Academic Writing Checklist: Writing like a college student

At first blush, academic writing can seem overly formal or stilted. If you write often, you will learn how to mold academic expectations into your own personal writing style. You will create your own academic voice. In order to do so, though, you should know some basic guidelines.

Follow these cardinal rules to avoid sounding like a high school student:

- **Eliminate informal transitions.** Scholars rarely begin sentences with words like “well,” “yes,” or “no.”

- **Eliminate colloquial language.** Common words and phrases (Peter dumped Marianne; Greta spilled the beans and exposed Sarah’s lie, etc.) that we use in conversation are not always acceptable in academic prose.

- **Eliminate rhetorical questions.** Posing your argument as a question can sometimes help you push your analysis further, but you should only use rhetorical questions for brainstorming purposes. In your papers, rephrasing your questions as statements gives you more rhetorical power.

- **Eliminate exclamation points.** They just look silly! See? If you’re using exclamation points for emphasis, vary your sentence structure or use more precise vocabulary to communicate that emphasis.

- **Avoid using quotation marks to illustrate irony or emphasis.** Using quotation marks to illustrate irony or emphasis can be confusing and ineffective (The automatic weapons ushered in a new era of “progress.”) Use style and vocabulary to illustrate irony or to emphasize a point.

- **Always include a bibliography.** Even if your professor says that he or she does not require one, you will benefit by attaching a bibliography to each one of your papers. Chances are good, though, that your professors will always require bibliographies.

- **Format your paper in accordance with the citation style you use.** Use your Diana Hacker guide to better understand the formatting expectations for each citation style. No matter the citation style, your paper must include page numbers, a descriptive title, your name, in-text citation, and a bibliography, works cited, or references page.