

Writing Tips

The following writing tips will help you avoid common mistakes and add sophistication to your style.

1. **Clearly express the main idea of your composition (or paragraph) in the *thesis statement* (or *topic sentence*).**
2. If you are writing about or in response to a piece of literature, then don't summarize what you've read. Instead, **address the prompt directly in the *thesis statement* (or *topic sentence*).**

Example Prompt:

Consider how Corie ten Boom felt at the beginning of The Hiding Place ...at the end. Think about a significant event that occurred and her response. Based on this knowledge evaluate this character. Is she dynamic or static?

Weak topic sentence:

The book I read is The Hiding Place. It was a good book. It was about.... The main character experienced many changes during this time.

Strong topic sentence:

Corie ten Boom, the main character of The Hiding Place, is a dynamic character because she undergoes great changes in the story.

3. **Strictly maintain *unity* and *coherence*.** A lack of unity and/or coherence frequently results in the reader perceiving the writing as "off-topic."
4. **When expressing your opinion, be direct and firm.** Avoid phrases such as "I think", "I believe", "I know", "In my opinion," and "In my experience." State your opinion as if it is fact. Furthermore, do not mention reasons why people might disagree with your opinion. This undermines your argument!
5. **Use *action verbs* instead of *linking verbs* whenever possible.**
6. **Avoid *run-on sentences*.**
7. **Use *transitions*.**
8. **Avoid beginning sentences with *coordinating conjunctions**—"For," "And," "Nor," "But," "Or," "Yet," and "So" (FANBOYS).**
*Unless these words are used as part of a formulaic transitional phrase (i.e. "For example").
9. **Avoid using the second person, "you".** Teenagers often use "you" when what they really mean is "people," "teenagers," "students," etc. Misuse of the second person makes assumptions about the reader that could be extremely inaccurate. A writer should only

Writing Tips

The following writing tips will help you avoid common mistakes and add sophistication to your style.

use "you" when he or she *really* wants to directly address the audience such as an appeal in a persuasive composition.

10. Use varied sentence lengths and beginnings.

11. Learn to properly capitalize and punctuate *titles* and names.

12. Learn the rules of *pronoun antecedent agreement* and observe them.

13. Carefully format your document. According to Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston's Elements of Language: Third Course, "when you write a formal paper, such as an analysis of literature, it is important to choose a design that maximizes legibility. You want to make it easy for your readers to focus on the *ideas* of your paper, not the type. Illegible text will frustrate your readers and perhaps even make them quit reading."

- Refer to Elements of Language, pages 186 and 806.
- Use font styles (*i.e.* bold), underling, color, and effects (*i.e.* emboss) intentionally—to convey meaning rather than because "they're pretty!"
- Get a grip on abbreviations. When writing about an institution, agency, organization, or object that is widely known by its abbreviation, write out the full name the first time you mention it in your composition followed by the abbreviation in parenthesis. Then, you can refer to it by its abbreviation throughout the rest of the paper.

EXAMPLE: Round Rock Independent School District (RRISD) is highly regarded throughout Texas.

- Avoid using most symbols—like ampersands (&), pound signs (#), at signs (@), slashes (/), etc. Spell out the words that these symbols represent. However widely used symbols like dollar signs (\$) and the percent symbol (%) are acceptable. When in doubt, spell it out!
- Know when to spell out numbers and when to use numerals. In general, spell out cardinal numbers (such as twenty) and ordinal numbers (such as twentieth) that you can write in one or two words. Spell out any number that occurs at the beginning of a sentence (or revise the sentence so that the number is not at the beginning). On the other hand, use numerals to express numbers that would be written in more than two words.

14. Use semicolons correctly.

15. Learn the difference between parenthesis, dashes, and commas and when to use each.

16. Learn the difference between some frequently confused words and when to use each.