

WRITING GUIDE¹

for those doing papers for

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The following is a series partly of requirements for papers assigned in my courses, partly of sage counsels, partly of my stylistic pet peeves. The first you should follow, the second you should ponder, and the third you should feel free to make up your own mind about (though it will please me if you eschew them in your papers for me).

1 Format requirements

1.1 *Appearance.* Papers should be **typed** (ie, printed out of your computer), **double-spaced**, about an inch margin on all sides, AND **PAGINATED** (i.e., pages numbered). If for some reason you don't know how to make your word-processing program paginate, then please **DO IT BY HAND**.

Make sure the printed version you give the professor is CLEAR and EASY TO READ, i.e., NO FAINT CHARACTERS PLEASE. Give the professor a copy straight out of the printer, not a xerox (you can keep the xerox copy for yourself, and indeed you should always keep a hardcopy version of the paper, at least until grades for the course have been posted).

1.2 *Cover sheet.* On a term paper, a one-page cover sheet will do, including the usual information: title of paper, your name, name of course, instructor's name, date, plus one additional item: your documentation style (see 1.5.b). Repeat the title on the first page of the text.

1.3 *Header.* It is a good idea to use your word-processor's header feature to put your name and some identification of the paper on every page (as well as the *page number*, it goes without saying [see section 1.1]).

1.4 *Indent* the first line of every paragraph; i.e., do not begin the first line flush with the left margin.

1.5 *Footnotes and bibliography.*

1.5.a. In addition to providing references in the paper itself to all quoted or cited materials, you should include the same items (all of them) in a separate bibliography at the end of the paper.

1.5.b. For both notes (end or foot) and bibliography, use a standard documentation style; include the name of the style on your cover sheet (see 1.2). MLA² style and Chicago³ style are both acceptable; each has two versions, a traditional one that provides full bibliographical information in the notes as well as the bibliography, and a newer streamlined one that gives references parenthetically. Either is okay, so long as you are consistent (but see 4.3). (Two more points to go to 1.5 on next page.) —>

¹ Anyone may reproduce all or any part of this guide, but please acknowledge its author, Stephen Maddux.

²Modern Language Association, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

³Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

(Continuation of 1.5)

1.5.c. Most word-processing programs nowadays will put notes indifferently at the bottom of each page or at the end of the paper. Given a choice, I prefer notes to be *at the bottom of the page*.

1.5.d. You do not need to include items in the bibliography you do not quote or refer to in the paper. If you do, please put them in a separate section of the bibliography, headed "Works Consulted But Not Cited."

2 Argumentative Prose; Mechanics

2.0 In most cases, you will be best off if you think of the paper you write for me as a piece of *argumentative prose*. That is, you present a thesis (a somewhat controversial statement about your subject) and you attempt to prove it, using logic and evidence. If this were a course in literature, then you would have almost no choice but to write argumentative prose: your thesis would be an *interpretation* of the work in question, and the rest of the paper would amplify and defend the interpretation. However, even if you don't end up writing on a literary subject for this course, I still recommend the model of argumentative prose as the one most likely to produce an interesting paper. (For instance, even in an historical survey, I would like to see a thesis, an argumentative interpretation of the historical facts you are dealing with, that provides the paper with a dynamic through-line. A paper [or section of a paper] that drifts into a mere recounting of events is guilty of a fault akin to paraphrase [see 2.3].)

Normally, the structure will have an introduction, body, and conclusion, corresponding to the following descriptions:

2.1 Introduction. =one paragraph, occasionally more, which concludes with the *thesis statement*. I really mean concludes: the thesis statement should normally be **THE last sentence** in the introduction. Moreover, normally it should be only one sentence. It should be a well-constructed sentence, of course: normally complex (or at least compound), because your thesis should have some complexity to it. Ideally, the syntactical structure of the thesis statement will herald the structure of the body of the paper.

All the rest of the introduction leads up to the thesis statement. Let me clarify this last point: the introduction does not start with the thesis statement; it does not give away the thesis in the middle; it leads up to the thesis statement. (See section 2.5 below on Flow.) In other words, do not state your thesis before the proper time, which is at the end of the introduction.⁴

⁴Experience has shown me that the principle I am trying to establish here does not always come through clearly. So let me reiterate, with even more absoluteness: *The sentence containing your thesis should be the last sentence of your introduction; if your introduction has more than one paragraph, the thesis should be in the last sentence of the last paragraph of your introduction.*

Possible ways to lead up to the thesis statement:

GENERAL (okay, but can be a little dull)	→	PARTICULAR
PROBLEM (much better)	→	RESOLUTION (OR HINT OF A RESOLUTION)
STRAW MAN (my favorite)	→	YOUR POSITION (THE RIGHT ONE)

(Combinations are possible, e.g. of the second and third types)

Some more about the thesis statement: It should contain the whole, or the essential, of what you want to say, and, as I suggested above, it should already give an idea of what the movement of the body is going to be. The only time the thesis statement will not give the whole of what you have to say is when it is phrased as a question, the answer to which will be given only by the end of the paper. Even here, however, the question/thesis will suggest very clearly what the answer is probably going to be (at the least it will limit severely the possible answers). This is one of the devices, and an important one, for creating *false suspense*, a very useful illusion for almost any paper. (See immediately below in this section on the conclusion to the paper, in which you will reword the thesis statement so as to make it *seem* different from the first time it appears, though it isn't really.)

What makes a good thesis or thesis statement? I said above that this kind of paper belongs to what is called argumentative prose. That does not mean it is pushy, or argumentative for the sake of being argumentative; on the contrary, it is argumentative only for the sake of being, ultimately, helpful. You are trying to prove something that, in the very process of its being proved, will illuminate your subject for both you and your reader.

So, you don't want your paper to be tendentious or aggressive; but you do want it to be made up of good, crisp, convincing arguments: and here, at the very outset of the paper, what you want is a thesis statement with punch. That is, it needs to make a difference; it needs to be something one could disagree with. (In quasi-scientific terms, it needs to be subject to the principle of falsifiability.) It needs to be something that, even from its first appearance, will make the reader say: "Hmm! If this thesis is true, it will make a difference to how I understand the subject matter this paper is about. Let's see how the author of this paper defends this thesis!" (Note that a well-presented thesis statement will make the reader eager to get on to your arguments.) Now, it is not always necessary (indeed it rarely is so) that the thesis should in fact be startlingly, unquestionably original; it only needs to *seem* original or in some way important. You get the thesis to *seem* original or important partly in the way you word the thesis itself, but even more *in the way you lead up to it in the introduction*.⁵

2.2. Conclusion. (I leap over the body for the moment.) The conclusion reverses the movement of the introduction. The introduction starts at some distance from the thesis statement (either at a higher level of generality from the thesis, as in the type of introduction that moves from GENERAL to PARTICULAR, or "sideways" from the thesis, as in the STRAW MAN—>CORRECT THESIS type of introduction), and as it proceeds zeroes in on the

⁵The whole introductory paragraph should pique the reader's interest. In this connection, it is almost always a bad idea to begin your introductory paragraph (and hence your paper) with a sentence of the type: "So-and-so was born in such-and-such a place on such-and-such a date." To excite interest after such a beginning will not be easy.

thesis. The conclusion does just the opposite: it *starts with* the restated thesis and then moves away from it. This is to say that, normally, the first sentence of the conclusion (the conclusion itself normally consisting of one paragraph, sometimes more) will restate the thesis.

The restated thesis normally should not include anything more than the original thesis statement—certainly not much more, or let's say not anything new *of comparable importance* to the original thesis—but on the other hand it is important that the restated thesis should not seem a flat repetition of the original statement. Somehow or other, the reader has to be left with the feeling that s/he did not waste time by reading the body of the paper; in other words, he needs to feel there has been forward movement, that he is in a different place (mentally speaking) from where he was earlier, when he first saw the thesis in the introduction. Very often, the mere fact that you have argued your thesis well in the body of the paper will have this effect, in which case the restatement can be as simple as "Hence, it is indeed true that...(original thesis statement)." In other words, the reader now knows not only the thesis, but that the thesis is true. In some cases, however, restating the thesis will be a more artful affair.

Having restated the thesis, how do you then move out from it? You can go from PARTICULAR → GENERAL, reversing one of the possible orders of the introduction. In more general terms, however, what I recommend is that you relate the thesis you have proved to some other issue in the work being studied. It could be a "larger" issue, i.e., one that involves "more" of the text than the point you focussed on, or it could simply be some *other* (but at least equally important) aspect of the work than the one you have written about. The goal is to convince the reader, as s/he is about to leave you, not only that you have made (proven) a thesis that is interesting in itself, but that the point you have made *has yet other significant implications for understanding this work than the ones you have been principally talking about*. In other words, the reader should think, as he finishes the conclusion: "Gosh! The point this author has made is even more important than I realized. Thank goodness I read this paper!"

Regarding this matter, I would refer you to Jean Guilton's *la Vie intellectuelle* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, c1951), in which he says that the essence of intellectual activity is the continual passage, in either direction, between different levels of abstraction or generality—that is, between two levels, one of which is more concrete or particular, and the other more abstract or general. The electrical charge, the spark, comes as you pass between the two, from the more concrete to the more abstract, or from the more abstract to the more concrete. Thus, for instance, by studying the concrete in a number of manifestations, we are able to raise ourselves up to a generalization based on those concrete cases; conversely, moving in the opposite direction, a general principle can be used to illuminate and unify concrete cases on the next level down. Either way, we have gained something; we have advanced in knowledge, or rather in understanding, and this is what the intellectual life is all about. What is extremely important in making these moves, however, and what is very frequently overlooked, is that the movement should properly be attempted *only between adjacent levels*. You should not jump from, say, a fairly concrete, particular level to a highly abstract or general level. You cannot leap over the intervening levels, as if they were not there. This is cheating; it is fake; it is mock intellectual activity that is only superficially impressive.

The preceding paragraph is an elaborate justification for the piece of advice I gave just before about relating your thesis, in your conclusion, to something else *in the work studied*. In both the introduction and the conclusion, not just in the thesis itself but also in the "general" or "other" phase of these paragraphs—the part that leads up to or away from the thesis—keep what you have to say *within the realm of the the subject you have been discussing*. For instance, if you have been talking about a work of literature, then, I recommend, stay within the context of the literary—indeed, preferably, stay *within the*

context of the literary work you are studying. In other words, do not leap up from the level of your thesis, which will be saying something particular about a particular literary work, to a horrendously general level of *Philosophy* or *the World* or *Experience* or *Life in General*. That would be an illegitimate (and ultimately not very helpful or interesting) overleaping of too many intervening levels. For the purposes of most papers, you will be doing quite enough to concern yourself with a few very particular truths, not Truth in the Largest Possible Sense. (What I am saying here about a paper on a literary subject applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to papers of other kinds as well, e.g., on historical subjects.)

A related piece of advice, having to do with a special kind of inappropriate leaping up to a high level of abstraction or generalization, applies to the entire paper: As a rule, you should avoid making any blunt, or indeed any simply overt, moral judgments about your subject. The problem with explicit moral judgments is twofold: i) since, typically, they merely assert, without explaining or justifying anything, they do nothing to improve the reader's understanding; ii) thus floating free and unsupported, they appear to usurp the reader's legitimate right to independent moral judgments. This is not to say that it is best for papers to be value-free. All I am saying is, whatever moral judgments are present in your paper, let them be implicit. So, for example, don't say:

Machiavelli's political philosophy is wicked, because it has led to the abandonment in modern political life of all reference to a transcendent moral realm.

Much better to leave out the (explicit) judgment (though to my mind the statement will still be asserting too much):

Machiavelli's political philosophy has led to the abandonment in modern political life of all reference to a transcendent moral realm.

The implicit moral judgment in such a formulation is plenty clear enough. However, the statement is still a bit too absolute for my taste; better, if you insert some weakening or blurring expressions (they will make the statement more persuasive):

Machiavelli's political philosophy, some have maintained, opened the way in modern political practice to the progressive abandonment of all transcendent moral reference.

Once in a while an explicit moral judgment may be permissible, but if you indulge in such it is very important that you should keep it *firmly subordinate*. Do *not* place it on centerstage. Here is an example of a possibly acceptable explicit (but acceptable because it is indirect and subordinate) moral judgment:

Machiavelli's contention, shocking even today, was that attention to transcendent moral values was of no use, indeed could be a positive hindrance, to effective political action.

2.3 The Body. The body needs two main things: 1) a very clear shape; 2) forward dynamism.

Regarding shape: as a rule (certainly in shorter compositions), each paragraph should constitute a point or stage of your argument. Ideally, the shape of the body will match the shape of the thesis statement; the body should seem to spring naturally from the thesis statement, since it is the fuller development of it. It is very important that, at just about any point, the reader should be able to grasp the shape of the body; and it should be a pleasing, natural (or logical) shape.

Regarding dynamism: You want to make the reader want to go forward. To create this desire, certain techniques of suspense (mystification) may be useful—e.g., multiply problems, make the question you have posed at the outset seem really difficult to solve, or accumulate objections to your thesis, and only after you have made the reader really worried do you provide the solution. Equally useful for creating the desire to go on are crescendo effects. If you are using an additive kind of structure, e.g., a series of examples in support of your thesis, you should put them in order of increasing importance, and make it very clear (in your transitional statements) that the examples are getting more important. More generally, it is important to make the reader feel that, as s/he is continuing with your paper, he is getting deeper and deeper into a true understanding of the work studied, that the most important insights you have to offer are yet to come.

Excursus on paraphrase. Since I don't know where else to put it—it is, after all, something that by its very nature has got to be out of place—I will speak here about a writerly vice that can arrest or break down altogether the flow of your thought, which ought to be clearly articulated and unimpeded throughout the body of your paper: I am referring to ***paraphrase***. This is when, in speaking of, say, a literary text, you begin summarizing the contents of the text, and the summary takes on a life of its own. It is a fault, because at all times, in a paper, the only thing that should occupy centerstage, call the shots, be the organizing principle and justification of *everything* that appears in the paper, is *your own thought*—that is, your thesis. The *subject* of the paper—the literary text, historical period, philosophical school, or whatever it is you are dealing with—is not the organizing principle, pivot, focal point, star, etc., of the paper, but rather *what you are saying about that subject*. If you start summarizing, say, the plot of a novel you are talking about, and seem to be doing *nothing but that*, then you have dropped the ball, lost your moorings, let things get out of focus, or whatever other image you like.

Of course, you often do have to recall what takes place in a text, both to remind your reader of it (supposing s/he has ever read the book, which may not be the case), but also so you can have something on the table to talk about. But you should always take care to *interpret* the elements of the plot as you are recalling them. In addition, whenever possible, it is good to *subordinate* the recalled elements: here I mean, quite literally, subordinate them in the syntax of your sentence—put them in a subordinate clause, participial phrase, or the like.

Here, for contrast, is an example of pretty much a mere summary, versus a more interpretative recalling of the plot (recalling of the plot *for the purpose of* interpretation):

Mere summary: Ganelon is angry at his stepson Roland for having nominated him as envoy to the Saracens. However, Charles's whole council think he is the right person. In the end, he agrees to accompany the Saracen mission back to Saragossa. En route, he enters into conversation with Blancandrin, the Saracen ambassador. They talk about the might of Charles, about Charles's relationship with Roland, and about Roland's intentions regarding world conquest. When the party arrive back in Saragossa, Ganelon is brought before Marsilius, the Saracen leader. He presents Charles's conditions to the Saracens in harsh and exaggerated terms. Marsilius is furious and ready to kill Ganelon, but his counselors dissuade him.... (Note the mainly paratactic character of the syntax.)

Summary that is at the same time an interpretation: Ganelon, furious at his stepson for having nominated him for a very dangerous mission and, doubtless, for yet other reasons that are only hinted at, begins plotting his treason from that moment on. En route to Saragossa, he enters into conversation with the Saracen

ambassador Blancandrin and subtly hints at his disapproval of Roland's pride and ambition. When he comes before Marsilius, the Saracen leader, he begins by intentionally provoking him, distorting Charles's peace terms with a view to hardening the Saracens against the Franks. He then...

2.4 Transitions. Beyond everything is the importance of transitions. My recommendation is that the first sentence of every paragraph of the body should function *both as a transition and as a topic sentence*. Some authorities will tell you that the topic sentence (the one that best sums up the idea of the whole paragraph) can come anywhere in the paragraph. That may be true. But the transitional expression, whatever it is, *must* come in the very first sentence, and I figure that, since what it is connecting is the idea of the old paragraph with the idea of the new paragraph, you might as well make the connection really clear, by combining the transition and the topic sentence into one.

The transitional/topic sentence must do two things: 1) It must show the relationship of the new paragraph (of its idea) to the preceding paragraph (to *its* idea). Possible relationships: additive (First, Second, Third; To begin with, Furthermore, Yet another, Lastly), intensifying (More important, Yet more important, A far profounder, By far the most important), Adversative (However, In contrast, Nevertheless). This is the transitional function of the sentence, and its importance cannot be exaggerated. 2) It must also make clear the relationship of the new idea to the overall thesis. Often the best thing to do for this purpose is to use wording that recalls the thesis statement (e.g., thesis statement says: "The real reason for the collapse of the Arthurian order is not the treachery of obviously wicked characters, but rather a hidden corruption at the core, that is to say in those who have the principal responsibility of upholding that order." Transitional/topic sentence says: "A third, and yet graver, form of hidden corruption in the Arthurian realm is...")

2.5. Flow. Just as one must be able to pass easily from one paragraph to another, so there should be no difficulties in passing from one sentence to another. Here is a general rule, to which I think there are no exceptions: If, when you reread your own prose, you find that a given sentence does not follow with complete clarity from the one before it, *then you must insert a connective expression into the second sentence*, to make the connection clear. (Of course, the problem could also be that the sentences are badly ordered; re-arranging them might then be the best way of dealing with the problem. Sometimes, also, a problem in flow could be due to unclear pronoun reference; here the solution is make the reference clear.) Types of connective expressions: additive (moreover, likewise, furthermore), adversative or concessive (however, nevertheless, in contrast), and other types I don't know how to classify (indeed, to be sure; meanwhile) I repeat: the reader should have no hitches in going from one sentence to the next.

3 Qualities of Style

3.1 Style (in the sense of pleasing language) is a wonderful thing, but not to be made an idol of. Here, in decreasing order of urgency, are the prime virtues of good expository prose:

CLARITY
VIGOR
ELEGANCE

Clarity means that the reader should never have to stop and puzzle over what you mean, never have trouble getting from one sentence to the next, one paragraph to the next, never

wonder where s/he is in your argument or where (in general) you are heading. (Think of how aggravating an experience it is for you yourself when you are obliged for one reason or another to read prose that isn't absolutely *smooth sailing*.) **Vigor** is, on the larger level, punch and dynamic flow, an incisive thesis and forward momentum in the argumentation, the feeling on the reader's part that this piece has compelling interest; on the smaller level, that is, stylistically, it is sentences that are direct and economical (with, for instance, a preponderance of active voice constructions over passive) and diction that expresses your thought clearly and precisely. **Elegance** really *is* a matter of style, and mostly involves individual sentences: it is diction, imagery, figurative turns, and sometimes the way you shape your thought, anything unusual that sets your language apart from the most ordinary, utilitarian, or conventional kind of writing. The best kind of prose has all three qualities, but the following piece of advice is univerrally valid:

Never hesitate for a *second* to sacrifice **elegance** when it interferes with either **clarity** or **vigor**, and be prepared (but with somewhat more regret) to sacrifice **vigor**, if (at a particular point) it is interfering with **clarity**.

3.2 If I were to add a fourth quality to the above three, it would be **authoritativeness**. You want to give the reader the impression that you know what you are about, that you know your subject well and know how to talk about it, that you are experienced and professional in the particular field of intellectual endeavor (literary analysis, philosophy, history,...); in short, you want the reader to think of you as a trustworthy guide in the doubtful forest of hermeneutics, or whatever else your field may be. Having sensible, sensitive things to say about your topic, and arranging them well and pleasantly within an easily graspable structure, will, needless to say, go a long way toward creating this impression. Appropriate word choice and use of idiom is also important—but it is practically impossible to formulate any rules about these matters, other than to say that you want to sound like the kind of person who writes this kind of paper for a living. (In order to get that sound into your ear, you need of course to have read a fair number of things written by that kind of person.) However, speaking very generally, regarding word choice, you want to be somewhat elevated and formal (slightly more formal, for instance, than the style of this Writing Guide⁶), without being stuffy, jargony, wordy, or obscure (e.g., by being overly abstract). Regarding sentence structure, you don't want to be overly paratactic (succession of simple sentences or independent clauses) on the one hand, or complex to the point of obscurity or awkwardness on the other.

3.3 The reader wants to be assured that you are in charge and that you know what you are doing; nevertheless s/he will appreciate (that is, I will appreciate) occasional parenthetical expressions of **becoming modesty** by which you seem to express doubt about your own opinions, such as “, in my opinion,” “, possibly,” “, I think,” “, it seems to me,” “, one could say,” and the like. That is, instead of baldly asserting something, especially when it is *particularly* bold, it is sometimes a good idea to insert a “fudging” expression that appears to weaken your assertion, but in fact, paradoxically, may strengthen it, precisely by making it more palatable to the dubious or resistant reader (see last paragraph of 2.2). E.g., “The real reason for Hamlet's inability to act, it seems to me, lies in his... [something surprising].” Sometimes less is more; that is, sometimes your assertions will be stronger, rhetorically speaking, if you incorporate into them a small amount of self-doubt. The utility of such expressions, for that matter, is not always merely rhetorical; in general, in matters of interpretation *one should not* assert more than one is truly in a position to, and at times simple accuracy will require one to insert a few perhapses.

⁶The Writing Guide has too many words in quotation marks, too many italics, too many parentheses, is a little too jokey, and a little too conversational.

While parenthetical expressions of this sort are advisable, I recommend steering clear of sentences beginning with expressions such as “I feel that, I think that, It seems to me that, I have the feeling that...” The syntax of such sentences puts your uncertainty too much on display.

4 Integration of Quotations

4.1 A general principle mentioned more than once in this Guide is that everything in your paper must be subordinate to your thought. Nothing else should be allowed to take centerstage, neither historical events, nor plot summary, nor—quotations. Consequently, as a rule you should avoid very long quotations, which can cause the reader to lose track of your own thought. If you do quote a long passage, it should only be when the passage is packed full of important things, all of them pertinent to your thesis, and you should *prepare* for the quotation adequately and (even more important) *follow up* on the quotation with your own analysis, bringing out all the important points you see in the quoted passage. Don't simply drop the passage in the reader's lap and leave it up to her-im to figure out what to do with it.

4.2 Here is another point (a somewhat quirky one) relating to proper integration of quotations. As much as possible, quotations need to be seamlessly fitted into your own prose. For that reason, I don't like this kind of lead-in to a quotation: “According to Fitzpace, Lancelot fails to live up to the knightly code in several important respects. He writes:...” What purpose is served by the “He writes”? It does nothing but break up the flow of your own prose. The previous sentence, “According to Fitzpace, etc.,” concluded with a colon, is a perfectly adequate introduction to the passage quoted from Fitzpace. Also to use sparingly or avoid altogether are sentences structured like this: “*Fitzpace says that* Lancelot is guilty of several...” The governing principle here is: *everything* you talk about in your paper, evidence from the text, reasonings, quotations, absolutely everything, must be subordinated to and integrated into the structure and movement of *your* thought. It does not exist off on its own, as is implied by the choppy “He writes:” and by constructions in which you put some other thinker besides you in the forefront.

4.3 This next point may seem to go against what I have just said about the “seamless integration of quotations”; nevertheless, it still has to do with the proper placing of quotations within your own prose. What I really dislike about the new parenthetical style of documentation is that it positively encourages writers to indulge in the vice of floating, contextless quotations. (The footnote system allows it as well, of course.) My rule is: *a paper should be able to be read*, that is, make perfect sense and contain all the information one needs in order to continue reading, *as if it had no references at all* (parenthetical or otherwise), indeed, almost as if it had no quotation marks. In practice, this means you must make it clear, by the very way you formulate the sentence, *that* you are quoting and *whom* you are quoting. Quotation marks that appear out of the blue, with no explanation, are hateful.

E.g., don't do this:

parenthetical style: *Lancelot fails to achieve the Grail because he “has not remained true to himself” (Fitzpace 333).*

footnote style: *Lancelot fails to achieve the Grail because he “has not remained true to himself.”¹*

Much better, according to me:

parenthetical style: *Lancelot fails to achieve the Grail, according to Fitzpace, because he "has not remained true to himself" (333).*

footnote style: *Lancelot fails to achieve the Grail, according to Fitzpace, because he "has not remained true to himself."¹*

4.4 When you do use a quotation as part of the construction of one of your own sentences, make sure that the syntax of the whole computes, i.e., that the syntax of the quotation fits in with the syntax of your part of the sentence.

4.5 *Punctuation leading into quotations.* For long quotations, set off from your prose, the usual prefatory punctuation will be a colon. For shorter quotations not set off, use whatever punctuation is appropriate for the sentence of which the quotation forms a part (see 4.4). It may be that no punctuation at all is called for.

4.5.a. Do not use any punctuation (except in the case of a parenthetical insertion) to break up the sequence S V C (Subject - Verb - Complement), even if the complement is a noun clause (i.e., the quotation):

Guenevere acknowledges in her final speech to Lancelot that "thorow the and me ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed" (22.9.876).

4.5.b. When the prefatory expression is essentially adverbial in function, normally you will use a comma:

As Guenevere acknowledges in her final speech to Lancelot, "thorow the and me ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed" (22.9.876).

4.5.c. When the syntax of your part of the sentence and the syntax of the quotation are essentially independent, you should probably use a colon:

In her final speech to Lancelot, Guenevere appears to acknowledge the role they have played in the downfall of the kingdom: "thorow the and me ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed" (22.9.876).

4.5.d. Capitalize or de-capitalize the first letter of the quotation as required by the way the quotation fits into your sentence. This is one regard in which you do not need to worry about preserving the original form of the text. (You also have considerable leeway about the final punctuation mark [if there is one] at the end of the quotation.)

4.6 *Ellipsis (points of suspension).* Use a series of dots (...), indicating that words have been omitted, only *within* a quotation; do not use them at the beginning or end of a quotation (see 4.5.d). A possible exception: incomplete lines of poetry at the beginning or end of the passage quoted—here it may be important for the reader to know that the quotation begins or ends in the middle of a line. (See 4.9)

4.7 *Punctuation at the ends of quotations.* Please observe the order of punctuation marks in the following models:

Long set-off quotations. No quotation marks (unless a character is quoted within the quotation)!

... *ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed.* (22.9.876)

... *ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed.¹*

Quotations not set off.

... *ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed" (22.9.876).*

... *ys the floure of kingis and knyghtes destroyed."¹*

Also:

destroyed,” destroyed” (22.9.876), destroyed,”¹
 destroyed”; destroyed” (22.9.876); destroyed”¹;

4.8 *Style of references.* In referring to a hierarchically divided text (e.g., volume, book, chapter), I recommend Chicago style, which is clean and neat: you use only Arabic numerals, separating the different “levels” with a period. In referring to a prose text, normally you should also give the page number of the edition you are using; with Caxton’s Malory, that could work out (for the above passage) as (3.15.115), i.e., Book 3, Chapter 15, page 115, except that things are confused by the Penguin edition’s having two volumes; you might try (3.15.1:115) or, if you find that ugly, something straightforward like (3.15, v. 1, p. 115) For a long poem with set line numbering, it is sufficient to give major division(s) and line numbers (e.g., for *Paradise Lost*, 3.115-17 would mean Book III, lines 115-117; for *Macbeth*, 5.5.18-28 would mean Act V, Scene v, lines 18-28).

4.9 *Quoting poetry.* The integrity of the lines of the original poem must be preserved.

4.9.a. In quotations not set off, line separations should be indicated by a space, a slash, and another space. If the first letter of each line is capitalized in the original, do the same your quotation. “For wide was spread / That war and various; sometimes on firm ground / A standing fight, then soaring on main wing / Tormented all the air” (*PL* 6.241-44).

4.9.b. In long set-off quotations, preserve the poem in exactly the same form as you found it, one line of your typescript containing one line of the poem.

5 Punctuation

5.0 Reread your college writing handbook (such as Harbrace) for rules of punctuation, particularly those regarding how you punctuate the different kinds of compound and complex sentences. Punctuation, like syntax, has only one purpose, and that is to make your thought clear to the reader.

In the following list, some items are a little idiosyncratic, but others should prove universally valid.

5.1 Generally speaking, you do not want any punctuation breaking up the sequence Subject - Verb - Complement (SVC), unless it is a parenthetical phrase set off by commas (see 5.2).

5.2 In parenthetical phrases, if you put a comma at one end, you need a comma at the other end (unless you are at the beginning or end of a sentence).

According to the experts, eggs are nutritious but fattening.

Eggs, according to the experts, are nutritious but fattening.

Eggs are nutritious but fattening, according to the experts.

5.3 Comma splices (cs) and fragments (fr) I do not look upon kindly, the former because they obscure the relationship between clauses (see 5.0), the latter because, even if they don’t cause problems of clarity, they are too colloquial.

5.4 In a series of more than two, I like to see a comma after the next-to-the-last item, right before the “and” (“A, B, and C”—not “A, B and C”). This is the old American way, superior to the British that alas seems to have taken over.

5.5 When you put “yet” at the beginning of a clause, do not place a comma after it (except when a parenthetical expression follows). E.g.: “Yet Lancelot will later admit...”; “Yet, in spite of this equivocation, Lancelot will later admit...”

- 5.6 An adjective-and-noun phrase like “twentieth century” will not be hyphenated when it is used by itself, but will be hyphenated when the whole expression is used as an adjective: “twentieth-century theater.”
- 5.7 Sometimes you will see (particularly in more popular types of writing) quotation marks used in a quasi-ironical way, that is, to raise doubts about, show disagreement with, or indeed express contempt for the person to whom the quoted expression is attributed (often an imagined or generic person). This practice is best avoided in formal prose. (It *is* appropriate, however, to put quotation marks around a word when it is simply being used in a different [*neutrally* different] sense from the habitual one.)

6 Stylistic Odds and Ends

- 6.1 You will of course make up your own mind about split infinitives, but some very fine writers avoided them, including Henry James, Jane Austin, Shakespeare (“To be, or not to be?”), and Thomas Malory (“...and always to flee treason”). Fowler (*Modern English Usage*, 2d edition) is too nuanced on this issue to be much practical help. If I come across any in your paper, I will undo them.
- 6.2 As a rule, use present tense when retelling a narrative, and avoid unnecessary and unmotivated tense shifts.
- 6.3 When you are free to choose between “that” and “which” as a relative pronoun, I recommend Fowler’s rule (*Modern English Usage*, 2d edition): use “that” in defining clauses, “which” in non-defining clauses.
- 6.4 “As,” used as a conjunction, is okay when used in the following two ways:
 = Just as
(Just) As the emperor is head of the temporal realm, so the pope is head of the spiritual. As Fitzpace remarks,... As I was saying,...
 = When, at the time when, while
I hit my head as I was getting into the car.
 What I do not like is when “as” is used with the meaning “since, because.”
Guibert expressed concern about the medieval practice of pilgrimage-going, as more and more people were taking it up.
 My reasons for disliking this “as”: i) it is too easy to confuse with “as” meaning “when, at the time when, while.” ii) For this reason, and because I have so often seen it in badly written sentences, it has come to be a sign for me of poor writing. My advice, consequently, is that you strike it out and replace it with “since.”
- 6.5 Use U.S. spelling, not British, i.e.: -er, nor -re, -ize, not -ise, -or, not -our.
- 6.6 Lexical Don'ts. Avoid the following just to please me!
- 6.6.a) Do not use “**perception**” when you mean “misperception” or “belief, impression.” (Our perceptions reveal things to us as they really are.)
- 6.6.b) Do not use the participle “**perceived**” as a short-cut for “what people believe to be the case.” (a and b may be usages borrowed from Gestalt psychology. No matter; I still don't like them.)
- 6.6.c) Do not use “**individual**” when you mean “person.” (Use “individual” when it is important to contrast the person with a group.)

- 6.6.d) Go easy on the words “**ironic, ironically.**” Properly irony is a trope, i.e., a figurative use of language, in which the author/speaker’s meaning is different from the usual meaning of the words. I don’t like seeing it used for how the universe trips us up (=dramatic irony). (Cf. Dr. John, in J. Larue’s *Polynesian Town*: “Don’t you get it? He poisoned the ribs, and then he got hit by a Ribs-R-Us truck. It’s *ironical!*”)
- 6.6.e) Do not use “**quote**” as a noun. The correct noun form is “quotation.”
- 6.6.f) Do not use “**impact**” as a verb. I.e., instead of “the war impacted on the economy” (worse still: “the war impacted the economy”), say “had an impact on.” The only verbal form I admit for “impact” is the past participle “impacted,” as in “an impacted tooth.”
- 6.6.g) “**Fortuitous**” means “by chance.” Don’t use it to mean “fortunate.”
- 6.6.h) I dislike the usage “**different than.**” It is based, I suppose, on expressions we use in comparisons: “more than,” “less than.” Use instead “**different from.**”
- 6.6.i) Use “**likely**” by itself only as an adjective, not as an adverb. The following are okay:
a likely story
This account is likely to be accurate.
 But I don’t like:
He will likely come tomorrow. (Ugh!)
 However, quite illogically, it is okay to use “**very (or most) likely**” as an adverb!— *He will very likely come tomorrow.*
- 6.6.j) In papers on the Middle Ages, you are allowed only one use of the expression “knightly code,” and only one use of the expression “code of courtly love” (and then it must be in quotation marks).

7 Responsible Hermeneutics

7.1 The following is a matter that comes up especially in the interpretation of literary works (both fictional and non-fictional). When are you justified in interpreting a part of a work as having a symbolic or otherwise figurative meaning—i.e., a meaning other than the item’s literal, or most obvious, or usual meaning? What control can you use to insure that you are not going off the deep end, letting your imagination run wild, etc.? In order to avoid hermeneutical chaos, there must be some rule of thumb allowing you to determine if a particular figurative interpretation is a) possible, and b) likely.

I suggest the following two-part rule:

Negative. The interpretation of the part should not contradict the meaning of the whole (the plain meaning of the whole, or what on some reasonable grounds you hypothesize as the meaning of the whole). If there is no such contradiction, your interpretation is at least **not intrinsically impossible.**

Positive. The symbolic or figurative interpretation should not simply flatly restate the meaning of the whole, in which case it would be redundant; it should *enrich* (by which I mean complexify) or at the very least *significantly reinforce* the meaning of the whole. In other words, the symbolic interpretation should *make a difference.* If this condition is

met, then your interpretation could be said to have at least **some degree of likelihood** (how much will depend on many factors).

You should not go forward with a figurative interpretation unless it meets both these criteria.

7.2 When elucidating symbols, do so cautiously (7.1) and with *appropriate reverence*. Don't de-petal the flower in your eagerness to reveal its nature to us. A literary symbol, as opposed to an ordinary linguistic sign or a mathematical symbol, will normally have something elusive about it. Don't treat it as if it were a mere riddle to be solved, with a flat one-to-one correspondance to something else. To put the matter another way: If an author has used a symbol, in all likelihood for some reason s/he did not want to state openly the meaning s/he had in mind (the symbol's "tenor"); it was important that this meaning should be partially hidden. Hence, you defeat the author's purpose if you treat the symbol as if its meaning were a (completely) open book. Ideally what you want to do (and this is a very difficult maneuver, because it is almost self-contradictory), is explicite the meaning as well as you can *without completely removing the mystery*. (See 3.3.)

8 Gender

Some writers and readers object to the use of masculine pronouns and adjectives when talking about a generic or indefinite person who could in fact be either male or female. I am sympathetic to this concern, but I do not know any completely satisfactory alternative. One solution, common in popular speech, is to substitute "they, their, them" for the invidious "he, his, him":

What do you do when someone tells you they can't stand your spouse?

Such formulations may be acceptable in spoken English, but are a little too illogical for anything more formal.

Always providing both forms ("he or she, his or her, her or him") is awkward; likewise, slashes (he/she, his/her, him/her), either for the same reason or because they are unpronounceable. Perhaps men writers should always use masculine forms, and women writers feminine forms? But then the men writers will still be liable to the reproach of male chauvinism. Or one could alternate between masculine and feminine forms, with confusion as a probable consequence. (I have seen the distinction of genders in the third person put to a clever use: when dealing with two generic [but different] humans, use one gender for one, and the other for the other. As, the teacher and the student: the teacher will be "she," and the student "he." But this tactic, an admirable enhancement to clarity in certain cases when two generic humans are involved, does not help when there is only one.)

In these circumstances I propose, completely unseriously, totally new inclusive third-personal singular forms currently lacking in English. In place of "he or she," the new form is sh-he, pronounced "shuh-hEE"; in place of "his or her," I propose "hizzer"; and for "him or her," the new form is "her-m," pronounced "hurrim." Alas, I do not expect these forms to catch on, because languages are notoriously resistant to the introduction of new function words. Consequently I cannot recommend your ever using them, except perhaps for fun, in a paper written for me.

9 Correction Symbols



(circled punctuation): something is wrong with the punctuation

c s comma splice

f r fragment

d m dangling modifier (usually a present participle)

a n t antecedent (antecedent is missing or ambiguous or vague).

1. Watch out for: the vague *this*. It is a good and useful exercise, when you find you have used "this" or "that" as a pronoun, *always* to revise by adding a noun. This practice forces you to be more precise in your thinking and writing. E.g., don't write simply "this," but "this problem," "this issue," "this process," "this principle," "this conclusion," "this practice," etc. The indefinite relative pronoun *which* is liable to a similar abuse.

2. Personal pronouns can also be unclear as to their antecedents. Rule: If the NOUN to which the PRONOUN refers is not present in the PRECEDING SENTENCE, you cannot use a pronoun; you must replace it with a noun.

¶ begin new paragraph here

w c word choice=word is inappropriate

exp expression=problem involving more than one word

awk awkward construction

< inadequate transition

^ problem with flow (within paragraph)

squiggly I don't like it

line

underneath

h or

beside

something

√ I like it

hmm... I'm dubious

hmm! Well, it's certainly an interesting idea (even if there isn't much support for it).

coor coordination=parts of a series are not coordinate, either on the level of language (eg: "His whole delight was to rob, to steal, and plundering." "The king was furious with his courtiers; the incident was gratifying to the queen." - > "; but the queen was delighted with them.") or on the level of ideas.

div/ division/classification (when you divide/classify, the parts of your division

class should completely divide the matter and should not overlap)

**** use small letter

≡ use capital letter

coll colloquialism

straight neutral; a mark for me of something I want to return to

line in

margin

~ delete (a loose letter d) (a slash / can also mean delete)

(~h) (parenthesis with squiggly line): you can do without

{ alternative expression(s), no better than yours, but you might want to consider it

agr a problem of agreement (as: subject/verb)

⋈ insert

⋈ insert space



delete space



invert

rep

repetition

sp

spelling

pc

passive construction. The use of a verb in the passive tense, or of a past participle, when an active form of the verb would be preferable. Chief objection to a pc: vagueness: you assert something was done, but you leave out who the agent was.

See WG See the Writing Guide.