

Grammar 101

For students who should know
the basics, but don't.

Just three rules,
given to you straight.

No pretty pictures.
No fancy layout.
No bullshit.

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An online version can be found at <https://petermoskos.com>

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Introduction: Is *Grammar 101* right for you?

Are you in college and still fumbling with basic grammar? Are you getting bad grades on writing assignments even though you know what you're trying to say? If you're not clear about the difference between a subject, a verb, and an object, this little booklet is for you.

Grammar 101 is for smart students who should know the basics of grammar but do not. If it makes you feel better, you're not alone. Maybe English isn't your first language. Maybe you never had a teacher who taught grammar. Perhaps you've only had teachers who circle what is wrong without ever teaching you what is right. Some professors are afraid to edit in red because they may hurt your tender self-esteem. But my goal isn't to make you *feel* better. I want you to write better. At some point you need to learn basic grammar.

Besides, maybe it *is* your fault you can't write correctly. Maybe you goofed off in high school. Maybe you didn't give a damn what made a sentence "complete." Maybe you thought you didn't need to learn this crap. And now you know you were wrong. No problem. There's no shame in learning. Better late than never.

This guide is not an advanced guide to writing or style. My goal is simply to bring your writing up to a level where whoever grades your paper doesn't think, "Is this person an idiot?" I want to make sure your future employers don't toss your résumé while snickering, "Another proud product of New York City public schools!" (And I have nothing against public schools. I am a product of them myself.)

Writing is more formal than speaking. You need to learn the basics of Standard English grammar. Sure, some of these rules don't necessarily make sense. They can even be culturally and racially biased. But while there's nothing inherently better about one kind of English over another, in mainstream America you need to write correctly in Standard English. If you don't, many people — including those who grade college papers and read job applications — will look down on you. But you probably already know that, or else you wouldn't be reading this.

So where should you start? A good first step is to buy a dictionary. Sure, you can look up words online. But a real dictionary on your desk is a tool of the trade. A dictionary by your side says you're serious about school and writing. Plus, they're cheap. My favorite is *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. You can probably find one used or at a stoop sale for \$2. If you won't buy a dictionary, bookmark merriam-webster.com.

The second step is not to be overwhelmed. You can go quite far in life without knowing what exactly constitutes, say, a participial phrase. I mention this because, honestly, I'm not 100 percent sure what it means. You can learn basic writing and grammar without knowing all the terms, but some nomenclature (use your dictionary whenever you don't know a word) is essential.

The good news is that grammar comes naturally. Even if you don't know what complete sentences are, you probably use them when you speak. Now let's get going!

Rule #1: Write in complete sentences

Sentences need one **subject**, one **verb**, and usually one **object**. Grasp this and everything else will start to fall into place. To repeat, a sentence is nothing more than a **subject**, a **verb**, and (probably) an **object**. Let's break this baby down.

The **subject** is a **noun**: a person, place, or thing. It is *what* does something. House, subway, the Bronx, and DJ are all nouns. You can usually put the in front of a noun.

The **verb** is the action word: go, stay, eat, drink, or kiss. In a sentence, the verb is what the subject *does*.

The **object** is also a **noun** (a person, place, or thing). The object (also known as a direct object) is what something is done to.

Take this sentence: The DJ spins the records. Try to identify the three parts of speech. The **subject** is the DJ (he or she on the wheels of steel), the **verb** is spins (what the DJ is doing), and the **object** (what something is being done to) is records. If you have a subject, a verb, and an object, you have a **complete sentence**. End that shit with a period and you're done.

Congratulations! That's half the battle. If the sentence were The DJ is spinning the records, then the verb would be is spinning. A verb can be two words. No worries.

Take this gem of a sentence: She slapped her two-timing man. It's a perfectly fine sentence. Let's break it down backward. What's the object? Ask yourself, "Who got slapped?" The man. The verb, what happened, is slapped. She is the subject, the one who did the slapping.

By the way, not that you asked, but I, you, he, she, it, we, you, and they are called **pronouns**. In writing, try to keep pronouns to a minimum because they're vague. August Vollmer, Robert Peel, and Bill Bratton walked into a bar. He told a joke. Who? Which one? Or: There is a mess in the precinct. It is nasty. Is the precinct nasty? Or the mess? We can't be certain. Use the specific noun whenever possible.

Once you have a **subject**, **verb**, and **object**, end the sentence with a period. You could go on ... but why? Keep things short and simple.

Some verbs do *not* need an object to make a complete sentence. The subway screeches, The man talks, and Jesus rises. These are all perfectly fine sentences. Verbs that need objects are called **transitive**. Verbs that don't need objects are called **intransitive**. Dictionaries will tell you if a verb is one or the other or can be either.

This might be a good time to mention that sometimes sentences don't need subjects. If you *order* somebody to do something, it's called an **imperative**. Go to the store. Get off that baby. Put out that fire. Fuck me! None of these actually have an *explicit* subject, but "you" is there in spirit.

If you do *not* have a complete sentence, you have a **phrase** (or **clause**). A **phrase** can be a lot of things, but it's less than a sentence. Watch me turn the previous sentence into two: A phrase can be a lot of things. It's less than a sentence. Instead of , but, I used a period and started a new sentence. *Both* are grammatically correct. As a general rule, shorter sentences are better. If you insist on combining two complete sentences into one, do so by placing a *comma*

before an and or but (and also sometimes or or because).

If you have a sentence like this, then you need to separate the two parts of that sentence with a comma. That preceding underlined part *could* be a complete sentence (in the context here, it is called an **independent clause** because it can stand alone).

The if in the sentence above — and it could be another word like while, as, because, although, or when — makes the first part of the sentence a phrase called a **dependent clause**. It is dependent on something else to make it complete.

You can also put phrases in sentences to modify things, to make things more complicated, and even to add maudlin poetic beauty to your writing. But a phrase such as maudlin poetic beauty doesn't stand alone as a sentence. You would need to say: Maudlin poetic beauty is probably not what you're going for.

Take the phrase Wherever she goes. It can't stand alone. It doesn't make sense standing alone. It lacks a subject. It's begging for completion.

Of course you could use Wherever she goes to *answer* a question like Where do you follow her? Then the subject, verb, and object (I follow her) are all implied in your answer. You could also say She goes wherever, and this would be a complete sentence because wherever just got changed into the **object** (and the meaning changed, too). But let's stick with the original.

Wherever she goes, she leaves the men talking. Now there's a sentence! The core sentence? The **subject, verb, and object**: She leaves men. Everything else — even if essential to the meaning — is just icing

on the tasty cake of basic grammar. A **phrase** may be essential to *the meaning* of a sentence, but it's not vital to the core grammar of the sentence.

Here's a quick summary quiz. There are just three words in the following sentence. She eats food. Identify the subject, verb, and object. Assuming the answer is now obvious, read on.

Rule #2: The subject and verb will agree

The subject and verb must agree in two ways: 1) singular or plural, and 2) person. Ah, yes, but what does "agree" mean? Or "person," for that matter? "Agree" means that if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject is plural the verb must be plural. Singular means just one. Plural is more than one. It really is that simple.

A singular subject could be I, she, or a 40-ounce bottle of King Cobra. Even a case of 40-ounce bottles of King Cobra is singular. Why? Because there's just one case. This is why you need to identify the subject. Everything after the of is adjective fluff, in this case describing case. A word that describes a noun is called an **adjective**. In the case of this case, everything after the of describes the case.

If the subject is plural, the verb has to be plural. The only thing you have to watch out for is the third-person singular of the verb. It usually ends in s. They drink whiskey. She drinks wine.

If the subject is anyone, everyone, someone, no one, nobody, the verb is singular. That's just a rule. It's the same with neither and either. Either Zora or Peter needs to clean up this mess (one of them, hence singular). Similarly, Neither she nor he has cleaned up

the mess (singular). And means it is plural: Zora and Peter need to clean up this mess. That is to say, They need to clean it up.

In a sentence, *the verb always agrees with the subject*. It doesn't matter what comes between the **subject** and **verb**. And this is true even when it sounds funny. For instance: The cop who arrested the thugs wants you. That sounds weird because in a different sentence you might say The thugs want you (want without an s). But the subject of the first sentence is one cop, not many thugs. And the verb always agrees with the subject.

Here's another example: One of the professors is a crook. Yes, you could say The professors are crooks. But in the first sentence, one is the subject (singular), not professors (plural). If something comes right after a **preposition** like of, you *know* it isn't the subject.

The verb also has to agree in **person**. This is simple. The **first person** is I (or we in the plural), the **second person** is you (same in the plural), and the **third person** is he, she, or it (they in the plural). That's it. Really. For instance: I go to the store; he goes to the store. Even though go and goes are both singular, go is first person [I or we], and goes is third person singular [he, she, or it]. When you hear, "Avoid the first person in academic writing," your professor just means don't use "I" in your papers.

English verbs don't change much, but they do change a little. Like many verbs, to go doesn't change *except* for the third-person singular present tense (I go, you go, we go, they go, but he/she/it goes). Usually the change is as simple as adding an s. Easy-peasy. Not adding this s is stereotyped as uneducated ghetto talk.

Is that fair? No. Is it racist? Probably. But if you don't want educated people (of all races) snickering, get this right.

Now let's do a real old-fashioned grammar exercise and **conjugate** a verb. To understand what "conjugate" means, it helps to have taken a foreign-language class. You conjugate verbs all the time in Spanish class. Just list all the forms of the verb in first, second, and third person, singular first and then plural.

Take the verb to have. Conjugating goes like this: I have, you (singular) have, he/she/it has, we have, you (plural) have, they have.

Subjects and verbs also have to agree in past, present or future **tense**. The past tense of go is went. The future adds will.

Now let's consider the **conditional** tense. This is when something is either hypothetical or contrary to fact, as if you *were* talking about what you *wish* had happened: Had I gone to the club, I so would have scored. The conditional kicks in anytime something starts with if. The conditional of to be is were, as in If I were a rich man... "If I was" is commonly used, but wrong.

There are also things called **cases**. These can have fancy names like "past conditional" (for example: I would have seen) and "pluperfect" (whatever that means). Feel free to ponder the subtle distinctions between I see, I saw, I will see, I have seen, I had seen, I will have seen, I would see, and I would have seen. See?

Rule #3: Use commas correctly

The little comma is amazing. Seriously. It's so small and does so much. Commas can be a kind of a breather, a helpful hint so your readers don't get confused. But there are times you need a comma.

Let's eat, grandma! has a very different meaning than Let's eat grandma! The comma means grandma isn't the object of the sentence or your appetite.

Similarly, I love cooking, my dog, and my mom is an easily understood series of things I like. Without the commas I love cooking my dog and my mom gets into some seriously bad eating.

Let's say you wrote this, a mistake I see way too often: Vybz Kartel used a meat grinder and he made a tasty meat patty. This is your basic **run-on sentence**. (Vybz Kartel is an imprisoned reggae artist who had an unfortunate fondness for grinding meat.) With a comma (, and) you can make the sentence grammatically correct (albeit needlessly long). The comma is there for your reader. It shows where the pause is and tells the reader a new subject is coming up.

- 1) Vybz Kartel used a grinder. He made a tasty meat patty. Two good sentences that, like Vybz himself, probably shouldn't be messed with.
- 2) You *could* make it one sentence: Vybz Kartel used a meat grinder, and he made a tasty meat patty.
- 3) If the latter part of a sentence doesn't have a subject, if it's just made a tasty meat patty, then use and *without a comma*: Vybz Kartel used a grinder and made a tasty meat patty.

This is important: If the second part of the sentence — the part after the and or but — can *stand alone as a complete sentence*, then you need a comma before the and or but. That's the rule! So zip it, and quit your bitching. Use one of the three methods above. They're all correct. Which you use is a matter of taste, style, and context.

There's also an important rule about **setting phrases off with commas**: If an adjective phrase *is* essential to a sentence, you *don't* use commas. If the phrase *isn't* essential to the sentence, set it off with commas. They serve a purpose, these commas around phrases do, to keep things clear.

Consider these two sentences: The man, who was fat, mugged me. And The man who was fat mugged me. In the first sentence you got mugged by one man, who happened to be fat. In the second sentence there may have been two men, one fat and one skinny, and you're saying the *fat* man mugged you.

Here are more examples where commas matter:

- Students who don't know basic grammar won't graduate.
- Students, who don't know basic grammar, won't graduate.

The first sentence says that *if* you don't know basic grammar, then you won't graduate. But the students who don't know basic grammar are not all students. Since who don't know basic grammar *is* essential to the meaning of the first sentence, you don't use commas.

The second sentence says that *all* students don't know basic grammar. Students won't graduate. The

phrase who don't know basic grammar modifies or describes students, but it's not essential. You could delete who don't know basic grammar and the sentence would mean the same thing. Since the phrase is *not* essential, you *do* use commas.

You can test your sentences by taking out the text between the commas. If the sentence still means what you're trying to say, then keep the commas.

Here's another place to use commas. If, before the subject in a sentence, you start a sentence with a phrase or two, set these phrases off with commas. Here's an example: Signing the bill, the president trembled. If the phrase does not start the sentence, the comma isn't needed: The president trembled as he signed the bill. Now I'm going to keep adding phrases (and commas): Signing the bill, the president, recently elected by a corrupt union, trembled with fear. I could just keep going: Signing the bill, the president, recently elected by a corrupt union, knowing that mob would knock on his door, afraid his mistress would kill him, trembled with fear. Stylistically this lengthy sentence is a mess. But grammatically it's OK as long as you keep setting off these phrases with commas. The subject and verb — president and trembled — have not changed. (And since trembled is an **intransitive** verb, it doesn't need an object.)

While you can and must use commas where they're needed, it's best to keep your sentences short and simple: Recently elected by a corrupt union, the president signed the bill. He trembled with fear. The mob would soon knock on his door. And the president knew his mistress was out to kill him. This could be the start of what could be an A+ thriller!

Also, commas always go between cities and states (Albuquerque, New Mexico) and between cities and countries (Athens, Greece). A comma separates the year when you list something in month-day-year format: After September 11, 2001, Katie hated that September 11 was also her birthday.

Commas in a series are called, not surprisingly, “serial commas.” Include the last comma before and in a series of three or more things. For some historical reason that I do not know, newspapers don’t follow this rule. But assuming your last name isn’t *Times*, *News*, or *Post*, you should use that serial comma before the final and or or in a series.

That’s it. Just three things to learn: complete sentences, subject verb agreement, and comma usage. Learn those and you’ll get better grades on your papers. Guaranteed or your money back. Well done. End of story.

But wait ... of course there’s more! If you’ve read this far, why not read more? Own this. Learn a bit more. You’ll look great and write even better. And everybody loves a good writer.

The misunderstood apostrophe

The apostrophe (’) is used for two unrelated purposes. First, it shows possession, when something belongs to someone. Second, the apostrophe makes up for missing letters, as in a contraction.

Possession: The driver’s uniform is dirty. The uniform belongs to one driver (singular): ’s. More than

one driver (plural): s'. That's the rule. The drivers' uniforms are dirty. And if the word already ends in s? Still add 's for the singular possessive (and just an ' after the s for the plural possessive). The species's extinction meant the end of the passenger pigeon. The species' extinction marked the end of the world!

Contractions are the other use for apostrophes. Doesn't stands for does not. It's stands for it is. You know this already. But get ready to have your mind blown: The possessive form of its *does not* use an apostrophe. The bodega has cold beer. Its beer is cold. Did that blow your mind? Well, goddamnit, it should. I mean, why is there one single case where you *leave out* an apostrophe to indicate possession? I don't know. But that's the way it is.

If you don't think apostrophes matter, consider this: Many readers mind small print (because their vision isn't good). This is different from Many readers' minds are filled with marbles. The word mind can be either a verb or a noun. And what mind means depends on which part of speech it is. And how do we know? Because of a little apostrophe! Duuude....

Who and whom

Who is a **subject** used when I, he, or she could be used. Whom is an **object** where you might use me, him, or her. In common spoken usage, people use who all the time. No big deal. You'll rarely get serious stink eye for using who, but why not get it right? And using whom incorrectly is both pretentious and wrong. Did you know the guy who was naked? You might think you could use a whom there. Nope.

Less and fewer

It makes me sad that the difference between less and fewer is disappearing. Sometimes it matters! If you're talking about things that are or can be made plural, use fewer. Fewer is used for things you can count. I'm going to have fewer racist friends means I'm going to dump my racist friends. I want less racist friends means I'm going to keep my friends. But I want them to be less racist.

Capitalization: Stop doing it for no reason, damn it!

I don't know what else to say. Kids these days! I don't know why they never use capitals when texting and then capitalize words in papers willy-nilly. It makes the old man in me grumpy. (And get off my lawn!)

If in doubt, I say don't capitalize. Only because ninety percent of the capitalization errors I see are words that are capitalized when they should not be.

Do capitalize the first word of sentences. I is always capitalized. So are **proper nouns**. And abbreviations. That's it (more or less). A **proper noun** is a specific, named person or place: New York City, Central Park, Brooklyn, and Hades.

Titles are only capitalized when specific names follow. Officer Moskos is capitalized. But police officer with no name after it is not capitalized *even when it refers to a specific officer*: Police Officer Moskos was a very handsome police officer. New York Police Department is capitalized because it's one specific police department. But police department is not, even when you're talking about the NYPD. Similarly, president is not capitalized unless you name

a specific president: **P**resident **O**abama was a better president than **P**resident **R**onald **R**eagan.

Some concepts like “reform era of policing” or “broken windows” can go either way. If in doubt, follow the source or just decide (and then be consistent). And **G**od is always capitalized. Why? Because **H**e says so.

Periods and commas go inside quotation marks

“This is wrong,” even though you probably do it. “This is right,” I say. I just wish I saw it more. Your professor says, “**Commas and periods go inside the closing quotation marks.**” Always. (At least in American English. The rule is different in British English.)

Your professor also says, “Somebody once told me, and I quote, ‘If you have a quotation inside another quote, the double quotes change to single quotes.’ ” A quote in a quote is the only time you should ever use the single quote. And yes, a single close-quote looks just like an apostrophe, but technically it’s different.

Stop using the dastardly semicolon!

You’re not impressing anybody. Seriously. Here’s God’s honest truth: You never have to use the semicolon. Ever. And misused semicolons stand out like the illiterate bit of pretension they are. Just skip it. But if something deep down inside you screams, “Oh my God, I need a semicolon here because these two complete sentences won’t make perfect sense until they’re more closely linked by something between the comma and period,” well, I can’t stop you. But don’t.

Personally, I use semicolons only when a period would distort the meaning of two complete sentences *and* those two sentences could be switched in order. That's a pretty high standard. Since you shouldn't use semicolons, I'm hesitant to give even one example of proper usage. A good writer avoids using semicolons; a bad writer uses too many.

But no matter what I say, some of you are still going to use semicolons. So let me add this: Semicolons function more like periods than commas. If you can't replace a semicolon with a period and have things be grammatically correct, you're doing it wrong. And sometimes, particularly in academic papers, you might see a semicolon as a sort of super comma in a long descriptive series in which commas are also used. This *is* correct usage. But it's both rare and a bit old-fashioned.

The unloved hyphen

A **hyphen** is a dash (-). You might want to use hyphens more. They tie words together and usually make things less ambiguous. Most often, hyphens involve **adjectives** (words that describe nouns).

Let's say there was a failed plot to bomb the subway. What we have is a failed subway bombing. Failed refers to bombing. But if we throw in a hyphen we can have a failed-subway bombing. With the hyphen, failed modifies subway. The subway failed, so we bombed it. And let's consider a failed subway-bomb. Here the subway *itself* is a bomb. Craazy! But at least it failed.

Adjectives and adverbs

An **adjective** modifies a noun. An **adverb** usually ends in **ly** and modifies a **verb** or an **adjective**. That's it. A common mistake with adverbs and adjectives is the use of good and well. Good is an adjective; well is the adverb. I feel good means you are healthy. I feel well means (at least in theory) you're really good at feeling. Maybe your hands are extra-sensitive? I feel good because I listen to James Brown. I feel well because I am blind and cannot see.

Example: I hate the obnoxious young professor. Obnoxious and young are adjectives, so they must modify the noun, professor, who is a jerk. But what if we were to say, the obnoxiously young professor? Obnoxiously is an adverb, so it modifies the adjective young. The problem now is just that the professor is still a kid.

Just so you know, adverbs are frowned upon in writing. They say you can always pick a better verb. I'm not sure who "they" are, but consider this: The man quickly left the scene of the crime. It's a bit better to write: The men fled the scene of the crime. It reads with more action. And you should always strive to be more precise and concise in your writing.

Avoid passive verbs

A **passive** verb is simply the verb to be or to have combined with another verb. The lady's phone was stolen by the man. I know it's not *grammatically* wrong, but in terms of style? The shit is weak. Was stolen is passive. Use **active** verbs: The man stole the lady's bag. Stole is active. You can almost always

change the passive voice into the active voice by swapping the subject and the object. Try it.

Infinitives and gerunds: Verbs without shame!

So what's an infinitive? Go on, ask me. I dare you! Because unlike prepositions, this I got down: An **infinitive** is the basic two-word form of a verb, with the first word being to. [mic drop]

To go, to eat, to love, to screw, they're all infinitives. And they let verbs do some crazy shit, like morph into **objects**. He wants to go. You might think to go is a **verb**, but here it's an **object**. What does he want? He wants to go.

If you add ing to a verb, you create a **gerund**. Running, talking, eating, and fucking are all gerunds. And gerunds do play, passing as nouns and even adjectives.

Identify the **subject** of this sentence: Observing somebody is secret but exciting work. Hmm ... secret and exciting are adjectives because they describe work, the **object**. The **verb** is is. If you think the **subject** is somebody ... you'd be wrong. Think about it. The secret but exciting work isn't somebody but observing.

Watch this change: Observing, somebody got busted. Somebody *is* now the subject. Observing, the gerund, just shape-shifted into a kind of adjective describing that somebody. (And once again, our hero, the little **comma**, makes a big difference.)

"Rules" to know before ignoring them

Ever hear anybody say "don't split infinitives" or "don't start sentences with and or but"? Yeah? Well here's my rule: Fuck 'em! People who worry about

such rules aren't getting enough action. These people tend to be the same prudes who say "never end a sentence with a **preposition**." That is an absurd concept that sprang out of some 18th-century love of Latin. It has nothing to do with English. The most famous quote on this matter is attributed to Winston Churchill (if you don't know who he is, look him up): "Ending a sentence with a preposition is something *up with which I shall not put*." The joke here, you see, is how absurd it is to follow this so-called rule.

What is a **preposition**? Er, I was afraid you would ask. I don't really know. But a quick Google search tells me a preposition is "something that links subjects, verbs, and objects." On, beneath, under, and up can all be prepositions. The cop locked his ass up both ends in a preposition (up) and splits up the verb (locked up). But it's OK because there's a certain flair and meaning that would be lost if you said, The police officer arrested the gentleman.

Other things being equal, you can't go wrong by keeping an infinitive together, but it really doesn't matter. Is it better to say He wants to go quickly rather than He wants to quickly go? I don't think so. And there's actually a subtle difference in meaning: to go quickly implies the *journey* will be fast; to quickly go implies the *departure* is quick. Just be warned that some numskulls still say not to split infinitives.

Homonyms: same same, but different

To, Too,
& Two

To is the most common form of this word. Too with two o's means "also." Two is 2. You need to piss, too? Then go to the alley. Just don't take a number-two!

Then
&
Than

Then with an e is used in the context of time. Jimmy made a mess. Then Rhonda had to clean it up. Than with an a is used as a comparative. Rhonda is smarter than Jimmy.

Their,
They're,
&
There

Their is possessive. They're is a contraction of they are. Nothing else. There is used for everything else. Over there, their cat is dirty. They're looking at you, hot mama.

Whether
&
Weather

I'm going to Coney Island whether or not the weather is hot. You figure it out.

Right
&
Write

You're right. This one is not hard. Right versus left. And you need to know how to write a complete sentence, right?

Affect
&
Effect

Usually affect is a verb and effect is a noun. The spliff affected him. The effect of the spliff was memorable. From my experience, odds are that you mean effect.

Where,
Were,
&
We're

Where refers to a place or state of being. Where did I leave my weed? Were is the past (and also conditional) tense of are. We're is an abbreviation of we are. Where rhymes with dare. Were rhymes with purr.

Ten sexy writing tips to drive your partner wild

- 1) Grammar matters. If you write well, you'll seem smarter. If you write well, you may even *be* smarter.
- 2) Use short and complete sentences: a subject, a verb, and probably an object. Next sentence, please.
- 3) Every sentence in a paragraph needs to relate to the same concept. Keep paragraphs short (four or five sentences is good) and never a page long.
- 4) Use the active voice. Avoid passive verbs.
- 5) In academic writing, don't use the first person.
- 6) A happy grader is an easy grader. Make things easy for your grader. Clearly state your main point in the title, the first sentence, or the first paragraph.
- 7) Edit for clarity and to be concise. Cut words and sentences mercilessly. Prune with glee. Don't say in five words what you can say in three.
- 8) Writing isn't easy. There's no shortcut here. Take time to do it right. A rushed paper is a crappy paper.
- 9) Use a normal font (like Times New Roman 12 point) and normal margins (1.25 inches all around is good). Use page numbers after the first page.
- 10) Proofread. Don't just use spell check! It's good to print out an actual hard copy to edit and proofread. It's even better to find somebody who can edit and proofread your work. Then, right before submitting your paper, proofread again. Write in corrections. Of all the time you spend working on a paper, the last 30 minutes spent rereading are the most beneficial.