

# English 96

## What to Avoid and What to Do

### What to Do

- Look through your first three essays and pick one to revise. The one you pick to revise might not be the best right now, but it should be the essay you feel you can make the best.
- Look at my comments on the first draft and see me if you are unsure how to proceed. Virtually all students will need to develop their ideas further, mainly by being more specific, by explaining the relationship between ideas, and by using specific examples to illustrate key ideas (remember cases?). See the handout “Developing an Essay,” for more on development.
- Use the text. The text is your friend. Use it to provide specific evidence of a claim you are making, as the “voice of authority” supporting your claim, or to provide yourself with someone to argue against.
- When you have completed your revision, attach the earlier draft to the back of the revision, and attach the essay topic sheet to the back of the earlier draft (if it is not already there).

### What to Avoid

Here is a short list of writing problems to avoid:

- Avoid contractions. Formal usage forbids the use of contractions, and besides it just sounds better without contractions. For example compare these two sentences:

*With Contractions:* Gottlieb’s right, but he should’ve also tried to consider other points of view because it’s only fair to do so.

*Without Contractions:* Gottlieb is right, but he should have also tried to consider other points of view because it is only fair to do so.

- Avoid “I” statements that weaken your argument. Phrases like “I believe,” “I think,” “The way I see it,” “It seems to me,” and so on, all imply that the statement that follows is *only* your opinion as opposed to being an argued position or a statement of fact. For example, the following statement is weak:

I think people in Los Angeles are right to worry about toxic waste dumps in their neighborhoods.

If you simply leave off the “I” part, the statement is much stronger:

People in Los Angeles are right to worry about toxic waste dumps in their neighborhoods.

Alternatively to leaving off the “I” phrase is to rephrase the sentence to give it some persuasive power as in the following:

Most readers agree that toxic waste dumps in their neighborhoods are a serious problem.

Who would not think that neighborhood toxic waste dumps are a serious problem?

- Avoid using “you” when you mean a specific group of people or yourself. Use “I,” or “People,” or “One,” or whatever designation is appropriate. For example, the following statement misuses “you”:

When you look at the test scores, you can understand the problems we face.

In the above sentence, the first “you” really means the writer of the paper. However, to refer to the writer’s own opinion is usually a weak argument. Instead rewrite the sentence to imply that all readers would see the situation in the same way:

When one looks at the test scores, one can understand the problems we face.

A look at the test scores reveals the problems we face.

As the consistently low test scores reveal, we have serious problems.

- Make sure the antecedent to each pronoun is clear. When in doubt use the noun. For example, the following sentences are unclear:

Mike taught Geoff how to live on the streets. He needed this to survive.

In the above sentences, the “He” in the second sentence refers to Mike, but it is obvious from the context that the writer intended “he” to refer to Geoff. These sentences could be rewritten as the following:

Mike taught Geoff how to live on the streets. Geoff needed this to survive.

- Avoid “telegraphing” the structure of your essay. In other words, avoid using phrases like “In this essay,” “My thesis is,” “My next example,” and so on. The arrangement of your ideas should follow your argument, and the connection between your ideas should be argued not assumed.

### Integrating Text (Proper Quotation Techniques)

When working with someone else’s words, often it is necessary to directly quote those words (place in quotation marks). There are good and bad ways to do this. Every effort should be made to integrate the quoted text into your own sentences. Sometimes, you will even need to make slight changes in the quoted text to make it match the grammar of your own writing. Shown below is an example of non-integrated text, adequately integrated text and well-integrated text:

<b>Bad</b>	<b>Adequate (barely)</b>	<b>Good</b>
“By 2001, some schools housed nearly twice the number of students they had been designed to teach.” This shows that schools in Los Angeles were very crowded.	According to Gottlieb, “By 2001, some schools housed nearly twice the number of students they had been designed to teach” (116). This shows that schools in Los Angeles were overcrowded and not getting any better.	According to Gottlieb, “By 2001, some schools housed nearly twice the number of students they had been designed to teach” (116), suggesting that despite promises to fix the problem overcrowding had actually increased rather than decreased.

In addition, you should avoid using long quotations. Use the appropriate “bits” and “pieces” to make your point. Remember, that you determine the text you feel you need to quote.