Writing 101

**Editing**

Editing is essential and usually improperly done. Each draft should be an improvement on the previous sentence. Polishing your essay can make a big difference with your final mark.

* Please have someone who has some proficiency with the English language check over your essay. This can be a sibling, parent, tutor, friend or teacher.

**Writing Tips**

* Please avoid “you” statements.  Even in informal essays, please use words such as “we,” “us,” and “our” to keep the writing semi-formal.  Please avoid writing directly to the reader of the essay by using “you” statements, unless it’s absolutely necessary.

         Example:  "Juggling a busy schedule with grade 12 classes and being on a team really teaches you  
                          the value of time-management."  
  
A 'you’ statement is advice to the reader. The reader in this case has a Masters Degree or PhD. They are not seeking any advice from you. It is also considered far too informal for the style demanded by universities.  
​

* Avoid the use of contractions:  I’ve = I have         We’d = We had
* Transition words
  1. For example,
  2. Furthermore,
  3. As we have seen,
  4. In conclusion

      \*\*It’s a good idea to use some transition words in your essay, but do not overdo it.  The strongest        
            writers use transition words sparingly since their writing tends to be edited, concise,  
            and flow naturally.  
  
**A few more Writing Tips:**

1. Avoid beginning every sentence with I
2. Vary your sentence structure to keep the reader interested
3. Begin sentences with a verb:

           Starting in grade 10….             
           Organizing our school’s Relay for Life…               
           Rehearsing for performances was…

​

Active Voice vs Passive Voice

Use Active Verbs   - here’s a list put out by Harvard Law School:

<https://hls.harvard.edu/dept/opia/job-search-toolkit/action-verbs/>  
 

2. Write concisely

Use the full 200 – 300 words only if necessary. A well-written shorter response will score more points for style

* Professors know that it takes more skill to write something strong with a fewer number of words. Write a full 300 words, then edit it down to the essential

**A Few Final Tips for Essay Writing**

1. **Proper Nouns are capitalized**

England, English (not english), Ottawa (not ottawa), British (not british), Anglo-India day school, Santha (not santha), Aboriginals (not aboriginials), Ayah (not ayah)

1. **Only write statements that are true**

Example: Premila never cared deeply about what the others would think, she simply was her own person.

*This sentence is only partially true because Premila initially does everything she can to fit in at the Anglo-Indian school.*

1. **People are referred to as ‘who’**

In Santha Rama Rau’s “….”, we are presented with the character Premila, a strong young girl **that** is moved from her Indian environment to a British one.

Corrected: In Santha Rama Rau’s “….”, we are presented with the character Premila, a strong young girl **who** is moved from her Indian environment to a British one.

1. **Each point of your thesis must be fully proven and Avoid ‘you’ statements because they are too colloquial**

Example: concluding sentence: Premila ultimately realizes that you will be treated differently if your culture is different than those around you.

Corrected: Premila ultimately realizes that people are often treated differently if their culture is different from the culture that surrounds them.

1. **Quotations must be 100% accurate**

Example: When Permila tells what happened to her mom, she intentionally avoid mentioning what it meant behind the fact that the teacher says **“Indian cheats”** to protect her sister’s innocence, thus revealing her care for her sister.

Corrected: When Premila explains her teacher’s “Indians cheat” comment to her Mom, she hopes that Santha will not become aware of just how racist the school was; by trying to protect Santha’s innocence, Premila reveals that she cares for her sister.

1. **Please keep your writing Concise – unnecessary words will distract from the power of your topic sentence**

Example: In Santha Rau’s “By Any Other Name”, the narrator’s sister, Premila, is an Indian girl **who lives during the British rule in India, and at first attempts to fit in** with the English Children, but eventually realizes she values her identity more.

Corrected:

In Santha Rau’s “By Any Other Name”, the narrator’s sister, Premila, is an Indian girl who initially attempts to fit in with the English children at school, but eventually **gives-up such conformity** when she comes to realize the tremendous value of her own culture.

1. **It’s almost impossible to begin a sentence with ‘Thus’ or ‘Which’ – please don’t use these words for a first word of any sentence**

Example: Thus revealing Premila’s knowledge of the school’s intentions and her loyalty to her culture.

*This sentence is a fragment because it does not express a complete thought.*

Corrected: Premila’s unwillingness to be assimilated, reveals her understanding of what the school was attempting to do and the loyalty that she has for Hindi culture.

1. **Be on the lookout for Pronoun Abuse – use specific names to help clarify meaning when needed**

Example: But more importantly, it reveals her fear of being judged by the other English students despite her confidence in her ethnicity.

*Who is her??? Corrected: replace “her” with Premila (a proper noun)*

1. **Always write using formal, 3rd person language – avoid colloquial phrases**

Example: One often assumes that ignorance and childishness is what defines a **kid**.

Correction [change kid to child]

1. **Use the word ‘because’**

Florence, who is Marusa’s mother agrees to their wedding, **just due to the fact** that Peter comes from a higher status family.

Marusa is highly favoured and looked upon as the ideal daughter, **because** of how beautiful she is.

1. **When using a semi-colon, both sides of the semi-colon must be complete sentences**

As it is her “first circus”, Jenny’s excitement and enthusiasm spikes as the poster introduced her to a whole “new world” (Ross 1) ; **an escape from the depressing conditions that she lived in** (3).

{Notice: the words after the semicolon are an incomplete sentence. Note also the appropriate use of short quotes and how the author’s name is used properly in the citations}

Corrected (fix the sentence fragment): As it is her “first circus”, Jenny’s excitement and enthusiasm spikes as the poster introduced her to a whole “new world” (Ross 1) ; **the poster thus serves as an** escape from the depressing conditions of Jenny’s life (3).

**Writing an Introduction or Topic Sentence**

topic: “The simple things in life bring us the most joy”

Options for writing an introductory paragraph or topic sentene:

1. Shotgun
2. Question
3. Quotation
4. Inverted Thesis
5. **Shotgun** – Thesis statement appears as the first sentence of introductory paragraph. One of my professors got sick of reading my lengthy introductions, and asked me try the shotgun method: He said, “for the love of God, just place your thesis at the beginning of your essay.” This is often the easiest way to begin an introduction. Be careful because some high school teachers will insist that the thesis be the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. Always check with your teacher first to see if he/she has any rule about where the thesis should be.

It is true that the simple things bring us the most joy. Although it is not always realized until we sit down and think about it. Some simple things in my life that bring me the most joy are family, friends, and summer camp.

1. **Question** – if you are truly stuck during a provincial exam, phrasing the topic as a question will help to get you writing. Simply take the topic and re-write it as a question. Sample:

Is it the simple things bring us the most joy? Anyone who has thought about this question has probably realized that there’s a lot of truth to the statement. Some simple things in my life that bring me joy are family, friends, and summer camp.

1. **Quotation** – a quotation is another easy way to get your essay going:

“The best things in life are free.” This is a line from a popular song which reminds us that it is the simple things in life that bring us the most joy. In my life, family, friends, and summer camp are three everyday things that bring me tremendous happiness.

1. **Inverted Thesis** – thesis is written as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. Some high school English teachers prefer that this method be used.

There are many things in life that affect our emotions. My family, friends, and summer camp are three ordinary things that bring me happiness and influence my life in a big way. Based on the positive impact that these everyday things have on my life, I can safely say that it is the simple things in life that bring the most joy.

**Writing a Strong Conclusion**

1. **Re-state the Thesis in different words**
2. Summarize or synthesize (combine) your supporting ideas using different words [this is optional]
3. **Always finish with an interesting last sentence**

Some options for a last sentence:

* Stress the importance of the topic
* Make a connection between your life and the lives of your readers
* Finish with a thoughtful question that gets your readers to think more deeply about your thesis
* Call for action – call upon readers to do something about your topic

\*\* Note that # 1 and #3 are two things you must do in the conclusion. There are other ways to have an interesting last sentence, but these are the most common. If you are stuck, try posing a question to your readers as this often is very easy to write.

Sample Conclusion:

Simple things in life often bring great happiness. The warm comfort of family, the laughter of friends, and the solitude of summer camp are three things that put me at peace. I often forget to acknowledge the everyday things that bring me joy, but deep down I am very appreciative of them.