

Formal Writing

“Do’s and Don’t’s”

Do’s

1. Write about literature in the PRESENT tense and use the ACTIVE voice.
2. Use a formal voice when writing paragraphs and essays.
3. Write one and two digit numbers out in full. However, numbers with three digits can be written numerically. **Example:** fifty-two, one hundred, twenty, seven, two thousand, 203, 2002. **Exceptions:** dates and time (May 7, 2005 at 3:00).
4. Vary vocabulary and make sure each word in the sentence expresses your thoughts descriptively.
5. Be concise. Avoid unnecessary words in a sentence (wordiness).
6. Choose words carefully. Ask yourself: “is this the perfect word, or is there a better, more descriptive word to use?”
7. Pay attention to word usage. Know the difference between the following tricky words:

a) there/their/ they’re	b) hear/here	c) choose/chose/choice
d) new/knew	e) know/now	f) to/too/two
g) hole/whole	h) thought/taught	i) threw/through/thorough
8. Use transition words and phrases to help your writing flow smoothly.
Examples: Thus, therefore, consequently, in addition, furthermore.
9. Reread your paper to make sure your writing has unity and coherence.
10. Make a point and take a stand! Do not say “I think, or “maybe.” These words suggest that you are afraid to argue your point. Don’t be scared!
11. Incorporate quotes within your sentence.
12. Provide support for your argument. Quote and cite examples from literature, the media, or from personal experience. (See style sheet for citation techniques).
13. Vary quote introductions. Avoid continually saying: “he says,” “she says.”
14. Check your spelling and grammar! Please note the following corrections:
A lot = two words. Each other = two words.
15. Reread the topic / question to make sure it has been fully discussed.
16. Make several drafts: outline, rough copy, and good copy etc.

Don't's

1. Don't use colloquial language. These are words used in everyday, informal speech and therefore, not appropriate for formal writing.
2. Don't use words such as "thing" and "stuff." These are VAGUE terms that don't adequately express what you mean.
3. Don't use contractions. Write words out in full. **Example:** do not use "can't," "don't," "shouldn't." Use cannot, do not, should not.
4. Don't use symbols. **Example:** (& or +). Write these words out in full.
5. Don't use abbreviations. Write the word out in full. **Example:** T.V. = television
6. Don't be repetitive and vague. **For instance:** "a group of people attacked another group of people and many people died." This is monotonous, unclear, and repetitive.
7. Don't use the words such as, "get" and "got."
8. Don't use words such as, "I," or "me" when writing persuasively.
9. Don't use the word "you." Use "one" instead, or reword the sentence. Otherwise you are referring directly to the reader. (This is informal and it may be rather insulting).
10. Don't write short choppy sentences. Formal writing should not sound like a list. Varied sentence length and structure makes the paper easier to read and more enjoyable. It also shows intelligence and reveals creativity.
11. Don't ask questions in formal writing. Your job is to answer all possible questions. Besides, the reader can't answer - it is not a conversation.
12. Don't state the obvious. **Example:** This paragraph..., this quote....
13. Don't summarize the quote beforehand. **Example:** Benvolio tells the fools to part when they are fighting. For example, he says, "part fools! Put up your swords, you know not what you do" (I.ii.55-56).
14. Don't write boring titles! Please start off on the right foot and intrigue me.
15. Don't repeat your topic sentence in your concluding sentence.
16. Don't forget to ask for your teacher's help!