

Writing Tips

You will be heading to college where an essay will be part of the fabric of your classes, especially English classes. Here are a few important reminders for your time in my class and for the future.

1. All papers must follow MLA format. If you need more information regarding MLA format, see me. But always double check your final draft to be sure it meets all the requirements.
2. Speaking of drafts—never turn in a first draft. Even if the time for the assignment is a weekend, find the time to revise. A paper is a reflection of you and the care you put into presenting yourself.
3. The title to your paper should be the reader's first indication as to the content. Without being overly clever, create a title that shows thought and gives definition to your piece.
4. Work with a unifying structure—thesis > topic sentences > evidence > explanation. It may seem a little artificial at first, but your writing will benefit from the progression and the coherence this structure brings to the paper.
5. Introduce quotes with a little context: "Richard, making excuses to his mother, says:..." This reminds your reader of the context the quote comes from and it forces you to use quotes in the proper context.
6. Your thesis needs to be more explicit. Don't "save the best for last" to keep your reader interested. Many times your conclusion is more concrete and direct than the thesis is. If your thesis is good, your whole paper will benefit and if it is lacking, then you will have a greater challenge keeping your writing focused.
7. Transition words to avoid: 'first,' 'second,' 'last,' 'in conclusion'. Instead, link your paragraphs using the key words and phrases from your thesis and from the previous paragraph.
8. Other words to avoid: 'clearly,' 'obviously'. If it is that clear or obvious, you don't need to mention it. If it isn't clear or obvious, your need to make it so. Too often, as writers, we think it is when it clearly isn't. There should be no contractions in your formal writing.
9. More words to be careful with: 'this,' 'that,' 'it,' 'also'. Tell what 'this' is so that you and the reader are referring to the same thing. 'Also' signals that you are moving to a new point; a new point often needs a new paragraph. Be sure you have fully finished the thought you are working with before moving on to a new one.
10. Be deeper thinkers. Get at the WHY of every essay question more than you are. It may be true that Shorty is degraded to the point where he has no self-respect, but WHY is Wright highlighting that (what do I mean by 'that')?