Top 10 Writing Errors and How To Fix Them

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Please click here to view this recorded workshop:
http://khe2.adobeconnect.com/p8ddez6t662/
In today’s workshop we will identify ten key problem areas that affect most writers, and, alongside this, we will also explore corresponding solutions to each individual issue. In conjunction with this, we will also offer ample ways to get all the help that you need with your writing via our fantastic services provided here at the university. But before we begin…
Why understand the problem areas? It remains important to understand the common issues most writers face for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, understanding an error and thinking of a unique way to overcome this obstacle requires a certain amount of critical thinking. In sum, you are placed in the shoes of the reader, which requires that you look at the work objectively. Likewise, and much more simply put, understanding the key problem areas can act as a simple “do-not-do” list to keep in mind while writing.
Mistake #1: Not understanding the assignment. As a student, it is a very common occurrence to not understand what the assignment is asking for. Rest assured, though: You are not the only one. I've been in this position before, and it's a nightmare. How can you get started on an assignment that you don't even understand? One way that you can easily overcome this obstacle involves asking questions. Putting it bluntly, seek the help that you need. There are a variety of resources available, including asking your instructor, to ensure that you completely understand the assignment before putting pen to page. In fact, as you'll notice, this is the sub-theme for this presentation; we help students dissect assignment instructions on a daily basis in Live Tutoring. Please take advantage of the service and bring your questions to us—we can help, that much I can promise!
Mistake #2: We’re all guilty of procrastination. There really is no excuse for procrastination. Trust me when I say that your professors have literally heard every excuse in the book, but this most always leads back to the fact that the student made an excuse to put off the work and not get it done. To keep up with your work, plan ahead at least 1-2 weeks for writing assignments to allow for ample revision and breaks along the way. It’s better to plan 1-2 weeks in advance and plan breaks in that time so that you can give yourself some time away and still progress with the work. Putting things off until the last minute causes stress which could impact the work as a whole, so simply avoid making excuses and plan ahead.
Mistake #3: Not doing enough “Presearch.” Before you actually begin writing, be sure that you do a bit of background research on the topic that interests you. Sometimes, though one may really want to write about a given topic, the assignment may require that you go in a different direction based on the subject matter, and one simple way to figure this out early is by doing the proper “presearch,” or the work you read before you actually begin to write. First, select a topic that genuinely interests you. You’ll find that it’s fifteen times easier, at the very least, to write about something that interests you instead of a topic you picked just because it looked easy. After you’ve selected something based on interest, do a light bit of presearch to gather current information. Why not surf the web and see how much information is currently available on the subject? What could this hurt? As this is just a very general search, most sources are viable here as you are just gathering some base information to get the gears turning. Most importantly, conducting this little bit of work will ultimately save you the time and hassle of an assignment you loathe writing.
Mistake #4: The Sit-and-Write Method

- Some students can sit and write an entire paper in one sitting; others, like myself, need time.
  - Like with procrastinating, set aside a suitable amount of time to complete the assignment.
  - Take breaks! No one is timing you, and if you set aside enough time, you are more than prepared.
  - Write what feels right.

Mistake #4: The sit-and-write method. Some students can simply sit and write an entire paper in one sitting. For those few of you out there, we are all envious. For others, very much like myself, we need a bit more time to construct our masterpieces! To combat this, be sure that you, again, set aside a suitable amount of time to complete the assignment. If you do this properly, you will also schedule breaks! No one is timing you, and you have already made the decision to plan ahead, so you have plenty of time. Approach the assignment in chunks, writing whichever you please so long as you feel the piece flows properly. Sometimes I’ll write my conclusion first just to mix things up a bit, and, of course, progressively go back through and add the rest in the remainder of the time. This is what rocks about writing so much: there are rules, sure, but you can dictate some of them. Consider this the punk-rock rule of writing: You can decide what you write and when you write it; just make sure it all gets done!
Mistake #5: Following a mold

- Not all writing assignments are 5 paragraphs (Introduction, conclusion, and three supporting points)
- Write based on the assignment’s instructions
- Never presuppose that older models of papers will work for any academic assignment.

Mistake #5: Following the mold. Many students fall into this trap where they presuppose that all college writing assignments follow a simple 5-paragraph mold. While some assignments may require this and it is beneficial to be familiar with the generic assignment construction, most other assignments require a bit more than this. To ensure that you are adhering to what your professor wants, be sure to write based on the assignment’s requirements. If the word count is 1200-1500 words, condensing that into 5 paragraphs may be a bit difficult, so think rationally about the overall shape of the paper in this respect. What’s most important remains the simplest here: Never presuppose that older models of papers will work for any academic assignment. An introductory paper for a CM107 course will look significantly different than one from a NU499 course, and that’s perfectly fine! Write to the assignment, and you should be safe either way.
Mistake 6: Using the work of others. These next two slides very briefly cover appropriately using the work of others or, as we like to term it, avoiding plagiarism. When you’re writing your academic assignments, you will be required, at some point, to cite from outside resources. These citations are typically found in the body of the paper with a corresponding reference list at the end of the paper. It is important to utilize outside resources when asked to do so in your writing for a variety of reasons, but, most importantly, it is vital that proper credit is given when accomplishing this task. We have a never-ending amount of resources covering citation here in the writing center, some of which will be shown later in the links section, so please take full advantage of what we have to offer if you need help further understanding citation.
Failure to provide adequate citation for work borrowed from others is known, of course, as plagiarism. Plagiarism is the theft and use of another’s words, ideas, results, or images without giving appropriate credit to that person, therefore giving the impression that it is your own work. To avoid this, and to stress this one last time, please get the help that you seek regarding citation from our writing center, as well! I help students understand citation in Live Tutoring at least once per week, so stop by if you have any questions along the way! We understand that citation is a process, and a tough one to tackle, so let us help where we can. It’s best to be safe when using the work of others, and we can certainly help you along the way.
Mistake #7: Writing outside your means. Sometimes, when writing, we all turn into William Shakespeare and feel that we need to broadcast the most beautiful prose in the history of the world. While that sounds ideal, the reality rarely meets our expectations—even for experienced writers. When writing, be sure that you use appropriate language that you, personally, know will convey your message. Simply using a thesaurus to beef up your language, more often than not, hurts the writing. Proper words require a proper context. For instance, if you lost a soccer match by 1 goal, would the term “obliterated” fit the context here? Hardly. Be sure that you are writing naturally, which requires that you try for a delicate balance of complex and simple sentences. This, too, will break up the writing and offer your readers a chance to process the information more effectively. Remember: You are trying to make sense - not win awards for your fantastic prose.
Mistake 8: The Dreaded Stress

- Though easier said than done, try your best to:
  - Always remain calm; you’re in control
  - Set manageable goals by not procrastinating
  - Ask for clarity if the assignment instructions do not make sense; professors won’t bite!
  - Give yourself the advantage: Read before you write!
  - Ask questions along the way; people will help!

Mistake #8: The dreaded stress. Stress can be a funny friend to have around when you want to complete a paper. We’ve all been in this position before, and, though easier said that done, always try your best to remain calm—you’re in control of your academic work and, one breath at a time, you can get through it. As I’ve been stressing throughout this presentation, set manageable goals by not procrastinating—do not give yourself an excuse to be stressed. Instead, be proactive! If you’re confused about an assignment, ask for clarity if the instructions do not make sense. You now know of multiple ways to accomplish this, so that takes care of that excuse for stress, as well! If you’ve done the work before you begin writing, which includes understanding the assignment and doing your presearch, you’re miles ahead of the excuse train we have all been know to ride. Just be sure to do one thing, if anything: Ask questions along the way. You’re a student—you’re here to learn, and I promise you no one will make you feel any lesser of a person if you ask questions to clear up any issue you may have. What else are we here for, anyway?
Mistake #9: Lacking confidence

- No more excuses!
  - I’m a bad writer
  - I’ve always been bad at English
  - My professors always graded hard in English
  - I can’t write

- Realize that your writing makes a difference
- You are accomplishing your goals; sure it might take time, but we are here to help!

Mistake #9: Lacking confidence. These sort of excuses wind me up the most. You may have used one of these in the past—I know I did. I’m a bad writer. I’ve always been bad at English. My professors always graded hard in English. And, the best one, I can’t write. All of those are nonsense, plain and simple. That sort of negativity does not have a place in this workshop or in higher education at all. By succumbing to one of those excuses, like I once did, you let the assignment win. The way that I overcame this obstacle included being told my writing makes a difference. Think about it: You’re in college. What you have to say matters and, in the very near future, will very much so matter in helping shape the world around us. Sure, you may struggle a bit with writing, but the only excuse that is absolute is that you have yet to seek the help available for free at the very university you attend. As we’ll be showering that knowledge on you here in a bit, please keep in mind that you are accomplishing your goals; sure it might take a bit of time, and, for some, more work than others, but we are here to help! And let me show you how…
Come to the Writing Center! We understand all of these writing-related issues—even when it comes to stress!
• We can clarify assignments, citation, and any other confusion you may be having.
• Major perk: It’s free!
• Use us as much as you’d like—we’re here to help.

Mistake 10: Not seeking help!

Come to the Writing Center! We understand all of these writing-related issues—even when it comes to stress! We’ve been there, we’ve done that, and know dozens of ways to help with each issue you bring to us. We specialize in clarifying tough assignments, helping students better understand citation, and, well, any other confusion regarding writing you may well have! The list really is endless with what we have to offer and can help you with, and, the major perk? It’s all free. You can use our services as much as you’d like. Just remember that we are here to help. It’s always important to ask questions, and now you know where you can receive the answers you seek.
For more writing support, connect with the [KUWC’s](#) new public webpage. You can actually Google and find this page. This is also a great way for you to stay connected to the KUWC through Facebook and Twitter. Many of our resources are here as well.
The best time to do a paper review in the Kaplan University Writing Center is after you have written your first draft. When you come to us early, we can help you the most by helping you with the structure of your paper. Many students send papers at the last minute because they want us to simply proofread their paper. However, KUWC writing tutors do not simply proofread the paper for you; we want to help you learn to write and proofread your own papers. You can submit a first draft, and then submit a later draft if you need further help on an assignment.

If you need help before you write the first draft, you can use live tutoring. During live tutoring, you can ask questions and brainstorm with a tutor. Live tutors can help you with other stages in the paper writing process as well. Come visit us. We can be found under the My Studies tab, then under Academic Support Center.
On the main Academic Support Center page, you will see the Writing Center links. These include Live Tutoring, Paper Review Service, the Writing Reference Library, Citation Guidelines, Workshops, English Language Learner, and Fundamental writing help. Notice, you can access the Kaplan Guide to Successful Writing on the right hand side in both print and audio form. Come visit us.
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Writing Fundamentals Program
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Workshops are recorded and recording links, with an accompanying PowerPoint, are posted on the Writing Center Workshop page after the workshop.

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