

## Common Writing Problems and Inclusive Language

With appreciation to Leslie Andres of Smith and Helwys Publishing.

1. Write on the assigned topic: Strong Thesis Statement
  - a. It tells the reader what your main idea or argument is.
  - b. It is an arguable statement - someone may disagree (your job in the paper is to prove your point)
  - c. It is of interest and there is adequate material to discuss the idea at length.
  - d. The paper should use detail to demonstrate the truth of the thesis statement.
  - e. The conclusion should identify how the thesis statement was proved throughout the paper.
2. Write cleanly and directly
3. Use strong verbs rather than weaker verb phrases
4. Watch for repetition
5. Be careful of commonly misused words
  - a. i.e. elicit vs. illicit, affect vs. effect, its vs it's
    - i. make a list of words that cause you trouble for easy reference.
6. Vary your sentence structure
7. Let's eat Grandma. (Watch your commas!)
8. Give yourself time to revise!
9. Avoid plagiarism
10. Be careful about the use of generic referents
  - a. To what does "it", "this", or "that" refer? If it won't be clear to the reader, you need to rename whatever "it" is.
11. Use of quotations without citation
  - a. If you quote someone, anytime, anywhere, you MUST cite the source.
12. Use of quotation marks in other ways
  - a. Do not use quotation marks around anything other than quotes, unless you are using them to identify a word or phrase that is used in an unusual or out-of-context manner
13. Colloquialisms

- a. State your thoughts directly
  - i. Instead of “she’s older than dirt” it is better to say “she is an older adult” or “she is a senior citizen.”
- 14. Grammar and Spelling
  - a. Most word processors show you when they believe there is a problem. Don’t ignore the red/blue/green wavy lines under your text - they’re trying to tell you something.
  - b. Ask a friend to proofread your paper for simple mistakes. We all make them.
- 15. Punctuation
  - a. The most common punctuation mistake I see is overuse of commas.
- 16. Formatting
  - a. Be sure that your paper is standard formatting throughout. Typically this means twelve point font, one-inch margins, and the first line of every paragraph indented.
- 17. Proofread, proofread, proofread.

The Chicago Manual of Style, Sixteenth Edition gives helpful advice for using inclusive language, adapted below:<sup>1</sup>

1. Omit the pronoun
  - a. “when the phone is taken from her” could be “when the phone is taken away”
2. Repeat the noun
  - a. “the artist should get credit for his work” could be “the artist should get credit for the artist’s work”
3. Use a plural antecedent
  - a. “the artist should get credit for his work” could be “the artists should get credit for their work”
4. Use an article instead of a personal pronoun
  - a. “when her phone is taken away” could be “when the phone is taken away”
5. Use the neutral singular pronoun *one*
  - a. “she could speak clearly” could be “one could speak clearly”
6. Use the relative pronoun *who*
  - a. “if the player cannot run he is no help” could be “a player who cannot run is no help”
7. Use the imperative mood
  - a. “he should heat the butter in the pan” could be “heat the butter in the pan”
8. Use *he or she* (sparingly)
  - a. “if she does not know what else to do” could be “if he or she does not know what else to do”
9. Revise the clause so a pronoun is unnecessary
  - a. “his effectiveness as a worship leader is shown” could be “a worship leader shows effectiveness by”

---

<sup>1</sup> Russell David Harper, Principal Reviser, *The Chicago Manual of Style, Sixteenth Edition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 302.