: A and B. Not: A, and B. (Get rid of the comma.)

For three items: A, B, and C. Or: A, B and C. (In this case, either way usually works.)

Tricky cases: Sentences with more than one "and." If A and B are related and X and Y are related, then punctuate as follows:

A and B, and X and Y

Complicated cases: When A, B, and C are lists, then you need semicolons as well:

A1, A2, and A3; B1, B2, and B3; and C1, C2, and C3.

Do not use a comma to separate the subject of a sentence from the predicate:

For ex. "The French garrison in Madrid, ruthlessly put down the uprising."
Remove the comma.

6 Contractions: In formal writing, try to avoid using contractions. For example: didn't, wouldn't, couldn't, won't, etc. Write out both words.

4 Diction: Diction means improper word usage. In English certain word pairs are fixed. For instance, Congress "convenes" not "starts," although convene and start are virtually synonymous. To eliminate diction problems, use a thesaurus in combination with a dictionary. I use *Roget's Thesaurus* but there are many others. Paperback editions are cheap.

Ending a sentence on a preposition: Avoid it.

Error: Whom did you go to the movies with?

Correction: With whom did you go to the movies?

It/She: Either refer to countries or ships as "it" or "she." Whichever way you go, be consistent. I recommend using "it" because it is harder to remember always to use "she."

Its/It's: "Its" is a possessive. "It's" is the contraction for "it is." The apostrophe stands for the missing letter "i."

Lead/Led: "Lead" is both the metal and the present tense of the verb, to lead. The past tense of the verb is "led" not "lead."

Lie/Lay:

	<u>Present tense</u>	<u>Past tense</u>
Transitive verb, "to lay"	Now I lay the book on the table.	Yesterday I laid the book on the table.
Intransitive verb: "to lie"	Now I lie down.	Yesterday I lay down.
Intransitive verb: "to lie"	to the dog: "Lie down now!"	

A transitive verb takes a direct object, "book" in the above example. An intransitive verb takes no object. The confusion: the present tense of one verb is the past tense of the other.

Like/As: "Like" is a preposition and should be followed by a noun or gerund. (A gerund is a verb in the "ing" form, ex. walking.) "As" is a conjunction and can be followed by a clause. The common mistake is to follow "like" with a clause. In these cases, use "as."

For example, it is incorrect to write: "He was running like a pack of wolves was chasing him."

Correction: He was running as if a pack of wolves were chasing him."

It is correct to write: "He was running like a cripple."

Classic error: "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should."

Correction: "Winston tastes good as a cigarette should."

May/Might: The past tense of "may" is "might."

For example: "If Napoleon had been wiser, he may have reconsidered the Russian Campaign."

Correction: "If Napoleon had been wiser, he might have reconsidered the Russian Campaign."

Numbers: Write out small numbers (up to one hundred) unless the sentence has all kinds of statistics. Use numerals for big numbers (over one hundred).

Only: The word, only, immediately precedes the word it modifies.

For example:

"He only touched one person." This placement means that the subject touched someone as opposed to doing some real damage that that person.

"He touched only one person." This placement means that he touched one out of many possible people.

3 Parallel Structure: In sentences that are lists or in clauses connected by coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet), each part of the list or clause should have the same grammatical structure as the other elements of the list or clause. That is, a list beginning with a noun should be followed by other nouns. Alternatively, a list beginning with a gerund (a verb in the "ing" form) should be followed by other gerunds.

Ex. U.S. objectives in the Gulf War included restoring the Kuwaiti government, Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, regional security, and to help protect American lives.

Solution 1 (nouns): U.S. objectives in the Gulf War included restoration of the Kuwaiti government, Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, enhancement of regional stability, and the protection of American lives.

Solution 2 (gerunds): U.S. objectives in the Gulf War included restoring the Kuwaiti government, forcing Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, enhancing regional security, and protecting American lives.

Solution 3 (verbs): In the Gulf War the U.S. intended to restore the Kuwaiti government expel Iraq from Kuwait, enhance regional security, and protect American lives.

The choice is yours, just be consistent.

10 Possessives:

singular: dog's house (one dog)
plural: dogs' house (several dogs, one house)
awkward (but O.K.): Athens's better: Athenian
multi-syllabic Greek names with unaccented endings: Alcibiades'

1 Pronoun agreement: Use "it" for a country and "they" for the citizens of that country. Similarly, use "it" for institutions such as the military, the army, the government, etc. and "they" for the members of those institutions such as military leaders, soldiers, officials, etc. Note: it is also possible to refer to countries and ships as "she." If you do so, you must be consistent throughout. Since this is hard to do, you are safer using "it."

Examples: Athens = it or she (but be consistent)
Athenians = they
navy = it
officers/sailors = they
government = it
civil leaders = they

Here is what can happen if you do not follow the rules:

For ex. "The Muslim allies of the United States and Britain, specifically Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey were ready to see the United Nations abandon their containment of Iraq."

Grammatically, "their" must refer to the Muslim allies, the only available plural. This is not the intended meaning of the sentence. The Muslim allies were not doing the containing, the UN was.

Revision: "The Muslim allies of the United States and Britain - specifically Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey - were ready to see the United Nations abandon its containment of Iraq."

For ex. "The balance of power slowly started to shift in favor of the Communists in early 1947 when it thwarted a major Nationalist offensive and took advantage of its overextension in Manchuria."

The Communists, not the balance of power, thwarted the offensive, but "it" is singular and grammatically must refer to the balance of power. There are two potential plurals in the sentence, the Communists and the Nationalists. Grammatically "they" could refer to either. I have avoided this ambiguity by reorganizing the sentence.

Revision: "The balance of power started to shift in favor of the Communists in early 1947 when they took advantage of the Nationalists' overextension to thwart a major offensive"

8 Punctuation for Quotations: Periods and commas fall within the quotation marks, while colons and semi-colons fall outside.

For ex.

“quotation,”
“quotation.”
“quotation”;
“quotation”:

The British do it differently. The above are U.S. rules for punctuation.

Punctuation for Quotations within Quotations:

(a) Hamlet: "To be or not to be?"

(b) Shakespearean scholar: Hamlet's timeless question, "To be or not to be?" has been repeated for generations.

(c) Someone quoting the Shakespearean scholar: According to a Shakespearean scholar, "Hamlet's timeless question, 'To be or not to be?' has been repeated for generations."

Note that the quotation within a quotation shifts from double to single quotation marks. See (c) above.

Split infinitive: An infinitive consists of "to" and a verb, for example, "to run." A split infinitive occurs with the introduction of any word – usually an adverb – between the "to" and the verb. In general, avoid split infinitives as much as possible unless it becomes unbearably awkward.

Infinitive: to verb, ex. "to run"

Split infinitive: to quickly run

Correction: to run quickly

5 Subjunctive Mood: In hypothetical alternatives, use the subjunctive mood. This usually entails the addition of "would have." For example, "Alternative A would have done the following..." This problem usually appears in counter-factual sections that propose alternate courses of action different from the historical record.

Time Phrases: Time phrases usually occur at the beginning of sentences.

To/Too: Too = excessive, also. To = for everything else except 2.

2 Verb Tense: While it is possible either to write your paper in the historical present tense or the past tense, in practice it is extremely difficult to maintain the present tense throughout and it is grammatically incorrect to mix and match tenses. Therefore, it is highly advisable to write your paper in the past tense. This should come more naturally since most of the wars in this course happened in the past. Whatever you choose, be consistent.

Which: "Which" usually modifies the word immediately preceding it.

For ex. In the phrase, "the house on the end of the street, which..." "which" refers to the "street" not the "house."

Which/who: "Who" refers only to people while "which" refers to just about anything else. "Which" is used to refer to institutions and "who" to the members of those institutions

Who/whom: "Who" is for the subject, while "whom" is for direct and indirect objects.

Joe kicked Charlie.

Who kicked Charlie? (The subject is Joe.)

Whom did Joe kick? (The direct object is Charlie).

Joyce gave the book to Pam. ("Pam" is the indirect object and "book" the direct object of the verb, "gave.")

To whom did Joyce give the book?

Tip off: A preposition following a verb usually indicates an indirect object.

Years: 1760s not 1760's. No apostrophe.

Weeds: Each of these grammar items is minor and easily corrected, but for your reader, their correction makes a surprisingly big difference. In some cases, following the grammar rules can eliminate incomprehensible prose to unveil brilliant analysis.

Style

Run-on sentence: Overloaded sentences can become very difficult for the reader to follow. When sentences become too long, subdivide them into several shorter sentences. Be on the lookout for any sentence over three lines long. Divide it into two or more sentences. Also try to intersperse some short sentences of less than one line.

Paragraphing: Likewise, subdivide long paragraphs. Deliver your argument in small enough portions so that your reader can digest them. This makes your argument clearer and clarity makes a good argument more compelling.

Constructions: You can show the logical relationship of the parts of your argument with sentence patterns or conjunctions.

Useful Sentence Patterns:

Not only, but also

On the one hand,..... On the other hand,.....

(Something was not the case); rather, (something else was the case)

First..... Second..... etc.

....., while.....

..... Meanwhile,....

Useful conjunctions: (For additional conjunctions, consult a synonym dictionary, a thesaurus, or a regular dictionary.)

however, nevertheless, although, despite, yet

therefore, so, because

in addition

similarly, likewise, moreover

conversely, in contrast

To be: The verb "to be" in its many conjugations (is, are, was, were) tends to be overused in writing. Its overuse suggests any of three problems: First, the word brings no special meaning, whereas more specific verbs provide additional information. Second, it is often the key part of extremely awkward sentence structures. Third, it can indicate a passive construction.

Here are some awkward sentence constructions culled from student papers:

a) "What they failed to ascertain was that they were fighting an entire people."

Simpler and more direct: "They failed to understand that they were fighting an entire people."

b) "A second problem with the Americans' overall assessment was their estimation of the value of the object to the Vietnamese."

Simpler and more direct: "Second, the Americans grossly underestimated the value of the object to the Vietnamese."

c) "Another aspect of geography in this conflict is that the farther inland Russia defended the greater the Japanese dependence on LOCs became."

Simpler and more direct: "Finally, the further inland Russia retreated, the greater the Japanese dependence on LOCs."

d) "A major problem with the containment strategy was that it was by its nature reactionary."

Simpler and more direct: "Containment ceded the initiative to the enemy."

Be on the look out for "to be" in all of its conjugations and replace a few of them, here and there.

Sometimes the verb, to be, indicates passive constructions.

Passive constructions: Rule of thumb: when in doubt, avoid them.

Passive: The war was won by Britain.

The war was won. (This variant does not even say who won.)

Active: Britain won the war.

Passive constructions tend to be vague, wordy, and awkward. Active constructions generally make for better writing. There are exceptions. Sometimes you may want to be vague. For instance: The china was broken. (When you do not want to blame the person who broke it.)

Dangling modifier: Usually you should avoid beginning a sentence with a long dependent clause. This is particularly true when the preceding sentence has a different subject. Until you specify the subject of the sentence – that is, after the long dependent clause – the reader has no idea what the dependent clause is all about. The solution is to begin the sentence with the subject and then launch into the dependent clause. This is simply an issue of clarity for the reader.

Ex. Having decided to prepare for war against Napoleon by raising a new army, Prussia approached Britain for help. (The underlining indicates the long dependent clause.)

Problem: Everyone in Europe was fighting Napoleon at one time or another. The reader has no idea what power is preparing for war this time until half-way through the sentence.

Solution: Start the sentence with the subject, Prussia.

Better: As Prussia prepared for war against Napoleon, it raised a new army and approached Britain.

While the above is bad style, the example below is also bad grammar:

Ex. Being in a somewhat dilapidated condition, I was able to buy the house very cheaply.

Grammatically, an opening subordinate clause without a subject by default applies to the subject of the sentence, which is “I” not the “house” in the above example. The sentence below resolves the ambiguity by specifying the subject of the subordinate clause.

Better: As the house was in a somewhat dilapidated condition, I was able to buy it very cheaply.

Quotations: Avoid unnecessary direct quotations. Unless quoting someone whose identity adds to the content of the quotations, paraphrase and footnote instead. Usually a direct quotation adds little while the quotation marks, the potential changes in writing style, and convoluted constructions to merge the grammar can all be distracting. Moreover, a second opinion does not constitute a proof of your own argument; evidence does. It is better to cite the relevant evidence than the generalization. Try to keep quotations to major historical figures, well-known experts on a subject, etc. Even then, quote sparingly.

Repeated Words: If you find yourself overusing the same word, either shorten the sentence to eliminate one usage or find a synonym

Two Verbs: Avoid using two verbs when one will suffice. Simpler is better.

Ex. "England's failure to mobilize quickly undermined its ability to counter French aggression while attempting to maintain a global presence."

Better: "England's failure to mobilize quickly undermined its ability to counter French aggression while maintaining a global presence."

Better still: "Because Britain did not mobilize quickly, it could not both counter French aggression and maintain a global presence."

Ex. "British strategy switched to look for loyalist support."

Better: "British strategy now sought loyalist support."

Slang: Avoid it in formal writing.

Appendix 1: Baer's Rules

From: PROF GEORGE BAER
To: S&P-all
Date: 12/17/96 8:01am
Subject: Good Writing

Proposed S&P Standard Guide to Good Writing

1. Subject and verb always has to agree.
2. Do not use a foreign term when there is an adequate English quid pro quo.
3. It behooves the writer to avoid archaic expressions.
4. Do not use hyperbole: not one writer in a million can use it effectively.
5. Avoid cliches like the plague.
6. Mixed metaphors are a pain in the neck and should be thrown out the window.
7. Avoid colloquial stuff.
8. Placing a comma between subject and predicate, is not correct.
9. Parenthetical words however must be enclosed in commas.
10. Consult a dictionary frequently to avoid misspelling.
11. Don't be redundant.
12. Don't repeat yourself or say what you have said before.
13. Remember to never split an infinitive.
14. The passive voice should not be used.
15. No sentence fragments.
16. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
17. Don't use no double negatives.
18. Proofread carefully to see if you have any words cut.
19. Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
20. Never us a long word when a diminutive will do.
21. Never end a sentence a preposition with.
22. Don't confuse your misplaced readers with modifiers.
23. See rule 24.
24. Minimize cross-references.
25. Redundant material that repeats information previously stated in an earlier section should be deleted and eliminated.
26. Writing carefully, dangling clauses were avoided.

Appendix 2: Additional Readings

Orwell, George. "Politics of the English Language." (1946) can be found at the following website: <http://www.resort.com/~prime8/Orwel/patee.html> Orwell, the author of the novel, *1984*, provides short examples of flawed prose and longer explanations for remedying the problems.

Strunk, William and E. B. White. *Elements of Style* (1918, 1999) can be found at the following website: <http://www.bartleby.com/141/> It is the classic work on good writing. The fifth edition remains in print and differs from the on-line version.

University of Chicago Press Staff. *Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. This manual is used by book publishers and authors of published work. It has over 800 pages of rules concerning grammar, style, footnoting, etc. It has a comprehensive index so you can find what you need. (Z253 .U69 2003)

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI



Title

By

Name

Rank / Service or Agency

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Strategy and Policy based on the following assigned topic:

Question #: "..."

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

Date

Seminar # Moderators:

Professor < Name >

Rank / Name