Academic Writing Don’ts

Student Name:

Instructor:

Date:

Course:

# About this DLA

## Important Note:

All the activities (3) in the DLA must be completed in their entirety before receiving credit for completion. Students are welcome to meet with a tutor if they need help, but please be aware that students might need a second appointment for review and signature in that case. 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.

# DLA Video Review

If you would like to watch [a brief video that reviews parts of the Academic Writing Don’ts DLA](https://youtu.be/UQ14RSIPVbw) content, please use the QR code below:

Qr code for Academic Writing Don'ts DLA video

Description automatically generated

# Academic Writing

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.

| **Inappropriate** | **Appropriate** |
| --- | --- |
| I think we should not be graded. (personal reference) | Students should not be graded. (rewritten without personal reference) |
| In my opinion, students should be required to volunteer before receiving a college degree. (personal reference) | Students should be required to volunteer before receiving a college degree. (rewritten without personal reference) |

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 acting unprofessionally.

| **Inappropriate** | **Appropriate** |
| --- | --- |
| When you do not memorize your lines, you will act unprofessionally. (second person) | When performers do not memorize their lines, they will act unprofessionally. (third person) |
| By reading and studying on a weekly basis, you will excel in your courses. (second person) | 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.

| **Inappropriate** | **Appropriate** |
| --- | --- |
| can’t | cannot |
| it’s | it is |
| they’re | they are |
| you’re | you are |
| Ave. | Avenue |
| Rd. | Road |
| $ | Dollar |
| etc. | Avoid |

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.

## 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.

| **MLA** | **APA** |
| --- | --- |
| one | one |
| ten | 10 |
| twenty-six | 26 |
| one hundred | 100 |
| 101 | 101 |

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.

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. Academic Writing Review

When is it appropriate to use second person? Why?

When is it appropriate to use contractions and abbreviations? Why?

## 2. Paragraph Correction

Read the following introductory paragraph about benefits of mindful meditations for college students and on a separate sheet of paper rewrite it using MLA format guidelines, avoiding the previously mentioned academic writing don’ts.

With all the stress that comes as a college student, you can’t help but become anxious at the thought of trying to manage all of your classes and maintain your social life. Fortunately for some of us, agonizing over due dates, essays, tests, and parking, and spending enough time with our friends, family, and significant others won’t overwhelm us once Aug. 23rd rolls around with the help of our daily, mindful meditations. For those of you who do find yourselves currently panicking over the start of a new semester, the time to start practicing mindful meditations is never too soon. Keeping this in mind, I present to you a breakdown of some of the many benefits that can help alleviate stress and increase time management from applying mindful meditations.

## Choose 3a or 3b Below

## 3a. Correct Your Own Writing

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. Sentence Correction

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 the cost of college tuition, you frequently find evidence of unnecessary fees that college students pay.
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 while using the school servers.
6. There were only 9 people in class today.
7. Going to a private university is a goal for 1000s of high school students.
8. Mt. SAC is at the corner of Temple Ave. and Grand Ave.
9. It’s where Amar Rd. begins.

## 4. Review the DLA

Go to https://mtsac2.mywconline.com and use the [Mt. SAC Writing Center Appointment System](https://mtsac2.mywconline.com/) to make a DLA appointment, or sign-up to see a tutor on the “**Walk-in**” list in the Writing Center. 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:

Tutor’s Signature:

Date:

Date:

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center’s website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, [access@mtsac.edu](mailto:access@mtsac.edu), (909) 274-4290.

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