

# Comment Bank for student feedback in VU Collaborate

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## Preface

This resource contains example feedback comments across a number of areas for you to adjust and use when providing student feedback in VU Collaborate. Most of the comments have come from [Turnitin QuickMarks](#) and are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License](#).

This resource is structured in three main sections

Section	Purpose
1 Strengths	<i>This section has comments to identify and explain strengths. They are applicable to multiple types of writing</i>
2 In-text referencing & paraphrasing	<i>This section contains comments that can be useful in explaining referencing and citation issues in writing</i>
3 Writing	
3.1 Information	<i>This section contains comments on how the writer has assembled the information in the document</i>
3.2 Narrative	<i>This section contains comments for narrative writing and may be helpful for essays or creative writing</i>
3.3 Punctuation	<i>This section may be useful if you are teaching English.</i>
3.4 Grammar corrections	<i>This section may be useful if you are teaching English.</i>

The resource is designed to be used in conjunction with the [annotation tool in VU Collaborate](#) and [rubrics](#). You can copy, paste and comments from these pages into the notes of the annotation tool or feedback box.

To learn more about providing feedback please see:

- [Facilitating good feedback in Block Mode](#)

To learn more about plagiarism please see:

- [The Plagiarism Handbook](#) by Ouriginal

To help students improve with your great feedback, direct them to personalised support through:

- [Learning Hubs](#) for students' academic and study skills
- [The VU Library](#) for referencing, copyright and resources.

## 1 Strengths

*This section has comments to identify and explain strengths. They are applicable to multiple types of writing.*

### **Clarity**

This part helps your readers understand your ideas. Use this clarity when explaining all ideas throughout your essay.

Your explanation in this section is clear. Think about which parts of your essay would benefit from this type of thorough attention.

Your position on the topic is explained well here. Think about which parts of your essay would benefit from this type of thorough attention.

These ideas are starting to link together nicely. Work on having evidence from the source(s) throughout your essay to help prove each point.

### **Convincing word choice**

Nice use of language in this sentence. Continue choosing words that will appeal to your audience's interests or emotions, or help in your purpose of persuading them.

### **Effective transition**

Your transitions are helping to make your ideas in this part clear. Continue to create connections and unity throughout your whole essay by using specific transitions to link your ideas together.

### **Engaging dialogue**

The dialogue here is bringing your narrative to life. Continue to develop your use of dialogue purposefully so the events of your plot and your characters' words show a connection to the story's theme.

This is one of your strongest pieces of dialogue. Consider other areas where you can include advanced vocabulary or sentence structures to create vivid imagery in the dialogue of your characters.

Dialogue like this helps to engage your readers. Continue to use dialogue between characters to show a conflict, decision, or major event that advances the story.

This dialogue is helpful. Consider including descriptive words and interesting speech patterns throughout the dialogue to help create a suspenseful, humorous, or dramatic atmosphere for your narrative.

### **Helpful organisation**

The organisation of your ideas is strong here. Continue to present all evidence and explanations in a way that helps the readers follow the progression of ideas that supports your position.

### **Helpful transition**

Nice work using a clear transition in this section. Continue to include transitions like finally; or next; throughout the body of your writing to show readers how events are connected.

Well done incorporating this transitional phrase. You may also want to consider advanced phrases (like 'hence' or 'subsequently') that will elevate your language and connections when writing.

### **High-quality evidence**

The support in this section of your writing is strong. Continue selecting high-quality evidence and thoroughly explain the connection to your claim throughout.

### **Impressive language**

The writing in this section is strong. Review other sentences to ensure you've maintained a formal style and an objective tone throughout.

### **Impressive sentence**

This sentence is nicely worded, which helps readers understand your ideas. Continue to use language that your audience expects, like words from the prompt and advanced vocabulary, here and in other parts of your essay.

This sentence helps to show some elements of your narrative. Continue to fully develop your characters and setting throughout the rising action.

This is one of your best sentences. Review other sentences in your essay to ensure you've maintained a formal style and an objective tone throughout.

### **Logical organisation**

Your ideas in this section are presented in a logical way. Consider other areas that would benefit from this type of structured approach.

### **Logical progress of ideas**

Your ideas in this section are presented in a logical order. Look for other places where you can revise your organisation so the progression of your ideas effectively supports your claim.

### **Nice tie to thesis**

This section shows a nice connection to your thesis. Look for other areas in your work that would support your thesis this strongly.

This section is strong in its connection to your thesis. Maintain this focus in each body paragraph by explaining the connection to your thesis thoroughly.

### **Powerful evidence**

Your evidence and explanations are strong here. Look for other opportunities to include appropriate and accurate examples from the source(s) to support your claim.

You're doing a better job of developing your ideas here. Look for other opportunities to include relevant and powerful examples from each source to support your position.

### **Powerful sentence**

This sentence is nicely worded, which helps readers understand your ideas. Continue to use language that your audience expects.

### **Strong relationship to claim**

This part shows a strong relationship to your claim. Maintain focus on the purpose of your prompt throughout your writing.

### **Strong section**

This section is strong in its development of your thesis. Look for other areas of your essay that could use more evidence or explanation in order to thoroughly support your thesis.

### **Strong tie to plot**

These ideas are helping shape the plot. Guide your readers toward the climax of your story with a detailed and natural advancement of rising action events.

This part of your writing helps tie your ideas to the plot. Look for other areas of your essay that could use vivid, relevant details that smoothly lead your readers to the exciting climax of your story.

**Thoughtful connection**

Nice work connecting your ideas to show how they progress and are related. Look for other parts of your work that could benefit from a stronger connection between ideas.

## 2 In-text referencing & paraphrasing

*This section contains comments that can be useful in explaining referencing and citation issues in writing.*

### **Add citation to table, figure, image**

This type of source (table, figure, or image) also needs a citation. When adding a table, figure, or image, it is important to share where the source was retrieved. Include the appropriate citation for this item.

### **Aggregator plagiarism**

This writing is comprised of information from multiple sources, with proper citation, and contains almost no original work. In this section of writing, include your own original ideas about the topic and evidence from the sources to support them.

This writing appears to be a mix of copied content from multiple sources. Paraphrase or quote copied content and be sure to include original ideas.

This writing appears to combine unchanged content from multiple sources. Revise this section by paraphrasing or quoting the author's idea and then properly citing it.

### **Copying**

This writing appears to be a copy of someone else's work. Rewrite this section of writing, being sure to incorporate your own ideas and properly cited quotes and ideas from your sources.

This section of writing appears to be a direct copy of text without any changes or alterations. Paraphrase by writing the statement in your own words and adding a citation.

### **Evaluate and explain evidence**

Evaluate your evidence in this section. Be sure you have included sufficient evidence by paraphrasing or using direct quotes to support each point, and that you have thoroughly explained how each point supports your work. Include proper citations for your evidence.

### **Format References**

The format of this reference list is inconsistent (punctuation, alphabetisation, and/or indentation). Revise this list so that all citations follow a consistent format.



### **Include citation for paraphrasing**

This section appears to rely on paraphrasing a source, as it refers to someone else's ideas. When sharing ideas from another author, credit the author with an appropriate citation. Cite the author properly at the end of this paraphrased section as well as in the reference list.

### **Hybrid**

This writing appears to be a hybrid of perfectly cited sources along with copied passages that lack proper citation. All sources need to be properly cited; copied content should either be written as a quote or paraphrased. Revise the copied section of writing by paraphrasing or quoting the author's idea and then properly citing it.

### **Inaccurate sources**

This writing appears to provide non-existent or inaccurate information about sources. Readers need to be able to trace each piece of evidence back to its original source. Revise the citation so the source is properly cited.

### **Include strong and original ideas**

This essay appears to rely heavily on content from other authors. Your ideas about the topic should be the focus of your writing, and evidence from sources should support them. Include your own original ideas in this section of your writing.

The evidence you include should directly support your ideas. Use paraphrasing strategies or include direct quotes to present the best examples that support your thesis. Properly cite each example from the source.

### **Include References**

This writing is missing a reference list. Reference lists help readers locate and retrieve any cited source from your essay. Add the appropriate reference list at the end of your work.

### **Paraphrasing**

This section is very similar to another source or existing content. Paraphrase by writing the statement in your own words and adding a citation.

This section retains another source's sentence structure and only replaces certain words. Paraphrase by writing the statement in your own words and adding a citation.

This paraphrased writing is too similar to the source. Consider using a quotation instead, especially if the passage strongly supports your thesis.

This section integrates and cites sources effectively. However, some of your writing is still too close to the original source. Review this section and use your own words to paraphrase the source.

Your writing is paraphrased properly in this section, however there may be too much of it. Condense this section by combining the most relevant ideas to support your point. This will help your writing be more precise.

Great job paraphrasing by taking an existing idea and writing it in your own words. Remember to include proper citations as it is based on ideas from another source.

Great job taking an existing idea, writing it in your own words, and including a citation. Look for other areas in your paper that could benefit from stronger paraphrasing.

### **Primary source**

This source does not appear to be a primary source. Primary sources, first-hand experiences of an event, object, or person, strengthen your writing because they are evidence from that time. Find a primary source (e.g. journals, letters, research, transcripts, photographs, etc.) to support this idea.

### **Quotations**

This quote does not give credit to the original author. When quoting a source, credit the original author with an appropriate citation. Cite the author properly at the end of this quote.

This section appears to be a quote from a source, but it is missing appropriate punctuation. Direct quotes from a source must contain quotation marks so the reader understands they are the original words of the author. Add quotation marks around this section and make sure to include a citation.

### **Review source**

This source does not appear to be credible. Evaluate the source by reviewing the author, where and when it was published, and for whom it was written. Consider obtaining a new, reliable source to develop this idea.

### **Revise citation**

This citation is incorrect and/or missing information. Readers need to be able to trace each piece of evidence back to its original source. Revise the citation so the source is properly cited.

### **Self-plagiarism**

This writing appears to be a recycle of previous work. Self-plagiarism happens when someone reuses their own work, without proper citation. The act of recycling previously written work, without proper acknowledgement of doing so, deceives the reader into thinking that the work is original and recently written. Choose to properly cite your previous work or revise this section.

This writing appears to be self-plagiarism. Self-plagiarism occurs when previously submitted work is submitted in another context without a proper citation. Choose to properly cite your previous work or revise this section.

### **Strong quotation**

This quote provides an example to support your ideas. Consider other areas in your writing where using a direct quote would help to strengthen your ideas.

### **Support idea with evidence**

### **Vary sources**

There are several ideas from this particular source throughout the writing. Strengthen your writing by including evidence or quotes from other sources as well as your own original ideas.

## 3 Writing

### 3.1 Information

*This section contains comments on how the writer has assembled the information in the document.*

#### **Add transition**

Show the relationships between and among your ideas by adding a simple transition. Using transitions like “because” or “similarly” helps your readers see how your thoughts connect.

#### **Appeal to readers**

Consider your audience's understanding of this information. Your readers expect you to use the words from the prompt in your essay. Make sure you use some of these words when explaining your ideas.

#### **Develop idea**

Slow down and develop this idea fully before making a clear transition to the next. An informative essay should complete its discussion of one specific point before moving on to the next.

#### **Explain evidence**

Evaluate your evidence in this section. Be sure you have included sufficient evidence to support each point, and that you have thoroughly explained how each point supports your thesis.

#### **Focus on task**

This section seems to be off-topic. Your essay needs to address the writing task. Reread the prompt question and stay focused on what the prompt asks you to do.

#### **Formal and objective language**

Remember to maintain a formal style when discussing evidence. Use specific, academic vocabulary and a serious tone to communicate your ideas properly.

Make sure you have stated all of your ideas in an objective, unbiased way in this section. Present your information to educate readers, rather than to persuade them to agree with you.

#### **Hook readers**

Think about how to engage your readers in the introduction. Try to hook their attention by using language that is precise or specific to the topic.

### **Include topic sentence**

The topic sentence of each body paragraph should connect to your thesis about the topic. Help your readers see the connection between this idea and your thesis with a clear topic sentence.

Integrate this quoted evidence with your own ideas so the sentence flows seamlessly. Evidence that is quoted from the source(s) should read as a coherent part of the sentence as a whole.

### **Move beyond a summary**

You are not being asked to summarise the topic. Explain the task to your readers using reasoning and evidence.

### **Organise ideas**

Clear organisation of your ideas improves the cohesion and makes your essay easy to follow. Make sure all parts of your essay are linked together clearly.

### **Paragraph transition**

Although paragraphs are separate, individual steps of your paper, it is important to clearly demonstrate a logical connection between them. A paragraph that begins with "also" or "in addition" offers a weak transition from the previous point, even though it may develop a highly interesting and related point.

### **Restate thesis**

This essay needs a conclusion that more strongly supports your main message. Remind your audience of your thesis and the main points you presented in your essay.

### **Revise for clarity**

This part doesn't seem to be as strongly connected to your thesis. Consider revising this and other parts of your work that could use more clarity.

### **Revise last sentence**

Revise this sentence so it effectively concludes this paragraph. The last sentence of each paragraph should finalise the points that were discussed in that paragraph.

### **Reword sentence**

This sentence might be difficult for your readers to understand. Reword this sentence so your meaning is clear to your audience.

### **Strengthen example**

The examples you include must address what you are being asked to write about. Reread the question and present the best examples that support your work.

### **Strong focus**

This part helps your readers understand your ideas. Maintain this clarity when explaining your ideas throughout your work.

### **Strong progress of ideas**

Nice work connecting your ideas to show how they progress and are related. Look for other areas of your writing that could improve in connecting your ideas.

### **Support with example**

This point needs to be explained. Try including a fact or specific example from the source(s) to help develop this idea.

### **Vary sentence structures**

Look at the length of your sentences in this section. Are they all very short or very long? Revise this sentence to be make sure you have both complex and simple sentence structures.

## **3.2 Narrative**

*This section contains comments for narrative writing and may be helpful for essays or creative writing.*

### **Advance characters**

Are your characters serving a purpose? Use your characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions to help make the conflict or theme apparent to your readers.

### **Affirming comments**

The way you have organised this idea is helpful. Look for other areas of your essay that could benefit from this type of structured approach.

This sentence helps to show some elements of your narrative. Continue to fully develop your characters and setting throughout the rising action.

This part of your writing helps tie your ideas to the plot. Look for other areas of your essay that could use vivid, relevant details that smoothly lead your readers to the exciting climax of your story.

### **Character development**

Consider how you could strengthen your character's voice throughout the dialogue in your writing. Each time a character speaks, use language that is representative of that character's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Consider how you can use the characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions to communicate their motivations in this part of the story.

Maintain a clear perspective for your narrative. Consistently tell the events of the story from one character's point of view.

Consider the voice of this character. The characters of your narrative should seem like real people. Make each character's voice distinct by using different descriptive words and sentence types for each one.

### **Communicate message**

In this section, develop your characters' connection to the theme to help bring your story to a close. Your characters should help show your readers the message that your story is trying to communicate.

### **Consider narrative techniques**

Consider including narrative techniques, like providing a flashback or foreshadowing a future event, to help readers better understand the development of the events of your story.

### **Consider point of view**

Who is the narrator? Maintain your story's narrator from beginning to end. If the story is told from a third person point of view, it should stay in that perspective, signalling dialogue with phrases like she uttered or he yelled.

### **Describe characters**

The characters in your narrative should appear detailed and realistic. Describe your characters in significant and meaningful ways to bring them to life for your readers.

### **Develop climax**

Describe in detail the chain of events that lead to the climax of the narrative. The events in the rising action of your story should naturally guide your readers to the climax.

### **Develop rising action**

Does this section contribute to your rising action? Be sure to include your rising action events in order to build toward a logical climax.

### **Engage readers**

Consider how you can make this part of your writing more interesting to read. Engage your readers with memorable descriptions of the characters' appearances and emotions. Describe clear, vivid images of the story's setting.

There is an opportunity to strengthen this description. Keep your readers engaged by using descriptive words, imagery, and figurative language to express your ideas.

### **Establish setting**

Immerse your readers in the setting of the story. Include thorough descriptions of the characters' surroundings in order to develop the setting completely.

### **Experiment with rhythm**

Consider experimenting with a different pacing technique, like including different sentence structures or exciting dialogue, to improve the rhythm of your story.

### **Include resolution**

Your readers are looking for a sense of closure in the resolution. Complete your story in a skilful manner by thoughtfully bridging the events of your climax to those in your resolution.

### **Organise events**

Consider how you can better organise the events in your story. Review the action in this section and organise it in a way that will more effectively communicate the sequence of events.

### **Provide context**

A narrative should begin by introducing the readers to the topic of the story. Remember to include background information to orient your readers to your story's setting and plot in this section.



### **Remain focused**

This idea seems to be off-topic. Include details that are directly relevant to the task to keep your story on track. Keep your narrative focused throughout your paragraphs.

### **Revise last sentence**

This last sentence should resolve the main action of that paragraph and prepare the readers to move forward. Develop each event fully before moving on to the next.

### **Situate conflict**

Help lead your readers to the conflict of your story. Include detailed descriptions of the events, setting, and characters of your story in order to fully situate your readers in the scenario.

### **Strengthen description**

Be purposeful in this description so your readers fully understand how each idea relates to the plot. The information that you include in your exposition should be there for a reason.

### **Strengthen vocabulary**

Each word must be chosen carefully. Describe the events of your narrative so that your audience can see, hear, taste, feel, and smell them.

### **Use of dialogue**

Consider including dialogue in this section to effectively convey the action of the story. The dialogue in a narrative can help readers better understand the sequence of events.

This dialogue is helpful. Consider including descriptive words and interesting speech patterns throughout the dialogue to help create a suspenseful, humorous, or dramatic atmosphere for your narrative.

Include dialogue that is relevant to the topic and that helps readers understand the sequence of events. The dialogue in a narrative should be meaningful and help shape the events of the story.

Develop this dialogue to reveal the personality of the character or an important aspect of the plot. Each piece of dialogue should be meaningful and significant.

### 3.3 Punctuation

This section may be useful if you are teaching English.

*Punctuation is not usually corrected in student work unless it is one of the rubric criteria or learning outcomes. If you notice that students need support with writing and punctuation, direct them to the [Learning Hubs](#).*

#### **Blocked Quotation**

Any direct quotation that takes up more than three lines in your work must be blocked: that is, indented several spaces from the left and right margins. Such blocked quotes are usually single spaced, but some citation manuals prefer them to be double-spaced.

#### **Comma Splice**

A sentence must have both a subject and a main verb in order to be complete, but it cannot have more than one subject or main verb. A comma splice is a variety of run-on sentence that occurs when two complete sentences, each with its own subject and verb, are joined mistakenly by a comma.

There are generally three methods of correcting this problem: 1) Replace the comma with a stronger mark of punctuation such as a period or semicolon, 2) use a coordinating conjunction ("and", "but", "or", "nor") to join the two constructions, or 3) make one of the two sentences a dependent construction by linking it to the other with a subordinating conjunction ("if", "when", "so that", "although", "because") or relative pronoun ("that", "which", "who", "whom", "whose").

#### **Hyphenate**

A compound adjective occurs when two or more words are used as a single modifier before a noun. Such compound adjectives require hyphens in order to clarify how the terms are to be grouped, as in "a not-for-profit organization" or "twentieth-century life". You do not need a hyphen, however, when one of the words in the compound is an adverb, as in "a thinly veiled insult".

#### **Misplaced apostrophe**

An apostrophe can function to indicate a possessive when accompanied by an -s ("the book that belongs to Roy" = "Roy's book"). For words that already have an -s at the end, just adding the apostrophe will do ("the team belonging to the boys" = "the boys' team"). Certain exceptions to this rule apply, and possessive personal pronouns ("like ours",

"yours", "hers", "his", "its") are possessive already and therefore do not take an apostrophe. It is always wrong to use a possessive apostrophe to simply make a word plural.

### **Missing comma**

Though it may not always be grammatically necessary, a comma can often help to prevent a misreading. When a sentence opens with an introductory element (a phrase, clause or word that is logically related to another phrase or clause in the same sentence), it is a great help to your reader to place a comma after that introductory element. Such phrases will often begin with words like "because", "while" or "although", as in the following example: "While everyone was fighting, the bear wandered away". As you can see, without the comma, the sentence would be confusing.

### **Missing Semicolon**

Semicolons are commonly used to join closely related, complete sentences that do not contain coordinating conjunctions or commas as connectors. Semicolons are also placed before words like "however" and "therefore" when such words are used to join sentences.

### **Missing Colon**

Colons are used to introduce lists, explanations, and quotations as well as to separate a clause for emphasis.

### **Missing quotation mark**

Quotation marks are used to enclose direct quotations which are less than three lines long (longer direct quotes should be blocked). Quotation marks are also used to enclose dialogue in your writing.

### **No comma necessary**

Commas have a wide variety of uses: setting off introductory phrases, separating items in lists, separating adjectives, enclosing appositives, and preceding coordinating conjunctions that are used to join two complete thoughts. However, commas should not be used alone to join two complete thoughts or to unnecessarily break apart long sentences. Careful comma usage is necessary to avoid confusing your readers.

## **Punctuation Outside Quotation**

Student writers often hesitate to add or subtract material within quotations taken from other sources. While the accuracy of your quotation is extremely important, not making changes within quotations can sometimes cause your writing to become awkward or incorrect. In American usage, all of your periods and commas that occur immediately after a quotation from another source should be placed within your quotation marks. Other punctuation marks (such as question marks, exclamation points, semicolons and colons) do not obey this rule and stand outside the quotation marks.

## **Unnecessary Semicolon**

Semicolons are commonly used to join closely related, complete sentences that do not contain coordinating conjunctions or commas as connectors. Semicolons are also placed before words like "however" and "therefore" when such words are used to join sentences.

## **3.4 Grammar corrections**

This section may be useful if you are teaching English.

*Grammar is not always corrected in student work unless it is one of the rubric criteria or learning outcomes. If you notice that students need support with writing and grammar, direct them to the [Learning Hubs](#).*

### **Affect/Effect**

The verb "affect" means "to influence or produce an effect on." As a noun "effect" is a result. As a verb "effect" means "to bring into existence." While in most cases, an effect is the result of all that has been done to affect a situation, it is possible for one person to effect change.

### **Awkward**

The expression or construction is cumbersome or difficult to read. Consider rewriting.

### **Can/May**

"Can" is used to express the physical capability to do something. "May" is used to express permission to do something.

### **Commonly Confused**

Accept (to receive) and except (to leave out)

Affect (to influence) and effect (result or to accomplish)

Allusion (an indirect reference) and illusion (a false perception)

Its (possessive form of "it") and it's (contraction of "it is")

Their (possessive form of "they"), there (indication of location), and they're (contraction of "they are").

Then (next or at that time) and than (used in comparisons).

To (toward), too (also or excessively), and two (number).

Your (possessive form of "you") and you're (contraction of "you are").

## **Double Negative**

Only one negative should be used to express a negative idea.

## **Excess "to be"**

This expresses the most basic relationship possible between subject and predicate and therefore offers your reader very little information. Overusing forms of this verb ("am", "are", "is", "was", "were", "be", "being" and "been") can drain the life out of your writing. If, for example, you find yourself using "is" more than three times in a paragraph, you should consider using a more vivid verb that tells your reader more specifics about the relationship you're describing.

## **I.e. & E.g.**

i.e./e.g.: I.e. and e.g. are both abbreviated Latin phrases. I.e. stands for id est, meaning "that is".

E.g. stands for exempli gratia, meaning "for the sake of example".

I.e. should be used when further specification or clarification is needed; e.g. should be used when giving an example.

## **Improper citation**

Improperly cited material. Please use the link below to find links to information regarding specific referencing styles: <https://www.vu.edu.au/library/get-help/referencing/referencing-guides>

## **Inappropriate use of slang, cliched phrases, or idiomatic expressions**

The use of slang, cliched phrases and idiomatic expressions can confuse your readers and destroy the formal tone of your writing.

## **Incorrect preposition**

Some words must be used together with certain prepositions in order to create the meaning you intend. For example, to yell "to" someone is different from yelling "at" someone. Some confusion results from words such as "compare", which usually takes the preposition "to" when it refers to describing the resemblances between things that are not similar, and takes the preposition "with" when it describes the resemblances between things that are similar.

## **Its/It's**

Confusing "it's" with "its" may be the single most common grammar problem in student writing. Apostrophes can either indicate possessive constructions (showing that something "belongs to" something else) or they can indicate a contraction (used to stand for missing letters). In most words, the role of an apostrophe is clear. With it's /its, however, the two functions easily become confused. In "it's" the apostrophe indicates a contraction of "it is" or "it has". "Its", on the other hand, is a possessive personal pronoun, meaning "of it" or "belonging to it". Whenever you write the word "it's", ask yourself if you mean to say, "it is." If not, then choose "its".

## **New paragraph**

When a paragraph gets too long your reasoning may appear jumbled and confused. Paragraphs are the steps that allow your reader to make progress through your paper. Without enough steps, the argument becomes difficult to follow. Usually there are subtle shifts of emphasis within a long paragraph that can become a paragraph break. Try to figure out what your paragraph's main point is so that your reader doesn't have to.

## **Passive voice**

Passive voice constructions do not tell your reader as much as the corresponding active version would. For instance, in the phrase "it is understood," a reader cannot know who or what is doing the understanding. A more active version requires that you tell your reader who is performing the action: "Students understand". While there are rare occasions when a writer cannot avoid the passive voice, the more informative active version is almost always a better choice. Changing passive constructions to active makes writing more lively and accessible.

## **Run-on sentence**

The sentence contains two or more independent clauses. Separate the clauses with a period or semicolon.

## **Support Needed**

A well-written paper will include strong support for its thesis. Support for your thesis should come from primary (original documents, interviews, and personal experiences) and secondary (information that has been processed or interpreted by someone else) sources. To use your support effectively, you must elaborate upon the information, quotations, and examples taken from your sources and connect them to your thesis. It is also important to remember to cite the sources of the evidence and support you use in your paper.

## **That/Which**

Student writers are often confused as to when to use "that" and when to use "which". The basic rule concerning this issue is "that" should be used when introducing restrictive clauses (clauses that are necessary to the sentence) and "which" should be used with commas to set off unrestrictive (unnecessary) clauses.

## **Then/Than**

"Then" is an adverb used to describe placement in time. "Than" is a conjunction used in comparisons.

## **There/Their/They're**

"There" is an adverb indicating location. "Their" is a pronoun indicating ownership. "They're" is a contraction meaning "they are".

## **To/Too/Two**

"To" is a preposition indicating either an action, a process or that the following verb is an infinitive. "Too" is an adverb indicating an excess. "Two" is the number following one (in use it is an adjective).

## **Unclear**

When making a point in one of your body paragraphs, one of the most common mistakes is to not offer enough details. A paragraph without much detail will seem vague and sketchy. A paper is always strengthened when your claims are as specific as possible. The more detailed evidence you offer, the more reference points your reader will have. Remember that you are communicating your argument to a reader who has only your description to go by. Someone who reads your essay will not automatically know what you mean to express, so you have to supply details, to show the reader what you mean, not just tell him or her.

## **Unnecessary repetition**

Avoid redundant use of words or phrases. Be aware of what is inherent to the words you choose to use, e.g. you would not write "the resulting effects" as "effects" are results and thus are always resulting from something. Also be aware of what the acronyms and abbreviations you use stand for, e.g. when using the acronym "ATM" you should not write "ATM machine" as "machine" is already in the acronym.

## **Word choice error**

Sometimes choosing the correct word to express exactly what you have to say is very difficult to do. Word choice errors can be the result of not paying attention to the word or trying too hard to

come up with a fancier word when a simple one is appropriate. A thesaurus can be a handy tool when you're trying to find a word that's similar to, but more accurate than, the one you're looking up. However, it can often introduce more problems if you use a word thinking it has exactly the same meaning.

### **Your/You're**

"Your" is a possessive pronoun meaning "of you" or "belonging to you". "You're", however, is an abbreviation for "you are".