

## TOP 10 WAYS to be an improved college writer using the SSC English Rubric

I know how hard you all work on your papers, so I'm confident you'll care about improving and incorporate these ideas into your individual and group writing. I pulled these examples from your first in-class essay rough draft, so we can all improve together.

**1. SAMPLE:** This also encourages us to share our own experiences and struggles. It is never ending.

**ADVICE:** Don't begin a sentence with the words THIS or IT. Instead, be specific about what THIS is. Same thing with IT in most cases – don't begin with IT. Avoid using the pronoun THIS and other vague, non-specific language as much as possible especially at the beginning of sentences. As writers, YOU are in control of every word you choose to use. **Make the most of every word.** Be specific.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Eliminating vague words with descriptive, specific word choice will help you improve in which area of the SSC Rubric?

... Numbers one and two relate to each other ....

**2.** Avoid vague pronouns and use specific names instead wherever possible. Remember, nothing is absolute – not ALL People care about something ... so, tune into who your **audience** really is. Focus on an audience. Ask yourself, "who will care about my paper?" To whom are you really writing? Teens, parents? Other workers?

**AVOID:** People, It, They, Person, One, Oneself, YOU, Yourself, That, This. (YOU is banned! Avoid the rest!

More specific word choice available to you from a peer or from your own brain.)

VAGUE EXAMPLES:

"We can't imagine ourselves doing that, so maybe we can't afford to do what reality stars get to do."

What is "that"? Who are "we"?

"Those people are uninformed. Instead, they should get an education so they can learn what everyone else knows already." Who are "those People"? Who are "They"? Who is "everyone else"?

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Eliminating vague pronouns and replacing them with specific word choice will help you improve in which area of the SSC Rubric?

**3. GREAT, NICE, VERY, GOOD JOB, HELPS, SHOWS ...** Stay away from these unnecessary words in college essays.

Your meal was great. (DULL) Your aunt is a nice lady. (VAGUE) The game was very boring. (DULL) She did a good job on her paper. (VAGUE) Writers help readers understand. (VAGUE) **DULL and non-specific language.**

**Fixes using specific language:** The meal of oysters I consumed at Eadies was flavorful.

My aunt is one of my strongest supporters.

The tennis match was so one-sided, I could not wait for the boredom to cease.

The author wrote an effective analysis.

Writers effectively convey information using description so readers can engage with the visuals.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Eliminating vague word choice and replacing vague, non-specific words with specific word choice will help you improve in which area of the SSC Rubric?

**4.** Also, avoid absolutes like ALWAYS, NEVER, WILL, MUST, WON'T, CAN'T ... Instead, avoid absolutes. Instead, convey possibilities by using SOMETIMES, OFTEN, MAY, COULD, MIGHT, POTENTIALLY, ... see? There are usually never any absolutes in life experiences. So, don't write them into your essays. Other opinions will most often exist, and that's okay. Not being absolute shows you are considering the other side of the argument. College professors are exceptionally knowledgeable in areas about which you will write. The professor reading your document will be open to considering your opinion if you write with possibilities and consider other viewpoints. Your writing should reflect your openness learning more, which will not negate the inclusion of your opinion.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** (Eliminating absolute words and replacing those with the language of possibilities will help you improve in which area of the SSC Rubric?)

Singular			Plural
another	everybody	no one	both
anybody	everyone	nothing	few
anyone	everything	one	many
anything	much	somebody	others
each	neither	someone	several
either	nobody	something	

5. Everyone is entitled to their own beliefs.

Pronoun and antecedent must agree in number and gender.

Correction: Everyone is entitled to his or her own belief. (Everyone is single – there is plural – so they don't agree.)

PROBLEM: **A student** may want to tailor the information **they are** learning to best fit **themselves**, but no one can just erase history or forget a fact.

FIX: **A student** may want to tailor the information **he or she is** learning to best fit **him or herself**, but no one can just erase history or forget a fact.

## Antecedents

*The astronaut could not remember where he parked.*

Can you spot the pronoun in this sentence? You may remember learning that a **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of or refers to a noun. A **noun** is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea. Pronouns basically help us avoid saying the same nouns over and over. In our example sentence, the word 'he' is a pronoun that takes the place of the noun 'astronaut'. Without the pronoun in this sentence, we'd have to say, *The astronaut could not remember where the astronaut parked.*

There's a special grammatical term that we use to name the word 'astronaut' in this sentence, beyond just calling it 'the noun.' In this sentence, 'astronaut' is an antecedent. An **antecedent** is the word a pronoun replaces or refers to. Any time that you have a pronoun, you'll have an antecedent, even if it's not in the very same sentence. This makes sense; if we didn't have an antecedent for every pronoun, we'd be left with a lot of confusion.

## PRONOUNS

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Which SSC rubric element would a stronger proficiency with your singular / plural antecedent agreement help you improve?

**6. WHO or THAT?** I prefer to use WHO for people and THAT for things or concepts if you must use WHO or THAT in the first place.

**PROBLEM:** A student is a person **that** is engaged in learning, studying, or investigating.

**FIX 1 :** A student is a person **who** is engaged in learning, studying or investigating.

**FIX 2 (EVEN BETTER):** Also, consider if you even NEED to use the word, THAT or WHO. Wouldn't the sentence sound just fine if you wrote, "A student is engaged in learning, studying or investigating"?

**REVISION eliminates unnecessary words.** I Recommend you revise for clarity.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Which SSC rubric element would knowing when to use who/whom or that help you improve?

7. A paragraph should have one idea in it followed by evidence. Student writers should explain the evidence in additional sentences so you're answering the SO WHAT? question. The paragraph should relate directly to the thesis sentence and contain evidence proving your thesis to be true. AVOID THE THREE-PRONGED THESIS for THIS CLASS and FOR COLLEGE WRITING. Instead, possibly focus on ONE of the specific ideas in the "three prongs" if you have written the thesis that way, and revise the thesis into one sentence with one idea. Then, write the thesis and focus in depth on that one claim. **Also, a thesis is JUST ONE SENTENCE.**

### Sample Thesis:

A. Whether it's athletes or fans, high school football has a rare power to bring the most diverse group of people together.

Brainstorm / Predict what the paragraphs that follow might contain to prove this thesis to be true. How would the writer restate the claim, then, in the paragraph?

7. (continued)

**Sample Thesis:**

B. I believe that high school students should pursue part-time jobs because of the required perseverance, balance of responsibilities and expanded perspective achieved by such an experience.

Change this thesis into a thesis with just ONE strong claim and ONE main purpose. Then, what would you expect would be incorporated into the next paragraphs? Which area would be the best focus for an essay? Think of what specific examples or rhetorical tools could be used for the paper.

More on the **SO WHAT ?** Question. Remember, you're making a claim in your paper of some kind. You're reflecting and wanting your reader to get your meaning and your message. So, as an improving writer, you'll have to come out and tell the reader your meaning throughout your paper. You will control your paragraphs and include reminders of why the example you just gave relates to your thesis.

**Here's an example:** *Having a part-time job is the best way for full-time high school students to learn monetary responsibility.* (Thesis)

**Paragraph 1** – Main idea about responsibility = Responsible money management using a **budget**. Topic sentence.

Then, content in paragraph 1 will be rhetorical tool choices – examples / scenarios, your testimony ... choices. Vivid Details about the importance of a high school student to budget.

In **Paragraph 1** – Restate the paragraph's idea about **budget** and money responsibility.

*"Money management as an adult takes responsibility, so a part-time job is a perfect starting point for a student needing to learn **to budget**."* << This is the SO WHAT? Phrase. See how it ties to the thesis? Includes part-time job and reflects the paragraph topic of money management.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Having a descriptive paragraph including the **SO WHAT?** factor encourages student writers improvement which topic in the SSC English Rubric?

8. An essay is much more powerful when the topic is narrow and interesting (therefore avoiding English). When an essay author writes about ideas already known to the general public, the essay is lifeless and dull. Restating the obvious about a topic without a point of contact, deep analysis, public resonance (a specific audience in mind), and an interesting introduction is critical for success in college writing.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Which SSC rubric element having a narrow, interesting, focused topic that is not restating obvious information help you improve?

9. Use transition words and phrases: *However, in contrast, in addition to, for example, furthermore, also, ...* See the full handout. (These are mostly absent from your rough draft essay #1.) How would reading a paper using appropriate transition words and phrases aid your reader's understanding of your content? Would the paper flow better for the reader?

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Which SSC rubric element of using transition words to help guide the reader through your essay would help you improve upon?

10. Avoid using too many rhetorical questions in your writing. Consider how you as an author could get a reader involved in your point or to consider his or her own point of view without using a host of rhetorical questions. There are stylistic moments, especially in narrative writing, where a rhetorical question might make sense. However, avoid multiple rhetorical questions in one paper. **HINT:** Try rewriting the rhetorical question as a strong statement instead.

**SAMPLE:** If the government can't take care of its people, who will?

**Statement:** The government should either take care of its own people or enable smaller organizations to do the job.

**NOW, LOOK AT THE SSC RUBRIC** Which SSC rubric element of avoiding rhetorical questions in your writing would help you improve upon?

## English Department Rubric

### **“A” Paper**

The writer maintains a clear thesis, focus, or controlling idea.

The writer demonstrates a clear understanding of the assignment and its requirements.

The paper is unified, coherent, and organized.

The details of the paper are relevant, vivid, and explicit, and provide ideas/information in depth.

Sources cited are credible, appropriate to the content, and formatted accurately.

The paper employs a tone that is reflective of its purpose and audience.

The paper contains few spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics, format, and/or documentation errors.

Departures from convention appear intentional and appropriate.

### **“B” Paper**

The writer strays minimally from a clear thesis, focus, or controlling idea.

The writer demonstrates a mostly clear understanding of the assignment and its requirements.

The paper contains few lapses in unity, coherence and organization.

The details are relevant and develop ideas/information with some depth and vividness.

Most sources cited are credible, appropriate to the content, and formatted accurately.

The paper employs a tone that is usually reflective of its purpose and audience.

Some spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics, format, and/or documentation errors exist.

Departures from convention appear intentional and appropriate.

### **“C” Paper**

The writer does not consistently support a thesis, focus, or controlling idea.

The writer demonstrates adequate understanding of the assignment and its requirements.

The paper contains some lapses in unity or coherence within the organizational structure.

The details adequately develop ideas/information.

Some of the sources cited are credible, appropriate to the content, and formatted accurately.

The paper employs a tone that inconsistently reflects its purpose and audience.

Numerous spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics, format, and/or documentation errors distract the reader.

### **“D” Paper**

The writer does not make the thesis, focus, or controlling idea clear.

The writer demonstrates minimal understanding of the assignment and its requirements.

The paper displays significant lapses in unity and coherence that impact organization.

Details lack elaboration, are merely listed, or are repetitious.

Few of the sources cited are credible, appropriate to the content, or formatted accurately.

The paper lacks a tone that reflects its purpose and audience.

Errors in spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics, format, and/or documentation interfere with the reader’s understanding of the paper.

### **“F” Paper**

The writer does not employ a thesis, focus, or controlling idea.

The writer demonstrates very little, if any, understanding of the assignment and its requirements.

The paper contains serious breaks in unity and coherence that impact organization.

Details are minimal, inappropriate, or random.

The sources cited are not credible, appropriate to the content, or formatted accurately.

The paper lacks a tone that reflects its purpose and audience.

Errors in spelling, grammar, usage, mechanics, format, and/or documentation seriously interfere with the reader’s understanding of the paper.