

- Organization
  - An essay must have a clear, defensible thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. Be careful to avoid contradictions!
  - Essays need a properly blended and complete introductory paragraph, logically-ordered BP's, and a thorough concluding paragraph.
  - All BP's need examples that are grouped conceptually (plot, theme, etc.) and organized logically (chronologically or by importance); they also need introductory and concluding sentences.
- Explanation
  - Explanations should be clear, thorough and specific, without being wordy. Have you provided thoughtful insight into the topic?
  - Avoid awkward or vague phrasing, clichés, euphemisms and colloquial language. Vocabulary should be sophisticated and appropriate.
  - Are the key points addressed? Do you have 3-4 concrete examples per BP? Have you avoided irrelevant examples or factual errors?
- Sentences
  - Avoid sentence fragments (you need a subject and a predicate), run-ons, and comma splices, but do vary your sentence lengths.
  - Avoid pronoun confusion (e.g. Who is *they*?) and improper parallel structure (e.g. I went running, hiking and ~~to~~ golf(ing)).
  - Agreement: subject-verb (e.g. each = is ~~are~~) and pronoun-antecedent (e.g. somebody = his or her ~~their~~).
  - Don't use "being" to replace active verbs (e.g. "is" and "are") or subordinating conjunctions (e.g. "since" and "because").
  - Don't mix your pronouns, especially "I"/"my" with "you"/"your". If general statements are needed, use "we" or "one".
- Transitions
  - Use proper and effective transitions, without overusing them. Consider using transitions before concluding sentences.
- Spelling and Usage
  - Are there any consistently misspelled or misused words? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Watch out for the basics: their/there/they're || to/too/two || a lot, never alot || woman vs. women || then vs. than || "who" for people, not "that" || amount vs. number || business || beginning || words ending in "y" are usually pluralized with "ies", not "ys"
- Tense Shifts
  - Keep your tense consistent! (When writing about literature, scholars prefer present tense.)
- Punctuation and Capitalization
  - Do not use apostrophes for pluralized words. Use apostrophes for possession or contraction. Watch out for **its** (possessive) vs. **it's**.
  - Colons are used for lists and answers, while semicolons are used sparingly to replace a period rather than a comma.
  - Use a comma after a sub. clause or introductory transition, but avoid one between the subject & the verb or between two examples.
  - Use a comma before and after an appositive phrase: Bella, *Bob's six year-old beagle*, chews holes in his socks.
  - A capital must be used for the pronoun "I". Capitalize specifically named (proper) nouns, but not general nouns and categories.
- Details
  - Avoid most abbreviations in formal writing, including *etc.* and *&*. Don't use "I", "my" or "you" in a formal essay.
  - Books, plays and movies are underlined or *italicized*, whereas poems, short stories, essays and articles are placed in "quotations".
  - Are your quotations appropriate, effectively blended and (if required) properly cited? Did you include a proper cover page?