

## Some Common Issues With Your English 112 Papers

1. **Use, over-use of "I feel"-type sentences:** "I feel that," "I believe that," "I think that"

- as in: "I feel that I write well" v. "I write well."

- "I think that over time, I have grown as a writer" v. "Over time, I have grown as a writer."

To persuade your reader, state your claims with confidence. "I feel.." and "I believe..." disclaimers occur in conversation as a form of politeness, a non-confrontational way to express an opinion ("Personally, I believe that [religious/political/personal belief].") In conversation and speech, those phrases are ok, but in writing they just take up space, make your sentences wordy, and imply that you lack confidence in your own judgment. **DELETE THESE** whenever you find them in your work.

2. **Wordiness and/or passive-voice** - Ex.: "Research papers have been a struggle for me" v. "I have struggled with research papers" or "I struggled with research papers."

The "I [verb]" examples are in the active voice, which is usually the voice you should employ. Passive (and/or wordy) sentences drain your writing of its force and energy. Strive to be concise and direct. To write sophisticated sentences, you have to first push yourself toward sophisticated thoughts. An experienced reader can tell when a writer has inflated, stretched or strained average thoughts to fill up fancy sentences.

3. **Redundancy** - the repetition of a word or idea (most often, a word) within one or two sentences, where repetition is not necessary - Ex.: "Don't repeat yourself excessively, repeating yourself is bad, it's bad to repeat yourself, and you shouldn't do it because it's bad to repeat yourself."

4. **"Surface" errors** - missing commas, noun/verb disagreement, misspelled words, typos - these are superficial mistakes which distract (and sometimes annoy) most readers from your message. Think of them as smudges or fingerprints on a window which prevent you from seeing clearly through to the objects or ideas on the other side.

5. **Pronouns without referents** - you should only use a pronoun when it clearly refers back to a specific noun in the sentence or paragraph.

Examples of errors: "Doug went to the store and bought it." "Doug and Mike played poker. He won." The pronouns here don't tell you WHAT Doug purchased or which person won the hand or game.

Correct usage: "Doug wanted a new iPhone, so he went to the store and bought it."

6. **Clarity and precision of vocabulary** - Writing at every level challenges you to find words to express your meaning as precisely and clearly as possible. You don't want to use overly simplistic language (Don't just use small words) or overly fancy language (Don't confuse your reader and obfuscate your meaning with needlessly pretentious diction). You can usually tell when you've hit on just the right word to express something, and you can usually also tell when you haven't.

6b. Even though a dozen ways might be found to word a single idea, you want to give your reader the feeling that you have selected the best words for your thoughts and put them in the best possible order. VERBS especially benefit from extra thought. "is", "are", "am", "was" and other basic verbs carry the least meaning (ex.: "One of the problems I had in English 111 was with my grammar" v. "In English 111, I struggled with my grammar" or "My grammar posed a problem in English 111.").

7. **Informality** - It's ok to use informal language sometimes, but you will want to be aware of the effect that choice has on a reader. If you want to convey that you have put serious thought into an issue and take your reader seriously (9 times out of 10 in an academic setting), you'll generally want to avoid conversational, slang, and informal words.

8. **Vague or absent theses, topic sentences, transitions** - Often, a paper or draft will have solid ideas in place but lack guideposts for a reader to follow. A clear thesis establishes both a topic and your perspective on it, and clear topic sentences for every paragraph, with transitions, show your reader how to follow your argument from point to point. (Additional handout on this issue may come later.)