

# Black Belt College Writing Skills

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## Workbook



Please use these lessons with the videos in the Black Belt College Writing Skills course

### UNIT 1. How to Read and Respond to Assignments

*Highlight or underline the verbs in these sample assignments.  
Then follow the exercise below each sample. Repeat this process  
for each of your own writing assignments.*

### Sample Assignment 1

To what extent would you say that the psychological profiles we studied this term are visible in the people you know?

List the core verbs in the assignment:

Source materials for this assignment (circle all that apply):

Course readings                      Readings I find                      My life/observations

Questions to ask yourself:

- Am I being asked to assess or evaluate something?
- Am I being asked to evaluate something on a continuum or figure out to what extent something is true?
- Am I being asked to analyze something?
- Am I being asked to reflect on my own empirical observations or experience?
- Am I being asked for an argument and evidence?
- Am I being asked for an opinion?
- Am I being asked to show comprehension of a text?
- Am I being asked to apply a concept or theory to a specific example?
- Am I being asked to describe or report on something?

### Sample Assignment 2

Collect and summarize 3 articles related to a course reading of your choosing. Then do an analysis of that reading using the three articles as a framework.

List the core verbs in the assignment:

Source materials for this assignment (circle all that apply):

Course readings                      Readings I find                      My life/observations

Questions to ask yourself:

- Am I being asked to assess or evaluate something?
- Am I being asked to evaluate something on a continuum or figure out to what extent something is true?
- Am I being asked to analyze something?
- Am I being asked to reflect on my own empirical observations or experience?
- Am I being asked for an argument and evidence?
- Am I being asked for an opinion?
- Am I being asked to show comprehension of a text?
- Am I being asked to apply a concept or theory to a specific example?
- Am I being asked to describe or report on something?

### Sample Assignment 3

Based on the scholarly articles over the last 5 years, what is your assessment of how privacy studies has evolved in that time?

List the core verbs in the assignment:

Source materials for this assignment (circle all that apply):

Course readings                      Readings I find                      My life/observations

Questions to ask yourself:

- Am I being asked to assess or evaluate something?
- Am I being asked to evaluate something on a continuum or figure out to what extent something is true?
- Am I being asked to analyze something?
- Am I being asked to reflect on my own empirical observations or experience?
- Am I being asked for an argument and evidence?
- Am I being asked for an opinion?
- Am I being asked to show comprehension of a text?
- Am I being asked to apply a concept or theory to a specific example?
- Am I being asked to describe or report on something?

### Sample Assignment 4

Conduct a thirty-minute observation of a public space on campus at three different times and then thoroughly describe how the space is used and by whom. Analyze how the layout of the space and the “furniture” (indoor or outdoor) affect the way people use the space.

List the core verbs in the assignment:

Source materials for this assignment (circle all that apply):

Course readings                      Readings I find                      My life/observations

Questions to ask yourself:

- Am I being asked to assess or evaluate something?
- Am I being asked to evaluate something on a continuum or figure out to what extent something is true?
- Am I being asked to analyze something?
- Am I being asked to reflect on my own empirical observations or experience?
- Am I being asked for an argument and evidence?
- Am I being asked for an opinion?
- Am I being asked to show comprehension of a text?

\_\_\_ Am I being asked to apply a concept or theory to a specific example?

\_\_\_ Am I being asked to describe or report on something?

*Use this process for assignments you receive in every class.*

## Quick List: Common Words to Use in Different Assignment Types

*Different genres of academic writing “attract” words that represent different modes of thinking and knowing.*

Reflection	Analysis/Argument	Describe/Report	Evaluate
Explore Ponder Realize Understand Appreciate Recognize	Consider Investigate Argue Propose Suggest Submit Make the case Apply	Finds Observe See Notice (who, what, where, when, why) Data/Statistics	More—less Better—worse Effective—ineffective Useful—not useful

## Quick List: Opinion vs. Evaluative Language

*When doing evaluation, be careful to use responsible evaluative language. Keep this list handy to distinguish between opinion/editorial language and acceptable evaluative language.*

<b>OPINION (avoid)</b>	<b>EVALUATION (use)</b>
Like/Dislike Feel that	Useful Applicable

Great, cool, wonderful	Credible
Awful, bad, terrible	Impressive/Unimpressive
Useless	Lacking in
Forgettable	Significant
Insignificant	Important
Pitch-perfect	Seminal
Perfect	Sound/Unsound
Trivial	Persuasive
Nice	Suspect
	Definitive, foundational
Prescriptive language ( <i>do not use in place of analysis; should be used only if asked for recommendations</i> ):	Elegant
Should	Valuable
Must	Credible
Ought to	Flawed

*Are these sentences appropriate or inappropriate for an academic paper?*

Smith and Jones conduct a useful study that gives us insight into the relationship between class size and student performance.

Brown's study, while cool in design, yielded findings that are basically lame.

School districts must allocate more resources to teacher training.

Smith's foundational study provided credible evidence for the value of drug treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

## Unit 2. Meaningful Paragraphs

### **Paragraph Length**

*I want you to go through your last few papers and look only at paragraph length. Ignore the contents. Are your paragraphs less than a quarter page? More than three quarters of a page? If so, they are too short or too long. In your next paper, work on aiming for paragraphs of a quarter to a half page (double spaced).*

### **Topic Sentences**

Topic sentences give structure and purpose to paragraphs.

*Read these paragraphs and ask:*

*Does the paragraph have a good topic sentence?*

*Does the paragraph seem to hang together as a self-contained unit?*

### **Sample Paragraph 1**

This may seem dense and off-topic to anyone who read “Security vs. Privacy.” Code is referenced only a few times throughout Bambauer’s paper and it may seem as though I have lost sight of the bigger picture, but I disagree. That is, in my opinion, an incredibly important and severely overlooked idea within Bambauer paper. By making the proper code and security changes, we can limit the harm inflicted on somebody’s data.

### **Sample Paragraph 2**

The way that people experience privacy is unique to each culture. In the U.S. people tend to place a high value on personal privacy, whereas other cultures place more value on group belonging and communication. As people raised in one culture, we cannot fully know what it is like to experience privacy norms in

another culture. Crussi writes, “We are largely what others think we are. The gaze of the Other shapes the very core of our person” (p. 127). But we could also say that we are shaped by how we see others.

### **Sample Paragraph 3**

I would order cat food from Amazon and seconds later my Facebook would be full of cat food ads. At first I did not even bother to make a correlation between these, but after I began to do some research, I began to become more aware of how corporations were handling my purchases. Anita Allen and I could agree on the importance of awareness when being an online consumer. She states: “U.S. corporations treat personal consumer data as a mere commodity to be aggressively collected, bought, and sold. The purpose of the ‘data’ market is to enable us to satisfy our preferences efficiently” (p. 1191). Much of my data is collected and stored so that I can be satisfied by what I need. They're able to do this because of my constant desire for instant gratification. When I'm shopping online it is convenient for me to have the webpage already know what I might want, it makes the process easier, but at the same time that is the corporation showing me what they want, or are being paid to show. Other companies can use my collected data to better guess what the trending markets are for my future investment for their products. This might seem convenient and awesome, but with this information they can also try to shift what I might want to buy, by only showing me what the company wants me to see.

## **Unit 3. Introductions**

*I want you to go back to the four assignment samples in the first unit, and write practice introductions with advanced organizers for each one. Explain what the paper will do. Make up text names and other details if you like.*

*Read these sample introductions. After reading them, do you have a clear idea of what the paper is about and what it will do?*

*When you're done with these samples, look at the introductions for the last three papers you've written. If someone read only the introduction, would they know what your paper was going to be about and what texts would be referenced?*

### **Sample Introduction 1**

Throughout the past term, privacy has pervaded my life like never before. Or rather, the intrusiveness has always been there though until this term I hadn't been aware enough to realize it. This paper will be a reflection on my own ideas, values, and behaviors that have grown out of the class, both based on the texts inherent to that class, as well as my own pre-existing ideas and thoughts.

### **Sample Introduction 2**

The digital age can be hard to understand for those who were not born recently enough to grow up surrounded by Internet culture as I was. In this essay I intend to account for the privacy values that I hold as American millennial in comparison with other generations. First I will use "The Privacy of Technology and the Technology of Privacy" by Koen Raes as a contrast to my own views of privacy and Western life. Secondly, I will use the account of American life found in "On Privacy" by F. Gonzalez-Crussi to define privacy ideals of American millennials. Finally, I will analyze "Gender and Privacy in Cyberspace" by Anita Allen as a Piece of literature on the sexual and technological habits of millennials from the perspective of the baby boomer. This account will not only help to clarify what my values are but will also include a justification of those values, and my interpretations of their importance.

### **Sample Introduction 3**

Privacy is undoubtedly a highly controversial topic in the world today. This class has done an outstanding job of deeply exploring different aspects and issues surrounding privacy. This class has definitely changed my opinion on privacy.



## Unit 4. Generalize Responsibly

While generalizations are necessary, overgeneralizing weakens your argument and credibility. Make the most specific generalization you can.

*Identify whether these statements are responsible generalizations or overgeneralizations.*

As humans, we don't want to be told what to do.

In a constantly evolving modern society, we are often forced to make decisions that impact our privacy.

Everyone accepts that celebrities are subject to paparazzi.

Many people feel uncomfortable knowing that the government is accessing their email and phone data.

Privacy is a very important thing for everyone to have.

*Now check your own recent papers for overgeneralization.*

**Avoid grounding arguments in “truisms” or universal truths. Red flags include the following:**

Everyone knows...

It's obvious that...

It goes without saying that...

**Quick List: Words for Making Qualified Arguments**

Often

Frequently

Sometimes

Mostly

Almost

Nearly  
In most/many cases

## Unit 5. I, You, They

The use of “person” in writing refers to first person (I, we), second person (you), and third person (he, she, they). It’s important to stay in one person per sentence in academic writing.

*Look at these sentences, and then correct them so that they stay in one person.*

This is a pedagogy that helps students develop the daily habits of reading and writing, which will help us with a lifetime of literacy independence.

The suburbs however, is a place of responsibility, where one raises a family and owns their own home.

I think of privacy as the personal information one is able to keep to themselves.

One does not want to be surveilled, but they do want to be protected.

A VPN can be used to make yourself appear to be in a different location, such as in Virginia, even though I am in Oregon.

### **First Person**

The use of first person (I) is becoming more common in academic writing, but it is still not universally accepted. Your best bet is to check with your professors and follow their preferences. Here are some first-person and third-person options.

In this paper, I explore the issue of...

This paper explores the question of...

### Examples:

For this project, I observed the quad during three different times of day.

The researcher observed the quad during three different times of day.

The quad was observed during three different times of day. [I dislike the use of passive voice as it obscures the do-er of the action, but some science fields prefer it].

### **Avoiding Second Person**

Avoid the use of second person (you) in academic writing. In my experience, when students use “you” they are either talking about themselves, but don’t want to use first-person, or they are generalizing about everyone. The only time one would use first person is to speak directly to the reader. This is extremely rare in academic writing.

*Rewrite these sentences to avoid the use of second person.*

My definition of privacy means that your data is for you and you only.

Just because you have a cellphone does not automatically mean you’re okay with being surveilled.

In the beginning of the play, you feel sorry for her.

## Staying in One Person within a Sentence

*Rewrite these sentences so that they stay in one person.*

They offer introductory pricing to lure you in hopes that one will become addicted to the service.

What if you aren't able or allowed to relocate? Does that impair one's growth?

That is a decision one must make for themselves.

People need privacy and freedom to be able to evolve and one needs to know they can live the life they want without feeling like they are being watched.

## Unit 6. Using Quotations Effectively

### Quick List: Alternatives to “She ” and “He ”

Neutral	Agreement	Disagreement
Writes Asserts Argues Suggests States Notes Offers Believes Thinks Observes Implies Reports Signals (agreement or disagreement) Maintains that	Agrees Extends (as in extending one argument to cover a different situation) Affirms Supports Acknowledges Concedes Endorses Grants that Admits Confirms Mirrors Augments Bolsters Improves	Responds Contrasts Rejects Refutes Disagrees Denies Deconstructs Complicates Unpacks Teases out Explores Uncovers Takes issue with Marshals (as in marshaling evidence to prove a point) Questions Challenges

## Unit 7. Rookie Mistakes You Aren't Gonna Make

### Comma Splice

Quite simply a comma splice is a sentence that joins two independent clauses with a comma but without a conjunction. What is a conjunction? Conjunctions include the little words: **and, nor, but, or, yet, so (ANBOYS)**.

You have two options when fixing a comma splice.

Option 1: Divide and conquer using a period, semicolon, question mark, or exclamation point.

Option 2: Join the independent clauses with a comma and a conjunction (**and, nor, but, or, yet, so**).

*Take a crack at joining or separating these comma splices.*

Every human being needs privacy, how much privacy they need is where the conflict lies.

We went out for Dim Sum, we filled up fast.

At airports, you never see a white male get taken for invasive search, it is almost always a minority.

Wildfires are incredibly damaging, they have happened recently in this county.

Our definitions of privacy are different, we both believe in restricting government access to personal information.

## Contraction Infractions

A contraction joins two words with an apostrophe. Contractions are frequently confused with possessives, which show ownership or belonging.

Memory aid for contractions: Where you see an apostrophe, say both words out loud.

Where there is no apostrophe, think “possessive.”

It’s = it is = contraction

Its = possession

You’re = you are = contraction

Your = possession

They’re = they are = contraction

Their = possession

There = location

We’re = we are = contraction

Were = past tense of the verb “to be”

*Fix the contraction infractions in these sentences.*

I don’t like you’re attitude.

It’s not theres to keep.

Their is no way I’m going home for the holiday.

Were not going to the store.

One of it’s best qualities is drought tolerance.

Your not coming over tonight.

Its not your best song.

That’s not where there going.

## Words That Sound Alike

To: preposition indicating direction or possession

Too: also, in addition

Than: comparison word (more or less)

Then: sequence

Accept: to consent or take on

Except: all but, to exclude or set aside

Effect:

Usually a noun meaning “an impact on.” (The recession had an effect on the economy.)

Occasionally a verb meaning “to bring about change.” (We tried to effect change through the student government.)

Affect:

Usually a verb meaning “to impact.” (Winter colds affect attendance.)

Occasionally a noun meaning one’s emotional appearance. (Her affect remained guarded during the trial.)

*Correct these commonly confused words in these sentences.*

Please except my application letter.

I wanted to go to.

The new principal had a positive affect on the school.

He wanted more then the job offered.

I wanted to affect change within the organization.

The affect of the change was to make me more skeptical.

## Dependent Clauses

Dependent clauses are sentence fragments that need to be joined to another sentence using a comma.

Try your hand at joining these dependent clauses to their sentences.

The company even came out with a few more features for Windows. Which allows users to use the touch screen with all application.

Private businesses have exploited the sensitive data of their customers by selling and using it. While also collecting other personal data.

These days we can trace a person's life online. Unlike in like the old days where you had to find their journals.

Studies have tried to explain the correlation between media and violence. Making me wonder how this could be proven.

Agencies need to be much more strategic about how they view openings and recruitment. Filling positions not just for today's needs but for future needs as well.

### **Don't Write Like You Talk**

Talking and writing are like two dialects of the same language. In academic writing, avoid "colloquial" or idiomatic language as well as oral speech patterns.

Avoid tag phrases such as **as so, well, like, right?**

Underline the colloquial aspects of the following sentences.

I would of gone, "That's not okay."  
 Here is the quote that hit me the hardest.  
 The 1968 film had a neat masquerade ball.  
 Her interpretation was completely out of the box.  
 Let's face it: there is no one right way to read this novel.  
 It boils down to a lack of equality.

Use "that" instead of "how" to describe talking or writing.

He talks on how...



She writes how...  
 He argues how...

## Random things to avoid:

Being as how...

Do not use the word “drastic” or “drastically” unless the events, changes, or other things you are describing are actually momentous, radical, extreme, or sudden.

## Staying in Parallel Sentence Structure

*This means making make sure that verb types and clauses types “work together” or are parallel within the sentence. Things also need to agree in number and (usually) in tense. See you if you can identify and fix the problem in each sentence.*

Readers participate in making meaning of texts, figure out the code of the text, and critically analyzing ideas.

Another concept that Crawford looks at is the idea of “office languages” and this is one with which I agree because through my experience in several different fields of work helps to confirm it.

Yet Taymor manages to balance between neither overwhelming and numbing the audience with gore, while neither buffering them excessively with stylized violence to distance them from the horror of what is happening.

This is a pedagogy that helps students develop the daily habits of reading, writing, vocabulary and work independently which will help them with a life-time of literacy independence.

To go where no man ever came back.

From a sociology point of view, some of the upper-class seems to be somewhat spoiled to where they want to find more within themselves as opposed to personal care for their families.

## Unit 8. Read Your Work Out Loud

No exercises. Just do it. Every time.