

Craig McConnell's One Page Checklist for Academic Writing Assignments

Thesis

You should be able to identify a clear statement of an original idea that you support with the rest of your essay.

References

- Every idea in your essay that is not your own should be clearly credited to the original author.
- Every quotation should be in quotation marks (“”) and properly cited. The page number where the quotation was found should be indicated.

Style

- Avoid the following cliché (and usually overly general) introductions:
Since the dawn of time . . . Since the beginning of civilization . . .
- Do not use rhetorical questions.
- Do not use the following phrases:
Everyone knows that . . . It is generally understood that . . .
In my opinion . . . It seems to me that . . .
As a Christian, I believe . . . According to Webster's Dictionary, . . .
- It is generally a bad idea to quote a dictionary definition. (It is reasonable to do this if you are discussing the evolution of the meaning of a word – in this case, consult the *Oxford English Dictionary* or another appropriate scholarly dictionary).
- “Titles of Short Stories, Articles, and Other Short Works in Quotation Marks”
Titles of Novels, Books, Plays, Films, and Other Long Works Italicized
- Follow the advice of Strunk and White: “Omit Needless Words”.
(Example: replace “. . . due to the fact that . . .” with “. . . because . . .”)
- Read your essay out loud – it should sound natural and smooth.

Grammar

Please check for the following common errors:

- “It’s” is a contraction for “it is”; “its” is a possessive.
- “Their” is possessive; “there” is a place; “they’re” is a contraction for “they are”.
- The past tense of “lead” is “led” (even though the past tense of “read” is “read”).
- “Who” is a subjective pronoun; “whom” is an objective pronoun:
“The man who was married.” “The girl to whom he was married.”
- It is never “people which” or “people that” – it is always “people who”.
- Know your own grammar foibles and check for them closely.**

Formatting

- Number the pages.
- Title your essay.
- All essays should be double spaced, one-inch margins all around, in a reasonable font (like the one on this page – Times New Roman 12).
- Make sure that the first line of a paragraph doesn't get stranded at the bottom of a page; make sure that the last line of a paragraph doesn't get bumped to the top of the next page (that is, enable “Widow/Orphan Protect” in your word processor).
- Always spell check before printing.
- One staple in the upper left corner is plenty – please don't use report covers.