Academic Writing Don’ts

Student Name: __________________________ Date: __________________

Instructor: __________________________ Course: __________________

IMPORTANT NOTE: All the activities (3) in the DLA must be completed in their entirety before meeting with a tutor and receiving credit. Where indicated, complete your work on this sheet. If your instructor wants evidence of this completed DLA, return this form to him or her with the tutor’s signature included.

Learning Outcomes: Through computer and other independent work, you will learn how to avoid first (I) and second person (you) usage, contractions, and abbreviations in academic writing.

Activities (approximately 1 hour): Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

College writing may be challenging to students for various reasons; however, the ultimate goal is to communicate clearly to any person reading your writing, and there are several items to keep in mind when writing for academic purposes. Using first (I) and second person (you), contractions, and abbreviations in academic writing may be grammatically correct; however, these points are stylistically incorrect and inappropriate in the academic setting. To be sure about these stylistic preferences, ask your professor when you are uncertain.

Understanding First Person Usage

Many students wonder if it is okay to use first person (I) in their writing. Writers use the first person many times in response to an instructor’s prompt. Although an instructor may ask for you to incorporate your own experience in an assignment, he or she may not want you to directly make any personal reference. In many cases, your point can be made more clearly by eliminating the personal reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate:</th>
<th>I think we should not be graded. (personal reference)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate:</td>
<td>Students should not be graded. (rewritten without personal reference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate:</td>
<td>In my opinion, students should be required to volunteer before receiving a college degree. (personal reference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate:</td>
<td>Students should be required to volunteer before receiving a college degree. (rewritten without personal reference)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is obvious this is your opinion. If it were someone else’s, you would have cited your source. It may be appropriate to use first person point of view in a narrative or descriptive assignment; however, you should check with your professor to make sure.

Understanding Second Person Usage

Writers use the second person to offer instructions or directly address the reader; however, in academic settings, many professors prefer that writers use the third person and/or write generally about a subject. By using second person, the writer makes assumptions about the reader that may or may not be true. In any case, avoid accusing the reader of anything. For example, the sentence below inappropriately accuses the reader of drug usage.
Inappropriate: When you use cocaine, you can get high. (second person)
Appropriate: When drug users use cocaine, they get high. (third person)
Inappropriate: By reading and studying on a weekly basis, you will excel in your courses. (second person)
Appropriate: By reading and studying on a weekly basis, students will excel in their courses. (third person)

In some disciplines like administrative justice or nursing, it is appropriate to use second person; in addition, it may be appropriate to use second person when providing directions. It is important to note, however, that many disciplines like English and humanities courses require writers avoid second person.

**Understanding Contractions**

Contractions quickly communicate information and are used frequently in informal pieces of speech and writing; however, contractions are generally unacceptable in academic assignments. Instead of writing contractions, spell out the words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate:</th>
<th>can’t</th>
<th>it’s</th>
<th>they’re</th>
<th>you’re</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate:</td>
<td>cannot</td>
<td>it is</td>
<td>they are</td>
<td>you are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Understanding Abbreviations**

With the prevalence of texting, it seems that abbreviations have seeped into academic assignments. Avoid the urge to abbreviate. Similar to contractions, abbreviations help to shorten information and quickly communicate ideas to the audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate:</th>
<th>Ave.</th>
<th>Rd.</th>
<th>etc.</th>
<th>$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate:</td>
<td>Avenue</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>generally avoid</td>
<td>dollar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Different formats may guide abbreviations differently. For example, MLA dictates that when few numbers are required in a discussion, they may be spelled out in one or two words; however, APA format requires only spelling out numbers one through nine. Both MLA and APA formats require spelling out numbers when they begin a sentence and using numerals in most other situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MLA:</th>
<th>one</th>
<th>ten</th>
<th>twenty-six</th>
<th>one hundred</th>
<th>101</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APA:</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are using a different format, consult a handbook or your instructor for clarification.

**Activities:** Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

☐ 1. When is it appropriate to use second person? Why?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

When is it appropriate to use contractions and abbreviations? Why?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
2. Read the following introductory paragraph on Valentine’s Day and on a separate sheet of paper rewrite it using MLA format guidelines, avoiding the previously mentioned academic writing don’ts.

With Valentine’s Day right around the corner, you can’t help but become slightly sickened by the inevitable start of major corporations constantly running television advertisements suggesting the best way to show your love (and also spend all of your money). Fortunately for some of us, agonizing over hundreds of mindless Valentine’s Day cards at the local Wal-Mart won’t be part of our plans on the night of Feb. 13th (due to our lack of a significant other). For those of you who do find yourselves currently head-over-heels in love, the time to start choosing that perfect gift for that special somebody is never too soon. Keeping this in mind, I present to you a breakdown of some of the more traditional gifts and what they really say to their recipients.

3a. Locate an essay you have previously written or one you are presently working on and identify areas where you have used academic writing don’ts. Revise these areas to communicate in a more formal, academic style. Bring your essay with the added revisions to the tutoring session.

If you do not have your own essay to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (3b).

3b. Review the sentences below and identify the elements that reflect an informal style. Then on a separate sheet of paper revise accordingly. Be prepared to tell your tutor both what you thought needed revision and why you revised it accordingly.

1. As soon as you start to look carefully at social service provision in the community, you frequently find evidence of abuse.
2. The advisory panel set up by the government couldn't establish the cause of the disaster, and in the end no blame was attached to the actions of the pilot.
3. I believe that without clear leadership from the United Nations, we are likely to find ourselves in a similar position next year.
4. Personally, I think that economic stability depends upon social cohesion.
5. I have worries about someone getting into my personal information that is kept on the servers.
6. There were only 9 people in class today.
7. Mecca is a destination for 1000s of pilgrims every year.
8. Mt. SAC is at the corner of Temple Ave. and Grand Ave.
9. It’s where Amar Rd. begins.

4. Review: Make a DLA appointment at https://mtsac2.mywconline.com/, or sign-up to see a tutor on the “DLA Walk-in” list. During your session with a tutor, explain your understanding of the different academic don’ts. Consider the main concept you learned in this DLA. How will knowledge of these concepts affect your writing?

Student’s signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

Tutor’s signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

Revised 2.16.2017

© Copyright 2011 Mt. SAC Writing Center
Building 26B, Room 1561
(909) 274-5325 http://www.mtsac.edu/writingcenter/