

The Scream List — Checklist for your papers.

Make sure you check you paper for these issues as they are the little things that really chip away at your writing (as well as your paper grade).

Content :

1. Do you follow a logical form of organization in your paper (3 is the magic number—assertion, evidence, importance)
2. If you make an assertion, do you provide evidence to support it? If you provide evidence, do you explain its importance to your argument? Do you make it clear how this assertion helps to support your overall thesis?
3. Can you clearly identify your thesis statement? If you are using critical sources to prove your argument, make sure you ask yourself “How does my argument differ from the argument I am citing to support my argument?”

Format:

1. Is your paper in MLA Format? (name, professor’s name, course/class, date— page numbers, proper margins, proper spacing, works cited page, proper font and font-size, paragraph length, no extra spaces or gaps)
2. Are your quotes and textual evidence formatted and cited properly? —
“This is a sample quote” (Hughes 121). OR Stephens states that “Chopin likes to watch television” (123).
3. Have you put your sources in proper MLA format on your works cited page? (Remember, web pages are not allowed as sources. Use articles from Library Databases, printed journals, or books instead).

Style:

Are you following the writing style rules?

1. No first or second person language (I, you, we, us, our, etc).
2. No contractions
3. No sentence fragments
4. No rhetorical questions
5. Avoid the vague “this” / put a noun after vague words to anchor them
6. Avoid the passive voice / minimize use of “to be” verbs (am, are, is, was, were, be, been)
7. Use transitional expressions to make your writing clearer to your audience and show logical progression of thoughts.
8. No Clichés (avoid overused, semi-vague, hollow, generic phrases).



Grammar —

1. Did you proofread your paper (not just spellcheck it)?
2. Do not end sentences with prepositions.
3. Gerunds take possessives.
4. Do not split infinitives.
5. Proper punctuation, capitalization, no comma splices, run-on sentences, etc.

REMEMBER YOUR COMMA RULES! This is the biggest Grammar/Punctuation error students make.

Top Three: Independent Clauses separated by coordinating conjunction.

Items in a series

When a dependent clause is at the front of a sentence (introductory material to the independent clause)

DO NOT SIMPLY PUT COMMAS WHERE YOU WOULD TAKE A BREATH OR PAUSE—WRITING IS NOT TALKING!

6. Are the titles typed correctly? *Italics* if it is a book or journal, “Quotations” if it is an article or chapter or short story.
7. Did you type your numbers correctly? One or two- word numbers are spelled out. Numbers that are more than two words are written as the number. Any number from Twenty-one or higher is hyphenated (unless it is one word). But be consistent within categories (for example, “The 7 Students joined the other 375 students in reading the two books).
8. Do pronouns and nouns agree? Do subjects and verbs agree?
9. Things take “that” / People take “who.” Carry over infinites for parallel structure (infinitives act as one word).
10. Use more formal versions of words (children, mother, father, grandfather.....not kids, mom, dad, grandpa, etc). Use “much” or “Many” instead of “a lot.”

1. Gerunds take possessives
2. Do not use exclamation marks—your paper is supposed to be neutral, formal, and analytic.
3. Apostrophes are only for contractions and possession—they do not show plural.
4. Never use “etc.” in your paper...it gives the reader the impression that there are more details to your argument, but you do not feel like listing them.
5. Dashes are two hypens--with no spaces between. In word it will auto correct to an Em-dash —
6. Make sure you ask yourself if what you are writing answers the essay question or assignment—you are not allowed to answer an assignment you wish was assigned just because it is easier to do so. You have to ask yourself, “is what I am arguing an answer to the assignment?” If the answer is “kinda, sorta, maybe, or no” then you need to rethink your organization and content.
7. Never use the word “nowadays.”
8. Master the simple art of parallel structure in your writing.
9. If you use the phrase “not only” you must eventually follow it with “but also”
10. People get “who,” things get “that”
11. Do not split infinitives
12. Always make sure to carry over the preposition with parallel structure and infinitives: for example
Bad – “They have the right to vote and dance at prom.”
Good – “They have the right to vote and to dance at prom”
Good – “ I fight for truth, for justice, and for the American way”
13. Inanimate objects cannot own things. You do not say “the car’s radio”, you say “the radio of the car”
14. When using quotation marks, use two, not one-- “hello” – not ‘hello’: single quotes are for quotes in quotes-- “Billy was walking down the street and said, ‘hello.’”
15. Inanimate things cannot own other things. If it is not or was not ever alive, then do not make it own things (“the plot of the story,” not “the story’s plot”)
16. Multiple plural words have plural on the first word, not the last (“points of view” “brothers in law”)
17. The phrase is “ a couple of” – such as “in the last couple of songs, there is a good one” – do not leave the “of” out. You do it in speaking sometimes, but it is not correct.
18. When using research, direct quotes are the strongest form of evidence. Paraphrasing all of your researched evidence makes your paper look like you are “faking it”. Paraphrase long or major big ideas, but always use a little bit of quote to demonstrate that it is genuine research and not a glancing sloppy reference.
19. Never begin and end with a simple direct quote—the first and last words of an essay should always be your own. Even if you start with a quote, introduce it first, or explain it when you conclude with it.
20. When using a quote that is more than 4 complete lines in your paper, you must indent them and use MLA formatting for longer quotes. However, you should minimize this to no more than once (if at all) in shorter papers (4 pages or less).
21. When talking about the theme of a story, never just reduce it to one simple word. If the theme is “innocence,” the first question your reader asks is “well, what about innocence?” answer that and make it clear in the into. Simply going to a one-word theme is oversimplifying the issue, and stunts your argument.