

HONORS COLLEGE GUIDE

HOW NOT TO SEE **RED**: YOU AND YOUR WRITING

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SOME BASIC POINTS ABOUT WRITING AND YOUR SENIOR PROJECT:

1. MAKE PROOFREADING A SEPARATE EXERCISE

There is a strong temptation to expel the project, to be done with it. You should take one full day to read your Senior Project, and you should go over the project with your mentor for writing issues.

2. EXPECT TO REVISE AND RESUBMIT

It is very rare that a project has no errors (most professional writers have to put their work through several versions and then proofread page proofs). But the cleaner the text you submit, the fewer rounds of revision you will do.

3. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR READERS

Dean Petruso, Assistant Dean Henry, and I are not going to proofread your entire Senior Project. It is quite likely that, if we start seeing a lot of mechanical problems, we will stop, send it back to you, and ask you to make corrections. You will be able to use the comments on the pages we have read as a guide, but you and your mentor must go through the entire project to make other corrections. The fact is that most errors are systematic; in other words, writers tend to make the same mistakes over and over again. Once we point out a mistake a couple of times, we expect you to identify and correct subsequent examples.

COMMON USAGE PROBLEMS TO BE AWARE OF (writing instructors use the term “usage” instead of “grammar,” because the former better indicates that academic writing is a matter of social conventions, in this case those governing academic culture):

1. COMMA USAGE: fused sentences, run-on sentences
2. SENTENCE FRAGMENTS: dependent and independent clauses
3. COORDINATION: coordinating conjunctions versus conjunctive adverbs
4. CONSISTENCY: use of abbreviations, capitalization, hyphenation, verb tense, serial comma (the Oxford comma)
5. PARAGRAPHING AND TOPIC SENTENCES
6. TRANSITIONS

AN INVITATION

Since most errors are systematic, I invite you, sometime in the course of writing your thesis, to bring a page or two of it to me. I will read the pages and give you some pointers on what I see to be the features of your usage that need the most work. A couple of quick lessons can save you, your mentor, and the reader of your project a great deal of work down the road.

A USEFUL ALLY: THE WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center (located on the fourth floor of the Central Library) is a very useful resource for your writing. Tutors are trained to work with students, especially on how to organize ideas and craft sentences. Tutors will also help with mechanical issues, but they will not proofread your paper. You can make an appointment by calling 817-272-2601.

A COUPLE OF REFERENCES

Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, *Rules for Writers*, 11th ed. (Bedford, 2011)

One of the best writing handbooks, *Rules* is used in first-year writing courses across the country. The treatment of basic issues—comma usage, coordination and subordination, parallelism—has remained more or less unchanged from earlier editions, which can be found used at deeply discounted prices. There are also multiple editions of this and similar writing handbooks in the UT Arlington Library.

Joseph Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 10th ed. (Longman, 2010)

This is a classic book aimed at adult writers: those who know a great deal about their specialized subject matter but need help with some tips on how to express their ideas more effectively. Williams is less helpful with punctuation, more useful on how to avoid verbal repetition, nominalization, and other problems that slow down or annoy readers.