

MECHANICS OF WRITING

The following suggestions are presented as a guide to writing and an as in avoiding some of the most common mistakes.

- Paragraph structure: Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that provides an overall understanding of the paragraph. Since each paragraph should have a single theme or conclusion, the topic sentence states that theme or conclusion.
- Sentence length: Sentences should be kept as short as possible so that their structure is simple and readable. Long sentences require complex construction, provide an abundance of opportunity for grammatical errors, take considerable writing time, and slow the reader down. Long sentences are often the result of putting together two independent thoughts that could be stated better in a separate sentence.
- Pronouns: There is no room for any ambiguity between a pronoun and the noun for which it is used. Novice commonly use "it", "this", "that", etc., where it would be better to use one of several nouns. It may be clear to the writer, but it is often ambiguous to the reader. In general, Personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, my, mine, our, us) are not used in technical reports.
- Spellings and punctuation: Errors in these basic elements of writing in the final draft of the report are inexcusable.
- Tense: use the following rules when choosing the tense of the verb:
 - Past tense: Use to describe work done when you are building or designing a sentence, or in general to the past events.
 - Present tense: Use in reference to items and ideas in the report itself.
 - Future tense: Use in making prediction from the data or results that will be applicable in the future.
- Error-free writing entails more than using good grammar. The *mechanics of writing* specifies how words should be used when printed, whereas *grammar* reflects the form of words and their relationships within a sentence.
- Presentation Style: Unlike the advertising executive, the engineer is ill-equipped to sell his ideas. Second hand information represented by the company officials may not answer all clients' questions.
- Productions and conclusions are important components of any essay. They work to book-end the argument made in the body paragraphs by first explaining what points will be made (in the introduction) and then summarizing what points were made (in the conclusion).

Introduction and conclusion

Introduction

An introduction is typically the first paragraph of your paper. The goal of your introduction is to let your reader know what he or she can expect from your paper. While there is no one formula for writing a good introduction, in general, an introduction should do the following:

1. Attract the Reader's Attention

Begin your introduction with a "hook" that grabs your reader's attention and introduces the general topic. Here are some suggestions on how to create a "hook":

- State an interesting fact or statistic about your topic.
- Ask a rhetorical question.
- Reveal a common misconception about your topic.
- Set the scene of your story: who, when, where, what, why, how?
- Share an anecdote (a humorous short story) that captures your topic.

2. State Your Focused Topic

After your "hook", write a sentence or two about the specific focus of your paper. What is your paper about? Why is this topic important? This part of the introduction can include background information on your topic that helps to establish its context.

3. State your Thesis

Finally, include your thesis statement. The kind of thesis you include depends on the type of paper you are writing, but, in general, your thesis should include:

- your specific topic
- your main point about that topic
- the points of discussion you will include in your paper

Conclusions

A conclusion works to remind your reader of the main points of your paper and summarizes what you want your reader to "take away" from your discussion. Consider these tips when writing your conclusion:

- Begin with your rephrased thesis statement to remind your reader of the point of your paper.
- Summarize the points you made in your paper and show how they support your argument; tie all the pieces of your paper together.
- Tell your reader what the significance of your argument might be. Why is the discussion important? Do you want your reader to think differently, question something, or perform some action? Make a recommendation of what your reader should "do" with the information you just gave them, or share the importance of the topic.

Capitalization

Writers tend to err on the side of too much capitalization. The chief reason to capitalize a word is that it is *proper* - not because the word has greater status than other words. A *proper noun* identifies a specific member of a class, whereas a *common noun* denotes either the whole class or any random member of the class. For example, King Henry VIII (a particular member of a class) was a king of England (the class itself).

Contractions

You can't write naturally without using contractions, but:

- Don't overuse them.
- Avoid obscure contractions and nonstandard usages and regionalisms.

mustn't
mightn't
shan't
"ain't"
"don't" to mean "does not"

- Never create your own contractions.
- Use "it's" correctly. "It's" is the contraction of "it is." "Its" is the possessive of "it."

It's the correct contraction to use.

Its features are many.

- Likewise, use "you're" correctly. "You're" is the contraction of "you are." "Your" is a possessive adjective.

You're looking at the data entry window.

Check the settings on your modem.

Numbers and Numerals

A *number* is a characteristic that describes a unit within a collection. A number is expressed by *numerals* (1, 2, 3, 4) or by words. *Cardinal numbers* use words such as "one, two, three," while *ordinal numbers* use words such as "first, second, third."