

# THE KEY

## TO WRITING AND REVISION

**CAP Capitalize** -- For titles of articles, essays, books, magazines, songs, poems, and so on, capitalize the first letter of the first, last, and important words. Words left in lower case include conjunctions like "or," and prepositions like "to," "in," and "between."

- For more information, see the *Handbook*, p. 461-465.

**CS Comma Splice** – Avoid connecting two complete sentences using a comma. Instead, use end punctuation and capitalization to make them separate sentences. Sometimes, you can connect them using a comma and conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). Other times, when the two complete sentences are both short and closely related, you can connect them with a semicolon.

- **Example:** I took the two-o'clock bus, it was a blazing hot afternoon.
- **(Problem:** Two independent clauses have been connected with a comma.)
- **Solution 1:** I took the two-o'clock bus. It was a blazing hot afternoon.
- **Solution 2:** It was a blazing hot afternoon, so I took the two-o'clock bus.
- **Solution 3:** I took the two-o'clock bus; it was a blazing hot afternoon.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 372-403.

**CTh Connect to Thesis** – Make it clear to readers how each idea that you present in your essay is related to your thesis statement, how each point you make helps to prove your argument. The end of each supporting paragraph is good place for you to place a sentence or two explaining how the evidence you are presenting strengthens your thesis. Do your best to avoid sounding repetitive.

**DW Dead Weight** – Eliminate unnecessary wording from your sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repeating points you have already made, and substitute wordy phrases like "due to the fact that" for more concise alternatives like "because."

- **Example:** *The thing about Law's article that does not make sense is that he promotes human rights abuses as a necessary growing experience for nations, even though those abuses could be stopped with international intervention.*
- **(Problem:** The first part of the sentence is wordy and does not say much.)
- **Solution:** Law's article promotes human rights abuses as a necessary growing experience for societies, even though those abuses could be stopped with international intervention.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 206-212.

**FG Fragment** – Every sentence must be an independent clause with a subject and a verb. Many times, sentence fragments can easily be made into complete sentences or connected to nearby sentences.

- **Example:** Zinn never formally learned about working-class American history. *Even though he received several degrees in U.S. History.*
- **(Problem:** The second “sentence” is a subordinate clause.)
- **Solution:** Zinn never formally learned about working-class American *history, even though he received several degrees in U.S. History.*
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 238-247.

**FP Faulty Parallelism** – Balance parallel ideas using parallel constructions.

- **Example:** Swift effectively persuades readers because of his satirical tone, clever use of counterarguments, and *he chooses accurate words.*
- **(Problem:** The first two items in the list (“satirical tone” and “clever use of counterarguments”) are noun phrases, whereas the last item (“he chooses accurate words”) is an independent clause with its own subject and verb.)
- **Solution:** Swift effectively persuades readers because of his satirical tone, clever use of counterarguments, and accurate word choice.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 152-157.

**FS Fused Sentence** (also called Run-On Sentence) -- Do not fuse complete sentences together without any punctuation. Separate them using end punctuation and capitalization, connect them with a comma and conjunction or (sometimes) a semicolon.

- **Example:** The author believes that torture of suspected terrorists should be *legal he* thinks it should be regulated and carried out by trained professionals.
- **(Problem:** Two independent clauses are fused without punctuation.)
- **Solution 1:** The author believes that torture of suspected terrorists should be *legal. He* thinks it should be regulated and carried out by trained professionals.
- **Solution 2:** The author believes that torture of suspected terrorists should be *legal, and he* thinks it should be regulated and carried out by trained professionals.
- **Solution 3:** The author believes that torture of suspected terrorists should be *legal; he* thinks it should be regulated and carried out by trained professionals.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 372-403, 421-424.

**HP Homophone** -- Many English words sound like other words, so they become confusing when written.

- **Common Examples:** there/their/they’re, red/read, aloud/allowed, hour/our/are, wait/weight. Learn the difference and use the right word every time.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 450-451, 842-857.

**LT Lacking Transition** – Provide transitions between sentences and paragraphs in order to connect the ideas for your readers. Although the connection may be obvious to you, it may not be for your readers. Sometimes transitions can be accomplished with transitional phrases, such as “first,” “however,” and “in addition,” but other times you will need a sentence (or two) to explain the connection between ideas.

- **Example:** Riley’s essay contains some humor. His tone is so sarcastic that some readers may be offended.
- **(Problem:** Because there is no transition, the two sentences seem to contradict each other.)
- **Solution:** Riley’s essay contains some humor; however, his tone is so sarcastic that some readers may be offended.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 95-98, 383-384, 399-400.

**MM Mixed Modifier** – Modifiers are parts of a sentence that modify, or describe, other parts of the sentence. If you misplace a modifier, you may create unintended, incorrect meanings.

- **Example:** Plagiarizing a famous poem, the dean suspended the student indefinitely.
- **(Problem:** The modifier “Plagiarizing a famous poem” should describe the student, but because it has been placed next to “the dean,” it sounds like the dean has plagiarized.)
- **Solution:** The dean suspended the student indefinitely for plagiarizing a famous poem.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p.163-184.

**OG Overgeneralization** – Do not make sweeping generalizations that ignore possible exceptions. Be careful with words like “every,” “always,” and “never.”

- **Example:** *All* people in Michigan enjoy fishing.
- **(Problem:** The word “All” claims that every single person in Michigan enjoys fishing.)
- **Solution:** *Many* people in Michigan enjoy fishing.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 226-236, 506-507.

**PA Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement** -- All pronouns must agree in number, gender, and person (or perspective) with their antecedents.

- **Number Agreement:**
  - **Example:** While the author’s point is valid, *their* support is insufficient.
  - **(Problem:** The antecedent “author” is singular, while the pronoun “their” is plural.)
  - **Solution:** While the author’s point is valid, *her* support is insufficient.
- **Gender Agreement:**
  - **Example:** A person who maintains a healthy lifestyle has a good chance of living to see *his* grandchildren.

- **(Problem:** The situation is hypothetical; “a person” is not necessarily male.)
- **Solution 1 (use “his or her”):** A person who maintains a healthy lifestyle has a good chance of living to see *his or her* grandchildren.
- **Solution 2 (pluralize):** *People* who maintain healthy *lifestyles* have a good chance of living to see *their* grandchildren.
- **Person (Perspective) Agreement:**
  - **Example:** If athletes want to succeed, *you* must play by the rules.
  - **(Problem:** The antecedent “athletes” represents third-person perspective and the pronoun “you” represents second-person perspective. Avoid second-person pronouns (you, your, yours, yourself) in academic writing unless otherwise instructed.)
  - **Solution:** If athletes want to succeed, *they* must play by the rules.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 271-278.

**PL Plurals** -- In formal academic English, nouns representing more than one usually include an “s” or “es” at the end.

- **Example:** Barry Glassner outlines three *method* of fear mongering.
- **(Problem:** Even though the word “three” indicates that there is more than one method, the word “method” is still in its singular form.)
- **Solution:** Barry Glassner outlines three *methods* of fear mongering.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 452-454.

**Poss Possession** -- To show that something belongs to someone or something else, you must put the “owner” word before the “owned” word and add an apostrophe and an “s” to the end of the “owner” word.

- **Example:** *Quindlen essay* criticizes American culture for the way alcohol is celebrated, while other drugs are condemned.
- **(Problem:** The writer has not included the apostrophe and the “s” at the end of “Quindlen” to show that the essay belongs to her.)
- **Solution:** *Quindlen’s essay* criticizes American culture for the way alcohol is celebrated, while other drugs are condemned.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 408-413.

**PR Pronoun Reference** – Every pronoun (words such as this, she, his, it, and them) has an antecedent—the word that the pronoun represents. Be sure that your readers know exactly to whom or what each of your pronouns refers, in order to avoid confusion.

- **Example:** As Dean and Sal walked through Central Park, *he* told *him* all about Denver.
- **(Problem:** It is not clear who told whom about Denver.)
- **Solution:** As they walked through Central Park, Dean told Sal all about Denver.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 279-284.

**RP Repetitive** – Repetition can be very powerful in writing (see Dr. M.L. King’s famous “I Have a Dream Speech”), but when not carefully planned, repeated words or phrasing can confuse readers or dull their interest. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms (double check them in the dictionary) and vary sentence length and structure.

- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 206-212.

**SV Subject-Verb Agreement** -- The subject of your sentence should agree in number with the verb that goes with it; plural nouns require the plural forms of verbs.

- Example: *Krauthammer suggest* that torture is sometimes justified.
- (Problem: The subject “Krauthammer” is a singular subject, while the verb “suggest” is in its plural form.)
- Solution: *Krauthammer suggests* that torture is sometimes justified.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 200-211, 311-324.

**TS Topic Sentence** – Divide ideas into separate paragraphs, and begin each paragraph with a sentence that lets readers know what the paragraph will discuss. Sometimes the topic sentence can help you transition from the previous paragraph so that readers understand how the ideas are related.

- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 76-80, and 97.

**VG Vague** – Avoid vague or unclear wording and ideas in your writing. Words like “people” and “things” can almost always be replaced by more specific words. When you write vaguely, you may confuse your readers. Also, vague writing gives the impression that you do not know your subject very well or did not place much effort into your writing.

- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 226-236.

**VT Verb Tense** – Verbs representing action that happened in the past generally add “ed” to the end of their present tense form (help/helped, walk/walked).

- Example: When Sabina *call* Tomas that day, he said he would come over immediately.
- (Problem: The verb “call” is in its present tense, even though it is clear that the action happened in the past.)
- Solution: When Sabina *called* Tomas that day, he said he would come over immediately.

**HOWEVER**, when referring to what an author has written, use the literary-historical present tense. Even though the author Paulo Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* years ago, and even though he has been dead since 1997, we always refer to authorial action in present tense.

- Example: As Freire *argued*, “Oppression---overwhelming control—is necrophilic.”
- (Problem: The verb “argued” is in the past tense.)
- Solution: As Freire *argues*, “Oppression---overwhelming control—is necrophilic.”

- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 325-334.

**WC Word Choice** – Mark Twain writes, “The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between the lightning and the lightning bug.” Always choose the best, most specific and fitting word for the rhetorical situation. Try starting with a word that feels almost right, and search for related words in a thesaurus (Shift+F7 accesses the one built into Microsoft Word). Always cross check unfamiliar synonyms in the dictionary. NEVER use a word you don’t know in your writing.

- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 212-236.

**WV Weak Verb** – Many commonly used English verbs and verb phrases can be replaced with stronger, more active and accurate verbs. Beware of verb phrases containing helping verbs derived from “to be,” “to have” and “to get.”

- Example: The author *gets the point across* that people should be treated equally.
- (Problem: The verb phrase “gets the point across” is weak and wordy.)
- Solution: The author *suggests* that people should be treated equally.
- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 146-151.

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## TO WORKING WITH SOURCES

**ABC** Alphabetize -- Arrange your Works Cited page entries alphabetically by the first word of each entry (usually author's last name or by title when a work has no title). For more help, see the *Handbook* p. 621-665.

**BQ** Block Quotation Needed -- Quotations that take up more than four lines in your essay are treated a special way in MLA For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 414-415, 600.

**DQ** Dropped Quotation -- Use a signal phrase and in-text citation For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 601-605.

**ITA** Italics Needed -- Put book titles (and the titles of most longer works) in *italics*. For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 441-445.

**ITC** In-Text Citation -- Includes a signal phrase and/or parenthetical citation with a page number. For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 610-621.

**LQ** Long Quotation -- For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 414-415, 598-600.

**MC** More Context Needed -- Give more information so that readers are not confused or misled. Remember to imagine that your reader has not read the same material you have read. For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 598-606.

**ML** Misleading -- Read more carefully and represent the ideas accurately.

**MQ** Misquote -- All wording and punctuation enclosed in quotation marks must be exactly like the original.

**PPh** Paraphrase -- Summarize an author's ideas in your own words by *completely* changing the wording and sentence structure. For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 576-578.

**QM** Quotation Marks Needed -- All wording borrowed from an author must be enclosed in quotation marks and cited appropriately. Also, article titles (and most short works) are enclosed in quotation marks. For more help, see , the *Handbook*, p. 413-420, 592-605.

**SPh** Signal Phrase Needed -- Lets the reader know you are introducing someone else's ideas. For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 418-419, 601-605.

**SQ** Single Quotation Marks Needed -- When you have a quotation within a quotation, use "regular quotation marks" for the whole quotation and 'single quotation marks' around the inner quotation. For more help, see the *Handbook*, p. 416.