

Writing Assistant Conference Report “Copy and Paste” Advice

(by Leah Becker, 2014)

(A compilation of individual paragraphs WAs can paste into conference reports for efficient and informative responses, depending on specific student needs.)

Introduction to Conf. Report

Here are some reminders as to what we went over during our session to help you as you finish up your assignment:

Help for Paper Structure and Parts of Essay

Introduction: Rather than explaining what you are about to do and how you are about to do it, feel free to *allude* to what your paper will include without stating it flat out. You will, of course, state all of these points within the body of your paper, so you don't need to be *as explicit* in your introduction. Try introducing your topic, giving a sentence or two of background information, and then bringing up the problem or question at hand, which will then lead to your thesis.

Thesis: Your thesis should include **WHAT** the author is doing, **HOW** the author is doing it, and **WHY** it matters.

Topic Sentences: Topic Sentences work to bring your paragraphs together. A topic sentence appears at the beginning of each new paragraph and acts as a sign post that 1) reminds your reader where you have just come from (referencing the previous paragraph) and 2) tells the reader where you are going (what is about to come in the new paragraph).

Linking Sentences: Similar to linking your paragraphs with topic sentences, you should also link the sentences within each of your paragraphs. Rather than beginning a whole new point without any context, think of each paragraph as a mini-essay in which all the points should build on one another and always reference each other. You can often link sentences with continuation words showing agreement, disagreement, or a new idea, such as “furthermore,” “on the other hand,” or “in addition.”

Paragraph Fluidity: Paragraphs should function as mini-essays. Like essays, paragraphs require an introduction that prepares the reader for what is to come in the paragraph and how it relates to the previous paragraph (your topic sentence). Next, your paragraph needs a middle that develops your point more in-depth. Finally, your paragraph needs a concluding sentence that summarizes the points you've made. Thus, like an essay, your paragraph forms a full circle and brings the reader to a logical conclusion.

Conclusion: Your conclusion can offer some new ideas but should mostly summarize your paper and tie all of the ideas back to your thesis. Feel free to include larger implications in your conclusion, but do not suggest completely new ideas without developing them earlier in your essay. Also, don't forget your “So What?” aspect!

So What: The “So What” part of your paper not only explains why the piece you are analyzing is important, but also why YOUR paper is important. You have developed a theory or an idea and you need to make sure to tell your reader why it is vital that they take the time and effort to understand that theory. This will give your paper credibility.

Help for Clarity and General Writing Guidelines

Clarifying Confusing Sentences: When you come across a confusing sentence that is too long or unclear, try stepping back from your computer and talking out loud to yourself. Start off saying (out loud!), “what I’m trying to say is...” and then finish the sentence. Most of the time how you finish that sentence will be much more coherent than what you currently have written down, so try replacing your confusing sentence with the more concise one you said out loud.

Reorganizing: If you feel like your paper might function better in a different order, just try it! You can always change it back to the way it was before if it goes badly, but trying out a new order now and then can help you gain perspective on your paper. I recommend doing the reorganizing in a completely new word document so that you always have the original if you need it.

Show vs. Tell: When writing narrative pieces it is important to show rather than tell. In order to SHOW readers what you’re talking about you need to use examples from which readers can draw their own conclusions. Your examples will lead them to these conclusions, but in a more interesting way than if you simply stated the point of your story flat out in a single sentence. Try to show as much as possible, rather than telling.

Incorporating Background Information: When it comes to incorporating background information into your paper there are two main ways to do so: with a background paragraph just after your introduction, or by sprinkling such information throughout your intro and body paragraphs when necessary.

Integrated quotations: Don’t forget to surround your quotations with context and introduce them as part of your own sentence. Instead of giving context and then simply providing the quotation, try giving the context along with a lead-in, such as, “as seen when X states, _____,” or “illustrated when X declares, _____” and then providing the quotation. Furthermore, you should also follow up your quotations with more explanation, proving that you truly understand the passage you used and stopping your reader from interpreting the quotation in a way that is contrary to your point.

Quotations Marks & Punctuation: Don’t forget that your periods and commas, etc. go INSIDE the quotation marks.

Block Quotations: Use block quotation formatting when quotations are longer than 4 lines. Also, remember that these quotations require extra analysis since they do not have as much context as to your own interpretation and your reader might not immediately understand your usage.

Grammar Help

Passive Voice: Passive voice occurs when the subject of your sentence is the *recipient* of action, rather than the *doer* of action. For example, “the student wrote a paper about dogs” is an ACTIVE sentence because it has an agent/subject (the student) doing an action (wrote) and another thing receiving the action (a paper about dogs). However, “a paper about dogs was written” is a PASSIVE sentence because the recipient of the action (the paper about dogs) is also the subject of the sentence. Thus, there is no subject or agent doing the writing! The active sentence is the one you want for English papers (passive is reserved for science and philosophy), so make sure that an agent conducts all of the action in your sentence.

Oxford Comma: An Oxford Comma, while highly debated, is often still necessary to clarify a sentence with a list of things. Without putting a comma before the last item on your list, a sentence could mistakenly read, “I am going to dinner with my dad, boyfriend and brother,” meaning that you are, in fact, dating your brother. However, if you add the Oxford Comma the sentence reads, “I am going to dinner with my dad, boyfriend, and brother,” indicating that your boyfriend and brother are two different people. Don’t forget your Oxford Commas!

Them vs. He/She: When you are referring to a genderless singular entity (the student) then you cannot refer to the student as “they/them,” or things belonging to the student as “their _____.” for this references a plural number of students, rather than a single student. Instead, try referring to the student as he/she, simply picking one gender or the other, or trying out the most modern solution: s/he. Thus, you could refer to the student’s lunch as “his/her lunch,” but not “their lunch.”

Semi-colon vs. Colon: Semi-Colons are used when combining two independent clauses (two clauses that could form their own sentences) without using a comma or words like “and” or “but.” Colons, however, are used when you are about to define something (“He only had one thing: a death wish”), or before lists (“I have three favorite foods: pizza, chocolate, and peanut butter”).

Tense: When discussing events that happen within a literary text, always use the present tense, since the events happen in the present as you read them. However, if discussing history or other subjects in which things *actually* take place in the past, use past tense.

Commas: Don’t forget to include commas after introductory clauses and when placing interjections into your sentences.

Define Ambiguous Words: make sure to define words like “this,” “it,” etc. by instead stating “this theory,” or “the quotation.” This adds clarity to your paper.

Philosophy Advice for Clarity

General Philosophy Advice: Be explicit. Philosophy professors want to make sure that you understand the philosophical concepts, and thus it is sometimes more important to write a

clear and concise paper than to write a super complicated one. Ways to further clarify your writing include eliminating unneeded and excess words or sentences, reading your paper out loud and noticing which confusing sentences might trip you up, and making sure to always bring your reader back to your main thesis at the beginning and/or end of each paragraph.